

THE MYSTERIES OF PARIS
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BY
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CHAPTER I.

THE PRESENTATION.

A few days after the murder of Madame Séraphin, the death of the Chouette, and the arrest of the gang of desperadoes taken by surprise at Bras-Rouge's house, Rodolph paid another visit to the house in the Rue du Temple.

We have already observed that, with the view of practising artifice for artifice with Jacques Ferrand, discovering his hidden crimes, obliging him to repair them, and inflicting condign punishment should the guilty wretch, either by skill or hypocrisy, continue to evade the just punishment of the laws, Rodolph had sent to fetch from one of the prisons in Germany a young and beautiful creole, the unworthy wife of the negro David. This female, lovely in person as depraved in mind, as fascinating as dangerous, had reached Paris the preceding evening, and had received the most minute instructions from Baron de Graün.

The reader will recollect that in the last interview between Rodolph and Madame Pipelet, the latter having very cleverly managed to propose Cecily to Madame Séraphin, as a servant to the notary in place of Louise Morel, her proposition had been so well received that the femme de charge had promised to speak to Jacques Ferrand on the subject; and this she had done, in terms most flattering to Cecily, the very morning of the day on which she (Madame Séraphin) had been drowned at the Isle du Ravageur.

The motive for Rodolph's visit was, therefore, to inquire the result of Cecily's introduction. To his great astonishment, he found, on entering the lodge, that although eleven o'clock in the morning had struck by all the neighbouring dials, Pipelet had not yet risen, while Anastasie was standing beside his bed, offering him some sort of drink.

As Alfred, whose forehead and eyes were entirely concealed beneath his huge cotton nightcap, did not reply to his wife's inquiries, she concluded he slept, and therefore closed the curtains of his bed. Turning around, she perceived Rodolph, and, as usual, gave him a military salute, by lifting the back of her left hand up to her wig.

"Ah, my king of lodgers! Service to you! How are you? As for me, I'm upset—bewildered—stupefied. Pretty doings have there been in the house since you

was here. And my poor Alfred,—obliged to keep his bed ever since yesterday!"

"Why, what has happened?"

"Positively, don't you guess? Still going on in the old way with that monster of a painter, who is more bitter than ever against Alfred. He has quite muddled his brains, till I declare I don't know what to do with him."

"Cabrimon again?"

"Oh, he'll never leave off."

"He must be the very devil!"

"Really, M. Rodolph, I shall very soon think so; for he always knows the very instant I quit the house. Scarcely is my back turned, than there he is, in the twinkling of an eye, worrying and tormenting my poor old dear of a husband, who is as helpless and frightened as a baby. Only last night, when I had just stepped out as far as M. Ferrand's the notary's—Ah, there's pretty work there, too!"

"But Cecily?" said Rodolph, with some little impatience. "I called to know—"

"Hold hard, my king of lodgers! Don't be in such a hurry, or you'll put me out. And I've such a deal to tell you, I don't know when I shall have done; and if once I'm interrupted in a story, I never know when to begin again."

"There now, go on as fast as you can; I'm listening."

"Well, then, first and foremost, what do you think has happened in the house? Ah, you'll never guess, so I'll tell you. Only imagine, old Mother Burette's being taken up!"

"What, the female pawnbroker?"

"Oh, Lord, she seems to have had a curious mixture of trades: for besides being a money-lender, she was a receiver of stolen goods, a melter of gold and silver, a fortune-teller, a cheat, a dealer in second-hand clothes, and any sort of contraband articles. The worst of the story is that M. Bras-Rouge, her old sweetheart and our principal lodger, is also arrested. I tell you the house is thoroughly upset with these strange doings."

"Arrested! Bras-Rouge arrested?"

"That he was, I can promise you. Why, even his mischievous little imp of a son—the lame boy we call Tortillard—has also been locked up. They say that lots of murders have been planned and managed at his house, which was the well-known resort of a gang of ruffians; that the Chouette, one of Mother Burette's most particular friends, has been strangled; and that, if assistance had not arrived in time, Mother Mathieu, the dealer in precious stones for whom Morel worked, would also have been murdered. Come, I think there's a pretty penn'orth of news for you,—and cheap, too, at the price!"

"Bras-Rouge arrested and the Chouette dead!" murmured Rodolph to himself, in deep astonishment at the tidings. "Well, the vile old hag deserved her fate, and poor Fleur-de-Marie is at least avenged!"

"So that is the state of things here," continued Anastasie. "As for M. Cabrion and his devil's tricks, I'll tell you all about it. Oh, you never knew such a bold howdacious willin as he is! But you shall hear,—I'll go straight on with my story. But there never,—no, there never was his feller for inperence! So when Mother Burette was took up, and we heard how that M. Bras-Rouge, our principal lodger, was quodded also, I says to my old boy, 'Alfred, darling,' says I, 'you must toddle off to the landlord and let him know as M. Bras-Rouge is in the stone jug.' Well, Alfred goes; but in about two hours' time back he comes—in such a state!—such a state! White as a sheet and puffing like an ox!"

"Why, what was the matter?"

"I'm a-going to tell you. I suppose, M. Rodolph, you recollect the high wall about ten steps from here? Well, my poor, dear, darling husband was going along thinking of nothing, when, quite by chance, he just looked upon this wall. And what do you think he saw written in great staring letters with a piece of charcoal?—why, 'Pipelet and Cabrion!'—the two names joined together by a sort of true-lover's knot. (Ah, it is that true-lover's knot which sticks so tight in the gizzard of my poor old chick!) That sight rather upset him; but still he tried to act like a man and not mind it. So on he went. But hardly had he proceeded ten steps farther when, on the principal entrance to the Temple, there again were the same hateful words, 'Pipelet and Cabrion,' united as before! Still he walked on; but at every turn he saw the same detestable writing on the walls, doors, and even shutters of houses! Everywhere Pipelet and Cabrion danced before his eyes, for ever bound in the same tender tie of love or friendship! My poor dear Alfred's head began to turn around, and his eyes to grow dizzy; all sorts of horrid objects seemed to meet him and laugh him to scorn. He fancied the very people in the streets were laughing at him. So, quite confused and ashamed, he pulled his

hat over his face, and took the road towards the Boulevards, believing that the scamp Cabrion would have confined his abominations to the Rue du Temple. But no—not he! All along the Boulevards, wherever a blank spot remained or a place could be found to hold the words, had he written 'Pipelet and Cabrion!'—sometimes adding, 'till death!' At last my poor dear man arrived at the house of the landlord, but so bewildered and stupefied that, after hammering and stammering and bodgering about without being able to utter a clear sentence, the landlord, having tried for nearly half an hour to bring him sufficiently to his senses to say what had made him come to his house, got quite in a passion, and called him a stupid old fool, and told him to go home and send his wife or somebody who could speak common sense. Well, poor dear Alfred left as he was ordered, thinking, at any rate, he would return by a different road, so as to escape those dreadful words that had so overcome him going. Do you believe he could get rid of them, though? No; there they were, large as life, scrawled upon every place, and united by the lover's band as before."

"What, Pipelet and Cabrion still written along the walls?"

"Precisely so, my king of lodgers. The end of it was that my poor darling came home to me regularly brain-struck, talked in the wildest and most desperate way of leaving France, exiling himself for ever, and no one knows what. Well, I persuaded him to tell me all that had happened; then I did my best to quiet him, and persuade him not to worry himself about such a beggar as that Cabrion; and when I found he had grown a little calmer, I left him, and went to take Cecily to the notary's, before I proceeded on to the landlord to finish poor Alfred's message. Now, perhaps, you think I've done? But I haven't, though. No; I had hardly quitted the place, than that abominable Cabrion, who must have watched me out, sent a couple of impudent great creatures, who pursued Alfred with the most determined villainy. Oh, bless you, it makes my very hair stand on end when I think of it! I'll tell you all about their proceedings another time; let me first finish about the notary. Well, off I started with Cecily in a hackney-coach,—as you told me to do, you know. She was dressed in her pretty costume of a German peasant; for having only just arrived, she had not had time to procure any other, which I was to explain to M. Ferrand, and beg of him to excuse. You may believe me or not, just as you please, my king of lodgers, but though I have seen some pretty girls in my time,—myself, for instance,—yet I never saw one (not even myself) comparable to Cecily. And then she has such a way of using those wicked black eyes of hers! She throws into them a look—a look—that seems—to mean—I know not what—only they seem to pierce you through, and make you feel so strange; I never saw such eyes in my life! Why, there's my poor, dear, darling Alfred, whose virtue has never

been suspected; well, the first time that she fixed her looks on him, the dear fellow turned as red as a carrot, and nothing in the world could have induced him to gaze in her face a second time. I'm sure for more than an hour afterwards he kept fidgeting about in his chair, as though he were sitting upon nettles. He told me afterwards he could not account for it, but that somehow the look Cecily bestowed on him seemed to bring to his thoughts all the dreadful stories that shameless Bradamanti used to tell about the female savages, and which used to make my poor dear simpleton of an Alfred blush to his very fingers' ends."

"But I want to hear what passed at the notary's. Never mind Alfred's modesty just now, but tell me."

"I was just going, M. Rodolph. It was just seven o'clock in the evening when we arrived at M. Ferrand's, and I told the porter to let his master know that Madame Pipelet was there with the young woman she had spoke to Madame Séraphin about, and by whose orders she had brought her. Upon which the porter heaved a deep sigh, and asked me if I knew what had happened to Madame Séraphin? I told him, 'No; I hadn't heard of anything being the matter with her.' Ah, M. Rodolph, prepare for another strange event,—a most astounding circumstance!"

"What can it be?"

"Why, Madame Séraphin was drowned while on a party of pleasure to which she had gone with her relations."

"Drowned, and on a party of pleasure in the winter?" exclaimed Rodolph, much surprised.

"Yes, drowned, M. Rodolph. For my part I must say that I was more astonished than distressed at the news; for since that affair of poor Louise, who was taken to prison entirely through her information, I downright hated Madame Séraphin. So when I heard what had befallen her, all I did was to say to myself, 'Oh, she's drowned, is she,—drowned? Well, I don't mean to make myself ill with crying, that's very sure. I sha'n't die of grief,—that's my disposition.'"

"And M. Ferrand?"

"The porter said at first he did not think I could see his master, and begged me to wait in his lodge while he went to see. But he almost directly came back to fetch me. We crossed the courtyard, and entered an apartment on the ground floor, where a single miserable candle was twinkling its best to

light it, but without success. The notary was sitting beside the fireplace, and on the hearth a few smouldering ashes still sent out a small degree of warmth. But such a wretched hole I never saw! It was my first view of M. Ferrand. Oh, my stars, what a downright ugly fellow he is! Such a man as he might have offered to make me Queen of Arabia before I would have played Alfred false."

"And tell me, did the notary appear much struck with Cecily when she entered?"

"Why, how can any one tell what he thinks while he keeps those great green spectacles on? Besides, a godly saint such as he passes for has no business to know whether a woman is handsome or ugly. However, when we both walked into the room and stood before him, he gave quite a spring up from his seat. Most likely, he was astonished at Cecily's dress, for she looked for all the world (only a hundred thousand times better) like one of those 'buy-a-broom' girls with her short petticoats and her handsome legs set off by her blue stockings with red clocks. My conscience, what a leg she has! Such a slender ankle!—and then, oh, such a calf! With a foot as small and delicate as an opera dancer's. I can tell you that the notary seemed almost speechless with surprise, after he had looked at her through his green specs from head to toe."

"Doubtless, as you say, he was struck by the whimsicality of Cecily's costume."

"Well, maybe so; however, I felt that the critical moment had arrived, and began to feel rather queer; fortunately, just as my courage began to fail me, M. Rodolph, I recollected a maxim I learned from you, and that got me safe through my difficulty."

"What maxim do you mean,—I don't remember teaching you any?"

"Don't you know?—'It is always enough for one to wish, for the other to refuse; or, for one to desire, for the other to be unwilling.' 'So,' said I to myself, 'here goes to rid my king of lodgers of his German niece, and to burthen the hard-hearted master of poor Louise with her. Now, then, for a good piece of shamming;' and, without giving the notary breathing time, I began by saying, in a polite and insinuating tone, 'I hope, sir, you'll excuse my niece being dressed as she is, but she has only just arrived, and has brought nothing with her but the costume of her country; and I am sure it don't lay in my power to provide her with others; and, besides, it would not be worth while, since we have merely called to thank you for having allowed

Madame Séraphin to say you would see Cecily, in consequence of the favourable character I had given her. Still, sir, I don't think, after all, she would suit you."

"Capital, Madame Pipelet; go on."

"'And why so?' inquired the notary, who had established himself by the warmest corner of the fire, and seemed to be looking very attentively at us from over his green spectacles, 'why should you suppose your niece not likely to suit me?' 'Because, sir, Cecily is already quite homesick; she has only been here three days and yet she wants to go back; and so, she says, she will, too, if she is obliged to beg her way, or sing songs and sell little brooms, like the rest of her countrywomen.' 'But bless me!' answered M. Ferrand, 'do you, who are her principal relation, mean to allow of that?' 'I don't see how I am to hinder her, sir,' said I. 'Certainly, I am the nearest relation she has, for the poor thing is an orphan, as I told good Madame Séraphin; but then she is twenty years of age, and, of course, mistress of her own actions.' 'Stuff and nonsense!' interrupted he, quite impatiently; 'don't tell me about being her own mistress; at her time of life she is bound to obey her relations, and take their advice in all things.' Upon which Cecily began to cry and to creep up to me, all of a tremble, as if she was quite afraid of the notary."

"And what said Jacques Ferrand further?"

"Oh, he kept muttering in a grumbling tone, 'A young creature at that age left to her own guidance! Why, it would be the ruin of her! And, as for begging her way back to Germany—a pretty idea! And you mean to call yourself her aunt, and say that you would sanction such conduct?' 'All right,' says I to myself; 'you are falling into the trap as neat as ninepence, you miserly old hunks, and if I do not saddle you with Cecily, my name is not what it is!' 'Yes,' cried I, in a discontented voice, 'I'm her aunt, sure enough, and worse luck to me for having such an encumbrance; I have difficulty enough to earn my bread, without having a great overgrown girl like that, to take it out of my mouth; and I would much rather she went back to her own country than stop here to be a burthen to me. The deuce take people who can't manage to maintain their own children, but just send them for others to work for and keep without even so much as paying their travelling expenses!' And then, as if Cecily were up to my schemes, and desirous of playing into my hands, she burst out into such a fit of crying and sobbing as quite touched the notary, who began in a sniffling, whining tone, as though preaching a sermon, 'Let me tell you that you are accountable before Providence for the charge he has entrusted to your care

and keeping, and you are answerable for any false step this poor girl may take. Now I am willing to join you in a charitable action; and if your niece will promise me to be honest, industrious, virtuous, pious, and, above all, never upon any occasion to desire to leave the house, I will take pity on her, and receive her into my service.' 'No, no!' said Cecily, crying more violently than ever, 'I don't want to stop here with this gentleman; I wish to go back to my home; and I will, too!'"

"Ah, ah," thought Rodolph, "her dangerous falsehood has not deserted her,—the depraved creature has, evidently, fully comprehended the instructions she received from Baron de Graün." Then, speaking aloud, the prince continued, "Did Cecily's resistance appear to displease M. Jacques Ferrand?"

"Yes, M. Rodolph, it seemed to make him as savage as could be, and he muttered something between his teeth I could not make out. Then he said, abruptly, 'It is not what you would prefer, young woman, but what is most suitable and creditable that is to be considered. Providence will never forsake you, so long as you conduct yourself respectably and virtuously, and carefully attend to your religious duties. You will be here in a family as pious as it is strict in all such matters; and if your aunt has any real regard for your welfare, she will take advantage of my offer. Your wages will be trifling at first, but hereafter I may be induced to increase them should your good behaviour render you deserving of encouragement.' 'Bravo!' thinks I to myself, 'I've regularly hooked the miser, and fixed him with Cecily as right as a trivet. Why, you old curmudgeon! You old skinflint! You miserable, hard-hearted old hypocrite! You know very well that Séraphin was your slave for years, and yet you seem to have forgotten her death, and the dreadful manner of it, as much as though nothing had happened.' Then I said out loud, 'No doubt, sir, yours is a very good place, and one as many would be thankful to have, but if this girl is so homesick, what am I to do?' 'Oh, take no notice of it,' replied the notary, 'and it will soon wear away. But make up your minds,—just say one way or the other; if you decide upon your niece entering my service, bring her here to-morrow evening at the same hour you came to-night; and my porter will show her about the premises, and also explain her work to her. As for her wages, I shall begin with twenty francs a month and her food.' 'Oh, sir, I hope you will make it twenty-five francs,—twenty is really too little!' 'No, no, not at present; by and by perhaps I may, if I am satisfied. One thing, however, I must impress upon you, and that is, that your niece will never go beyond these walls, neither will she be allowed to receive any visitors.' 'Bless your heart, sir! Who could come to see her? Why, she does not know a single soul in Paris, except myself, and I am obliged to stay at home to mind my lodge. I have been terribly put about to

come out this evening, so you will see nothing of me; and as for my niece, she will be as great a stranger to me as though she was in her own country; and the best way to prevent her going out will be to make her wear the costume of her country,—she could not venture in the streets dressed in that manner.' 'You are quite right,' replied the notary; 'it is, besides, always respectable to wear the dress of our own country; your niece shall, therefore, continue to dress as she now is.' 'Come, my girl,' said I to Cecily, who, with her head hanging down, and her finger in the corner of her mouth, was keeping up a continual weeping, 'come, make up your mind. A good place with a worthy master is not to be found every day; so, if you choose to refuse it, do, but don't look to me for any further support; I'll have nothing to do with you, I can tell you!' Upon which Cecily, swelling as though her heart would burst, replied, sobbing, 'Very well, then, if aunt was so particular, she should stay, but only on condition that, if she did not find herself comfortable, she might come away at the end of a fortnight.' 'Don't be alarmed,' answered the notary, 'I shall not force you to stop against your will. I can promise you there are too many young persons would be thankful to have my situation; but I pity your position as an orphan, and, therefore, give you the preference. There, take your earnest money; and let your aunt bring you here about this time to-morrow evening.' Cecily was too busy crying to take the two francs' piece the old starvemouse offered, so I took it for her. We made our courtesies and came away."

"You have managed admirably, Madame Pipelet; and I do not forget my promise; here is what I promised you, if you managed to get this girl taken off my hands."

"Wait till to-morrow before you give it me, my king of lodgers!" cried Madame Pipelet, putting back the money Rodolph offered her; "perhaps, when I go to take Cecily this evening, M. Ferrand may have changed his mind."

"Not he, depend upon it! But where is she?"

"In the small room adjoining the apartments of the commandant; she will not stir out after the orders you gave. She seems mild and gentle as a lamb; but then, her eyes! Oh, dear! It is difficult to fancy her either one or the other, when one looks at those—Talking of the commandant, what a plotting, mysterious person he is! Would you believe it? When he came here to superintend the packing up of his furniture, he told me that if any letters came addressed to 'Madame Vincent,' they were for him, and that I was to send them to the Rue Mondine, No. 5. The idea of the pretty creature having his letters addressed as if for a female! What a conceited jackanapes he is! But the best of it was, he asked me what had become of his wood! 'Your

wood?' said I, 'why don't you ask after your forest when you are about it?' Oh, I said it so flat and plain! A mean, grasping hound, to trouble himself to ask after two pitiful loads of wood,—his wood, indeed! 'What has become of your wood?' repeated I, still working him on, till he got quite white with passion, 'why, I burnt it to keep your things from the damp, which would otherwise have made mushrooms grow upon your fine embroidered cap, and the mildew from rotting your smart, glittering robe de chambre, which you must love so dearly, because you have put it on so many times when you were fool enough to wait for those who never meant to come, but were only laughing at you,—like the lady who made believe she was going to pay you a visit, and then passed your door, though you had set it wide open to show yourself decked in all your finery. Your wood, indeed! I like that! You poor squeeze-penny of a commandant,—enough to disgust one with men altogether."

A deep, plaintive groan, something between a grunt and a sigh, from the bed on which Alfred reposed, here interrupted Madame Pipelet.

"Ah, there's the old duck beginning to stir; he will not be long before he wakes now. Will you excuse me, my king of lodgers?"

"Certainly; but I have yet some particulars to inquire of you."

"Oh, very well," answered Madame Pipelet. Then going up to her husband, she drew back the curtains, saying, "How are you by this time, my old chick? Look! there's M. Rodolph, who has heard all about this fresh villainy of Cabrion's, and is as sorry about it as can be."

"Ah, M. Rodolph," murmured Alfred, languidly turning his head towards the announced visitor, "this time the monster has struck at my heart; I shall quit this bed no more. I am now the object of all the placards of this vast city; my name is blazoned upon every wall in Paris, linked with that of a wretch unworthy of mention. Yes, m^ossieur, there you may see 'Pipelet and Cabrion,' bound together by an enormous band of union. Yes, I—I—the injured Pipelet—united in bonds of seeming amity and intimacy with that fellow Cabrion! Oh, m^ossieur, pity me! My name joined with his in the eyes of all the dwellers of this great capital,—the leading city of Europe!"

"Ah, M. Rodolph knows all about that; but he has yet to be told of your yesterday's adventures with those two singular women, or whatever they were."

"Alas, monsieur," sighed Alfred, in a mournful voice, "he reserved his master-stroke of wickedness and fiendish malice till the last. This, however, passes all bounds, and human patience can bear no more!"

"Come, my dear M. Pipelet, calm yourself, and endeavour to relate this fresh annoyance to me."

"All that he has hitherto done to vex and insult me is as nothing compared to his last malignant scheme to break my heart and ruin my peace. But now the shameless monster has gone the full extent of fiendish provocation. I know not whether I have the power of describing to you the scene of last night; when I attempt to speak, shame, confusion, and outraged modesty seem to deprive me of voice and breath."

M. Pipelet, having managed with some difficulty to raise himself in his bed, modestly buttoned his flannel waistcoat up to his throat, and began in the following terms:

"My wife had just gone out, absorbed in the bitter reflections arising from the sight of my name so disgracefully prostituted on every wall in Paris; I sought to while away my solitary hours by attending to the new soling of a boot twenty times commenced and as often abandoned,—thanks to the unceasing persecutions of my pitiless persecutor. Well, sir, I was sitting at a table with the boot on my arm, though my thoughts were far otherwise engaged, when I saw the lodge door open and a female enter. The person who had just come in was wrapped in a large hooded cloak, and, without thinking any harm, I civilly rose from my seat, and put my hand to my hat. Then I observed another female, also attired in a similar cloak, with a large hood, enter the lodge and shut the door after her. Although somewhat astonished at the familiarity of such a proceeding, and the silence maintained by both the women, I rose a second time from my chair, and a second time I lifted my hand to my hat. And then, sir,—but no, no, I can never finish the recital; my wounded modesty chokes my utterance."

"Come, come, old pet," said Madame Pipelet, encouragingly, "get on with your story; we are all men here."

"Well, then," stammered forth Alfred, his face becoming scarlet as the fullest blown peony, "then their mantles fell to the ground. And what do you think I saw? Why, a couple of sirens, or nymphs, or witches of one kind or the other, with no sort of clothing except a petticoat made of leaves, while a wreath of similar descriptions decorated their heads. And then the two

advanced towards me with outstretched arms, as though inviting me to throw myself into them."

"Oh, the impudent sluts!" exclaimed Anastasie.

"Their impure advances disgusted me," continued Alfred, animated with a chaste indignation; "and, in conformity with a habit which has ever attended the most critical moments of my life, I remained still and motionless on my chair. Then, profiting by my surprise and stupor, the two sirens came gently forward to a sort of low music, turning and twisting and extending their arms and legs in all directions. I became petrified, as though changed to stone; I waited their approach in silent agony. They came nearer and nearer, till at last they wrapped me tight in their arms."

"Did they, though?" cried Anastasie. "Oh, the hussies! I only wish I had been there with my broomstick; I'd have taught them how to come hopping and skipping, and holding out their arms for an innocent, virtuous, married man to tumble into,—I would, the bold-faced beggars!"

"Slowly Dancing and Whirling around Me"

Original Etching by Porteau

"When I felt myself in a manner half stifled between them, I gave myself up for lost. My blood retreated from my heart,—I felt as if struck with death; when one of the sirens—a great, fair girl, and the boldest of the two—leaned upon my shoulder, took off my hat, and, still slowly dancing and whirling around me, left me bald-headed and defenceless. Then the other one, accompanying the action with all sorts of attitudes and singular dances, and waving of the arms, draws out a pair of scissors she must have hid somewhere,—for I'm quite sure she had no pockets,—came close behind me, and grasping with one hand all my remaining hair, snipped it all off with one cut of her huge scissors; yes, all,—every lock,—every hair I had to cover my poor old head; dancing, and wheeling, and balancing, first on one foot, then on the other, swaying out legs and arms in all sorts of stage-struck ways; then joining voices, the pair of audacious spirits began singing, 'Tis for Cabrion,—for Cabrion; we take your locks for Cabrion,—your dear friend Cabrion!' Whilst the second voice repeated in a louder strain, 'Your head is shorn for Cabrion,—for Cabrion, your friend!'"

After a pause, interrupted by repeated sighs and groans, Alfred resumed:

"During this impudent spoliation I once ventured to raise my eyes, and then I saw flat against the windows of the lodge the detestable countenance of

Cabrion, with his large beard and pointed-crowned hat. He was laughing, too,—laughing with all his might. Oh, how I shuddered at the horrible vision! To escape from so harrowing a sight I closed my eyes. When I opened them again all had disappeared, and I found myself seated on my chair, bald-headed and completely disfigured for life. You see, monsieur, that, by dint of obstinacy, impudence, and cunning, Cabrion has at length effected his fell design. But by what fearful, what diabolical means, has he succeeded! He wishes the world to believe he is my accepted friend; began by sticking up a notice here in my immediate neighbourhood to the effect that he and I had entered into a treaty of friendship! Then, not content with so infamous an assertion, he has caused my name, in conjunction with his own, to be displayed on every wall in Paris, binding them together with an enormous band of union, so that at this moment the whole of this vast capital is impressed with the most perfect belief of my close intimacy with this scoundrel. Then he desired locks of my hair, and he has every hair off my head,—no doubt with the view, the guilty view, of exhibiting them as proofs of our sworn friendship. Thanks to the merciless exaction of his bold-faced dancing women, my last lock is stolen. So now, monsieur, you see plainly there is nothing left for me but to quit France,—my lovely and beloved France,—in whose dear bosom I had hoped to live and die!"

And with these pathetic words Alfred clasped his hands, closed his eyes, and threw himself back upon his bed.

"Oh, nonsense, you old duck!" cried Anastasie. "On the contrary, now the villain has gained his point and stolen your hair, he will let you alone for the future. He has no further cause to disturb and torment you."

"Let me alone?" exclaimed M. Pipelet, with a convulsive spring upwards. "Oh, you know him not; he is insatiable. True, he has got the hair he so much desired to obtain; but who can say what he may further require of me?"

The appearance of Rigolette at the entrance to the lodge put a stop to the lamentations of M. Pipelet.

"Stay where you are, mademoiselle!" cried he, faithful to his habitual chaste delicacy. "Pray don't think of coming in, for I am undressed and in bed!" So saying, he covered himself up almost to his eyes, while Rigolette, surprised and bewildered, remained at the threshold of the door.

"Oh, my pretty neighbour," said Rodolph, pitying her confusion, "I was just coming up to speak with you. Can you wait for me one minute?" Then

addressing Anastasie, he said, "Pray let nothing prevent your taking Cecily to Jacques Ferrand's this evening."

"Make yourself perfectly easy, my king of lodgers; at seven o'clock precisely she shall be duly placed there. Now that Morel's wife is able to get about, I will ask her to mind the lodge for me while I am away; for, bless you, Alfred would not stay by himself,—not for a 'varsal crown!"

The bright freshness of Rigolette's complexion was daily fading away, while her once round, dimpled cheek had sunk and given place to a pale, careworn countenance, the usually gay, mirthful expression of which had changed into a grave, thoughtful cast, more serious and mournful still since her meeting with Fleur-de-Marie at the gate of St. Lazare.

"I am so glad to see you," said Rigolette to Rodolph, when they were at a convenient distance from the lodge of Madame Pipelet. "I have so much to say to you; I have, indeed."

"Well, then, first of all, tell me of yourself and your health. Let me look at this pretty face, and see whether it is as gay and blooming as usual. No, indeed. I declare you have grown quite pale and thin; I am sure you work too hard."

"Oh, no, indeed, M. Rodolph, it is not that. On the contrary, my work does me good; it hinders me from thinking too much, for I am obliged to attend to what I am about. But it is grief, M. Rodolph, and nothing else, that has altered me so much. And how can I help it? Every time I see that poor Germain, I grieve more and more."

"He is still as desponding as ever, then?"

"Oh, worse than ever, M. Rodolph. And what is the most distressing is, that, whatever I try to do to cheer him up, takes quite the contrary effect; it seems as though a spell hung over me!" And here the large, dark eyes of Rigolette were filled with tears.

"How do you know, my dear neighbour?"

"Why, only yesterday I went to see him, and to take him a book he was desirous of having; it was a romance we read together when we lived happily as near neighbours and dear friends. Well, directly he saw the book, he burst into tears; but that did not astonish me,—it seemed natural enough. Poor fellow! I dare say it brought back to his recollection those happy evenings when he used to sit beside the fire in my nice, pretty little room;

while now he was in a horrid prison, the companion of vile and wicked men, who only jeered at his melancholy. Poor, dear Germain! It is very, very hard!"

"Take courage, my dear friend," said Rodolph. "When Germain quits his prison, and his innocence is proved, he will find his mother and many dear friends, in whose society, as well as in yours, he will soon forget his present sufferings, as well as the hard trials he has undergone."

"That's all very pleasant when it arrives, but that won't stop his tormenting himself till it does. But that is not all, neither."

"What other uneasiness has he?"

"Why, he being the only innocent man among all the bad people there, they are always annoying and behaving ill to him, because he will not join in their idle and vicious amusements. The head turnkey, who is a very good sort of man, advised me to recommend Germain, for his own sake, not to keep himself at quite such a distance from his companions, but to try and familiarise himself with these bad men. However, it is no use trying; he cannot bring himself to endure their company or conversation. And I am constantly tormented with the dread that some of these days they will do him some harm out of spite."

Then all at once interrupting herself, and drying her tears, Rigolette resumed:

"But, dear me, how selfish I am! I keep talking of my own concerns without ever recollecting to speak to you about the Goualeuse."

"The Goualeuse!" exclaimed Rodolph, with surprise.

"I met her the day before yesterday, when I went to see Louise at St. Lazare."

"The Goualeuse?"

"Yes, indeed, M. Rodolph."

"At St. Lazare?"

"She was leaving the prison in company with an elderly female."

"It cannot be," exclaimed Rodolph, in extreme astonishment; "you must be mistaken."

"I assure you it was herself, M. Rodolph."

"You really must be in error."

"Oh, no, I was not mistaken; although she was dressed as a country girl I recollected her again directly. She looked beautiful as ever, though pale; and she had just the same melancholy look she used to have."

"How very strange that she should be in Paris without my having heard of it! I can scarcely credit it. And what had she been doing at St. Lazare?"

"I suppose, like myself, she had been to see some one confined there; but I had not time to ask her many questions, for the person who was with her seemed so very cross, and to be in such a hurry! Then it seems you know the Goualeuse as well as myself, M. Rodolph?"

"I do, certainly."

"Oh, then, that settles the matter! And it must have been of you she spoke."

"Of me?"

"Yes, indeed, M. Rodolph. For, you see, I was just mentioning to her what had happened to poor Louise and Germain,—both so good, yet so persecuted by that wicked Jacques Ferrand,—taking care to do as you bid me, and not say a word of your being interested in their welfare so then the Goualeuse told me if a generous person she knew were once acquainted with their hard fate, and how little they deserved it, he would be sure to assist them. And then I asked her the name of the person she alluded to, and she named you, M. Rodolph."

"Oh, then, it was her, sure enough."

"You can't imagine how much surprised we both were at this discovery, either of resemblance or name; and before we parted we agreed to let each other know whether our M. Rodolph was one and the same. And it seems you are the very identical Rodolph both of La Goualeuse and myself. Are you not, neighbour?"

"I believe so; and I can, at least, assure you I take the greatest possible interest in the fate of this poor girl,—still I am much surprised to find, by what you say, that she is in Paris. And so great is my astonishment that, had you not so faithfully related your interview, I should have persisted in believing you were mistaken. But I must say good-bye for the present,—what

you tell me respecting La Goualeuse obliges me to quit you. Be as careful as ever in not mentioning to any one that there are certain unknown friends watching over the welfare both of Louise and Germain, who will come forward at a right moment and see them safe through their troubles; it is more essential than ever that strict secrecy should be kept on this point. By the way, how are the Morel family getting on?"

"Oh, extremely well, M. Rodolph. The mother has quite got about again, and the children are daily improving. Ah, the whole family owe their life and happiness to you! You are so good and so generous to them."

"And how is poor Morel himself? Does he get any better?"

"Oh, dear, yes; I heard of him yesterday, he seems from time to time to have some lucid moments, and hopes are entertained of his madness being curable. So be of good heart, neighbour, take care of yourself, and good-bye for the present."

"But first tell me truly, are you quite sure you want for nothing? Are you still able to maintain yourself with the profits of your needle?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, M. Rodolph. I work rather later at night to make up for my lost time during the day. But it does not matter much, for if I go to bed I don't sleep."

"Poor, dear neighbour! Why, you have grown sadly out of spirits. I am afraid that Papa Crétu and Ramonette don't sing much, if they wait for you to set them the example."

"You are right enough, M. Rodolph, my birds have quite left off singing, as well as myself. Now I know you will laugh at me, but I'll tell you what I firmly think and believe,—the poor little creatures are aware that I am dull and out of spirits, and instead of singing and warbling as if their little throats would burst for joy when they see me, they just give a little gentle twitter, as though they would not disturb me for the world, but would be so glad to console me if they had the power. It is very stupid of me to fancy such things, is it not, M. Rodolph?"

"Not at all! And I am quite sure that your affectionate friends the birds have observed your being less happy than usual."

"Well, I'm sure I shouldn't wonder! The poor, dear things are so very clever," said Rigolette, innocently, delighted to find her own opinion as to the sagacity of her companions in solitude thus powerfully confirmed.

"Oh, I am quite sure about it, nothing is more intelligent than gratitude. But once more, good-bye,—I shall see you again soon, I hope, and by that time, I trust your pretty eyes will have grown brighter, your cheeks regained their usual roses, and your merry voice have recovered all its gaiety, till Papa Crétu and Ramonette will scarcely be able to keep up with you."

"Heaven grant you may prove a true prophet, M. Rodolph!" said Rigolette, heaving a deep sigh. "But, good-bye, neighbour, don't let me keep you."

"Fare you well, for the present!"

Rodolph, wholly at a loss to understand why Madame Georges should have brought or sent Fleur-de-Marie to Paris without giving him the least intimation of her intention, hastened home for the purpose of despatching a special messenger to the farm at Bouqueval.

Just as he entered the Rue Plumet he observed a travelling carriage drawn up before the entrance of his hotel. The vehicle contained Murphy, who had that instant returned from Normandy, whither he had gone, as the reader is already aware, to counteract the base schemes of the stepmother of Madame d'Harville and her infamous confederate, Bradamanti.

CHAPTER II.

MURPHY AND POLIDORI.

Sir Walter Murphy's features were beaming with satisfaction. When he alighted from the carriage he gave a brace of pistols to one of the prince's servants, took off his long travelling coat, and, without giving himself time to change his clothes, followed Rodolph, who impatiently had preceded him to his apartment.

"Good news, monseigneur! Good news!" exclaimed the squire, when he was alone with Rodolph; "the wretches are unmasked, M. d'Orbigny is saved. You despatched me just in time; one hour later and another crime would have been committed."

"And Madame d'Harville?"

"Is overjoyed at having again acquired her father's affection; and full of happiness at having arrived, thanks to your advice, in time to snatch him from certain death."

"So, then, Polidori—"

"Was, in this instance, the worthy accomplice of Madame d'Harville's stepmother. But what a wretch is this stepmother! What sang-froid! What audacity! And this Polidori! Ah, monseigneur, you have frequently desired to thank me for what you call my proofs of devotion."

"I have always said proofs of friendship, my dear Murphy."

"Well, monseigneur, never—no, never—has this friendship been exposed to a severer trial than in this present case!" said the squire, with an air half serious, half pleasant.

"What mean you?"

"The disguises of the coalman, the peregrinations in the Cité, and all that sort of thing, they have been as nothing, actually nothing, when compared with the journey I have just made with that infernal Polidori."

"What do you mean? Polidori?"

"I have brought him back with me."

"With you?"

"With me: judge what company! During twelve hours side by side with the man I most despise and hate in the world,—I'd as soon travel with a serpent—any beast of antipathy!"

"And where is Polidori now?"

"In the house in the Allée des Veuves, under good and safe guard."

"Then he made no resistance to following you?"

"None. I offered him the choice between being apprehended at once by the French authorities, or being my prisoner in the Allée des Veuves,—he didn't hesitate for an instant."

"You are right; it is best to have him thus in our grasp. You are worth your weight in gold, my dear old Murphy. But tell me all about your journey; I am impatient to know how this shameless woman, and her equally shameless accomplice, were at last unmasked."

"Nothing could be more simple. I had only to follow the letter of your instructions in order to terrify and crush these wretches. Under these circumstances, monseigneur, you have served, as you always do, persons of worth, and punished the wicked, noble preserver that you are!"

"Sir Walter! Sir Walter! Do you recollect the flatteries of the Baron de Graün?" said Rodolph, smiling.

"Well, then, monseigneur, I will begin,—or, perhaps, you would prefer first reading this letter of the Marquise d'Harville's, which will inform you on every point that occurred previous to my arrival, which so completely confounded Polidori."

"A letter! Pray let me have it immediately."

Murphy gave the letter of the marquise to Rodolph, adding:

"As we had agreed, instead of accompanying Madame d'Harville to her father's, I alighted at a small inn quite close to the château, where I was to wait until the marquise sent for me."

Rodolph read what follows with tender and impatient solicitude:

"MONSEIGNEUR:—After all I owe you already, I now owe to you my father's life. I will allow facts to speak for themselves; they will say better than I can what fresh accumulations of gratitude to you I have added to those already amassed in my heart. Understanding all the importance of the advice you sent to me by Sir Walter Murphy, who overtook me on my way to Normandy a short distance from Paris, I travelled as speedily as possible to the Château des Aubiers. I know not why, but the countenances of the persons who received me appeared to me sinister. I did not see amongst them any one of the old servitors of our house; no one knew me. I was obliged to tell them my name.

"I learned that for several days my father had been suffering greatly, and that my stepmother had just brought a physician from Paris. I had no doubt but this was Doctor Polidori. Desirous of being immediately conducted to my father, I inquired for an oldvalet de chambre to whom he was much attached; he had quitted the château some time previously. This I learned from a house-steward who had shown me to my apartment, saying that he would inform my stepmother of my arrival. Was it illusion or suspicion? It seemed to me that my coming annoyed the people at the château where all was gloomy and sinister. In the bent of mind in which I was we seek to draw inferences from the slightest circumstances. I remarked in every part traces of disorder and neglect, as if it had been too much trouble to take care of a house which was so soon to be abandoned. My uneasiness—my anxiety increased at every moment.

"After having established my daughter and her governess in an apartment, I was about to proceed to my father, when my stepmother entered the apartment. In spite of her artfulness, in spite of the control which she ordinarily exercised over herself, she appeared alarmed at my sudden arrival. 'M. d'Orbigny does not expect your visit, madame,' she said to me, 'and he is suffering so much that a surprise may be fatal. I think it, therefore, best that he should not be told of your arrival, for he would be unable to account for it, and—'

"I did not allow her to finish. 'A terrible event has occurred, madame,' I said, 'M. d'Harville is dead, in consequence of a fatal imprudence. After so deplorable a result, I could no longer remain in Paris in my own house, and I have, therefore, come to my father's, in order to pass the first days of my mourning.'

"'A widow! Ah, that, indeed, is unexpected happiness!' exclaimed my stepmother, in a rage. From what you know, monseigneur, of the unhappy

marriage which this woman had planned in order to avenge herself on me, you will comprehend the brutality of her remark.

"It is because I fear you might be as unexpectedly happy as myself, madame, that I came here,' was my (perhaps imprudent) reply. 'I wish to see my father.'

"That's impossible, at this moment!' she replied, turning very pale; 'the sight of you would cause a dangerous degree of excitement.'

"If my father is so seriously ill,' I observed, 'why was I not informed of it?'

"Such was M. d'Orbigny's will,' replied my stepmother.

"I do not believe you, madame! and I shall go and assure myself of the truth,' I said, and turned towards the door of my chamber.

"I tell you again that the unexpected sight of you may have a most prejudicial effect on your father!' she cried, coming before me so as to hinder my further progress; 'I will not allow you to go into his room, until I have informed him of your arrival with all the care and precaution which his situation requires.'

