Mysteries of Paris, V3

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MYSTERIES OF PARIS

By EUGENE SUE

VOLUME THREE

[Illustration: THE RECITATION]

PART III.

NIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE NOTARY'S OFFICE.

Brain, or heart of the land, which you will, as large cities are, Paris may claim to have nerves, muscles, and arteries centering in it, which but few capitals, by right of size, passions, horrors, loves, charms, mysteries, in a word, can reveal. To trace its emotions, impulses, secrets, wounds, cankers, joys, the following pages are devoted.

We must begin by taking up the further ends of threads which will soon lead us deep into its labyrinths, not without events on the way, only surpassed by those we shall meet in the mazes themselves.

In the year 1819, a singular project, incited by the current stories of left-handed marriages and loving episodes, as in the case of the Prince of Capua and Miss Penelope Smith, was put into operation by one Sarah Seyton, widow of the Earl of M'Gregor. Her brother, the Honorable Tom Seyton, assisted her to the utmost, fully prepared to aid his sister in matrimonially entangling any crown-wearer whomsoever; he was perfectly willing to participate with her in all the schemes and intrigues that might be useful toward the success of her endeavor to become the wife of a sovereign, however humble in possessions and power; but he would far rather have killed the sister whom he so devotedly loved, than he would have seen her become the mistress of a prince, even with the certainty of a subsequent marriage in reparation.

The matrimonial inventory drawn up by Tom, with the aid of the _Almanach de Gotha_, had a very satisfactory aspect. The Germanic Confederation, especially, furnished a numerous contingency of young presumptive sovereigns, the first to whom the adventurers meant to pay attention being thus designated in the diplomatic and infallible Almanac of Gotha for the year of 1819:

Genealogy of the Sovereigns of Europe and their Families.

GEROLSTEIN.

Grand-Duke MAXIMILIAN RUDOLPH, born December 10th, 1764.
Succeeded his father, CHARLES FREDERIC RUDOLPH, April 21st 1785.
Widower January, 1808, of Louisa, daughter of Prince JOHN AUGUSTUS of Burglen.

SON,

GUSTAVUS RUDOLPH, born April 17th, 1803.

MOTHER,

Grand-Duchess JUDITH, dowager widow of the Grand-Duke

CHARLES FREDERIC RUDOLPH, April 21st, 1785.

Tom had sense enough to inscribe first on his list the youngest of the princes whom he desired for his brother-in-law, thinking that extreme youth was more easily seduced than riper age.

The Countes M'Gregor was not only favored with the introduction of the Marquis d'Harville (a friend of the grand-duke, to whom he had rendered great services in 1815, and a little of a suitor of the lady's while she was in Paris) and of the British Ambassador in Paris, but with that of her own personal appearance. To rare beauty and a singular aptitude of acquiring various accomplishments, was added a seductiveness all the more dangerous, because she possessed a mind unbending and calculating, a disposition cunning and selfish, a deep hypocrisy, a stubborn and despotic will--all hidden under the specious gloss of a generous, warm, and impassioned nature. Physically her organization was as deceptive as it was morally. Her large black eyes--which, by turns languished and beamed with beauty beneath their ebon lashes--could feign to admiration all the kindling fires of voluptuousness. And yet, the burning impulses of love beat not in her frozen bosom; never could a surprise of either the heart or the senses disturb the stern and pitiless schemes of this intriguing, egotistical, and ambitious girl.

Fortunately for her, her plans were assisted by one Dr. Polidori, a learned but hypocritical man, who hoped to be the future Richelieu over the puppet he trusted to convert Prince Rudolph into. The lady and her brother combined with Polidori against the youthful prince, whose only ally was his true friend, an English baronet, Sir Walter Murphy.

The Countess M'Gregor drove things to the end, and, during a brief absence of the grand-duke, was secretly married to Prince Rudolph. In time, about to become a mother, the artful woman began to clamor for an acknowledgment of the union. She braved exposure, hoping to force the prince into giving her the station she sought. All was discovered, easily, therefore. But the old duke was all-powerful within his realm: the clandestine union was pronounced null and void, and the countess expelled. Her latest act of vengeance was to inform Rudolph that their child had died. This was in 1827. But this assurance was on a par with her former falseness: the child, a girl, was handed over to Jacques Ferrand, a miserly notary in Paris, whose housekeeper got rid of it to a rogue known as Pierre Tournemine. When he at last ran to the end of his tether, and was sentenced to imprisonment in the Rochefort-hulks for forgery, he induced a woman called Gervais, but nicknamed the Screech-Owl (Chouette), to take the girl, now five or six years old, who brought the little creature up in the midst of as much

cruelty as degradation.

Meanwhile the countess nursed the idea of wedding Prince Rudolph in a more secure manner. When, in time, he became grand-duke, she was more eager than ever to enjoy what she considered her own. Though he had married, she hoped; and, the second wife having died childless, the Countess M'Gregor followed Rudolph into Prance, where he traveled _incognito_ as Count Duren. As a last resort to force the grand-duke into her ambitious aims, she sought for a girl of the age that her own would have been, to pass it off as their child. By chance, the woman to whom she applied was La Chouette, and hardly had she spoken of the likeness which the counterfeit would have to bear to the supposed _suppressed_ child, than the woman recognized the very girl whom she had kept for years by her, or in view.

Yes, the offspring of Prince Rudolph and the countess was a common girl of the town, known as Fleur-de-Marie (the Virgin's Flower), for her touching religious beauty, as La Goualeuse (the Songstress), for her vocal ability, and La Pegriotte (Little Thief), out of La Chouette's anger that she would not be what she styled her.

She had long shunned her sad sisters in shame, and, indeed, in all her life had known but one friend. This was a sewing-girl known as Rigolette, or Miss Dimpleton, from her continual smiles; a maid with no strong ideas of virtue, but preserved from the miry path which poor Fleur-de-Marie had been forced to use, merely by being too hard-worked to have leisure to be bad.

Prince Rudolph entertained the most profound aversion for the mother of his child, yet for the latter he mourned still, fifteen or eighteen years after her reported decease. Weary of life, save for doing good, he took a deep liking for playing the part of a minor providence, be it said in all reverence.

Known to society as the grand-duke, otherwise Count Duren, he had humble lodgings in No. 7, Rue du Temple, as a fan-painter, plain M. Rudolph. To mask the large sums which on occasion he dispensed in charity, he was wont to give out that he was the agent of wealthy persons who trusted him in their alms-giving.

Events brought him into immediate contact with Fleur-de-Marie, and Rigolette (who lived in his own house in the Rue du Temple).

The former he had rescued from her wretchedness and provided with a home on a farm at Bouqueval, whence she had been abducted by Chouette and comrades of hers, by orders of Jacques Ferrand, who wanted her put out of the way.

The wretches who had undertaken to drown the girl with Ferrand's housekeeper (become dangerous to him, as one aware of too many of his secrets) murdered the latter, but the former, swept from their sight by the Seine's current, had been saved by a former prison-mate of hers, a girl of twenty, so wild in manner as to have won the nickname of Louve (Wolf).

Snatched from death, the exhausted girl now lay, but a little this side of life's confines, in the house of Dr. Griffon, at Asnieres, under his care and that of the Count of St. Remy, two gentlemen who had seen her escape.

Rudolph was seeking her all this while, yet not so busily that he forgot his avenger's course. Chief among social oppressors, whose cunning baffled the law, and verified the old saying of "what is everybody's business is nobody's business," Jacques Ferrand stood.

He withheld a large sum of money, intrusted _verbally_ to him, from its owner, the Baroness Fermont, and impoverished her and her daughter; he had seduced his servant Louise Morel, caused her imprisonment on a charge of child-murder, driving her father, a working jeweler, insane, and menacing the destruction of the whole family--but Rudolph was at hand to support them.

His cashier, Francois Germain, also was in prison, thanks to him. The youth--who had saved some money, and deposited it with a banker out of town--had no sooner heard that Louise Morel's father was in debt (a means of Ferrand's triumph over the girl), than he gave her some of his employer's money, thinking to replace it with his own immediately after. But while he was away to draw the deficit from his banker's, the notary discovered the loss, and had him arrested as a thief.

The notary, whose cunning had earned him a high reputation for honesty, strictness, and parsimony, was, at this moment, therefore, at the climax of inward delight. His chief accomplice removed (his only other being the Dr. Polidori already mentioned) he believed he had nothing to fear. Louise Morel had been replaced by a new servant, much more tempting to a man of the notary's sensual cravings than that first poor victim had been.

We usher the reader, at the clerks' breakfast-time, into the notary's gloomy office.

A thing unheard-of, stupendous, marvelous! instead of the meager and unattractive stew, brought every morning to these young people by the _departed_ housekeeper, Madame Seraphin, an enormous cold turkey, served up on an old paper box, ornamented the middle of one of the tables of the office, flanked by two loaves of bread, some Dutch cheese, and three bottles of sealed wine; an old leaden inkstand, filled with a mixture of salt and pepper, served as a salt-cellar; such was the bill of fare.

Each clerk, armed with his knife and a formidable appetite, awaited the hour of the feast with hungry impatience; some of them were raging over the absence of the head clerk, without whom they could not commence their breakfast pursuant to etiquette.

This radical change in the ordinary meals of the clerks of Jacques Ferrand announced an excessive domestic revolution.

The following conversation, eminently Boeotian (if we may be allowed to borrow this word from the witty writer who has made it popular), will throw some light upon this important question:

"Behold a turkey who never expected, when he entered into life, to appear at breakfast on the table of our governor's quill-drivers!"

"Just so; when the governor entered on the life of a notary, in like manner he never expected to give his clerks a turkey for breakfast."

"For this turkey is ours," cried Stump-in-the-Gutters, the office-boy, with greedy eyes.

"My friend you forget; this turkey must be a foreigner to you."

"And as a Frenchman, you should hate a foreigner."

"All that can be done is to give you the claws."

"Emblem of the velocity with which you run your errands."

"I think, at least, I have a right to the carcass," said the boy, murmuring.

"It might be granted; but you have no right to it, just as it was with the Charter of 1814, which was only another carcass of liberty," said the Mirabeau of the office.

"Apropos of carcass," said one of the party. "May the soul of Mother Seraphin rest in peace! for, since she was drowned, we are no longer condemned to eat her ever lasting hash!"

"And for a week past, the governor, instead of giving us a breakfast--"

"Allows us each forty sous a day."

"That is the reason I say: may her soul rest in peace."

"Exactly; for in her time, the old boy would never have given us the forty sous."

"It is enormous!"

"It is astonishing!"

"There is not an office in Paris--"

"In Europe."

"In the universe, where they give forty sous to a famishing clerk for his breakfast."

"Apropos of Madame Seraphin, which of you fellows has seen the new servant that takes her place?"

"The Alsatian girl whom Madame Pipelet, the porter's wife of No. 17, Rue du Temple, the house where poor Louise lived, brought one evening?"

"Yes."

"I have not seen her yet."

"Nor I."

"Of course not; it is altogether impossible to see her, for the governor is more savage than ever to prevent our entering the pavilion in the courtyard."

"And since the porter cleans the office now, how can one get a glimpse at his Mary?"

"Pooh! I have seen her."

"You?"

"Where was that?"

"How does she look?"

"Large or small?"

"Young or old?"

"I am sure, beforehand, that she has not so good-looking a face as poor Louise--that good girl?"

"Come, since you have seen her, how does this new servant look?"

"When I say I saw her, I have seen her cap--a very funny cap."

"What sort?"

"It was cherry color, and of velvet, I believe; something like those worn by the little broom girls."

"Like the Alsatians? it is very natural, since she is an Alsatian."

"You don't say so!"

"But I do! what is it that surprises you? The burnt child shuns the fire!"

"Chalamel! what relation between your proverb and this cap?"

"There is none."

"Why did you say it, then?"

"Because a benefit is never lost, and the dog is a friend of man!"

"Hold! If Chalamel opens his budget of proverbs, which mean nothing, we are in for it. Come, tell us what you know of this new servant."

"The day before yesterday I was out in the yard: she had her back toward one of the windows of the ground-floor."

"The yard's back?"

"What stupidity! No, the servant's. The glasses are so dirty that I could see nothing of her figure; but I could see her cherry-colored cap, and a profusion of curls, as black as jet; for she wears her hair in short curls."

"I am sure that the governor would not have seen through his spectacles as much as you did; for here you have one, as they say, who, if he remained alone with a woman on the earth, the world would soon come to an end."

"That is not astonishing. He laughs best who laughs last, and, moreover, punctuality is the politeness of kings."

"How wearisome Chalamel is when he lays himself out to it!"

"Tell me what company you keep, and I'll tell you what you are."

"Oh! how pretty!"

"As for me, I have an idea that it is superstition that stupefies the governor more and more."

"It is, perhaps, from penitence, that he gives us forty sous for our breakfast."

"The fact is, he must be crazy."

"Or sick."

"I think for the last two or three days he has been quite wild."

"Not that we see him so much. He who was, for our torment, in his cabinet from morning till night, and always at our backs, now has not, for two days, put his nose into the office."

"That is the reason the head clerk has so much to do."

"And that we are obliged to die with hunger in waiting for him."

"What a change in the office."

"Poor Germain would be much astonished if any one should say to him, 'Only fancy, my boy, the governor gives us forty sous for our breakfast;' 'Pshaw! it is impossible,' he would say. 'It is so possible that he has announced it to me, Chalamel, in my own person.' 'You are jesting.' 'I jest! This is the way it occurred: during two or three days which followed the death of Madame Seraphin, we had no breakfast at all. We liked that well enough, for no breakfast at all was better than that she gave us; but, on the other hand, our luncheon cost us money. However, we were patient, and said: "The governor has got no servant, no housekeeper, and when he gets one, we shall have to live on hash again." It wasn't so, my poor Germain: the old fellow finally employed a servant, and our breakfast was still buried in the river of oblivion. I was appointed a sort of deputy, to present to the governor the complaints of the stomach; he was with the principal clerk." I do not want to feed you in the morning," said he, in a gruff, surly tone; "my servant has no time to prepare your breakfast." "But, sir, you are bound to give us our morning meal." "Well, you may send out for your breakfast, and I will pay for it. How much do you want?--forty sous each?" added he, with some other subject evidently upon his mind, and mentioning, "forty sous," in the same manner that he would have said twenty sous, or a hundred sous. "Yes, sir," I exclaimed, "forty sous, will do," catching the ball "on the fly." "Let it be so," answered the notary; "the head clerk will take charge of the expense, and I will settle with him." Thereupon the governor shut the door in my face.' You must confess, gentleman that Germain would be astonished at the extraordinary liberality of the governor."

"Germain would say: 'The governor is out of his head.'"

"And forty sous a-head out of his pocket," said Chalamel.

"Well done! the first chemist was right who said: 'Bitter as _Calomel!_'"

"Seriously, I believe that the governor is sick."

"For ten days past, he is scarcely to be recognized. His cheeks are so hollow, that you might thrust in your fist."

"And he is so absent-minded, that it is curious to see him. The other day

he took off his glasses to read a deed; his eyes were red as live coals."

"He was right; short reckonings make long friends."

"For heaven's sake, don't cut me with your saws. I tell you, gentlemen, that it is very singular. It was upside down."

"Which was upside down?--the deed or the governor? It is singular, as you say. What the devil was he doing in that position? I should think it would have given him the apoplexy, unless his habits, as you say, have changed very suddenly."

"How wearisome you are, Chalamel! I mean that it was the deed which I presented wrong end foremost."

"How wild he must have been!"

"Not at all; he didn't even perceive it. He looked at it for ten minutes, with his bloodshot eyes fixed upon it, and then he gave it back to me, saying: 'Quite correct.'"

"Still upside down?"

"Still."

"How could he have read the deed?"

"He couldn't, unless he can read upside down."

"No man can do that."

"He looked so gloomy and savage, that I dared not open my lips, and I went away as if nothing had happened."

"I have got something to tell you. Four days ago I was in the office of the head clerk, and in come one client, two clients, three clients, with whom the governor had made an appointment. They waited impatiently, and requested me to go and rap at the door of the study. I rapped, and, receiving no answer, I walked in."

"Well, what did you see?"

"M. Ferrand lying upon his arms, which were placed upon the table, and his bald head uncovered. He did not stir."

"He was asleep, probably."

"I thought so. I approached him, and said: 'There are some clients outside, who wish to see you.' He did not move. 'M. Ferrand!' No reply. At length I touched his shoulder, and he started up as if the devil had bitten him. His motion was so sudden, that his big glasses fell off from his nose, and I saw--you never can believe it--"

"Out with it. What did you see?"

"Tears!"

"Nonsense!"

"Isn't he a queer bird?"

"The governor weep! Get out of the way!"

"When you see him cry, ladybirds will play on the French horn!"

"And monkeys chew tobacco!"

"Pshaw! your nonsense won't prevent me from knowing what I saw with my own eyes. I tell you I saw him as I have described."

"What! weeping?"

"Yes, weeping. And after that, he was wroth at being caught in such a lachrymose condition, and sung out to me: 'Go away--go away!' 'But, sir.--' 'Go away, I tell you!' 'There are some clients in the office, with whom you have made an appointment, sir, and--' 'I haven't the time to see them. Let them go to the devil, and you with them.' Thereupon he arose, as furious as he could be, and looked so much as if he would kick me out at the door, that I didn't wait for the compliment, but hooked it, and told the clients to leave also. They didn't look greatly pleased, I assure you; but for the reputation of the office, I told them that the governor had caught the whooping-cough."

This conversation was now interrupted by the entrance of the principal clerk, who came in as if pressed with business. His appearance was hailed by a general acclamation, and all eyes were turned toward the turkey.

"Without being uncivil, my lord, I must say that you have detained us from breakfast for a long time," said Chalamel. "You must look out, for the next time our appetites won't be under such good control."

"It is not my fault, I assure you; I was more impatient than you are--the governor must be mad!"

"That's what I have been saying."

"But the madness of the governor ought not to keep us from eating."

"It should have the opposite effect."

"We can talk just as well with our mouths full."

"A thousand times better," said the office-boy.

Chalamel was carving the turkey, and he said to the principal clerk: "What reason have you for thinking that the governor is crazy?"

"We were inclined to think that he had become perfectly stupid, when he agreed to give us forty sous per head for our daily breakfast."

"I confess that I was as much surprised as you are, gentlemen; but it is a trifle, actually a trifle, compared with what has just occurred."

"You don't say so!" said another.

"Is the notary crazy enough to invite us to dine every day, at his expense, at the Cadran-Bleu?"

"And give us tickets to the play, after dinner?"

"And after that, take us to the _cafe_, to round off with punch?"

"And after that a la--"

"Gentlemen, just as far as you please; but the scene which I have just observed is more frightful than funny."

"Give us the scene, I beg of you."

"That's right; don't trouble yourself about the breakfast--we are all ears."

"And all jaws! I see through you, my pretties! while I am speaking, your teeth will be in motion, and the turkey would be finished before my story. Be patient; I will reserve it for the dessert."

We do not know whether it was the goad of hunger or curiosity that stimulated the mastication of the young limbs of the law, but the breakfast was so rapidly completed, that the moment for the story arrived immediately.

Not to be surprised by the governor, they sent the office-boy, on whom the carcass and claws of the turkey had been most liberally bestowed, as a sentry into the neighboring room.

The head clerk said to his colleagues, "In the first place, you must know that, for some days past the porter has been alarmed about master's health. As the good man sits up very late, he has seen M. Ferrand go down to the garden in the night in spite of the cold and rain, and walk up and down rapidly. He ventured to leave his nest, and ask his master if he had need of anything. The governor sent him to bed in such a tone that, since then, the porter has kept himself quiet, and he will keep himself so always, as soon as he hears the governor descend to the garden, which happens every night, no matter what weather."

"The old boy is, perhaps, a somnambulist?"

"Not probable; but such nocturnal promenades announce great agitation. I arrive at my story: just now, I went in to get some signatures. At the moment I placed my hand on the lock, I thought I heard some one speak. I stopped, and distinguished two or three dull cries, like stifled sobs. After having hesitated to enter for a moment, fearing some misfortune, I opened the door."

"Well?"

"What did I see? The governor on his knees, on the floor."

"On his knees?"

"On the floor?"

"Yes, kneeling on the floor, his face in his hands and Us elbows on the seat of one of his old arm-chairs."

"It is very plain. What fools we are! He is so bigoted, he was making an extra prayer."

"In any case, it would be a funny prayer! Nothing could be heard but stifled groans, only from time to time he murmured, between his teeth, 'Lord, lord!' like a man in a state of despair. Seeing this, I did not know whether I ought to remain or to retire."

"That would have been also my political opinion."

"I remained, therefore, very much embarrassed, when he rose and turned suddenly. He had between his teeth an old pocket-handkerchief; his spectacles remained on the chair. In all my life I have never seen such a face: he had the appearance of a lost soul. I drew back, alarmed--on my word of honor, alarmed! Then he--"

"Caught you by the throat?"

"You are out there. He looked at me, at first, with a bewildered air; then, letting his handkerchief fall, which he had, doubtless, gnawed and torn in grinding his teeth, he cried, throwing himself into my arms, 'Oh! I am very unhappy!'"

"Draw it mild!"

"Fact! Well, in spite of his death's-head look, when he pronounced these words his voice was so heart-rending--I would say, almost so soft--"

"So soft? Get out. There is not a rattle, nor Tom-cat with a cold, whose sounds would not be music alongside his voice."

"It is possible; that did not prevent it from being so plaintive at that time that I felt myself quite affected; so much the more as M. Ferrand is not habitually communicative. 'Sir,' said I, 'I believe that.' 'Leave me! leave me!' he answered, interrupting me; 'to tell your sufferings to another is a great solace.' Evidently he took me for some one else."

"So familiar? Then you owe us two bottles of Bordeaux:

"'When one's master is not proud
One must freely treat the crowd.'

It is the proverb that speaks; it is sacred. Proverbs are the wisdom of a nation."

"Come, Chalamel, leave your proverbs alone. You comprehend, that, on hearing that, I at once understood that he was mistaken, or that he was in a high fever. I disengaged myself, saying, 'Calm yourself! it is I.' Then he looked at me with a stupid look."

"Very well! now that sounds like the truth."

"His eyes were wild. 'Eh!' he answered. 'What is it?--who is there? what do you want with me?' At each question he ran his hand over his face, as if to drive away the clouds which obscured his thoughts."

"'Which obscured his thoughts!' Just as if it were written! Bravo, head clerk; we will make a melodrama together:

"'Who speaks so well, and so polite,
A melodrama ought to write.'"

"Do hold your tongue, Chalamel. I know nothing about it; but what is sure is, that, when he recovered his Senses, it was another song. He knit his brows in a terrible manner, and said to me, with quickness, without giving me time to answer, 'What did you come here for?--have you been a long time here?--can I not be alone in my own house without being surrounded by spies?--what have I said?--what have you heard? Answer, answer.' He looked so wicked that I replied, 'I have heard nothing, sir; I just came in.' 'You do not deceive me?' 'No, sir.' 'Well, what do you want?' 'To ask for some signatures, sir.' 'Give me the papers.' And he began to sign--without reading them, a half dozen notarial acts--he, who never put his flourish on an act without spelling it, letter by letter, and twice over, from end to end. I remarked that, from time to time, his hand slackened a little in the middle of his signature, as if he was absorbed by a fixed idea, and then he resumed and signed quickly, in a convulsive manner. When all were signed he told me to retire, and I heard him descend by the little staircase which leads from his cabinet to the court."

"I now come back to this: what can the matter be with him?"

"Perhaps he regrets Madame Seraphin."

"Oh, yes! _he_ regrets any one!"

"That reminds me of what the porter said: that the cure of Bonne-Nouvelle and his vicar had called several times, and were not received. That is surprising."

"What I want to know is, what the carpenter and locksmith have been doing in the pavilion."

"The fact is, they have worked there for three days consecutively."

"And then one evening they brought some furniture here in a covered cart."

"I give it up! as sung the swan of Cambrai."

"It is perhaps remorse for having imprisoned Germain which torments him."

"Remorse--_he?_ It is too hard, and too tough, as the eagle of Meau said."

"Fie, Chalamel!"

"Speaking of Germain, he is going to have famous recruits in his prison, poor fellow."

"How is that?"

"I read in the 'Gazette des Tribunaux' that the gang of robbers and assassins who have been arrested by the Champs Elysees in one of those little subterranean taverns--"

"They are real caverns."

"That this band of scoundrels has been confined in La Force."

"Poor Germain, good society for him."

"Louise Morel will also have her part of the recruits; for in the band they

say there is a whole family, from father to son and mother to daughter."

"Then they will send the women to Saint Lazare, where Louise is."

"It is, perhaps, some of this band who have attempted the life of the countess who lives near the Observatory, one of our clients. Has not master sent me often enough to know how she is? He appears to be very much interested about her health. Only yesterday he sent me again to inquire how Lady M'Gregor had passed the night."

"Well."

"Always uncertain: one day they hope, the next despair--they never know whether she will get through the day; two days ago she was given up; but yesterday there was a ray of hope; what complicates the matter is, she has a brain fever."

"Could you go into the house, and see where the deed was committed?"

"Oh! by no means! I could go no further than the gate, and the porter did not seem disposed to walk much, not as ..."

"Here comes master," cried the boy, entering the office with the carcass. Immediately the young men seated themselves at their respective desks, over which they bent, moving their pens, while the boy deposited for a moment the turkey skeleton in a box filled with law papers.

Jacques Ferrand appeared.

Taking off his old silk cap, his red hair, mixed with gray, fell in disorder from each side of his temples; some of the veins on his forehead seemed injected with blood, while his flat face and hollow cheeks were of a livid paleness. The expression of his eyes could not be seen, concealed as they were by his large green spectacles; but the visible alteration of his features announced a consuming passion.