"I was in a cruel perplexity, monseigneur. A sudden surprise might really be dangerous to my father, but this woman,—usually so calm, so self-possessed—seemed to me so overcome by my presence, I had so many reasons to doubt the sincerity of her solicitude for the health of him whom she had married from cupidity; and then, too, the presence of Doctor Polidori, the murderer of my mother, caused me altogether such extreme alarm that, believing my father's life menaced, I did not hesitate between the hope of saving him and the fear of causing him severe emotion. 'I will see my father, and that instantly!' I said to my stepmother. And although she tried to retain me by the arm, I went out of the room. Completely losing her presence of mind, this woman tried a second time, and almost by force, to prevent me from quitting the chamber. This incredible resistance increased my alarm, I disengaged myself from her grasp, and, knowing my father's apartment, I ran thither with all speed, and entered the room.

"Oh, monseigneur, during my life I never can forget that scene, and the picture presented to my eyes. My father, scarcely to be recognised, pale and meagre, with suffering depicted in every feature, his head reclining on a pillow, was lying extended on a large armchair. At the corner of the fireplace, standing close to him, was Doctor Polidori, just about to pour into a cup, which a nurse presented to him, some drops of a liquor contained in a small

glass bottle which he held in his hand. His long red beard gave even a more than usually sinister appearance to his physiognomy. I entered so hastily that he gave a look of surprise at my stepmother, who followed me with hasty steps; and instead of handing to my father the draught he had prepared for him, he suddenly placed the phial on the mantelpiece. Guided by an instinct for which I am unable to account, my first movement was to seize the phial. Remarking instantly the surprise and alarm of my stepmother and Polidori, I congratulated myself on my promptitude. My father, amazed, seemed irritated at the sight of me. I expected this. Polidori darted at me a ferocious scowl, and, in spite of the presence of my father and the nurse, I feared the wretch, seeing his crime so nearly disclosed, would have recourse to violence with me. I felt the necessity of support at a moment so decisive; and ringing the bell, one of my father's servants came in, whom I requested to tell my valet de chambre (who had already been informed) to go and seek some things I had left at the little inn. Sir Walter Murphy was aware that, in order not to arouse my stepmother's suspicions, in case it should be necessary to give my orders in her presence, I should employ this means of requesting him to come to me. Such was the surprise of my father and stepmother, that the servant quitted the room before they could utter a word. I felt my courage then rise, for, in a few minutes, Sir Walter Murphy would be at my side.

"What does all this mean?" said my father to me, in a voice feeble, but still angry and imperious. 'You here, Clémence without my sending for you? Then, scarcely arrived, you seize the phial containing the draught the doctor was about to give me. Will you explain this madness?'

"Leave the room," said my stepmother to the nurse. The woman obeyed. 'Compose yourself, my dear!' said my stepmother, addressing my father; 'you know how injurious the slightest emotion is to you. Since your daughter will come here in spite of you, and her presence is so disagreeable to you, give me your arm. I will lead you into the small salon, and then our good doctor will make Madame d'Harville comprehend how imprudent her conduct has been, to say the least of it.' And she gave her accomplice a meaning look. I at once saw through my stepmother's design. She was desirous of leading my father away, and leaving me alone with Polidori, who, in this extreme case, no doubt, would have used force to obtain from me the phial which might supply so evident a proof of his criminal designs.

"You are right," said my father to my stepmother. 'Since I am thus pursued, even in my private apartments, without respect for my wishes, I will leave the place free to intruders.' And rising with difficulty, he took the arm that was offered to him by my stepmother, and went towards the salon.

"At this moment Polidori advanced towards me; but I went close up to my father and said to him, 'I will explain to you why I have arrived so suddenly, and what may appear strange in my conduct. I became yesterday a widow; and it was yesterday, father, that I learned your life was threatened.' He was walking very much bent, but at these words he stopped, threw himself erect, and looking at me with intense surprise, said:

"'You are a widow? My life is threatened? What does all this mean?'

"'And who dares threaten the life of M. d'Orbigny, madame?' asked my stepmother, most audaciously.

"'Yes, who threatens it?' added Polidori.

"'You, sir!—you, madame!' I replied.

"'What horror!' exclaimed my stepmother, advancing a step towards me.

"'What I assert I will prove, madame!' I replied.

"'Such an accusation is most frightful!' cried my father.

"'I will leave the house this very moment, since I am exposed to such shameful calumnies,' said Doctor Polidori, with the apparent indignation of a man whose honour has been outraged. Beginning to feel the danger of his position, no doubt, he was desirous of effecting his escape. At the moment when he was trying to open the door, it opened, and he found himself face to face with Sir Walter Murphy."

Rodolph ceased reading, held out his hand to the squire, and said:

"Well done, my good old friend; your presence must have crushed the scoundrel!"

"That's precisely the word, monseigneur. He turned livid, receded a couple of paces, looking at me aghast; he seemed thunderstruck. To find me at the further extremity of Normandy, in such a moment, he must have thought he had a terrible dream. But go on, monseigneur; you will see that this infernal Comtesse d'Orbigny had her share of the overwhelming shame, thanks to what you told me as to her visit to the charlatan Bradamanti—Polidori—in the house in the Rue du Temple; for, after all, it was you who acted in this, I assure you, and you came in most happily and opportunely to the rescue on this occasion."

Rodolph smiled, and continued reading Madame d'Harville's letter:

"At the sight of Sir Walter Murphy, Polidori was panic-struck; my stepmother went on from one surprise to another; my father, agitated at this scene, weakened by his malady, was compelled to sit down in an armchair. Sir Walter double-locked the door by which he had entered; and placing himself before that which led to the next apartment, that Doctor Polidori might not escape, he said to my poor father, with a tone of the utmost respect, 'A thousand pardons, Monsieur le Comte, for the liberty I take, but an imperious necessity, dictated by your interest alone (and which you will speedily recognise), compels me to act thus. My name is Sir Walter Murphy, as this wretch can testify, who at the sight of me trembles in every limb. I am the private adviser of his royal highness Monseigneur the Grand Duke Regnant of Gerolstein.'

"'Quite true!' stammered forth Doctor Polidori, overcome with fright. 'But then, sir, what have you come here for? What seek you?'

"'Sir Walter Murphy,' I observed, addressing my father, 'is here with me to unmask the wretches whose victim you have so nearly been.' Then handing the phial to Sir Walter, I added, 'I was suddenly tempted to seize on this phial at the moment when Doctor Polidori was about to pour some drops of the liquor it contains into a draught he was about to offer to my father.'

"'A practitioner in the neighbouring village shall analyse before you the contents of this bottle, which I will deposit in your hands, M. le Comte; and if it is proved to contain a slow and sure poison,' said Sir Walter Murphy to my father, 'you cannot have any further doubt as to the dangers you have run, and which the tender care of your daughter will most happily have averted.'

"My poor father looked by turns at his wife, Doctor Polidori, and Sir Walter, with an air of doubt and anxiety; his features betrayed indescribable anguish. No doubt but he resisted with all his might increasing and terrible suspicions, fearing to be obliged to confess the infamy of my stepmother. At length, concealing his head in his hands, he exclaimed, 'Oh, this is, indeed, horrible!—impossible! Am I in a dream?'

"'No, it is no dream!' cried my stepmother, audaciously; 'nothing can be more real than this atrocious calumny, concerted beforehand to destroy an unhappy woman, whose only crime is that of consecrating her whole existence to you. Come, come, my dear, do not remain a moment longer

here!' she continued, addressing my father; 'I do not suppose that your daughter will have the insolence to retain you here against your will.'

"Yes, yes, let me go!" said my father, highly excited; 'all this is not true—cannot be true! I will not hear any more, my brain cannot endure it. Fearful misgivings would arise in my mind, which would embitter the few days I have still to live, and nothing could console me for so horrible a discovery.'

"My father seemed to suffer so much, to be so despairing that, at all hazards, I resolved on putting an end to this scene, which was so acutely trying for him. Sir Walter guessed my desire, but desirous of full and entire justice, he replied to my father, 'But a few words more, M. le Comte. You will, no doubt, suffer chagrin of a most painful kind, when you detect in the woman's conduct, whom you believe attached to you by gratitude, a system of most atrocious ingratitude,—in herself a hypocritical monster. But you will find your consolation in the affections of your daughter, who has never failed you.'

"This passes all bounds!" cried my stepmother, with rage. 'And by what right, sir, and on what proofs, dare you to base such infamous calumnies? You say the phial contains poison? I deny it, and will deny it until you prove the contrary. And even supposing Doctor Polidori has by mistake confounded one medicine with another, is that a reason why you should dare to accuse me of having sought—desired to be his accomplice? Oh, no, no! I cannot go on! An idea so horrible is already a crime! Once again, sir, I defy you to say upon what proofs you and madame here dare rely to support this shameful calumny!' said my stepmother, with incredible audacity.

"Yes, on what proofs?" exclaimed my poor father; 'the torture I undergo must have an end.'

"I am not here, sir, without proofs, M. le Comte," replied Sir Walter; 'and these proofs, the answer of this wretch shall supply to you instantly.' Then Sir Walter spoke in German to Doctor Polidori, who seemed to have suddenly assumed a little assurance, but lost it as soon."

"What did you say to him?" inquired Rodolph of the squire, pausing from his perusal of the letter.

"A few significant words, monseigneur, something like this: 'You have escaped by flight from the sentence passed upon you by law and justice in the Grand Duchy; you live in the Rue du Temple, under the false name of Bradamanti; we know the infamous calling you pursue there. You poisoned

the count's first wife. Three days since Madame d'Orbigny went to find you, in order to bring you here to poison her husband. His royal highness is in Paris, and has proofs of all I now aver. If you confess the truth in order to confound this wretched woman, you may hope, not for pardon, but for an amelioration of the punishment you deserve. You will accompany me to Paris, where I will deposit you in a safe place, until his royal highness decides on what shall be done with you. If not, one of two things: either his royal highness will demand and obtain your delivery up to him, or this very moment I will send for the nearest magistrate, this phial containing the poison shall be handed to him, you will be apprehended on the spot, and a search be made instantly at your domicile in the Rue du Temple; you know how utterly that must compromise you, and then the justice of the French courts will take its course. Choose therefore.' These disclosures, accusations, and threats, which he knew to be so well founded, succeeding each other thus rapidly, overwhelmed the scoundrel, who did not dream of my being so thoroughly informed. In the hope of diminishing his expected punishment, he did not hesitate to sacrifice his accomplice, and replied to me, 'Interrogate me, and I will disclose the whole truth as regards this woman.'

"Capital! Excellent! my dear Murphy. I expected no less of you."

"During my conversation with Polidori, the features of Madame d'Harville's stepmother became greatly agitated. Although she did not understand German, she saw, by the increasing dejection of her accomplice, by his deprecating attitude, that I controlled him. In a state of fearful anxiety, she endeavoured to catch Polidori's glance, in order to inspire him with courage, or implore his discretion, but he carefully avoided looking towards her."

"And the count?"

"His agitation was inexpressible! With his clenched hands he grasped convulsively the arms of his chair, the perspiration stood on his brow, and he scarcely breathed, whilst his burning and fixed eyes never quitted mine; his agony was equal to his wife's. The remainder of Madame d'Harville's letter will tell you the conclusion of this painful scene, monseigneur."

Rodolph continued the perusal of Madame d'Harville's letter:

"After a conversation in German, which lasted for some minutes, between Sir Walter Murphy and Polidori, Sir Walter said to the latter, 'Now reply. Was it not madame,' and he looked towards my stepmother, 'who, during the illness of the count's first wife, introduced you to him as a physician?'

"Yes, it was!" replied Polidori.

"In order that you might serve the horrid projects of madame, were you not criminal enough to render mortal, by your deadly prescriptions, the malady of the Countess d'Orbigny, which was but slight in the first instance?"

"Yes!" replied Polidori. My father heaved a painful sigh, raised both his hands to heaven, and let them fall perfectly overcome.

"Lies and infamies!" cried my stepmother; 'it is all false,—a plot got up to destroy me!'

"Silence, madame!" said Sir Walter Murphy, in an authoritative voice. Then continuing to address Polidori, 'Is it true that three days since madame was at your residence in the Rue du Temple, No. 17, where you lived under the assumed name of Bradamanti?'

"That is true.'

"Did not madame propose to you to come here to assassinate the Comte d'Orbigny, as you had assassinated his wife?"

"Alas! I cannot deny it!" said Polidori.

"At this overwhelming revelation my father rose up, then, extending his arms to me, he exclaimed, in a broken voice, 'In the name of your unfortunate mother, pardon, pardon! I made her suffer much, but I swear to you I was a stranger to the crime which led her to the tomb!' and before I could prevent it, my father fell at my knees. When Sir Walter and I raised him he had fainted. I rang for the servants. Sir Walter took Polidori by the arm and led him out of the room with him, saying to my stepmother, 'Believe me, madame, it is best for you to leave this house within an hour, otherwise I will deliver you up to justice.' The wretched woman left the room in a state of rage and affright, which you will easily conceive. When my father recovered his senses, all that had occurred seemed to him a horrid dream. I was under the sad necessity of imparting to him my first suspicions as to my mother's premature death, suspicions which your knowledge of Doctor Polidori's earlier crimes had converted into certainty. I also told him how my stepmother had persecuted me to the time of my marriage, and what had been her object in making me marry M. d'Harville. In proportion as my father had shown himself weak with respect to this woman, so was he now pitiless towards her. He was desirous of handing Madame d'Orbigny over to the tribunals. I represented to him the horrible scandal of such a process, the publicity of which must be so distressing to him; and I induced him to

allow her as much as was requisite for her to live upon. I had considerable difficulty in persuading my father to these terms, and he then wished me to dismiss her. This task was so painful that I requested Sir Walter to perform it for me, which he did."

"I consented with pleasure," interrupted Murphy.

"And what said this woman?"

"Madame d'Harville kindly solicited a pension of a hundred louis for this woman: this appeared to me not only kindness, but weakness; it was bad enough to allow her to escape from justice; and the count agreeing with me, it was arranged that we should give her in all twenty-five louis to maintain her until she should find some occupation. 'And to what occupation can I, the Countess d'Orbigny, turn?' she asked me, insolently. 'Ma foi! that is your affair,—you may do as a nurse or housekeeper; but take my advice and seek some humbler, more obscure occupation, for if you have the daring to mention your name—a name which you owe to a crime—people will be astonished to see the Countess d'Orbigny reduced to such a condition; they will then begin to make inquiries, and you may judge what will be the result, if you are so indiscreet as to say one word of the past. Hide yourself, therefore, at a distance,—try and become forgotten; become Madame Pierre or Madame Jacques, and repent if you can.' 'And do you suppose, sir,' she said, having, no doubt, resolved on a piece of stage effect, 'do you suppose that I shall not sue for the advantage which my marriage settlement awards me?' 'Why, madame, nothing can be more just; it will be dishonourable of M. d'Orbigny not to execute his promises, and forget all you have done—and particularly all you wished to do towards him. Go to law—go to law! Try for justice, and, no doubt, it will right you with your husband.' A quarter of an hour after our conversation the wretch of a woman was on the road to the neighbouring town."

"You are right, it is painful to leave such an abandoned creature unpunished, but a law proceeding is impossible."

"I easily persuaded my father to leave Aubiers the same day,"

resumed Rodolph, continuing the perusal of Madame d'Harville's letter,

"as too many painful feelings were excited by his being where he was. His weak health will be benefited by a few days' change of air and scene, as the doctor saw, whom Polidori had succeeded, and for whom I sent from the neighbouring town. My father wished him to analyse the contents of the

phial, without giving him any information as to what had passed. The doctor informed us that he must do this at home, and that in two hours we should know the result of his scrutiny; which was that several doses of this liquor, composed with devilish skill, would, within a certain time, cause death, without leaving any traces beyond those of an ordinary malady, which he mentioned. In a few hours, monseigneur, I go with my father and daughter to Fontainebleau, where we shall remain for some time; then my father wishes to return to Paris, but not to my house, for I could not reside there after the late appalling event. As I mentioned in the beginning of my letter, monseigneur, facts prove all I shall owe to your inexhaustible care and solicitude. Forewarned by you, aided by your advice, strong in the assistance of your excellent and high-couraged Sir Walter, I have been enabled to snatch my father from certain death, and am again assured of his love. Adieu, monseigneur, it is impossible for me to say more; my heart is too full, and I explain but faintly all I feel."

"D'ORBIGNY D'HARVILLE."

"I open my letter to repair something I had, I regret to say, forgotten. According to your noble suggestion, I went to the prison of St. Lazare, to visit the poor women prisoners, and I found there an unhappy girl in whom you are interested. Her angelic mildness, her pious resignation, were the admiration of the respectable women who superintend the prisoners. To say that she is called La Goualeuse is to urge you to obtain her liberty instantly. The poor girl will tell you under what circumstances she was carried off from the asylum in which you had placed her, and was put in prison, where, at least, the candour and sweetness of her disposition have been appreciated. Permit me, also, to recall to you my two future protégées, the unhappy mother and daughter despoiled by the notary Ferrand,—where are they? I pray of you to try and discover them, so that, on my return to Paris, I may pay the debt I have contracted towards all unfortunate beings."

"What! Has La Goualeuse, then, left the Bouqueval farm?" inquired Murphy, as much astonished as Rodolph at this fresh discovery.

"Just now I was informed that she had been seen quitting St. Lazare," replied Rodolph. "I am quite bewildered on the subject; Madame Georges's silence surprises and disturbs me. Poor little Fleur-de-Marie, what fresh disasters can have befallen her? Send a man on horseback directly to the farm, and write to Madame Georges that I beg of her to come to Paris instantly. Request M. de Graün to procure for me a permission to visit St. Lazare. By what Madame d'Harville says to me, Fleur-de-Marie must be confined there. Yet, no," he added, "she cannot be there, for Rigolette saw

her leave the prison with an aged woman. Could it be Madame Georges? If not, who could be the woman that accompanied La Goualeuse?"

"Patience, monseigneur; before the evening you will know all about it. Then to-morrow you can interrogate that vagabond Polidori, who has, he assures me, important disclosures to make,—but to you alone."

"This interview will be most odious to me!" said Rodolph, sorrowfully; "for I have never seen this man since the fatal day when I—"

Rodolph, unable to finish, hid his face in his hands.

"But, monseigneur, why accede to Polidori's request? Threaten him with the justice of the French law, or immediate surrender to your authority, and then he will reveal to me what he now declares he will only reveal to you."

"You are right, my worthy friend; for the presence of this wretch would make my terrible recollections even still more distressing, connected as they are with incurable griefs,—from my father's death to that of my daughter. I know not how it is, but as I advance in life the more I seem to miss that dear child. How I should have adored her! How very dear and precious to me she would have been, this offspring of my first love, of my earliest and purest beliefs—or, rather, my young illusions! I should have poured out on this innocent creature those treasures of affection of which her hateful mother is so unworthy; and it seems to me that, as I have dreamt, this child, by the beauty of her mind, the charm of her qualities, would have soothed and softened all my griefs, all these pangs of remorse, which are, alas, attached to her fatal birth."

"Monseigneur, I see with grief the increasing empire which these regrets, as vain as they are bitter, assume over your mind."

After some moments' silence, Rodolph said to Murphy:

"I will now make a confession to you, my old friend. I love—yes, I passionately love—a woman worthy of the noblest, the most devoted affection. Since my heart has again expanded to all the sweetness of love, since I am thus again affected by tender emotions, I feel more deeply than ever the loss of my daughter. I might have feared that an attachment of the heart would weaken the bitterness of my regrets. It is not so; all my loving qualities—my affections—are but the keener. I feel myself better, more charitable; and more than ever is it afflicting to me not to have my daughter to adore."

"Nothing more easily explained, monseigneur,—forgive me the comparison,—but, as certain men have a joyous and benevolent intoxication, so you have good and generous love."

"Still, my hatred of the wicked has become more intense; my aversion for Sarah increases, in proportion, no doubt, to the grief I experience at my daughter's death. I imagine to myself that that wretched mother must have neglected her, and that, when once her ambitious hopes were ruined by my marriage, the countess, in her pitiless selfishness, abandoned our daughter to mercenary hands, and, perhaps, my child died from actual neglect. It is my fault, also. I did not then think of the sacred duties which paternity imposes. When Sarah's real character was suddenly revealed to me, I ought instantly to have taken my daughter from her, and watched over her with love and anxiety. I ought to have foreseen that the countess would make but a very unnatural mother. It is my fault,—yes, indeed, my fault."

"Monseigneur, grief distracts you! Could you, after the sad event you know of, delay for a day the long journey imposed on you, as—"

"As an expiator! You are right, my friend," said Rodolph, greatly agitated.

"You have not heard anything of the Countess Sarah since my departure, monseigneur?"

"No; since those infamous plots which twice nearly destroyed Madame d'Harville, I have heard nothing of her. Her presence here is hateful to me,—oppresses me; it seems as though my evil demon was near me, and some new misfortune threatens me."

"Patience, patience, monseigneur! Fortunately Germany is forbidden ground to her, and Germany awaits us."

"Yes, we shall go very soon. At least, during my short residence in Paris, I shall have accomplished a sacred vow, and have made some steps in the meritorious path which an august and merciful will has traced for my redemption. As soon as Madame Georges's son is restored to her tender arms, free and innocent; as soon as Jacques Ferrand shall be convicted and punished for his crimes; as soon as I am assured of the good prosperity of all the honest and hard-working creatures who, by their resignation, courage, and probity, have deserved my interest, we will return to Germany, and then my journey will not have been wholly unfruitful."

"Particularly if you achieve the exposure of that abominable wretch, Jacques Ferrand, monseigneur,—the angular stone, the pivot on which turn so many crimes."

"Although the end justifies the means, and scruples with such a scoundrel are absurd, yet I sometimes regret that I have allowed Cecily to become an instrument in working out this just and avenging reparation."

"She ought to be here very shortly."

"She has arrived."

"Cecily?"

"Yes; I refused to see her. De Graün has given her ample instructions, and she has promised to comply with them."

"Will she keep that promise?"

"Why, everything conspires to make me think so. There is the hope of ameliorating her future condition, and the fear of being instantly sent back to Germany to prison; for De Graün will not lose sight of her, and the least defection on her part will cause her being handed over to justice."

"True, she comes here as an escaped criminal, and when we know the crimes that have led to her perpetual imprisonment, she would be at once surrendered to our demand."

"And then, even if it were not her interest to aid our schemes, the task which is assigned to her being one which can only be effected by stratagem, perfidy, and the most devilish seduction, Cecily must be (and the baron assures me she really is) overjoyed at such an opportunity for playing off those infernal advantages with which she is so liberally endowed."

"Is she as handsome as she was, monseigneur?"

"De Graün declares that she is more attractive than ever; he told me that he was really quite dazzled at her beauty, to which the Alsatian costume she had chosen gave even more piquancy. The glance of this devil in petticoats, he says, has still the same really magic expression."

"Why, monseigneur, I have never been what is called a dissipated fellow, a man without heart or conduct, but if at twenty years of age I had met with Cecily, even knowing her then to be as dangerous, as wicked as I do now, I

assure you I would not have answered for myself, if I had been for any time exposed to the fire of her large, black, and brilliant eyes, sparkling in the centre of her pale and ardent countenance. Yes, by heaven! I dare not think of the extremities into which so fatal an amour might have urged me."

"I am not astonished, my dear Murphy, for I know this woman. Moreover, the baron was really frightened at the quickness with which Cecily understood—or, rather guessed—the part, at once inciting and platonic, which she was to play with the notary."

"But will she, think you, be introduced as easily as you wish, monseigneur, by the intervention of Madame Pipelet? Individuals like Jacques Ferrand are so suspicious."

"I had relied, with reason, on the sight of Cecily to overcome and dissipate the notary's distrust."

"What! Has he already seen her?"

"Yesterday. And from what Madame Pipelet told me, I have no doubt but he was fascinated by the creole, for he instantly took her into service."

"Then, monseigneur, the game is won, and ours."

"I hope so. A ferocious cupidity, a brutal passion, have impelled the injurer of Louise Morel to the most odious crimes. It is in his passion and his cupidity that he shall find the terrible punishment of his crimes,—a punishment which, moreover, shall not be without fruit for his victims, for you know the aim of all the Creole's wiles."

"Cecily! Cecily! Never did greater wickedness, never more dangerous corruption, never blacker soul have served for the accomplishment of a more strict morality, a more just result! And David, monseigneur, what does he say to this arrangement?"

"Approves of everything. At the pitch of contempt and horror which he has reached for this creature, he sees in her only the instrument of a just vengeance. 'If this accursed woman ever could deserve any commiseration after all the ill she has done me,' he said to me, 'it would be by devoting herself to the remorseless punishment of this scoundrel, whose exterminating demon she may become.'"

A servant having knocked at the door, Murphy went out, but soon returned with two letters, only one of which was for Rodolph.

"A line from Madame Georges," he said, as he hastily perused it.

"Well, monseigneur, and La Goualeuse?"

"There can be no further doubt," exclaimed Rodolph, after having read, "there is some dark plot afoot. On the evening of the day when the poor girl disappeared from the farm, and at the instant when Madame Georges was about to inform me of this event, a man unknown to her, sent express and on horseback, came as from me to tell her that I was aware of the sudden disappearance of Fleur-de-Marie, and that in a few days I should take her back to the farm. In spite of this, Madame Georges, uneasy at my silence with respect to her protégée, cannot, as she says, resist the desire to hear how her dear daughter is, for so she calls her."

"It is very strange, monseigneur."

"What could be the motive for carrying off Fleur-de-Marie?"

"Monseigneur!" said Murphy, suddenly, "the Countess Sarah is no stranger to this carrying off."

"Sarah! And what makes you think so?"

"Compare this event with her denunciations against Madame d'Harville."

"You are right!" cried Rodolph, struck with a sudden light, "it is evident—now I understand. Yes, constantly the one calculation. The countess persists in thinking that by breaking down all the affections which she supposes me to form, she will make me feel the necessity of attaching myself to her. This is as odious as it is absurd. Still, such unworthy persecution must be put a stop to. It is not only myself, but all that deserve respect, interest, and pity, that this woman assails. Send M. de Graün instantly and officially to the countess and let him say that I have the certain assurance that she has been instrumental in carrying off Fleur-de-Marie, and if she does not give me at once such information as is necessary for me to find the poor girl, I will show no mercy; and then M. de Graün will go to the law officers of the crown."

"According to Madame d'Harville's letter, La Goualeuse must be in St. Lazare."

"Yes, but Rigolette declares that she saw her free, and quit the prison. There is some mystery which I must clear up."

"I will instantly go and give the Baron de Graün your orders, monseigneur. But allow me to open this letter, which comes from my correspondent at Marseilles, to whom I had recommended the Chourineur, as he was to facilitate the passage of the poor devil to Algeria."

"Well, has he set sail?"

"Monseigneur, it is really singular!"

"What is it?"

"After having waited for a long time at Marseilles for a ship to convey him to Algeria, the Chourineur, who seemed every day more sad and serious, suddenly protested, on the very day fixed for his embarkation, that he should prefer returning to Paris."

"What a whim!"

"Although my correspondent had, as agreed, placed a considerable sum at the disposal of the Chourineur, he had only taken sufficient for his return to Paris, where he must shortly arrive."

"Then he will explain to us his change of resolution. But despatch De Graün immediately to the Countess Macgregor, and go yourself to St. Lazare, and inquire about Fleur-de-Marie."

After the lapse of an hour, the Baron de Graün returned from the Countess Sarah Macgregor's. In spite of his habitual and official sang-froid, the diplomatist seemed overwhelmed; the groom of the chambers had scarcely admitted him before Rodolph observed his paleness.

"Well, De Graün, what ails you? Have you seen the countess?"

"Your royal highness must prepare for very painful intelligence—so unexpected—the Countess Macgregor—"

"The countess, then, is dead?"

"No, but her life is despaired of; she has been stabbed with a stiletto."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Rodolph. "Who committed the crime?"

"That is not ascertained; the murder was accompanied with robbery; a large quantity of jewels have been stolen."

"And how is she now?"

"She has not recovered her senses yet; her brother is in despair."

"Send some one daily to make inquiries, my dear De Graün."

At this moment Murphy entered, having returned from St. Lazare.

"Sad news!" said Rodolph to him; "Sarah has been stabbed."

"Ah, monseigneur, though very guilty, one must still pity her."

"Yes, such a fearful end! And La Goualeuse?"

"Set at liberty by the intercession of Madame d'Harville."

"That is impossible! for Madame d'Harville entreats me to take the necessary steps for getting the poor, unhappy girl out of prison."

"Yet an elderly woman came to St. Lazare, bringing an order to set Fleur-de-Marie at liberty, and they both quitted the prison together."

"As Rigolette said. But this elderly woman, who can she be? The Countess Sarah alone can clear this up, and she is in no state to afford us particulars."

"But her brother, Tom Seyton, may throw some light on it, he has always been in his sister's confidence."

"His sister is dying, and if there is any fresh plot, he will not say a word. But," added Rodolph, "we must learn the name of the person who liberated Fleur-de-Marie, and then we shall arrive at something."

"True, monseigneur."

"Try, then, and find out this person, my dear De Graün; and if you do not succeed, put your M. Badinot on the scent."

"Your royal highness may rely on my zeal."

"Upon my word, monseigneur," said Murphy, "it is, perhaps, fortunate that the Chourineur returns to us, his services may be useful."

"You are right; and now I am impatient to see my brave preserver arrive in Paris, for I never can forget that I owe my life to him."

CHAPTER III.

THE CLERK'S OFFICE.

Several days had elapsed since Jacques Ferrand had taken Cecily into his service. We will conduct the reader (who already knows the place) into the notary's office, whilst his clerks are at breakfast. Unheard of, extravagant, wonderful thing! Instead of the meagre and repulsive broth brought each morning to these young men by the late Madame Séraphin, an enormous cold roast turkey, placed in a large box, was enthroned in the centre of one of the office-tables, flanked by two new loaves, a Dutch cheese, and three bottles of wine; an ancient leaden inkstand served to hold a mixture of pepper and salt. Each clerk, provided with a knife and a strong appetite, awaited the arrival of the head clerk with hungry impatience, without whom they could not, without a breach of etiquette, begin to breakfast. A revolution so radical in Jacques Ferrand's office bespoke some extraordinary domestic mutation. The following conversation may throw some light on this phenomenon:

"Here is a turkey who did not expect when he was ushered into life ever to appear on the breakfast-table of our governor's clerks."

"No more than the governor, when he was ushered into the life of a notary, expected to give his clerks a turkey for breakfast."

"But, at least, the turkey is ours!" said the junior fag of the office, with a greedy grin.

"Hop-the-Gutter, my friend, you forget yourself; this poultry is and must be a stranger to you."

"And, like a good Frenchman, you should have a wholesome hatred of the stranger."

"All that will come to your share may be his feet."

"Emblem of the velocity with which you run on the office errands."

"I thought I might at least have a right to the carcass to pick!" muttered Hop-the-Gutter.

"Perchance, as an excessive favour, but not as a right; just as with the Charter of 1814, which was but another carcass of liberty!" said the Mirabeau of the office.

"Talking of carcasses," observed one youth, with brutal insensibility, "may heaven receive the soul of Madame Séraphin! For since she was drowned in her water-party of pleasure, we are no longer condemned to eternal 'cag-mag.'"

"And, for a whole week, the governor, instead of giving us breakfast—"

"Allows us each two francs a day."

"It was that which made me say, 'Heaven receive the soul of Mother Séraphin!'"

"Talking of Madame Séraphin, who has seen the servant who has come in her place?"

"The Alsatian girl whom the portress of the house in which poor Louise lived brought one evening, as the porter told us?"

"Yes."

"Parbleu! It is quite impossible to get a glimpse of her; for the governor is more resolute than ever in preventing us from entering into the pavilion in the courtyard."

"And besides, as it is the porter who now cleans out the office, how can one see this damsel?"

"Well, I've seen her."

"You?"

"When I say I've seen her, I've seen her cap; such a rum cap!"

"Oh, pooh! What sort?"

"It was cherry-coloured velvet, I think; a kind of skull-cap like the 'buy-a-broom' girls wear."

"Like the Alsaciennes? Why, that's simple enough, as she is an Alsacienne!"

"I was passing across the yard the day before yesterday, and she was leaning with her back against one of the windows of the ground floor."

"What! The yard?"

"No, donkey, no,—the servant! The panes of the lower part are so dirty that I could not see much of the Alsacienne; but those in the middle of the window were not so grubby, and I saw her cherry-coloured cap and a profusion of curling hair as black as jet, for she had her head dressed à la Titus."

"I'm sure the governor has not seen even as much as that through his spectacles; for he is one who, as they say, if he were left alone with one woman on the earth, then the world would end."

"That is not astonishing. 'He laughs best who laughs last!' And the more so, as 'Punctuality is the politeness of monarchs!'"

"Jupiter! How stupid Chalamel is when he likes!"

"Deuce take it! Tell me where you go, and I'll tell you who you are!"

"Beautiful!"

"As for me, I think it is superstition which makes our governor more and more hoggish."

"And, perhaps, it is as a penitence that he gives us forty sous a day for our breakfast."

"He must, indeed, have taken leave of his senses."

"Or be ill."

"I have thought him very much bewildered these many days past."

"It is not that we see so much of him. He who, for our misery, was in his study at sunrise, and always at our backs, is now two days without even poking his nose into the office."

"That gives the head clerk so much to do."

"And we are obliged to die of hunger waiting for him this morning."

"What a change in the office!"

"How poor Germain would be astonished if any one told him, 'Only think, old fellow, of the governor giving us forty sous for our breakfast.' 'Pooh! Impossible!' 'Quite possible! And I, Chalamel, announce the fact in my own proper person.' 'What, you want to make me laugh?' 'Yes. Well, this is the

way it came about. For the two or three days which followed the death of Madame Séraphin we had no breakfast at all; and, in one respect, that was an improvement, because it was less nasty, but, in another, our refecton cost us money. Still we were patient, saying, "The governor has no servant or housekeeper; as soon as he gets one we shall resume the filthy paste gruel." No, by no means, my dear Germain; the governor has a servant, and yet our breakfast continued buried in the wave of oblivion. Then I was appointed as a deputation to inform the governor of the griefs of our stomachs. He was with the chief clerk. "I will not feed you any longer in the morning," he replied, in his harsh tone, and as if thinking of something else; "my servant has no time to prepare your breakfast." "But, sir, it was agreed that you should find us in breakfasts." "Well, send for your breakfasts from some house, and I will pay for it. How much is sufficient,—forty sous each?" he added; all the time evidently thinking of something else, and saying forty sous as he would say twenty sous or a hundred sous. "Yes, sir, forty sous will be sufficient," cried I, catching the ball at the bound. "Be it so; the head clerk will pay you and settle with me." And so saying, the governor respectfully slammed the door in my face.' You must own, messieurs, that Germain would be most extraordinarily astonished at the liberality of the governor."

"Seriously, I think the governor is ill. For the last ten days he has scarcely been recognisable; his cheeks are so furrowed you could hide your fist in them."

"And so absent; you should just see him. The other day he lifted his spectacles to read a deed, and his eyes were as red and glaring as fiery coals."

"He was right. 'Short reckonings make long friends!'"

"Let me say a word. I will tell you, gentlemen, something very strange. I handed this deed to the governor, and it was topsy-turvy."

"The governor? How strange! What could he mean by topsy-turvying thus? Enough to choke him, unless, as you say, his habits are so completely altered."

"Oh, what a fellow you are, Chalamel! I say I gave him the deed wrong end up'ards."

"Wasn't he in a rage?"

"Not the slightest. He did not even notice it, but kept his great red eyes fixed upon it for at least ten minutes, and then handed me back the deed, saying, 'Very good!'"

"What, still topsy-turvy?"

"Yes."

"Then he couldn't have read it?"

"Pardieu! not unless he can read upside down."

"How odd!"

"The governor looked so dull and cross at the moment that I did not dare to say a word, and so I left him, just as if nothing had occurred."

"Well, four days ago I was in the head clerk's office; there came a client, then two or three clients with whom the governor had appointments. They got tired of waiting; and, at their request, I went and knocked at his study door. No answer; so in I went."

"Well?"

"M. Jacques Ferrand had his arms crossed on his desk, and his bald and not overdelicate forehead leaning on his hands. He never stirred."

"Was he asleep?"

"I thought so, and went towards him: 'Sir, there are clients waiting with whom you have made appointments.' He didn't stir. 'Sir!' No answer. Then I touched his shoulder, and he bounced up as if the devil had bitten him. In his start his large green spectacles fell from his eyes on to his nose, and I saw—you'll never believe it—"

"Well, what?"

"Tears."

"Oh, what nonsense!"

"Quite true."

"What! the governor snivel? No, I won't have that."

"When that's the case why cockchafers will play the cornet-à-piston."

"And cocks and hens wear top-boots."

"Ta, ta, ta, ta; all your folly will not prevent my having seen what I did see as plain as I see you."

"Weeping?"

"Yes, weeping. And he was in such a precious rage at being surprised in this lachrymose mood that he adjusted his spectacles in great haste, and said to me, 'Get out—get out!' 'But, sir—' 'Get out!' 'Three clients are waiting to whom you have given appointments, and—' 'I have not time; let them go to the devil along with you!' Then he got up in a desperate rage to turn me out, but I didn't wait, but went and dismissed the clients, who were not by any means satisfied; but, for the honour of the office, I told them that the governor had the whooping-cough."

This interesting conversation was interrupted by the head clerk, who entered apparently quite overcome. His arrival was hailed by general acclamation, and all eyes were sympathetically turned towards the turkey with impatient anxiety.

"Without saying a word, seigneur, you have kept us waiting an infernally long while," said Chalamel.

"Take care! Another time our appetite will not remain so subordinate."

"Well, gents, it was no fault of mine. I have had much to annoy me,—more than you have. On my word and honour, the governor must be going mad."

"Didn't I say so?"

"But that need not prevent one eating."

"On the contrary."

"We can talk just as well with something in our mouths."

"We can talk better," cried Hop-the-Gutter; whilst Chalamel, dissecting the turkey, said to the head clerk:

"What makes you think that the governor is mad?"

"We have a right to suppose he is perfectly beside himself when he allows us forty sous a head for our daily breakfast."

"I confess that has surprised me as much as yourselves, gents. But that is nothing—absolutely nothing—to what has just now occurred."

"Really?"

"What! has the unhappy old gent become so decidedly lunatic that he insists on our dining at the Cadran Bleu every day at his expense?"

"Theatre in the evening?"

"Then coffee, with punch to follow?"

"And then—"

"Gents, laugh as much as you please; but the scene I have just witnessed is rather alarming than pleasant."

"Well, then, relate this scene to us."

"Yes, do. Don't mind your breakfast," observed Chalamel; "we are all ears."

"And jaws, my lads. I think I see you whilst I am talking working away with your teeth; and the turkey would be finished before my tale. By your leave, patience, and the story shall come in with the dessert."

Whether it was the spur of appetite or curiosity which incited the young men we will not decide, but they went through their gastronomic operation with such celerity that the moment for the head clerk's history came in no time. In order that they might not be surprised by their employer, they sent Hop-the-Gutter into the adjoining room as a sentinel, having liberally supplied him with the carcass and drumsticks of the bird.

The head clerk then said to his colleagues, "You must know, in the first place, the porter has been very uneasy, for he has frequently seen M. Ferrand, in spite of the cold and rain, pace the garden at night for a considerable time. Once he ventured to ask his master if he wanted anything; but he sent him about his business in such a manner that he has not again ventured to intrude himself."

"Perhaps the governor is a sleep-walker?"

"That is not probable. But, to continue; a short time since I wanted his signature to several papers. As I was turning the handle of his door, I thought I heard some one speaking. I stopped, and made out two or three repressed sounds, like stifled groans. After pausing an instant in fear, I opened the door, and saw the governor kneeling on the floor, his forehead buried in his hands, and his elbows resting on the seat of one of his old armchairs."

"Oh, it's all plain enough: he has turned pious, and was saying an extra prayer."

"Well, then, it was a strong prayer enough. I heard stifled groans, and every now and then he murmured between his teeth 'Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!' like a despairing man. Then,—and this is very singular,—in a movement which he made as if to tear his breast with his nails, his shirt came partly open, and I saw on his hairy chest a small red pocketbook fastened around his neck by a steel chain. When I saw that I did not really know whether I ought to retreat or advance. I remained, however, very much embarrassed, when he rose and suddenly turned around, holding between his teeth an old check pocket-handkerchief; his spectacles were left on the chair. Let me say, gents, that I never in my life saw such a figure; he looked like one of the damned. I retreated really in alarm. Then he—"

"Seized you by the throat?"

"You are quite wrong. He looked at me first with a bewildered air; then letting fall his handkerchief, he threw himself into my arms, exclaiming, 'Oh, I am very unhappy!'"

"What a farce!"

"Well, but that did not prevent his voice—in spite of his death's-head look—from being so distressing, I may say so imploring—"

"Imploring! Come, come, no gammon! Why, there is no night-owl with a cold in her head which is not music to the governor's voice."