He crossed the office slowly, without saying a word to his clerks, without appearing to notice their presence, entered the room of the head clerk, walked through it, as well as his own cabinet, and descended immediately by the little staircase which led to the court. Jacques Ferrand having left behind him all the doors open, the clerks could, with good reason, be astonished at the extraordinary motions of their master, who came up one staircase and descended another, without stopping in any of the chambers, which he had traversed mechanically.

The Countess M'Gregor, at least, was not his trouble. In showing La Chouette Fleur-de-Marie's picture, she had exposed her jewels, and to secure them, the hag poniarded the lady and decamped.

CHAPTER II.

THOU SHALT NOT LUST.

It was night. The profound silence which reigned in the house occupied by Jacques Ferrand was interrupted at intervals by the sighing of the wind,

and by rain, which fell in torrents. These melancholy sounds seemed to render still more complete the solitude of the dwelling. In a bed-chamber on the first floor, very comfortably and newly furnished, and covered with a thick carpet, a young woman was standing before an excellent fire.

What was very strange, in the center of the door, which was strongly bolted, and opposite the bed, was placed a small wicket of about five or six inches square, which could be opened on the outside.

A reflecting lamp cast an obscure light in this room, which was hung with garnet-colored silk; the curtains of the bed, as also the covering of a large sofa, were of silk and worsted damask, of the same color.

We are minute in these details of furniture, so recently imported into the dwelling of the notary, because it announces a complete revolution in the habits of Jacques Ferrand, who, until then was of Spartan avarice and meanness (above all as respected others) in all that concerned living. It is then upon this garnet tapestry, a strong background, warm in color, on which is delineated the picture we are going to paint.

Of tall and graceful stature, she is a quadroon in the flower of bloom and youth. The development of her fine shoulders, and of her luxurious person, makes her waist appear so marvelously slender, that one would believe that she might use her necklace for a girdle.

As simple as it is coquettish and provoking, her Alsatian costume is of strange taste, somewhat theatrical, and thus more calculated for the effect that it was intended to produce.

Her spencer of black cassimere, half open on her swelling bosom, very long in the body, with tight sleeves and plain back, is embroidered with purple wool on the seams, and trimmed with a row of small chased silver buttons. A short petticoat of orange merino, which seems of exaggerated amplitude, although it fits admirably on the contours of sculptural richness, allows a glance at the charming leg of the Creole, in the scarlet stockings with blue clocks, just as it is met with among the old Flemish painters, who show so complacently the garters of their robust heroines.

Never did artist dream of an outline more pure than her limbs; strong and muscular above their full calves, they terminated in a small foot, quite at ease, and well arched in its very small shoe of black morocco with silver buckles. She is standing before the glass on the chimney-piece. The slope of her spencer displays her elegant, graceful neck, of dazzling whiteness, but without transparency.

Taking off her cherry-colored cap, to replace it by a Madras kerchief, the Creole displayed her thick and magnificent hair of bluish black, which, divided in the middle of her forehead, and naturally curled, descended no lower than the junction of the neck with the shoulders. One must know the inimitable taste with which a Creole twists around her head these handkerchiefs, to have an idea of the graceful appearance, and of the piquant contrast of this tissue, variegated purple, azure, and orange, with her black hair, which, escaping from the close folds, surrounds with its large, silky curls her pale, but plump and firm cheeks.

Her arms raised above her head, she finished, with her slender ivory fingers, arranging a large bow, placed very low on the left side, almost on the ear. Her features are of the kind it is impossible ever to forget.

A bold forehead, slightly projecting, surmounted a visage of perfect oval, her complexion of a dead white, the satin-like freshness of a camellia imperceptibly touched by a ray of the sun; her eyes of a size almost immoderate, have a singular expression, for the pupil, extremely large, black, and brilliant, hardly allows the transparent pale blue of the eye ball to be seen from the corners of her eyelids, fringed with long lashes; her chin is perfect; her nose, fine and straight, is terminated by nostrils dilating at each emotion; her lovely impudent mouth is of a lively red.

Let one imagine this pale face, with its sparkling black glances, its red, moist, and glossy lips, which shine like wet coral.

Let us say that this tall Creole, slender, fleshy, strong and active as a panther, was the type of that sensuality which is only lighted up by the fires of the tropics. Such was Cecily.

She was once the slave of a Louisiana planter, who designed her for his harem. Her lover, a slave named David, resisted that design to the only gain of being flogged, while his loved one was borne away. David was no common black; he had been educated in France, and was the plantation surgeon. The story of this high-handed and twofold outrage reached Rudolph, whose yacht was on the coast. The prince, landing in the night with a boat's crew, carried off David and Cecily from the planter's calaboose, leaving a sum of money as indemnity. The two were wedded in France, but Cecily, won away by a very bad man, had become so evil, that her new life was a series of scandals. David would have killed her, but Rudolph, whose physician he had worthily become, induced him to prefer her life-prisonment in Germany. Out of her dungeon she was brought by Rudolph, who knew no fitter implement with which to chastise the notary.

Her detestable predilections, for some time restrained by her real attachment for David, were only developed in Europe; the civilization and climatical influence of the North had tempered the violence, modified the expression. Instead of casting herself violently on her prey, and thinking only, like her compeers, to destroy as soon as possible their life and fortune, Cecily, fixing on her victims her magnetic glances, commenced by attracting them, little by little, into the blazing whirlwind which seemed to emanate from her; then, seeing them lost, suffering every torment of a tantalized craving, she amused herself by a refinement of coquetry, prolonging their delirium; then, returning to her first instincts, she destroyed them in her homicidal embrace. This was more horrible still.

The famished tiger, who springs upon and carries off the prey which he tears with wild roars, inspires less horror than the serpent, which silently charms, attracts by degrees, twists in inextricable folds the victim, feels it palpitate under its deadly stings, and seems to feed upon its struggles with as much delight as upon its blood.

To the foregoing let there be joined an adroit, insinuating, quick mind--an intelligence so marvelous, that in a year she spoke both French and German with the most extreme facility--sometimes even with marked eloquence. Imagine, in fine, a corruption worthy of the courtesan queens of ancient Rome, and audacity and courage above all proof, propensities, diabolical wickedness, and one would have a correct idea of the new _servant_ of Jacques Ferrand--the determined creature who had dared to throw herself into the den of the wolf. And yet (singular anomaly) on learning from M. de Graun the provoking _platonic_ part which she was to play at the notary's and what avenging ends were to be produced by her artifices, Cecily had promised to perform her part with a will; or, rather, with a terrible

hatred against Jacques Ferrand, being very indignant at the recital of his having drugged Louise--a recital it was found necessary to make, in order that she should be on her guard against the hypocritical attempts of the monster. Some retrospective words concerning the latter personage are indispensable.

When Cecily was presented to him by Rudolph's intermediary, Madame Pipelet, as an orphan over whom she wished to have no control, or care, the notary had, perhaps, been less struck with the beauty of the Creole than fascinated by her irresistible glances, which, at the first interview, lighted a fire which disturbed his reason.

This man, ordinarily with so much self-command, so calm, and cunning, forgot the cold calculations of his profound dissimulation when the demon of lust obscured his mind. Besides he had no reason to suspect the _protegee_ of Madame Pipelet.

After her conversation with the latter, Madame Seraphin had proposed to Jacques Ferrand, to take the place of Louise, a young girl almost without a home, for whom she would answer. The notary had gladly accepted, in the hope of abusing, with impunity, the precarious and isolated condition of his new servant. Finally, far from being suspicious, Jacques Ferrand found, in the progress of events, new motives of security.

All responded to his wishes. The death of Madame Seraphin rid him of a dangerous accomplice. The death of Fleur-de-Marie (he thought her dead) released him from the living proof of his crime of child-stealing. He did not fear the Countess M'Gregor now that she was wounded, while La Chouette was dead, as we have related.

We repeat, no sentiment of suspicion came to counterbalance in his mind the sudden, irresistible impression which he had experienced at the sight of Cecily. He seized, with delight, the occasion to receive into his solitary dwelling the pretended niece of Madame Pipelet.

The character, habits, antecedents of Jacques Ferrand known and stated, the provoking beauty of the Creole, such as we have endeavored to paint it, some other facts which we will now expose, will cause to be comprehended, we hope, the sudden frenzied passion of the notary for this seductive and dangerous creature.

Although Jacques Ferrand was never to obtain the object of his wishes, the Creole was very careful not to deprive him of all hope; but the vague and distant hopes which she rocked in the cradle of so many caprices were for him only increased tortures, and riveted more solidly still the burning chain he wore.

If any astonishment is felt that a man of such vigor and audacity had not had recourse to cunning or violence to triumph over the calculated resistance of Cecily, it must not be forgotten that Cecily was not a second Louise. Besides, the next day after her presentation to the notary, she had played quite another part than the simple country lass, under whose semblance she had been introduced to her master, or he would not have been the dupe of his servant for two consecutive days.

Instructed of the fate of Louise by Baron de Graun, and knowing by what abominable means the unfortunate daughter of Morel had become the prey of the notary, the Creole, entering into this solitary house, had taken excellent precautions to pass the first night in security.

The evening of her arrival, remaining alone with Jacques Ferrand, who, in order not to alarm her, affected hardly to look at her, and told her, roughly, to go to bed, she avowed innocently, that at night she was very much afraid of thieves, but that she was strong, resolute, and ready to defend herself.

"With what?" asked Jacques Ferrand.

"With this," answered the Creole, drawing from the ample woolen pelisse in which she was wrapped up a little dagger, of high finish, which made the notary reflect.

Yet, persuaded that his new servant only feared _robbers,_ he conducted her to the room she was to occupy (the former chamber of Louise). After having examined the localities, Cecily told him, trembling, with her eyes cast down, that, from fear, she would pass her night on a chair, because she saw on the door neither lock nor bolt.

Jacques Ferrand, already completely under the charm, but not wishing to awaken the suspicions of Cecily, said to her, in a cross tone, that she was a fool to have such fears; but he promised that the next day the bolt should be arranged. The Creole did not go to bed.

In the morning the notary came to instruct her as to her duties. He intended to preserve, during the first day, a hypocritical reserve toward his new servant in order to inspire her with confidence; but, struck with her beauty, Which, in the broad daylight seemed still more dazzling, blinded, and carried away by his feelings, he stammered forth some compliments on her figure and beauty.

She, with rare sagacity, had judged from her first interview with the notary, that he was completely under the charm, at the avowal which he made of his _flame,_ she thought she would at once throw off her feigned timidity, and change her mask. The Creole then assumed all at once a bold air. Jacques Ferrand went into new ecstasies, on the beauty of features, and the enchanting figure of his new maid.

"Look me full in the face," said Cecily, resolutely; "although dressed as an Alsatian peasant, do I look like a servant?"

"What do you mean to say?" cried Jacques Ferrand.

"Mark this hand--is it accustomed to rude labor?"

And she showed a white and charming hand, with slender and delicate fingers, the long nails polished like agate, but of which the slightly-shaded crown betrayed the mixed blood.

"And is this a servant's foot?"

And she advanced a ravishing little foot, which the notary had not yet remarked, and which he now only desisted from looking at to regard Cecily with amazement.

"I told Aunt Pipelet just what suited me; she is ignorant of my past life; she thought I was reduced to this position by the death of my parents, and took me for a servant; but you have, I hope, too much sagacity to partake of her error, _dear master."_

"And what are you, then?" cried Jacques Ferrand, more and more surprised at this language.

"That is my secret. For reasons best known to myself, I have been obliged to leave Germany in this disguise. I wish to remain concealed at Paris for some time. My aunt, supposing me reduced to poverty, proposed my entering your service, spoke of your solitary manner of living, and told me that I would never be allowed to go out. I accepted quickly. Without knowing it, my aunt anticipated my most anxious desire. Who could look for and discover

me here?"

"Conceal yourself! what have you done, to be obliged to conceal yourself?"

"Soft offenses, perhaps, but this is my secret."

"And what are your intentions, miss?"

"Always the same. Saving your significant compliments on my shape and beauty, I should not, perhaps, have made this avowal, which your penetration had sooner or later provoked. Listen to me, then, my dear master: I have accepted for the moment the condition, or, rather, the appearance of a servant; circumstances oblige me to do so. I shall have the courage to play this part to the end. I will submit to all the consequences. I will serve you with zeal, activity, and respect, to preserve my place; that is to say, a sure and unknown retreat. But at the least word of gallantry, at the least liberty you take with me, I leave you--not from prudery, nothing in me, I think, looks like the prude."

And she cast a glance charged with sensual electricity, which reached the very bottom of the notary's soul; he shuddered.

"No, I am not a prude," she resumed, with a provoking smile, which displayed her dazzling teeth. "When love bites me, the _bacchantes_ are saints in comparison. But be just, and you will agree that your unworthy servant only wishes to perform honestly her duty as a servant. Now you know my secret, or at least a part of my secret, will you, perchance, act as a gentleman? Do I seem too handsome to serve you? Do you desire to change parts and become my slave? So be it! Frankly, I prefer that, but always on this condition, that I shall never go out of the house, and you shall have for me the most paternal attention--that need not hinder you from saying that you find me charming: it shall be the recompense of your devotion and your discretion."

"The sole?" stammered Jacques Ferrand.

"The sole--unless solitude makes me mad; which is impossible, for you will keep me company, and, in your quality as a holy man you shall exorcise the evil spirit. Come, decide, no mixed position; either I will serve you, or you shall serve me; otherwise I leave your house, and I beg my aunt to find me _another place_. All this must seem strange to you; so be it; but if you take me for an adventurer, without the means of existence, you are wrong. In order to make my aunt my accomplice without her knowledge, I allowed her to think I was too poor to buy other clothes than these. Yet I have, you see, a purse well-filled: on this side with gold, on the other with diamonds" (and she showed the notary a long red silk purse, filled with gold, through the meshes of which also shone precious stones). "Unfortunately, all the money in the world could not give me a retreat as

secure as your house, so isolated by the retirement in which you live. Accept, then, one or the other of my offers; you will render me a service. You see, I place myself at your discretion; for to tell you that I concealed myself, is to tell you I am sought for. But I am sure you will not betray me, even if you knew how to betray."

This romantic confidence, this sudden transformation of character, troubled the brain of Jacques Ferrand.

Who was this woman? Why did she conceal herself? Had chance alone conducted her to his dwelling? If, on the contrary, she came there for some secret purpose, what was this purpose?

Among all the hypotheses which this singular adventure raised in the mind of the notary, the true motive of the Creole's presence never came to his thought. He had not, or, rather, he thought he had not, any other enemies than the victims of his licentiousness and cupidity. Now all of them were in such a condition of trouble or distress that he could not suppose them capable of spreading a snare of which Cecily was the bait.

And then, again, for what purpose was it spread? No, the sudden transformation of Cecily inspired but one fear to Jacques Ferrand: he thought that if this woman did not speak the truth she was an adventurer, who, believing him rich, introduced herself into the house to cajole him, find him out, and perhaps cause him to marry her. But, although his avarice and cupidity revolted at the idea, he perceived, shuddering, that these suspicions and reflections were too late; for, with a single word, he could put his suspicions at rest by sending this woman away. And this word he did not speak. Already he loved her, after his manner, and passionately. Already the idea of seeing this seducing creature leave his house seemed to him impossible. Already, even, feeling the pangs of a savage jealousy to think that Cecily might bestow on others favors refused to him, he experienced some consolation in saying, "As long as she is sequestered in my house no one will possess her."

The boldness of language of this woman, the fire in her eyes, the provoking liberty of her manners, sufficiently revealed that she was not, as she said, _a prude._ This conviction, giving vague hopes to the notary, assured still more the empire of Cecily.

In a word, the licentiousness of Jacques Ferrand stifled the voice of cold reason; he abandoned himself blindly to the emotions which overwhelmed him.

It was agreed that Cecily should be his servant only in appearance; in this manner there would be no scandal. Besides, to assure still more the security of his guest, he would take no other domestic; he would himself serve her and himself also; a neighboring coffee-house keeper could bring his repasts. He paid in money the breakfasts of his clerks, and the porter could take care of the office. Finally, the notary ordered to be promptly furnished a chamber on the first floor, according to Cecily's taste. She offered to pay the expense. He opposed it, and expended two thousand francs.

This generosity was enormous, and proved the unheard-of violence of his passion. Then commenced for this wretch a strange life.

Shut up in the impenetrable solitude of his house, inaccessible to all, more and more under the yoke of his frenzied love, no longer attempting to discover the secrets of this strange woman, from master he became a slave;

he was the footman of Cecily--he served her at her repasts--he took care of her apartment. Informed by the baron that Louise had been surprised by a narcotic, the Creole only drank very pure water, only ate meats impossible to adulterate; she chose the chamber which she occupied, and assured herself that the walls concealed no secret doors.

Besides, Jacques Ferrand soon comprehended that Cecily was a woman not to be surprised with impunity. She was vigorous, agile, and dangerously armed.

Nevertheless, not to allow his passion to flag, the Creole seemed at times touched with his attentions, and flattered by the terrible domination she exercised over him. Then, supposing that by proofs of his devotion and self-denial he could make her forget age and ugliness, she delighted to paint in glowing colors his reward when he should arrive at that success.

At these words of a woman so young and so lovely, Jacques Ferrand felt sometimes his mind wandering; a devouring imagery pursued him, waking or sleeping. The ancient fable of the Nessus' shirt was realized for him.

In the midst of these nameless tortures he lost his health, appetite, and sleep. Often at night, in spite of cold or rain, he descended to his garden, and endeavored by a rapid walk to calm his emotions.

At other times, during whole hours, he looked into the chamber where the Creole slept, for she had had the infernal kindness to allow a wicket to be placed in her door, which she often opened, in order that she might almost cause him to lose his reason, so that she could then execute the orders she had received.

The decisive moment seemed to approach. The chastisement of Ferrand became from day to day more worthy of his sins.

He suffered all the torments. By turns absorbed, lost, out of his mind, indifferent to his most serious interests, the maintenance of his reputation as an austere, grave, and pious man--a reputation usurped, but acquired by long years of dissimulation and cunning--he astonished his clerks by his aberrations, displeased his clients by his refusal to see them, and harshly kept at a distance the priests, who, deceived by his hypocrisy, had been, until then, his most fervent trumpeters.

As we were saying, Cecily was arranging her head for the night before a glass. On a slight noise coming from the corridor, she turned her face away from the door.

Notwithstanding the noise which she had just heard at the door, Cecily did not the less tranquilly continue her undressing; she drew from her corsage, where it was placed like a busk, a dirk, five or six inches long, in a case of black shagreen, with a handle of black ebony fastened with silver, a very simple handle, but perfectly _handy_, not a weapon of mere display.

Cecily took the dirk from its case with excessive precaution, and placed it on the marble chimney-piece; the blade, of the finest Damascus and the best temper, was triangular; its point, as sharp as a needle, had pierced a dollar without blunting it.

Impregnated with a subtle and quick poison, the least wound from this poniard was mortal.

Jacques Ferrand, having one day doubted the dangerous properties of this

weapon, the Creole made before him an experiment _in anima vita_, that is to say, on the unfortunate house dog, who, slightly pricked in the nose, fell dead in horrible convulsions.

The dirk placed on the chimney, Cecily taking off her spencer of black cloth, exposed her shoulders, bosom, and arms, naked like a lady in ball costume.

According to the custom of most girls of color, she wore, instead of a corset, a second corsage of double linen, which was closely bound around her waist; her orange petticoat, remaining fastened under her white inner waist with short sleeves, composed thus a costume much less severe than the first, and harmonized wonderfully with the scarlet stockings, and the Madras scarf so capriciously twisted around the head of the Creole. Nothing could be more pure, more beautiful, than the contour of her arms and shoulders, to which little dimples gave a charm the more.

A profound sigh attracted the attention of Cecily. She smiled, while roiling around one of her ivory fingers some stray curls which escaped from the folds of the bandana.

"Cecily! Cecily!" murmured a voice, at once harsh and plaintive.

And at the narrow opening of the wicket appeared the pale, flat face of Jacques Ferrand; his eyes sparkled in the shade.

Cecily, silent until then, began to sing softly in Creole French, a Louisianian air. The words of this melody were soft and expressive. Although restrained, the noble contralto overpowered the noise of the torrents of rain and violent gusts of wind, which seemed to shake the old house to its foundation.

"Cecily! Cecily!" repeated Jacques Ferrand, in a supplicating tone.

The Creole suddenly stopped, turned her head quickly, and appeared to hear for the first time the voice of the notary, and approached the door. "How! dear master, you are there?" said she, with a slight foreign accent, which gave additional charm to her melodious voice.

"Oh! how handsome you are!" murmured the notary.

"You think so?" answered the Creole: "this bandana suits my hair?"

"Every day I find you still more handsome."

"And see how white my arm is."

"Monster! go away! go away!" cried Jacques Ferrand, furiously.

Cecily laughed immoderately.

"No, no, this is suffering too much! Oh! if I did not fear death!" cried the notary, in a hollow voice; "but to die--to renounce the sight of you, so handsome. I prefer to suffer, and see you--"

"See me; this wicket is made for that, and, also, that we can talk as friends, and thus charm our solitude; which, in truth, does not weigh heavily, you are so good a _master!_ See what dangerous confessions I can make through this door."

"And will you not open this door? Yet see how submissive I am! to-night I might have tried to enter with you into your chamber--I did not."

"You are submissive for two reasons. In the first place, you know that being, from necessity, in the habit of wearing a dirk, I handle with a firm hand this venomous plaything, sharper than the tooth of a viper; you know also, that on the day I complain of you, I shall leave forever this house, leaving you a thousand time more charmed, since you have been so gracious toward your unworthy servant as to be charmed with her."

"My servant? it is I who am your slave--your slave, mocked, despised."

"That is true enough."

"And does not this touch you?"

"It amuses me. The days, and, above all, the nights, are so long."

"Oh, the cursed--"

"No seriously, you appear so completely bewildered, your features change so sensibly, that I am flattered. It is a poor triumph, but you are the only man here!"

"To hear that, and only be able to consume in powerless rage!"

"How little wit you have! never, perhaps, have I said anything to you more tender."

"Scoff--scoff."

"I do not scoff; I have never seen a man of your age so much in love; and, it must be acknowledged, that a young and handsome man would be incapable of such mad passion. An Adonis admires himself as much as he admires us; he loves on the end of his teeth; and then to love him is his due, hardly is he grateful; but to love a man like you, my master, oh! that would be to raise him from earth to heaven; it would be to accomplish his wildest dreams, his hopes the most extravagent. For, in fine, the being would say to you, 'You love Cecily madly; if I wish it, she shall be yours'--you would believe such a being endowed with supernatural powers, would you not, dear master?"

"Yes, oh! yes."

"Well! if you knew how to convince me better of your passion, I should have, perhaps, the fantasy to play myself, in your favor, this supernatural part. Do you comprehend?"

"I comprehend that you scoff at me still, always, and without pity."

"Perhaps solitude creates such strange fantasies."

Her tone, until then, had been sardonic; but she pronounced these last words with a serious expression, and accompanied them by a glance which made the notary tremble. "Hush--do not look at me thus; you will make me mad. I prefer that you should say to me _never_; at least, I could abhor you, drive you from the house," cried Jacques Ferrand, who again abandoned his vain hopes. "Yes, for I expect nothing from you. But woe is

me! woe! I know you now enough. You tell me to convince you of my love; do you not see how unhappy I am! Yet I do all I can to please you. You wish to be concealed from every eye: I conceal you, perhaps at the risk of compromising myself; in fine, I do not know who you are; I respect your secret; I never speak to you about it. I have interrogated you on your past life; you have not answered me."

"Well! I was wrong; I am going to give you a mark of blind confidence. Oh! my master, listen to me."

"Once more a bitter joke!"

"No, it is very serious. You must know, you should know, the history of her to whom you give such generous hospitality."

And Cecily added, in a tone of hypocritical and tearful compunction:

"The daughter of a brave soldier, brother of my Aunt Pipelet, I have received an education above my condition; I was seduced, then abandoned, by a rich young man. Then, to escape from the rage of my old father, I fled my native country." Then, laughing heartily, Cecily added: "There, I hope is a little story very presentable, and, above all, very probable, for it has often been related. Amaze your curiosity with that, while waiting for some revelation more piquant."

"I was very sure that this was a cruel pleasantry," said the notary, with suppressed anger. "Nothing touches you, nothing; what must be done? tell me, at least. I serve you like the meanest valet; for you I neglect my dearest interests; I know no more what I do. I am a subject of laughter for my clerks; my clients hesitate to leave me their business. I have parted with some pious people who used to visit me. I dare not think what the public say of this complete change in all my habits. You do not know, no, you do not know the fatal consequences that my mad passion may have for me. See, now, the proofs of my devotion, my sacrifices. Do you wish more? speak! Is it gold you wish? The world thinks me richer than I am, but I----"

"What would you have me to do with your gold?" said Cecily, interrupting the notary, and shrugging her shoulders. "To reside in this chamber--what good would the gold do me? You have small invention!"

"But it is not my fault if you are a prisoner. Does this room displease you? Will you have it more magnificent? speak, command."

"For what purpose; once more, for what purpose? Oh! if I expected here an adored being, I would have gold, silk, flowers, perfumes, all the wonders of luxury; nothing could be too sumptuous, too enchanting."

"Well! these wonders of luxury; say a word, and----"

"For what purpose? What should I do with the frame without the picture? The adored being, where is he, oh! my master?"

"It is true!" cried the notary, bitterly. "I am old. I am ugly. I can only inspire disgust and aversion; she loads me with contempt; she scoffs at me, and I have not the strength to drive her away. I have only strength to suffer."

"Oh! the insupportable _cry-baby_; oh! the silly, with his complaints,"

cried Cecily, in a sardonic and contemptuous tone; he does nothing but groan and lament, and has been for ten days shut up alone with a young woman, in a deserted house."

"But this woman despises me--is armed--is locked!" cried the notary in a rage.

"Well! overcome the disdain of this woman; cause the dagger to fall from her hand; constrain her to open this door, which separates you from her; and that not by brutal force, which would fail."

"And how then?"

"By the force of your passion."

"Passion! and how can I inspire it?"

"Stop, you are but a notary bound up with a sexton; you make me pity you. Am I to teach you your part? You are ugly; be terrible, your ugliness will be forgotten. You are old; be energetic, your age will be overlooked. You are repulsive; be threatening. Since you cannot be the noble horse, who neighs proudly in the midst of his wives, be not, at least, the stupid camel, who bends the knee and crooks the back; be a tiger. An old tiger, who roars in the midst of carnage, has also its beauty; his tigress answers him from the depths of the desert."

At this language, which was not without a sort of bold natural eloquence, Jacques Ferrard shuddered, at the savage and almost ferocious expression of the face of Cecily, who, with heaving bosom, expanded nostril, haughty mouth, fixed on him her large black and burning eyes.

Never had she appeared so lovely.

"Speak, speak again!" cried he, passionately; "you speak seriously this time. Oh! if I could----"

"One can do what one wishes," said Cecily, abruptly.

"But----"

"But I tell you that if you wish, repulsive as you are----"

"Yes, I will do it! Try me, try me!" cried Jacques Ferrand, more and more excited.

Cecily continued, approaching nearer, and fixing on the notary a penetrating look, "For a woman loving a handsome youth would know," resumed the Creole, "that she would have an exorbitant caprice to satisfy; that the boys would look at their money if they had any, or, if they had none, to a mean trick, while the old tiger----"

"Would regard nothing, do you understand? nothing. Fortune, honor, he would know how to sacrifice all he would!"

"True," said Cecily, placing her charming fingers on the bony and hairy hands of Jacques Ferrand, who, for the first time, touched the soft and velvety skin of the Creole. He became still paler, and uttered a hoarse sigh.

"How this woman would be beloved," added Cecily, "had she an enemy, whom, pointing out to her old tiger, she would say strike, and--"

"And he would strike," cried Jacques Ferrand, endeavoring to approach the ends of her fingers to his withered lips.

"True, the old tiger would strike," said the Creole, placing her hand softly on his.

"If you would love me," cried the wretch, "I believe I would commit a crime."

"Hold, master," said Cecily, suddenly withdrawing her hand; "in your turn go away, go away, I know you no more; you do not appear to me so ugly now as before; go away."

She retired quickly from the wicket. The detestable creature knew how to give to her gestures and to her last words an accent of truth so incredible--her look, at once surprised and annoyed, seemed to express so naturally her spite at having for a moment forgotten the ugliness of Jacques Ferrand--that he, transported with frenzied hope, cried, clinging to the bars of the wicket, "Cecily, return, command, I will be your tiger!"

"No, no, master," said Cecily, retreating still further from the wicket; "and to lay the devil who tempts me--I am going to sing a song of my country. Master, do you hear? without, the wind redoubles, the tempest is unchained; what a fine night for two lovers, seated side by side near a sparkling fire!"

"Cecily, return!" cried Jacques Ferrand, in a supplicating tone.

"No, no, presently, when I can without danger; but the light from this lamp hurts my eyes, a soft languor weighs down my eyelids. I do not know what emotion agitates me; a demi-obscurity will please me more; one would say I am in the twilight of pleasure."

And Cecily went toward the chimney, put out the lamp, took a guitar suspended on the wall, and stirred the fire, whose blaze illuminated this large room.

From the narrow wicket where he remained immovable, such was the picture which Jacques Ferrand perceived. In the midst of the luminous horizon formed by the undulating light of the fire, Cecily, in a position full of languor, half reclining on a divan of pink satin, held a guitar, from whence she drew some harmonious preludes.

The blazing hearth shed its rosy light on the Creole, who appeared brilliantly illumined in the midst of the obscurity of the rest of the apartment.

To complete the effect of this picture, let the reader recall to his mind the mysterious and almost fantastic appearance of a room where the firelight struggles with the long, dark shadows which tremble on the ceiling and walls.

The storm redoubled its violence, its roaring could be heard from within.

While preluding on her guitar, Cecily fixed her magnetic glances on Jacques Ferrand, who, fascinated, could not withdraw.

"Now, master," said the Creole, "listen to a song of my country; we do not know how to make verses; we muse a simple recitative, without rhyme, and at each pause we improvise a couplet appropriate to the subject; it is very pastoral; it will please you, I am sure, master. This song is called the 'Loving Girl!' it is she who speaks."

And Cecily commenced a kind of recitative, much more accented by the expression of the voice than by the modulations of the song. A few soft and trembling chords served as an accompaniment. This was the song:

"Flowers, everywhere flowers,
My lover comes! The hope of happiness enervates and destroys.
Soften the light of day--pleasure seeks a lucid darkness.
To the fresh perfume of flowers my love prefers my warm breath,
The glare of day shall not wound his eyes, for I will keep them closed by my kisses.
My angel, come! My heart beats; my blood burns!
Come, come, come!"

These words, chanted with as much ardor as if she had addressed an invisible lover, were, thus to speak, translated by the Creole into a theme of enchanting melody; her charming fingers drew from her guitar sounds full of delicious harmony.

The animated face of Cecily, her veiled and moistened eyes constantly fixed on those of Jacques Ferrand, expressed all the languor of the song. Words of love; intoxicating music; inflamed looks; silence; night! all conspired at this moment to disturb the reason of the notary. He cried, bewildered:

"Mercy! Cecily! mercy I I shall go wild. Hush! I die. Oh! that I were mad!"

"Listen, then, to the second couplet," said the Creole, preluding anew.

And she continued her passionate recitative:

"If my lover were there, and with his hand touched my soft neck, I should shudder and die.
If he were there, and his hair touched my cheek, my cheek so pale would become red.
My cheek so pale would be as fire.
Life of my soul, if you were there, my parched lips could not speak.
Life of my life, if you were there--expiring--I would ask no mercy.
Those whom I love as I love you, I kill.
My angel, come. Oh! come! My heart beats: my blood burns I
Come, come, come!"

If the Creole had accented the first stanza with a voluptuous languor, she poured into these last words all the transports of Eros of old. As if the music had been powerless to express her wild delirium, she threw the guitar aside, and half rising from the couch and extending her arms toward the door, she repeated, in an expiring, languishing voice,

"Oh! come, come, come!"

To paint the electric look with which she accompanied these words would he impossible.

Jacques Ferrand uttered a terrible cry.

"O! death--death to him you love so much, to whom you have addressed these words!" cried he, shaking the door in a transport of jealousy.

Active as a tigress, with one bound Cecily was at the wicket, and, as if she had with difficulty dispelled her feigned transports, she said to Jacques Ferrand, in a low, palpitating voice: "Well! I avow I did not wish to return to the door. I am here in spite of myself; for I fear your words spoken just now. _If you say strike--I will strike._ You love me well, then?"

"Do you wish gold--all my gold?"

"No; I have enough."

"Have you an enemy? I'll kill him."

"I have no enemy."

"Will you be my wife? I will espouse you."

"I am married."

"But what do you wish, then! what _do_ you wish?"

"Prove to me that your passion for me is blind, furious, that you will sacrifice everything for me!"

"All! yes, all! But how?"

"I do not know; but there was a moment when the glance of your eye bewildered me. If now you give me some proof of your love, I do not know of what I should be capable! Hasten! I am capricious; to-morrow the impression of this hour will perhaps be effaced."

"But what proof can I give you on the moment?" cried the wretch. "It is an atrocious torment! What proof? speak! What proof?"

"You are only a fool!" answered Cecily, retreating from the wicket with an appearance of extreme irritation. "I am mistaken! I thought you capable of energetic devotion! Good-night. It is a pity--"

"Cecily! oh! do not go--return. But what must I do? tell me, at least. Oh! my senses wander. What must I do? what do?"

"Guess!"

"But, in fine--speak! what do you wish?" cried the notary, quite beside himself.

"Guess."

"Explain--command."

"Ah! if you love me as passionately as you say, you will find the means. Good-night."

"Cecily!"

"I am going to shut this wicket--instead of opening the door--"

"Mercy! listen--remain--I have found it," cried Jacques Ferrand, after a moment's pause, with an expression of joy impossible to describe. The wretch was seized with a vertigo. He lost all prudence, all reserve; the instinct of moral preservation abandoned him.

"Well! this proof of your love?" said the Creole: who, having approached the chimney, took hold of her knife, and returned slowly toward the wicket.

Then, without being seen by the notary, she assured herself of the action of a small chain, one end of which was fastened to the door, the other to the door-post.

"Listen," said Jacques Ferrand, in a hoarse and broken voice; "listen. If I place my honor, my fortune, my life, at your mercy--here--on the spot--will you then believe I love you? This proof of an insane passion, will it suffice?"

"Your honor, your fortune, your life? I do not comprehend."

"If I confide to you a secret which would place me on the scaffold?"

"You a criminal? You jest. And your austerity?"

"A lie."

"Your probity?"

"A lie."

"Your piety?"

"A lie."

"You pass for a saint, and you would be a demon! You are a boaster! No; there is no man quite cunning enough, bold enough, thus to insinuate himself into the confidence and respect of men. It would be a frightful defiance cast in the face of society."

"I am this man! I have thrown this taunt, this defiance, in the teeth of society!" cried the monster, in an access of frightful pride.

"Jacques! Jacques! do not speak thus," said Cecily. "You will make me mad!"

"My head for your love--do you wish it?"

"Oh! this is love, indeed!" cried Cecily. "Here--take my poniard; you disarm me."

Jacques Ferrand took, through the wicket the dangerous weapon with precaution, and threw it from him into the corridor.

"Verily--you believe me, then?" cried he, in transport.

"I believe you?" said the Creole, leaning with force her charming hands on those of Jacques Ferrand. "Yes, I believe you; for I see again your look of just now--that look which fascinated me. Your eyes sparkle with savage ardor; Jacques, I love your eyes!"

"Cecily!"

"You should speak the truth."

"I speak the truth! Oh! you shall see."

"Your countenance is lowering. Your expression formidable. Hold, you are as fearful and beautiful as a mad tiger. But you speak the truth, do you not?"

"I have committed crimes, I tell you."

"So much the better, if by their avowal you prove your love."

"And if I tell you all?"

"I grant all; for if you have this blind confidence in me--do you see, Jacques--it will no longer be the ideal lover of the song I call. It is to you, my tiger, you, that I shall say come--come--come."

"Oh, you will be mine. I shall be your tiger," cried he; "and then, if you will, you shall dishonor me--my head shall fall. My honor, my life, all is yours now,"

"Your honor?"

"My honor! Listen; ten years since an infant was confided to my care, and two hundred thousand francs for its support; I have abandoned this child. I spread the report the child was dead, and I kept the money."

"It was bold and skillful--who would have thought it of you?"

"Listen again: I hated my cashier, Francois Germain. One night he took from me a little gold, which he returned the next day; but to ruin him, I accused him of having robbed me of a considerable sum. I was believed, he was thrown into prison. Now my honor is at your mercy."

"Oh, you love me, Jacques, you love me. To inform me thus of your secrets--what empire I must have over you! I will not be ungrateful; let me kiss this forehead, where so many infernal thoughts were created."

"Oh!" cried the notary, stammering, "if the scaffold stood there, ready, I would not draw back. Listen again: this child, Fleur-de-Marie, once abandoned, crosses my path--she inspires me with fears; I have had her killed!"

"You? How? where?"

"A few days since--near Asnieres Bridge, by Ravageurs' Island. One named Martial drowned her in a boat. Are these details sufficient? do you believe me?"

"Oh! demon from hell: you alarm, yet attract me. You inspire me. What is, then, your power?"

"Listen again: before that a man had confided to me a hundred thousand crowns. I set a trap for him. I blew his brains out. I proved that he committed suicide, and I denied the deposit which his sister the Baroness de Fermont reclaimed. Now my life is at your mercy--open."

"Jacques, I adore you!" said the Creole, with warmth.

"Oh! come a thousand deaths, and I'd dare them!" cried the notary, in an intoxication impossible to describe. "Yes, you are right; were I young and charming, I should not experience this triumphant joy. The key! throw me the key! draw the bolt!"

The Creole took the key from the lock, and handed it to the notary through the wicket, saying, "Jacques, I am mad!"

"You are mine, at length!" cried he, with a savage roar, turning the key in the lock. But the door, fastened with a bolt, did not open.

"Come, my tiger! come," said Cecily, in an expiring voice.

"The bolt! the bolt!" cried Jacques Ferrand.

"But, if you deceive me," cried the Creole, suddenly, "if these secrets are an invention, to cajole me---"

The notary remained for a moment, struck with stupor; he thought he had succeeded: this last difficulty raised his impatient fury to its climax.

He thrust his hand quickly in his bosom, opened his waistcoat, broke with violence a small chain of steel, to which was suspended a small, thin pocket-book, took it, and showing it through the wicket to Cecily, he said, in an oppressed and breathless tone,

"Here is what would cause my head to fall! draw the bolt--the book is yours."

"Give it to me, my tiger," cried Cecily.

And hastily drawing the bolt with one hand, with the other she seized the book.

But Jacques Ferrand did not abandon it until the moment he felt the door yielding to his efforts.

But though the door yielded, it was only for about six inches, confined, as it was, by the chain above mentioned. At this unforeseen obstacle, Jacques Ferrand threw himself against the door, and shook it with a desperate effort. Cecily, with the rapidity of thought, put the wallet between her teeth, opened the window, threw a cloak into the court, and with great dexterity making use of a cord previously fastened to the balcony, she let herself down into the court, as rapidly and lightly as an arrow falls to the ground.

Then, wrapping herself up in haste in the mantle, she ran to the porter's lodge, opened it, drew the bolt, went out into the street, and jumped into a carriage, which, since her residence at Jacques Ferrand's, was sent every night by order of Baron de Graun, stationed not twenty steps from the notary's mansion.

This carriage was quickly driven off, drawn by two stout horses. It reached the boulevard before Jacques Ferrand had perceived the flight of Cecily. Let us return to this monster.

Through the opening of the door it was impossible for him to see the window by which the Creole escaped. With one mighty effort with his broad shoulders, he burst the chain which confined the door, and rushed into the chamber, and found no one.

The cord waved in the wind, as he leaned from the balcony. Then, from the other side of the court, by the light of the moon, which burst forth at intervals from the driving clouds, he saw the gate open.

In a moment he divined everything. A last ray of hope remained.

Vigorous and determined, he sprang over the balcony, using the cord in his turn, lowered himself into the court, and rushed out of the house. The street was deserted--he was alone.

He heard no other noise than the distant rolling of the carriage which was rapidly carrying off the Creole. The notary thought it was some belated vehicle, and attached no importance to this circumstance.

Thus, for him no chance remained of finding Cecily, who carried off with her the proofs of his crimes!!!

On this frightful certainty, he fell, thunderstruck, on his own threshold.

He remained there a long time, dumb, immovable, petrified. With wan eyes, his teeth compressed, his mouth foaming, tearing mechanically with his nails his breast, he felt his reason totter, and was lost in an abyss of darkness. When he awoke from his stupor, he walked heavily, and with an ill-assured step; objects trembled in his sight; he felt as if recovering from a fit of intoxication.

He shut with violence the street door, and re-entered the court. The rain had ceased, but the wind continued to blow with violence, chasing the heavy laden clouds, which veiled, without concealing, the light of the moon.

Slightly calmed by the brisk and cold air of the night, Ferrand, hoping to combat his internal agitation by the rapidity of his walk, plunged into the obscure walks of his garden, marching with rapid strides, and from time to time striking his forehead with his clinched fists.

Walking thus at hazard, he reached the end of a walk near a greenhouse in ruins. Suddenly he stumbled violently over a mound of earth newly raised. He stooped, and looked mechanically on some linen stained with blood.

He was near the grave where Louise Morel buried her dead child. Her child--also the child of Jacques Ferrand! Notwithstanding his obduracy, notwithstanding the frightful fears which agitated him, Jacques Ferrand shuddered with alarm.

There was something supernatural in this stumbling-block. Pursued by the avenging punishment of his _vice_, chance carried him to the grave of his child--unhappy fruit of his violence. Under any other circumstances, Jacques Ferrand would have trampled on this sepulcher with atrocious indifference; but having exhausted his savage energy in the scene we have related, he was seized with a weakness and sudden alarm. His face was covered with an icy sweat, his trembling knees shook under him, and he fell lifeless across this open grave.

CHAPTER III.

LA FORCE.

The interior of a prison is a frightful pandemonium--a sad _thermometer_ of the state of society, and an instructive study.

In a word, the varied physiognomies of all classes of prisoners, the relations of family or affection which connects them still to the world, from which the prison walls separate them, have appeared to us worthy of regard.

The reader will, then, excuse us for having grouped around several of the prisoners personages to be known in this tale, and other secondary figures, destined to place in active relief certain critical events necessary to complete this initiation into prison life. Let us enter La Force.

There is nothing gloomy, nothing sinister in the aspect of this house of detention.

In the middle of one of the first courts are to be seen some mounds of earth, planted with shrubbery, at the foot of which are already shooting forth some precocious cowslips and snowdrops; a trellised doorway leads to one of the seven or eight exercise-grounds destined for the prisoners.

The vast buildings surrounding this court resemble much a barrack or manufactory, kept with extreme neatness. They are built of limestone, with lofty windows, in order to allow a free circulation of air. The steps and pavement of the yard are of scrupulous cleanliness. On the ground-floor, vast halls, heated during winter, and well aired during summer, serve during the day as a place for conversation, workshops, or refectories. The upper stories are used as immense sleeping apartments, ten or twelve feet in height, with shining floors; they are furnished with two rows of iron bedsteads, excellent beds, composed of a soft thick mattress, a bolster, sheets of white linen, and a warm woolen covering.

At the sight of these accommodations, uniting all the requisites of comfort and salubrity, a stranger is much surprised, accustomed as he is to suppose all prisons as sorrowful, dirty, unhealthy, and gloomy. He is mistaken.

Sad, dirty, and gloomy are the holes where so many poor and honest workmen languish exhausted, forced to abandon their beds to their infirm wives, and to leave with powerless despair their half-starving, naked children, struggling with the cold, in the infectious straw.

There is some contrast between the physiognomies of the inhabitants of these two dwellings. Incessantly occupied with the wants of his family, to whom the day is hardly long enough, seeing a mad perversity reducing his salary, the artisan will be cast down and worn out; the hour of repose will not be sound to him; a kind of sleep like lassitude alone interrupts his daily toil. Then, on awaking from this mournful drowsiness, he will find himself overwhelmed with the same racking thoughts of the present, with the same inquietudes for the morrow.

But if, hardened by vice, indifferent to the past, happy with the present, certain of the future (he can assure himself of it by an offense or crime),

regretting his liberty without doubt, but finding large compensation in the personal well-being he enjoys, certain to carry away with him on his release a good sum of money, gained by moderate and easy labor, esteemed, or, may be, feared by his companions, either for his impudence or perversity, the convict, on the contrary, will be almost always careless and gay. Once more; what does he want?

Does he not find in prison good shelter, good bed, good food, good pay, easy labor, and above all and before all, _a society to his taste_, a society, let us repeat, which measures his merit by the magnitude of his offenses?

A hardened criminal, then, knows neither poverty, hunger, nor cold. What matters to him the horror he inspires in honest men? He does not see them--he knows none.

His crimes are his glory, influence, and strength with the bandits among whom he will henceforth pass his life. How can he fear shame?

Instead of grave and charitable remonstrances, which might force him to blush and to repent, he hears savage plaudits, which encourage him to robbery and murder, Scarcely imprisoned, he meditates new misdeeds. What is more logical?

If he is discovered, arrested anew, he will find repose, the personal care of the prison, and his joyous and bold companions in crime and debauchery.

Is his corruption less great than that of the others? does he manifest, on the contrary, the slightest remorse that he is exposed to atrocious railings, infernal shouts, terrible threats?

In fine--a thing so rare that it has become an exception to the rule--should a condemned man come out of this frightful pandemonium with a firm resolution to reform by prodigies of labor, courage, patience, and honesty, and be able to conceal his past offenses, a meeting with one of his old prison companions would be sufficient to overturn his plan of reformation so carefully designed. In this way:

A hardened ticket-of-leave proposes a job to a repentant one; the latter, in spite of dangerous threats, refuses the criminal association; immediately an anonymous communication strips the veil from the past life of this unfortunate, who wishes, at any sacrifice, to conceal and expiate a first fault by honorable conduct.

Then, exposed to the contempt, or, at least, the suspicion of those whose interest he had obtained by force of industry and probity, reduced to distress, soured by injustice, carried away by want, yielding, in fine, to these fatal derelictions, this man, almost restored, falls back again, and forever, to the bottom of the abyss from whence he had with so much difficulty escaped.

In the following scenes we shall endeavor, then, to show the monstrous and inevitable consequences of promiscuous confinement.

After ages of barbarous proofs and pernicious doubts, it begins to be understood how unreasonable it is to plunge into an atmosphere abominably vitiated, people whom a pure and salubrious air might have saved.

How much time shall be required to find out that, to associate gangrened

beings is to redouble the intensity of their corruption, which thus becomes incurable?

How long to find out that there is but one remedy to this growing leprosy, which threatens the body social, Solitary confinement?

We should esteem ourselves happy if our feeble voice could be, if not counted, at least heard, among all those which, more imposing, more eloquent than ours, demand, with so just and so impatient an importunity, the complete, absolute adoption of the _solitary system_.

Some day, also, perhaps, society will know that evil is an accidental, not organic malady; that criminals are almost always good in substance, but false and wicked through ignorance, selfishness, or negligence of those governing; and that the health of the soul, like that of the body, is invincibly subordinate to the laws of a "hygiene" at once salubrious and preservative.

God gives to all, along with healthy organs, energetic appetites, and the desire of comfort; it is for society to modify and satisfy these wants.

The man who only has as his share strength, good-will, and health, has the _right_, sovereign _right_ to a labor justly remunerated, which will assure him, not the superfluities, but the necessaries of life, the means to be healthy and robust, active and industrious, therefore honest and virtuous, because his condition will be happy.

The dismal regions of misery and ignorance are peopled with beings of sorrowful hearts. Cleanse these sewers, spread there the inclination to labor, equitable salaries, just rewards, and soon these sickly faces, these broken hearts, will be brought back to virtue, which is the life and health of the soul.

We will conduct the reader to the visitors' room of the prison. It is an obscure apartment, separated down its whole length into two equal parts by a narrow, railed passage. One part communicates with the interior, destined for the prisoners.

The other communicates with the office, destined for strangers admitted to visit the prisoners.

These interviews and conversations take place through the double grating of iron, in presence of a warder, who remains inside, at the extremity of the passage. The appearance of the prisoners assembled in the visiting room on this day offered numerous contrasts: some were covered with wretched vestments; some seemed to belong to the working class; others, again, to the well-to-do class.

The same contrast of condition was observable among the persons who came to see the prisoners; they were almost all of them women. Generally the prisoners appear less sad than the visitors; for, strange as it may appear, it is proved by experience, there are few sorrows and little shame which resist three or four days of imprisonment passed in company.

Those who are most alarmed at this hideous communion are soon habituated; the contagion reaches them; surrounded by degraded beings, hearing only infamous words, a kind of ferocious emulation drags them on, and either to impose upon their companions by rivaling their obduracy or to stupefy themselves by this moral intoxication, almost always the newly-arrived show

as much depravity and insolent gayety as the old hands. Let us return to the visitors' room.

Notwithstanding the humming noise of a great number of conversations carried on in a low tone, from one side of the passage to the other, prisoners and visitors succeeded, after some practice, in being able to converse among themselves--on the absolute condition not to allow themselves, for a moment, to be distracted or occupied with the conversation of their neighbors, which created a kind of secret in the midst of all this noisy exchange of words, each one being forced to hear, but not to listen, to a word of that which was spoken around him.

Among the prisoners summoned to the visitors' room, and the furthest from the place where the guardian was seated, was one whom we still particularize.

To the sad state of dejection he was in on his arrest had succeeded impudent assurance. Already the contagious and detestable influence of imprisonment _in common_ bore its fruits. Without doubt, if he had been immediately transferred to a solitary cell, this wretch, still under the blow of his first detection, the thought of his crimes constantly before him, alarmed at the punishment which awaited him, might have experienced, if not repentance, at least a salutary alarm, from which nothing might have distracted him. And who knows what effect may be produced on a criminal by an incessant, forced meditation on the crimes which he had committed, and their punishment? Far from this, thrown into the midst of a ruffianly crowd in whose eyes the least sign of repentance is cowardice, or, rather, _treachery_, which they dearly expiate, for, in their savage obduracy and in senseless distrust, they look upon as a spy every man (if there should be such a one) who, sad and mournful, regretting his fault, does not partake of their audacious thoughtlessness, and shudders at their contact.

Thrown among the bandits, this man, knowing, for a long time and by tradition, the manners and ways of prisons, overcame his weakness, and wished to appear worthy of a name already celebrated in the annals of robbery and murder.

For it had been to him, Nicholas Martial, that Ferrand had applied when the idea struck him to be rid of his housekeeper and Fleur-de-Marie at a blow.