"That may be; but yet at this moment his voice was so plaintive that I was almost affected. 'Sir,' I said to him, believe me—' 'Let me!—let me!' replied he, interrupting me. 'It is so consoling to be able to say to any one that we are suffering!' He evidently mistook me for some other person. You may suppose that when he thus addressed me I felt sure it was a mistake, or that he had a brain fever. I disengaged myself from him, saying, 'Sir, compose yourself, it is I!' Then he looked at me with a stupid air, and

exclaimed, 'Who is it? Who's there? What do you want with me?' And he passed, at each question, his hand over his brow, as if to dispel the cloud which obscured his mind."

"Which obscured his mind! Capital! Well spoken! We'll get up a melodrama amongst us!

"Methinks a man with such a power of words,Should try his hand at melodrame!"

"Chalamel, will you be quiet?"

"What could ail the governor?"

"Ma foi! How can I tell? But of this I'm sure, that when he recovers he'll sing to another tune, for he frowned terribly, and said to me sharply, without giving me time to reply, 'What did you come for? Have you been here long? Am I to be surrounded with spies? What did I say? Reply—answer!' Ma foi! he looked so savage that I replied, 'I heard nothing, sir; I only this moment entered.' 'You are not deceiving me?' 'No, sir.' 'Well, what do you want?' 'Some signatures, sir.' 'Give me the papers!' And then he signed and signed—without reading—half a dozen notarial deeds; he who never put his initials to a deed without spelling it over word by word, and twice over from one end to the other. I remarked that from time to time his hand relaxed in the middle of his signature, as if he were absorbed in some fixed idea; then he went on signing very quick, and, as it were, convulsively. When all were signed he told me to retire, and I heard him descend the small staircase which leads from his room to the courtyard."

"I still ask what can be the matter with him?"

"Gentlemen, it is perhaps Madame Séraphin whom he regrets."

"He? What, he regret any one?"

"Now I think of it, the porter said that the curé of Bonne Nouvelle and the vicar had called several times to see the governor, and he was denied to them. Is not that surprising?—they who almost lived here!"

"What puzzles me is to know what the workpeople are at."

"They have been working at the pavilion three days running."

"And one evening they brought furniture covered up with a carpet."

"Perhaps he feels remorse for having put Germain into prison?"

"Talking of Germain, he will have some fine recruits in his prison, poor fellow! For I read in the Gazette des Tribunaux that the band of robbers and assassins, whom they seized in the Champs Elysées, in one of the small underground public-houses, had been locked up in La Force."

"Poor Germain! What society for him!"

"Louise Morel, too, will have her share of the recruits; for in this gang, they say, there is a whole family of thieves."

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

"Perhaps it was some of that gang who stabbed the countess, one of the governor's clients. He has often sent me to inquire after the state of this countess, and seems much interested in her recovery."

"Did they let you enter the house and see the spot where the assassination was committed?"

"Oh, no! I could not go farther than the entrance; and the porter was not at all a person inclined to talk."

"Gents, gents, take your places; here's the gov'nor coming up!" shouted Hop-the-Gutter, coming into the office with the carcass still in his hand.

The young men instantly took their seats at their respective desks, over which they bent, handling their pens with great dexterity; whilst Hop-the-Gutter deposited his turkey's skeleton in a box filled with law papers.

Jacques Ferrand entered the room. His red hair, mingled with gray, escaping from beneath an old black silk cap, fell in disorder down each side of his temples. Some of the veins which marbled his head appeared injected with blood, whilst his face, his flat nose, his furrowed cheeks, were all of ghastly paleness. The expression of his look, concealed by his large green spectacles, could not be seen; but the great alteration in the man's features announced the ravages of a consuming passion.

He crossed the office slowly, without saying a word to one of the clerks, or without even appearing to notice that they were there; then went into the room in which the chief clerk was employed, traversed it as well as his own cabinet, and again instantly descended the small staircase which led to the courtyard.

Jacques Ferrand having left all the doors open behind him, the clerks had a right to be astonished at the strange demeanour of their employer, who had come up one staircase and gone down another without pausing for a moment in any of the apartments he had mechanically traversed.

CHAPTER IV.

AVOID TEMPTATION!

It is night. Profound silence reigns in the pavilion inhabited by Jacques Ferrand, interrupted only at intervals by gusts of wind and the dashing of rain, which falls in torrents. These melancholy sounds seemed to render still more complete the solitude of this abode. In a sleeping-room in the first floor, very nicely and newly furnished, and covered with a thick carpet, a young female is standing up before a fireplace, in which there is a cheerful blaze. It is strange, but in the centre of the door, carefully bolted, and which is opposite to the bed, is a small glass door, five or six inches square, which opens from the outside. A small reflecting lamp casts a half shadow in this chamber, hung with garnet-coloured paper; the curtains of the bed and the window, as well as the cover of the large sofa, are of silk and woollen damask of the same colour. We are precise in the details of this demi-luxury so recently imported into the notary's residence, because it announces a complete revolution in the habits of Jacques Ferrand, who, until now, was of the most sordid avarice, and of Spartan disregard (especially as it concerned others) to everything that respected comfortable existence. It is on this garnet-coloured ground that was shadowed forth the figure of Cecily, which we will now attempt to paint.

Tall and graceful, the creole was in the full flower of her age. Her spreading shoulders and hips made her waist appear so singularly small that it seemed as if it could be easily spanned. As simple as it was coquettish, her Alsatian costume was of singular taste, somewhat theatrical,—but for that reason more capable of producing the effect she desired. Her bodice, of black cassimere, half open on her full bosom, was very long-waisted, with tight sleeves, plain back, and slightly embroidered with purple wool down the seams, perfected by a row of small cut silver buttons. A short petticoat, of orange merino, which seemed of vast fullness, descended little lower than the knee; her stockings were of scarlet, with blue clocks, as we see them in the drawings of the old Flemish painters, who so complacently show us the garters of their robust heroines.

No artist ever drew more perfect legs than were those of Cecily: symmetrical and slim beneath the swelling calf, they terminated in a small foot, quite at ease, and yet restrained in a small slipper of black morocco, with silver buckles. Cecily was looking into the glass over the mantelpiece. The slope of her bodice displayed her elegant and dimpled neck of dazzling but not transparent whiteness.

Taking off her cap of cherry-coloured velvet to replace it with a kerchief, she displayed her thick, magnificent head of hair, of lustrous black, which, divided over her brows, and naturally curling, came down only to the necklace of Venus, which unites the neck and shoulders.

It is necessary to know the inimitable taste with which the Creoles twist around their heads their kerchiefs of bright hues, to have an idea of the graceful head-dress of Cecily, and the piquant contrast of this variegated covering of purple, blue, and orange, with the black silky tresses, which, escaping from beneath the tight fold of the nightkerchief, surrounded her pale but round and firm cheeks. With her two arms raised above her head, she proceeded with the ends of her fingers, as slender as spindles of ivory, to arrange a large rosette, placed very low on the left side, almost over the ear.

Cecily's features were such as once seen it is impossible ever to forget. A bold forehead, somewhat projecting, surmounts her face, which was a perfect oval; her pearly white complexion, the satiny freshness of the camelia leaf slightly touched by a sun-ray; her eyes, of almost disproportionate size, have a singular expression, for their irises, extremely large, black, and brilliant, hardly allow the blue transparency of the orbits, at the two extremities of the lids, fringed with long lashes, to be visible; her chin is very distinctly prominent; her nose, straight and thin, ends in two delicate nostrils, which dilate on the least emotion; her mouth, insolent and amorous, is of bright purple.

We must imagine this colourless countenance, with its bright black glance, its two red, pulpy, and humid lips, which glisten like wet coral. Such was Cecily. Her infamous instincts, at first repressed by her real attachment for David, not being developed till she reached Europe, civilisation and the influence of northern climates had tempered their violence.

We have already said that Cecily had scarcely reached Germany, when, first seduced by a man of desperately depraved habits, she, unknown to David, who loved her with equal idolatry and blindness, exercised and turned to account, for a considerable time, all her seductive powers; but soon the scandal of her adventures was raised abroad, and such exposures ensued that she was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment.

To all this let there be joined a plastic, adroit, insinuating mind, an intelligence so wonderful that in a year she spoke French and German with perfect ease, sometimes even with natural eloquence; then add a corrupted heart worthy of the courtesan queen of ancient Rome, an audacity and courage proof against everything, instincts of diabolical wickedness, and

then we may understand the new servant of Jacques Ferrand, the resolute being who had dared to venture into the wolf's den.

Yes, strange anomaly! On learning from M. de Graün the inciting and platonic part she was to play with the notary, and what avenging ends were to be derived from her seductions, Cecily had promised to go through the character with love, or, rather, terrible hatred against Jacques Ferrand, being sincerely indignant at the recital of the infamous violence he had exercised against Louise,—a recital necessary to be unfolded to the creole, to put her on her guard against the hypocritical attempts of this monster. A few retrospective words as to this latter are indispensable.

When Cecily was presented by Madame Pipelet as an orphan over whom she did not desire to maintain any right, any control, the notary was, perhaps, less smitten by the beauty of the creole than fascinated by her irresistible look,—a look which, at the first interview, disturbed the reason of Jacques Ferrand.

We have already said, in reference to the insensate boldness of some of his words when conversing with Madame de Lucenay, that this man, usually so completely master of himself, so calm, so cunning, so subtle, forgot the cold calculations of his deep dissimulation when the demon of desire darkened his better sense.

Besides, he had no cause to distrust the protégée of Madame Pipelet. After her conversation with Alfred's spouse, Madame Séraphin had proposed to Jacques Ferrand a young girl, almost destitute, to replace Louise, and he had eagerly accepted the offer, in the hopes of taking advantage of the isolated and precarious position of his new servant. Moreover, far from being predisposed to mistrust, Jacques Ferrand found, in the march of events, fresh motives for security.

All succeeded to his utmost wishes. The death of Madame Séraphin released him from a dangerous accomplice; the death of Fleur-de-Marie (he believed her dead) delivered him from a living proof of one of his earliest crimes. Finally, thanks to the death of the Chouette, and the unexpected murder of the Countess Macgregor (whose life was despaired of), he no longer had these two women to fear, whose disclosures and attacks might have been most disastrous to him.

The disposition, habits, and former life of Jacques Ferrand known and displayed, the exciting beauty of the creole admitted, as we have endeavoured to paint her, together with other facts we shall detail as we

proceed, will account, we presume, for the sudden passion, the unbridled desire of the notary for this seductive and dangerous creature. Then we must add, that if women of Cecily's stamp inspire nothing but repugnance and disgust to men endued with tender and elevated sentiments, with delicate and pure tastes, they exercise a sudden action, a magic omnipotence, over men of brutal sensuality like Jacques Ferrand. Thus a just, an avenging fatality, brought the creole into contact with the notary, and a terrible expiation was beginning for him. A fierce passion had urged him on to persecute, with pitiless malice, an indigent and honest family, and to spread amongst them misery, madness, and death. This passion was now to be the formidable chastisement of this great culprit.

Although Jacques Ferrand was never to have his desires realised, the creole took care not to deprive him of all hope; but the vague and distant prospects she held out were so coloured by caprices that they were an additional torture, and more completely enslaved him.

If we are astonished that a man of such vigour and audacity had not recourse to stratagem or violence to triumph over the calculating resistance of Cecily, we forget that Cecily was not a second Louise. Besides, the day after her presentation to the notary, she had played quite another part from that by aid of which she had been introduced to her master, for he had not been the dupe of his servant two days.

Forewarned of the fate of Louise by the Baron de Graün, and knowing besides by what abominable means she had become the prey of the notary, the creole, on entering this solitary house, had taken excellent precautions for passing her first night there in perfect security. The evening of her arrival, being alone with Jacques Ferrand, he, in order not to alarm her, pretended scarcely to look at her, and rudely ordered her to bed. She told him, naïvely, that she was afraid of thieves in the night, but that she was resolute, and capable of defending herself; at the same time drawing from her large woollen pelisse a small but exceedingly keen stiletto, the sight of which set the notary thinking.

Believing that Cecily was afraid of robbers only, he showed her to the late chamber of Louise; after having examined it, Cecily said, trembling, she would sleep in a chair, because the door had neither lock nor bolt. Jacques Ferrand, unwilling to compromise himself by rousing Cecily's suspicions, promised a bolt should be fixed. The creole did not go to bed.

In the morning the notary sent to her to show her how to set about her work. He had promised himself to preserve for the first few days a

hypocritical reserve with respect to his new servant, in order to inspire her with confidence; but smitten by her beauty, which by daylight was even more striking, blinded, maddened by his desires, which already got the better of him, he stammered out some compliments as to the figure and beauty of Cecily. She, with keen sagacity, had judged that, from her first interview with the notary, he was completely caught in her spells; at the confession he made of his flame, she thought it policy to cast aside at once her feigned timidity, and, as we have said, to change her mask. The creole suddenly assumed a bold air. Jacques Ferrand again complimented her beauty and her graceful figure.

"Look at me well!" said Cecily to him, in a bold tone. "Although I am dressed as an Alsatian peasant, do I look like a servant?"

"What do you mean?" cried Jacques Ferrand.

"Look at this hand, does it appear accustomed to hard labour?" and she presented a white, delicate hand, with long and slender fingers, with nails as rosy and polished as agate, but whose root, slightly browned, betrayed the creole blood. "And this foot, is it that of a servant?" and she protruded a beautiful small foot, coquettishly shod, which the notary had not before remarked, and from which he only removed his eyes to gaze on Cecily with amazement. "I told my Aunt Pipelet what story I chose; she knew nothing of my former life, and believes me reduced to my present condition through the death of my parents, and takes me for a servant,—but you, I hope, have too much sagacity to show her error, dear master."

"Who, then, are you?" exclaimed Jacques Ferrand, more and more surprised at her language.

"That is my secret. For reasons best known to myself I was obliged to quit Germany in this attire. I wished to remain concealed in Paris for some time, being as secluded as possible. My aunt, supposing me reduced to misery, proposed to me your service, telling me of the solitary life which I must of compulsion lead in your house, informing me that I should never have leave to quit it. I accepted the offer unhesitatingly,—without knowing it my aunt had anticipated my most earnest desire. Who would think of looking for and finding me here?"

"And what have you done to compel you to seek concealment?"

"Agreeable sins, perhaps; but that is, also, my secret."

"And what are your intentions, mademoiselle?"

"What they always have been. But for your significant compliments as to my shape and beauty, perhaps I should not have confessed so much to you; although, no doubt, your clear-sightedness would, sooner or later, have induced my confession. Now listen to me, my dear master. I have for the moment accepted the condition—or, rather, the character—of a servant; circumstances compelled me. I have courage enough to sustain the character to the end, and will risk all the consequences. I will serve you with zeal, activity, and respect, in order to retain my situation, that is to say, a sure and unknown asylum. But on the least word of gallantry, the least liberty you take with me, I will leave you,—not from prudery, there is nothing of the prude about me, I fancy." And she darted a look at the notary which had full effect. "No, I am no prude!" she continued, with a provoking smile, which displayed her teeth of dazzling whiteness. "Indeed, no, when I love, I do love! But be discreet, and you will see that your unworthy servant has no desire but honestly to discharge her duty as a servant.

"Now you have my secret, or, at least, a portion of it. But should you, by any chance, desire to act as a gentleman, should you find me too handsome to serve you, should you like to change parts, and become my slave, be it so! Frankly speaking, I should prefer it, and had rather you should feel paternally disposed towards me. That would not prevent you from saying that you found me charming; this will be the recompense of your devotion and discretion."

"The only one? The only one?" stammered Jacques Ferrand.

"The only one, unless solitude make me mad,—which is impossible, for you will keep me company. Come, make up your mind,—no ambiguity. I either serve you, or you shall serve me; if not, I leave your house, and beg my aunt to find me another place. All this may, perhaps, appear strange to you; but if you take me for an adventuress, without any means of existence, you are wrong. In order that my aunt should be my accomplice without knowing it, I have made her believe that I was so poor that I could not purchase any other garments than those I now wear. I have, however, as you see, a tolerably well filled purse; on this side gold, on the other diamonds" (and Cecily displayed before the notary's eyes a long, red silk purse, filled with gold, and through the meshes of which he could also see several sparkling gems). "Unfortunately all the money in the world could not purchase for me a retreat so secure as your house,—so isolated, from the very solitude in which you live. Accept, then, one or other of my offers, and you will do me a kindness. You see I place myself almost at your discretion; for to say to you, I conceal myself, is to say to you I am sought for. But I am sure you will not betray me, even if you could."

This romantic confidence, this sudden change of character, completely upset all Jacques Ferrand's ideas. Who was this woman? Why did she conceal herself? Was it chance alone that had brought her to him? If she came with some secret aim, what could it be? Amongst all the ideas which this singular adventure gave rise to in the notary's mind, the real motive of the creole's presence did not occur to him. He had not, or, rather, he believed he had no other enemies than the victims of his licentiousness and his cupidity, and all these were in such miserable circumstances that he could not suspect them capable of spreading any net for him, of which Cecily should be the bait.

And then, moreover, what could be the motive of any such snare? No, the sudden transformation of Cecily inspired Jacques Ferrand with one fear only—he believed that this woman did not tell the truth, and was, perhaps, an adventuress, who, thinking him rich, had introduced herself into his house to wheedle and get money from him, and, perhaps, induce him to marry her. But although his avarice at once revolted at this idea, he perceived (and trembled) that his suspicions and reflections were too late, for he might by one word have calmed his distrust by sending away this woman from his house,—but this word he could not say.

These thoughts hardly occupied him a moment, so fascinated had he become. He already loved, after his own fashion, and the idea of being separated from this enchanting creature seemed impossible; and he felt also a jealousy, which made him say to himself, "So long as she is immured in my house, she can have no other lover." The boldness of her language, the wantonness of her look, the freedom of her manner, all revealed that she was not (as she had said) a prude. This conviction, giving vague hopes to the notary, still more assured Cecily's empire. In a word, Jacques Ferrand's passion choking the calm voice of reason, he blindly resigned himself to all that might result.

It was agreed that Cecily should only be the servant in appearance; thus there would be no scandal. Besides, in order the more completely to render his guest at her ease, he was not to engage any other servant, but make up his mind to wait on her and on himself. The meals were brought from a neighbouring tavern, the porter swept out and attended to the office, and he paid for his clerks' breakfast. Then the notary would furnish at once an apartment on the first floor, as Cecily wished. She desired to pay for it, but he refused, and spent two thousand francs (80l.). This was enormous generosity, and proved the unheard-of violence of his passion.

Then began the terrible life of this miserable wretch. Enclosed in the impenetrable solitude of this house, inaccessible to all, more and more under the galling yoke of his mad love, careless of penetrating the secret of this singular woman; from a master he was made a slave,—he was Cecily's valet, served her at meal-times, and took care of her apartment. Forewarned by the baron that Louise had been overcome by a narcotic, the creole drank only pure water, eating only of dishes with which it was impossible to tamper. She had selected the apartment she was to occupy, assuring herself that there was there no concealed entrance. Besides, Jacques Ferrand soon discovered that Cecily was not a woman whom he could assail with impunity; she was vigorous, agile, and dangerously armed; thus a frenzied delirium alone could have incited him to attempt force, and she was quite protected from this peril.

Yet, that she might not weary and utterly repulse the notary's passion, the creole seemed sometimes touched by his assiduities, and flattered by the control which she exercised over him. And, perceiving that he hoped, by dint of proofs of devotion and self-denial, he should contrive to make her overlook his age and ugliness, she amused herself with telling him that, if she ever could love him, how excessive that love would be. With this Jacques Ferrand's reason wandered, and he would frequently walk in his garden at night absorbed in his own reflections. Sometimes he gazed for hours into the bedroom of the creole; for she had allowed a small window to be made in the door, which she frequently and intentionally left open. Absorbed, lost, wandering, indifferent to his most important interests, or the preservation of his reputation as an austere, serious, and pious man,—a reputation usurped, it is true, but, at the same time, acquired after long years of dissimulation and chicanery,—he amazed his clerks by his aberration of mind, offended his clients by his refusals to receive them, and abruptly refused the visits of the priests, who, deceived by his hypocrisy, had been until then his warmest champions.

We have said that Cecily was dressing her head before her glass. At a slight noise in the corridor she turned her head towards the door. In spite of the noise she had heard, Cecily continued her night toilet tranquilly. She drew from her corsage, where it was placed almost like a busk, a stiletto five or six inches long, enclosed in a case of black shagreen, having a small ebony handle, with silver threads,—a plain handle, but very fit for use; it was not a mere weapon for show. Cecily took the dagger from its scabbard with excessive precaution, and laid it on the marble mantelpiece. The blade, of finest temper and Damascus steel, was triangular, with keen edges; and the point, as sharp as a needle, would have pierced a shilling without turning the edge. Impregnated with a subtle and rapid poison, the slightest

puncture of this poniard was mortal. Jacques Ferrand having one day alluded to the danger of this weapon, the creole made in his presence an experiment, in *animâ vita*,—that is to say, on the unfortunate house-dog, which, slightly pricked on the nose, fell and died in horrible convulsions. The stiletto placed on the mantelpiece, Cecily took off her black bodice, and was then, with her shoulders, neck, and arms denuded, like a lady in her ball-dress. Like most of the creole women, she wore, instead of stays, another bodice of stout linen, which fitted her figure very closely; her orange-coloured petticoat, remaining attached to this sort of white spencer, with short sleeves, and cut very low, formed a costume less precise than the other, and harmonised wonderfully with the scarlet stocking, and the coloured handkerchief, so coquettishly arranged around the creole's head. Nothing could be more perfect, more beautifully defined, than the graceful contour of her arms and shoulders. A heavy sigh aroused Cecily's attention. She smiled, as she twisted around her finger one of her curling tresses, which had escaped from beneath her head-dress.

"Cecily! Cecily!" murmured a voice, which was plaintive though coarse. And through the wicket was visible the pale and flat face of Jacques Ferrand.

Cecily, silent until then, began to hum a creole air; the words of this melody were sweet and expressive. Although repressed, the full contra-alto of Cecily was heard above the noise of the torrents of the rain and gusts of wind, which seemed to shake the old house to its very foundation.

"Cecily! Cecily!" repeated Jacques Ferrand, in a tone of supplication.

The creole paused suddenly and turned her head around quickly, as if, for the first time, she then heard the notary's voice; and going towards the door,—

"What, dear master (she called him so in derision), you there?" she said, with a slight foreign accent, which gave additional charm to her full and sarcastic voice.

"Oh, how beautiful you are!" murmured the notary.

"You think so?" said Cecily. "Doesn't my head-dress become me?"

"I think you handsomer every day."

"Only see how white my arm is."

"Monster, begone! Begone!" shouted Jacques Ferrand, furious.

Cecily burst into a loud fit of laughter.

"No, no, it is too much to suffer! Oh, if I were not afraid of death!" said the notary, gloomily. "But to die is to renounce you altogether, and you are so beautiful! I would rather, then, suffer—and look at you."

"Look at me? Why, that's what the wicket was made for; and so we can thus chat, like two friends in our solitude, which really is not irksome to me, you are such a good master! What a dangerous confession I make through the door!"

"Will you never open this door? You see how submissive I am; this evening I might have tried to enter into your chamber with you, but I did not do so."

"You are submissive for two reasons: in the first place, because you know that, having, from the necessity of my wandering life, always had the precaution to carry a stiletto, I can manage with a strong hand this inestimable jewel, whose tooth is sharper than a viper's; and you know, too, that, from the day in which I have to complain of you, I will quit this roof for ever, leaving you a thousand times more enamoured than ever,—since you have so greatly honoured your unworthy servant as to say that you are enamoured of her."

"My servant? It is I who am your slave,—your mocked, derided, despised slave!"

"That's true enough."

"And yet it does not move you?"

"It amuses me; the days, and especially the nights, are so long!"

"Accursed creature!"

"But, seriously, you look so perfectly wretched, your features have so sensibly altered, that I am quite flattered at it. It is a poor triumph, but you are the only one here."

"To hear that, and me consume in impotent rage!"

"Have you really any understanding? Why, I never said anything more tender."

"Jeer at me,—jeer at me!"

"I do not jeer. I never before saw a man of your age in love after your fashion; and, I must confess, a young and handsome man would be incapable of these outrageous passions. An Adonis admires himself as much as he admires us; he likes us, and we choose to notice him,—nothing more simple. He has a claim to our love, but is hardly grateful; but to show favour to a man like you, my master dear, would be to take him from earth to heaven, to fulfil his wildest dreams, his most insensate hopes. For if some being were to say to you, 'You love Cecily to distraction, if I chose she should be yours next minute,' you would suppose such a being endued with supernatural power, shouldn't you, master dear?"

"Yes! Ah, yes!"

"Well, if you could convince me more satisfactorily of your passion, I might, perchance, have the whimsical fancy to enact this supernatural part myself in your favour. Do you comprehend?"

"I comprehend that you are still fooling me,—that you are still pitiless."

"Perhaps,—for solitude creates so many singular fancies."

Until this moment Cecily's accent had been sarcastic, but she pronounced these last words with a serious, reflecting tone, and accompanied them with a look which made the notary start.

"Silence! Do not look at me thus,—you will drive me mad! I would rather you denied me,—at least, I could then hate you,—drive you from my house!" cried Jacques Ferrand, who again gave himself up to a vain hope. "Yes, for I should then hope nothing from you. But, misery! Misery! I know you well enough now to hope, in spite of myself, that one day I might, from your very hate or proud caprice, obtain what I shall never owe to your love. You bid me convince you of my passion,—do you not see how unhappy I am? I will do all I can to please you. You desire to, be concealed from all eyes, and from all eyes I conceal you, perchance at the risk of compromising myself most seriously; for, indeed, I know not who you are. I respect your secret,—I never speak to you of it. I have interrogated you as to your past life, and you have given me no answer."

"Well, then, I was very wrong. I'll give you a mark of blind confidence, oh, master, dear! And so, listen."

"Another bitter jest, no doubt."

"No, a serious tale. You ought, at least, to know the life of her to whom you afford such generous hospitality." Then Cecily continued, in a tone of hypocritical and lachrymose earnestness, "Daughter of a brave soldier, brother of my Aunt Pipelet, I received an education, beyond my condition. I was seduced, and then abandoned, by a rich young gentleman; then, to escape the anger of my father, whose notions of honour were most strict, I fled my native country." Then bursting into a loud fit of laughter, Cecily added, "Now I hope that's what you call a very pretty and particularly probable tale, for it has been very often told. Amuse your curiosity with that until you get hold of some other story more interesting."

"I was certain it was some cruel jest," said the notary, with concentrated rage; "nothing touches you,—nothing. What must I do? Tell me. I serve you like the lowest footboy, for you I neglect my dearest interests,—I no longer know what I do. I am a subject of astonishment and derision to my own clerks; my clients hesitate any longer to entrust me with their affairs; I have severed my connection with some religious persons whom I knew intimately. I dare not think of what the world will say of my change of demeanour and habits. But you do not know,—no, you do not know the fatal consequences my mad passion for you may entail on me. Yet I give you ample proof of my devotion. Will you have more? Speak! Is it gold you would have? They think me richer than I am, but I—"

"What could I do with your gold?" asked Cecily, interrupting the notary, and shrugging her shoulders; "living in this chamber, what is the use of gold? Your invention is at fault."

"It is no fault of mine if you are a prisoner. Is this chamber displeasing to you? Will you have one more splendid? Speak! Order!"

"Once more, what is the use? What is the use? Oh, if I might here expect a beloved one, full of the love he inspires and participates, I would have gold, silks, flowers, perfumes, all the wonders of luxury; nothing could be too sumptuous, too enchanting to enshrine my love," said Cecily, with an impassioned voice.

"Well, these wonders of luxury, say but a word, and—"

"What's the use? What's the use? Why make a frame for which there is no picture? And the adored one! Where is he,—where is he, master, dear?"

"True," exclaimed the notary, with bitterness, "I am old, I am ugly, I can only inspire disgust and aversion. She overwhelms me with contempt, jests at

me,—and yet I have not the resolution, the power to send her away. I have only the resolution to suffer!"

"Oh, silly old mourner! And what an absurd elderly gentleman, with his sufferings!" cried Cecily, in a contemptuous and sarcastic tone; "he only knows how to groan, to despair,—and yet he has been for ten days shut up alone with a young woman in a lone house."

"But this woman scorns me,—this woman is armed,—this woman is shut up!" groaned the notary, furiously.

"Well, conquer her scorn, make the dagger fall from her hands, compel her to open the door which separates her from yourself! But not by brute force, that would be useless."

"How, then?"

"By the strength of your passion."

"Passion! And can I inspire it?"

"Why, you are nothing but a lawyer, affecting piety,—I really pity you. Is it for me to teach you your part? You are ugly,—be terrible, and one may forget your ugliness. You are old,—be energetic, and one may forget your age. You are repulsive,—become menacing. Since you cannot be the noble steed that neighs proudly in the midst of his harem, do not become the stupid camel that bends the knee and offers his back; be the tiger! The old tiger, that roars in the midst of carnage, still excites admiration; his tigress responds to him from the deepest recesses of the desert."

At this language, which was not deficient in a sort of natural and hardy eloquence, Jacques Ferrand shuddered; struck by the expression, wild and almost fierce, which Cecily's features displayed, as, with her bosom palpitating, her nostrils open, her mouth defying, she fastened on him her large and brilliant black eyes. Never had she seemed to him more fascinating, or more resplendently beautiful than at this moment.

"Speak,—speak again!" he exclaimed, with excitement. "For now you speak in earnest. Oh, if I could—"

"One can do what one wishes," replied Cecily, sternly.

"But—"

"But I tell you, old as you are, if I were in your place I would undertake to engage the affections of a young and handsome woman, and once having achieved this result, what had been against me would turn to my advantage. What pride, what triumph to say to oneself, I have made my age and ugliness forgotten! The love that is shown me I do not owe to pity, but to my spirit, my courage, and my skill. Yes, and now if there were here some handsome young fellows, brilliant with grace and attractions, the lovely woman, whom I have subdued by proofs of a resistless and unbounded devotion, would not deign to cast a look at them. No; for she would know that these elegant effeminates would fear to compromise the tie of their cravat, or a curl of their hair, in obedience to her caprices; whilst if she cast her handkerchief in the midst of flames, on a signal from her her old tiger would rush into the furnace with a roar of ecstasy."

"Yes, I would do it! Try! Try!" exclaimed Jacques Ferrand, more and more excited.

Cecily continued drawing nearer to the aperture, and fixing on Jacques Ferrand a steadfast and penetrating look.

"For this woman would well know," continued the creole, "that she would have some exorbitant caprice to satisfy,—that these dandies would look at their money, if they had any, or, if they had not, at some other low consideration, whilst her old tiger—"

"Would consider nothing,—nothing, I tell you. Fortune,—honour,—he—he—would sacrifice all!"

"Really?" said Cecily, putting her lovely fingers on the bony fingers of Jacques Ferrand, whose clutched hands, passed through the small glass door, were clasping the top of the ledge. "Would not this woman be ardently loved?" added Cecily. "If she had an enemy, and with a gesture pointed him out to her old tiger, and said to him, Strike—"

"And he would strike!" exclaimed Jacques Ferrand, attempting to press Cecily's fingers with his parched lips.

"Really, the old tiger would strike?" said the creole, placing her hand gently on the hand of Jacques Ferrand.

"To possess you," cried the wretch, "I could commit a crime—"

"Ah, master," said Cecily, suddenly, and withdrawing her hand, "go—go,—in my turn I scarcely know you,—you do not seem to me so ugly as you did just now. But go—go!" and she left the aperture abruptly.

The artful creature gave to her gestures and these last words an appearance of truth so perfect, and a look of such surprise, as if angry and disappointed with herself for having for an instant only appeared to forget the ugliness of Jacques Ferrand, that he, transported by frenzied hope, cried, as he clung convulsively to the ledge of the aperture:

"Cecily, come back,—come back! Bid me do what you will, I will be your tiger."

"No, no, master!" said Cecily, still retreating. "And in order to forget you, I will sing a song of my country."

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

"No, no! Later, when I can without danger. But the light of this lamp hurts my eyes,—a soft languor overcomes my senses!" and Cecily extinguished the lamp, took down a guitar, and made up the fire, whose increased blaze then lighted up the whole apartment.

From the narrow window, where he stood motionless, such was the picture that Jacques Ferrand perceived. In the midst of the luminous circle formed by the flickering blaze on the fire Cecily, in a position full of softness and abandonnement, half reclining on a large sofa of garnet damask, held a guitar, on which she ran over several harmonious preludes. The fire-light threw its red tints on the creole, who appeared thus in strong relief. To complete the tableau, the reader must call to mind the mysterious and singular appearance of a room in which the fire from the grate struggles with the deep and large black shadows, which tremble on the ceiling and the walls. The storm without increased, and roared loudly.

Whilst she preludised on her guitar, Cecily fixed her eyes immovably on Jacques Ferrand, who, fascinated, could not take his look from her.

"Now, master mine," said the creole, "listen to a song of my country. We do not understand how to make verses, but have a simple recitative, without rhyme, and between each rest we improvise, as well as we can, a symphony appropriate to the idea of the couplet; it is very simple and pastoral, and I am sure, master, it will please you."

And Cecily began a kind of recitative, much more accentuated by the expression of the voice than the modulation of the music. Some soft and vibrating chords served as accompaniment. This was Cecily's song:

"Flowers—still flowers, everywhere. My lover is coming—my hope of happiness unnerves me. Let us subdue the glare of daylight, pleasure seeks the softer shade. My lover prefers my breath to the perfume of the sweetest flowers. The brightness of day will not affect his eyelids, for my kisses will keep them closed. Come—come—come—come, love! Come—come—come!"

These words, uttered with animation, as if the creole was addressing an unseen lover, were rendered by her the theme of a delicious melody; her charming fingers produced from the guitar, an instrument of no great power, vibrations full of harmony. The impassioned look of Cecily, her half closed, humid eyes fastened on Jacques Ferrand, were full of the expression of expectation. Words of love, delicious music, together conspired at the moment to bereave Jacques Ferrand of his reason; and, half frenzied, he exclaimed:

"Mercy, Cecily, mercy! You will drive me distracted! Oh, be silent, or I die! Oh, that I were mad!"

"Listen to the second couplet, master," said the creole, again touching the chords; and she thus continued her impassioned recitative:

"If my lover were here, and his hand touched my bare shoulder, I should tremble and die. If he were here, and his curly hair touched my cheek, my pale cheek would become purple—my pale cheek would be on fire. Soul of my Soul, if thou wert here, my parched lips would not utter a word. Life of my Life, if thou wert here, I should expiring ask thy pardon. 'Tis sweet to die for and with those we love. Angel, come—come to my heart—come—come—come!"

If the creole had rendered the first strophe with languid pleasure, she put in her last words all the enthusiasm of antique love; and as if the music had been powerless to express her intense passion, she threw her guitar from her, and, half rising and extending her arms towards the door, where Jacques Ferrand stood, she repeated, in a faltering, dying tone, "Oh, come—come—come!" It would be impossible to depict the electric look with which she accompanied these words. Jacques Ferrand uttered a terrible cry.

"Oh, death! Death to him whom you could thus love!" he cried, shaking the door in a burst of jealousy and furious rage.

Agile as a panther, Cecily was at the door with one bound; and, as if she with difficulty repressed her feigned transports, she said to Jacques Ferrand, in a low, concentrated, palpitating voice:

"Well, then, I will confess I am excited by my song. I did not mean to approach the door again, yet here I am, in spite of myself; for I hear still the words you said just now, 'If you bade me strike, I would strike.' You love me, then?"

"Will you have gold,—all my gold?"

"No, I have enough."

"Have you an enemy? I will kill him."

"I have no enemy."

"Will you be my wife? I'll marry you."

"I am married."

"What would you, then? Oh, what would you?"

"Prove to me that your passion for me is blind,—furious! And that you would sacrifice all to it."

"Ah!—yes—all. But how?"

"I do not know,—but a moment since your eyes fascinated me. If again you give me one of those marks of intense love, which excite the imagination of a woman to madness, I know not of what I should not be capable. Make haste, then, for I am capricious, and to-morrow, perhaps, all the impression will be effaced."

"But what proof can I give you at this moment?" cried the notary.

"You are but a fool, after all!" replied Cecily, retreating from the aperture with an air of disdain. "I was deceived,—I believed you capable of energetic devotion. Goodnight! It's a pity!"

"Cecily, do not leave me! Return! What can I do?"

"I was but too much disposed to listen to you; you will never have such another opportunity."

"But oh, tell me what you would have!" cried the notary, half mad.

"Eh! If you were as passionately in love as you say, you would find means to persuade me. Good night!"

"Cecily."

"I will shut the door, instead of opening it."

"Cecily,—listen! I will give you yet another proof of my devotion."

"What is this proof of your love?" said the creole, who, having approached the mantelpiece to resume her dagger, returned slowly towards the door, lighted by the flame of the hearth. Then, unobserved by the notary, she made sure of the action of an iron chain, which terminated in two small knobs, one of which was screwed into the door, and the other into the door-post.

"Listen!" said Jacques Ferrand, in a hoarse and broken voice, "listen! If I place my honour, my fortune, my life, at your mercy,—now, this very instant,—will you then believe I love you?"

"Your honour, your fortune, your life! I do not comprehend you."

"If I confide to you a secret which may bring me to the scaffold, will you then believe me?"

"You a criminal? You do but jest. What, then, of your austere life,—your piety,—your honesty?"

"All—all a lie!"

"You pass for a saint, and yet you boast of these iniquities! No, there is no man so craftily skilful, so fortunately bold, as thus to captivate the confidence and respect of men; that were, indeed, a fearful defiance cast in the teeth of society!"

"I am that man,—I have cast that sarcasm, that defiance, in the face of society!" exclaimed the monster, in a tone of ecstatic pride.

"Jacques! Jacques! Do not speak thus!" said Cecily, with a tone of emotion.
"You make me mad!"

"My head for your love,—will you have it so?"

"Ah, this, indeed, is love! Here, take my poniard,—you disarm me!"

Jacques Ferrand took, through the wicket, the dangerous weapon, with due precaution, and flung it from him to a distance in the corridor.

"Cecily, you believe me, then!" he exclaimed with transport.

"Do I believe you?" said the creole, energetically pressing her beautiful fingers on the clasped hands of Jacques Ferrand. "Oh, yes, I do! For now, again, you look as you did a short time since, when my very soul seemed fascinated by your gaze."

"Cecily, you will speak the words of, truth—and truth only—to me?"

"And can you doubt it for a moment? Ah, you will soon have ample proof of my sincerity. But what you are about to tell me is quite true,—is it not?"

"I repeat that you may believe each word I utter."

"So much the better, since you are enabled to prove your passion by the avowal of them."

"And if I tell you all?"

"Then will I, in return, withhold nothing from you; for if, indeed, you have this blind, this courageous confidence in me, Jacques, I will call no more for the ideal lover of my song, but you,—my hero, my tiger! to whom I will sing, 'Come—come—oh, come!'"

As Cecily uttered these words, with an air and voice of seductive tenderness, she drew so close to the wicket that Jacques Ferrand could feel the hot breath of the creole pass over his cheek, while her fresh, full lip lightly touched his coarse, vulgar hand. "Call me your tiger,—your slave,—what you will,—and if after that you but divulge what I entrust to you, my life will be the consequence. Yes, enchantress, a word from you, and I perish on a scaffold. My honour, reputation, nay, my very existence, are henceforward in your hands."

"Your honour?"

"Yes, even so. But listen. About ten years ago I was entrusted with the care of a child, and a sum of money for her use, amounting to two hundred thousand francs; well, I wronged the little creature by spreading a false report of her death, and then appropriated the money to my own purposes."

"It was boldly and cleverly done! Who would ever have believed you capable of such conduct?"

"Again. I had a cashier whom I detested, and I determined upon ruining him one way or other. Well, one evening, under some great emergency, he took from my cash-box a trifling amount of gold, which he paid back the next day; but to wreak my malice on the object of my dislike, I accused him of having stolen a large sum. Of course my testimony was believed, and the wretched man was thrown into prison. Now is not my honour—my very safety—at your will and pleasure? At your word both would be in peril."

"Then you love me, Jacques,—oh, truly, blindly love me! Since you thus surrender to me the most precious secrets of your heart, how plainly does it prove the empire I must have over you! Ah, believe me, I will not be niggardly in repaying you. Stoop that brow, from which have emanated so many infernal schemes, that I may press it with my lips."

"Were the scaffold erected for me," cried the excited notary, "did death stare me in the face, I would not now recall my words. But hearken to what I have still to confess. The child I formerly wronged and forsook has again crossed my path, her reappearance disquieted me, and I have had her murdered."

"Murdered! and by your orders? But how—in what manner?"

"A few days since; it occurred thus: Near the bridge of Asnières, at the Isle du Ravageur, a man named Martial, for a bribe, contrived to sink her in a boat made purposely with a false bottom. Are these particulars sufficient? Will you believe me now?"

"Oh, fiend! demon! You terrify while you fascinate me! In what consists your marvellous power and influence?"

"But listen further, for I have not yet finished my catalogue of crimes. Previously to that a man had entrusted me with one hundred thousand crowns. I contrived to waylay and blow out his brains, making it appear he had fallen by his own hand. Afterwards, when his sister claimed the money entrusted to my charge, I denied all knowledge of it. Now, then, I have proclaimed myself a malefactor, guilty of every crime. Will you not open your door, and admit a lover so ardent, so impatient as myself?"

"Jacques," exclaimed the creole, with much excitement, "I admire,—love,—nay, adore you!"

"Let a thousand deaths come!" cried the notary, in a state of enthusiastic delight impossible to describe, "I will brave them all! Oh, you are right! Were I ever so young, so handsome, or so seducing, I could not hope for joy such as now swells my heart. But delay not, charmer of my soul,—give me the key, or yourself undo the bolts which separate us. I can endure this torturing suspense no longer!"

The creole took from the lock, which she had carefully secured beforehand, the key so ardently prayed for, and, handing it to the notary through the aperture, said, in a languishing tone of utter abandonnement:

"Jacques, my senses seem forsaking me,—my brain is on fire,—I know not what I do or say."

"You are mine, then, at length, my adorable beauty!" cried he, with a wild shout of savage exultation, and hastily turning the key in the lock. But the firmly bolted door yielded not yet.

"Come, beloved of my heart!" murmured Cecily, in a languid voice; "bless me with your presence,—come!"

"The bolt! The bolt!" gasped out Jacques Ferrand, breathless with his exertions to force open the door.

"But what if you have been deceiving me?" cried the creole, as though a sudden thought had seized her; "if you have only invented the secrets with which you affect to entrust me, to mock at my credulity, to ensnare my confidence?"

The notary appeared thunderstruck with surprise at this fresh expression of doubt, at the very moment when he believed himself upon the point of attaining his wishes; to find a new obstacle arise when he considered success certain drove him almost furious. He rapidly thrust his hand into his breast, opened his waistcoat, impatiently snapped a steel chain, to which was suspended a small red morocco pocketbook, took it, and showing it to Cecily, through the aperture, cried, in a thick, palpitating voice:

"This book contains papers that would bring me to a scaffold; only undo the bolts which deny me entrance to your presence, and this book, with all its precious documents, is yours."

"Oh, then, let us seal the compact!" exclaimed Cecily, as, drawing back the bolt with as much noise as possible with one hand, with the other she seized the pocketbook.

But Jacques Ferrand permitted it not to leave his possession till he felt the door yield to his pressure. But though it partially gave way, it was but to leave an opening about half a foot wide, the solid chain which passed across it above the lock preventing any person's entering as completely as before. At this unexpected obstacle Jacques Ferrand precipitated himself against the door and shook it with desperate fury, while Cecily, with the rapidity of thought, took the pocket-book between her teeth, opened the window, threw a large cloak out into the yard below, and, light and agile as bold and daring, seized a knotted cord previously secured to the balcony, and glided from her chamber on the first floor to the court beneath, descending with the swiftness of an arrow shot from a bow. Then wrapping herself hastily in the mantle, she flew to the porter's lodge, opened the door, drew up the string, ran into the street, and sprang into a hackney-coach, which, ever since Cecily had been with Jacques Ferrand, came regularly every evening, in case of need, by Baron Graün's orders, and took up its station a short distance from the notary's house. Directly she had entered the vehicle it drove off at the topmost speed of the two strong, powerful horses that drew it, and had reached the Boulevards ere Jacques Ferrand had even discovered Cecily's flight.

We will now return to the disappointed wretch. From the situation of the door he was unable to perceive the window by which the creole had contrived to prepare and make good her flight; but concentrating all his powers, by a vigorous application of his brawny shoulders Jacques Ferrand succeeded in forcing out the chain which kept the door from opening.

With furious impatience he rushed into the chamber,—it was empty. The knotted cord was still suspended to the balcony of the window from which he leaned; and then, at the other extremity of the courtyard, he saw by means of the moon, which just then shone out from behind the stormy clouds which had hitherto obscured it, the dim outline of the outer gate swinging to and fro as though left open by some person having hastily passed through. Then did Jacques Ferrand divine the whole of the scheme so successfully laid to entrap him; but a glimmer of hope still remained. Determined and vigorous, he threw his leg over the balcony, let himself down in his turn by the cord, and hastily quitted the house.

The street was quite deserted,—not a creature was to be seen; and the only sound his ear could detect was the distant rumbling of the wheels of the vehicle that bore away the object of his search. The notary, who supposed it to be the carriage of some person whose business or pleasure took them late from home, paid no attention to this circumstance.

There was then no chance of finding Cecily, whose absence was the more disastrous, as she carried with her the positive proof of his crimes. As this fearful certainty came over him, he fell, struck with consternation, on a bench placed against his door, where he long remained, mute, motionless, and as though petrified with horror. His eyes fixed and haggard, his teeth clenched, and his lips covered with foam, tearing his breast, as though unconsciously, till the blood streamed from it, he felt his very brain dizzy with thought, till his ideas were lost in a fathomless abyss.

When he recovered from his stupor he arose and staggered onwards with an unsteady and faltering step, like a person just aroused from a state of complete intoxication. He violently shut the entrance door and returned to the courtyard. The rain had by this time ceased, but the wind still continued strong and gusty, and drove rapidly along the heavy gray clouds which veiled without entirely excluding the brightness of the moon, whose pale and sickly light shone on the house.

Somewhat calmed by the clear freshness of the night air, Jacques Ferrand, as though hoping to find relief from his internal agitation by the rapidity of his movements, plunged into the muddy paths of his garden, walking with quick, hurried steps, and from time to time pressing his clenched hands against his forehead. Heedless of the direction he proceeded in, he at length reached the termination of a walk, adjoining to which was a dilapidated greenhouse.

Suddenly he stumbled heavily against a mass of newly disturbed earth. Mechanically he stooped down to examine the nature of the impediment which presented itself; the deep hole which had been dug, and morsels of torn garments lying by, told him with awful certainty that he stood by the grave dug by poor Louise Morel to receive the remains of her dead infant,—her infant, which was also the child of the heartless, hardened wretch who now stood trembling and conscience-stricken beside this fearful memento of his sensuality and brutal persecution of a poor and helpless girl. And spite of his hardihood, his long course of sin and seared conscience, a deadly tremor shook his frame, he felt an instinctive persuasion that the hour of deep retribution was at hand.

Under other circumstances Jacques Ferrand would have trampled the humble grave beneath his feet without remorse or concern, but now, exhausted by the preceding scene, he felt his usual boldness forsake him, while fear and trembling came upon him. A cold sweat bedewed his brow, his tottering knees refused to support him, and he fell motionless beside the open grave.

CHAPTER V.

LA FORCE.

We may, perhaps, be accused, from the space accorded to the following scenes, of injuring the unity of our story by some episodical pictures; but it seems to us that, at this moment particularly, when important questions of punishment are engaging the attention of the legislature, that the interior of a prison—that frightful pandemonium, that gloomy thermometer of civilisation—will be an opportune study. In a word, the various physiognomies of prisoners of all classes, the relations of kin or affection, which still bind them to the world from which their gaol walls separate them, appear to us worthy of interest and attention. We hope, therefore, to be excused for having grouped about many prisoners known to the readers of this history other secondary characters, intended to put in relief certain ideas of criticism, and to complete the initiation of a prison life.

Let us enter La Force. There is nothing sombre or repulsive in the aspect of this house of incarceration in the Rue du Roi de Sicile, in the Marais. In the centre of one of the first courts there are some clumps of trees, thickened with shrubs, at the roots of which there are already, here and there, the green, precocious shoots of primroses and snowdrops. A raised ascent, surmounted by a porch covered with trellis-work, in which knotty stalks of the vine entwine, leads to one of the seven or eight walks assigned to the prisoners. The vast buildings which surround these courts very much resemble those of barrack or manufactory kept with exceeding care. There are lofty façades of white stone, pierced with high and large windows, which admit of the free circulation of pure air.

The stones and pavement of the enclosures are kept excessively clean. On the ground floor, the large apartments, warmed during the winter, are kept well ventilated during the summer, and are used during the day as places of conversation, work, or for the meals of the prisoners. The upper stories are used as immense dormitories, ten or twelve feet high, with dry and shining floors; two rows of iron beds are there arranged, and excellent bedding it is, consisting of a palliasse, a soft and thick mattress, a bolster, white linen sheets, and a warm woollen blanket. At the sight of these establishments, comprising all the requisites for comfort and health, we are much surprised, in spite of ourselves, being accustomed to suppose that prisons are miserable, dirty, unwholesome, and dark. This is a mistake.

It is such dogholes as that occupied by Morel the lapidary, and in which so many poor and honest workmen languish in exhaustion, compelled to give

up their truckle-bed to a sick wife, and to leave, with hopeless despair, their wretched, famishing children, shuddering with cold in their infected straw—that is miserable, dark, dirty, and pestilent! The same contrast holds with respect to the physiognomy of the inhabitants of these two abodes. Incessantly occupied with the wants of their family, which they can scarcely supply from day to day, seeing a destructive competition lessen their wages, the laborious artisans become dejected, dispirited; the hour of rest does not sound for them, and a kind of somnolent lassitude alone breaks in upon their overtasked labour. Then, on awakening from this painful lethargy, they find themselves face to face with the same overwhelming thoughts of the present, and the same uneasiness for the future.

But the prisoner, indifferent to the past, happy with the life he leads, certain of the future (for he can assure it by an offence or a crime), regretting his liberty, doubtless, but finding much compensation in the actual enjoyment, certain of taking with him when he quits prison a considerable sum of money, gained by easy and moderate labour, esteemed, or rather dreaded, by his companions, in proportion to his depravity and perversity, the prisoner, on the contrary, will always be gay and careless.

Again, we ask, what does he want? Does he not find in prison good shelter, good bed, good food, high wages, easy work, and, especially, society at his choice,—a society, we repeat, which measures his consideration by the magnitude of his crimes? A hardened convict knows neither misery, hunger, nor cold. What is to him the horror he inspires honest persons withal? He does not see, does not know them. His crimes made his glory, his influence, his strength, with the ruffians in the midst of whom he will henceforward pass his life. Why should he fear shame? Instead of the serious and charitable remonstrances which might compel him to blush for and repent the past, he hears the ferocious applauses which encourage him to theft and murder. Scarcely imprisoned, he plans fresh crimes. What can be more logical? If discovered, and at once apprehended, he will find the repose, the bodily supplies of a prison, and his joyous and daring associates of crime and debauchery. If his experience in crimes be less than that of others, does he for that evince the less remorse? It follows that he is exposed to brutal scoffing, infernal taunts, and horrible threats. And—a thing so rare that it has become the exception to the rule—if the prisoner leaves this fearful pandemonium with the firm resolution to return to the paths of honesty by excessive labour, courage, patience, and honesty, and has been able to conceal the infamy of his past career, the meeting with one of his old comrades in gaol is sufficient to overturn this good intention for the restoration of his character, so painfully struggled for.

And in this way: A hardened, discharged convict proposes a job to a repentant comrade; the latter, in spite of bitter menaces, refuses this criminal association; forthwith an anonymous information reveals the life of the unfortunate fellow who was desirous, at every sacrifice, of concealing and expiating a first fault by honourable behaviour. Then, exposed to the contempt, or, at least, the distrust, of those whose good-will he had acquired by dint of industry and probity, this man, reduced to distress, and urged by want, yielding at length to incessant temptations, although nearly restored to society, will again fall, and for ever, into the depths of that abyss whence he had escaped with such difficulty.

In the following scenes we shall endeavour to demonstrate the monstrous and inevitable consequences of confinement in masses. After ages of barbarous experiments and pernicious hesitations, it seemed suddenly understood how irrational it is to plunge into an atmosphere of deepest vice persons whom a pure and salubrious air could alone save. How many centuries to discover that, in placing in dense contact diseased beings, we redouble the intensity of their malignity, which is thus rendered incurable! How many centuries to discover that there is, in a word, but one remedy for this overwhelming leprosy which threatens society,—isolation!

We should esteem ourselves happy if our feeble voice could be, if not relied upon, at least spread amongst all those which, more imposing, more eloquent than our own, demand with such just and impatient urgency the entire and unqualified application of the cell system.

One day, perchance, society will know that wickedness is an accidental, not an organic malady; that crimes are almost always the results of perverted instincts, impulses, still good in their essence, but falsified, rendered evil, by ignorance, egotism, or the carelessness of governments; and that the health of the soul, like that of the body, is unquestionably kept subordinate to the laws of a healthy and preserving system of control.

God bestows on all passions that strive for predominance, strong appetites, the desire to be at ease, and it is for society to balance and satisfy these wants. The man who only participates in strength, good-will, and health has a right—a sovereign right—to have his labour justly remunerated, in a way that shall assure to him not the superfluities, but the necessities of life,—the means of continuing healthy and strong, active and industrious, and, consequently, honest and good, because his condition is rendered happy. The gloomy regions of misery and ignorance are peopled with morbid beings with withered hearts. Purify these moral sewers, spread instruction, the inducement to labour, fair wages, just rewards, and then these unhealthy

faces, these perishing frames, will be restored to virtue, which is the health, the life of the soul.

Let us now introduce the reader into the room in the prison of La Force in which the prisoners are allowed to see persons who visit them. It is a dark place, partitioned in its length into two equal parts, by a narrow grated division. One of these divisions communicates with the interior of the prison, and is the place for the prisoners. The other communicates with the turnkey's lobby, and is devoted to the persons admitted to visit the prisoners. These interviews and conversations take place through the double iron grating of the reception room, in presence of the turnkey, who remains in the interior, at the extremity of the passage.

The appearance of the prisoners, who were in this room on the day in question, offered great contrasts. Some were clad in wretched attire, others seemed to belong to the working class, and some to the wealthy citizen body. The same contrasts were remarkable amongst the visitors to the prisoners, who were nearly all women. The prisoners generally appear less downcast than the visitors, for, strange and sad to say, yet proved by experience, there is but little sorrow or shame left after the experience of three or four days spent in prison in society. Those who most dreaded this hideous community habituate themselves to it quickly; the contagion gains upon them. Surrounded by degraded beings, hearing only the language of infamy, a kind of ferocious rivalry excites them; and, either to emulate their companions in the struggle for brutalism, or to make themselves giddy by the usual drunkenness, the newcomers almost invariably display as much depravity and recklessness as the habitués of the prison.

Let us return to the reception-room. Notwithstanding the noisy hum of a great many conversations carried on in undertones on each side of the divisions, prisoners and visitors, after some experience, are able to converse with each other without being for a moment disturbed by, or attentive to, the conversation of their neighbours, which creates a kind of secrecy in the midst of this noisy interchange of words, each being compelled to hear the individual who addressed him, but not to hear a word of what was said around him.

Amongst the prisoners called into the reception-room by visitors, the one the farthest off from the turnkey was Nicholas Martial. To the extreme depression with which he was seized on his apprehension, had succeeded the most brazen assurance. Already the detestable and contagious influence of a prison in common bore its fruits. No doubt, had he been at once conveyed to a solitary cell, this wretch, still under the influence of his first

terror, and alone with the thought of his crimes, fearful of impending punishment, might have experienced, if not repentance, at least that wholesome dread from which nothing would have distracted him.

And who knows what incessant, compulsory meditation may produce on a guilty mind, reflecting on the crimes committed and the punishment that is to follow? Far from this, thrown into the midst of a horde of bandits, in whose eyes the least sign of repentance is cowardice,—or, rather, treason,—which they make him dearly expiate; for, in their savage obduracy, their senseless bravado, they consider every man as a spy on them, who, sad and disconsolate, regretting his fault, does not join in their audacious recklessness, and trembles at their contact. Thrown into the midst of these miscreants, Nicholas Martial, who had for a long time, by report, known the prison manners, overcame his weakness, and wished to appear worthy of a name already celebrated in the annals of robbery and murder.

Several old offenders had known his father, who had been executed, and others his brother, who was at the galleys; he was received and instantly patronised by these veterans in crime with savage interest. This fraternal reception between murderer and murderer elevated the widow's son; the praises bestowed on the hereditary infamy of his family intoxicated him. Soon forgetting, in this horrible mood, the future that threatened him, he only remembered his past crimes to glory in them, and elevate himself still higher in the eyes of his companions. The expression of Nicholas's physiognomy was then as insolent as that of his visitor was disturbed and alarmed.

This visitor was Daddy Micou, the receiver and lodging-house keeper in the Passage de la Brasserie, into whose abode Madame de Fermont and her daughter, victims of Jacques Ferrand's cupidity, had been compelled to retreat. Father Micou knew the penalties to which he was amenable for having many a time and oft obtained at low prices the fruits of the robberies of Nicholas and many others of his stamp. The widow's son being apprehended, the receiver felt he was almost at the mercy of the ruffian, who might impeach him as a regular buyer. Although this accusation could not be supported by flagrant proofs, still it was not the less dangerous, the less dreaded by Daddy Micou, and he had thus instantly obeyed the orders which Nicholas had transmitted to him by a discharged prisoner.

"Ah, ah! how goes it, Daddy Micou?" said the brigand.

"At your service, my good fellow," replied the receiver, eagerly. "As soon as I saw the person you sent to me, I directly—"

"Oh, you are becoming ceremonious, daddy!" said Nicholas, with impatience. "Why is this, because I'm in trouble?"

"No, no, my lad,—no, no!" replied the receiver, who was not anxious to seem on terms of familiarity with this ruffian.

"Come, come, be as familiar as usual, or I shall think you have forgotten our intimacy, and that would break my heart."

"Well, well," said Micou, with a groan, "I directly went about your little commissions."

"That's all right, daddy. I knew well enough that you would not forget your friends. And my tobacco?"

"I have left two pounds at the lodge, my boy."

"Is it good?"

"Cannot be better."

"And the knuckle of ham?"

"Left at the lodge, also, with a four-pound white loaf; and I have added something that will surprise you, in the shape of a dozen hard eggs and a Dutch cheese."

"This is what I call doing the thing like a friend! And the wine?"

"Six bottles of capital. But, you know, you will only have one bottle a day."

"Well, that can't be helped, and so one must make up one's mind to it."

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

"Certain, and I shall be so again, and for ever, Father Micou; for the ham, the cheese, the eggs, and the wine will only last just so long as it takes to swallow them; but, as a friend of mine remarked, when they are gone there'll be more where they came from, thanks to you, who will always do the handsome thing so long as I do the same."

"What! You expect—"

"That in two or three days you will renew my little stock, daddy dear."

"Devil burn me if I do! It's all very good for once—"

"For once! What d'ye mean, man? Why, ham and wine are always good, you know that very well."

"Certainly, but I have not undertaken to feed you in delicacies."

"Oh, Daddy Micou, that's shabby—indecent. What, refuse me ham! One who has so often brought you 'double tresse' (stolen lead)!"

"Hush, hush! You mischievous fellow," cried the alarmed receiver.

"No, I'll put the question to the big-wig (the judge). I'll say to him, only imagine now, sir, that Daddy Micou—"

"Hush, hush!" exclaimed the receiver, seeing with equal alarm and anger that Nicholas was much disposed to abuse the influence which their guilty companionship gave him. "I'll agree—I will renew your provision when it is consumed."

"That's all right, and what's fair. And you mustn't forget, too, to send some coffee to mother and Calabash, who are at St. Lazare; they like a cup in a morning, and they'll miss it."

"What more? Would you ruin me, you extortionate fellow?"

"Oh, just as you like, Daddy Micou,—don't say another word, but I shall ask the big-wig—"

"Well, then, they shall have the coffee," said the receiver, interrupting him. "But devil take you! Accursed be the day when I first knew you!"

"Old boy, I say quite the contrary. I am delighted to have your valuable acquaintance at this particular moment. I revere you as a nursing father."

"I hope you have nothing more to ask of me?" said Micou, with bitterness.

"Yes; say to my mother and sister that, if I was frightened when they apprehended me, I am no longer so, but as determined as they two are."

"I'll say so. Anything more?"

"Stay another moment or two. I forgot to ask you for a couple of pairs of warm woollen stockings,—you'd be sorry if I caught cold, shouldn't you?"

"I should be glad if you were dead."

"Thank ye, daddy, thank ye! But that pleasure is yet to come, and to-day I'm alive and kicking, and inclined to take things easy. If they serve me as they did my father, at least I shall have enjoyed my life while it lasted."

"It's a nice life, yours is!"

"Superb! Since I have been here I've enjoyed myself like a king. If we had lamps and fireworks, they would have lighted them up, and fired them off in my honour, when they knew I was the son of the famous Martial who was guillotined."

"How affecting! What a glorious parentage!"

"Why, d'ye see, there are many dukes and marquises. Why, then, shouldn't we have our nobility, too?—such as us!" said the ruffian, with bitter irony.

"To be sure, and Charlot (the headsman) will give you your letters of nobility on the Place du Palais."

"You may be sure it won't be the gaol chaplain. But in prison we should have the nobility of top-sawyers (noted robbers) to be thought much of; if not, you are looked upon as nobody at all. You should only see how they behave to those who are not tip-tops and give themselves airs. Now there's in here a chap called Germain, a young fellow, who appears disgusted with us, and seems to despise us all. Let him take care of his hide! He's a sulky hound, and they say he is a 'nose' (a spy); if he is, they'll screw his nose around, just by way of warning."

"Germain? A young man called Germain?"

"Yes; d'ye know him? Is he one of us? If so, in spite of his looks, we—"

"I don't know him; but if he is the Germain I have heard speak of, his affair is settled."

"How?"

"Why, he has only just escaped from a plot which Velu and the Stout-Cripple laid for him lately."

"Why?"

"I don't know, but they said that in the country somewhere he had tricked one of their pals."

"I was sure of it, Germain is a spy. Well, we'll spy him! I'll go and tell our friends; that'll set them sharper against him. By the way, how does Gros-Boiteux get on with your lodgers?"

"Thank heaven, I have got rid of him,—a blackguard! You'll see him here to-day or to-morrow."

"All right; how we shall laugh! He's a boy who is never taken aback!"

"It's because I knew that he would find this Germain here that I said his affair was settled,—if it's the same chap."

"Why have they got hold of the Gros-Boiteux?"

"For a robbery committed with a discharged convict, who wanted to turn honest and work. Well, you see, the Gros-Boiteux soon got him in a string; he is such a vicious devil, the Boiteux! I am certain it was he who broke open the trunk of the two women who live in the little room on my fourth floor."

"What women?—ah, yes, two women! You was smitten by the young 'un, I remember, you old vagabond, because you thought her so nice."

"They'll not smite anybody any more, for by this time the mother must be dead, and the daughter is scarcely alive. I shall lose a fortnight's rent, and I sha'n't give a sou to pay for their burial. I've had so many losses, without talking of the little matters you entreat me to give you and your family, that my affairs are quite disarranged. I've had the luck of it this year."

"Pooh, pooh! You are always complaining, old gentleman; you who are as rich as Cræsus. But don't let me detain you."

"You're polite."

"You'll call and tell me how mother and Calabash are when you bring me my other provisions?"

"Yes, if I must."

"Ah, I'd nearly forgot; whilst you're about it, bring me a new cap, of plaid velvet, with an acorn at top; mine's regularly done for."

"Come, now, you're laughing at me."

"No, daddy, by no means; I want a plaid velvet cap. That's my wish."

"Then you're resolved to make a beggar of me?"

"Come, I say, Micou, don't get out of temper about it. It's only yes or no,—I do not force you, but—you understand?"

The receiver, reflecting that he was at the mercy of Nicholas, rose, fearing that if he prolonged his visit he would be exposed to fresh demands.

"You shall have your cap," he replied; "but mind, if you ask me for anything more, I will give you nothing,—let what will occur, you'll suffer as much as I shall."

"Make your mind easy, I'll not make you sing (force you to give money under the threat of certain disclosures) more than is sufficient for you not to lose your voice; for that would be a pity, you sing so well."

The receiver went away, shrugging his shoulders with rage, and the turnkey conducted Nicholas back to the interior of the prison.

At the moment when Micou quitted the reception-room, Rigolette entered it. The turnkey, a man about forty years of age, an old soldier, with stern and marked features, was dressed in a round jacket, with a blue cap and trousers; two silver stars were embroidered on the collar and facings of his jacket. At the sight of the grisette the face of this man brightened up, and assumed an expression of benevolence. He had always been struck by the grace, gentleness, and touching kindness with which Rigolette consoled Germain when she came there to see him. Germain was, besides, not an ordinary prisoner; his reserve, his peaceable demeanour, and his melancholy inspired the persons about the prison with deep interest,—an interest which they did not manifest, for fear of exposing him to the ill-treatment of his brutal companions, who, as we have said, looked upon him with mistrusting hate. It was raining in torrents, but, thanks to her goloshes and umbrella, Rigolette had boldly faced the wind and rain.

"What a shocking day, my poor girl!" said the turnkey, kindly. "It requires a good deal of courage to leave home such weather as this."

"When we think as we come along of the pleasure we shall give a poor prisoner, we don't think much about the weather, sir."

"I need not ask you whom you have come to see?"

"Certainly not. And how is poor Germain?"

"Why, my dear, I have seen many prisoners; they have been sad for a day,—two days, perhaps,—and then gradually got into the same way as the others; and those who were most out of sorts at first often ended by becoming the merriest of all. But M. Germain, is not one of these, he has still that melancholy air."

"How sorry I am to hear it!"

"When I'm on duty in the yards, I look at him from the corner of my eye, he is always alone. I have already told you that you should advise him not to do so, but to resolve on conversing with the others, or it will end with his becoming suspected and ill-used by them. We keep a close look-out, but a mischievous blow is soon given."

"Oh, sir, is there any danger threatens him?" cried Rigolette.

"Not precisely, but these ruffians see that he is not one of them, and hate him because he has an honest and proud look."

"Yet I advised him to do what you told me, sir, and make up his mind to talk to some of the least wicked! But he cannot help it, he cannot get over his repugnance."

"He is wrong—wrong! A struggle is so soon begun."

"Can't he, then, be separated from the others?"

"For the last two or three days, since I have seen their ill-will towards him, I advised him to place himself what we call *à la pistole*,—that is, in a room."

"Well?"

"I had not thought of one thing. A whole row of cells is undergoing repair, and the others are full."

"But these wretches may kill him!" said Rigolette, her eyes filling with tears. "And if, by chance, he had any protectors, what could they do for him, sir?"

"Nothing, but enable him to obtain what these debtors who can pay for it obtain,—a chamber, *à la pistole*."

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

"Oh, don't be downhearted, we will look well to him. But I repeat, my dear, do advise him to familiarise himself a little,—the first step is half the battle."

"I will advise him as strongly as I can, sir. But for a good and honest heart it is very hard, you know, to familiarise itself with such people."

"Of two evils we must choose the least. Now I will fetch M. Germain. But now I think of it," said the turnkey, "there are only two visitors; wait until they are gone, there'll not be any more to-day, for it is two o'clock. I will then fetch M. Germain, and you can talk at your ease. I can then, when you are alone, let him come into the passage, so that you will be separated by one grating instead of two. Won't that be better?"

"Ah, sir, how kind you are, and how much I thank you!"

"Hush! Do not let any one hear you, or they may be jealous. Sit down there at the end of the bench, and when this man and woman have gone, I will tell M. Germain."

The turnkey returned to his post inside the grating, and Rigolette sat down very melancholy at the end of the visitors' bench.

Whilst the grisette is awaiting the coming of Germain, we will allow the reader to overhear the conversation of the prisoners who remained there after the departure of Nicholas Martial.

CHAPTER VI.

PIQUE-VINAIGRE.

The prisoner who was beside Barbillon was a man about forty-five years of age, thin, mean-looking, with a keen, intelligent, jovial, merry face. He had an enormous mouth, almost entirely toothless; and, when he spoke, he worked it from side to side, very much after the style of those orators who are accustomed to harangue from booths at fairs. His nose was flat, his head disproportionately large and nearly bald; he wore an old gray knit worsted waistcoat, a pair of trousers of indescribable colour, torn and patched in a thousand places; his feet, half wrapped up in pieces of old linen, were thrust into wooden shoes.

This man, Fortuné Gobert, called Pique-Vinaigre, formerly a juggler, a convict freed after condemnation for the crime of uttering false money, was charged with having broken from gaol and committed violent burglary. Having been confined but very few days in La Force, Pique-Vinaigre already filled the office of story-teller, to the general satisfaction of his fellow prisoners. Now story-tellers have become very rare, but formerly each ward had usually, for a slight general subscription, its official story-teller, who, by his narrations, made the long winter evenings appear less tedious when the prisoners went to bed at sunset.

If it be curious to note the desire for these fictions which these outcasts display, it is yet a more singular thing to reflect upon the hearing of these recitals. Men corrupted to the very marrow, thieves, and murderers, prefer especially the histories in which are expressed generous, heroic sentiments, recitals in which weakness and goodness are avenged in fierce retribution. It is the same thing with women of lost reputation; they are singularly fond of simple, touching, and sentimental details, and almost invariably refuse to read obscene books.

Pique-Vinaigre excelled in that kind of heroic tales in which weakness, after a thousand trials, concludes by triumphing over persecution. He possessed, besides, a deep fund of satire, which had procured for him his name, his repartees being very frequently ironical or merry. He had just entered the reception-room. Opposite to him, on the other side of the grating, was a female of about thirty-five years of age, of pale, mild, and interesting countenance, meanly but cleanly clad. She was weeping bitterly, and held a handkerchief to her eyes. Pique-Vinaigre looked at her with a mixture of impatience and affection.

"Come, Jeanne," he said, "do not play the child. It is sixteen years since we met, and to keep your handkerchief up to your eyes is not the way for us to know each other again."

"Brother—my poor, dear Fortuné! I am choking—I cannot speak."

"Ah, nonsense! What ails you?"

His sister repressed her sobs, wiped her eyes, and, looking at him with astonishment, replied, "What ails me? What, when I find you again in prison, where you have already been fifteen years!"

"True. It is six months to-day since I left Melun; and I didn't call upon you in Paris because the capital was forbidden to me."

"Why did you leave Beaugency when you were under surveillance?"

"In the first place, Jeanne, since the gratings are between us, you must fancy I have embraced you, squeezed you in my arms, as a man ought to do who has not seen his sister for an eternity. Now let us talk. A prisoner at Melun, who is called the Gros-Boiteux, told me that there was at Beaugency an old convict of his acquaintance, who employed the freed prisoners in a factory of white lead. Those who work at it in a month or two catch the lead-colic. One in three of those attacked die. It is true that others die also; but they take their time about it and get on, sometimes as long as a year or even eighteen months. Then the trade is better paid than most others, and there are fellows who hold out at it for two or three years. But they are elders—patriarchs—of the white-leaders. They die, it is true, but that is all."

"And why did you choose a trade so dangerous that they die at it?"

"What could I do? When I went to Melun for that well-known job of the forged coin I was a thimble-rigger. As in gaol there was no scope for my line of business, and I am not stronger than a good stout flea, they put me to making children's toys. There was a tradesman in Paris who found it very advantageous to have his wooden trumpets and swords made by the prisoners. Why, I must have made half the wooden swords used by the children of Paris; and I was great in the trumpet line. Rattles, too,—why, with two of my manufacture I could have set on edge the teeth of a whole battalion! Well, when my time was up I was a first-rate maker of penny trumpets, and my only resource was making child's playthings. Now, supposing that a whole town, young and old, were inclined to play tur-tu-tu on my trumpets, I should still have had a good deal of trouble to earn a

livelihood; and then I could not have induced a whole population to continue playing the trumpet from morning to night."

"You are still such a jester!"

"Better joke than cry. Well, then, seeing that at forty leagues from Paris my trade of juggler was no more useful to me than my trumpets, I requested the surveillance at Beaugency, intending to become a white-leader. It is a trade that gives you indigestion enough to send you mad; but until one bursts one lives, and that is always something, and it was better than turning thief. I am neither brave nor strong enough to steal, and it was from pure accident that I did the thing I have just mentioned to you."

"And yet you had the courage to take up with a deadly trade! Come now, Fortuné, you wish to make yourself out worse than you are."

"I thought that the malady would have so little to take hold of in me that it would go elsewhere, and that I should become one of the patriarchal white-leaders. Well, when I came out of prison, I found my earnings had considerably increased by telling stories."

"So you told us. You remember how it amused poor old mother?"

"Dear soul! She never suspected that I was at Melun?"

"Never. She thought you had gone abroad."

"Why, my girl, my follies were my father's fault, who dressed me up as a clown to help in his mountebank displays, to swallow tow and spit fire, which did not allow me spare time to form acquaintance with the sons of the peers of France; and so I fell into bad company. But to return to Beaugency. When once I had left Melun, like the rest, I thought I must see some fun; if not, what was the use of my money? Well, I reached Beaugency, with scarcely a sou in my pocket. I asked for Velu, the friend of Gros-Boiteux, the head of the manufactory. Your servant! There was no longer any white-lead factory; it had killed eleven persons in the year, and the old convict had shut up shop. So here I was in the middle of this city, with my talent for trumpet-making as my only means of existence, and my discharge from prison as my only certificate of recommendation. I did my best to procure work, but in vain. One called me a thief, another a beggar, a third said I had escaped from gaol; all turned their backs upon me. So I had nothing to do but die of hunger in a city which I was not to leave for five years. Seeing this, I broke my ban, and came to Paris to utilise my talents. As I had not the means to travel in a coach and four, I came begging and tramping all the way,

avoiding the gens-d'armes as I would a mad dog. I had luck, and reached Auteuil without accident. I was very tired, hungry as a wolf, and dressed, as you may see, not in the height of the fashion." And Pique-Vinaigre glanced comically at his rags. "I had not a sou, and was liable to be taken up as a vagabond. Well, ma foi! an occasion presented itself; the devil tempted me, and, in spite of my cowardice—"

"Enough, brother,—enough!" said his sister, fearing lest the turnkey might hear his dangerous confession.

"Are you afraid they listen?" he said. "Be tranquil; I have nothing to conceal. I was taken in the act."

"Alas!" said Jeanne, weeping bitterly; "how calmly you say this!"

"If I spoke warmly what should I gain by it? Come, listen to reason, Jeanne. Must I have to console you?"

Jeanne wiped her eyes and sighed.

"Well, to go back to my affair," continued Pique-Vinaigre. "I had nearly reached Auteuil, in the dusk. I could not go any farther, and I did not wish to enter Paris but at night; so I sat down behind a hedge to rest myself, and reflect on my plan of campaign. My reflections sent me to sleep, and when the sound of voices awoke me it was night. I listened. It was a man and woman, who were talking as they went along on the other side of the hedge. The man said to the woman, 'Who do you think would come and rob us? Haven't we left the house alone a hundred times?' 'Yes,' replied the woman; 'but then we hadn't a hundred francs in the drawers.' 'Who knows that, you fool?' says the husband. 'You are right,' replies the wife; and on they went. Ma foi! the occasion seemed to me too favourable to lose, and there was no danger. I waited until they got a little farther on, and then came from behind the hedge, and, looking twenty paces behind me, I saw a small cottage, which I was sure must be the house with the hundred francs, as it was the only habitation in sight. Auteuil was about five hundred yards off. I said to myself, 'Courage, old boy,—there is no one. Then it is night; if there is no watch-dog (you know I was always afraid of dogs), why, the job is as good as done.' Luckily there was no dog. To make sure I knocked at the door. Nothing. This encouraged me. The shutters were closed on the ground floor, but I put my stick between and forced them. I got into the window, and in the room the fire was still alight. So I saw the drawers, but no key. With the tongs I forced the lock, and under a heap of linen I found the prize, wrapped in an old woollen stocking. I did not think of taking anything else, but

jumping out of the window, I alighted on the back of the garde-champêtre, who was returning home."

"What a misfortune!"

"The moon had risen. He saw me jump from the window and seized me. He was a fellow who could have eaten a dozen such as I was. Too great a coward to resist, I surrendered quietly. I had the stocking still in my hand, and he heard the money chink, took it, put it in his game bag, and made me accompany him to Auteuil. We reached the mayor's with a crowd of blackguards and gens-d'armes. The owners of the cottage were fetched, and they made their depositions. There was no means of denial; so I confessed everything and signed the depositions, and they put on me handcuffs, and I was brought here."

"In prison again, and for a long time, perhaps?"

"Listen to me, Jeanne, for I will not deceive you. I may as well tell you at once; for it is no longer an affair of prison."

"Why not?"

"Why, the relapse, the breaking in and entry into a dwelling-house at night, the lawyer told me, is a complete affair, and I shall have fifteen or twenty years at the galleys, and the public exposure into the bargain."

"The galleys,—and you so weak? Why, you'll die!"

"And suppose I had been with the white-lead party?"

"But the galleys,—the galleys!"

"It is a prison in the open air, with a red shirt instead of a brown one; and then I have always had a curiosity to see the sea!"

"But the public exposure! To be subject to the contempt of all the world! Oh, my poor brother!" And the poor woman wept bitterly.

"Come, come, Jeanne, be composed; it is an uncomfortable quarter of an hour to pass. But you know I am used to see crowds. When I played with my cups and balls, I always had a crowd around me; so I'll fancy I am thimble-rigging, and if it has too much effect on me I'll close my eyes, and that will seem as if no one was looking at me."

Speaking with this derision, the unhappy man affected this insensibility, in order to console his sister. For a man accustomed to the manners of prisons, and in whom all shame is utterly dead, the *bagne* (galleys) is, in fact, only a change of shirt, as Pique-Vinaigre said, with frightful truth. Many prisoners in the central prisons even prefer the *bagne*, because of the riotous life they lead, often committing attempts at murder in order to be sent to Brest or Toulon.

"Twenty years at the galleys!" repeated Pique-Vinaigre's poor sister.

"Take comfort, Jeanne, they will only pay me as I deserve. I am too weak to be put to hard labour, and if there is no manufactory of wooden trumpets and swords as at Melun, why, I shall be set to some easy work; they will employ me at the infirmary. I am not a troublesome fellow, but a good, easy chap; and I shall tell my stories as I do here, and shall be esteemed by my chiefs, and adored by my comrades, and I will send you carved cocoanuts and straw boxes for my nephews and nieces."

"If you had only written to me that you were coming to Paris, I would have tried to conceal you until you found work."

"Pardieu! I meant to have gone to you, but I preferred arriving with my hands full,—for I see you do not ride in your carriage. Well, and your children,—and your husband?"

"Has left me these three years, after having sold off every stick, not leaving me or the children one single thing but a straw palliasse."

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

"Why, I have suffered very much. I worked at my business as a trimming-maker as well as I could, the neighbours helping me a little, watching my children when I went out. And then I, who haven't much luck, had a bit of good fortune once in my life; but it was no avail, because of my husband."

"How was that?"

"My employer had spoken of my trouble to one of his customers, telling him how my husband had left me with nothing, after having sold all our furniture, and that, in spite of this, I was working as hard as I could to bring up my children. One day when I returned what did I find? Why, my room fitted up again, a good bed, furniture, and linen; it was the kind customer of my employer."

"Poor sister! Why didn't you write and tell me of your misfortune; and then, instead of spending my money, I would have sent you some."

"What! I free to ask of you a prisoner?"

"Why not? I was fed, clothed, lodged, at the cost of government; all I gained was so much profit. But knowing my brother-in-law was a good workman, and you a good manager and worker, I was quite easy, and melted my 'tin' with my eyes shut, and my mouth open."

"My husband was a good workman, that is true; but he became dissipated. However, thanks to this unexpected aid, I took courage again. My eldest girl began to earn a little, and we were happy, except when we remembered that you were at Melun. Work went well with us, and my children were well clad, and wanted for nothing hardly, and that gave me good heart; and I had actually saved thirty-three francs, when suddenly my husband returned. I had not seen him for a year; and when he found me so well off and tidily dressed, he stood for nothing, but took my money and lived with us without working, getting drunk every day, and beating me when I complained. And that is not all. He gave up a small room adjoining ours to a woman with whom he lived openly as his mistress; so I had that indignity to endure for the second time. He soon began to make away with the few poor things I had managed to get together; so, foreseeing what would be the end of such conduct, I went to a lawyer who lived in the same house, and begged him to advise me how to act to prevent my husband from taking the very bed from me and my children."

"Why, there needed no lawyer, I should think, to tell you that the only thing you had to do was to turn your husband out of your doors."

"Ah, but I could not,—the law gave me no power to do so. The lawyer told me that, as 'head of the family,' my husband could take up his abode wherever I dwelt, and was not compelled to labour unless he liked; that it was very hard for me to have to maintain him, and endure his ill-treatment into the bargain, but that he recommended me to submit to it, though certainly the circumstance of his having a mistress living under the same roof entitled me to demand separation from 'bed and board,' as he called it; and further, that as I would bring witnesses to prove his having repeatedly struck me, and otherwise ill-treated me, I could institute a suit against him, but that it would cost me, at the very least, from four to five hundred francs to obtain a perfect separation from him. Only think what a sum,—as much as I should earn in a year! And who would lend me so much money, which would have

to be repaid heaven knows how? For four or five hundred francs is a perfect fortune."