His family were what are called ravageurs, that is dredgers, living on what they could pick up out of the mud of the Seine. At least they were openly these, but, secretly, they were river pirates, "lumpers," "light horsemen," housebreakers, and bravoes. The father had perished on the scaffold. His widow, forty-five years old, was confirmed in crime, stern, hard, coldly cruel, and bent on training all her children up into the life which would most revenge on society the slaying of her husband. One son, Ambrose, had been sold by Bras-Rouge (Red-Arm), a tavern keeper and fence, and now languished in the Rochefort hulks. The eldest son, known as Martial, being head of the family, was a poacher, a fisherman at unlawful seasons, but not irreclaimably bad. The youngest children, Francois and Amandine, were not yet spoiled by evil surroundings.

To this family, who added to their evil income by keeping a thieves' resort in their house on Ravageur's Island, La Chouette had applied for the murdering of Fleur-de-Marie. Nicholas and his sister, known as Calabash (from her yellow complexion) had succeeded in drowning Ferrand's housekeeper only. But, believing they had fulfilled the twofold bargain, they had gone off rejoicing with their mother, to meet La Chouette, report

their success, and join in a fresh atrocity. This new crime, the robbery and murder of a diamond-dealer in Red-Arm's public-house, was frustrated by the landlord's secret connection with the police. They had made their descent just as the jewel-broker was in the villains' hands, and arrested the whole gang. Bras-Rouge (taken to prevent his fellows suspecting his treachery), Nicholas Martial, and a scamp named Barbillon, were put in La Force, widow Martial and Calabash in Saint Lazare. Another capture, a ruffian called the Maitre d'Ecole (Schoolmaster), from his caligraphic abilities, who had killed La Chouette in a fit of madness, was put in the Conciergerie Prison, in a cell for the insane.

To return to Nicholas Martial in La Force. Some veteran gallows-birds had known his executed father, others, his brother, the galley-slave; he was received and immediately patronized by these revelers in crime with savage interest.

This paternal reception from murderer to murderer exhilarated the widow's son, these praises bestowed on the hereditary perversity of his family intoxicated him. Soon forgetting, in this hideous thoughtlessness, the future which menaced him, he only remembered his past misdeeds but to exaggerate them and glorify himself in the eyes of his companions. The expression, then, of his face, was as impudent as his visitor's was uneasy and concerned. This individual was one Micou, a receiver, dwelling in the Passage de la Brasserie, to whose house Madame de Fermont and her daughter, victims of the cupidity of Jacques Ferrand, had been obliged to retire. Micou knew to what punishment he was subject, for having several times acquired, at a miserable price, the fruits of Nicholas's robberies, and of several others.

He being arrested, the receiver found himself almost at the discretion of the bandit, who could point him out as his habitual fence. Although this accusation might not be sustained by flagrant proofs, it was not the less very dangerous for Micou: so he had immediately executed the orders which Nicholas had sent him by a prisoner whose time had expired.

"Well! how do you get on, Daddy Micou?" said the thief.

"To serve you, sir," answered the receiver, eagerly. "As soon as I saw the person you sent me, right away I--"

"Stop! why do you speak so loftily, Micou?" said Nicholas, interrupting him, with a sardonic air. "Do you not despise me because I am in quod?"

"No, I despise no one," said the receiver, who did not care to make public his past familiarity with this wretch.

"Well, then, speak as usual, or I shall believe you have no friendship for me, and that would break my heart."

"As you like," said Micou, sighing. "I have busied myself with all your little commissions."

"Well spoken, Micou. I knew well that you would not forget friends. The weed?"

"I have left two pounds at the office, my lad."

"Is it good?"

"None better."

"And the ham?"

"Also left there, with a quartern loaf. I have added a little surprise you did not expect--half a dozen hard-boiled eggs, and a fine Dutch cheese."

"That's what I call acting like a pal! And wine?"

"There are six bottles, sealed; but, you know, they will only give you one bottle a day."

"What would you have? One ought to be content with that."

"I hope you are satisfied with me, my friend?"

"Certainly; and shall be still, and shall be again, Daddy Micou, for this ham, cheese, eggs, and wine will only last the time to swallow them; but, when there is no more, there will come some more, thanks to Daddy Micou, who will give me some more sugar-plums, if I am a good boy."

"How? you wish--"

"In two or three days you would renew my little provision, Micou."

"May the devil burn me if I do. It is all very well for once."

"Good for once! Come, come; ham and wine are good always, you know that well enough."

"It is possible; but I am not obliged to feed you with dainties."

"Oh, Micou! it is wrong, it is unjust, to refuse ham to me, who have so often brought you fat tripe (sheet-lead)."

"Hush!" said the alarmed receiver.

"No; I'll make the beak decide; I will tell him. Imagine that, Daddy Micou--"

"Good, good!" cried the receiver, seeing, with as much fear as anger, Nicholas was disposed to abuse the position which their dealings gave him; "I consent--I will replenish your stock of provisions when they are exhausted."

"It is just--nothing but just. Neither must you forget to send some coffee to my mother and Calabash, who are at Saint Lazare; they used to take their cup every morning--they will feel the want of it."

"Still more? But do you mean to ruin me, lad?"

"As you please, old Micou; let us speak no more about it. I will ask the big-wig if--"

"Agreed, then, for the coffee," said the receiver, interrupting him. "But may the devil take you! cursed be the day I knew you!"

"My old man, as for me, it is just the contrary. At this moment, I am delighted to know you. I venerate you as my foster-father."

"I hope that you have nothing more to order?" answered Micou, with bitterness.

"Yes! tell my mother and sister that, though I trembled when I was arrested, I tremble no more, and that I am now as bold as both of them."

"I will tell them. Is that all?"

"Stop! I forgot to ask for two pair of warm woolen stockings--you do not wish me to take cold, do you?"

"I wish you were froze!"

"Thank you, Micou, that shall be later; at present, I prefer something else. I wish to pass life calmly--at least, if they do not make me a head shorter, like father, I shall have enjoyed life."

"Your life is very pleasant!"

"It is superb! Since I have been here, I have amused myself like a king. If there had been lamps and guns, there would have been an illumination and a salvo in my honor, when it was known that I was the son of the famous Martial!"

"It is touching. Beautiful relationship!"

"Hold! there are many dukes and marquises; why, then, should not we of the oldest family have our nobility?" said the thief with savage irony.

"Yes, Jack Ketch gives you your letters of nobility in Palace Square!"

"Very sure that it is not the parson! So much the more reason in prison one should be of high Toby nobility, otherwise you are looked upon as a nobody. You ought to see how they treat those mere fogle-hunters, and who do their--Hold! there is one here named Germain, a young man who plays the disgusted, and seems to despise us. Let him take care of his skin. He is a sneak; he is suspected of being a spy. If this is so, they will slit his nose, by way of warning!"

"Germain! A young man called Germain?"

"Yes. Do you know him? He is, then, in the family line, notwithstanding his innocent looks?"

"I do not know him. But if it is the Germain of whom I have heard speak, his lookout is good."

"How?"

"He once escaped a snare which Velu and the Big Cripple laid for him."

"Why did they do it?"

"I don't know. They said that down among the yokels he had sold one of their band."

"I was sure of it. Germain is a spy. Well! I will tell this to my friends; that will give them an appetite. Does the Big Cripple still play tricks on

your lodgers?"

"I am rid of the villain! you will see him here to-day or to-morrow."

"Bravo! we shall have a laugh! He's another who never looks glum!"

"Because he is going to meet Germain here, is why I said his account was good--if he is the same--"

"And why has the Cripple been nabbed?"

"For a robbery committed with a lagger (released convict) who wished to remain honest and labor. Oh, yes! the Big Cripple nicely fixed him; he is so wicked! I am sure it was he who forced the trunk of two women who occupy my fourth floor."

"What women? Oh! the two, the youngest of whom was so handsome, old brigand."

"Oh, yes; but it is all over with her; for, at this present moment, the mother must be dead, and the daughter not far from it. I shall be in for two weeks' lodgings; but may the devil burn me if I give a rag to bury them! I have had losses enough, without counting the presents which you _beg_ me to give you and your family. This will nicely derange my business. I have luck this year."

"Bah, bah! you are always complaining, old Micou; you are as rich as Croesus. When you come to bring me some more provisions, you can give me news of my mother and Calabash!"

"Yes, it must be so."

"Oh! I forget, while you are out, buy me also a new cap, of plaid velvet, with a tassel; mine is no longer fit to be worn."

"Decidedly--you are joking!"

"No, Micou. I want a cap of plaid velvet; it is my notion."

"But you are determined, then, to make me sleep on straw?"

"Come, Daddy Micou, don't get vexed; it is yes or no; I do not force you. But enough."

The receiver, reflecting that he was at the mercy of Nicholas, arose, fearing to be assailed with new demands if he prolonged his visit.

"You shall have your cap," said he; "but take care, if you ask me for anything more, I shall give nothing; happen what may, you will lose as much as I."

"Be tranquil, Micou; I shall not blackmail you any more than is necessary, for this would be a pity; you pay much heavy postage as it is."

The receiver went out, shrugging his shoulders with rage, and the warder reconducted Nicholas into the prison. At the moment Micou left, Rigolette entered.

The warder, a man of forty years, an old soldier of energetic appearance,

was dressed in a jacket, cap, and trousers of blue cloth; two silver stars were embroidered on the collar and skirts of his coat.

At sight of the grisette, his face brightened up, and assumed an expression of affectionate benevolence. He had always been struck with the grace, gentility, and touching goodness with which Rigolette consoled Germain when she came to converse with him. Germain, on his part, was no ordinary prisoner. His reserve, his mildness, his sadness, inspired interest in the prison officials; an interest they were careful not to show him, for fear of exposing him to the bad treatment of his vicious companions, who, as we have shown, regarded him with suspicious hatred.

It rained in torrents, but thanks to her overshoes and umbrella, Rigolette had courageously braved the wind and rain.

"What a horrible day, my poor girl!" said the guardian to her, kindly. "You must have had a good deal of courage to come out such a time as this, at least!"

"When one is thinking all along the way of the pleasure they are going to give a poor prisoner, one does not pay much attention to the weather, sir!"

"I have no need to ask you whom you come to see?"

"Surely not. And how is my poor Germain?"

"My dear, I have seen many prisoners; they were sad, one or two days, but by degrees they fell in with the rest, and the most sorrowful at first often became the most gay. Germain is not so; he appears to grow sadder every day."

"It is this that troubles me."

"When I am on service in the yards, I watch him out of the corner of my eye; he is always alone. I have already told you, you should advise him not to act thus, but to speak to his comrades, otherwise he will become their butt. The yards are watched, but--a blow is soon struck!"

"Oh, sir! is there still more danger for him?" cried Rigolette.

"Not precisely; but the knaves see he is not one of them, and they hate him because he appears honest and proud."

"Yet I have advised him to do what you have told me, sir; to endeavor to converse with the least wicked; but it is too much for him; he cannot overcome his repugnance."

"He is wrong--wrong; a quarrel is soon got up."

"Can he not be separated from the others?"

"Since I have noticed two or three days ago their evil intentions toward him, I have advised him to take a room by himself."

"Well?"

"I did not think of one thing. A whole range of cells are comprised in the repairs now going on in the prison, and the others are occupied."

"But these bad men are capable of killing him!" cried Rigolette, with her eyes filled with tears. "If by chance he had some persons interested in his fate, what could they do for him, sir?"

"Nothing more than to obtain what the prisoners can obtain themselves by paying money--a separate cell."

"Alas! then he is lost, if they hate him in the prison."

"Don't disturb yourself; he shall be watched closely. But I repeat, my dear, counsel him to be a little familiar with them; only the first step costs!"

"I will recommend him to do this with all my strength, sir; but for a good and honest heart it is hard to be familiar with such people."

"Of two evils, choose the least. I go to ask for Germain. But, stop," said the warder, reflecting; "there are only two visitors left; as soon as they are gone--no more will come to-day, for it is now two o'clock--I will send for Germain; you can talk more at ease. I can, even, when you are alone, let him enter into the passage, so that you will be separated by one grating instead of two; so much less."

"Oh, sir! how kind you are; how much I thank you!"

"Hush! let not any one hear you; it will cause jealousy. Seat yourself up there, at the end of the bench, and as soon as this man and woman are gone, I will send for Germain."

The warder returned to his post inside the passage. Rigolette went and seated herself sadly at the extremity of the visitor's bench.

Thus we have a fine chance to draw the grisette's portrait.

Rigolette was hardly eighteen, of a middling size, perhaps rather small, but so gracefully shaped, so finely modeled, so voluptuously developed,

that her size responded well to her bearing, fearless and yet modest; one inch more in height would have caused her to lose much of her grace; the movement of her small feet, always irreproachably confined in gaiter-boots of black cloth, with rather thick soles, recalled to mind the coquettish, light and discreet run of a quail. She did not appear to walk, she merely touched the pavement; she slid rapidly on its surface. This walk, peculiar to grisettes, ought to be attributed, without doubt, to three causes: To their desire to be thought handsome; to their fear of an admiration expressed in pantomime too expressive; to the desire that they always have to lose as little time as possible in their peregrinations.

Rigolette's two broad thick bands of shining hair, black as jet, fell very low on her forehead; her fine eyebrows seemed traced with ink, and overshadowed large black eyes, sparkling and wicked; her full, plump cheeks were like velvet of the freshest carnation, fresh to the sight, fresh to the touch, like a rosy peach impregnated with the cold dew of the morning.

Her little turned-up nose, saucy and cunning, would have made the fortune of a stage chambermaid; her mouth, somewhat large, with lips of rose well moistened, and little, white, pearly teeth, was smiling and provoking; of three charming dimples, which gave enticing grace to her face, two buried themselves in her cheeks, the other in her chin, not far from a beauty

spot, a little black patch most killingly placed near the corner of her mouth.

Up to the day of Germain's arrest, Rigolette had had no sorrows but those of others; she sympathized with all her flowers--devoted herself, body and soul, to those who suffered--but thought no more about it when her back was turned. Often she ceased from laughing to weep sincerely, and then she ceased from weeping to laugh again. A true child of Paris--she preferred noise to solitude, movement to repose the resounding harmony of the orchestra at the Chartreuse or Coliseum balls, to the soft murmur of the winds, the waters, and the foliage--the deafening noise of the streets of Paris to the solitude of the country--the glare of fireworks, the glitter of a ball, the noise of rockets, to the serenity of a fine night, with stars and darkness and silence. Alas! yes; the good girl frankly preferred the black mud of the streets of the capital to the verdure of the flowery meadows--its dirty or scorching pavements to fresh and velvet moss of wood-paths perfumed with violets--the suffocating dust of the barriers or the boulevards to the waving of golden corn, enameled with the scarlet flowers of the wild poppy and the azure of the bluebells. Rigolette only left her room on Sundays--and each morning, to lay in her provision of chickweed, bread, milk, and hempseed, for herself and her two birds, but she lived in Paris for Paris' sake. She would have been in despair to have lived elsewhere than in the capital.

Another anomaly: notwithstanding this taste for Parisian pleasures; notwithstanding the liberty, or, rather, the state of abandonment in which she found herself, being alone in the world; notwithstanding the rigid economy which she was obliged to use in her smallest expenses in order to live on thirty sous a day; notwithstanding the most mischievous and adorable little face in the world, never had Rigolette been a man's prey.

Early in life, she had lost her parents by the cholera, and, at ten years of age, strangers had taken care of her, until she left them to find her own living. At this period she had made Fleur-de-Marie's passing acquaintance, and later, as she dwelt in Rudolph's lodging-house--that of the prince whom she only thought to be a workman--she had been in the habit of going out on Sundays and other holidays with young men of her house, but they had given up the companionship when they found how virtuous she was, without knowing it. Germain, also her neighbor in the house, had, however, fallen desperately in love with Rigolette, without daring to breathe one word respecting it. Far from imitating his predecessors, who resorted to other sources of solace, without losing their regard for her, Germain had delightfully enjoyed his intimacy with the girl, and the pleasure afforded by her society on Sundays and every other evening that he was disengaged. During these long hours, Rigolette was always gay and merry, and Germain affectionate, serious, and attentive, and often slightly melancholy. This sadness was his only disadvantage, for his manners, being naturally refined, did not suffer by comparison with the ridiculous pretensions of M. Girandeau, a traveling clerk, or with the boisterous eccentricities of Cabrion, an artist, though Girandeau, by his excessive loquacity, and the painter, by his no less excessive hilarity, had the advantage of Germain, whose gentlemanly gravity rather awed his lively neighbor.

Rigolette had never evinced any partiality for either of her three lovers; but, with excellent judgment, she soon discovered that Germain combined all the qualities which would render any reasonable woman happy.

When the latter was imprisoned, her feeling manifested itself as love.

CHAPTER IV.

PIQUE-VINAIGRE.

The prisoner who was placed alongside of Barbillon in the visitor's room, was a man about forty years of age, and of slender make, and with a cunning, intelligent, jovial, and jeering face; he had an enormous mouth, almost entirely without teeth; when he spoke he twisted it from side to side, according to the pretty general custom of those who address the populace of market places; his nose was flat, his head immensely large, and almost entirely bald; he wore an old gray waistcoat, trousers of an indescribable color, pieced in a thousand different places; his naked feet, red from the cold, half wrapped up in old linen, were thrust into wooden shoes.

This man, named Fortune Gobert, nick-named Pique-Vinaigre (Sharp Vinegar, to prevent mistakes), formerly a juggler, and a prisoner for the crime of passing counterfeit money, was accused of breaking the terms of his ticket-of-leave, and of burglary.

Confined but for a few days at La Force, already Pique-Vinaigre filled, to the general satisfaction of his prison companions, the post of story-teller. At the present day these are rare, but formerly each ward generally had, at the expense of a light, individual contribution, its tale-teller, who, by his improvisations, made the interminable winter evenings appear less long, the prisoners retiring to rest at nightfall.

Pique-Vinaigre excelled in that kind of heroic recital where weakness, after a thousand crosses, finishes by triumphing over its persecutors. Pique-Vinaigre possessed, besides, an immense fund of irony, which had given him his nickname. He had just entered the room.

Opposite him, on the other side of the railing, was a woman of about thirty-five, with a pale, sweet, and interesting face, poorly but neatly clad; she wept bitterly, and kept her handkerchief to her eyes. Pique-Vinaigre looked at her with a mixture of impatience and affection.

"Come now, Jeanne," said he, "do not be a child; it is sixteen years since we have met; if you keep your handkerchief over your eyes, we won't know each other."

"My brother, my poor Fortune--I suffocate--I cannot speak."

"Ain't you droll! what ever is the matter with you?"

This sister--for this woman was his sister--restrained her sobs, dried her eyes, and regarding him with stupor, answered, "What is the matter? I find you again in prison, who had already been in fifteen years!"

"It is true; to-day six months I came out of Melun prison, without going to see you at Paris, because the _capital_ was forbidden to me."

"Already retaken! What have you then done? Why did you leave Beaugency, where you were sent, with orders to report yourself now and then?"

"Why? You ought to ask me why I went there?"

"You are right."

"In the first place, my poor Jeanne, since these gratings are between us both, imagine that I have embraced you, folded you in my arms, as one ought to do when he sees a sister after an age. Now, let us chat. A prisoner of Melun, called the Big Cripple, told me that there was at Beaugency an old galley-slave of his acquaintance, who employed liberated convicts in a manufactory of white-lead. Do you know what that is?"

"No, brother."

"It is a very fine trade; those who are employed in it, at the end of a month or two, have the painter's colic; of three attacked, about one dies. To be just, the two others die also, but at their ease; they take their time; take good care of themselves, and they may last a year, eighteen months at the most. After all, the trade is not so badly paid as some others, and there are some folks born already dressed, who hold out two or three years; but these are the old folks, the centenaries of the _white-leaders_. They die, it is true, but that's not fatiguing."

"And why did you choose a trade so dangerous, my poor Fortune?"

"And what would you have me do? When I entered Melun for this affair of false money, I was a juggler. As in the prison there was no work-shop for my trade, and as I was no stronger than a fly, they put me at making toys for children. It was a manufacturer of Paris who found it advantageous to have made by the prisoners his harlequins, his trumpets of wood, and his swords of ditto. Thus, I tell you, haven't I sharpened, and cut, and carved for fifteen years, these toys! I am sure that I supplied the pets of an entire quarter of Paris--it was, above all, on the trumpet I excelled; and rattles too! With these two instruments one could have put on edge the teeth of a whole battalion! I pride myself, on it. My time out, behold me with the degree of penny-trumpet manufacturer. They allowed me to choose for my residence three or four places, at forty leagues from Paris; I had for sole resource my knowledge of trumpet-making. Now, admitting that, from old men to babies, all the inhabitants of the town should have had a passion to play toot-too on my trumpets. I should have had, even then, trouble enough to pay my expenses; but I could not seduce a whole village into blowing trumpets from morning to night. They would have taken me for a conspirator!"

"You always laugh."

"That is better than to cry. Finally, seeing that at forty leagues from Paris my trade as a juggler would be of no more resource to me than my trumpets, I demanded an exchange to Beaugency, wishing to engage myself in the white-lead factory. It is a pastry which gives you an indigestion of misery; but, until one dies from it, one has a living; it is always something gained, and I like that trade as well as that of a robber; to steal I am not brave or strong enough, and it was by pure chance I have committed the act of which I shall speak directly."

"You would have been brave and strong if you had only had the _idea_ not to steal any more."

"Ah! you believe that, do you?"

"Yes, at the bottom you are not wicked; for, in this dangerous affair of false money, you had been dragged into it in spite of yourself, almost forced--you know it well."

"Yes, my girl--but, do you see, fifteen years in a prison, that spoils a man like my old pipe which you see, whenever it comes in the jail white as a new pipe; on coming out of Melun, then, I felt myself too cowardly to steal."

"And you had the courage to follow a deadly calling. Hold, Fortune! I tell you that you wish to make yourself worse than you are."

"Stop a moment, then; all greenhorn that I was, I had an idea, may the devil burn me if I know why! that I would not care for the colic, that the malady would find too little in me to feed on, and that it would go elsewhere; in fine, that I would become one of the old white-leaders. On leaving the prison I began by squandering my savings, augmented, understand, by what I had gained by relating stories at night in our ward."

"As you used to tell us in old times, my brother? It used to amuse our mother so much, do you remember?"

"Pardieu! good woman! And she never suspected before she died that I was at Melun?"

"Never: to her last moments she thought you had gone to the islands."

"What could I do, my girl? My escapades were the fault of my father, who brought me up to play the clown, to assist him in his juggling, to eat flax and spit fire; that was the cause that I had not the time to associate with the sons of peers of France, and that I made bad acquaintances. But, to return to Beaugency: once out of Melun, I spent my money as I had a right. After fifteen years in a cage one must have a little air, and amuse one's self so much the more, as, without being too greedy, the white lead might give me a last indigestion; then, what good would my pension money be to me? I ask you. Finally, I arrived at Beaugency almost without a sou: I asked for _Velu_, the friend of Big Cripple, the chief of the factory. Serviteur! no more manufactory of white-lead than you could put under your hand; eleven persons had died there in one year; the old galley-slave had shut up shop. Here I was in this village, with my talents for making wooden trumpets for my dinner, and my convict's passport for my sole recommendation. I asked for employment suited to my strength, and, as I had no strength, you can comprehend how I was received; robber here, gueux there, jail bird! in fine, as soon as I made my appearance anywhere, every one clapped their hands on their pockets; I could not, then, prevent myself from starving with hunger in a hole which I was not to leave for five years. Seeing this, I broke my 'parole' to come to Paris to use my talents. As I had not the means to come in a carriage and four, I came begging all along the road; avoiding the constables as a dog does a kick. I was lucky--I arrived without difficulty at Auteuil. I was worried, I was as hungry as the devil, I was dressed, as you see, without profuseness." And Pique-Vinaigre cast a merry glance at his rags. "I had not a sou; I could at any moment be arrested as a vagabond. Faith, an opportunity offered, the devil tempted me, and, in spite of my cowardice--"

"Enough, my brother, enough," said his sister, fearing that the warder, although at this moment some distance off, might hear the dangerous confession.

"You are afraid that some one will listen?" answered he: "be tranquil, I do not conceal it; I was taken in the act; there are no means to deny it; I have confessed all; I know what I have to expect; my account is good."

"Alas!" answered the poor woman, weeping, "with what ease you speak of this."

"If I were to speak of it with uneasiness, what should I gain? Come, be reasonable, Jeanne; must _I_ console _you?_" Jeanne wiped away her tears, and sighed.

"But to return to my affair," said Pique-Vinaigre; "I arrived near Auteuil in the dusk of the evening. I could go no further; I did not wish to enter Paris but at night; I seated myself behind a hedge to repose and reflect upon my plans. From the intensity of my thoughts I fell asleep; a noise of voices awoke me; it was quite dark; I listened, it was a man and a woman talking on the road, on the other side of my hedge; the man said to the woman, 'Who do you think would rob us? have we not left the house alone a hundred times?' 'Yes,' answered the woman, 'but then we did not leave a hundred francs in our chest.' 'Who knows it, fool?' said the husband. 'You are right,' replied the woman, and they passed on. The chance appeared too favorable for me to lose--there was no danger.

"I waited until they had got a little distance to come out from behind my hedge; I looked around: at twenty steps off I saw a small cottage; that must be the house with the hundred francs; there was no other hovel on the road but this one; Auteuil was five hundred yards off. I said to myself, 'Courage, my old boy, there is no one there, it is night, if there is no dog (you know I always was afraid of dogs), the affair is done.' Luckily there was no dog. To be still more sure, I knocked against the door--nothing; that encouraged me. The shutters of the ground floor were closed: I passed my stick between the two, I forced them, I entered through the window into a chamber; there was some fire in the fireplace; this served as a light; I saw a chest from whence the key had been taken; I took the tongs, I forced the drawers, and under a heap of linen I found the treasure, wrapped up in an old woolen stocking; I did not amuse myself by taking anything else; I jumped out of the window and I fell--guess where? There's luck!"