"Yet there is one very simple means of amassing the money," replied Pique-Vinaigre, bitterly; "that of living upon air during the twelve months it would take you to earn that sum, working all the same, but denying yourself even the necessaries of life; and I am only surprised the lawyer did not advise you to starve yourself and your children, or any other kind-hearted expediency."

"You always make a jest of everything, brother!"

"This time, however, I am not in a jesting humour. It is scandalous that the law should be so expensive to poor creatures such as we. Now, just look at yourself,—a good and affectionate mother, striving by every means in your power to bring up your children honestly and creditably; your husband, a bad, lazy fellow, who, not content with stripping you of all you earn, that he may spend his time in drinking and all sorts of loose pleasures, beats and ill-uses you into the bargain. Well, you apply to the justice of your country for protection for yourself and your children. 'Ah,' say the lawyers, 'yours is a hard case, and your husband is a worthless vagabond, and you shall have justice. But then you must pay five hundred francs for that same justice,—five hundred francs, mind; precisely all your utmost labour can obtain to nourish yourself and family for a year. I tell you what, Jeanne, all this proves the truth of the old saying, that 'There are but two sorts of people,—those who are hanged, and those who deserve to be!'"

Rigolette, alone and pensively inclined, had not lost a word of all that tale of woe breathed by the poor, suffering, and patient wife into her brother's ear; while her naturally kind heart deeply sympathised with all she heard, and she fully resolved upon relating the whole history to Rodolph the very first time she saw him, feeling quite sure of his ready and benevolent aid in succouring them. Deeply interested in the mournful fate of the sister of Pique-Vinaigre, she could not take her eyes from the poor woman's face, and was endeavouring to draw a little closer to her; but unluckily, just at that moment, a fresh visitant, entering the room, inquired for a prisoner, and while the person he wished to see was sent for, he very coolly seated himself on the bench between Jeanne and the grisette, who, at the sight of the individual who so unceremoniously interrupted her making closer acquaintance with her neighbour, felt a degree of surprise almost amounting to fear, for in him she recognised one of the bailiffs sent by Jacques Ferrand to arrest poor Morel, the lapidary. This circumstance, recalling as it did to the mind of Rigolette the implacable enemy of Germain, redoubled her

sadness, which had been in some manner diverted while listening to the touching recital of the unfortunate sister of Pique-Vinaigre.

Retreating from the fresh arrival as far as she could, the grisette leaned her back against the wall, and once more relapsed into her mournful ruminations.

"Look here, Jeanne!" cried Pique-Vinaigre, whose mirthful, pleasure-loving countenance was suddenly overcast by a deep gloom; "I am by nature neither very strong nor very courageous; but, certainly, if I had chanced to have been by when your husband so shamefully treated you, I don't think I should have let him slip through my fingers without leaving my mark. But you were too good for him, and you put up with more than you ought!"

"Why, what would you have had me do? I was obliged to endure what I could not avoid. So long as there remained an article that would fetch money did my husband sell it, even to the frock of my little girl, and then repair to the alehouse with his mistress."

"But why did you give him your daily earnings?—you should have hid them from him."

"So I did; but he beat me so dreadfully that I was obliged to give them to him. I cared less for the blows he gave me than because I dreaded his doing me some bodily injury, such as breaking my arm and dislocating my wrist, that would have hindered me from working; and then, what would have become of my poor children? Suppose I had been compelled to go to a hospital, they must have perished with hunger. So, you see, brother, I thought it was better to give up my earnings to my husband than run the risk of being lamed by him."

"Poor woman! People talk of martyrs, but what martyrdom can exceed what you have endured?"

"And yet I can truly say I never injured a living creature, and my only desire was to work hard and do my duty to my husband and children. But it is no use thinking about it; there are fortunate and unfortunate persons, just the same as there are good people and bad people in the world!"

"True; and it is a beautiful sight to see how happy and prosperous the good always are,—aren't they, sister? And do you now believe yourself for ever freed from your scoundrel of a husband?"

"I trust so. He staid till he had sold even my bedstead and the cradle in which my youngest child lay. But when I think that, even more than that, he wished—"

"What did he wish?"

"When I say he, I ought rather to tell you that it was rather that wicked woman who urged him on. One day he said to me, 'I tell you what, when folks have a pretty girl of fifteen belonging to them, they are cursed fools if they do not turn her to good account.'"

"Oh, to be sure! When he had sold the poor girl's clothes, he was willing to sell her also."

"When I heard him say those dreadful words I lost all command over myself, and, I promise you, I did not spare him all the reproaches he merited. And when his vile paramour took upon herself to interfere, and say that my husband had a right to do what he liked with his own child, I could contain myself no longer; but I fell with all my fury on the wretched creature. This obtained for me a severe beating from my husband, who then left me; and I have never seen him since."

"I tell you, Jeanne, that there are men condemned to ten years' punishment and imprisonment who have not done so much to deserve it as your husband has done."

"Still he had not a bad heart. It was his frequenting alehouses, and the bad companions he met there who made him the lost creature he is."

"True, he would not hurt a child; but a grown-up person he was not so very particular."

"Then Left Me"

Original Etching by Adrian Marcel

"Alas, it is no use repining! We must take life as we find it. Well, when my husband had left me I seemed to regain my courage, for I had no longer the constant dread of being crippled by him, and so prevented from earning bread for my children. For want of money to buy a mattress (for one must live and pay one's rent before thinking of other things), and poor Catherine (my eldest girl) working with me fifteen hours a day, we could scarcely earn twenty pence a day both together, and my other two children were too young to be able to earn anything; so, as I was saying, for want of a mattress we

slept upon straw we picked up from time to time before the door of a large furniture packer in the neighbourhood."

"And to think that I have spent and squandered all my money as I have done!"

"Pray do not reproach yourself. How could you possibly imagine I was in want or difficulties when I never said a word to lead you to conclude so? So poor dear Catherine and I set to work again with redoubled courage and determination. If you only knew what a dear, good child she is, so honest, industrious, and good, watching me with her eyes to try and find out what I wish her to do. Never has a murmur escaped her lips; and yet she has seen much want and misery, though scarcely fifteen years of age! She has consoled me in the midst of my severest troubles. Oh, brother," added Jeanne, drying her eyes, "such a child is enough to repay one for the severest trials!"

"You were just such another yourself at her age; and it is but fair you should have some consolation amidst your troubles!"

"Believe me, 'tis rather on her account than mine I grieve; for it really seems out of nature to see a young creature like her slaving herself to death. For months together she has never quitted her work, except once a week, when she goes to wash the trifle of linen we possess in the river, near the Pont-au-Charge, where they only charge three sous an hour for the use of the boats, beaters, etc. All the rest of her time she is working like a galley-slave. Ah, she has known misfortune too early! I know well that troubles must come; but then a poor girl should be able to look back upon a happy childhood, at least! And another thing that grieves and vexes me almost as much as that, is not being able to render you any assistance. Still I will endeavour."

"Nonsense; don't talk so! Do you suppose I would accept of anything from you? On the contrary, I'll tell you what I'll do to help you. From this time forward I'll insist upon being paid for my amusing tales and wonderful recitals; and those who object to pay from one to two sous for hearing shall no more be treated to the entertaining histories of Pique-Vinaigre. I shall soon collect a pretty little sum for you, I know. But why don't you take furnished lodgings, so that your husband could not molest you by selling your little possessions?"

"Furnished lodgings! Only consider, there are four, and for such a number we should have to pay at least twenty sous (ten pence) a day. What should

we have to live upon if we paid all that for rent? And now we give but fifty francs a year for the rooms we occupy."

"True, my girl," replied Pique-Vinaigre, with bitter irony. "That's right,—work, slave, begrudge yourself necessary rest or food, in order to refurnish your place. And directly you have once more got things comfortably about you, your husband will come and strip you of everything; and when he has deprived you almost of the garments you wear, he will take your dear Catherine from you and sell her also."

"No, no, brother; he should take my life ere I would suffer him to injure my good, my virtuous child."

"Oh, but he does not wish to do her any bodily harm; he only wants to sell her. And then, remember, as the lawyer said, he is master until you can find five hundred francs to be legally separated from him. So, as that is not the case, at present you must make up your mind to submit to what cannot be helped. It seems that, by law, your husband has a right to take his child from you and send her where he pleases. And if he and his mistress are bent upon the ruin of the poor girl, doubtless they will stop at nothing to achieve it."

"Merciful God!" exclaimed the almost frantic mother, "surely such wickedness can never be tolerated in a Christian land! Justice itself would interpose if a father could insist upon selling his daughter's honour."

"Justice!" repeated Pique-Vinaigre, with a sardonic laugh, "justice! No, no, that meat is too dear for poor folks like you and I. Only, do you see, if it refers to sending a parcel of poor wretches to prison or the galleys, then it is quite a different affair; and they have justice without its costing them anything,—nay, it becomes a matter of life and death. An unhappy criminal gets his head shaved off by the guillotine for nothing; not a single farthing are they or their friends, whether rich or poor, tailed upon to pay for this act of impartial justice. The object of it only gives his head! All other expenses are defrayed by a liberal and justice-loving legislature. But the justice that would protect a worthy and ill-treated mother of a family from being beaten and pillaged to support the vices of a man who seeks even to sell the honour of his innocent child,—such justice as that costs five hundred francs! So, my dear Jeanne, you must do without it."

"Brother, brother," exclaimed the poor woman, bursting into tears, "you break my heart by such words as these!"

"Well, and my own heart aches even to bursting as I think of your fate and that of your children, while I recollect that I am powerless to help you. I seem always gay and merry; but don't you be deceived by appearances, Jeanne! I tell you what, I have two descriptions of gaiety, my gay gaiety, and my sad gaiety. I have neither the strength or the courage to indulge in envy, hatred, or malice, like the other prisoners; I never go beyond words, more or less droll as occasion requires. My cowardice and bodily weakness would never have allowed me to be worse than I am. And nothing but the opportunity presenting itself of robbing that poor little lone house, where there was neither a cat nor a dog to frighten one, would have drawn me into the scheme that brought me here. And then, again, by chance it was a brilliant moonlight night; for if ever there was a poor devil afraid of being alone in the dark it is me."

"Ah, dear brother, I have always told you you are better than you yourself think! Well, I trust the judges will be of my opinion and deal mercifully with you."

"Mercy! What, for me, a liberated convict? Don't reckon too much on that or you'll be disappointed. But, hang it, what care I? Here or elsewhere is all the same to me! Let my judges do as they will with me, I shall bear them no ill-will. For you are right; I am not a bad sort of fellow at heart; and those who are worse than myself I hate with all the hatred of a good man, and show my dislike by raillery of every sort. You can imagine, can you not, that, by dint of relating stories in which, to please my auditors, I always make those who wantonly torment others receive the reward of their wickedness in the end, I get into the habit of feeling all the indignation and virtuous desire for vengeance I relate?"

"I should never have thought such persons as your prison companions would have been interested in such recitals!"

"Oh, but I'm awake to how to tickle their fancies. If I were to relate to them the story of a man who committed no end of crimes, robbery and murder being among the mildest, and got scragged at last, they would get into a downright passion and not allow me to go on; but if I make up a tale of a woman or child, or a poor, cowardly fellow like myself, that a breath of wind would knock over, being pursued by an atrocious persecutor,—a sort of Blackbeard, who torments them to death, for the pure pleasure of the thing! Oh, how they roar and stamp for joy when I make Mr. Blackbeard in the end served out as he deserves. I have got a story they have never yet heard, called 'Gringalet and Cut-in-Half,' which used to delight all the folks at Melun. I have promised to tell it to them here to-night. But, before I begin, I

shall see that they come down pretty handsome when I send the box around collecting; and you may depend upon being all the better for its contents. And, besides that, I will write out the story itself to amuse your children. Poor dears! How pleased they will be with it! 'Gringalet and Cut-in-Half,'—there's a title for you! And, bless you, it is so virtuous and moral that an abbé might read it from his pulpit! So make yourself quite happy in every respect."

"One thing gives me great pleasure, dear brother, and that is to see that your disposition keeps you from being as unhappy as the rest of your companions here."

"Why, I am quite sure if I were like a poor fellow who is a prisoner in our ward, I should be tempted to lay violent hands on myself. Poor young man! I really am sorry for him,—he seems so very wretched; and I am seriously afraid that before the day is over he will have sustained some serious mischief at the hands of the other prisoners, whom he refuses to associate with, and they owe him a grudge for it; and I know that a plan is arranged to serve him out this very evening."

"Dear me, how shocking! But you, brother, do not mean to take any part in it, I hope?"

"No, thank you, I am not such a fool; I should be sure to catch some of the good things intended for another. All I know about it I picked up while going to and fro. I heard them talking among themselves of gagging him to hinder him from crying out, and in order to prevent any one from seeing what is going on they mean to form a circle around him, making believe to be listening to one of their party, who should pretend to be reading a newspaper or anything they liked out loud."

"But why should they thus ill-treat the poor man?"

"Because, as he is always alone, never speaks to any person, and seems to hold everybody in disgust, they have taken it into their heads he is a spy, which is immensely stupid on their parts, because a spy would naturally hook on with them the better to find out all they said and did; but I believe that the principal cause of their spite against him is that he has the air of a gentleman, which is a thing they hold in abhorrence. It is the captain of the dormitory, who is known by the name of the Walking Skeleton, who is at the head of this plot; and he is like a wild beast after this Germain, for so the object of their dislike is called. But let them all do as they like; it is no affair of mine. I can be of no use, therefore let them go their own way. But then

you see, Jeanne, it is of no use being dull and mopish in prison, or the others are sure to suspect you of something or other. They never had to find fault with my want of sociability, and for that reason never suspected me or owed me a grudge. But come, my girl, you had better return home; we have gossiped long enough. I know very well how it takes up your time to come hither. I have nothing to do but to idle away my days; it is very different with you; so good night. Come and see me again when you can; you know how happy it always makes me."

"Nay, but, brother, pray do not go yet; I wish you to stay."

"Nonsense, Jeanne; your children are wanting you at home. I say—I hope you have not told the poor, dear, little innocent things that their 'nunky' is in prison?"

"No, indeed, I have not; the children believe you are abroad, and as such I can always talk to them of you."

"That's all right. Now then, be off, and get back to your family and your employment as fast as you can."

"But listen to me, brother,—my poor Fortuné. I have not much to give, God knows! but still I cannot bear to see you in so deplorable a plight as you are at present. Your feet must be half frozen without any stockings; and that wretched old waistcoat you have on makes my heart ache to see it. Catherine and I together will manage to get a few things together for you. You know, Fortuné, that at least we do not want for good will—to—"

"To what—to give me better clothes? Lord love you, I've got boxes full of everything you can mention, and directly they come I shall be able to dress like a prince! There, now; come, give me one little smile,—there's a good girl! You won't? Well, then, you shall make me and bring me what you like; only remember, directly the tale of 'Gringalet and Cut-in-Half' has replenished my money-box, I am to return all you expend upon me. And now once more, dear Jeanne, fare you well! And the next time you come to see me, may I lose the name of Pique-Vinaigre if I don't make you laugh! But be off now; cut your stick, there's a good girl! I know I have kept you too long already."

"No, no, dear brother, indeed you have not. Pray hear what I have to say!"

"Hallo, here! I say, my fine fellow," cried Pique-Vinaigre to the turnkey, who was waiting in the lobby, "I have said my say, and I want to go in again. I've talked till I'm tired."

"Oh, Fortuné," cried Jeanne, "how cruel you are to send me thus from you!"

"No, no; on the contrary, I am kinder than you give me credit for."

"Good-bye; keep up your spirits; and to-morrow morning tell the children you have been dreaming of their uncle who is abroad, and that he desired you to give his kind love to them. There—good-bye—good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Fortuné!" replied the poor woman, bursting into tears, as her brother entered the interior of the prison.

From the moment when the bailiff seated himself between her and Jeanne, Rigolette had been unable to overhear a word more of the conversation between Pique-Vinaigre and his sister; but she continued to gaze intently on the latter, her thoughts busied with devising some plausible pretext for obtaining the poor woman's address, for the purpose of recommending her as a fit object for Rodolph's benevolence. As Jeanne rose from her seat to quit the place, Rigolette timidly approached her, and said, in a kind voice:

"Pray excuse my addressing you, but a little while ago I could not avoid overhearing your conversation, and by that I found that you were a maker of fringe and fancy trimmings."

"You heard rightly," replied Jeanne, somewhat surprised, but, at the same time, much prepossessed in favour of the open, frank expression of Rigolette's charming countenance, as well as won to confidence by her kind and friendly manner.

"And I," continued Rigolette, "am a dressmaker. And just now that fringes and gimps are so much worn, I am frequently requested by my customers to get a particular sort for them; so it occurred to me that perhaps you who make at home could supply me with what I required cheaper than the shops, while, on the other hand, you might obtain a better price from me than you get from the warehouse you work for."

"Certainly, I should make a small profit by buying the silk myself, and then making it up to order. You are very kind to have made me the proposal; but I own I feel unable to account for your being so well acquainted with my manner of gaining a living."

"Oh, I will soon explain all that to you. You must know I am waiting to see the person I came here to visit. Being quite alone, I could not help hearing all you said to your brother,—of your many trials, also of your dear children. So then, thinks I to myself, poor people should always be ready to assist

each other. I hope you believe that I did not try to listen? And after that gentleman came and placed himself between us, I lost all that passed between your brother and yourself. So I tried to hit upon some way of being useful to you, and then it struck me that you being a fancy trimming-maker, I might be able to put work in your way more profitable than working for shops,—they pay so very little. So, if you are agreeable, we will take each other's address. This is where I live; now please to tell me where to send to you directly I have any work for you."

With these words Rigolette presented one of her businesslike cards to the sister of Pique-Vinaigre, who, deeply touched by the words and conduct of the grisette, exclaimed with much feeling:

"Your face does not belie your kind heart; and pray do not set it down for vanity if I say that there is something about you that reminds me so forcibly of my eldest daughter that when you first came in I could not help looking at you several times. I am very much obliged to you; and should you give me any work, you may rely on my doing it in my best possible manner. My name is Jeanne Duport, and I live at No. 1 Rue de la Barillerie,—No. 1, that is not a difficult number to recollect."

"Thank you, madame."

"Nay, 'tis rather for me to express thanks for having had the goodness even to think of serving a stranger like myself. But still I cannot help saying it does surprise me to be taken notice of by a young person like you, who most likely has never known what trouble was."

"But, my dear Madame Duport," cried Rigolette, with a winning smile, "there is really nothing so astonishing in the affair. Since you fancy I bear some resemblance to your daughter Catherine, why should you be surprised at my wish to do a good action?"

"What a dear, sweet creature it is!" cried Madame Duport, with unaffected warmth. "Well, thanks to you, I shall return home less sad than I expected; and perhaps we may have the pleasure of meeting here again before long, for I believe you, like me, come to this dreadful place to visit a prisoner?"

"Yes, indeed, I do," replied Rigolette, with a sigh, which seemed to proceed from the very bottom of her heart.

"Then farewell for the present; we shall very shortly meet again, I hope, Mlle.—Rigolette!" said Jeanne Duport, after having referred for the necessary information to the card she held in her hand.

"Oh, yes, I'm sure I trust so, too. Good-bye, then, till we meet again, Madame Duport."

"Well," thought Rigolette, as she returned and reseated herself on the bench, "at least I know this poor woman's address; and I feel quite sure M. Rodolph will assist her directly he knows what trouble she is in, for he always told me whenever I heard of a case of real distress to let him know, and I am sure this is one if ever there was." And here Rigolette suddenly changed the current of her ideas by wondering when it would be her turn to ask to see Germain.

A few words as to the preceding scene. Unfortunately it must be confessed that the indignation of the unhappy brother of Jeanne Duport was quite legitimate. Yes, when he said that the law was too dear for the poor he spoke the truth. To plead before the civil tribunals incurs enormous expenses, impossible for workpeople to meet when they can scarcely subsist on the wages they earn.

Ought not civil as well as criminal justice to be accessible to all? When persons are too poor to be able to invoke the benefits of any law which is eminently preservative and beneficial, ought not society at its own cost to enable them to attain it out of respect for the honour and repose of families?

But let us speak no longer of the woman who must be, for all her life, the victim of a brutal and depraved husband, and speak of Jeanne Duport's brother. This freed prisoner leaves a den of corruption to reënter the world; he had submitted to his punishment, payed his debt by expiation. What precaution has society taken to prevent him from falling again into crime? None! If the freed convict has the courage to resist evil temptations, he will give himself up to one of those homicidal trades of which we have spoken.

Then the condition of the freed convict is much more terrible, painful, and difficult than it was before he committed his first fault. He is surrounded by perils and rocks,—he must have refusal, disdain, and often even the deepest misery. And if he relapses and commits a second crime, you are more severe towards him than for his first fault a thousand times. This is unjust, for it is always the necessity you impose on him that makes him commit the second crime. Yes, for it is demonstrated that, instead of correcting, your penitentiary system depraves; instead of ameliorating, it renders worse; instead of curing slight moral defects, it renders them incurable.

The severe punishment inflicted on offenders for the second time would be just and logical if your prisons, rendered moral, purified the prisoners, and

if, at the termination of their punishment, good conduct was, if not easy, at least possible for them. If we are astonished at the contradictions of the law, what is it when we compare certain offences with certain crimes, either from the inevitable consequences, or from the immense disproportions which exist between the punishments, awarded to each?

The conversation of the prisoner who came to see the bailiff will present one of these overwhelming contrasts.

CHAPTER VII.

MAÎTRE BOULARD.

The prisoner who entered the reception-room at the moment when Pique-Vinaigre left it was a man about thirty, with reddish brown hair, a jovial countenance, florid and full; and his short stature made his excessive fatness still more conspicuous. This prisoner, so rosy and plump, was attired in a long and warm dressing-gown of gray kersey, with pantaloons of the same down to his feet. A kind of cap of red velvet, called Perinet-Leclerc, completed this personage's costume, when we add that his feet were thrust into comfortable furred slippers. His gold chain supported a number of handsome seals with valuable stones, and several rings with real stones shone on the red fingers of the détenu, who was called Maître Boulard, ahuissier (a law-officer), and accused of breach of trust.

The person who had come to see him was, as we have said, Pierre Bourdin, one of the gardes de commerce (bailiffs) employed to arrest poor Morel, the lapidary. This bailiff was usually employed by Maître Boulard, the huissier of M. Petit-Jean, the man of straw of Jacques Ferrand.

Bourdin, shorter and quite as stout as the huissier, formed himself on the model of his employer, whose magnificence he greatly admired. Very fond as he was of jewelry, he wore on this occasion a superb topaz pin, and a long gilt chain was visible through the buttonholes of his waistcoat.

"Good day, my faithful friend, Bourdin, I was sure you would not fail to come at my summons!" said Maître Boulard, in a joyful tone, and in a small, shrill voice, which contrasted singularly with his large carcass and full-moon face.

"Fail at your summons!" replied the bailiff; "I am incapable of such behaviour, mon général."

This was the appellation by which Bourdin, with a joke at once familiar and respectful, called the huissier, under whose orders he acted; this military appellation being very frequently used amongst certain classes of clerks and civil practitioners.

"I observe with pleasure that friendship remains faithful to misfortune!" said Maître Boulard, with gay cordiality. "However, I was getting a little uneasy, as three days had elapsed, and no Bourdin."

"Only imagine, mon général!—it is really quite a history. You remember that dashing vicomte in the Rue de Chaillot?"

"Saint-Remy?"

"Yes; you know how he laughed at all our attempts to 'nab' him?"

"Yes; he behaved very ill in that way."

"Well, this vicomte has got another title."

"What, is he a comte?"

"No, but from swindler he has become thief!"

"Ah, bah!"

"They are after him for some diamonds he has stolen; and, by the way, they belonged to the jeweller who used to employ that vermin of a Morel, the lapidary we were going to arrest in the Rue du Temple, when a tall, thin chap, with black moustaches, paid for this half-starved devil, and very nearly pitched me and Malicorne headlong down-stairs."

"Ah, yes, yes, I remember; you told me all about it, Bourdin,—it was really very droll! But as to this dashing vicomte?"

"Why, as I tell you, Saint-Remy was charged with robbery, after having made his worthy old father believe that he wished to blow out his brains. A police agent of my acquaintance, knowing that I had been long on the traces of the vicomte, asked me if I could not give him information so that he could 'grab' the dandy. I had learned (too late for myself) that he had 'run to earth' in a farm at Arnouville, five leagues from Paris; but when we got there the bird had flown!"

"But next day he paid that acceptance,—thanks, as I have heard say, to some rich woman!"

"Yes, general; but still I knew the nest, and he might have gone there again, and so I told my friend in the police. He proposed to me to give him a friendly cast of my office and show him the farm, and as I had nothing to do and it was a rural trip, I agreed."

"Well, and the vicomte?"

"Not to be found. After having lurked about the farm for some time, we gained admittance, and returned as wise as we went; and this is why I could not come to your orders sooner, general."

"I was sure it was something of this sort, my good fellow."

"But, if I may be allowed to ask, how the devil did you get here?"

"Wretches, my dear fellow, a set of wretches who, for a miserable sixty thousand francs of which they declare I have wronged them, have charged me with a breach of trust and compelled me to resign my office."

"Really, general! Well, that's unfortunate! And shall I then work for you no longer?"

"I am on half pay now, Bourdin,—on the retired list."

"But who are these vindictive persons?"

"Why, only imagine, one of the most savage of all is a liberated convict, who employed me to recover the amount of a bill of seven hundred miserable francs, for which it was requisite to bring an action. Well, I brought the action, and got the money and used it; and because, in consequence of some unsuccessful speculations, I swamped that money and several other sums, all these blackguards have assailed me with warrants; and so you find me here, my dear fellow, neither more nor less than a malefactor."

"And does it not alarm you, general?"

"Yes; but the oddest thing of all is that this convict wrote me word some days ago that this money being his sole resource for bad times, and these bad times having arrived (I don't know what he means by that), I was responsible for the crimes he might commit in order to escape from starvation."

"Amusing, 'pon my soul!"

"Very; and the fellow is capable of saying this, but fortunately the law does not recognise any such accompliceships."

"After all, you are only charged with breach of trust?"

"That is all. Do you take me for a thief, Maître Bourdin?"

"Oh, dear general! I meant to say there was nothing very serious in this."

"Why, I don't look very down, do I, my boy?"

"By no means; never saw you looking better. Indeed, if you are found guilty, you will only have two or three months, imprisonment and twenty-five francs fine. I know the law, you see!"

"And these two or three months I shall contrive, I know, to pass quietly in some infirmary. I have a deputy at my elbow."

"Oh, then, you're all right."

"Yes, Bourdin; and I can scarcely help laughing to think what little good the fools who put me here have done themselves,—they will not recover a sou of the money they claim. They compel me to sell my post,—what do I care?"

"True, general; it is only so much the worse for them."

"Yes, my boy. And now for the subject on which I was anxious to see you, Bourdin; it is a very delicate affair,—there is a lady in the case!" said Maître Boulard, with mysterious self-complacency.

"Oh, you gay deceiver! But, be it what it may, you may rely on me."

"I am greatly interested in the welfare of a young actress at the theatre of the Folies-Dramatiques. I pay her rent; but, you know, the absent are always in the wrong! Alexandrine has applied to me for money. Now I have never been a very gay fellow, but yet I do not like to be made a fool of; so, before I comply, I should like to know if the lady is faithful. I know there is nothing more absurd and uncommon than fidelity, and so you will do me a friendly service if you could just watch her for a few days and let me know your opinion, either by a talk with the porter at her abode or—"

"I understand, general," said Bourdin; "this is no worse than watching a debtor. Rely on me; I will have an eye to Mlle. Alexandrine,—although, I should say, you are too generous and too good-looking not to be adored!"

"My good looks are no use, my friend, so long as I am absent; and so I rely on you to discover the truth."

"Rely on me."

"How can I, my dear fellow, prove my gratitude?"

"Don't mention it, general."

"Pray understand, my dear Bourdin, that your fees in this case will be the same as if you were after an arrest."

"I can't allow it, general. As long as I act under your orders, have you not allowed me to shear the debtor to his very skin,—to double, treble, the costs of arrests? And have you not sued for those costs for me as eagerly as if they were due to yourself?"

"But, my dear fellow, this is very different; and, in my turn, I declare I will not allow it."

"Mon général, you will really make me quite ashamed if you do not allow me to make these inquiries as to Mlle. Alexandrine as a poor proof of my gratitude."

"Well, well; be it so. I will no longer contend with your generosity; and your devotion will be a sweet reward to me for considerations I have always mixed up in our transactions."

"Very good, general; and now we understand each other. Is there anything else I can do for you? You must be very uncomfortable here. I hope you are à la pistole (in a private room)?"

"Yes; I came just in time to get the only empty room,—the others are being repaired. I have made myself as comfortable as possible in my cell, and am not so very miserable. I have a stove and a very nice easy chair; I make three long meals a day, and my digestion is good; then I walk and go to sleep. Except my uneasiness about Alexandrine I have not so much to complain of."

"But for you who were such an epicure, general, the prison diet is very poor."

"Why, there is an excellent cookshop in my street, and I have a running account with him, and so every two days he sends me a very nice supply. And, by the way, I would get you to ask his wife—a nice little woman is Madame Michonneau—to put into the basket a bit of pickled thunny. It is in season now, and relishes one's wine."

"Capital idea!"

"And tell Madame Michonneau to send me a basket of various wines,—burgundy, champagne, and bordeaux,—like the last; she'll know what I mean. And tell her to put in two bottles of old cognac of 1817, and a pound of pure Mocha, fresh roasted and ground."

"I'll put down the date of the cognac, lest I should forget it," said Bourdin, taking a memorandum-book from his pocket.

"As you are writing, my good fellow, be so good as make a minute of my wish to have an eider-down quilt from my house."

"All shall be done to the letter, general; make your mind easy. And now I shall be comfortable about your living. But your walks; you are compelled to take them along with those ruffians confined here?"

"Yes; and it's really very lively and animated. I go down after breakfast; sometimes I go into one yard, sometimes another, and I mix with the mob. Really they appear very good sort of fellows! Some of them are very amusing. The most ferocious are collected in what is called the Fosse aux Lions. Ah, my good fellow, what hang-dog-looking fellows there are amongst them. There's one they call the Skeleton,—I never saw such a creature."

"What a singular name!"

"He is so thin, or rather bare of flesh, that this is the nickname which has been given to him; he is really frightful. He is, besides, director of his ward, and, moreover, an infernal villain. He has just left the galleys, and went directly to murder and assassination. But his last murder was really horrible, as he knew he should be condemned to death without chance of remission; but he laughs at it."

"What a scoundrel!"

"All the prisoners admire and tremble before him. I got into his good graces at once by offering him some cigars, and so he made a friend of me at once, and offered to teach me slang; and I have made considerable progress."

"Oh, what an idea!—my general learning slang!"

"I amuse myself as much as I can, and all these fellows adore me. I am not proud like a young fellow they call Germain, who gives himself the airs of a lord."

"But he must be delighted at meeting with such a gentleman as you, even if he is disgusted with the others."

"Why, really, he did not seem even to notice that I was there; but, if he had, I should have taken care how I took any notice of him. He is the *bête noire* of the whole prison, and some day or other they'll play him a slippery trick; and, *pardieu*! I have no wish to come in for my share of what may befall him."

"You're right."

"It would interfere with my pleasures, for my walk with the prisoners is really a pleasure to me; only these ruffians have no great opinion of me morally. You see, my accusation of a simple breach of trust is contemptible in the eyes of these out-and-outers; and they look on me as a nobody."

"Why, really, with such criminals you are—"

"A mere chicken, my dear fellow. But do not forget my commissions."

"Make your mind easy, general. First, Mlle. Alexandrine; second, the fish-pie and basket of wine; third, the old cognac of 1817, the ground coffee, and the eider-down quilt; you shall have it all. Is there anything else?"

"Yes, I forgot. You know the address of M. Badinot?"

"The agent? Yes."

"Well, be so kind as to call on him, and say that I rely on his friendship to find me a barrister such as my case requires, and that I shall not stand for forty or fifty pounds."

"I'll see M. Badinot, depend upon it, general; and all your commissions shall be attended to this evening, and to-morrow you shall receive all you wish for. So good day, and a happy meeting to us soon, *mon général*."

"Good-bye, my worthy friend!" And the prisoner quitted the parlour at one door, and the visitor by the other.

Let us now compare the crime of Pique-Vinaigre with that of M. Boulard, the *huissier*. Compare the beginning of the two, and the reasons, the necessities, which impelled them to evil. Compare, too, the punishment which awaited them respectively. The one, driven by his hunger and need, robs. He is apprehended, judged, and sentenced to fifteen or twenty years of

hard labour and exposure. Property is sacred, and he who, in the night, breaks for plunder should undergo sacred punishment. But ought not the well-informed, intelligent, rich man who robs—not to satisfy hunger, but his caprices or gambling in the stocks—to be punished? Yet for the public spoliator there is two months' imprisonment; for the relapsed convict twenty years' hard labour and exposure. What can we add to these facts, which speak for themselves?

The old turnkey kept his word; and when Boulard left the parlour, Germain entered, and Rigolette was only separated from him by a light wire grating.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRANÇOIS GERMAIN.

Although the features of Germain could not be styled regular, it was scarcely possible to see a more interesting countenance. There was an air of ease and elegance about him, while his slight, graceful figure, plain but neatly arranged dress (consisting of a pair of gray trousers and black frock coat, buttoned up to the chin), formed a striking contrast to the slovenliness and neglect to which the occupants of the prison generally gave themselves up; his white hands and well-trimmed nails evinced an attention to his personal appearance which had still further excited the ill-will of the prisoners against him, for bodily neglect is almost invariably the accompaniment of moral perversion. He wore his long and naturally curling chestnut hair parted on one side of his forehead, according to the fashion of the day, a style that well became his pale and melancholy countenance, and large, clear blue eyes, beaming with truth and candour; his smile, at once sweet and mournful, expressed benevolence of heart, mingled with a habitual dejection, for, though young, the unfortunate youth had already deeply tasted affliction.

Nothing could be imagined more touching than the look of suffering impressed on his features, while the gentle and resigned cast of his whole physiognomy was but a fair transcript of the mind within, for a better, purer, or more upright heart could scarcely have beaten in human form.

The very cause of his imprisonment (divested of the calumnious aggravations affixed to it by Jacques Ferrand) proved the goodness of his nature, and left him worthy of blame only for suffering himself to be led astray by his feelings to commit an action decidedly wrong, but still excusable if it be remembered that the son of Madame Georges felt perfectly sure of replacing on the following morning the sum temporarily taken from the notary's cash-box, for the purpose of saving Morel the lapidary, from being dragged from his family and confined in a prison.

Germain coloured slightly as he perceived, through the grating of the visitor's room, the bright and charming countenance of Rigolette, who strove, as usual, to appear gay, in hopes of encouraging and enlivening her protégé a little; but the poor girl was too bad a dissembler to conceal the sorrow and agitation she invariably experienced upon entering the prison. She was seated on a bench at the outside of the grating, holding her straw basket on her lap.

Instead of remaining in the adjoining passage, from whence every word could be heard, the old turnkey retired to the stove placed at the very extremity of the visiting-room, closed his eyes, and in a very few seconds was (as his breathing announced) fast asleep, leaving Germain and Rigolette at perfect liberty to converse at their ease.

"Now then, M. Germain," cried the grisette, placing her pretty face as closely as she could to the grate, the better to examine the features of her friend, "let me see what sort of a countenance you have got to-day, and whether it is less sad than it was? Humph, humph—only middling! Now, do you know that I've a great mind to be very angry with you?"

"Oh, no, you are too good for that. But how very kind of you to come again so soon!"

"So soon! Does it seem to you so soon? You mean by those words to reproach me for coming so frequently. Well—"

"Have I not good cause to find fault with you for taking so much pains and trouble for me, while I, alas! can merely thank you for all your goodness?"

"That is a little mistake of yours, my fussy friend, because the little services in my power to render you afford me quite as much pleasure as they do you; so that, you see, I am as much bound to say 'Thank you for all favours,' as you are. So, you see, I am not to be cheated that way. And now I think of it, the best way to punish you for such very improper ideas will be not to give you what I have brought for you."

"What! Another proof of your thoughtful care of me? Oh, you spoil me—you do, indeed! I shall be fit for nothing but to be somebody's pet when (if ever, alas!) I get out of prison. A thousand thanks! Nay, you must pardon my using that word, although it does displease you. But, indeed, you leave me nothing else to say."

"Ah, but don't be in such a hurry to thank me, before you even know what I have brought!"

"Why, what do I care what it is?"

"Well, I'm sure that's very civil, M. Germain!"

"Nay, I only meant to say that, be it what it may, it must needs be dear and precious to me, since it comes from you. Oh, Mlle. Rigolette, your unwearied kindness, your touching sympathy, fills me with the deepest gratitude,

and—and—" But finding it impossible to conclude the sentence, Germain cast down his eyes and remained silent.

"Well," said Rigolette, "and what else?"

"And—devotion!" stammered out Germain.

"Why could you not have said 'respect,' as people write at the end of a letter?" asked Rigolette, impatiently. "Ah, but I know very well that was not what you were going to say, else why did you stop all of a sudden?"

"I assure you—"

"There, don't endeavour to assure me of anything; I can see you are blushing through this grating. Now why can't you speak out, and tell me every thought and wish of your heart? Am I not your true and faithful friend as well as old companion?" continued the grisette, timidly, for she but waited the confession of Germain's love for her to tell him frankly and sincerely how truly she returned his affection with a passion as true and as generous as his own.

"I assure you Mlle. Rigolette," said the poor prisoner with a sigh, "that I had nothing else to say, and that I am concealing nothing whatever from you."

"For shame for shame," cried Rigolette, stamping her foot; "don't tell such stories. Now, look here," continued she, drawing a large, white, woollen neck wrapper from her basket; "do you see this beautiful thing? Well, I brought it on purpose for you. But now—to punish you for being so deceitful and sly—I will not give it to you. I knitted it on purpose for you, too; for, said I, it must be so damp and cold in those yards in the prison. And this nice, soft, woollen handkerchief is just the thing to keep him warm; he is so delicate!"

"And is it possible you—"

"Yes, sir, I said you were delicate—and so you are," cried Rigolette, interrupting him. "I suppose I may recollect, if I please, how chilly you used to be of an evening, though all the time you tried to conceal it, that you might hinder me from putting more wood on my fire when you came to sit with me. I've got a good memory, I can tell you; so don't contradict me."

"And so have I," replied Germain, in a voice of deep feeling "far too good for my present position;" and, with these words, he passed his hand across his eyes.

"Now then, I declare, I believe you are falling into low spirits again, though I so strictly forbade it."

"How is it possible for me to avoid being moved even to tears, when I recollect all you have done for me ever since I entered this prison? And is not your last kind attention another proof of your amiable care for me? And do I not know that you are obliged to work at night to make up for the time it occupies for you to visit me in my misfortunes, and that on my account you impose additional labour and fatigue on yourself?"

"Oh, if that be all you have to be miserable about I beg you will make very short work of it. Truly, I deserve a great deal of pity for taking a nice refreshing walk two or three times a week just to see a friend—I who so dearly love walking—and having a good stare at all the pretty shops as I come along."

"And see, to-day, too, what weather you have ventured out in! Such wind and rain! Oh, it is too selfish of me to permit you thus to sacrifice your health for me!"

"Oh, bless you, the wind and rain only make the walk more amusing. You have no idea what very droll sights one sees,—first comes a party of men holding on their hats with both hands, to prevent the storm from carrying them away; then you see an unfortunate individual with his umbrella blown inside out, making the most ludicrous grimaces, and shutting his eyes while the wind drives him about like a peg-top. I declare, all the way I came along this morning, it was more diverting than going to a play. I thought I should make you laugh by telling you of it; but there you are looking more dull, and solid, and serious than ever!"

"Pray forgive me if I cannot be as mirthful as your kind heart would have me; you know I never have what is styled high spirits, and just now I feel it impossible even to affect them."

Rigolette was very desirous of concealing that, spite of her lively prattle, she was to the full as sad and heavy-hearted as Germain himself could be. She therefore hastened to change the conversation by saying:

"You say it is impossible for you to conquer your low spirits, but there are other things you choose to style impossibilities I have begged and prayed of you to do, because I very well know you could, if you chose."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean your obstinate avoidance of all the other prisoners, and never speaking to one of them; the turnkey has just been talking to me about it, and he says that for your own sake you ought to associate with them a little. I am sure it would not do you any harm; you do not speak; it is always the way. I see very well you will never be satisfied till these dreadful men have played you some dangerous trick in revenge."

"You know not the horror with which they inspire me, any more than you can guess the personal reasons I have for avoiding and execrating them, and all who resemble them."

"Indeed, but I do know your reasons! I read the accounts you wrote for me, and which I went to fetch away from your lodgings after your imprisonment; from them I learned all the dangers you had incurred upon your arrival in Paris, because, when you were in the country, you refused to participate in the crimes of the bad man who had brought you up; and that it was in consequence of the last snare they laid to catch you that you quitted the Rue du Temple, without telling any one but me where you had gone to. And I read something else, too, in those papers," said Rigolette, casting down her eyes, while a bright blush dyed her cheeks; "I read things that—that—"

"You would never have known, I solemnly declare," exclaimed Germain, eagerly, "had it not been for the misfortune which befell me. But let me ask you to be as generous as you are good; forget and pardon my past follies, my insane hopes. 'Tis true, in times past I ventured to indulge such dreams, wild and unfounded as they were."

Rigolette had endeavoured a second time to draw a confession of his love from the lips of Germain by alluding to those tender and passionate effusions written by him, and dedicated to the remembrance of the grisette, for whom, as we have before stated, he had always felt the sincerest affection; but, the better to preserve the confiding familiarity with which he was treated by his pretty neighbour, he concealed his regard under the semblance of friendship.

Rendered more timid and sensitive by imprisonment, he could not for an instant believe it possible for Rigolette to reciprocate the attachment of a poor prisoner like himself, whose character was, moreover, tarnished by so foul an accusation as he laboured under, while previous to this calamity she had never manifested more than a sisterly interest in him. The grisette, finding herself so little understood, stifled a sigh, and awaited with hopeful eagerness a better opportunity of opening the eyes of Germain to the real state of her heart. She contented herself, therefore, with merely replying:

"To be sure, it is quite natural the sight of these wicked men should fill you with horror and disgust; but that is no reason for your exposing yourself to unnecessary dangers."

"I assure you that, in order to follow your advice, I have endeavoured to force myself to converse with such as seemed the least depraved among them; but you can form no notion what dreadful men they are, or what shocking language they talk."

"I dare say they do, poor unfortunate creatures! It must be horrid to hear them."

"But there is something more terrible than that, the getting gradually used to the disgusting conversations which, in spite of yourself, you are compelled to hear all day long. Yes, I am sorry to say, I now hear with gloomy indifference horrible remarks and speeches that would have excited my utmost indignation when I first came here. So, you see," continued Germain, bitterly, "I begin to be more afraid of myself than I am of them."

"Oh, M. Germain!"

"I am sure of it," pursued the unfortunate young man. "After a residence within a prison in company with such as are always to be found assembled there, the mind becomes accustomed to guilty thoughts, in the same manner as the ear gets inured to the coarse and vulgar expressions continually in use. Oh, God, I can well believe how possible it is to enter these walls innocent of the crimes ascribed to one, and to leave them with principles utterly and irretrievably perverted!"

"But you never could be so changed! Oh, no, not you!"

"Ay, me, and others twenty times better than myself! Alas, alas! those who condemn men to this fearful association little think that they expose their fellow creatures to breathe an air laden with the direst moral contagion, and inevitably fatal to every right or honourable feeling!"

"Pray do not go on so! You know not how you grieve me!"

"Nay, I but wished to explain to you why I am daily more and more melancholy. I wished not to have said so much, but I have only one way of repaying the pity you have evinced for me."

"Pity? Pity? Indeed—"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, but the only way by which I can acquit myself towards you is to speak with perfect candour; and, with shuddering alarm, I confess that I am no longer the same person I was. In vain do I fly these unfortunate wretches, their very presence, their contact seems to take effect on me; in spite of myself, I seem to feel a fatal influence in breathing the same atmosphere, as though the moral pestilence entered at every pore, and rested not till it had mingled with the heart's blood. Should I even be acquitted on my trial, the very sight of, and association with, good and virtuous men would cover me with shame and confusion; for, though I have not yet been able to find pleasure in the society of my companions, I have, at least, learned to dread the day when I shall again mix with persons of respectability, because now I am conscious of my weakness and cowardice; for is not he guilty of both who dares to make a compromise with his duties or his honesty? And have not I done so? When I first came here I did not deceive myself as to the extent of my fault, however excusable the circumstances under which it was committed might have seemed to make it; but now it appears to me an offence of a trifling description when compared with the crimes of which the robbers and murderers by whom I am surrounded make daily boast. And I sometimes surprise myself envying their audacious indifference, and blaming myself with my own weak regrets for so insignificant an action."

"And so it was an insignificant action, far more generous than wrong. Why, what did you do but borrow for a few hours a sum of money you knew you could replace on the following morning; and that, too, not for yourself, but to save a whole family from ruin, perhaps death."

"That matters not, it was a theft in the eyes of the law and all honest men. Doubtless it is better to rob with a good motive than a bad one, but it is a fearful thing to be obliged to seek an excuse for oneself by comparing one's own guilt with that of persons far beneath ourselves. I can no longer venture to compare my actions with those of upright persons, consequently, then, I am compelled to institute a comparison between myself and the degraded beings with whom I live; so that I plainly perceive in the end the conscience becomes hardened and is put to sleep. The next theft I commit, probably without the prospect of replacing the money, but from mere cupidity, I might still find an excuse for myself by comparing my conduct with that of a man who adds murder to theft; and yet at this moment there is as great a difference between me and a murderer as there is between a person of untainted character and myself. So, because there are beings a thousand times more degraded and debased than I am, by degrees my own degradation would become diminished in my estimation; instead of being able to say, as I once could, 'I am as honest a man as any I meet with,' I

shall be obliged to content myself with saying I am the least guilty of the vile wretches among whom I am condemned for ever to live."

"Oh, do not say for ever! Once released from this place—"

"What should I gain even then? The lost creatures by whom I am surrounded are perfectly well acquainted with my person, and, were I even to be set free, I am exposed to the chance of meeting them again, and being hailed as a prison associate; and even though the fact of my imprisonment might be unknown, these unprincipled beings would be for ever threatening me to divulge it, thereby holding me completely in their power, by bands too firm for me to hope to break; while, on the other hand, had I been kept confined in my cell until my trial, they would have known nothing of me, or I of them; so that I should have escaped the fears which may paralyse my best resolutions. And, besides, had I been permitted to contemplate my fault in the solitude of my cell, instead of decreasing in my eyes, its enormity would have appeared still greater; and in the same proportion would the expiation I proposed to make have been augmented; and as my sin grew more and more apparent to my unbiassed view, so also would my earnestdetermination to atone for it by every means my humble sphere afforded have been strengthened; for well I know it takes a hundred good deeds to efface the recollection of one bad.

"But how can I ever expect to turn my thoughts towards expiating a crime which scarcely awakens in me the smallest remorse? I tell you again—and I feel what I say—that I seem acting under some irresistible influence, against which I have long and fruitlessly struggled. I was brought up for evil, and, alone, friendless, and powerless to resist, I yield to my destiny. What matters it whether that destiny be accomplished by honest or dishonest means? Yet Heaven knows my thoughts and intentions were ever pure and upright; and I felt the greater satisfaction in the possession of an unsullied reputation, from recollection of all the attempts that had been made to lead me to a life of infamy; and mine has been a course of infinite difficulty while seeking to free myself from the odious wretches who wished to degrade me, and render me as vile as themselves.

"But what avails my having been a person of unblemished honour and unspotted reputation? What am I now? Oh, dreadful, dreadful contrast!" exclaimed the unhappy prisoner, in an agony of tears and sobs, which drew a plenteous shower of sympathising drops from the tender-hearted grisette, who, guided by her natural right-mindedness, her woman's wit, as well as warmed by her deep affection for Germain, clearly perceived that, although as yet her protégé had lost none of the scrupulous notions of honour and

probity he had ever entertained, yet that he spoke truly when he expressed his dread that the day might come when he would behold with guilty indifference those words and actions he now shuddered even to think of.

Drying her eyes, therefore, and addressing Germain, who was still leaning his forehead against the grating, she said, in a voice and manner more touchingly serious than Germain had ever before observed:

"Listen to me, Germain! I shall not, perhaps, be able to express myself as I could wish, for I am not a good speaker like you, but what I do say is uttered in all sincerity and truth; but first I must tell you you have no right to call yourself alone and friendless."

"Oh, think not I can ever forget all your generous compassion has induced you to do to serve me!"

"Just now, when you used the word pity, I did not interrupt you; but now that you repeat the word, or at least one quite as bad, I must tell you quite plainly that I feel neither pity nor compassion for you, but quite a different—Stay, I will try and explain myself as well as I can. While we were next-door neighbours, I felt for you all the regard due to one I esteemed as a friend and brother. We mutually aided each other; you shared with me all your Sunday amusements, and I did my very best to look as well and be as gay and entertaining as I could, in order to show how much I was gratified; so there again we were quits."

"Quits? Oh, no, no! I—"

"Now, do hold your tongue, and let me speak! I'm sure you have had all the talk to yourself this long while. When you were obliged to quit the house we lodged in, I felt more sorrow at your departure than I had ever done before."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, indeed, for all the other persons who had lived in your apartments were careless creatures, whom I did not care a pin for; while you, from the very first of our acquaintance, seemed just the sort of person I wanted to be my neighbour, because you could understand that I wished us to be good friends, and nothing more. Then you were so ready to pass all your spare time with me, teaching me to write, giving me good advice,—a little serious, to be sure, but all the better for that. You were ever kind and good, yet never presumed upon it in any way; and even when compelled to change your lodging, you confided to me a secret you would not have trusted to any one else,—the name of your new abode; and that made me so proud and happy,

to think you should have so much reliance on the silence and friendship of a giddy girl like myself. I used to think of you so constantly that at last every other person seemed to be banished from my recollection, and you alone to occupy my memory. Pray don't turn away as if you did not believe me. You know I always speak the truth."

"Indeed, indeed, I can scarcely believe that you were kind enough thus to remember me."

"Oh, but I did, though; and I should have been very ungrateful had I acted otherwise. Sometimes I used to say to myself, 'M. Germain is the very nicest young man I know, though he is rather too serious at times; but never mind that. If I had a friend whom I wished to be very, very happy when she was married, I certainly should recommend her marrying M. Germain, who would make just such a husband as a good wife deserves to meet with.'"

"You remembered me then, it seems, for the sake of bestowing me on another," murmured poor Germain, almost involuntarily.

"Yes, and I should have been delighted to have helped you to obtain a good wife, because I felt a real and friendly interest in your happiness. You see I speak without any reserve; you know I never could disguise my thoughts."

"Well, I can but thank you for caring enough about me even to wish to dispose of me in marriage to one of your acquaintances."

"This was the state of things when your troubles came upon you, and you sent me that poor, dear letter in which you acquainted me with what you styled your fault, but which, to an ignorant mind like my own, seemed a noble and generous action. That letter directed me to go and fetch away your papers, among which I found the confession of your love for me,—a love you had never ventured to reveal; and there, too," continued Rigolette, unable longer to restrain her tears, "I learned that, kindly considering my future prospects (illness or want of employ might render so distressing), you wished, in the event of your dying a violent death (as your fears foretold might be the case), to secure to me the trifle you had accumulated by industry and care."

"I did; and surely if, during my lifetime, you had been overtaken by sickness or any other misfortune, you would sooner have accepted assistance from me than from any other living creature, would you not? I flattered myself so, at least. Tell me, tell—I was right, that to me you would have turned for succour and support as to any true and devoted friend?"

"Of course I should! Who else should I have thought of in any hour of need or sorrow but you, M. Germain?"

"Thanks, thanks! Your words fall like healing drops upon my heart, and console me for all I have suffered."

"But how shall I attempt to describe to you what I felt while reading that—oh, it is a dreadful word to utter!—that will, each word of which breathed only care and solicitude for my future welfare? And yet these tender, touching proofs of your sincere regard were to have been concealed from me till your death. Surely it was not strange that conduct so generous and delicate should at once have converted my feelings towards you into those of an affection sincere and fervent as your own for me. That is easily understood, is it not, M. Germain?"

The large dark eyes of Rigolette were fixed on Germain with an expression so earnest and tender, her sweet voice pronounced the simple confession of her love in a tone so touchingly true to nature, that Germain, who had never for one instant flattered himself with having awakened so warm an interest in the heart of the grisette, gazed on her for an instant in utter inability to believe the words he heard; then, as the bright beaming look he encountered conveyed the truth to his mind, his colour varied from deepest red to deadly pale, he cried out in a voice quivering with emotion:

"Can it be? Do I hear aright? Ah, repeat those dear words that I may feel convinced of their reality."

"Why should I hesitate to assure you again and again that when I learned your kind consideration for me, and remembered how miserable and wretched you were, I no longer felt for you the calm feelings of friendship? And certainly, M. Germain," added Rigolette, smilingly, while a rosy blush mantled her intelligent features, "if I had a friend now I wished to see well married, I should be very sorry indeed to recommend her choosing you, because, because—"

"You would marry me yourself!" exclaimed the delighted young man.

"You compel me to tell you so myself, since you will not ask it of me."

"Can this be possible?"

"It is not from not having put you in the direct path more than once to make you understand. But you will not take a hint, and so, sir, I am compelled to confess the thing myself. It is wrong, perhaps; but, as there is no one but

yourself to reprove my boldness, I have less fear; and then," added Rigolette, in a more serious tone, and with tender emotion, "you just now appeared to me so greatly overcome, so despairing, that I could no longer repress my feelings; and I had vanity enough to believe that this avowal, frankly made and from my heart, would prevent you from being unhappy in future. I said to myself, 'Until now I had been able to amuse or comfort him—' Ah, mon Dieu! what is the matter?" exclaimed Rigolette, seeing Germain conceal his face in his hands. "Is not this cruel?" she added; "whatever I do, whatever I say, you are still as wretched as ever, and that is being too unkind—too selfish; it is as if it were you only who suffered from sorrows!"

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

"Not worthy of me? Why, how can you talk so absurdly? It is just as if I said that I was not formerly worthy of your friendship because I had been in prison; for, after all, I have been a prisoner also; but am I the less an honest girl?"

"But you were in prison because you were a poor forsaken girl; whilst I—alas, what a difference!"

"Well, then, as to prison, we shall neither of us ever have anything to reproach each other with. It is I who am the more ambitious of the two; for, in my position, I have no right to think of any person but a workman for my husband. I was a foundling, and have nothing but my small apartment and my good spirits, and yet I come and boldly offer myself to you as a wife."

"Alas, formerly such a destiny would have been the dream—the happiness of my life! But now I am under the odium of an infamous accusation; and should I take advantage of your excessive generosity, your commiseration, which no doubt misleads you? No, no!"

"But," exclaimed Rigolette, with pained impatience, "I tell you that it is not pity I feel for you, it is love! I think of you only; I no longer sleep or eat. Your sad and gentle countenance follows me everywhere. Can that be pity only? Now, when you speak to me, your voice, your look, go to my very heart. There are a thousand things in you now which please me, and which I had not before marked. I like your face, I like your eyes, your appearance, your disposition, your good heart. Is that pity? Why, after having loved you as a friend, do I love you as a lover? I cannot say. Why was I light and gay when I liked you as a friend? Why am I quite a different being now I love you as a lover? I do not know. Why have I been so slow in finding you at once

handsome and good,—in loving you at once with eyes and heart? I cannot say—or rather, yes—I can; it is because I have discovered how much you love me without having told me of it,—how generous and devoted you were. Then love mounted from my heart to my eyes, as a tear does when the heart is softened."

"Really, I seem to be in a dream when I hear you speak thus!"

"And I never could have believed that I could have told you all this, but your despair has forced me to it. Well, sir, now you know I love you as my friend, my lover—as my husband! Will you still call it pity?"

The generous scruples of Germain were overcome in an instant before this plain and devoted confession, a hopeful joy prevailed over his painful reflections.

"You love me?" he cried; "I believe you; your accent, your look,—everything proclaims it! I will not ask how I have merited such happiness, but I abandon myself to it blindly; my life, my whole life, will not suffice to pay my debt to you! Oh, I have greatly suffered already, but this moment effaces all!"

"Then you will be comforted at last? Oh, I was sure I should contrive to do so!" cried Rigolette, in a transport of joy.

"And it is in the midst of the horrors of a prison, and when all conspires to overwhelm me, that such happiness—"

Germain could not conclude. This thought reminded him of the reality of his position. His scruples, for a moment lost sight of, returned more severe than ever, and he said, with despair:

"But I am a prisoner—I am accused of robbery; I shall be sentenced—dishonoured, perhaps! And I cannot accept of your generous sacrifice—profit by your noble excitement. Oh, no, no; I am not such a villain as that!"

"What do you say?"

"I may be sentenced to several years' imprisonment."

"Well," replied Rigolette, with calmness and firmness, "they shall see that I am an honest girl, and they will not refuse to marry us in the prison chapel."

"But I may be put in prison at a distance from Paris."

"Once your wife, I will follow you and settle in the city where you may be. I shall find work there, and can see you every day."

"But I shall be disgraced in the eyes of all."

"You love me better than any one—don't you?"

"Can you ask me such a question?"

"Then of what consequence is it? So far from considering you as disgraced in my eyes, I shall consider you as the victim of your own kind heart."

"But the world will accuse, condemn, calumniate your choice."

"The world! Are not you the world to me—I to you? So let it say as it may!"

"Well, quitting prison at length, my life will be precarious—miserable. Repulsed on all sides, I may, perhaps, find no employment, and then it is appalling to think! But if this corruption which besets me should seize on me in spite of myself, what a future for you!"

"You will never grow corrupted. No; for now you know that I love you, this thought will give you the power of resisting bad examples. You will reflect that if all repulse you when you quit your prison, your wife will receive you with love and gratitude, assured, as she will be, that you will still be an honest man. This language astonishes you, does it not? It astonishes even myself. I do not know whence I derive all I say to you; from the bottom of my soul, assuredly—and that must convince you! That is, if you do not reject an offer made you most unreservedly, if you do not desire to reject the love of a poor girl who has only—"

Germain interrupted Rigolette with impassioned voice:

"Yes, indeed—I do accept—I do accept! Yes, I feel it. I am assured it is sometimes cowardly to refuse certain sacrifices; it is to avow oneself unworthy of them. I accept them, noble, brave girl!"

"Really, really—are you really in earnest?"

"I swear to you; and you have, too, said something which greatly struck me, and gives me the courage I want."

"Delightful! And what did I say?"

"That, for your sake, I should in future continue an honest man. Yes, in this thought I shall find strength to resist the detestable influences which surround me. I shall brave contagion, and know how to keep worthy of your love the heart which belongs to you."

"Oh, Germain, how happy I am! If I have ever done anything for you, how you recompense me now!"

"And then, observe, although you excuse my fault I shall never forget it. My future task will be double: to expiate the past and deserve the happiness I owe to you. For that I will do my best, and, as poor as I may be, the opportunity will not fail me, I am sure."

"Alas! that is true; for we always find persons more unfortunate than ourselves."

"And if we have no money, why—"

"We give our tears, as I did for the poor Morels."

"And that is holy alms. 'Charity of the soul is quite equal to that which bestows bread.'"

"You accept, then, and will never retract?"

"Never, never, my love—my wife! My courage returns to me, and I seem as though awaking from a dream, and no longer doubt myself. My heart would not beat as it does if it had lost its noblest energies."

"Oh, Germain, how you delight me in speaking so! How you assure me, not for yourself but for myself. So you will promise me, now you have my love to urge you on, that you will no longer be afraid to speak to these wicked men, so that you may not excite their anger against you?"

"Touched with His Lips through the Grating"

Original Etching by Mercier

"Take courage! When they saw me sad and sorrowful, they accused me, no doubt, of being a prey to my remorse; but when they see me proud and joyous, they will believe their pernicious example has gained on me."

"That's true; they will no longer suspect you, and my mind will be easy. So mind, no rashness, no imprudence, now you belong to me,—for I am your little wife."

At this moment the turnkey awoke.

"Quick," said Rigolette, in a low voice, and with a smile full of grace and modest tenderness, "quick, my dear husband, and give me a loving kiss on my forehead through the grating; that will be our betrothing." And the young girl, blushing, bowed her forehead against the iron trellis.

Germain, deeply affected, touched with his lips through the grating her pure and white forehead.

"Oh, oh! What, three o'clock already?" said the turnkey; "and visitors ought to leave at two! Come, my dear little girl," he added, addressing the grisette, "it's a pity, but you must go."

"Oh, thanks, thanks, sir, for having allowed us thus to converse alone! I have given Germain courage, and now he will look livelier, and need not fear his wicked companions."

"Make yourself easy," said Germain, with a smile; "I shall in future be the gayest in the prison."

"That's all right, and then they will no longer pay any attention to you," said the guardian.

"Here is a cravat I have brought for Germain, sir," said Rigolette. "Must I leave it at the entrance?"

"Why, perhaps you should; but still it is such a very small matter! So, to make the day complete, give him your present yourself." And the turnkey opened the door of the corridor.

"This good man is right, and the day will be complete," said Germain, receiving the cravat from Rigolette's hands, which he pressed tenderly.

"Adieu; and to our speedy meeting! Now I am no longer afraid to ask you to come and see me as soon as possible."

"Nor I to promise you. Good-bye, dear Germain!"

"Good-bye, my dear girl!"

"Wear the cravat, for fear you should catch cold; it is so damp!"

"What a pretty cravat! And when I reflect that you knitted it for me! Oh, I will never let it leave me!" said Germain, pressing it to his lips.

"Now, then, your spirits will revive, I hope! And so good-bye, once more. Thank you, sir. And now I go away, much happier and more assured. Good-bye, Germain!"

"Farewell, my dear little wife!"

"Adieu!"

A few minutes afterwards, Rigolette, having put on her goloshes and taken her umbrella, left the prison more joyfully than she had entered it. During the conversation of Germain and the grisette, other scenes were passing in one of the prison yards, to which we will now conduct the reader.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LIONS' DEN.

If the appearance of a house of confinement, constructed with every attention to salubrity and humanity, has nothing repulsive in its aspect, the sight of the prisoners causes a very different feeling. At the sight of the criminals who fill the gaols, we are at first seized with a shudder of fear and horror. It is only after some reflection that this is overcome, and feelings of pity mixed with bitterness overcome us.

To understand the feeling of horror and fear, our reader must follow us to the Fosse aux Lions (the Lions' Den), one of the yards in La Force so called. In this are usually placed the most dangerous criminals, whose ferocity, or the charges against whom, are most serious. At this time they had been compelled to place there, in consequence of the alterations making in the prison, many other prisoners. These, although equally under accusations and awaiting the assizes, were almost all respectable persons in comparison with the usual occupants of the Lions' Den. The sky, gloomy, gray, and rainy, cast a dull light over the scene we are about to depict, and which took place in the centre of the yard of considerable extent, square, and enclosed by high white walls, having here and there several grated windows.

At one end of this yard was a narrow door with a wicket; at the other end, at the entrance to the day-room, a large apartment with a stove in the centre, surrounded by wooden benches, on which were sitting and lying several prisoners conversing together. Others, preferring exercise, were walking up and down the walks, four or five in a row, arm in arm. It requires the pencil of Salvator or Goya, in order to sketch the different specimens of physical and moral ugliness, to render in its hideous fantasy the variety of costumes worn by these men, for the most part covered with squalid rags,—for being only accused, i. e. supposed innocent, they were not clad in the usual uniform of the central houses. Some, however, wore it; for on their entrance into gaol, their rags appeared so filthy and infected that, after the usual washing and bath, they had the frock and trousers of coarse gray cloth, as worn by the criminals, assigned to them.

A phrenologist would have observed attentively those embrowned and weather-beaten countenances, those flat or narrow foreheads, those cruel or crafty looks, the wicked or stupid mouth, the enormous neck,—they nearly all presented frightful resemblances to brutes. In the cunning looks of one was seen the perfidious subtlety of the fox, in another was the sanguinary rapacity of the bird of prey, in a third, the ferocity of a tiger; and, in all, the

animal stupidity of the brute. We will sketch one or two of the most striking physiognomies in the Fosse aux Lions.

Whilst the turnkey was watching his charge, a sort of council was being held in the day-room. Amongst the prisoners there assembled were Barbillon and Nicholas Martial. The prisoner who appeared to preside and lead in this debate was a scoundrel called the Skeleton, whose name has been often mentioned by the Martial family in the Isle du Ravageur. The Skeleton was prévôt, or captain, of the day-room. This fellow was tall and about forty years of age, fully justifying his sinister nickname by a meagreness impossible to describe, but which might almost be termed osteologic.

If the countenance of the Skeleton presented more or less analogy with that of the tiger, the vulture, or the fox, the shape of his forehead, receding as it did, his bony, flat, and lengthened jaws, supported by a neck of disproportioned length, instantly reminded you of the conformation of a serpent. Complete baldness increased still more this hideous resemblance, for beneath the corded skin of his forehead, nearly as flat as a reptile's, might be distinguished the smallest protuberances, the smallest sutures of his skull. His beardless face was exactly like old parchment tightly distended over the bones of his face, and only somewhat stretched from the projection of the cheek-bone to the angle of the lower jaw, the working of which was distinctly visible. His eyes, small and lowering, were so deeply imbedded, and the rim of his brow so prominent, that under his yellow brow, when the light fell, were seen two orbits literally filled with shadows; and, a little further on, the eyes seemed to disappear in the depths of these two dark cavities, these two black holes, which gave so sinister an aspect to the skeleton head. His long teeth, whose alveolar projections were to be accurately traced beneath the tanned skin of his bony and flat jaws, were almost continually developed by a habitual sneer.

Although the stiffened muscles of this man were almost reduced to tendons, he possessed extraordinary strength, and the strongest resisted with difficulty the grasp of his long arms, his long and lean fingers. He had the formidable clutch of a skeleton of iron. He wore a blue smock-frock, very short, and which exposed (and he was vain of it) his knotted hands and half his forearm, or rather two bones, the radius and the ulna (this anatomy will be excused us), two bones enveloped in a coarse and black skin, separated by a deep groove, in which were some veins hard and dry as cords. When he placed his hands on a table he seemed, as Pique-Vinaigre justly remarked, as if he were spreading out a game of knuckle-bones.

The Skeleton, after having passed fifteen years of his life at the galleys for an attempt at robbery and murder, had broken his ban and been taken in the very act of theft and murder. The last assassination had been committed with circumstances of such ferocity that the ruffian made up his mind, and with reason, that he should be condemned to death. The influence which the Skeleton exercised over the other prisoners, from his strength, energy, and wickedness, had caused him to be chosen by the director of the prison as prévôt of the dormitory,—that is to say, the Skeleton was charged with the police of the chamber as far as concerned its order, arrangement, and the cleanliness of the room and the beds, a duty which he discharged perfectly; and no prisoner dared to fail in the cares and duties which he superintended. The Skeleton was discoursing with several prisoners, amongst whom were Barbillon and Nicholas Martial.

"Are you sure of what you say?" inquired the Skeleton of Martial.

"Yes, yes,—a hundred times, yes! Father Micou heard it from the Gros-Boiteux, who has already tried to knock this hound on the head because he peached about some one."

"Then let's do for him,—brush him up!" said Barbillon. The Skeleton was already inclined to give that skulking Germain a turn of his hand.

The prévôt took his pipe from his mouth for a moment, and then said, in a tone so low and husky as to be scarcely audible:

"Germain kept aloof from us, gave himself airs, watched us,—for the less one talks the more one listens. We meant to get rid of him out of the Fosse aux Lions, and if we had given him a quiet squeeze, they'd have taken him away."

"Well, then," inquired Nicholas, "what alteration need there be now?"

"This alteration," replied the Skeleton; "that if he has turned informer, as the Gros-Boiteux declares, he mustn't get off with a quiet squeeze."

"By no manner o' means!" said Barbillon.

"We must make an example of him," continued the Skeleton, warming as he went on. "It is not now the nabs who look out for us, but the noses. Jacques and Gauthier, who were guillotined the other day, were informed against,—nosed; Rousillon, sent to the galleys for life,—nosed."

"And me, and my mother, and Calabash, and my brother at Toulon," cried Nicholas; "have we not all been nosed by Bras-Rouge? To be sure we have; because, instead of shutting him up here with us, he has been sent to La Roquette. They daren't put him with us; he knew he had done us wrong, the old—"

"Well," added Barbillon, "and didn't Bras-Rouge nose upon me, too?"

"And I, too," said a young prisoner, in a thin voice, and lisping affectedly. "I was split upon by Jobert, who had proposed to me a little affair in the Rue St. Martin."

The latter personage, with a fluty voice, pale, fat, and effeminate face, and with a sly and treacherous glance, was singularly attired. He wore as a head-dress a red pocket-handkerchief, which exposed two locks of light brown hair close to his temples; the two ends of his handkerchief formed a projecting rosette over his forehead; his cravat was a merino shawl, with a large pattern, which crossed over his chest; his mulberry-coloured waistcoat almost disappeared beneath the tight waistband of a very large pair of trousers of plaid, with very large and different-coloured checks.

"And was not that shameful? Such a man to turn against me!" he added, in his shrill voice. "Yet, really, nothing in the world would have made me distrust Jobert."

"I know very well that he sold you, Javatte," replied the Skeleton, who seemed to protect the prisoner peculiarly; "and as a proof that they have done for thy nose the same as they have done for Bras-Rouge, they have not dared to leave Jobert here, but sent him to the stone jug of the Conciergerie. Well, there must be an end put to this! There must be an example; for traitors are doing the work of the police, and believe themselves safe in their skins because they are put in a different prison from those on whom they have nosed."

"That's true."

"To prevent this, every prisoner should consider every nose as his deadly enemy. Whether he informs against Peter or James, here or there, that's nothing; fall on him tooth and nail. When we have made cold meat of four or five in the prisons, the others will think twice before they turn 'snitch.'"

"You're right, Skeleton," said Nicholas; "and let Germain be number one."

"And no mistake," replied the prévôt; "but let us wait until the Gros-Boiteux arrives. When, for instance, he has proved to all the world that Germain is a nose the thing shall be settled out of hand; the calf shall bleat no more, we'll stop his wind."

"And what shall we do with the turnkeys who watch us?" inquired the prisoner whom the Skeleton called Javatte.

"I have my plan, which Pique-Vinaigre will aid."

"He! He's a coward."

"And no stronger than a flea."

"I'm awake. Where is he?"

"He had come out of the visiting-room, but went back again to see his lawyer."

"And is Germain still in the visiting-room?"

"Yes, with the little wench who comes to see him."

"When he returns be on your guard. But we must wait for Pique-Vinaigre, without him we can do nothing."

"No?"

"No."

"And Germain shall be done for?"

"I'll take care of that."

"But with what? They have taken all our knives away."

"What do you think of these nippers, would you like to have your neck in their clutch?" asked the Skeleton, opening his long bony fingers, hard as iron.

"You'll choke him?"

"Decidedly."

"But if they find out that it is you?"

"Well, what if they do? Am I a calf with two heads, such as they show at the fair?"

"No, that's true; a man has but one throat, and yours—"

"Is sentenced; my lawyer told me so yesterday. I was taken with my hand in the bag, and my knife in the weasand of the stiff'un. I'm a 'return horse,' too; so nothing can be more certain. I'll drop my head into Charlot's (the headsman's) basket, and I shall see if it's true that he does his customers, and puts sawdust into his basket instead of the bran which government allows us."

"True, the guillotine has a right to its bran. Now, I remember my father was robbed in the same way," said Nicholas Martial, with a ferocious grin.

This horrid jest created immense laughter amongst the prisoners. This is fearful, but far from exaggeration; we give but a faint idea of these conversations, so common in prisons. The prisoners were all laughing joyously.

"Thousand thunders!" cried the Skeleton. "I wish they who punish us would come and see how we bear it. If they will come to the Barrière St. Jacques the day of my benefit they will hear me address the audience in a neat and appropriate speech, and say to Charlot, in a gentlemanly tone, 'Père Sampson, the cord if you please.'"

Fresh bursts of laughter hailed this jest.

"And then Charlot opens the baker's (the devil's) door," continued the Skeleton, still smoking his pipe.

"Ah, bah! Is there a devil?"

"You fool, I was only joking. There's a sharp blade, and they put a head under it, and that's all. And now that I know my road, and must stay at the abbey of Mont-à-Regret (guillotine), I would rather go there to-day than to-morrow," said the Skeleton, with savage excitement. "I wish I was there now,—my blood comes into my mouth when I think what a crowd there'll be to see me; there'll be, at least, I should say, from four to five thousand who will push and squeeze to get good places, and they'll hire seats and windows, as if for a grand procession. I hear 'em now crying, 'Seats to let! Seats to let!' And then there'll be troops of soldiers, cavalry and infantry, and all for me,—for the Skeleton! That's enough to rouse a man if he was as big a coward as Pique-Vinaigre, that would make you walk like a hero. All eyes

on you, and that makes a fellow pluck up; then—'tis but a moment—a fellow dies game, and that annoys the big-wigs and curs, and gives the knowing ones pluck to face the chopper."

"That's true, on Gospel!" added Barbillon, trying to imitate the fearful audacity of the Skeleton; "they think to make us funky when they set Charlot to work to get his shop open at our expense."

"Ah, bah!" said Nicholas, in his turn; "we laugh at Charlot and his shop; it is like the prison or the galleys,—we laugh at them, too; and so, that we may be all friends together, let's be jolly as long as we can."

"The thing that would do us," said the shrill-voiced prisoner, "would be to put us in solitary cells day and night. They do say they mean to do so at last."

"In solitary cells!" exclaimed the Skeleton, with repressed rage; "don't talk of it! Solitary cell—alone! Hold your tongue! I would rather have my arms and legs cut off! Alone within four walls! Quite alone—without having our pals to laugh with! Oh, that will never be! I like the galleys a hundred times better than the central prison, because at the galleys, instead of being shut up, one is out-of-doors, sees the world, people going and coming, and has his jokes and fun. Well, I'd rather be done for at once than be put in a solitary cell, if only for a year. Yes, for at this moment I am sure to be guillotined—ain't I? Well, if they said to me, 'Would you rather have a year of solitary confinement?' I should hold out my neck. A year all alone! Why, is it possible? What do they suppose a man thinks of when he is alone?"

"Suppose you were carried there by main force?"

"Well, I wouldn't stay; I would make such use of my hands and feet that I should escape," replied the Skeleton.

"But if you couldn't,—if you were unable to escape?"

"Then I'd kill the first person who came near me, in order to have my head chopped off."

"But if, instead of sentencing such as us to death, they condemned us to be in solitary confinement for life?"

The Skeleton appeared struck at this remark, and, after a moment's silence, replied:

"Why, then, I'll tell you what I should do,—I should dash out my brains against the walls. I would starve rather than be in a solitary cell. What, all alone! all my life alone with myself,—and no chance of escape! I tell you it is impossible. Well, you know, there's no man more reckless than I am—I'd kill a man for a dollar, and for nothing if my honour was concerned; they believe I have only killed two persons, but if the dead could tell tales there are five tongues could say what I have done."

The ruffian was boasting. The sanguinary declarations are still another trait of the hardened criminals. A governor of a prison said to us, "If the assassinations boasted of by these scoundrels were really committed, the population would be decimated."

"And I, too," said Barbillon, desirous of bragging in his turn; "they think I only silenced the husband of the milk-woman in the Cité, but I did many others with tall Robert, who suffered last year."

"I was going to say," continued the Skeleton, "that I fear neither fire nor devil. Well, if I were in a solitary cell, and certain I could not escape,—thunder! I believe I should be frightened!"

"And so, if you had to begin your time over again as prig and throtter, and if, instead of central houses, galleys, and guillotine, there were only solitary cells, you would hesitate before such a chance?"

"Ma foi! I believe I really should!" replied the Skeleton.

And he said truly. It is impossible to describe the vast terror which such ruffians experience at the very idea of being in solitary confinement. And is not this very terror an eloquent plea in favour of this punishment?

An uproarious noise made by the prisoners in the yard interrupted the Skeleton's council. Nicholas rose hastily, and went to the door of the room to discover the cause of this unusual tumult.

"It is the Gros-Boiteux," said Nicholas, returning.

"The Gros-Boiteux!" exclaimed the prévôt. "And has Germain come down from the visiting-room?"

"Not yet," replied Barbillon.

"Then let him make haste," said the Skeleton, "and I'll give him an order for a new coffin."

The Gros-Boiteux, whose arrival was so warmly hailed by the prisoners in the lions' den, and whose information might be so fatal to Germain, was a man of middle stature; but, in spite of being fat and crippled, he was nimble and vigorous. His countenance, brutal like that of most of his companions, was of the bulldog character; his low forehead, his small yellow eyes, his flaccid cheeks, his heavy jaws, the lower being very projecting, and armed with long teeth, or, rather, broken fangs, which in places projected beyond his lips, made his resemblance to that animal the more striking. He wore a felt cap, and over his clothes a blue cloak with a fur collar.

The Gros-Boiteux was accompanied into the prison by a man about thirty years of age, whose tanned and freckled face appeared less dissolute than that of the other prisoners, although he affected to appear as dogged as his companion. From time to time his features became overcast, and he smiled bitterly. The Gros-Boiteux soon found himself amongst his boon companions and acquaintances, and he could scarcely reply to the congratulations and kind words which came to him from all sides.

"What, is it you, old boy? All right! Now we shall have some fun."

"You haven't hurried yourself."

"Still I have done all I could to see my friends again as soon as possible, and it was no fault of mine if the stone jug didn't claim me sooner."

"Don't doubt you, old boy! And a man doesn't pick out a gaol as his favourite residence; but once trapped he does his best to be jolly."

"And so we shall be, for Pique-Vinaigre is here."

"Is he? What, one of the old customers of Melun? Why, that's capital! For he'll help us to pass the time with his stories, and his customers will not fail him, for there are more recruits coming in."

"Who are they?"

"Why, just now at the entrance, whilst I came in, I saw two fresh chaps brought in; one I didn't know, but the other, who wore a blue cotton cap and a gray blouse, I have seen before somewhere. He is a powerful-looking man, and I think I have met him at the Ogress's of the White Rabbit."

"I say, Gros-Boiteux, don't you remember at Melun I bet you a wager that in less than a year you would be nabbed again?"

"To be sure I do, and you've won. But what are you here for?"

"Oh, I was caught on the prigging lay—à la Americaine."

"Ah, always in the same line."

"Yes, I continue in my usual small way. The rig is common, but there are always 'culls'; and but for the stupidity of a pal I should not be here. However, once caught twice warned; and when I begin again I will be more careful,—I have my plan."

"Ah, here's Cardillac!" said the Boiteux, going to a little man wretchedly dressed, with ill-looking aspect, full of craft and malignity, and with features partaking of the wolf and fox. "Ah, old chap, how are you?"

"Ah, old limper," replied the prisoner nicknamed Cardillac to the Gros-Boiteux; "they said every day, 'He's coming—he's not coming!' But you are like the pretty girls, you do as you like."

"Yes, to be sure."

"Well," replied Cardillac, "is it for something spicy that you are here now?"

"Yes, my dear fellow, I had done one or two good things, but the last was a failure; it was an out-and-out-go, and may still be done. Unfortunately, Frank and I overshot the mark."

And the Gros-Boiteux pointed to his companion, towards whom all eyes now turned.

"Ah, so it is—it's Frank!" said Cardillac; "I didn't know him again because of his beard. What, Franky! Why, I thought you'd turned honest, and was, at least, mayor of your village."

"I was an ass, and I've suffered for it," said Frank, quickly; "but every sin has its repentance. I was good once, and now I'm a prig for the rest of my days. Let 'em look out when I get out."

"What happened to you, Frank?"

"What happens to every free convict who is donkey enough to think he can turn honest. Fate is just! When I left Melun I'd saved nine hundred and odd francs."

"Yes, that's true," said the Gros-Boiteux, "all his misfortunes have come from his keeping his savings, instead of spending 'em jolly when he left the 'jug.' You see what repentance leads to!"

"They sent me, en surveillance, to Etampes," replied Frank; "being a locksmith by trade, I went to a master in my line and said to him, 'I am a freed convict, I know no one likes to employ such, but here are nine hundred francs of my savings, give me work, my money will be your guarantee, for I want to work and be honest.'"

"What a joke!"

"Well, you'll see how it answered. I offered my savings as a guarantee to the master locksmith that he might give me work. 'I'm not a banker to take money on interest,' says he to me, 'and I don't want any freed convicts in my shop. I go to work in houses to open doors where keys are lost, I have a confidential business, and if it were known that I employed a freed convict amongst my workmen I should lose my customers. Good day, my man.'"

"Wasn't that just what he deserved, Cardillac?"

"Exactly."

"You simpleton!" said the Gros-Boiteux to Frank, with a paternal air; "instead of breaking your ban at once, and coming to Paris to melt your mopusses, so that you might not have a sou left, but be compelled to return to robbing. You see the end of your fine ideas."

"That's what you are always saying," said Frank, with impatience; "it is true I was wrong not to spend my 'tin,' for I have not even enjoyed it. Well, as there were only four locksmiths in Etampes, he whom I had first addressed had soon told all the others, and they said to me as had said their fellow tradesman, 'No, thank ye.' All sung the same song."

"Only see, now, what it all comes to! You must see that we are all marked for life."