"Go on!"

"On the back of the watchman who was going to the village."

"What a misfortune!"

"The moon had risen, he saw me coming out of the window; he seized me. He was a giant who could have eaten ten such as me. Too cowardly to resist, I resigned myself to my fate. I still held the stocking in my hand; he heard the money jingle, he took it all, put it in his bag, and compelled me to follow him to Auteuil. He went to the mayor's with the usual accompaniment of boys and constables; they waited for the proprietors to return; they made their declaration. I could not deny it; I confessed all, they put on the handcuffs, and off we went!"

"And here you are in prison again, perhaps for a long time!"

"Listen, Jeanne, I do not wish to deceive you, my girl, so I will tell you at once."

"What more now?"

"Come, take courage!"

"But speak, then!"

"Well! there is no more prison for me."

"How is that?"

"On account of the burglary in an inhabited house, the lawyer told me, 'It's a safe thing.' I shall have fifteen or twenty years at the galleys and a berth in the pillory to boot."

"The galleys! but you are so weak you will die there!" cried the unhappy woman, bursting into tears.

"How if I had enrolled myself among the white-leaders?"

"But the galleys, oh! the galleys!"

"It is a prison in the open air, with a red cap instead of a brown one, and, besides, I have always been curious to see the ocean. What a starer I am!"

"But the pillory! To be exposed there to the contempt of all the world, oh! my brother." And the unfortunate woman began again to weep.

"Come, come, Jeanne, be reasonable. It is a bad quarter of an hour to pass, but I believe one is seated. And, besides, am I not accustomed to a crowd? When I played juggler I always had people around me; I will imagine that I am at my old trade, and if it has too much effect upon me I will close my eyes; it will absolutely be the same as if they did not see me."

Speaking with so much stoicism, this unfortunate man wished less to appear insensible of his criminal actions than to console and satisfy his sister by this apparent indifference. For a man accustomed to prison _manners_, and with whom all shame is necessarily dead--even the galleys were only a change of condition, a "change of caps," as Pique-Vinaigre said, with frightful truth.

Many of the prisoners of the central prisons even prefer the galleys on account of the lively, animated life which is led there, committing often attempts at murder to be sent to Brest or Toulon. This can be imagined before they enter the galleys they have almost as much work, according to their declaration. The condition of the most honest workman of the forts is not less rude than that of the convicts. They enter the workshop, and leave it, at the same hour, and the beds on which they repose their limbs, exhausted by fatigue, are often no better than those of the galleys.

They are free, some one will say. Yes, free one day, Sunday, and this is also a day of repose for the convict. But feel they no shame and contempt? What is shame for these poor wretches, who, each day, bronze the soul in this infamy, in this mutual school of perdition, where the most criminal are the most distinguished? Such are the consequences of the present system of punishment. Incarceration is very much sought after. The galleys--often demanded.

"Twenty years in the galleys!" repeated the poor sister of Pique-Vinaigre.

"But be comforted, Jeanne; they will only pay me in my own coin; I am too feeble to be placed at hard labor. If there is not a manufactory of trumpets and wooden swords, as at Melun, they will give me easy work, and employ me in the infirmary. I am not refractory; I am good-natured. I will tell stories as I do here, I will make myself adored by the keepers, esteemed by my comrades, and I will send you some cocoanuts nicely carved, and some straw boxes for my nephews and nieces; in short. as we make our bed, so must we lie on it!"

"If you had only written that you were coming to Paris, I would have tried to conceal and lodge you while you were waiting for work."

"I reckoned to go to your house, but I prepared to come with my hands full; for, besides, from your appearance I see that you do not ride in your carriage. How about your children and husband?"

"Do not speak to me about him."

"Always a rattler, it is a pity, for he is a good workman."

"He does me much harm--I have had troubles enough of my own, without having yours added to them."

"How? your husband--"

"Left me three years ago, after having sold all our furniture, leaving me with the children, without any thing, my straw bed excepted."

"You did not tell me this!"

"For what good? It would have grieved you."

"Poor Jeanne! How have you managed, all alone with your three children?"

"Holy Virgin! I had much trouble; I worked by the job as a fringe-maker, as well as I could, my neighbors helped me a little, taking care of my children when I went out; and then I, who do not always have luck, had it for once in my life, but it did not profit me, on account of my husband."

"How is that?"

"The lace-maker had spoken of my troubles to one of his customers, informing him how my husband had left me without anything, after having sold all my furniture, and that in spite of it I worked with all my strength to bring up my children; one day, on returning home, what do I find? my room newly furnished, a good bed, linen, and so on; it was the charity of my lace-maker's customer."

"Good customer! Poor sister! Why the devil did you not write me about your poverty? Instead of spending my earnings, I would have sent you some money."

"I, free, to ask from you, a prisoner!"

"Exactly; I was fed, warmed, lodged at the expense of the government; what I earned was so much gained; knowing that my brother-in-law was a good workman, and you a good manager, I was easy, and I fiddled away my money with my eyes shut and my mouth open."

"My husband was a good workman, it is true, but he became dissipated; in fine, thanks to this unexpected succor, I took fresh courage; my eldest daughter began to earn something; we were happy, except for the sorrow of knowing that you were at Melun. Work was plenty, my children were properly dressed, they wanted scarcely anything; that made me take heart. At length I had even saved thirty-five francs, when, suddenly, my husband returned. I had not seen him for a year. Finding me comfortably fixed and well clad, he made no bones about it; he took the money, settled himself at home, got drunk every day, and beat me when I complained."

"The scoundrel!"

"This is not all: he had lodged in a room of our apartments a bad woman with whom he lived; I had to submit to that. For the second time he began to sell little by little the furniture I had. Foreseeing what would happen, I went to a lawyer who lived in the house, and asked him what I should do to prevent my husband from placing me and my children on straw again."

"It was very plain, you ought to have thrust him out of doors."

"Yes, but I had not the right. The lawyer told me that my husband could dispose of everything, and remain in the house without doing anything; that it was a shame, but that I must submit; that the circumstance of his mistress, who lived under one roof, gave me the right to demand the separation of bed and board, as it is called; so much the more as I had proofs my husband beat me; that I could plead against him, but that it would cost me at least four or five hundred francs to obtain my divorce, you may judge; it is almost all that I could earn in a year! Where could I borrow such a sum? And, besides, it is not only to borrow--but to return. And five hundred francs--all at once--it is a fortune."

"There is, however, a very simple way to amass five hundred francs," said Pique-Vinaigre, with bitterness; "it is to hang up one's appetite for a year--to live on air, but work just the same. It is astonishing that the lawyer did not give you this advice."

"You are always joking."

"Oh! this time, no!" cried Pique-Vinaigre, with indignation; "for it is infamous that the law should be too dear for poor folks. For look at you, good and worthy mother of a family, working with all your might to bring up your children honestly. Your husband is an arrant scoundrel; he beats you, abuses you, robs you, and spends at the tavern the money you earn; you apply to justice, that it may protect you, and keep from the clutches of this rascal your bread and your children's. The people of the law tell you, 'Yes, you are right, your husband is a bad fellow, justice shall be done you; but this justice will cost you five hundred francs.' Five hundred francs! that would support you and your family for a whole year! Now, do you see, Jeanne? all this proves what the proverb says, that there are only two kinds of people: those who are hung and those who deserve to be."

Rigolett, alone and pensive, having no one else to listen to, had not lost a word of this conversation, and sympathized deeply in the misfortunes of this poor woman. She promised herself to mention this to Rudolph as soon as she should see him, not doubting that he would assist her.

Rigolette, feeling a lively interest in the sad fate of the sister of Pique-Vinaigre, did not take her eyes from her, and was endeavoring to

approach a little nearer, when, unfortunately, a new visitor entering asked for a prisoner, and seated himself on the bench between Jeanne and the grisette. She, at the sight of this man, could not restrain a movement of surprise, almost fear. She recognized one of the two bailiffs who had come to arrest Morel, putting in execution the judgment obtained against the jeweler by Jacques Ferrand.

This circumstance, recalling to Rigolette's mind the untiring persecutor of Germain, redoubled her sadness, from which her attention had been slightly withdrawn by the touching and painful communications of the sister of Pique-Vinaigre. Retreating as far as she could from her new neighbors, the grisette leaned against the wall, and abandoned herself to her sad thoughts.

"Hold, Jeanne," resumed Pique-Vinaigre, whose jovial face had become suddenly clouded; "I am neither strong nor brave; but if I had been there while your husband was causing you so much misery, very playful things would not have passed between us. But you did not act rightly--you--"

"What could I do? I have been obliged to suffer what I could not prevent! As long as there was anything to be sold, my husband sold it, so that he might go to the tavern with his mistress--everything, even to my little girl's Sunday frock."

"But your daily earnings, why did you give them to him? Why did you not hide them?"

"I did hide them; but he beat me so much that I was obliged to give them up. It was not on account of the blows that I yielded, but because I said to myself, in the end he will wound me so seriously that I shall not be able to work for some time. Suppose he breaks my arm, then what will become of me--who will take care of and feed my children? If I am forced to go the hospital, they will die of hunger then. Thus you can imagine, my brother, I preferred to give my money to my husband, not on account of the beating, but that I might not be wounded, and remain _able to work_."

"Poor woman. Bah! they talk of martyrdom--it is you who are a martyr!"

"And yet I have never harmed any one; I only ask to work to take care of my children; but what would you? There are the happy and unhappy, as there are the good and the wicked."

"Yes, and it is astonishing how happy the good are! But you have finally got rid of that scoundrel of a husband?"

"I hope so, for he did not leave me until he had sold my bedstead, and the cradle of my two little children. But I think he wished to do something worse."

"What do you mean?"

"I say him, but it was rather this bad woman who urged him; it is on that account I speak of it. 'I say,' one day he said to me, 'when in a family there is a pretty girl of fifteen like ours, it is very stupid not to make use of her beauty.'"

"Oh! good! I understand. After having sold the clothes, he wished to sell the body."

"When he said that, Fortune, my blood boiled; and, to be just, I made him blush with shame at my reproaches: and as this bad woman wished to meddle in our quarrel by asserting that my husband could do with his daughter as he pleased, I treated her so badly, the wretch, that my husband beat me, and since that time I have not seen them."

"Look here, Jeanne, there are folks condemned to ten years' imprisonment, who would not have done like your husband; at least, they only despoil strangers."

"At bottom he is not wicked, look you; it is bad company at the taverns which has ruined him."

"Yes, he would not harm a child; but to a grown person it is different."

"What would you have? One must take life as it comes. At least, my husband gone, I had no longer any fear of being lamed by any blow. I took fresh courage. Not having anything to purchase a mattress with, for before all one must eat and pay rent, and my poor daughter Catherine and myself could hardly earn together forty sous a day, my two other children being too young to work--for want of a mattress we slept upon a straw bed, made with straw that we picked up at the door of a packer in our street."

"And I have squandered my earnings!"

"How could you know my trouble, since I did not tell you? Well, we doubled our work, Catherine and I. Poor child, if you knew how virtuous, and industrious, and good she is! always with her eyes on mine to know what I wish her to do; never a complaint, and yet--she has already seen so much misery, although only fifteen! Ah, it is a great consolation, Fortune to have such a child," said Jeanne, wiping her eyes.

"It is just your own picture, I see; you should have this consolation, at least."

"I assure you that it is more on her account that I complain than on my own; for, do you see, the last two months she has not stopped working for a moment; once every week she goes out to wash at the boats near the Pont-au Change, at three sous the hour, the few clothes my husband left us: all the rest of the time at the stake like a poor dog. True, misfortune came to her too soon; I knew well enough that it must come; but at least their are some who have one or two years of tranquillity. That which has also caused me much sorrow in all this, Fortune, is, that I could give you no assistance in anything; yet I will try."

"Do you think I would accept? On the contrary, I'll ask a sou for each pair of ears that listens to my stories; I will ask two, or they will have to do without Pique-Vinaigre's romances, and that will help you a little in your housekeeping. But why don't you go into lodgings? Then your husband can't sell anything."

"In lodgings? Why, only reflect, we are four; they would ask us at least twenty sous a days; how much would remain for our living! while our room only costs us fifty francs a year."

"That is true, my girl," said Pique-Vinaigre, with bitter irony; "work, break your back to fix up your room a little; as soon as you get something, your husband will rob you again, and some fine day he will sell your daughter as he has sold your clothes."

"Oh! before that he must kill me!--my poor Catherine!"

"He will not kill you, and he will sell your poor Catherine. He is your husband, is he not? He is the head of the family, as your lawyer told you, as long as you are not separated by law, and as you have not five hundred francs to give for that, you must be resigned; your husband has the right to take his daughter from you, and where he pleases. Once he and his mistress have a hankering after this poor little child, they will have her."

"But, if this infamy was possible, would there be any justice?"

"Justice," said Pique-Vinaigre, with a burst of sardonic laughter, "is like meat; it is too dear for the poor to eat. Only, understand me, if it is in question to send them to Melun, to put them in the pillory, or throw them into the galleys, it is another affair; they give them this justice _gratis_. If they cut their throats, it is again _gratis_--always _gratis_. Ta-a-a-ake your tickets!" added Pique-Vinaigre, imitating a mountebank; "it is not ten sous, two sous, one you, a centime that it will cost you. No, ladies and gentlemen, it will cost you the trifle of nothing at all; it suits every one's pockets; you have only to furnish the _head_--the cutting and curling are at the expense of the government. Here is justice _gratis_. But the justice which would prevent an honest mother of a family from being beaten and despoiled by a vagabond of a husband, who wishes to make money out of his daughter, this kind of justice costs five hundred francs; you must give it up, my poor Jeanne."

"Fortune," said the unhappy mother, bursting into tears, "you kill me!"

"And does it not kill me to think of your lot, and that of your family, and seeing that I can do nothing? I seem always gay; but do not be deceived; I have two kinds of gayety, Jeanne; my gayety gay, and my gayety sad. I have neither the strength nor the courage to be bad, angry, nor malicious, as others are, that always passes over with me in words more or less farcical. My cowardice and my weakness of body have prevented me from becoming worse than I am. It needed the chance of this lonely hut, where there was neither cat, nor, above all, a dog, to have urged me to steal. And then, again, it chanced to be a fine moonlight night; for alone, and in the dark, I am as cowardly as the devil!"

"That is what I have always said, my poor Fortune, that you are better than you think. Thus I hope the judges will have pity on you."

"Pity on me? a returned criminal? reckon on it! After that, I don't wish it; to be here, there, or elsewhere, all the same to me; and then, you are right, I am not wicked; and those who are, I hate them, after my fashion, by making fun of them; you must think that, from relating stories where, to please my audience, I make it come out that those who torment others from pure cruelty receive, in the end, their pay, I become accustomed to feel as I relate."

"Do these people like stories, my brother? I should not have thought it."

"A moment! If I tell them a story where a fellow who robs, or who kills to rob, is strung up at the end, they will not let me finish; but if it is concerning a woman or child, or, for example, a poor devil like me, who would be thrown to the ground if he was only blown upon, and let him be ill-treated by a Bluebeard, who persecutes him solely for the pleasure of

persecuting him, for honor, as they say; oh! then they shout with joy when, at the end, the Bluebeard receives his pay. I have, above all, a history called Gringalet and Cut-in-half, which created the greatest sensation at the Centrale de Melun, and which I have not yet related here. I have promised it for tonight; but they must subscribe largely to my money-box, and you shall profit by it. Without extra charge, I will write it out for your children. My yarn will amuse them; very religious people would read this story; so be easy."

"In fine, poor Fortune, what consoles me a little is, to see that you are not as unhappy as others, thanks to your character."

"I am very sure that if I were like a prisoner of our ward, I should be hateful to myself. Poor fellow! I am much afraid that before the end of the day he will bleed; it grows red-hot for him; there is a bad plot formed against him for to-night."

"Oh! they wish to do him harm? you will have nothing to do with it, at least, Fortune?"

"Not such a fool! I might be spattered. As I went backward and forward among them, I heard them muttering. They spoke of a gag, to prevent him from crying out; and then, to hinder any one from seeing the execution, they mean to make a circle around him, pretending to listen to one of them who should be reading a paper or something else."

"But why do they wish to injure him thus?"

"As he is always alone, and speaks to no one, because he seems disgusted with them, they imagine he is a spy, which is very stupid; for, on the contrary, he would keep company with every one, if he wished to spy. Besides, he has the air of a gentleman, and that eclipses them. It is the _captain_ of the ward, called the Living Skeleton, who is at the head of this plot. He is like a real _bloody bones_ after this poor Germain--their intended victim is so named. Let them make their own arrangements--it is their business; I can do nothing. But you see, Jeanne, what good comes from being sad in prison; right away you are suspected. I have never been suspected, not I. But, my girl--enough talk; go and see if I am at your house; you lose too much precious time by coming here. I can only talk; with you it is different; therefore goodnight. Come here from time to time; you know I shall be glad to see you."

"My brother, still a few moments, I beg you."

"No, no; your children are expecting you. Ah, you do not tell them, I hope, that their uncle is a boarder here?"

"They think you are at the islands, as my mother did formerly. In this way, I hope, I can talk to them of you."

"Very good. Go! quickly!"

"Yes, but listen, my poor brother. I have not much, yet I will not leave you thus. You must be cold--no stockings, and this wretched waistcoat! I will fix something for you, with Catherine's aid. Fortune, you know that it is not the will to do something for you that is wanting."

"What? clothes? why, I have my trunks full. As soon as they arrive, I shall have wherewithal to dress myself like a prince. Come, laugh, then, a

little. No? Well! seriously, my girl, I do not refuse, while waiting for Gringalet and Cut-in-half to fill my money-box. Then I will return it. Adieu, my good Jeanne; the next time you come, may I love my name of Pique Vinaigre, if I do not make you laugh. Go away; I have already kept you too long."

"But, brother, listen!"

"My good man! my good man!" cried Pique-Vinaigre to the warder seated at the other end, "I have finished my conversation; I wish to go in; talked enough."

"Oh! Fortune, it is not kind to send me away thus," said Jeanne.

"On the contrary, it is very right. Come, adieu; keep up your courage, and to-morrow morning say to the children that you have dreamed of their uncle, who is in the West Indies, and that he begged you to embrace them. Adieu."

"Adieu, Fortune," said the poor woman, all in tears at seeing her brother enter the prison.

Rigolette, since the bailiff had seated himself alongside of her, had not been able to hear the conversation of Pique-Vinaigre and Jeanne; but she had not taken off her eyes from them, thinking how to find out the address of this poor woman, so as to be able, according to her first idea, to recommend her to Rudolph. When Jeanne rose from the bench to leave, the grisette approached her, saying, timidly, "Madame, just now, without wishing to listen to you, I heard that you were a lace fringe-maker."

"Yes, my friend," answered Jeanne, a little surprised but prepossessed in favor of Rigolette by her pleasing manners and charming face.

"I am a dressmaker," answered the grisette. "Now that fringes and lace are in fashion, I have sometimes some customers who ask me for trimmings after their own taste; I have thought perhaps it would be cheaper to apply to the makers; and, besides, I could give you more than your employer does,"

"It is true; by buying the silk on my own account I should gain something. You are very kind to think of me. I am quite surprised."

"I will speak to you frankly. I await a person I came to see; having no one to talk with, just now, before this gentleman placed himself between us, without wishing it, I assure you, I have heard you talk to your brother of your sorrows, of your children; I said to myself, poor folks ought to assist each other. The idea struck me at the time that I might be of some use to you, since you are a fringe-maker. If, indeed, what I have proposed suits you, here is my address; give me yours, so that when I shall have a little order to give you I shall know where to find you."

And Rigolette gave one of her cards to the sister of Pique-Vinaigre. She, quite touched at the proceedings, said gratefully:

"Your face has not deceived me; and, besides, do not take it for pride, but you have a resemblance to my eldest daughter, which made me look at you twice on entering. I thank you much; if you employ me, you shall be satisfied with my work; it shall be done conscientiously. I am called Jeanne Duport. I live at No. 1, Rue de la Barillerie."

"No. 1, it is not difficult to remember. Thank you, madame."

"It is for me to thank you, my dear, it is so kind in you to have thought at once of serving me! Once more I express my surprise."

"Why, that is very plain, Madame Duport," said Rigolette, with a charming smile. "Since I look like your daughter Catherine, that which you call my kindness ought not to surprise you."

"How kind! Thanks to you, I go away from here less sad than I thought; and then, perhaps, we may meet here again, for you come, like me, to see a prisoner?"

"Yes, madame," answered Rigolette, sighing.

"Then, adieu. I shall see you again; at least, I hope so, Miss Rigolette," said Jeanne Duport, after having cast her eyes on the address of the grisette.

"At least," thought Rigolette, resuming her seat, "I know now the address of this poor woman; and certainly M. Rudolph will interest himself for her when he knows how unfortunate she is, for he has always told me, 'If you know any one much to be pitied, address yourself to me.'"

And Rigolette taking her place, awaited with impatience the end of the conversation of her neighbor, in order to be able to ask for Germain.

Now a few words on the preceding scene. Unfortunately, it must be confessed, the indignation of the brother of Jeanne Duport was legitimate. Yes: in saying the law was _too dear_ for the poor, he said the truth. To plead before the civil tribunals is to incur enormous expenses, quite out of the reach of artisans, who barely exist on their scanty wages.

Let a mother or father of a family belonging to this ever-sacrificed class wish to obtain an obliteration of the conjugal tie; let them have all right to obtain it: will they obtain it? No; for there is no workman in a condition to spend four or five hundred francs for the onerous formalities of such a judgment.

Yet the poor have no other life than a domestic one; the good or bad conduct of the head of an artisan's family is not only a question of morality; but of _bread_. The fate of a woman of the people, such as we have endeavored to paint, does it deserve less interest, less protection, than that of a rich woman, who suffers from the bad conduct or infidelities of her husband, think you?

Nothing is more worthy of pity, doubtless, than the griefs of the heart. But when to these griefs is added, for an unfortunate mother, the misery of her children, is it not monstrous that the poverty of this woman places her without the law, and leaves her and her family without defense against the odious treatment of a drunken and worthless husband?

Yet this monstrosity exists. [Footnote: Translator's Note.--How singular that, as this new edition of the _sensational romancist's_ work is issued, the Imperial Parliament should have a bill to redress this very oversight before it.]

And a liberated criminal can, in this circumstance as in others, deny, with right and reason, the impartiality of the institutions in the name of which he is condemned. Is it necessary to say what there is in this dangerous to

society, to justify such attacks?

What will be the influence, the moral authority, of those laws whose application is absolutely subordinate to a question of money? Ought not civil justice, like criminal justice, to be accessible to all?

When people are too poor to be able to invoke the benefits of a law eminently preservative and tutelary, ought not society to assure the application, through respect for the honor and repose of families?

But let us leave this woman, who will remain all her life the victim of a brutal and perverted husband, because she is too poor to obtain a matrimonial separation by law. Let us speak of Jeanne Duport's brother. This man left a den of corruption to enter the world again; he has paid the penalty of his crime by expiation. What precautions has society taken to prevent his falling back into crime? None.

Has any one, with charitable foresight, rendered possible his return to well-doing, in order to be able to punish, as one should punish, in a becoming manner, if he shows himself incorrigible? No.

The contagious influence of your jails is so well known, and so justly dreaded, that he who comes out from them is everywhere an object of scorn, aversion, and alarm. Were he twenty times an honest man, he would scarcely find occupation anywhere. And what is more: the penalty of a ticket-of-leave banishes him to small localities, where his past life must be well known; and here he will have no means of exercising the exceptionable employment often imposed on the prisoners by the contractors of the maisons centrales. If the liberated convict has the courage to resist temptation, he abandons himself to some of those murderous occupations of which we have spoken, to the preparation of certain chemical productions, by which one in ten perishes; or, if he has the strength, he goes to get out stone in the forest of Fontainebleau, an employment which he survives, average time, six years! The condition of a liberated convict is, then, much worse, more painful, more difficult, than it was before his first criminal action: he lives surrounded by shackles and dangers; he is obliged to brave repulses and disdain--often the deepest misery. And if he succumbs to all these frightful temptations to criminality, and commits a second crime, you show yourself ten times more severe toward him than for his first fault. That is unjust; for it is almost always the necessity you impose on him which conducts him to a second crime. Yes; for it is shown that, instead of correcting him, your penitentiary system depraves. Instead of ameliorating, it makes worse; instead of curing slight moral affections, it renders them incurable. Your aggravation of punishment, applied without pity to the backslider, is, then, iniquitous, barbarous, since this backsliding is, thus to express it, a forced consequence of your penal institutions. The terrible punishment which awaits this _double guilt_ would be just and excusable if your prisons improved the morals, purified the prisoners, and if, at the expiration of the sentence, good conduct was, if not easy, at least generally possible. If any one is surprised at these contradictions of the law, what would he be when he compares certain penalties to certain crimes--either on account of their inevitable consequences, or on account of the disproportion which exists in their punishment? The conversation of the prisoner whom the bailiff came to see will offer to us one of these afflicting contrasts.

CHAPTER V.

BOULARD.

The prisoner who entered at the moment that Pique-Vinaigre left it was a man of about thirty years of age, with red hair, and a jovial, fat, and rubicund face; his middling stature rendered still more remarkable by his enormous corpulency. This prisoner, so rosy and stout, was wrapped up in a long, warm coat of gray swan's-down, with gaiter trousers of the same material. A kind of hooded cap of red velvet completed the costume of this personage, who wore excellent furred slippers. Although the fashion of wearing trinkets was over, the golden watch-chain sustained a goodly number of fine gold seals and rings. Finally, several rings, enriched with precious stones, sparkled on the fat red fingers of this prisoner, known as Boulard the Bailiff, accused of breach of trust.

[Illustration: THE REQUEST FOR A FRIENDLY SERVICE]

His visitor was Pierre Bourdin, one of the officers charged with the arrest of Morel the jeweler. Bourdin was rather shorter, but quite as fat, and attired after his patron, whose magnificence he admired. Having, like him, a partiality for jewels, he wore on this day a huge topaz pin, and a long gold chain, suspended from his neck, was entwined among the buttonholes of his waist-coat.

"Good-day! faithful Bourdin; I was quite sure you would not be missing at the roll-call," said Boulard, joyously, in a faint, cracked voice, which singularly contrasted with his fat body and blooming face.

"Missing at the roll-call!" answered the bailiff; "I am incapable of such an act, general!" It was thus that Bourdin, with a pleasantry at once familiar and respectful, called the bailiff, under whose orders he acted; this military form of speech being often used among certain classes of civil practitioners.

"I see with pleasure that friendship remains faithful to the unfortunate," said Boulard, with cordial gayety; "yet I began to be uneasy. Three days since I wrote to you, and no Bourdin till now."

"Imagine, general, quite a history. You recollect well the handsome viscount in the Rue de Chaillot?"

"Saint Remy?"

"Exactly! you know how he laughed at our writs?"

"It was quite indecent."

"To be sure it was. Malicorne and I were quite stupefied at it, if that were possible."

"It is impossible, brave Bourdin."

"Happily, general, but here is the fact; this handsome viscount has got new titles."

"Has he become a count?"

"No! from a cheat he has become a robber."

"Ah! ah!"

"They are at his heels for some diamonds he has stolen; and, by way of parenthesis, they belong to that jeweler who employed this sneak of a Morel, the lapidary whom we went to nab in the Rue du Temple, when a tall slim jockey, with black mustaches, paid for the starved rat, and came near pitching headforemost down the stairs Malicorne and me."

"Oh! yes, yes; I recollect. You told me that, my poor Bourdin; it was very funny. The best of the farce was that the portress of the house emptied on your backs a saucepan of boiling soup."

"Saucepan included, general, which burst like a bomb at our feet. The old sorceress!"

"That will be taken into your charge. But this handsome viscount?"

"I tell you, then, that Saint Remy was prosecuted for a robbery, after having made his ninny of a father believe that he had blown his brains out. An agent of the police, one of my friends, knowing that I had for a long time tracked this lord, asked me if I could not put him on the scent. I learned too late, at the time of our last writ, which he had escaped, that he was burrowed in a farm at Arnouville, at five leagues from Paris. But when we arrived there it was too late; the bird had flown!

"Besides, he had the following day paid this bill of exchange, thanks to a certain great lady, they say. Yes, general; but no matter, I knew the rest. He had once been concealed there; he might well enough be concealed there a second time. That is what I said to my friend in the police. He proposed for me to lend a hand, as an amateur, and conduct him to the farm. I had nothing to do--it was a nice party to the country--I accepted."

"Well! the viscount?"

"Not to be found. After having at first wandered around the farm, and having afterward introduced ourselves there, we returned as wise as we went; and this is the reason I have not been able to render myself sooner to your orders, general."

"I was very sure there was an impossibility on your part, my good fellow."

"But, if it is not improper, tell me, how the devil did you get here?"

"Vulgar people, my dear--a herd of riff-raff, who, for the miserable sum of sixty thousand francs, of which they pretend I have despoiled them, have carried a complaint against me for an abuse of confidence, and forced me to give up my commission."

"Really! general? Ah, well! this is a misfortune! How--shall we work no more for you?"

"I am on half-pay, my good Bourdin; here I am on an allowance."

"But who is, then, so savage?"

"Just imagine that one of the most severe against me is a liberated robber,

who gave me to collect a bill of seven hundred miserable francs, for which it was necessary to prosecute. I did prosecute; I was paid, and I pocketed the money; and because, in consequence of speculations which did not succeed, I have spent this money, as well as that of many others, all the rubbishing lot have made such a brawling, that a writ was issued to arrest me, and thus you see me here, my good fellow; neither more nor less than a malefactor."

"Take care that don't hurt you, general."

"Yes; but what is most curious is, this convict has written to me, some days since, that this money, being his sole resource for rainy days, and that these days had now arrived (I do not know what lie means by that), I was responsible for the crimes he might commit to escape starvation."

"It is charming, on my word!"

"Is it not? Nothing more convenient. The droll fellow is capable of giving that as an excuse. Happily, the law knows no such accomplices."

"After all, you are only accused of an abuse of confidence, is it not, my general?"

"Certainly! Do you take me for a thief, Master Bourdin?"

"Oh! general. I meant to say there was nothing serious in all this; after all, there is not enough to whip a cat."

"Have I a despairing look, my good fellow?"

"Not at all; I never saw you look more cheerful. Indeed, if you are condemned, you will only have two or three months' imprisonment, and twenty-five francs fine. I know my code."

"And these two or three months I shall be allowed, I am sure, to pass at my ease in a lunatic asylum. I have one deputy under my thumb."

"Oh! then your affair is sure."

"Hold, Bourdin, I can hardly keep from laughing; these fools who have sent me here will gain much by it! They shall never see a sou of the money they claim. They force me to sell my commission--all the same. I am aware of the duty I owe my predecessor. You see it is these muffs who will be the geese of the farce, as Robert Macaire says."

"That produces the same effect on me, general; so much the worse for them."

"My good fellow, let us come to the subject which made me beg you to come here; it is touching a delicate mission concerning a female," said Boulard, with a mysterious air.

"Ah! rogue of a general, I recognize you there! What is it? Count on me."

"I interest myself particularly in a young actress of the Folies-Dramatiques; I pay her board, and, in exchange, she pays me in return--at least, I think so; for, my good fellow, you know, the absent are often in the wrong. Now, I am the more tenacious to know if I am wrong, as Alexandrine--she is called Alexandrine--has sent for some money. I have never been stingy with the fair sex; but I do not wish to be made a fool

of. Thus, before playing the generous with this dear friend, I wish to know if she deserves it by her fidelity. I know there is nothing more absurd than fidelity; but it is a weakness I have. You will render me, then, a friendly service, my dear comrade, if you can for a few days have a supervision over my love, and let me know how to act either by talking with the landlady of Alexandrine, or--"

"Sufficient, general," interrupting. "This is nothing worse than watching, spying, and following a creditor. Have confidence in me; I shall find out if Lady Alexandrine sticks a penknife in the contract, which appears to me quite improbable; for, without flattery, general, you are too handsome a man, and too generous not to be valued."

"I ought to be a handsome man; yet I am absent, my dear comrade, and it is a great wrong; in fine, I count on you to know the truth."

"You shall know it, I will answer for it."

"Ah! my dear comrade, how can I express my gratitude?"

"Come, come, now, general."

"It is understood, my good Bourdin, that in this affair your fees shall be the same as for an arrest."

"General, I will not allow it; so long as I acted under your orders, have you not always allowed me to grind the debtors to the quick, treble the fees of arrest, costs, which you have afterward prosecuted to payment with as much activity as if they had been due to yourself?"

"But, my dear comrade, that is different; in my turn I will not allow--"

"General, you will humiliate me, if you do not allow me to offer you this as a feeble proof of my gratitude."

"Very well; I shall struggle no longer with your generosity. Besides, your devotion will be a sweet recompense for the freedom that I have always maintained in our business affairs."

"That is what I expect, my general; but can I not serve you in any other way? you must be horribly situated here, you, who like to be so much at your ease! You are in a cell by yourself, I hope?"

"Certainly, and I arrived just in time, for I have the last vacant room. I have arranged myself as well as I can in my cell; I am not very badly off; I have a stove; I sent for a good arm-chair; I make three long repasts; I digest, I walk and sleep. Saving the inquietude which Alexandrine causes me, you see I am not much to be pitied."

"But you are so much of a _gourmand_, general! the resources of the prison are so meager!"

"But the provision merchant who lives in this street has been created, as it were, for my service. I have an open account with him, and every day he sends me a nice little basket; and while on this subject, and you are ready to do me a favor, beg good Mrs. Michonneau, who, by the way, is not so bad--"

"Ah! rogue--rogue of a general!"

"Come, my dear comrade, no evil thoughts," said the bailiff, "I am only a good customer and neighbor. Pray dear Mrs. Michonneau to put into my basket to-morrow some pickled funny fish; it is now in season; it will be good for my digestion, and make me thirsty."

"Excellent idea!"

"And then, let her send a hamper of Burgundy, Champagne, and Bordeaux, just like the last--she knows what that means! and let her add two bottles of her old 1817 Cognac, and a pound of pure Mocha, fresh ground and burned."

"I will just note down the date of the brandy, so as not to forget it," said Bourdin, taking his notebook from his pocket.

"Since you are writing, my dear comrade, have the goodness to note down to ask at my house for my eiderdown coverlet."

"All this shall be executed to the letter, general. Be easy; I feel now a little more assured as to your good living. But do you take your walks pell-mell among the low prisoners?"

"Yes, and it is very gay, very animated; I come out of my room after breakfast. I go sometimes into one court, sometimes into another; and, as you say, I mix with the dregs. I assure you that, at the bottom, they appear to be very good fellows; some of them are very amusing. The most abandoned assemble in what they call the Lions' Den. Ah! my dear comrade, what hangdog faces! There is one among them named Skeleton! I have never seen his fellow."

"What a singular name!"

"He is so thin, or, rather, so fleshless, that it is no nickname; I tell you, he is frightful; and with all this, he is provost-marshal of his ward; he is by far the greatest villain of them all. He comes from the galleys, and he has again robbed and murdered; but his last murder is so horrible, that he knows very well he will be condemned to death to a certainty, but he laughs at it like fun."

"What a ruffian!"

"All the prisoners admire, and tremble before him. I put myself at once in his good graces, by giving him some cigars; he has taken me into his friendship, and teaches me slang. I make progress."

"Oh! oh! what a good lark! my general learning flash!"

"I tell you I amuse myself like anything. These jockeys adore me; some of them are even familiar as relations. I am not proud, like a little gentleman, Germain, a barefoot, who has not the means to be separate, and yet pretends to play the disdainful with them."

"But he must have been delighted to find a man so much at home as you are, to talk with, if he is so highly disgusted with the others?"

"Bah! he did not seem to remark who I was; but had he remarked it, I should have been very guarded to respond to his advances. He is the butt of the prison. They will play him, sooner or later, a bad turn, and I have not, of course, any desire to partake of the aversion of which he is the object."

"You are very right."

"That would spoil my recreation; for my promenade with the prisoners is a real promenade. Only these robbers have not a great opinion of me, mentally. You comprehend--my accusation of a simple abuse of confidence--it is a sad thing for such fellows. Thus they look upon me as no great shakes, as Arnal says."

"In fact, alongside of these matadores of crime, you are--"

"A lamb, my dear comrade. Since you are so obliging, do not forget my commissions."

"Do not be uneasy, my general."

"1st Alexandrine; 2d the fish, and the hamper of wine; 3d the old 1817 Cognac, the ground coffee, and the eiderdown coverlet."

"You shall have all. Anything more?"

"Yes, I forgot. Do you know where M. Badinot lives?"

"The broker? yes."

"Will you tell him that I reckon on his obliging disposition to find me a lawyer who is prepared for my cause--that I shall not regard a cool thousand?"

"I will see M. Badinot, be assured, general; this evening all your commissions shall be executed, and to-morrow you will receive what you have demanded. Adieu, and a good heart, general."

"Ta, ta!"

And the prisoner left on one side, and the visitor on the other.

Now compare the crime of Pique-Vinaigre, a robber, to the offense of Boulard, the bailliff. Compare the point of departure from virtue of the two, and the reasons, necessities, which have pushed them on to crime. Compare, finally, the punishment that awaits them. Coming out of prison, inspiring everywhere fear and indifference, the liberated convict could not follow, in the residence appointed him, the trade he knew; he hoped to be able to work at an occupation dangerous to his life, but suitable for his strength; this resource failed him.

Then he breaks his terms of release, returns to Paris, contriving to conceal his former life and find some work. He arrives, exhausted with fatigue, dying with hunger; by chance he discovers that a sum of money is deposited in a neighboring house; he yields to temptation, he forces a window, opens a desk, steals one hundred francs, and flies. He is arrested, is a prisoner. He will be tried, condemned. For a second crime, fifteen or twenty years of hard labor and the pillory is what awaits him. He knows it. This formidable punishment he deserves. Property is sacred. He who, at night, breaks open your doors to take your goods ought to undergo a severe penalty. In vain shall the culpable plead the want of work, poverty, his position so difficult and intolerable, the wants which this position, this condition of a liberated convict, imposes on him. So much the worse; there is but one law. Society, for its peace and safety, will and ought to be

armed with boundless power, and without pity repress these audacious attacks upon others.

Yes, this wretch, ignorant and stupid, this corrupted and despised convict, has merited his fate. But what shall he then deserve who, intelligent, rich, educated, surrounded by the esteem of all, clothed with an official character, will steal--not to eat, but to satisfy some fanciful caprice, or to try the chance of stock-jobbing? Will steal, not a hundred francs, but a hundred thousand francs--a million? Will steal, not at night, at the peril of his life, but tranquilly, quite at his ease, in the sight of all? Will steal, not from an unknown who has placed his money under the safeguard of a lock, but from a client, who has placed from necessity his money under the safeguard of the public officer, whom the law points out--imposes on his confidence? What terrible punishment will be deserve, then, who, instead of stealing a small sum almost from necessity, will steal wholesale a considerable amount? Would it not be a crying injustice not to apply to him a similar punishment to that bestowed on the poor villain pushed to extremities by misery, to theft by want? Get along! says the law. How! apply to a man well brought up the same punishment as to a vagabond? For shame! To compare an offense of good society with a vulgar burglary? Fie!

Thus, for the public defaulting officer: two months imprisonment. For the liberated prisoner: twenty years hard labor, and the pillory. What can be added to these facts? They speak for themselves.

What sad and serious reflections they give birth to. Faithful to his promise, the old warder had called for Germain. When Boulard re-entered the prison, the door opened, Germain entered, and Rigolette was no longer separated from her poor lover but by a slight wire railing.

CHAPTER VI.

FRANCOIS GERMAIN.

Germain's features were wanting in regularity, but a more interesting face could scarcely be seen; his bearing was exalted; his figure graceful; his dress plain, but neat (gray trousers and a black frock-coat closely buttoned), showed none of that slovenly carelessness so peculiar to prisoners; his white hands bore witness of a care for his person which had still more increased the aversion of the other prisoners; for moral perversity is almost always joined to personal filthiness. His brown hair, naturally curled, which he wore long and parted on the side, according to the fashion of the times, hung around his pale and dejected face; his eyes, of a beautiful blue, announced frankness and kindness; his smiles, at once sad and sweet, expressed benevolence and habitual melancholy; for, although very young, this unfortunate youth had experienced many trials.

In a word, nothing could be more touching than his appearance, suffering, affecting, resigned; as also nothing more honest, more loyal, than the heart of this young man. The cause even of his arrest (despoiling it of the calumnious aggravations due to the hatred of Jacques Ferrand) proved the kind-heartedness of Germain, and accused him only of a moment's thoughtlessness or imprudence; culpable, doubtless, but pardonable, when one reflects that he was able to replace in the desk of the notary the sum taken to save Morel the lapidary. Germain blushed slightly when, through

the grating, he perceived the fresh and charming face of Rigolette. She, according to her custom, wished to appear gay, to encourage and cheer his spirits; but she ill-concealed the sorrow and emotion that she had always felt since he had been imprisoned. Seated on a bench on the other side of the railing, she held on her lap her basket.

The old warder, instead of remaining in the passage, went and seated himself near a stove at the extremity of the room. In a few moments he fell asleep. Germain and Rigolette could talk at their ease.

"Come, M. Germain," said the grisette, approaching her face as close as she could to the grating, the better to examine the features of her friend, "let me see if I am satisfied with your face. Is it less sorrowful? Hum! hum! so, so; take care; you will make me angry."

"How kind you are to come again to-day!"

"Again! what! that is a reproach."

"Ought I not, in truth, reproach you for doing so much for me--for me, who can do nothing but thank you?"

"An error, sir; for I am also as happy from my visits as you are. So I must, in my turn, thank you. Ah! ah! there is where I have caught you, Master Unjust. I have half a mind to punish you for your wicked ideas, by not giving you what I have brought."

"Another kindness! how you spoil me!--oh! thank you. Pardon me if I repeat so often this word, which you dislike!--but you leave me nothing else to say."

"In the first place, you do not know what I have brought."

"What is that to me?"

"Well, you are polite!"

"Whatever it may be, does it not come from you? Your touching kindness, does it not fill me with gratitude, and----"

Germain could not finish, but cast down his eyes.

"And with what?" asked Rigolette, blushing.

"And with--and with devotion," stammered Germain.

"Why not add respect at once, like at the end of a letter," said Rigolette impatiently. "You deceive me; it was not that which you intended to say. You stopped short."

"I assure you----"

"You assure me!--you assure me! I see you blush through the grating. Am I not your little friend, your neighbor? Why do you conceal anything? Be frank, then, with me; tell me all," added the grisette, timidly; for she only waited for an avowal from Germain to tell him openly that she loved him. An honest and generous love, which the misfortunes of Germain had called into existence.

"I assure you," answered the prisoner, with a sigh, "that I conceal nothing from you!"

"Fie, the false man!" cried Rigolette, stamping her foot. "Well, you see this large cravat of white wool that I brought for you?" and she took it from her basket. "To punish you for your dissimulation, you shall not have it. I knit it for you. I said to myself, it must be so cold, so damp, in those large prison yards, that at least he will be protected nicely with this; he is so chilly."

"How, you?"

"Yes, you are liable to cold," said Rigolette, interrupting him. "Perhaps I recollect it well! that did not, however, prevent you hindering me (out of delicacy) from putting any more wood in my stove when you passed the evening with me. Oh, I have a good memory!"

"And I also-only too good!" said Germain, in an agitated voice, passing his hand over his eyes.

"Come, now, there you are becoming sad again, although I forbid it."

"How; do you wish me not to be touched, even to tears, when I think of all that you have done for me since my detention here? And this new attention, is it not charming? Do I not know that you encroach upon your nights to make time to come and see me? On my account you impose upon yourself extra labor."

"That is it! Pity me then, quickly, because every two or three days I take a fine walk to come and visit my friends, I, who adore a walk. It is so amusing to look at the shops along the streets!"

"And to come out on such a day; such a wind!"

"A reason the more; you have no idea what funny figures you meet! Some holding on their hats with both hands, so that the wind shall not carry them off; others, with their umbrellas turned wrong side out like a tulip, are making incredible grimaces, shutting their eyes, while the rain beats in their faces. Ah! this morning, during my whole walk, it was a real comedy! I promised myself to make you laugh by telling it you. But you will not even force a smile."

"It is not my fault; pardon me, but the kind interest you have manifested for me touches my very heart. You know it; my emotions are never gay; they are stronger than--"

Rigolette, not wishing to let him observe that, notwithstanding her prattle, she was very near partaking his agitation, hastened to change the conversation, and replied:

"You say that your feelings are stronger than you; but there is another thing that you will not master, although I have begged and supplicated you," added Rigolette.

"Of what do you speak?"

"Of your obstinacy in always keeping yourself apart from the other prisoners; in never speaking to them. The warder has just told me again that, for your own interest, you should associate with them. I am sure you

will not do it. You are silent. You see well it is always the same thing! You will not be contented until these frightful men have done you some harm!"

"You do not know the horror with which they inspire me. You do not know all the personal reasons that I have to fly and execrate them and their fellows!"

"Alas! yes; I think I know them--these reasons. I have read the papers which you wrote for me, and which I went to your lodgings to get after your imprisonment. There I have learned the dangers you have incurred since your arrival in Paris, because you would not associate yourself in crime with the scoundrel who brought you up. It was on account of the trap set for you that you left the Rue du Temple, only telling me where you were going to reside. In those papers I have also read something else," added Rigolette, blushing anew, and casting down her eyes; "I have read some things--that--"

"Oh! that you should have been always ignorant of, I swear it," cried Germain, quickly, "but for the misfortune which has fallen upon me--Ah! I interest you; be generous; pardon me these follies; forget them. In happier times I allowed myself these dreams, as wild as they were."

Rigolette had a second time endeavored to extract an avowal from the lips of Germain, by making allusion to passages filled with tenderness and passion, which he had formerly written and dedicated to the recollections of the grisette; for, as we have said, he had always felt for her a lively and sincere affection; but to enjoy the cordial intimacy of his sweet neighbor, he had concealed this love under the mask of friendship. Rendered by misfortune still more suspicious and timid, he could not imagine that Rigolette loved him with love: he, a prisoner, he, withering under a terrible accusation, while before these misfortunes she had never evinced any attachment stronger than that of a sister. The grisette, seeing herself so little understood, suppressed a sigh, waiting--hoping for a better occasion to unfold to Germain the wishes of her heart. She answered, then, with embarrassment: "I can easily comprehend that the society of these bad people causes you horror, but that is no reason for you to brave useless dangers."

"I assure you that in order to follow your advice, I have several times tried to address some of them who seemed the least criminal; but if you knew what language! what men!"

"Alas! it is true, it must be terrible."

"What is still more terrible is, to find I become more and more accustomed, habituated to the frightful conversations which, in spite of myself, I hear all the day; yes, now I listen with a sad apathy to the horrors which, during my first days here, aroused my indignation; thus, I begin to doubt myself," cried he, with bitterness.

"Oh! M. Germain, what do you say?"

"By constantly living in these horrid places, our minds become accustomed to criminal thoughts, as our hearing becomes habituated to the gross words which resound continually around us. I comprehend now that one can enter here innocent, although accused, and leave it perverted."

"Yes, but not you--not you?"

"Yes, I; and others a thousand times better than I. Alas! those who, before conviction, condemn us to this odious association, are ignorant of its mournful and fatal effects. They are ignorant that almost in all cases the air which is breathed here becomes contagious--fatal to honor!"

"I pray you do not talk thus; you cause me too much sorrow."

"You ask me the cause of my growing sadness, there you have it. I did not wish to tell you; but I have only one way of acknowledging your pity for me."

"My pity--my pity!"

"Yes, it is to conceal nothing from you. Ah, well! I acknowledge it with affright. I no longer recognize myself. I have good reason to despise, to fly these wretches. Their presence, their contact affects me, in spite of myself. One would say that they have the fatal power to vitiate the atmosphere they breathe. It seems to me that I feel the corruption entering through every pore. If they absolve me from the fault I have committed, the sight, the acquaintance of honest men will fill me with confusion and shame. I have not yet had the enjoyment of pleasant companions; but I dread the day when I shall find myself among honorable people, because I have the consciousness of my weakness."

"Of your weakness?"

"Of my cowardice!"

"Of your cowardice? but what unjust ideas you have of yourself!"

"Ah! is it not to be cowardly and culpable to compound with one's duty and probity? And that I have done!"

"You! you!"

"I! On entering here I did not extenuate the magnitude of my fault, all excusable as it was, perhaps. Well! now it appears to me less, from hearing these robbers and these murderers speak of their crimes with obscene jests or ferocious pride. I surprise myself sometimes envying them their audacious indifference, and upbraiding myself bitterly for the remorse with which I am tormented for so slight an offense compared to their misdeeds."

"But you are right; your deed, far from being blamable, is generous; you were sure of being able to return the money which you took only for a few hours, in order to save a whole family from ruin, from death, perhaps."

"No matter; in the eyes of the law, in the eyes of honest men, it is a robbery. Doubtless, it is less criminal to steal for such a purpose than for any other; but it is a fatal symptom, to be obliged, in order to excuse one's self in one's eyes, to look around for a reason. I am no longer the equal of men without a stain. Behold me already forced to compare myself with the degraded men with whom I live. Thus, in time, I well see, conscience is blunted, and becomes hardened. To-morrow, I shall commit a robbery, not with the certainty of being able to restore what I took for a laudable object, but I shall steal from cupidity, and I shall doubtless think myself innocent in comparison to those who murder to rob. And yet, at this present moment, there is as great a distance between me and an assassin, as there is between me and an irreproachable man. Thus, because

there are beings a thousand times more degraded than I am, my degradation is to be excused in my eyes! Instead of being able to say, as formerly, I am as honest as the most honest men, I will console myself by saying I am the least degraded of the wretches among whom I am condemned to live!"

"Not always? Once out of this?"

"No matter; even if acquitted, these people know me; when they leave the prison, if they meet me, they will speak to me as their old jail companion. If any one is ignorant of the accusation which brought me to the assizes, these wretches will threaten to divulge it. Thus you well see, cursed and now indissoluble links unite me to them, while, shut alone in my cell until the day of my trial, unknown by them as they would have been unknown to me, I should not have been assailed by these fears, which may paralyze the best resolutions. And then, alone, in thinking of my fault, it would have been magnified instead of being diminished; the graver it appeared to me, the greater would have been my future expiation. Thus, the more I should have felt the need of my own pardon, the more in my poor sphere I should have tried to do good. For it needs a hundred good actions to atone for a single bad one. But shall I ever dream of expiating that which at this moment scarcely causes me any remorse? Hold! I feel it, I obey an irresistible influence, against which I have struggled for a long time with all my strength. I was educated for crime, I yield to my destiny; after all, isolated, without family, what matters it that my destiny should be accomplished, be it honest or criminal? And yet, my intentions were good and pure. When they wished to make me guilty, I experienced a profound satisfaction in saying to myself: I have never been wanting in honor, and that, perhaps, was more difficult for me than all the rest. And now--oh! it is frightful--frightful!" cried the prisoner, sobbing in so heartrending a manner that Rigolette, deeply affected, could not restrain her tears.