"Well, then, I was on the idle of Etampes, and my money melted and melted," continued Frank, "but no work came. I left Etampes, in spite of my surveillance, and came to Paris, where I found work immediately, for my employer did not know who or what I was, and it's no boast to say I am a first-rate workman. Well, I put my seven hundred francs which I had remaining into an agent's hands, who gave me a note for it; when that was due he did not pay me, so I took my note to a huissier, who brought an

action against him, and recovered the money, which I left in his hands, saying to myself there's something for a rainy day. Well, just then I met the Gros-Boiteux."

"True. Well, Frank was a locksmith and made keys, I had a job in which he could be of service, and I proposed it to him. I had the prints, and he had only to go to work, when, only imagine, he refused,—he meant to turn honest. So, says I, I'll arrange about that, I'll make him work, for his own interest. So I wrote a letter, without any signature, to his master, and another to his fellow workmen, to inform them that Frank was a liberated convict,—so the master turned him away. He went to another employer and worked there for a week,—same game again; and if he had gone to a dozen I'd have served him in the same way."

"And if I had suspected that it was you who had informed against me," answered Frank, "I'd have given you a pleasant quarter of an hour to pass. Well, I was at length driven away from my last employer as a scamp only fit to be hanged. Work, then,—be respectable,—so that people may say, not 'What are you doing?' but 'What have you done?' Once on the pavé I said, 'Fortunately I have my savings to fall back upon.' So I went to the huissier, but he had cut his stick, and spent my 'tin'; and here was I without a feather to fly with, not even enough to pay for a week's lodging. What a precious rage I was in! Well, at this moment comes the Gros-Boiteux, and he took advantage of my situation. I saw it was useless trying to be honest, and that once on the prig there's no leaving it. But, old Gros, I owe you a turn."

"Come, Frank, no malice!" replied the Gros-Boiteux. "Well, he did his part like a man, and we entered upon the business, which promised royally; but, unfortunately, at the moment when we opened our mouths to swallow the dainty bit, the 'traps' were down upon us. Couldn't be helped, you know, lad! If it wasn't for that, why, our profession would be too good."

"Yet if that vagabond of a huissier had not robbed me I should not have been here," said Frank, with concentrated rage.

"Well, well," continued the Gros-Boiteux, "do you mean to say that you were better off when you were breaking your back with work?"

"I was free," retorted Frank.

"Yes, on Sundays and when you were out of work, but the rest of the week you were tied up like a dog, and never sure of employ. Why, you don't know when you are well off."

"Will you teach me?" said Frank, bitterly.

"Well, you've a right to be vexed, for it was shameful to miss such a good stroke; but it is still to be done in a month or two. The people will become reassured, and it is a rich, very rich house. I shall be sentenced for breaking my ban, and so cannot resume the job, but if I find an amateur I will hand it over to him a bargain. My woman has the prints, and there is nothing to do but make new keys, and with the information I can give it must succeed. Why, there must be, at least, 400l. to lay hands on, and that ought to console you, Frank."

Frank shook his head, crossed his hands over his chest, and made no reply.

Cardillac took the Gros-Boiteux by the arms, led him into a corner of the yard, and said to him, after a moment's silence:

"Is the affair you have failed in still good?"

"In two months as good as new."

"Can you prove it?"

"Of course."

"And what do you ask for it?"

"A hundred francs as earnest; and I will give you the word arranged with my woman, on which she will hand you the prints, from which you can make the false keys. And, moreover, if the thing comes off, I shall expect a fifth share of the swag to be handed over to my woman."

"That's not unreasonable."

"As I shall know to whom she has given the prints, if I am done out of my share I shall know whom to inform against."

"And very right, too, if you were choused; but amongst prigs and cracksmen there's honour,—we must rely on each other, or all business would be impossible."

Another anomaly in this horrid existence. This villain spoke the truth. It is very seldom that thieves fail in their faith in such arrangements as these, but they usually act with a kind of good faith,—or, rather, that we may not prostitute the word, we will say that necessity compels these ruffians to

keep their words; for if they failed, as the companion of the Gros-Boiteux said, "All business would be impossible." A great number of robberies are arranged, bought, and plotted in this way in gaol,—another pernicious result of confinement in common.

"If what you say is sure," continued Cardillac, "I can agree for the job. There are no proofs against me, I am sure to be acquitted, and in a fortnight I shall be out; let us add three weeks in order to turn oneself about, to get the false keys, and lay our plans, and then in six weeks from this—"

"You'll go to the job in the very nick of time."

"Well, then, it's a bargain."

"But how about the earnest? I must have something down."

"Here is my last button, and when I have no more,—yet there are others left," said Cardillac, tearing off a button covered with cloth from his ragged blue coat, and then tearing off the covering with his nails, he showed the Gros-Boiteux that, instead of a button-mould, it contained a piece of forty francs. "You see I can pay deposit," he added, "when the affair is arranged."

"That's the ticket, old fellow!" said the Gros-Boiteux. "And as you are soon going out, and have got rhino to work with, I can put you up to another thing,—a real good go,—the cheese,—a regular affair which my woman and myself have been cooking up, and which only wants the finishing stroke. Only imagine a lone street in a deserted quarter, a ground floor, looking on one side into an obscure alley, and on the other a garden, and here two old people, who go to roost with the cocks and hens since the riots, and, for fear of being robbed, they have concealed behind a panel, in a pot of preserves, a quantity of gold; my woman found it out by gossiping with the servant. But I tell you this will be a dearer job than t'other, for it is in hard cash, and all cooked ready to eat and drink."

"We'll arrange it, be assured. But you haven't worked over well since you left the central."

"Yes, I have had a pretty fair chance. I got together some trifles which brought me nearly sixty pounds. One of my best bites was a pull at two women who lodged in the same house with me in the Passage de la Brasserie."

"What, at Daddy Micou's?"

"Yes."

"And your Josephine?"

"Just the same; a real ferret as ever. She cooks with the old couple I have mentioned to you, and so smelt out the pot with the golden honey in it."

"She's nothing but a trump!"

"I flatter myself she is. But, talking of trumps, you know the Chouette?"

"Yes; Nicholas has told me the Schoolmaster did for her, and he has gone mad."

"Perhaps from losing his sight through some accident. But I say, old fellow, it's quite understood that you will buy my two bargains, and so I shall not speak to any one else."

"Don't; and we will talk them over this evening."

"Well, and how are you getting on here?"

"Oh, we laugh and play the fool."

"Who's prévôt of the chamber?"

"The Skeleton."

"He's not to be joked with. I have seen him at Martial's, in the Isle du Ravageur. We had a flare-up with Josephine and La Boulotte."

"By the way, Nicholas is here."

"So Micou told me when he made a lament that Nicholas was putting the screw on—an old hunk! Why, what else were receivers made for?"

"Here is the Skeleton," said Cardillac, as the prévôt appeared at the door of the room.

"Young 'un, come forward," said the Skeleton to the Gros-Boiteux.

"Here I am," he replied, going into the apartment, accompanied by Frank, whose arm he held.

During the conversation between the Gros-Boiteux, Frank, and Cardillac, Barbillion had been, by order of the prévôt, to select twelve or fifteen of the choicest prisoners, who (in order to avoid the suspicions of the turnkey) had come separately into the day-room. The other détenus had remained in the yard, and some of them, by Barbillion's advice, had appeared to be disputing, in order to take off the attention of the turnkey from the room in which were now assembled the Skeleton, Barbillion, Nicholas, Frank, Cardillac, the Gros-Boiteux, and some fifteen other prisoners, all awaiting with impatient curiosity until the prévôt should open the business.

Barbillion, charged with the look-out, placed himself near the door. The Skeleton, taking his pipe from his mouth, said to the Gros-Boiteux:

"Do you know a slim young man named Germain, with blue eyes, brown hair, and the look of a noodle?"

"What! Is Germain here?" inquired the Gros-Boiteux, with surprise, hate, and anger in his looks.

"What, then, you know him?" said the Skeleton.

"Know him?" replied the Gros-Boiteux. "Why, my lads, I denounce him as a nose, and he must be punished!"

"Yes, yes!" replied the prisoners.

"Are you sure it was he who informed against you?" asked Frank; "suppose it was a mistake,—we mustn't ill-use a man who's innocent."

This remark was displeasing to the Skeleton, who leaned over to the Gros-Boiteux, and said in his ear:

"Who is this man?"

"One with whom I have worked."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes—but he hasn't gull enough—too much treacle in him."

"Good, I'll keep an eye on him."

"Tell us how Germain turned nose," said a prisoner.

"Yes, let us know all about it, Gros-Boiteux," continued the Skeleton, who did not take his eyes off Frank.

"Well, then," said Gros-Boiteux, "a man of Nantes, named Velu, a freed convict, brought up the young fellow, whose birth no one is acquainted with. When he had reached the proper age they put him into a banking-house at Nantes, thinking they had put a wolf to watch the money-box, and make use of Germain to do a bold and great stroke which had been meditated for a very long time. There were to be two coups, a forgery and a dip into the strong chest at the bank, something like a hundred and fifty thousand francs. All was arranged, and Velu relied on the young fellow as on himself, for the chap slept in the room in which the iron safe was. Velu told him his plans; Germain neither says yes or no, but reveals all to his employer, and the very same evening cuts his stick and mizzles to Paris."

The prisoners burst into various murmurs of indignation and threats.

"He's a spy—nose—informer!—and we'll have the bones out of his body!"

"If it's agreeable, I'll seek a quarrel with him, and settle his hash!"

"Silence in the stone jug!" exclaimed the Skeleton, in a tone of command.

The prisoners were silent.

"Go on," said the prévôt to Gros-Boiteux, and he went on smoking.

"Believing that Germain had consented, and relying on his assistance, Velu and two of his friends attempted the job that same night. The banker was on the watch; one of Velu's friends was taken as he was entering a window, he himself escaping with difficulty. He reached Paris enraged at having been sold by Germain, and foiled in a splendid affair. One fine day he met the young fellow; it was in the open daylight, and he didn't dare do anything, but he followed him, found out where he lived, and one night we two, Velu and little Ledru, fell on Germain. Unfortunately he escaped, and then changed his residence in the Rue du Temple, where he lived; we were unable to find him afterwards. But if he is here, I demand—"

"You have nothing to demand," said the Skeleton, in a tone of authority.

The Gros-Boiteux was instantly silent.

"I take the bargain off your hands; you will concede to me Germain's skin, and I'll flay him alive. I am not called the Skeleton for nothing. I am dead-

alive, my grave is dug, and I run no risk in working for the stone jug. The informers destroy us faster than the police; they put noses of La Force into La Roquette, and the noses of La Roquette in the Conciergerie, and they think themselves safe. Now, mind you, when each prison shall have killed its informer, no matter when he may have informed, that will take away the others' appetite. I will set the example, and let others follow it."

All the prisoners, admiring the Skeleton's resolution, closed around him. Barbillon himself, instead of remaining near the door, joined the group, and did not perceive another prisoner, who had entered the room. This individual, clothed in a gray blouse, and wearing a blue cotton cap with a red worsted border, pulled down over his eyes, started as he heard the name of Germain mentioned, and then, mingling with the Skeleton's admirers, gave out loud tones of approbation at the deadly determination of the prévôt.

"What an out-and-outer the Skeleton is!" said one.

"The devil himself is a fool to him!"

"This here's what I call a man!"

"If all were like him, wouldn't the flats be afeard?"

"He'll do a real service to the stone jug, and when they see this, the noses will look blue."

"And no mistake!"

"And since the Skeleton is safe to suffer, why, it'll cost him nothing to put a nose out of joint!"

"Well, I think it's too bad," said Frank, "to kill the young chap."

"Why? Why?" exclaimed the Skeleton, in a savage tone; "no one has a right to protect a traitor."

"Yes, to be sure, he is a traitor,—so much the worse for him," said Frank, after a moment's reflection.

These latter words, and Gros-Boiteux's assurance, put the doubts which the other prisoners had entertained against Frank to rest.

The Skeleton alone continued to mistrust him.

"And what are we to do with the turnkey? Tell us, Dead-Alive, for that is your name as well as the Skeleton," said Nicholas, with a grin.

"We must draw off his attention somehow."

"No; we'll hold him down by main force."

"Yes!"

"No!"

"Silence in the stone jug!" said the Skeleton.

There was complete silence.

"Listen to me!" said the prévôt, in his hoarse voice. "There is no means of doing the thing so long as the turnkey remains in the day-room or the walking-yard. I have no knife, and there must be a few groans, for the sneak will struggle."

"Well, what then?"

"Why, this. Pique-Vinaigre has promised to tell us to-day after dinner his story of 'Gringalet and Cut-in-Half.' It rains, and we shall all come here, and the sneak will come and sit down there in the corner, as he always does. We'll give Pique-Vinaigre some sous that he may begin his tale. It will be dinner-time in the gaol; the turnkey will see us quietly employed in listening to the miraculous mystery of 'Gringalet and Cut-in-Half,' and will, suspecting no harm, make off to the tap. As soon as he has left the yard we shall have a quarter of an hour to ourselves, and the nose will be cold meat before the turnkey can return. I will undertake it,—I who have done for stouter fellows in my day; and mind, I'll have no assistance!"

"Mind your eye!" cried Cardillac; "and what about the huissier who will always come for a gossip amongst us at dinner-time? If he comes into the room to listen to Pique-Vinaigre, and sees Germain done for, he will cry out for help. He's not one of us, the huissier,—he's in a private cell, and we should mistrust him."

"Is there a huissier here?" said Frank, the victim as we know of a breach of trust, by Maître Boulard. "Is there a huissier here?" he repeated, with astonishment, "and what is his name?"

"Boulard," replied Cardillac.

"The very man! The identical villain!" cried Frank, clenching his fists. "It is he who has stolen my savings!"

"The huissier?" inquired the prévôt.

"Yes, seven hundred francs of mine."

"You know him? And has he seen you?" inquired the Skeleton.

"I have seen him, worse luck! But for him I should not be here."

These regrets sounded ill in the Skeleton's ears, and he fixed his malignant eyes steadfastly on Frank, who replied to several of his comrade's questions. Then stooping towards the Gros-Boiteux, he said, in a low voice:

"This is a fresh 'un who might tell the turnkey."

"No, I'll answer for his not informing against any one; yet still he has his scruples about going the whole hog, and he might aid Germain in defending himself. It would be best to get him out of the yard."

"I'll do it," said the Skeleton; and then aloud he said, "I say, Frank, won't you pitch into this thief of a lawyer?"

"Won't I, that's all!"

"Well, he's coming, and so look out."

"I'm ready, and he shall bear my marks!"

"We shall have a row, and they will send the huissier to his room and Frank to the black-hole," said the Skeleton, in an undertone, to the Gros-Boiteux; "we shall thus get rid of both."

"What a lucky pitch! Why, this Skeleton is a prime minister!" said the Boiteux, admiringly; and then he added, in a loud tone, "I say, shall we tell Pique-Vinaigre that we shall avail ourselves of his history to come over the turnkey and throttle the sneak?"

"By no means; Pique-Vinaigre is too soft and too cowardly. If he was up to the thing he wouldn't tell the story, but when the job is done and over he'll bear his share."

The dinner-bell sounded at this moment.

"To your puddings, dogs!" said the Skeleton; "Pique-Vinaigre and Germain will soon be in the yard. Now mind your eyes, my boys! They call me Dead-Alive, but the sneak is also dead-alive!"

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY-TELLER.

The new prisoner of whom we have spoken, and who was dressed in a gray blouse, with a cotton cap on his head, had attentively listened to and energetically applauded the scheme for punishing the reserve of Germain, even at the expense of his life. This individual, whose form betokened strength and power of no ordinary description, quitted the day-room with the rest of the prisoners without being noticed, and soon mingled with the different groups assembled in the courtyard to receive their rations, crowding around the persons employed in the distribution like so many hungry cormorants.

Each prisoner received a piece of the meat employed in making the day's soup, with about half a loaf of tolerably good bread. Such of the détenus as possessed the means were allowed to purchase drink at the wineshop belonging to the prison, and even to go thither to regale themselves with their lush; while persons who, like Nicholas, had received provisions from their friends, generally made a sort of feast, to which they invited their most intimate acquaintances. The guests selected by the son of the executed felon upon the present occasion were the Skeleton, Barbillon, and, at the suggestion of the latter, Pique-Vinaigre, in order that good eating and drinking might quicken his talent for "storytelling."

The ham, hard boiled eggs, cheese, and delicate white bread, wrung from the forced generosity of Micou the receiver, were arranged most temptingly on a bench in the day-room, and the Skeleton prepared himself to do ample justice to the repast, without in the slightest degree disturbing his appetite by the thoughts of the cold-blooded murder that was to follow it.

"Just go and see whether Pique-Vinaigre is coming, will you, my fine fellow?" cried he, addressing an individual who stood near him. "I tell you what it is, while I'm waiting to choke that stuck-up young fool they call Germain, I'm blowed if hunger and thirst won't choke me, if I have to dawdle about much longer. And here; don't forget to work old Frank up to do for the bum-bailiff, so that we may kill two birds with one stone, as the saying is."

"Don't you be afraid, old Dead-Alive! If Frank don't make a stiff'un of the bailey, it won't be our fault, that you may take your oath of!" And, while uttering these words, Nicholas went forth from the day-room.

At this moment Maître Boulard entered the yard, smoking a cigar, his hands buried in the pockets of his gray duffle dressing-gown, his peaked cap pulled down well over his ears, and a look of chuckling satisfaction upon his fat, full-blown countenance. He quickly espied Nicholas, who was busily occupied gazing around in search of Frank. That person was at that precise period of time busily occupied, in company with his friend Gros-Boiteux, in eating his dinner, and, from the position in which they sat on one of the benches, they perceived not the presence of the bailiff. Acting in implicit obedience to the directions given him by the Skeleton, directly Nicholas, from the corner of his eye, descried the approach of Maître Boulard, he feigned entire ignorance of his vicinity, but made for the place where Frank and his companions were seated.

"How are you, my ticket?" inquired the bailiff of Nicholas.

"Bless me!" answered he; "I declare I didn't see you. I suppose you're like me, come out to take a sniff of fresh air and have your daily walk?"

"Why, that's about it. But I happen to have more reasons than one to-day; and I tell you how it is. But, first of all, catch hold of one of these cigars; they're deuced good ones. Come, don't be so missy and shy about it; take as many as you like. Hang it all, when men are shut up together in a place like this, they oughtn't to be stingy."

"You are very good, and so are your cigars. But you were saying you had several reasons for walking out to-day?"

"Well, and so I have. First and foremost, I don't feel as hungry as usual; so, thinks I, I'll go and look on while those chaps eat their dinner. Who knows but the sight of their jaws all working away together may screw me up a bit, and give me a relish against feeding-time?"

"A famous idea!" said Nicholas. "But if you really do want to see a couple of feeders, just draw this way. There!" added he, pointing to the bench on which Frank was sitting; "what do you think of a pair of grubbers like those? I should say we were better behind than before them, or they might even swallow us instead of those huge lumps of bread and cheese and onions so rapidly stowed away in their capacious jaws."

"Let's have a look at them!" said Maître Boulard.

"Well, to be sure!" cried Nicholas, with feigned surprise; "I declare one of them is Gros-Boiteux!"

Gros-Boiteux and Frank both turned around at these words. Stupefied and speechless, the bailiff continued to gaze in utter amazement at the man he had so wronged, while, starting up with a sudden spring, Frank threw down the morsel he had been eating, and darting on Maître Boulard, he seized him by the throat, exclaiming, "My money—my money; give me my money!"

"Hallo! Who are you? What do you mean? Hands off, or you'll strangle me! I—"

"My money, I say!"

"My good man, only calm yourself and listen to reason!"

"No, not till you give me back my money. What, aren't you satisfied with having brought me here? Can you not restore me what you stole from me?"

"But I—I—I—never—"

"I tell you again, if I get sent to the galleys 'tis all along of you; for had you not taken my little all from me, I should not have been driven to the necessity of robbing others; I might have lived and died an honest man. You may be acquitted, you may escape the punishment you deserve, but, at least, you shall carry my marks away with you. Ha, ha! You can come it grand, and swagger about here dressed up with your gold chains and trinkets, bought, no doubt, with the money of other poor devils who have been cheated by you as I have been. Take that for your pains—and that—that—and that! Now, have you had enough? No! Then here's for you again!"

"Help, help!" screamed the bailiff, as he rolled on the ground at Frank's feet, while his infuriated antagonist continued to belabour him with all his force.

The rest of the prisoners took little or no interest in this affray, but contented themselves with forming a circle around the two combatants, or rather the assailant and the assailed; for Maître Boulard, frightened and out of breath, made not the slightest resistance, but contented himself with warding off his adversary's blows as well as he could. Fortunately, the repeated cries of the poor maltreated bailiff reached the ears of one of the superintending officers, by whose intervention he was rescued from the rough hands of Frank. Pale, terrified, and almost speechless with terror, Maître Boulard arose. One eye was wholly closed by the severe beating he had received, and without giving himself time to pick up his cap, he wildly cried, as he rushed towards the officer:

"Open the door! Let me out—let me out! I can't and I won't stay here another minute. Help, here! Help, help!"

"As for you," exclaimed the officer, grasping Frank by the collar, "do you come along with me before the governor. I know you'll catch it, too, for fighting; two days in the black-hole is the very least you'll get, I promise you."

"I've paid him off, at any rate," returned Frank; "and I don't care for the rest."

"I say," whispered Gros-Boiteux, while affecting to be merely helping to arrange his dress, "I say, you won't breathe a word of what's going to happen to the sneak, of course?"

"Oh, don't be afraid; 'tis just likely, had I been by, I might have stood up in his defence, because to kill a man in that manner is—hard—at least—and for such a trifle! But as for telling of it, or betraying you all—oh, no!"

"Now, then," called out the officer, "I say, are you coming or are you not?"

"That's all right!" said Nicholas. "We've got well rid of Frank and the bailiff, now let's go to work without further loss of time upon the sneak!"

As Frank was being led from the prison yard, Germain and Pique-Vinaigre entered it. It was scarcely possible to recognise Germain, for his hitherto melancholy and dejected countenance was radiant with joy and exulting happiness. He walked proudly erect, casting around him a look of certain and assured content; he knew himself to be beloved, and with that consciousness all the horrors of his prison seemed to disappear. Pique-Vinaigre followed him with a timid, confused air, and, after much hesitation, at length plucked up sufficient courage to venture to address Germain, whose arm he gently touched, ere the intended victim had reached the group of prisoners, who, from a distance, were examining him with looks of deadly hatred. Spite of himself, Germain shuddered at thus being brought into contact with a person of Pique-Vinaigre's appearance, whose wretched person and ragged attire were ill-calculated to impress any one with a favourable opinion of him; but recollecting the earnest advice of Rigolette, and feeling altogether too happy himself to act with any want of benevolence, Germain stopped, and said to Pique-Vinaigre, in a gentle tone of voice:

"What do you want with me, my friend?"

"I want to thank you."

"For what?"

"For the kindness shown to my sister by the pretty young woman who visited you to-day."

"I really do not understand you," said Germain, much surprised.

"Well, then, I'll try and make you. Just now, when I was in the lodge of the prison, I saw the man who was on duty in the visitors' room a little while ago."

"Ah, yes, a very good-hearted sort of man, too. I recollect him well."

"It is not often you can apply that term to the gaolers of a prison, but the man I mean (Rousel is his name) is really deserving of being styled a kind, good-hearted man. So, all of a sudden, he whispers in my ear, 'I say, Pique-Vinaigre, my lad,' he says, 'do you know M. Germain?' 'Yes,' says I, 'I do,' says I; 'he's the bête noire of the prison yard.'" Then suddenly interrupting himself, Pique-Vinaigre said to Germain, "I beg your pardon for calling you a bête noire. Don't, think anything of that, but listen to the end of my story."

"Oh, I'm listening; go on."

"'Yes,' says I, 'I know who you mean very well,' says I. 'You mean M. Germain, the bête noire of the prison yard.' 'And of you, too, I suppose?' said the officer, in a severe and serious manner. 'Oh, bless you,' says I, 'I am too good-natured, as well as too much of a coward, to venture to call any one disagreeable; and less M. Germain than any one else,' says I, 'for I don't see any harm in him, and other folks appear to me very cruel and unjust towards him.' 'That's all right, then,' answers the officer; 'and I can tell you that you are bound to side with M. Germain, for he has been very kind to you,' he says. 'To me?' says I; 'how do you mean?' 'Well,' he answers, 'I don't mean M. Germain exactly, and it ain't to you altogether he's been kind; but still, for all that,' says Rousel, 'you are bound to show him your gratitude.'"

"Try," said Germain, smilingly, "and make me understand what it is you do mean."

"That's precisely what I said to the officer. 'Speak more clearly,' I says. So then he makes answer, 'Why, it was not M. Germain, but the very pretty young person that was here just now to see him, who loaded your sister with all sorts of kindnesses. She overheard the poor thing telling you all her

troubles; and directly as the creature went out, the charming young woman as come visiting to M. Germain went and offered to serve her in every way she could."

"Dear, good Rigolette!" murmured Germain, deeply affected by this little incident; "she said not one word to me of all this."

"Well, to be sure!" I says to the officer; 'what a poor stupid goose I am!' 'You are quite right—you are!' M. Germain—leastways, his friend—has been good to me,—that is to say to my sister Jeanne, which is the same thing, only much more than if the favour had been done to myself."

"Poor, dear Rigolette!" said Germain; "ever the same tender, compassionate, generous-hearted creature!"

"So then the officer goes on to say how he heard all that passed between your nice young woman and my poor sister Jeanne. 'And now,' he says, 'Pique-Vinagre, that you are aware of the fact, if you don't try to show kindness by every means in your power to M. Germain, and more especially, if you should know of any plot got up against him and not warn him of it, why,' he says, 'Pique-Vinagre, you would be a regular scamp and a blackguard.' 'I tell you what,' I makes answer and says, 'I'm an unfinished scamp as yet, but I'm no blackguard, and, what's more, I never will be worse than I am, for the sake of my poor dear Jeanne and her children; and so because M. Germain's friend has taken notice of my Jeanne, who is one of the best and worthiest creatures that ever lived,—I may venture to boast of my sister, though I am ashamed of myself, but for that reason I will do all in my power to save or serve M. Germain; unfortunately, I can do but little, after all!' 'Never mind! Do your best; that is all I ask of you. But I will give you the pleasure of being the pleasing bearer of news to M. Germain, which, indeed, I have only just learned myself.'"

"What is it?" inquired Germain.

"That to-morrow morning there will be a vacant chamber you can have for paying for, then you will be all to yourself. The officer desired me to tell you so."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Germain; "how truly glad I am to hear it! That worthy man was right in saying you would be the bearer of pleasant news."

"Well, I do think so myself; for it is quite easy to perceive that you do not feel comfortable among such poor wretches as we are." Then suddenly breaking off, Pique-Vinagre hastily added, in a low whisper, while feigning to stoop,

as though searching for something he had dropped, "Hark ye, M. Germain, the prisoners are all looking at us, wondering what we are talking about. I must go. But be on your guard; and if any one tries to quarrel with you, don't make any answer; they want a pretext for all attacking you at once. Barbillon is the one chosen to provoke you, so take especial care of him. I will try and turn the attention of the others from being directed towards you in a spiteful manner." And, with these words, Pique-Vinaigre rose up from his stooping position, with the air of one who had found the object of his search.

"Thanks, my good fellow!" said Germain, eagerly, as he separated from his companion; "rely on my prudence!"

Only that morning aware of the plot against Germain, which, as far as he knew, consisted merely in an intention of involving him in some affray which should compel the governor of the prison to remove him to some other yard in the building, Pique-Vinaigre was not only ignorant of the murderous designs so recently projected by the Skeleton, but equally so that the conspirators intended to avail themselves of his recital of "Gringalet and Cut-in-Half" to deceive the vigilance of the officer on duty, as well as to beguile his attention from what was going on.

"Come on, old Make-believe!" said Nicholas to Pique-Vinaigre, as he advanced to meet him. "Throw away that lump of dog's-meat you have got in your hand; we have got a regular feast among us, and you are invited to it!"

"A feast? La, how nice! What, out of the Panier Fleuri, or the Petit Ramponneau?—tell us which it is! But they are both such nice places, there isn't a pin to choose."

"Oh, you fool! Our feast is prepared in the day-room; all laid out so temptingly on a bench. There you'll see ham and eggs, and cheese, and—It's my treat, mind!"

"Well, I'm one of the right sort to walk into it. But it seems a pity to throw away this good ration I have just received! I only wish my poor sister and her children could have the benefit of it. Ah, poor things! It's not often they see meat, unless, indeed, when they find a few scraps thrown out before the butcher's door."

"Oh, bother about your sister and her brats! Let's go in, or Barbillon and the Skeleton will leave nothing but empty trenchers for us!"

Nicholas and Pique-Vinaigre entered together into the day-room, where they found the Skeleton sitting astride on the bench on which the savoury viands were displayed, swearing and grumbling at the absence of the founder of the feast.

"Oh, there you are, you creeping animal!" exclaimed the ruffian, as he caught sight of the story-teller. "What the deuce hindered you from bringing your blessed carcass here a little sooner?"

"He was spinning a yarn with Germain when I found him," answered Nicholas, helping himself to a large slice of the ham.

"Ho, ho!" cried the Skeleton, gazing earnestly on Pique-Vinaigre, without, however, diminishing the ardour with which he devoured the provisions; "so you were gossiping with Germain, were you?"

"Yes, I was," returned Pique-Vinaigre. "But what a fool that Germain is! I used to think that he was a sort of spy in the yard; but, Lord love you, he is too much of a simpleton for that!"

"Oh, you think so, do you?" said the Skeleton, exchanging a rapid and significant glance with Nicholas and Barbillon.

"I'm as sure of it as I am that I see a capital ham before me. Besides, how the devil can he be a spy when he is always by himself? He speaks to no one, and nobody ever changes a word with him; and you all know that he runs from us as if we carried the plague in our pockets. Now, how a man can tell many tales who acts as he does, is more than I can conceive. However, spy or not, he will not be able to do us much more harm, as to-morrow he will obtain a room for himself."

"The deuce he will!" replied the Skeleton. Then taking advantage of a conversation which had commenced between Barbillon and Pique-Vinaigre, he leaned towards Nicholas, and said, whisperingly, "You see, we have not an instant to lose. After four o'clock to-day all chance of serving him out is over; it is now nearly three. You see, unfortunately, he does not sleep in my dormitory, or I would settle him in the night; and to-morrow he will be out of our reach."

"Well, I don't care!" answered Nicholas, as though replying to some observation of his companions; "I say—and I'll stick to it—Germain always seems to look down upon us as though we were not as good as he."

"No, no!" interposed Pique-Vinagre; "you are quite wrong as regards this young man—you are, indeed. You frighten him—you do; and I know that he considers himself not fit to hold a candle to you. Why, if you only knew what he was saying to me just now—"

"Let's hear what it was!"

"'Why,' says he, 'you are a lucky fellow, Pique-Vinagre, you are,' he says, 'to take the liberty of speaking to the celebrated Skeleton (that was the very word he used), just for all the world as if you were his equal! But whenever I meet him,' he says, 'I feel myself overcome with so much awe and respect that, though I would give my eyes out of my head to know him and converse with him, I no more dare do it than I should make bold to accost the préfet de police if he were in his chair of office, and me beholding him body and bones.'"

"He said that, did he?" returned the Skeleton, feigning to believe the well-meant fiction of Pique-Vinagre, as well as to feel gratified by the deep admiration he was reported to have excited in the breast of Germain.

"As true as that you are the cleverest ruffian upon earth, he said those very words; and, more than that, he—"

"Oh, then, if that is the case," said the Skeleton, "I shall make it up with him. Barbillon wanted to pick a quarrel with him, but I shall advise him to be quiet."

"That's right!" exclaimed Pique-Vinagre, fully persuaded that he had effectually diverted from Germain the danger that threatened him; "that would be much the best way! For this poor chicken-hearted fellow would never quarrel,—simply because, like me, he has not pluck enough to fight; therefore it is no use getting into a dispute."

"Still," cried the Skeleton, "I am sorry, too, that we shall not have our fun; we had quite reckoned upon getting up a fight with Germain to amuse us after dinner. I don't know now what we shall do to kill the time."

"Ah, to be sure!" chimed in Nicholas. "What the deuce shall we do with ourselves? Can anybody tell me?"

"Well, then, I'll settle it!" said Barbillon. "Since you seem to recommend my leaving Germain alone, I'll agree to do so, on condition that Pique-Vinagre tells us one of his best stories."

"Done!" exclaimed the story-teller. "But I must make one condition as well as you, and, without both are agreed to, I don't open my lips."

"Well, then, say what your other condition is. I dare say it is not more difficult than the former, and we soon agreed about that."

"It is that this honourable company, which is overstocked with riches," said the Pique-Vinaigre, resuming his old tone when addressing his audiences preparatory to commencing his juggling tricks, "will have the trifling kindness to club together and present me with the small sum of twenty sous,—a mere trifle, gents, when you are about to listen to the celebrated Pique-Vinaigre, who has had the honour of appearing before the most celebrated prigs of the day—he who is now expected at Brest or Toulon, by the special command of his majesty's government."

"Well, then, we'll stand the twenty sous after you have finished your story."

"After?—no—before!" said Pique-Vinaigre.

"What! Do you suppose us capable of doing you out of twenty sous?" asked the Skeleton, with an air of disdain.

"By no means!" replied Pique-Vinaigre. "I honour the stone jug with my confidence, and it is in order to economise its purse that I ask for twenty sous in advance."

"On your word and honour?"

"Yes, gentlemen; for, after my story, you will be so satisfied, that it is not twenty sous but twenty francs—a hundred francs—you will force me to take! I know that I should be shabby enough to accept them; and thus, you see, it is from consideration, and you will do wisely to give me twenty sous in advance."

"You don't want for the gift of the gab!"

"I have nothing but my tongue, and I must make use of that. And then,—if it must be told,—my sister and her children are in terrible distress, and, in a small house, even twenty sous is a consideration."

"Then why doesn't your sister prig, and her kids, too, if they're old enough?" asked Nicholas.

"Don't ask me; it distresses—dishonours me! I am too kind—"

"What do you mean, you fool? Why, you encourage her!"

"True; I encourage her in the vice of being honest, and that is the only line in which she shines. But come, it is agreed that I shall tell you my famous story of 'Gringalet and Cut-in-Half.' But you must hand out twenty sous, and Barbillon shall not pick a quarrel with this simpleton of a Germain!"

"Well, you shall have twenty sous, and Barbillon shall not pick a quarrel with that simpleton of a Germain," said the Skeleton.

"Then open your ears, and you will hear what you will hear! But it is raining, which will make the customers tumble in, and there will be no occasion to go out and seek them."

And the rain began to fall, and the prisoners, quitting the yard, took refuge in the day-room, the turnkey being still in attendance.

We have said that this room was large and long, with a pavement, and lighted by three windows, which looked out into the yard. In the centre was the stove, near which were the Skeleton, Barbillon, Nicholas, and Pique-Vinaigre. At a signal from the prévôt, the Gros-Boiteux joined this group. Germain was one of the last to enter, absorbed in most delightful thoughts, and he went mechanically to seat himself on the ledge at the lowest window in the apartment, a place he usually occupied, and which no one disputed with him, for it was at a distance from the stove around which the prisoners were assembled.

We have already said that some fifteen of the prisoners had been informed in the first instance of the treachery attributed to Germain, and the murder which was to avenge it. But, soon whispered to one another, the plan comprised as many adherents as there were prisoners; these ruffians, in their blind cruelty, considering this fearful plot as legitimate revenge, and viewing therein a certain guarantee against the future disclosure of spies. Germain, Pique-Vinaigre, and the turnkey were alone ignorant of what was about to take place. General attention was divided between the executioner, the victim, and the story-teller, who was about innocently to deprive Germain of the only succour he could hope for; for it is nearly sure that the turnkey, when he saw the prisoners attentive to the story of Pique-Vinaigre, would think his surveillance useless, and take advantage of that moment of tranquillity to go and take his meal. And when the prisoners had entered, the Skeleton said to the turnkey:

"Old fellow, Pique-Vinaigre has a capital idea; he is going to tell us his story of 'Gringalet and Cut-in-Half.' It is weather in which one would not put a policeman out-of-doors, and we shall quietly wait in till it is time to go to roost."

"Why, you are always pretty quiet when he begins his talk, and have no need for me to be at your heels."

"Yes," said the Skeleton; "but Pique-Vinaigre asks a high price,—he wants twenty sous for his story."

"Yes, the trifle of twenty sous,—a mere nothing!" cried Pique-Vinaigre. "Yes, gents, nothing; for who that had a liard would not bestow it to hear the adventures of poor little Gringalet, Cut-in-Half, and the wicked Gargousse? It will rend your hearts, and make your hair stand on end! And, gents, who is there that would not dispose of the paltry sum of four liards—or, if you prefer counting my mites, of five centimes—to have their hearts rent and their hair standing on end?"

"There are two sous," said the Skeleton, throwing down the piece of money before Pique-Vinaigre. "Come, is the stone-jug too niggardly to enjoy this pastime?" he added, looking at his accomplices with a significant air.

Several sous fell around him, to the great joy of Pique-Vinaigre, who thought of his sister as he collected the money.

"Eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve—thirteen!" he said, as he picked up the money. "Now, my rich friends, my capitalists, and others of the cash interest, try once more. You cannot stop at thirteen, for it is an unlucky number! Only seven sous deficient, the trifle of seven sous! What, gents, shall it be said that the Fosse aux Lions could not produce seven sous—seven miserable sous? Oh, gents, gents, you would make me believe that you have been brought here very unjustly or that you have all had a sad run of ill luck."

The shrill voice and broad jests of Pique-Vinaigre had brought Germain from his reverie, and, as much to follow Rigolette's advice and make himself popular with the prisoners as to give a trifle to the poor devil who had testified some desire to be of service to him, he rose and threw a piece of ten sous at the tale-teller's feet, who exclaimed, as he pointed at his generous benefactor:

"Ten sous, gents! You see, I was speaking of capitalists! Honour to that gentleman! He behaves like one of the monied interest, as an ambassador to

be agreeable to the company! Yes, gents; for it is to him that you will owe the greater portion of 'Gringalet and Cut-in-Half,' and you will thank him for it. As to the three sous over, why, I shall earn them by imitating the voices of the personages, instead of speaking like you and me. That will be another obligation you will owe to this wealthy capitalist, whom you ought to adore."

"Come, no more blarney, but begin!" said the Skeleton.

"One moment, gents!" said Pique-Vinaigre. "It is but right that the capitalist who has given me ten sous should be the best situated, except our prévôt, who has first choice."

This proposal squared so well with the Skeleton's project that he exclaimed:

"True; after me he ought to be best placed!" And again he looked significantly at the prisoners.

"Yes, yes; let him come nearer," said the prisoners.

"Let him sit on the front bench."

"You see, young man, your liberality is recompensed; the honourable company sees that you have a right to the front seat," said Pique-Vinaigre to Germain.

Believing that his liberality had really better disposed his hateful companions in his favour, and delighted thus to follow up Rigolette's earnest desires, Germain, in spite of considerable repugnance, left the place of his choice, and went towards the story-teller, who, having arranged four or five benches around the stove, by the aid of Nicholas and Barbillon, said, with emphasis:

"Here are the dress-boxes. All respect to the worthy—the capitalist first."

"Now, then, let those who have paid take their seats," added Pique-Vinaigre, gaily, firmly believing that, thanks to himself, Germain had nothing now to fear. "And those who have not paid," he added, "will sit down or stand up, which they please."

Let us sum up the arrangement of his scene. Pique-Vinaigre was standing up near the stove ready to commence; near him was the Skeleton, also standing up, and with his eyes intently fixed on Germain, ready to rush upon him the moment the turnkey left the cell. At some distance from Germain, Nicholas, Barbillon, Cardillac, and other prisoners, amongst whom

was the man with the blue cotton nightcap and gray blouse, occupying the remoter benches. The majority of prisoners, grouped here and there, some sitting on the ground, others standing and leaning against the wall, composed the secondary figures of this picture, lighted, à la Rembrandt, by three lateral windows, which threw strong light and deep shadows on forms so variously characterised and so strongly marked. The turnkey, whose departure was to be, unknown to himself, the signal for Germain's murder, kept close to the door, which was ajar.

"Are we all ready?" asked Pique-Vinaigre of the Skeleton.

"Silence in the stone-jug!" said the latter, turning half around; and then addressing Pique-Vinaigre, "Now, begin; we are all attention!"

CHAPTER XI.

GRINGALET AND CUT-IN-HALF.

Pique-Vinaigre began his recital thus, in the midst of the profound silence of his auditory:

"It is no inconsiderable time ago that the story occurred which I am about to relate to this honourable company. What was called La Petite Pologne was not then destroyed. The honourable society knows (or does not know) what was called La Petite Pologne?"

"Well enough!" said the prisoner in the blue cap; "they were some small houses near the Rue du Rocher and the Rue de la Pépinière?"