Let us say, however, that Germain, thanks to his sterling probity, had struggled for a long time victoriously, and that he felt the approaches of the malady more than he experienced in reality. His fear of seeing his fault become of less gravity in his own eyes, proved that he still felt all its enormity; but the trouble, apprehension, and doubts which cruelly agitated his virtuous and generous mind were not the less alarming symptoms. Guided by the rectitude of her understanding, by her woman's sagacity, and by the impulses of her love, Rigolette divined that which we have just said. Although well convinced that her friend had not yet lost any of his probity, she feared that, notwithstanding the excellence of his nature, Germain might at some future period become indifferent to that which then tormented him so cruelly.

Rigolette, wiping her eyes, and addressing Germain, who was leaning against the grating, said to him with a touching, serious, almost solemn accent, and in a manner he had never seen her assume, "Listen to me, Germain; I shall express myself perhaps badly; I do not speak so well as you; but what I shall tell you will be as truly sincere. In the first place, you were wrong to complain of being isolated, abandoned."

"Oh! do not think that I ever forget that which your pity for me inspires you to do!"

"Just now, I did not interrupt you when you spoke of _pity_; but since you repeat this word, I must say that it is not pity at all which I feel for you. I am going to explain this as well as I can. When we were neighbors, I loved you as a brother, as a good companion; you rendered me some little services, I rendered you others; you made me partake of your

Sunday amusements, I tried to be very lively, very agreeable, in order to thank you; we were quits."

"Quits? oh! no--I----"

"Let me speak in my turn. When you were forced to leave the house where we dwelt, your departure caused me more regret than that of my other neighbors."

"Can it be true?"

"Yes, because they were men without care, whom certainly I ought to miss less than you; and, besides, they did not yield themselves to be my acquaintances until I had told them a hundred times that they could be nothing else; while you----you have at once imagined what we ought to be to each other. Notwithstanding this you have passed with me all the time you had to spare: you taught me to write; you gave me good advice, a little serious, because it was good: in fine, you have been the most attentive of my neighbors, and the only one who asked nothing of me for the trouble. This is not all; on leaving the house you gave me a great proof of confidence. To see you confide a secret so important to a little girl like me, bless me! that made me proud. Thus, when I was separated from you, my thoughts were oftener of you than of my other neighbors. What I tell you now is true; you know I never tell a falsehood."

"Can it be possible you should have made this distinction between me and the others?"

"Certainly, I have made it, otherwise I should have a bad heart. Yes, I said to myself, 'No one can be better than M. Germain; only he is a little too serious; but never mind, if I had a friend who wished to marry to be very, very happy, certainly I should advise her to marry M. Germain; for he would be the idol of a nice little housekeeper.'"

"You thought of me for another!" Germain could not prevent himself from saying mournfully.

"It is true; I should have been delighted to see you make a happy marriage, since I loved you as a valued friend. You see I am frank; I tell you everything."

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart; it is a consolation for me to learn that among your friends I was he whom you preferred."

"This was the situation of things when your troubles came. It was then that I received the good and kind letter in which you informed me of what you called your fault; fault! which I think--who am not a scholar--is a good and praiseworthy action; it was then that you asked me to go for those papers which informed me that you had always loved me, without daring to tell me so. Those papers, in which I read"--and Rigolette could not restrain her tears--"that, thinking of my future, which sickness, or the want of work might render so painful, you left me, if you should die a violent death, as you feared--you left me the little which you had acquired: by force of industry and economy--"

"Yes; for if I were alive and you found yourself without work or sick, it is to me, rather than any one else, that you would address yourself--is it not so? I count on it! speak! speak! I am not mistaken, am I?"

"It is very plain; to whom would you have me apply?"

"Oh! hold; these are words which do good, which are a balm for many sorrows!"

"I cannot express to you what I felt on reading--what a sad word--this _will_, of which each line contained a 'souvenir' of me, or a thought for my welfare; and yet I was not to know these proofs of your attachment until you were no longer in existence. Bless me! what would you? after such generous conduct one is astonished that love should come all at once! yet it is very natural, is it not, M. Germain?"

The girl said these last words with such touching frankness, fixing her large black eyes on those of Germain, that he did not understand her at first, so far was he from thinking himself beloved by Rigolette. Yet these words were so pointed, that their echo resounded from the bottom of the prisoner's heart; he blushed, then became pale, and cried,

"What do you say! I fear--oh! I am mistaken--I----"

"I say that from the moment in which I found you were so kind to me and in which I saw you so unhappy, I have loved you otherwise than as a brother, and that if now one of my friends wished to marry," said Rigolette, smiling and blushing, "it is no longer you I should recommend to her, M. Germain."

"You love me! you love me!"

"I must then tell you myself, since you ask me."

"Can it be possible?"

"It is not, however, my fault, for having twice put you in the way to make you comprehend it. But no, my gentleman does not wish to understand a hint; he forces me to confess these things to him. It is wrong, perhaps; but as there is no one here but you to scold me for my effrontery, I have less fear; and, besides," added Rigolette, in a more serious tone, and with deep emotion, "just now you appeared to me so much afflicted, so despairing, that I did not mind it; I have had the self-love to believe that this avowal, made frankly and from the bottom of the heart, would prevent you from being so unhappy for the future. I thought, 'Until now I have had no luck in my efforts to amuse or console him; my dainties take away his appetite, my gayety makes him weep; this time at least'--oh dear me! what is the matter?" cried Rigolette, on seeing Germain conceal his face in his hands. "There, tell me now if this is not cruel!" cried she; "no matter what I say or what I do, you remain still unhappy; it is to be too wicked, and by far too egotistical also. One would say there was no one but you who suffered."

"Alas, what misery is mine!" cried Germain, with, despair. "You love me, when I am no longer worthy of you!"

"No longer worthy of me? There is no good sense in what you say now. It is as if I had said formerly, that I was not worthy of your friendship, because I had been in prison; for, after all, I have also been a prisoner; am I any less an honest girl?"

"But you were sent to prison because you were a poor abandoned child, while I--what a difference!"

"In fine, as to the prison, we have nothing to reproach ourselves for. It is rather I who am presumptuous; for in my situation I ought only to think of marrying some workman. I am a foundling: I possess nothing but my little chamber and my good courage; yet I come boldly and propose to you to take me for a wife."

"Alas! formerly this had been the dream, the happiness of my life! but now--I, under the weight of an infamous accusation, I should abuse your admirable generosity--your pity, which carries you away, perhaps! no--no!"

"But," cried Rigolette, with impatience, "I tell you, it is not pity, it is love. I only think of you! I sleep no more--I eat no more. Your sad and melancholy looks follow me everywhere. Is that pity? Now, when you speak to me, your voice, your look, go to my heart. There are a thousand things in you which now please me, and which I had not remarked. I love your face, I love your eyes, I love you, I love your mind, I love your good heart; is this still pity? Why, after having loved you as a friend, do I love you as a lover? I do not know! Why was I lively and gay when I loved you as a friend? Why am I all changed since I love you as a lover? I do not know. Why have I waited so long to find you both handsome and good? to love you at once with my eyes and my heart? I do not know; or, rather, yes, I do know: it is because I have discovered how much you loved me without ever telling it; how much you were generous and devoted. Then love mounted from my heart to my eyes, like as a soft tear mounts there when one is affected."

"Really, I think I am in a dream on hearing you talk thus."

"And I, then! I never should have thought it possible that I could dare to tell you all this; but your despair compelled me! Ah, well! now that you know that I love you as my friend, as my lover, as my husband, will you still say it is pity?"

The generous scruples of Germain were dispelled in a moment before this avowal, so artless and courageous. A joy unlooked--for tore him from his sorrowful meditations.

"You love me!" cried he. "I believe you; your voice, your look, all tell me! I do not wish to ask myself how I have deserved such happiness, I abandon myself to it blindly. My life, my whole life, will not suffice to pay my debt to you! Ah! I have already suffered much, but this moment compensates all!"

"At length you are consoled. Oh! I was very sure, very sure I should succeed!" cried Rigolette, with a burst of charming joy.

"And is it in the midst of the horrors of a prison, and is it when everything oppresses me, that such a felicity--" Germain could not finish. This thought recalling the reality of his position, his scruples, for a moment forgotten, returned more cruel than ever, and he resumed, with despair, "But I am a prisoner; I am accused of robbery; I shall be condemned perhaps; and I would accept your valorous sacrifice! I would profit by your generous exaltation! Oh, no! no! I am not infamous enough for this!"

"What do you say?"

"I may be condemned to years of imprisonment."

"Well!" answered Rigolette, with calmness and firmness, "they will see that I am a virtuous girl; they will not refuse to marry us in the prison chapel."

"But I may be confined far from Paris."

"Once your wife, I will follow you; I will live in the place where you may be; I will work there, and will come to see you every day!"

"But I shall be disgraced in the eyes of all."

"You love me more than all, don't you?"

"Can you ask me?"

"Then what matters it to you? Far from being disgraced in my eyes, I shall regard you as the martyr of your good heart."

"But the world will condemn, calumniate your choice."

"The world! we will be the world to each other, and then let them talk."

"Finally, on coming out of the prison, my living will be precarious, miserable. Repulsed on all sides, perhaps I shall find no employment; and then, it is horrible to think of: but if this corruption which I dread should, in spite of myself, gain on me, what a future for you!"

"You will not be corrupted; no, for now you know I love you, and this thought will give you strength to resist bad examples. You will think that even if every one should repulse you on your leaving the prison, your wife will receive you with love and gratitude, very certain that you are still an honest man. This language astonishes you, does it not? It astonishes _me_. I do not know where I find what I say to you. It is from the bottom of my heart, assuredly, and that ought to convince you; otherwise, if you disdain an offer which is made from the heart, if you do not wish the attachment of a poor girl who--"

Germain interrupted Rigolette with warmth:

"Well! I accept--I accept; yes, I feel that it is sometimes cowardly to refuse certain sacrifices; it is to acknowledge that one is unworthy of them. I accept, noble and courageous girl."

"True! very true this time!"

"I swear it to you; and, beside, you have spoken words which have struck me--which have given me the courage I wanted."

"What happiness! and what have I said?"

"That for you I ought to remain an honest man. Yes, in this thought I will find the strength to resist the detestable influences which surround me. I will brave the contagion, and will know how to preserve worthy of your love this heart, which belongs to you!"

"Oh! Germain, how happy I am! if I have done anything for you, how you recompense me!"

"And then, do you see, although you excuse my fault, I will not forget its

gravity. My task, for the future, shall be doubled--to atone for the past, and deserve the happiness I owe to you. For that I will do good; for, however poor one may be, the occasion is never wanting."

"Alas! that is true; those who are more unfortunate than one's self can always be found."

"In default of money--"

"One gives tears, that which I did for the poor Morels. And it is holy alms: the charity of the heart is worth more than that which gives bread."

"In fine, you accept; you will not retract?"

"Oh! never, never, my friend, my wife; yes, my courage returns; I seem to emerge from a dream; I doubt myself no longer! I wronged myself--happily, I wronged myself. My heart would not beat as it does beat if it had lost its noble energy."

"Oh! Germain, how handsome you look while thus speaking! How you reanimate me, not for myself, but for you! Now, you promise, do you not, that, now you have my love to shield you, you will no longer fear to speak to these wicked men, in order not to excite their anger against you?"

"Be comforted. On seeing me sad and dejected, they, doubtless, accused me of being a prey to my remorse; and in seeing me joyous and gay, they will think that I have acquired their recklessness."

"It is true; they will suspect you no more, and I shall be happy. So, no imprudence; now you belong to me. I am your little wife!"

At this moment the warder stirred: he awoke. "Quick!" whispered Rigolette, with a smile full of grace and maiden tenderness; "quick, my husband, give me a sweet kiss on my forehead, through the grating; it will be our betrothal!"

And the girl leaned her face against the iron bars. Germain, profoundly affected, touched with his lips, through the grating, the pure and white forehead. A tear from the prisoner fell like a humid pearl. Oh! touching baptism, of this chaste, melancholy, and charming love!

"Ho! ho! already three o'clock!" said the warder, rising from his seat; "and visitors ought to leave at two. Come, my dear," added he, addressing the grisette; "it is a pity, but you must part."

"Oh! thank you, thank you, sir, for allowing us to talk alone. I have given Germain good courage; he will no longer look so sorrowful, and thus he will have nothing more to fear from his wicked companions. Is it not so, my friend?"

"Be tranquil," said Germain, smiling; "I shall be for the future the gayest in the prison."

"Very good; then they will pay no more attention to you," said the warder.

"Here is a cravat which I have brought for Germain," said Rigolette; "must I leave it at the office?"

"It is the rule; but, after all, while I have already transgressed orders,

in for a lamb, in for a sheep--come, make the day complete; give him quickly the present yourself." And the warder opened the door.

"The good man is right; the happiness of the day will be complete," said Francois Germain, on receiving the cravat from the hands of Rigolette, which he tenderly pressed. "Adieu! Now I have no longer any fear to ask you to come and see me as soon as possible."

"Nor I to promise it. Adieu, good Germain!"

"Farewell, my own darling!"

"And be sure to make use of my cravat; take care you do not catch cold; it is so damp."

"What a handsome cravat! When I think that you made it for me! Oh! I will always keep it," said Germain, carrying it to his lips.

"Now you will have some appetite, I hope. Do you wish that I should make my little dish for you?"

"Certainly, and this time I will do it honor."

"Do not be uneasy, then, Mister Glutton; you shall give me your opinion. Come, once more, adieu. Thank you, Mister Warder; today I go away very happy and gratified. Adieu, Germain."

"Adieu, my little wife: soon again!"

"Forever yours!"

Some moments after, Rigolette, having put on her pattens, left the prison with a lighter heart than when she entered it. During the conversation of Germain and the grisette, other scenes were passing in one of the courts of the prison, where we shall now conduct the reader.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LION'S DEN

If the material aspect of a vast house of detention, constructed with every reference to comfort and salubrity claimed by humanity, presents, as we have said, nothing gloomy or sinister, the sight of the prisoners causes a contrary impression. A person is commonly touched with sadness and pity when he finds himself in the midst of a crowd of female prisoners, in thinking that these unfortunates are almost always forced to crime less from their own will than by the pernicious influence of the first who betrayed them. And then, again, women, the most criminal, preserve at the bottom of the heart two holy ties, which the violent action of passions the most detestable, the most impetuous, never breaks entirely--Love and Maternity! To speak of love and maternity, is to say that with these poor creatures a soft and pure emotion can still light up here and there the profound gloom of a wretched corruption. But with men, such as the prison makes them and casts into the world, there is nothing similar. It is crime of one cast; it is a lump of brass, which only becomes red in the fire of

infernal passions. Thus, at the sight of the criminals who encumber the prisons, one is at first seized with a shudder of alarm and horror. Reflection alone leads you to thoughts more compassionate, but of great bitterness. Yes, of great bitterness; for one reflects that the vicious population of jails and hulks, the bloody harvest of the executioner, springs up from that mire of ignorance, of misery, and of stupidity. To comprehend this alarming and horrible proposition, let the reader follow us into the Lions' Den. One of the courts of La Force is thus called. There are ordinarily placed the prisoners most dangerous, for their previous ferocity, or for the gravity of the accusations which rest upon them. Nevertheless, it had been found necessary to add to their number temporarily, in consequence of the repairs now going on in the prison, several other prisoners. These, although equally under the jurisdiction of the Court of Assizes, were almost honest people compared to the habitual inmates of the Lions' Den. The gloomy, dark, and rainy sky cast a mournful light on the scene we are going to describe. It took place in the middle of the court, which was a vast quadrangle, formed by high white walls, pierced here and there by some grated windows.

At one of the ends of this court was seen a narrow wicket door; at the other, the entrance to the sitting-room; a large paved hall, in the middle of which was a cast-iron stove, surrounded by wooden seats, on which were stretched several prisoners, talking among themselves. Others, preferring exercise to repose, were walking in the courts, in close ranks, four and five together, With locked arms.

[Illustration: THE DISCOMFITED MONKEY]

One should possess the energetic and somber pencil of Salvator or of Goya to sketch these diverse specimens of physical and moral ugliness; to describe their hideous habiliments, the variety of costume of these wretches, covered for the most part with miserable clothing; for, only being attainted, that is to say, supposed innocents, they were not dressed in the uniform of the penitentiaries; some of them, however, wore it; for, on their entrance into prison, their rags had appeared so dirty, so infectious, that, after the customary bath, they had given to them the cap and coarse gray trowsers of the convict. A phrenologist would have attentively studied these ghastly and bronzed faces, with their flat foreheads, their cruel and insidious glances, wicked mouths, and brawny necks; almost all offered a frightful resemblance to the brute. On the cunning features of this, one would find the subtle perfidy of the fox; on another, the sanguinary rapacity of the bird of prey; on a third, the ferocity of the tiger; and on another, again, the animal stupidity of the brute. The circular walk of this band of silent beings, with bold and contemptuous looks, an insolent and cynical laugh, pressing one against the other, at the bottom of this court, offered something strangely suspicious. It caused a shudder to think that this ferocious horde would be, in a given time, again let loose among mankind, against whom they had declared an implacable warfare. How much sanguinary revenge, how many murderous projects, lurk under this appearance of brazen and jeering perversity!

Let us sketch some few of the prominent physiognomies of the Lions' Den, let us leave the others in the background. While one of the warders watched those who were walking, a kind of meeting was held in the hall, Among those who were present, we will find Barbillon and Nicholas Martial, of whom we shall speak only to remind the reader of their presence. He who appeared to preside and conduct the discussion was a prisoner nicknamed Skeleton. He was provost-marshal or captain of the hall. This man, of a good height, and about forty years of age, justified his appropriate nickname by a leanness

impossible to be described, which we should call almost osteological. If the physiognomies of his companions offered more or less analogy to that of the tiger, the vulture, or the fox, the form of his retreating forehead, and his bony, lank, and protruding jaws, supported by a neck of immense length, resembled entirely the conformation of a serpent's head. Total baldness increased this resemblance still more, for, under the rough skin of this reptile-shaped forehead, could be distinguished the slightest protuberances, the smallest sutures of his skull; as to his visage, let one imagine some old parchment drawn over the face, and only slightly tightened from the cheek-bone to the angle of the lower jaw, the ligament of which was plainly visible. The eyes, small and squinting, were so deeply sunken, the eyebrows and cheek-bones so prominent, that under the yellowish forehead could be seen two sockets, literally filled with darkness, and, at a small distance, the eyes seemed to disappear in the bottom of these cavities, two black holes, which give such a horrible appearance to a skull. His long projecting teeth were almost constantly displayed by an habitual grin. Although the emaciated muscles of this man were almost reduced to the condition of tendons, he was of extraordinary strength. The most robust resisted with difficulty the grasp of his long arms and long, bony fingers. It could be called the grasp of an iron skeleton. He wore a blue smock-frock, much too short, which disclosed, and he was proud of them, his sinewy hands, and the lower part of his arms, or rather bones (the _radius_ and the _cubitus_ the reader will pardon the anatomical designations), wrapped in a rough, blackened skin, and separated by some hard and cord-like veins. When he placed his hands on a table, he seemed to use a just metaphor of Pique-Vinaigre to play a game of cockles.

After having passed fifteen years of his life at the galleys for robbery and attempt at murder, he had broken his ticket-of leave, and had been taken in the act of murder and robbery. This last assassination had been committed under circumstances of such ferocity, that, taking into account he was a robber, this bandit looked upon himself, with good reason, as already condemned to death. The influence which the living Skeleton exercised over the other prisoners by his strength and his perversity, had caused him to be chosen by the director of the prison provost of the dormitory; that is to say, he was charged with the government of his ward, as far as regarded the order, arrangements, and neatness of the room and beds. He acquitted himself perfectly of these functions; and never had the prisoners dared to fail in the duties of which he had the superintendence. Strange and significant. The most intelligent directors of prisons, after having tried to invest with the functions of which we speak the prisoners who most recommended themselves by their good conduct, or whose crimes were less grave, had found themselves obliged to deviate in their choice, however logical and moral, and seek for provosts among prisoners the most corrupted, the most feared: these alone could exercise any influence over their companions.

Thus, let us repeat it again, the more a culprit shows audacity and impudence, the more he will be regarded, and, thus to speak, respected. This fact, proved by experience, sanctioned by the forced choice of which we have spoken, is an irrefragable argument against the evil of an imprisonment in common, I say.

Does it not show, even to an absolute evidence, the intensity of the contagion which mortally attacks prisoners in whom there is some hope of restoration? Yes, for what use of thinking of repentance, amendment, when, in this pandemonium, where one must pass many years--his life, perhaps--it is seen that influence is measured by the number and gravity of misdeeds? The provost of the hall was talking with several prisoners, among whom were

Barbillon and Nicholas Martial, we repeat.

"Are you very sure of what you say?" asked he of Martial.

"Yes, yes, a hundred times, yes; Micou had it from Big Cripple, who already wanted to kill the muff, because he betrayed some one."

"Then let some one eat his nose, and put a stop to this!" added Barbillon. "Just now, Skeleton was for giving a stab to this spy Germain."

The provost took his pipe for a moment from his mouth, and said, in a voice so low, so crapulously hoarse, that he could scarcely be heard, "Germain holds up his head; he is a spy; he troubles us: for the less one talks, the more one listens. We must make him clear out of the Lions' Den. Once we make him bleed, they will take him from here."

"Well, then," said Nicholas, "what change is that?"

"There is this change," replied Skeleton, "that if he has sold us, as Big Cripple says, he shall not escape with a small bleeding."

"Very good," said Barbillon.

"There must be an example," said Skeleton, becoming more animated. "Now it is no longer the grabs who find us out: it is the spies. Jacques and Gauthier guillotined the other day. Roussillon, sent to the galleys for life, sold!"

"And me, and my mother, and Calabash, and my brother at Toulon!" cried Nicholas, "have we not been sold by Bras-Rouge? That is certain now, since, instead of putting him here, they have sent him to La Roquette! They did not dare leave him with us; he knew his treachery, the sneak!"

"And," said Barbillon, "has not Bras-Rouge also sold me?"

"And me," said a young prisoner, in a shrill and reedy voice, lisping in an affected manner, "I was betrayed by Jobert, a man who proposed an affair in the Rue Saint Martin."

This last personage, with the reedy voice, a pale, fat, and effeminate face, and an insidious and cowardly expression, was dressed in a singular manner. He had on his head a red handkerchief, which allowed two locks of white hair to be seen plastered on his temples; the ends of the handkerchief formed a bow over his forehead; he wore, for a cravat, a shawl, of white merino with green palms in the corners on his bosom; his jacket, of maroon colored cloth, disappeared under the tight waistband of his ample trousers, made of gay Scotch plaid.

"If this is not an indignity! Must a man be a scoundrel?" resumed this gentleman with the pretty voice. "Nothing in the world would have made me suspect Jobert."

"I know that he informed against you," answered the Skeleton, who seemed to patronize this prisoner particularly. "The proof is, that they have done with him as they did with Bras-Rouge; they did not dare leave Jobert here; they locked him up at the Conciergerie. Well, this must be put a stop to: we must have an example. Our traitor brothers carve out work for the police. They think they are sure of their necks because they are put in a different prison from those they have betrayed."

"It is the truth."

"To prevent this, every prisoner must look upon all turncoats as deadly enemies: if they have blown on Tony, Dick, or Harry, it matters not which pounce on them. When we have done the job for four or five in the court, the others will wag their tongues twice before they blow the gaff!"

"You are right," said Nicholas; "Germain must die!"

"He shall die," answered the provost; "but let us wait until Big Cripple comes. When he shall have proved to everybody that" Germain is a spy, enough said: the sheep will bleat no more; his breath shall be stopped."

"And what shall we do with the warders, who watch us!" asked the prisoner whom the Skeleton called Ja-votte.

"I have my own idea. Pique-Vinaigre shall serve us."

"He? He is too cowardly."

"And not stronger than a mouse."

"Enough. I understand. Where is he?"

"He returned from the grate, some one came for him to go and patter with his Newgate lawyer."

"And Germain. Is he still at the grate?"

"Yes; with the little mot who comes to see him."

"As soon as he descends, attention. But we must wait for Pique-Vinaigre; we can do nothing without him."

"Without Pique-Vinaigre?"

"No."

"And Germain shall be--"

"I will take charge of it."

"But with what? They have taken away our knives."

"And these hooks--will you put your neck between them?" asked Skeleton, opening his long fingers, hard as iron.

"Choke him?"

"A little."

"But if they know it is you?"

"What's the odds? Am I a calf with two heads, such as is shown in the fair?"

"That is true. One can only be made a head shorter once; and since you are

sure of being--"

"Doubly sure; the lawyer told me so yesterday. I have been taken with my hand in the pocket, and my knife in the throat, of the stiff 'un; I am a second comer; it is all over with me. I will send my head to see, in the basket, if it is true that they cheat the condemned, and put sawdust in, instead of bran, which the government allows us."

"It is true; the guillotined has a right to his bran. My father was cheated, I recollect," said Nicholas Martial, with a ferocious chuckle.

This abominable pleasantry made all the prisoners laugh loudly.

"A thousand thunders!" cried Skeleton. "I wish all the nobs could hear us talk, who think to make us quake before the guillotine. They have only to come to the Barriere Saint Jacques the day of my benefit; they will hear me crack jokes with the crowd, and say to Jack, in a bold voice, 'Open the door till I go down into the cellar!' Renewed laughter followed this sally.

"The fact is, that the affair lasts as long as it takes to swallow a mouthful. Draw the bolt; and he opens the devil's door for you!" said Skeleton continuing to smoke his pipe.

"Ah, bah! is there a devil?"

"Fool! I said that for a joke. There is a knife; a head is placed under, and that is all."

"Besides, is that our business?"

"As for me, now that I know my road, and that I must stop at the tree, I would as soon go today as tomorrow," said Skeleton, with savage energy. "I wish I was there now. I feel my blood in my mouth when I think of the crowd who will be there to see me. There will be four or five thousand who will fight or quarrel for places. They will hire out windows and chairs as for a procession. I hear them already cry, 'Window to let! Place to let!' And then there will be the troops, cavalry and infantry. And all this for me--for old Boulard. It is not for an honest man that they take all this trouble, hey, Sals! Here is something to make a man proud. Even he should be as cowardly as Pique-Vinaigre, it would make him resolute. All these eyes which are looking at you give you courage, and it is but a moment to pass, you die boldly; that vexes the judges and the duffers, and encourages a flash cove to die game."

"That is true," replied Barbillon, endeavoring to imitate the frightful boasting. "They think to make us afraid, and confess all, when they send Ketch to open shop on our account."

"Bah!" said Nicholas, in his turn. "One is not wrong to laugh at the scaffold; it is like the prison and the galleys; we laugh at them also; so long as we are all friends together, 'A short life and a merry one!'"

"For instance," said the prisoner with the lisping voice, "what would be tough would be to keep us in cells day and night."

"In cells!" cried Skeleton, with a kind of savage alarm. "Do not speak of it. In cells! All alone! I would rather they would cut off my arms and legs. All alone! Between four walls! All alone! No old mates to laugh with!

That cannot be! I prefer a hundred times the galleys to the prisons, because at the galleys, instead of being shut up, one is out of doors, sees company, moves about. Well! I would rather a hundred times be a head shorter than be put into a cell only for one year. See here, at this moment, I am sure of being cut down, am I not? Well, let them say to me, 'Would you prefer a year in a cell?' I would stretch out my neck. A year all alone! Can this be possible? What would they have one think of when one is all alone?"

"If they were to put you there by force?"

"I would not remain. I would make such use of my feet and hands that I would escape," said Skeleton.

"But if you could not--if you were sure that you could not escape?"

"Then I would kill the first one I could, in order to be guillotined."

"But if, instead of condemning the red-handed to death, they condemned them to a solitary cell for life?"

Skeleton seemed to be staggered by this reflection. After amoment's pause he replied:

"Then I do not know what I should do. I would break my head against the walls. I would allow myself to die with hunger rather than be in a cell. How? All alone--all my life alone with myself? without the hope of escape? I tell you it is not possible. You know there is no one bolder than I am. I would bleed a man for a crown, and even for nothing, for honor. They think that I have only assassinated two persons; but if the dead could speak, there are five who could tell how I work." The brigand boasted of his crimes. These sanguinary egotisms are among the most characteristic traits of hardened criminals. A prison governor told us,"If the pretended murders of which these wretches boast were real, population would be decimated."

"So I say," replied Barbillon, boasting in his turn; "they think that I only laid out the milkwoman's husband in the city; but I have served many others out, with Big Robert, who was shortened last year."

"It was only to tell you," said Skeleton, "that I neither fear fire nor the devil. But, if I were in a cell, and very sure of not being able to escape--thunder! I believe I should be afraid."

"Of what?" asked Nicholas.

"Of being all alone," answered the cock of the walk.

"So, if you had to recommence your robberies and murders, and, instead of prisons and galleys and guillotine, there were only cells, you would hesitate?"

"Yes--perhaps" (_a fact_), answered the Skeleton.

And he spoke the truth. A noisy burst of laughter, and exclamations of joy proceeding from the prisoners who were walking in the court, interrupted the meeting. Nicholas rose precipitately, and advanced toward the door to ascertain the cause of this unaccustomed noise.

"It is the Big Cripple!" cried Nicholas, returning.

"The Big Cripple?" said the provost; "and Germain, has he descended from the talking-room?"

"Not yet," said Barbillon.

"Let him hurry, then," said Skeleton, "that I may give him an order for a new coffin."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLOT.

Big Cripple, whose arrival had been hailed by the prisoners in the Lions' Den with such noisy joy, and whose denunciation was to be so fatal to Germain, was a man of middle stature; notwithstanding his obesity and his infirmity, he seemed active and vigorous. His bestial physiognomy, as was the case with most of his companions, much resembled a bull-dog's; his low forehead, his little yellow eyes, his falling cheeks, his heavy jawbones, of which the lower projecting beyond the other was armed with long teeth, or rather, broken tusks, which protruded over the lips, rendered this animal resemblance still more striking; he had on his head an otter-skin cap, and wore over his coat a blue cloak with a fur collar. He entered the hall, accompanied by a man of about thirty years of age, whose brown and sunburnt face seemed less degraded than those of the other prisoners, although he affected to appear as resolute as his companion; sometimes his face became clouded, and he smiled bitterly. The Cripple found himself, to use a vulgar expression, quite at home. He could hardly reply to the felicitations and welcomes which were addressed to him from all sides.

"Here you are at last, my jolly bloke! So much the better; we shall have a laugh."

"We wanted you, old son!"

"You have stayed away a long time."

"Yet I have done all I could to return to my friends. It is not my fault if they would not have me sooner."

"Just so, my crummy mate; no one will come of his own accord to be caged; but once there, one must enjoy himself."

"You are in luck, for Pique-Vinaigre is here."

"He also? an old Melun chum! famous, famous, he will help us pass the time with his stories, and customers will not be wanting, for I announce some recruits."

"Who then?"

"Just now, at the office, while they were enrolling me, they brought in two young coves. One I do not know; but the other, who wore a blue cotton cap and a gray blouse, struck my eye. I have seen the fellow somewhere. I think it was in the White Rabbit: a very fine-looking prig."

"Say now, Big Cripple, do you recollect at Melun, I bet you, before a year you would be nabbed?"

"That is true; you have won; but I had more chances to be a second comer than to be medaled; but what have you done?"

"On the American lay."

"Ah! good, always the same fashion!"

"Always; I go my own nice little road. This trick is common; but yokels are also common; and if it had not been for the ignorance of my _bonnet_, I should not be here."

"Never mind, the lesson will be of service."

"When I begin again, I will take my precautions; I have my plan."

"Ah, here is Cardillac," said the Cripple, seeing a man approach, miserably dressed, with a low, cunning, and wicked expression, which partook of the fox and the wolf "Good-day, old man."

"Come, come, limpy," answered Cardillac, gayly; "they said every day, 'He will come.' You do like the pretty women one must wish for."

"Yes, yes."

"Oh!" continued Cardillac, "is it for something a little uppish that you are here?"

"My dear, I went in for burglary. Before, I had done some good business; but the last failed, a superb affair; which, however, still remains to be done. Unfortunately, me and Frank, whom you see, missed our mark!" He pointed to his companion, on whom all eyes were turned.

"So it is true, here is Frank!" said Cardillac. "I would not have known him on account of his beard. Is it you? I thought that at this present moment you were at least the mayor of your district. You wished to play honest?"

"I was a fool, and I have been punished," said Frank, roughly; "but pardon for all sinners; it was good for once; now I belong to the _forty_ until I die; look out when I am released; hang 'em!"

"Very good, that is the style!"

"But what has happened to you, Frank?"

"What happens to all liberated prisoners who are fools enough, as you say, to play honest. Their fate is so just! On coming out of Melun, I had saved nine hundred and odd francs."

"It is true," said the Cripple, "all his misfortunes come from his haying saved this money instead of spending it. You will see what repentance leads to, and whether one pays his expenses by it."

"They sent me to Etampes," resumed Frank; "locksmith by trade, I went to seek employment. I said, 'I am a released convict; I know no one likes to employ them, but here are 900 francs of my savings; give me work, my money

shall be your guarantee; I wish to labor and be honest.'"

"On my word, there is no one but Frank could have such ideas."

"I proposed, then, my savings as a guarantee to the master locksmith, so that he might give me work. 'I am not a banker, to take money on interest,' said he. 'I do not wish convicts in my shop; I work in houses, open the doors the keys of which are lost; my trade is a confidential one, and if it were known that I had a convict among my workmen, I should lose my customers. Goodnight, neighbor.' Did he not, Cardillac, get what he deserved?"

"Most certainly."

"Childish!" added the Cripple, addressing Frank in a paternal manner,

"instead of tearing your ticket at once, and coming to Paris to fritter away your savings, so as to be without a sou in your pocket, and compelled to rob. Then one finds superb ideas."

"You tell me always the old story," said Frank, with impatience; "it is true, I was wrong not to spend my money, since I have not enjoyed it. As there were only four locksmiths at Etampes, he to whom I had first spoken had blabbed; when I addressed myself to the others, they told me the same as their fellow. Thank you; everywhere the same song. So you see, friends, where is the use? We are marked for life! Behold me on a strike in the streets of Etampes! I lived on my money for two months," said Frank; "the money went, and no work came. I broke my leave. I left Etampes."

"That's what you should have done before."

"I came to Paris; then I found some work; my master did not know who I was. I told him I came from the country. There was no better workman than myself. I placed 700 francs, which remained of my savings, with a broker, who gave me a note; when it fell due, he did not pay; I placed my note in the hands of an attorney, who sued and recovered; I left my money with him, and I said to myself, 'It is for a rainy day.' Then I met the Big Cripple."

"Yes, pals, and I was his rainy day, as you will see. Frank was a locksmith; he manufactured keys; I had an affair in which he could serve me; I proposed it to him; I had impressions; he had only to copy them. The lad refused; he wished to become honest; I said to myself, 'I must do him good in spite of himself.' I wrote a letter, without a signature, to his master, another to his companions, to inform them that Frank was a released convict. The master turned him out of doors, and his companions turned their backs upon him. He went to another master; worked there a week; same game. If he had gone to ten more I would have served him the same."

"I did not then suspect that it was you who denounced me," said Frank, "otherwise you might have had it hot!"

"Yes; but I was no fool; I told you I was going to Longjumeau to see my uncle; but I remained at Paris; and I knew all you did through little Ledru."

"In short, they drove me away from my last master like a beggar, fit only to hang. Work then! be peaceable! so that one may say to you, not, What are you doing? but, What have you done? Once in the street, I said to myself, 'Happily I have my money left.' I went to the attorney; he had cleared

out-my money was gone--I was without a you. I had not enough to pay my week's rent. You ought to have seen my rage! Thereupon Big Cripple pretended to arrive from Longjumeau; he profited by my anger. I did not know on what peg to hang myself. I saw there was no means to be honest; that, once a robber, one was in for it for life! the Cripple kept so close at my heels."

"Let Frank scold no more," said the Cripple, "he took his part boldly; he entered into the put-up thing; it promised great things. Unfortunately, the moment we opened our mouths to swallow the morsel--nabbed by the police! What would you, it is a misfortune. The trade would be too fine without this."

"I don't care. If that confounded lawyer had not robbed me, I should not be here," said Frank, with rage.

"The Skeleton is here!" said Cardillac, pointing out the provost, who had just appeared at the door, to his companion.

"Cadet, advance at the call!" said Skeleton to the Cripple.

"Here!" he answered, advancing into the hall, accompanied by Frank, whom he took by the arm. During the conversation of Cripple, Frank and Cardillac, Barbillon had gone, by orders of the provost, to recruit twelve or fifteen prisoners, picked men. These, not to excite the suspicions of the keeper, had gone separately to the hall. The other prisoners remained in the yard; some of them, following the instructions of Barbillon, spoke in a loud, quarrelsome tone, to attract the notice of the keeper, and thus call his attention away from the hall, where were soon assembled Barbillon, Nicholas, Frank, Cardillac, Big Cripple, the Skeleton, and some fifteen other prisoners, all waiting with impatient curiosity until the provost should take the chair. Barbillon, charged as spy to announce the approach of the superintendent, placed himself near the door. The Skeleton, taking his pipe from his mouth, said to the Big Cripple:

"Do you know a young man named Germain, with blue eyes, brown hair, and the air of a swell cove?"

"Germain here!" cried Cripple, whose features expressed at once surprise, hatred, anger.

"You do know him, then?"

"Don't I know him? My friend, I denounce him, he is a betrayer! he must be rolled up!"

"Yes, yes!" said the prisoners together.

"Is it very sure that he has denounced?" asked Frank. "Suppose you should be mistaken, and injure a man who does not deserve it?"

This observation displeased the Skeleton, who leaned toward the Cripple, and whispered:

"Who is this?"

"A man with whom I have worked."

"Are you sure of him?"

"Yes; only he is not made of gall--but treacle!"

"Enough; I'll keep my eye upon him."

"Let us hear how Germain is a spy," said a prisoner.

"Explain yourself, Cripple," resumed the Skeleton, who watched Frank closely.

"Here you are," said the Cripple. "A Nantes man, named Velu, an old convict, brought up this young fellow, whose parents are unknown. When he was old enough, he placed him in a banking-house at Nantes, intending to make use of him for an affair he had in view. He had two strings to his bow--a forgery, and robbery of the banker's strong box! perhaps a hundred thousand francs to gain by the two. All is ready; Velu counted on the young man as on himself; this blackguard slept in the room where the strong box was kept; Velu told him his plan; Germain neither said yes nor no, but told his master all about it, and left the same evening for Paris."

The prisoners uttered violent threats and murmurs of indignation.

"If he is a betrayer, we must settle him."

"If any one wishes it, I'll pick a quarrel, and I'll brain him."

"We must write on his face an order for the hospital."

"Silence in the gang!" cried Skeleton, in an imperious tone. "Continue!" he said to the Cripple; and he recommenced smoking.

"Believing that Germain had said yes, counting on his aid, Velu and two of his mates attempted the affair the same night; the banker was on his guard, one of Velu's pals was nabbed in climbing in at a window, and he himself had the luck to escape. He arrived in Paris, furious at having been betrayed by Germain, and foiled in a tip-top job. One fine day he met the nice young man; it was broad day; he did not dare to touch him; but he followed him, he saw where he lived, and one night me, Velu, and little Ledru pounced upon Germain. Unfortunately he escaped us; he left his nest in the Rue du Temple, and since that time we have not been able to find him; but if he is here, I demand----"

"You have nothing to demand," said the Skeleton, with authority. The Cripple was silent. "I take your bargain; or make over to me the skin of Germain, I'll take it off. I am not called Skeleton for nothing. I am dead in advance; my grave is already dug at Clamart; I risk nothing in working for the leary coves: the spies devour us more than the police; they place the turncoats of La Force at La Roquette, and those of La Roquette at the Conciergerie, where they think themselves safe. Stop a bit, when each prison shall have killed its pet, no matter where he has denounced, that will take away the appetite from the others. I set the example--they will follow."

All the prisoners, admiring the resolution announced, crowded around him. Barbillon himself, instead of remaining at the door, joined the group, and did not perceive that a new prisoner had entered the hall. This newcomer, clothed in a gray blouse, and wearing a cap of blue cotton embroidered with red wool, pulled well over his eyes, started on hearing the name of Germain; then he went in among the Skeleton's admirers and loudly approved

both with voice and gesture the determination of the provost.

"Isn't Bones a mad-cap?" said one.

"What a learned man!"

"The devil himself could not scare him."

"There's a man!"

"If all the family had his cheek, it would be they who would judge and guillotine the honest fools."

"That would be just: every one in his turn."

"Yes; but they won't agree upon that subject."

"All the same; he renders a famous service to the family by killing them; betrayers will denounce no more."

"That is certain."

"And since Skeleton is so sure of being cut down, it costs him nothing to kill beggars."

"I think it cruel to kill this young man!" said Frank.

"What: what!" cried Skeleton, in an angry tone; "one has no right to pay off a traitor?"

"Yes, true, he is a traitor; so much the worse for him," said Frank, after a moment's reflection.

These last words, and the assurances of Cripple, calmed the suspicions which Frank for a moment had raised among the prisoners. Skeleton alone remained doubtful.

"What shall we do with the keeper?"

"Tell us, Doomed-to-Death," said Nicholas, laughing.

"Well! some will engage his attention on one side."

"No: we will hold him by force."

"Yes."

"No."

"Silence in the gang!" cried Skeleton. The most profound quiet ensued.

"Listen to me well," resumed the provost, in a hoarse voice, "there are no means to do the job while the keeper is in the ward, or the court. I have no knife; there will be some stifled cries--the sneak will struggle."

"Then what is to be done?"

"This is my plan: Pique-Vinaigre has promised to relate to us to-day, after dinner, his story of Gringalet and Cut-in-half. It rains, we will all

retire here, and the beggar will come and take his seat in the corner, in his usual place. We will give some sous to Pique-Vinaigre to make him commence his story. It will be the dinner hour. The keeper, seeing us quietly occupied in listening to the nonsense, will have no suspicions; he will go and take a pull at the canteen. As soon as he has left the court, we have a quarter of an hour to ourselves--the turncoat will be done up before the warder returns. I take it upon myself. I have done the trick for stouter fellows than he. I wish no help."

"A moment," said Cardillac; "the bailiff always comes lounging here at dinner-time. If he should enter the hall to listen to Pique-Vinaigre, and should see us fixing Germain, he is likely to sing out for help; he is not fly; look out."

"That is true," said the Skeleton.

"A bailiff here!" cried Frank, the victim of Boulard, with astonishment. "And what is his name?"

"Boulard," said Cardillac.

"It is my man," cried Frank, doubling his fists; "it is he who stole my savings."

"The bailiff?" asked the provost.

"Yes; seven hundred and twenty francs which he collected for me."

"You know him? he has seen you?" asked the Skeleton.

"I should think I had seen him, to my sorrow. But for him I should not be here."

These regrets sounded badly in the ears of Skeleton; he fixed his squinting eyes on Frank, who answered some questions of his comrades; then leaning over toward Cripple, whispered in a low tone, "Here is a kid who is capable of informing the keepers of our plant."

"No: I answer for him: he will denounce no one, but he is still a little timid about crime, and he might be capable of defending Germain. Better get him out of the way."

"Enough," said Skeleton, and he said in a loud tone, "I say, Frank, won't you have a settlement with this rascally bailiff?"

"Let me alone; let him come, his account is made out."

"He is coming, get ready."

"I am all ready; he will bear my mark."

"That will make a scuffle; they will send the bailiff to his ell, and Frank to the dungeon," whispered Skeleton to the Cripple, "we shall get rid of both."

"What a head! Is he not a trump?" said the robber, with admiration; then he resumed aloud, "Shall Pique-Vinaigre be informed that by the assistance of his story we mean to stuff the keeper and finish the traitor?"

"No; Pique-Vinaigre has too much milk in his composition, and is too great a coward; if he knew it he would not tell his story; the blow struck, he will bear his part." The dinner-bell rang.

"To your grub, mates!" said Skeleton; "Pique-Vinaigre and Germain are going to enter the court. Attention, friends! you call me Doomed-to-Death! all right, the denouncer is in the same boat!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE PATTERER.

The new prisoner of whom we have spoken, who wore a blue cotton cap and gray blouse, had attentively listened to, and energetically approved, the plot which threatened the life of Germain. This man, of athletic form, left the sitting-room with the other prisoners, without having been remarked, and soon mingled with the different groups that pressed into the court around the persons who distributed the beef, which they brought in brass kettles, and the bread in huge baskets. Each prisoner received a piece of boiled beef, which had served to make the soup for the morning meal, with half a loaf of bread, superior in quality to that given to soldiers. The prisoners who had money could buy wine at the canteen, and go there to drink. Those who, like Nicholas, had received victuals from out of doors, got up a feast to which they invited the other prisoners. The guests of the widow's son were Barbillon, Skeleton, and, upon the latter's recommendation, Pique-Vinaigre, in order to get him in a good humor for telling stories. The ham, hard eggs, cheese, and white bread, due to the forced liberality of Micou the receiver, were spread out on one of the benches, and Skeleton prepared to do honor to this repast, without feeling any inquietude concerning the murder he was about to commit.

"Go and see if Pique-Vinaigre is never coming. While I am waiting to choke Germain, I choke with hunger and thirst; do not forget to say to the Big Cripple that Frank must pull the bailiff's hair, so that we may be rid of them both."

"Be easy, if Frank does not pitch into the tipstaff, it will not be our fault."

And Nicholas left the sitting-room. At this moment, Boulard entered the yard smoking a cigar, his hands plunged into his long surtout of gray moleskin, his cap drawn over his ears, his face smiling and gay; he spied Nicholas, who on his side looked at Frank. The latter and the Cripple were dining, seated on one of the benches in the court; they had not perceived the bailiff, on whom their backs were turned. Faithful to the Skeleton's recommendations, Nicholas, seeing with the corner of his eye Boulard coming toward him, appeared not to remark him, and drew nearer to Frank and the Cripple.

"Good-day!" said the bailiff to Nicholas.

"Ah! good-day, master, I did not see you; you come, as usual, to take a little walk?"

"Yes, my boy, and to-day I have two reasons for doing it. I am going to tell you why; but first take these cigars. Come, now, among comrades--the devil! one must not stand on ceremony."

"Thank you, my gentleman. Why have you two reasons for walking?"

"You will understand it, my boy; I do not feel any appetite to-day. I said to myself, 'Looking at these gay boys at their dinner, and seeing them make use of their jaws, perhaps hunger will come.'"

"Not so bad. But look this way if you wish to see two babies who eat lustily," said Nicholas, leading the bailiff by degrees near the bench of Frank, whose back was turned; "just look at these two; your hunger will come as if you were eating a whole bottle of pickles."

"Oh! let us see this phenomenon!" said Boulard.

"I say, Big Cripple!" cried Nicholas.

The Big Cripple and Frank quickly turned their heads. The bailiff was stupefied, and stood with his mouth open on recognizing him whom he had swindled.

Frank, throwing his bread and meat on the bench, with one bound jumped at Boulard, whom he caught by the throat, crying:

"My money!"

"How? What? You strangle me. I--"

"My money!"

"My friend, listen to me!"

"My money! And yet is is too late, for it is your fault that I am here."

"But--I--but--"

"If I go to the hulks, mark me, it is your fault; for if I had that of which you robbed me, I should not have been under the necessity of stealing. I should have remained honest, as I wished to be. And you will be acquitted perhaps--they will do nothing to you. But I will do something to you. You shall bear my marks. Ah! you wear jewels, gold chains, and you rob. There--there--have you enough? No--here, take some more!"

"Help, help!" cried the bailiff, rolling under the feet of Frank, who struck him furiously.

The other prisoners, very indifferent to this squabble, made a ring round the combatants, or, rather, round the beating and the beaten, for Boulard, panting and much alarmed, made no resistance, but endeavored to parry, as well as he could, the blows of his adversary. Happily, the overseer ran up, on hearing the cries, and released the bailiff from his peril. Boulard arose, pale and trembling, with one of his large eyes bruised, and, without giving himself time to pick up his cap, cried, as he ran toward the wicket:

"Keeper--open for me; I do not wish to remain a moment longer--help!"

"And you, for having struck the gentleman, follow me to the governor," said

the keeper, taking Frank by the collar; "you will go to the blackhole two days for this."

"I don't care; he has got his gruel."

"Mum!" whispered the Cripple to Frank, pretending to adjust his clothes, "not a word of what they are going to do to the spy."

"Be easy; perhaps if I had been there, I should have defended him; for to kill a man for that is hard; but blab! never."

"Will you come?" said the keeper.

"There we are rid of the bailiff and Frank now; hot work for the spy!" said Nicholas.

As Frank left the court, Germain and Pique-Vinaigre entered. Germain was no longer recognizable; his physiognomy, formerly so sad and cast down, was radiant with joy; he carried his head erect, and cast around him a cheerful and assured glance; he was beloved!--the horrors of the prison disappeared from before his eyes. Pique-Yinaigre followed him with an embarrassed air; at length, after having hesitated two or three times to accost him, he made a great effort, and slightly touched the arm of Germain before he had approached the group of prisoners, who, at a distance, were examining him with sullen hatred. Their victim could not escape. In spite of himself, Germain shuddered at the touch of Pique-Vinaigre; for the face and rags of the ex-juggler did not speak much in his favor. But, recollecting the advice of Rigolette, and, besides, too happy not to be friendly, Germain stopped, and said kindly to Pique-Vinaigre,

"What do you wish?"

"To thank you."

"For what?"

"For what your pretty little visitor wishes to do for my sister."

"I do not understand you," said Germain, surprised.

"I am going to explain. Just now, in the office, I met the overseer, who was on guard in the visitors' room."

"Ah, yes; a very good man."

"Ordinarily, the jailers do not agree with that description. But Roussel is another bird; he deserves it. Just now he whispered in my ear, 'Pique-Vinaigre, my boy, do you know Germain well?' 'Yes; the butt of the yard,' I answered." Then, interrupting himself, Pique-Vinaigre said to Germain, "Pardon, excuse me, if I have called you a butt. Do not think of it; wait for the end. 'Yes, then,' I answered, 'I know Germain, the butt of the prison.' 'And yours also, perhaps, Pique-Vinaigre?' asked the keeper, in a severe tone. 'I am too cowardly and too good-natured to allow myself any kind of a butt black, white, or gray, and Germain still less than any other for he does not appear wicked, and they are unjust toward him.' 'Well, Pique-Vinaigre, you have reason to be on Germain's side, for he has been good to you.' 'To me? How so?' 'That is to say, not to you; but, saving that, you owe him great gratitude,' answered old Roussel."

"Let us see; explain yourself a little more clearly," said Germain,

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