"Exactly so, my dear sir," replied Pique-Vinaigre; "and the Quartier of the Cité, which, at the same time, does not consist of palaces, would be in comparison to La Petite Pologne the Rue de la Paix or the Rue de Rivoli. What a rookery! but, at the same time, very convenient for gents in our line. There were no streets but narrow alleys, no houses but ruins, no pavement but a small carpet of mud and dungheaps, which would have destroyed all the noise of wheels,—that is, supposing any carriages passed by that way; but none did! From morn till night, and, particularly, from night till morn, there were only heard cries of 'Watch! Watch! Help! Murder!' but the watch took no notice. The more persons were knocked on the head in La Petite Pologne, the fewer persons there were to apprehend. You should have seen the respectable inhabitants who lived there! There were very few jewellers, goldsmiths, and bankers; but then, on the other hand, there were quantities of organ-grinders, puppet-showmen, punches, and showers of remarkable animals. Amongst the latter was one well known as Cut-in-Half,—he was so cruel, and especially to children. He acquired this name because it was reported that he had cut a small Savoyard in two with a blow of his hatchet."

At this moment the prison clock struck a quarter past three o'clock. The prisoners being made to return to their cells at four o'clock, the Skeleton's murderous design must be carried into execution before that hour.

"Mille tonnerres! The turnkey won't go!" he said, in a low tone, to Gros-Boiteux.

"Be easy! He'll go when once the story is begun."

Pique-Vinagre continued: "No one knew where Cut-in-Half came from. Some said he was an Italian, others a Bohemian, others a Turk, others an African; the gossips called him a magician, although a magician in our times would be something to look at. What made them believe this was, that he always had with him a large red monkey called Gargousse, and who was so cunning and savage that he seemed as if possessed by the devil. I shall mention this beauty again presently; as to Cut-in-Half, I shall soon describe him. His complexion was like the old tops of a pair of jockey-boots, his hair as red as the hair of his monkey, his eyes green, and (what made the women think he was a conjuror) he had a black tongue."

"A black tongue!" exclaimed Barbillon.

"Black as ink!" replied Pique-Vinagre.

"And how did that happen?"

"Because, no doubt, when his mother was in the family way she had, perhaps, talked of a negro," said Pique-Vinagre, with modest assurance. "To these attractions Cut-in-Half joined the profession of having a multitude of tortoises, monkeys, guinea-pigs, white mice, foxes, and marmosettes, corresponding to an equivalent total of Savoyards and forsaken children. Every morning he distributed his animal to each, and a morsel of black bread, and then despatched them to beg for 'Only one ha'penny!' or dance the Catarina. Those who only brought in at night fifteen sous were beaten, soundly beaten, so that their shrieks might be heard from one end of La Petite Pologne to the other. I should also say that there was in La Petite Pologne a man called Le Doyen (the Dean), because he was the 'oldest inhabitant,' and, as it were, mayor, provost, magistrate, for it was in his room (he kept a Tom and Jerry shop) that all went when they could not otherwise decide their quarrels. Although rather aged, yet Le Doyen was as strong as Hercules, and very generally feared. They swore by him in La Petite Pologne; and when he said 'Very good!' all the world said 'Very good!' When he said 'That's bad!' all the world said 'That's bad!' He was a good fellow at bottom, but very fierce, particularly when the strong misused the weak,—then look out for squalls! As he was Cut-in-Half's nearest neighbour, he had heard the children cry very frequently from the blows which the shower of beasts gave them. He had said to him, 'If I hear the children cry, I will make you cry in your turn; and, as you have the stronger voice, I will give you the severer beating.'"

"Well done, Le Doyen! I like Le Doyen!" said the prisoner in the blue nightcap.

"So do I!" added the turnkey, as he approached the group.

The Skeleton could not repress a movement of angry impatience.

Pique-Vinaigre proceeded:

"Thanks to Le Doyen, who had threatened Cut-in-Half, the cries of the children were heard no more in the night-time in La Petite Pologne; but the poor, unhappy little fellows did not suffer the less, for if they cried no longer when their master beat them, it was because they were afraid of being more cruelly beaten. As to complaining to Le Doyen, they had no idea of that. For the fifteen sous which each little fellow was obliged to bring in, Cut-in-Half lodged, boarded, and clothed them. In the evening a bit of black bread, as at breakfast,—this was their food. He never gave them clothes,—that was the way he clothed them; and he shut them up at night with their animals, on the same straw in a garret, to which they mounted by a ladder and a trap,—this was the lodging. When once all had ascended, and the tale of children and animals was complete, he took away the ladder and locked the trap.

"You may judge of the life and row which these monkeys, guinea-pigs, foxes, mice, tortoises, marmosettes, and children made all in the dark in this cock-loft, which was as big as a barn. Cut-in-Half slept in a room underneath, with his great ape, Gargousse, fastened to the foot of his bed. When the brute growled, because there was too much noise in the loft, the beast-shower went up the ladder without any light, and, going into the loft, laid about him right and left with a heavy whip, without seeing or counting his blows. As there were always some fifteen children, and some of the poor dears brought him in twenty sous a day, Cut-in-Half having defrayed all his outlay, which was by no means excessive, had left for himself some four or five francs a day, with which he enjoyed himself, for it must be told that he was one of the greatest tipplers that ever lived, and was regularly blind drunk once a day. That was his rule; and he declared that, but for that, he should have the headache every day. We should add, that out of his gains he used to buy some sheeps' hearts for Gargousse, who ate raw flesh like a cannibal. But I see the honourable society are anxious to be introduced to Gringalet! Here he is, gents!"

"Let's have Gringalet, and I'll go and eat my soup," said the turnkey.

The Skeleton exchanged a look of savage satisfaction with the Gros-Boiteux.

"Amongst the children to whom Cut-in-Half distributed his animals," continued Pique-Vinaigre, "was a poor little devil named Gringalet. Without

father or mother, brother or sister, without fire, food, or shelter, he was alone in the world,—quite alone in a world which he had not asked to enter, and which he might leave without attracting any one's attention. He was not called Gringalet for any pleasure he had in the name, for he was meagre, lean, and pallid; he did not look above seven or eight years old, but was really thirteen. If he did not seem more than half his name, it was not because of his own will, but because he only fed perhaps every other day, and then so scantily, so poorly, that it was really an exertion to make him pass for seven years old."

"Poor little brat! I think I see him!" said the prisoner in the blue cotton nightcap; "there are so many children like him on the streets of Paris dying of hunger!"

"They must begin to learn that way of living very young in order to get accustomed to it," said Pique-Vinagre, with a bitter smile.

"Come, get on!" said the Skeleton, suddenly; "the turnkey is getting impatient—his soup is getting cold."

"Oh, never mind that!" said the surveillant. "I wish to know something more of Gringalet; it is very amusing!"

"Yes, it is really very interesting!" added Germain, who was very attentive to the story.

"Ah, thank ye for saying that, my capitalist," said Pique-Vinagre; "that gives me more satisfaction than your ten-sous' piece."

"Tonnerre!" exclaimed the Skeleton, "will you have done with your delays?"

"Well, then," replied Pique-Vinagre, "one day Cut-in-Half had picked up Gringalet in the streets, dying with cold and hunger; perhaps it would have been best if he had let him die. As Gringalet was weak, he was a coward; as he was a coward, he became the jest and sport of the other lads, who beat him and used him so ill that he would have become wicked if he had not been deficient in strength and courage. But no; when he had been heartily thumped, he cried, and said, 'I have not done any harm to anybody, and everybody is unkind to me,—that's very cruel; oh, if I were strong and bold!' You will, perhaps, imagine that Gringalet was about to add, 'I would return to others the ill they do to me?' By no means. He said, 'Oh, if I were strong and bold, I would defend the weak against the strong, for I am weak, and the strong have made me suffer!' In the meanwhile, as he was too small a

boy to prevent the strong from ill-using the weak, beginning with himself, he prevented the larger brutes from eating the smaller ones."

"What a strange idea!" said the prisoner in the blue cap.

"And, what is stranger still," said the tale-teller, "it was this idea that consoled Gringalet for being beaten; which proves that his heart was not bad at bottom."

"Pardieu! Quite the contrary," said the guardian. "What an amusing devil that Pique-Vinagre is!"

At this instant the chimes went half past three o'clock. The Skeleton and Gros-Boiteux exchanged significant glances. The time was drawing on, and the surveillant did not go; and some of the less hardened prisoners seemed almost to forget the sinister projects of the Skeleton against Germain, as they listened attentively to Pique-Vinagre's recital.

"When I say," he continued, "that Gringalet prevented the larger brutes from eating the smaller, you must understand that Gringalet did not mix himself up with tigers, and lions, and wolves, or even foxes and monkeys, in the menagerie of Cut-in-Half,—he was too much of a coward for that; but if he saw, for instance, a spider hidden in his web, in wait for a poor foolish fly flying gaily in the sunshine of the good God, without hurting any one, why, in a moment, Gringalet smashed the web, freed the fly, and did for the spider like a regular Cæsar,—a real Cæsar; for he turned as white as a sheet in touching such nasty reptiles; and then it required resolution in him, who was afraid of a cockchafer, and had been a long while in forming an intimacy with the tortoise which Cut-in-Half handed to him every morning. Thus Gringalet, overcoming the fear which the spider caused him, in order to prevent flies from being eaten, proved himself—"

"As plucky in his way as a man who attacks a wolf to take a lamb from his jaws," said the prisoner in the blue cap.

"Or a man who would have attacked Cut-in-Half to take Gringalet from his clutches," added Barbillion, who was deeply interested.

"As you say," continued Pique-Vinagre; "so that after one of these onslaughts Gringalet did not feel himself so unhappy. He who never laughed, smiled, looked about him, cocked his cap on one side (when he had one), and hummed the 'Marseillaise' with the air of a conqueror. At this moment, there was not a spider that dared to look him in the face. Another time it was a grasshopper which was swimming and struggling in a brook;

in a moment, Gringalet put his two fingers boldly in the water and rescued the grasshopper, which he put on the grass. A first-class swimmer, who had fished up his tenth drowning man at fifty francs a head, could not have been prouder than Gringalet when he saw his grasshopper bend his legs and jump away. And yet the grasshopper gave him neither money nor medal, nor uttered any more thanks than did the fly. But then, Pique-Vinaigre, worthy friend, the honourable company will say to me, what the devil pleasure could Gringalet, whom all the world thumped and buffeted, find in freeing grasshoppers and destroying spiders? Since people were unkind to him, why did he not take his revenge by doing all the evil in his power? For instance, in giving spiders flies to eat, leaving grasshoppers to drown, or even drowning them on purpose?"

"Yes, why not? Why did he not revenge himself in that way?" asked Nicholas.

"What good would that have been?" inquired another.

"Why, to do ill, as ill was done to him."

"No! Well, then, I understand he liked to save the flies, poor little chap!" said the man in a blue cap. "He said, perhaps, 'Who knows if some day they mayn't save me in the same way?'"

"My right worthy friend is right," cried Pique-Vinaigre, "and has read in his heart what I was about to narrate to the honourable assembly. Gringalet was not wicked; he did not see beyond the end of his nose; but he said, 'Cut-in-Half is my spider, and perhaps some day some one will do for me what I do for the other poor little flies,—break his web and take me from his clutches;' for till then nothing could have induced him to run away from his master; he would as soon have thought of killing himself. However, one day, when neither he nor his tortoise had had a chance, and had not gained between either of them more than three sous, Cut-in-Half beat the poor child very severely, so severely that, ma foi! Gringalet could not stand it any longer; and, tired of being the butt and martyr of everybody, he watched a moment when the trap was open, and, whilst Cut-in-Half was feeding his animals, he slid down the ladder."

"Oh, so much the better," said a prisoner.

"But why didn't he go and complain to the Doyen?" inquired the blue cap; "he would have served Cut-in-Half out."

"Yes, but he dared not; he was too much afraid, and preferred trying to escape. Unfortunately, Cut-in-Half had seen him, and, seizing him by the

wrist, lugged him up again into the loft. Poor Gringalet, thinking of what must befall him, shuddered all over, although he was by no means at the end of his troubles. Apropos of Gringalet's troubles, I must now mention to you Gargousse, the large and favourite ape of Cut-in-Half. This mischievous brute was, *ma foi!* taller than Gringalet; only imagine what a size for a monkey! I must tell you why he was never taken into the streets to be shown, like the other animals of the menagerie: it was because Gargousse was so wicked and powerful that there was not one amongst all the show-boys, except an Auvergnat of fourteen, a determined chap, who, after many skirmishes and contests with Gargousse, had mastered him, and could lead him about with a chain; and even with him Gargousse frequently got up some fights, which ended in bloodshed produced by Gargousse's bites. Enraged at this, the little Auvergnat said, one fine day, 'Very well, I will revenge myself on this infernal monkey;' and so, one morning, having gone out with the brute as usual, he, in order to appease its savageness, bought a sheep's heart. Whilst Gargousse was eating it, he put a rope through the end of his chain, tied it to a tree, and, when he had got the brute quite at his mercy, he gave it an outrageous walloping."

"Well done! Bravo the Auvergnat! Go it, my lad! Skin the beast alive!" said the prisoners.

"He did whack him gloriously!" continued Pique-Vinagre. "And you should have seen how Gargousse cried, ground his teeth, leaped, danced, and skipped hither and thither; but the Auvergnat used his stick famously! Unfortunately, monkeys, like cats, are very tenacious of life. Gargousse was as crafty as he was vicious; and when he saw, as they say, how the wood was on fire, at a heavy blow he made a final bound, and fell flat at the foot of a tree, shook for a moment, and then shammed dead, lying as motionless as a log. The Auvergnat believed he had done for him, and, thinking the ape dead, he cut away, resolved never again to return to Cut-in-Half. But the beast Gargousse watched him out of the corner of his eye, and, bruised and wounded as he was, as soon as he saw himself alone he rent the cord asunder with his teeth. The Boulevard Monceaux, where he had had this hiding, was close to La Petite Pologne, and the monkey knew his way as easy as his paternoster; and, making off in that direction, arrived at his master's, who roared and foamed when he saw how his monkey had been served. This is not all. From this moment Gargousse entertained such a furious revenge against all children that Cut-in-Half, who was not the tenderest soul alive, dared not trust him to any one for fear of an accident; for Gargousse was capable of strangling or devouring a child, and all the little brute-showers, knowing that, would rather be thrashed by Cut-in-Half than go near the monkey."

"I must really go and eat my soup," said the turnkey, turning towards the door; "this devil of a Pique-Vinaigre would wheedle a bird down from a tree to hear him! I can't tell where the deuce he fishes up all he tells!"

"Now, then, the turnkey will go," said the Skeleton, in a whisper to the Gros-Boiteux. "I'm in such a rage I shake all over! Mind and form a wall all around the informer,—I will take care of the rest!"

"Mind, now, and be good boys!" said the turnkey, turning towards the door.

"As good as images!" replied the Skeleton, coming closer to Germain, whilst the Gros-Boiteux and Nicholas, after having agreed on a signal, made two steps in the same direction.

"Ah, worthy turnkey, you are going at the most interesting moment!" said Pique-Vinaigre, with an air of reproach.

Had it not been for the Gros-Boiteux, who anticipated his intention, and seized him suddenly by the arm, the Skeleton would have rushed on Pique-Vinaigre.

"What! The most interesting moment?" replied the turnkey, turning towards the story-teller.

"Decidedly," said Pique-Vinaigre; "you do not know all you will lose,—the most delightful portion of the history is now about to commence."

"Don't attend to him," exclaimed the Skeleton, who with difficulty repressed his rage; "he is not in good trim to-day; for my part I think his story very stupid."

"My story very stupid?" cried Pique-Vinaigre, wounded in his pride as a tale-teller. "Well, turnkey, I beg of you,—I entreat you to remain till the conclusion, which, at most, will not be longer than a quarter of an hour, and as by this time your soup must be cold, why, you haven't much to lose by a little delay. I will go ahead with my narrative, so that you may still have time to eat your soup before we are locked up for the night."

"Well, then, I'll stay, but make haste," said the turnkey, coming closer towards him.

"You are wise to stay, turnkey," continued Pique-Vinaigre; "without bragging, you never heard anything like it before, especially the finale, which is the triumph of the ape, and Gringalet escorted in procession by all the

little beast-showers and inhabitants of La Petite Pologne. On my word and honour, it is not for the sake of boasting, but it is really superb."

"Then tell it speedily, my boy," said the turnkey, returning towards the stove.

The Skeleton shook with rage. He almost despaired of accomplishing his crime. If bedtime arrived, Germain must escape, for he was not in the same dormitory with his implacable enemy, and on the following day Germain was to be in a separate cell.

"So it's very stupid!" continued Pique-Vinaigre. "Well, the honourable company shall be the judge of that. There could not exist a more vicious brute than the big ape Gargousse, who was even more savage with children than his master. What does Cut-in-Half do to punish Gringalet for trying to run away? You shall know by and by. Well, in the meantime, he seizes on the unhappy child, and locks him into the cock-loft for the night, saying, 'To-morrow morning, when all your companions are gone out, I will let you see what I do with vagabonds who try to run away from me.' You may imagine what a wretched night Gringalet passed. He did not close an eye, but kept asking himself what Cut-in-Half meant to do with him, and then he fell asleep. He had a dream,—such a horrid dream,—that is, the beginning of it was, as you shall see. He dreamed that he was one of the very poor flies that he had so often rescued from the spiders' webs, and that he had fallen into a large and strong web, where he was struggling,—struggling with all his might, without being able to escape. He then saw coming towards him, stealthily and treacherously, a kind of monster, which looked like Cut-in-Half turned into a spider. Poor Gringalet began to struggle again, as you may suppose, but the more he struggled the more he got entangled, like the poor flies. At last the spider came up to him, touched him, and he felt the cold and hairy paws of the horrid beast curl around him and enclose him, intending to devour him. He believed he was dead, when suddenly he heard a kind of clear, ringing, sharp sort of buzzing, and he saw a beautiful golden fly, with a kind of brilliant dart, like a diamond needle, which flew around the spider with a furious air, and a voice (when I say a voice you must imagine a fly's voice) which said, 'Poor little fly! You have saved flies! The spider shall not—' Unfortunately Gringalet jumped up at this moment, and did not see the end of his dream; but yet he was at first somewhat assured, and said to himself, 'Perhaps the golden fly with the diamond dart would have killed the spider if I had finished the dream.' But in vain did Gringalet endeavour to make himself easy and take comfort; in proportion as the night ended, his fears renewed, so strongly, that at last he forgot his dream, or, rather, he only remembered the portion which affrighted him, the large web

in which he had been caught and enfolded by the spider which resembled Cut-in-Half. You may imagine what a fright he was in; only think—only think—alone,—quite alone, and no one to defend him! In the morning, when he saw daybreak gradually appear through the skylight of the cock-loft, his fears redoubled, and the moment was at hand when he would be alone with Cut-in-Half. He then threw himself on his knees in the middle of the garret, and, weeping bitterly, entreated his comrades to ask Cut-in-Half to forgive him, or else to help him to escape if possible. But some from fear of their master, others from disregard, and some from ill nature, refused what poor Gringalet requested so earnestly."

"Young scamps!" said the prisoner in the blue cap; "he is to be pitied, so helpless. If he could have defended himself, tooth and nail, it would have been very different, ma foi! If you have fangs, show 'em, boy, and defend your tail!"

"To be sure!" said several prisoners.

"Holloa, there!" exclaimed the Skeleton, unable to conceal his rage, and addressing the Blue Cap; "won't you hold your jaw? Didn't I say silence in the stone-jug? Am I captain of the ward or not?"

The Blue Cap's answer was to look the Skeleton full in the face, and then make that low-lived gesture of the blackguards, which consists in applying the thumb of the right hand to the end of the nose, opening the fingers like a fan, and putting the little finger on the thumb of the left hand, similarly extended. He accompanied this mute reply with so odd a look that many of the prisoners laughed heartily, whilst others, on the contrary, were actually stupefied at the audacity of the new prisoner, so greatly was the Skeleton feared. The latter shook his fist at the new prisoner, and said to him, grinding his teeth:

"We'll settle this to-morrow!"

"I'll make the calculation on your nob! I'll put down seventeen and carry nothing!"

For fear the turnkey should have fresh motive for staying, in order to repress any row, the Skeleton quietly replied:

"That is not what I mean; I am the captain of this room, and ought to be attended to,—ought not I, turnkey?"

"Certainly," replied the superintendent; "no interruption; and go on, Pique-Vinaigre, and make haste, will you, my lad?"

"Then," resumed Pique-Vinaigre, "Gringalet, seeing how all the world forsook him, resigned himself to his miserable fate. It was broad day, and all the boys were going out with their animals. Cut-in-Half opened the trap, and called each to give him his morsel of bread. They all descended the ladder, and Gringalet, more dead than alive, squeezed up in a corner of the cock-loft with his tortoise, did not move, but watched his companions as they descended one after the other, and would have given everything he had to have done as they did. At length the last quitted the loft, and then his heart beat quick as he thought his master might forget him. But Cut-in-Half, who was standing at the foot of the ladder, exclaimed in a loud voice, 'Gringalet! Gringalet!' 'Here I am, master.' 'Come down directly, or I'll fetch you!' added Cut-in-Half; and Gringalet believed his last hour was come. 'Oh,' said he to himself as he trembled in all his limbs, and recollected his dream, 'you are in the web, little fly, the spider is going to eat you!' After having put his tortoise quietly down on the ground, he said farewell to it, for he had become fond of the creature, and went to the trap, and put his leg on the ladder to go down, when Cut-in-Half, taking hold of his miserable little leg, as thin as a stick, pulled him down so suddenly that Gringalet lost his hold, and fell with his face all down the rounds of the ladder."

"What a pity it was that the Doyen of La Petite Pologne was not there at that moment! What a dance he could have played to Cut-in-Half!" said the blue nightcap; "it is at such moments as these that a man is always happy and contented to feel how useful it is sometimes to be strong."

"That's all right, my lad, but, unfortunately, the Doyen was not there, so Cut-in-Half seized hold of the child by the waistband of his little breeches, and carried him to his own hole of a chamber, where the huge monkey was kept fastened to the foot of his bed. Directly the spiteful beast saw the boy, he began to jump and spring about, grinding his teeth like a mad thing, and darting towards Gringalet as near as his chain permitted him, as though he meant to devour him."

"Poor Gringalet! How ever will he be able to escape? If that beast of a monkey once gets hold of him he is safe to strangle him! I declare," exclaimed the man in the blue cap, "the very thoughts of a poor innocent child being in such a dangerous situation makes me shiver from head to foot, and I seem as though I couldn't hurt a worm. How do you feel, good friends?"

"The very same!" replied a burst of voices. "No more could we!"

At this moment the prison clock chimed forth the first quarter past three, and the Skeleton, becoming momentarily more and more apprehensive that the time would slip away without their being able to accomplish their design, and furious at the continued interruptions, as well as irritated at the evident sympathy and compassion awakened in the breasts of the prisoners by Pique-Vinagre's recital, called out in angry voice:

"Silence in the stone jug, I say! We shall never get to the end of this unlucky history if you persist in chiming in."

The buzz of voices died away at these words, and Pique-Vinagre thus continued:

"When it is recollected how much poor little Gringalet had had to endure before he could get used to his tortoise, and that even the boldest of his companions trembled and turned pale even at the mention of Gargousse's name, it may very easily be imagined what deadly terror he experienced when he found himself placed by his master within the reach of the horrible monkey. 'Oh, master, master!' he cried, as his teeth rattled and shook in his head, as though he were under the influence of an ague fit, 'pray—pray forgive me! Pray have mercy on me! I will never do so any more. Indeed, indeed, I never will! Oh, I promise you, master; only let me off this time, and I will never do so again!' But all these prayers and supplications escaped almost unconsciously from the poor child, who had indeed committed no fault that called for such promises. Cut-in-Half, however, laughed at the boy's terrors, and, spite of the struggles and resistance of the unhappy child, he dragged him within the grasp of Gargousse, who sprang upon him, and seized him with a savage grasp."

A cry of execration passed throughout the assembly, which had been listening with the profoundest attention to the progress of the tale.

"I should have been a rare fool had I gone away," said the officer on duty, as he drew nearer to the listening groups.

"Oh, but," said Pique-Vinagre, "you've heard nothing as yet,—the best is still to come. Directly poor Gringalet felt the cold hairy paws of the ape seize him by the head and neck, he imagined it was with the intention of devouring him, and driven almost mad by his agony, he began shrieking and groaning in a manner that would have moved a stone to pity him, while he wildly exclaimed, 'Oh, send help! Send help from heaven, God of goodness

and of little children! Oh, little golden fly, come and preserve me! Come, little fly, and save me from the horrible spider I dreamed about!' 'Will you hold your noise?' exclaimed Cut-in-Half, as he gave him several hard kicks, for he was fearful lest his cries should be heard; but in a minute's time there was no further danger of that, for the poor boy neither cried or struggled further, but pale and cold as marble, he remained kneeling, while the devilish monkey clawed and scratched and buffeted the trembling victim, who, closing his eyes, resigned himself to his fate. After Gargousse had tired himself with thus tormenting poor Gringalet, he suddenly paused, and looked up to his master's countenance, as though asking what he should do next. And really it seemed as though the ape and his master understood each other's thoughts, for Gargousse immediately renewed the attack by plucking out handfuls of the shuddering boy's hair, upon which Cut-in-Half burst into fits of laughter, so long and so loud that, had poor Gringalet tried ever so hard, he could not have made himself heard amid these wicked and malicious rejoicings. They had, however, the effect of encouraging Gargousse, who proceeded to attack the unfortunate child with redoubled fierceness."

"Ah, you beggar of a monkey!" exclaimed Blue Bonnet, "I only wish I had been near enough to catch hold of your tail! I'd have swung you round and round like a windmill, and finished by knocking out your dirty brains against the hardest stone I could find! That beastly ape was as cruel as if he had been a man!"

"Oh!" cried a simultaneous burst of voices, "no man ever was, or ever will be, so cruel as that, I'm sure!"

"Hallo!" interrupted Pique-Vinaigre, "you forget Cut-in-Half when you make that remark. However, just listen to what he did next. He unfastened the long chain of Gargousse from the leg of his bed, around which it was generally secured, and tied it to the waist of the poor trembling child, who by this time was more dead than alive; so that the monkey and the boy were thus placed at the opposite ends of the chain."

"There was a devil's own invention! Ay, ay, it is quite certain that some human creatures are more cruel than the most savage wild beast!"

"When Cut-in-Half had completed this arrangement, he said to the monkey, who appeared to understand every word he said,—and certainly these were such a precious pair it would have been a thousand pities they should have had any difficulty in the matter: 'Now, then, Gargousse, attention! You have been exhibited with all your clever tricks, but it is now your turn to be

showman. You shall be master, and Gringalet shall be monkey,—yes, your monkey. So up with you, Gringalet, or I shall set Gargousse on you, and let him tear you to pieces!" The unhappy child, unable to utter a word, had again fallen on his knees, holding up his clasped hands in mute supplication, while the only sound he could utter proceeded from the convulsive rattling of his teeth. 'Make him stand upright, Gargousse!' said Cut-in-Half to his ape, 'and if he is obstinate do as I am doing;' and with these words he belaboured the child with a switch he held in his hand. Then passing the stick to the monkey, he added, 'Make him stand up! Hit harder!—harder!' You all know what close imitators all monkeys are, but Gargousse was ever remarkable for his extreme quickness in copying the actions of others. He was not long, therefore, in bestowing so severe a flagellation on the shoulders of his terrified victim as soon compelled him to try at least to stand upon his feet, and once up, the unhappy child became as nearly as possible the same height as the ape. Then Cut-in-Half went out of the room, and descended the staircase, calling out to Gargousse to follow him, which he did, tugging violently at the end of the chain to which Gringalet was fastened, and compelling him to follow like a slave, at the same time beating him as hard as he could with his cane; and thus they reached the small courtyard belonging to the miserable tenement occupied by Cut-in-Half and his live stock.

"Now, then, Cut-in-Half reckoned on having good sport, so, first securing the door that opened into the lane, he made signs to Gargousse to play Gringalet round and round the yard as fast as he could. The ape loved the fun as well as his master, and coursed the frightened boy round the yard, beating him with all the strength the switch admitted of, while Cut-in-Half laughed till his sides ached. Perhaps you may think this malicious nature was now satisfied,—not a bit of it! This was a mere beginning!

"So far Gringalet had merely endured excessive fright, been torn and scratched by the sharp teeth and claws of Gargousse, and severely beaten with the stick. This, however dreadful, was far from contenting Cut-in-Half's savage nature. He therefore devised another scheme, equally diabolical with his other proceedings. In order to enrage the monkey still more against the unhappy boy, who by this time was more dead than alive, he seized Gringalet by the hair of his head, and, after feigning to overwhelm him with blows, he pushed him towards the monkey, saying, 'Tear him! Worry him!' showing Gargousse at the same time a great lump of sheep's heart, as much as to say, Do as I bid you, and here is your reward.

"And then began a fearful sight! Just imagine a huge red ape, with a black muzzle, grinding his teeth like a mad thing, and throwing himself, in a state

of savage fury, on the poor helpless object of his cruelty, who, unable to defend himself, had no other means of preserving his face and eyes from being torn to pieces than by throwing himself down on the ground, flat on his face. Seeing this, Gargousse, wrought up by his master to a state of frenzied hatred against poor Gringalet, bestrode him as he lay on the ground, seized him by the neck, and bit him on the back of his head till the blood came. 'Oh, the spider! The spider I dreamed of!' cried poor Gringalet, firmly believing now that he should be devoured. All at once a noise was heard at the gate that opened from the lane into the yard. Knock! knock! knock!"

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed all the prisoners at once. "How delightful! 'Tis Le Doyen come to set the boy free! Oh, tell us if it was not!"

"Yes, my good friends, you have guessed right; it was Le Doyen, and he cried out, 'Now then, Cut-in-Half, will you open the door or no? Don't pretend to be deaf; I see you through the keyhole.' The exhibitor of beasts was obliged to answer, and went grumblingly along to open the gate for Le Doyen, who was a regular brick of a man, as strong and sturdy as a mountain for all his age, and, moreover, he was one of those persons with whose displeasure it was anything but safe to trifle. 'Well, what do you want with me?' asked Cut-in-Half, half opening the yard door. 'I have something to say to you,' answered Le Doyen, entering almost forcibly into the little courtyard. Then observing the savage conduct of the monkey, he ran towards him, seized him by the scruff of the neck, and sought to fling him to the other end of the yard; but perceiving that the boy and the animal were chained together, Le Doyen cast a stern and fearful glance on Cut-in-Half, as he called out in a severe tone, 'Let this unfortunate child loose directly!' Only conceive the joyful surprise experienced by Gringalet, who, nearly dead with terror, found himself so unexpectedly preserved, and by means which seemed to him so miraculous that he could not help turning his eyes on his preserver, with a recollection of the golden-winged fly he had seen in his dream, though he saw merely a stout, square-built, elderly gentleman, looking more like a creature of earth than air."

"Well, now then," said the officer on duty, "now that Gringalet is safe, I will go and take my soup."

"Safe!" exclaimed Pique-Vinaigre, "not a bit of it! Bless you, poor little Gringalet has not got to the worst of his troubles yet."

"No?" cried several prisoners, with the deepest interest. "No; hasn't he, though?"

"But what else happened to him then?" inquired the officer.

"Wait a bit and you'll hear," answered the story-teller.

"What a fellow that Pique-Vinaigre is!" cried the officer; "he makes you do just as he pleases! Well, I'll stay a little longer, at any rate!"

The Skeleton spoke not, but he actually foamed with rage, as Pique-Vinaigre thus continued his recital:

"Cut-in-Half, who feared Le Doyen as the devil fears holy water, had, in a grumbling manner, unfastened the chain from Gringalet's waist, which done, Le Doyen tossed Gargousse up in the air, and when he fell to the ground he gave him so desperate a kick in his ribs that he sent him rolling ten feet off. The monkey screamed with passion, chattered, and ground his teeth with rage; then, fearing a repetition of the rough usage he had experienced, scampered away, and, climbing to the roof of a small shed, manifested his hatred of Le Doyen by a variety of threatening gestures. 'What do you mean by ill-using my monkey?' inquired Cut-in-Half of Le Doyen. 'You ought rather to ask me why I do not beat you instead of your spiteful beast there; for shame! Thus to torture and ill-use a poor helpless boy! Is it possible you can be drunk at this early hour of the morning?' 'I am no more drunk than you are! I was teaching my monkey a trick I wish him to learn. I want to get up a scene between Gringalet and my monkey. I attend to my business, and I only wish other people would do the same, and not trouble themselves with what does not concern them.' 'And I tell you that I have a right to interfere in the present case, and that it is my duty so to do. This morning when I missed Gringalet from among the other children who passed by my window, I inquired of them where he was. They did not make me any answer, but hung down their heads, and seemed confused. I know you, therefore suspected the boy was kept back for some bad purpose, and it seems I was not mistaken.

"Now, just listen to me. Every day that I do not see Gringalet pass my door with the other lads, I will come here to know the reason, whether you like it or not; and what's more, you shall produce him alive and well, or—or—or—I'll—I'll knock you down!' 'I shall do precisely as I please with the boy, without asking your leave,' answered Cut-in-Half, excessively irritated by this threat of keeping him under surveillance; 'you'll just please to keep your hands to yourself; and if you do not take yourself off, and if ever you presume to show your face here again, I'll—I'll—' 'Take that, then, as an earnest of the future!' cried Le Doyen, interrupting Cut-in-Half by a couple of blows heavy enough to knock down a rhinoceros; 'you deserve that and

more, too, for presuming to answer Le Doyen of La Petite Pologne in so impertinent a manner."

"O Lord! Lord!" groaned forth the man in the blue cap, "only two blows! I wish I had had the handling of him. He should have had a round dozen to begin with, and afterwards I would have knocked all his teeth down his throat!"

"As far as strength went," continued Pique-Vinaigre, "Le Doyen could have killed and eaten a score of such fellows as the beast-master, so Cut-in-Half was compelled to pocket the affront. But he was not the less incensed at being struck in the presence of Gringalet, and well did he promise himself to be richly avenged for the indignity he had sustained; and an idea suddenly suggested itself to him, which could only have originated in the mind of a fiend of malice like himself. While he was meditating on his diabolical scheme, Le Doyen said, 'Bear in mind that if you torment this poor boy any more I will just make you and your menagerie turn out and quit La Petite Pologne, or I will bring the whole neighbourhood to pull your house about your ears. You know very well how universally you are hated already, and you may rest assured you will have such an escort to conduct you hence as shall leave you marks enough on your back to serve as a remembrancer of your parting, let you live as long as you may, that I promise you!'

"Like a treacherous, mean-spirited wretch as he was, Cut-in-Half, the better to effect his villainous design, instead of quarrelling further with Le Doyen, feigned to submit to his decision, and replied, in a false, wheedling tone, 'You were wrong to strike me, my worthy neighbour, or to imagine I had any intention of harming Gringalet; on the contrary, I tell you again I was merely teaching my monkey a new trick; he is rather awkward when he is put out in any way, and, while trying to manage him, the boy got a few trifling bites, which I very much regret.' 'Humph!' said Le Doyen, casting a scrutinising look on him; 'now is this all gospel you are telling me? And why, if you only wished to teach a thing to your monkey, did you fasten him to Gringalet?' 'Because the boy has to learn the trick as well as the animal. Now this is what I want to do,—to dress up Gargousse in a red coat and a hat with a feather in it, like a barber, and then Gringalet is to sit in a little chair, with a cloth tucked under his chin, while the monkey affects to shave him with a large wooden razor.' The joke appeared so very droll to Le Doyen that he could not forbear laughing. 'Isn't that a funny idea?' inquired Cut-in-Half, in a crafty and malicious manner. 'Why, upon my word,' answered Le Doyen, 'it does strike me as a very amusing device, and one which, I doubt not, your monkey would carry into execution most admirably, that is, if he be as clever and skilful in imitation as he is represented.' 'Oh, bless you!'

continued Cut-in-Half, 'when he has seen me for five or six times make believe to shave Gringalet, he will imitate me exactly with his large wooden razor; but for that purpose it is absolutely necessary he should become habituated to the boy, and that was my reason for fastening them both together.' 'But why did you select Gringalet more than any other of your boys?' 'Because he was the least among 'em, so that, you see, when he sat down the monkey was the taller of the two.

"To be sure I had another reason besides, M. le Doyen, although I know a man oughtn't to own such a thing as making a difference with his boys, but, for all that, I'll own the truth, whatever comes of it, and that is, that I made choice of this here little chap because I meant to give half the profits from the performance to whoever it was acted the scene with the animal, because I knew, in course, it was disagreeable.' 'Well,' said Le Doyen, completely gulled by this false and hypocritical manner of accounting for the conduct which had first attracted his displeasure,—'well, if such be the case, I can only say, I'm very sorry I gave you such a very hard thump; however, it does not matter, just consider it as "paid on account," so that—' While Cut-in-Half was talking with Le Doyen, poor little Gringalet durst scarcely breathe,—he trembled like an aspen leaf, and, though dying with eagerness to throw himself at the feet of Le Doyen, and to supplicate of him to take him away from his cruel master, he had not courage to make the attempt, and in a low despairing voice he murmured to himself, 'I shall be like the poor fly I dreamed about, and the horrid spider will eat me up; it was folly of me to expect that any golden fly would come to save me!'

"Come, my lad, since your master means to let you share his profits, you ought to try and get used to acting with the monkey; never mind being tied to him, he won't hurt you, I dare say, and then, you know, when you have earned a large sum of money by doing this trick with him, you will have nothing to complain of.' 'Complain, indeed!' exclaimed his master, giving him at the same time a side-look that froze poor Gringalet's blood, 'what should he know of complaining? Now then, speak up, and tell this worthy gentleman whether you ever have had anything to complain of.' 'Come, let's hear all about it,—have you any cause of complaint, you are asked?' 'No—no—master,' stammered out the unhappy child. 'You hear what he says?' said Cut-in-Half, turning to Le Doyen, 'he never has had anything to complain of. No; I should rather think not! Why, bless you, I was only thinking of his good when I tied him to the monkey, and if he has got a bit of a scratch from Gargousse, why, I'll take care it does not happen again. The monkey is just a little awkward at first, but I'll see to it for the future,—take my word for it, it won't happen again.' 'That's all right, then, and now everybody's satisfied, are they not?' 'Gringalet is, most especially; are you

not, my fine fellow?' asked Cut-in-Half, casting a savage glance on the poor child. 'Yes—yes—master,' sobbed forth the wretched boy. 'And I'll tell you what I'll do further, to make up for the scratches you have got from the monkey, I'll let you share in a good breakfast I meant to order from our worthy Doyen's excellent larder; I intend having a dish of mutton-chops and pickles, four bottles of wine, and a pint of brandy.' 'Much obliged to you,' answered Le Doyen; 'all shall be sent as you desire. Few men have a better cellar or more tempting larder, and the contents of both are at the service of all who can pay for them.'

"Le Doyen was not a bad sort of a man, but it must be remembered that he had his living to get, and, therefore, so that he disposed of his eatables and drinkables at a sufficient profit, he cared but little who it was in that case,—friend or foe were quite alike to him. The beggar, Cut-in-Half, knew well enough where his weak side lay, so he hit upon this method of getting rid of him, in high good humour at having by his visit not only ascertained the safety of Gringalet, but also obtained a good order. And now was the unfortunate child thrown into the hands of his master, past all hopes of safety; for no sooner had Le Doyen turned his back than Cut-in-Half, pointing to the staircase with a dreadful frown, bade the trembling lad betake himself to his garret without loss of time; and the frightened child, glad at any rate to be freed from the monkey and his master, did not require a second bidding, but made off as fast as his strength permitted him. When Gringalet reached his own wretched chamber, he threw himself on the dirty straw allotted him for a bed beside his tortoise, and wept as though his heart were breaking. 'He will surely kill me!' cried the miserable boy, as he reflected on the cruelty of his master and his own inability to escape from him. 'What shall I do? Oh, how I wish I were dead and in my grave!' Thus he remained sobbing and lamenting for more than an hour, when he was roused by hearing the coarse voice of Cut-in-Half calling upon him to descend. And the terror of the boy was still further increased by discovering a considerable alteration in the rough tones of his master. 'Now, then!' roared out the brutal man, with a torrent of oaths, 'are you coming down, or must I fetch you?' The unhappy child almost slid down the ladder in his haste to descend, but scarcely had he reached the bottom than Cut-in-Half seized hold of him, and dragged him to his own room, stumbling at every step he took; for the fellow had been drinking so hard that he could scarcely stand on his legs, while his body swung to and fro like the sails of a windmill.

"Almost bereft by extreme intoxication of the power of speech, he continued to gaze on the shrinking child with eyes full of dreadful meaning, though his tongue was unable to declare the murderous designs he meditated. Never

had the poor boy endured such horror at the sight of his master. Gargousse was chained as usual to the foot of the bed, and in the middle of the room stood a chair, from the back of which hung a strong cord. 'S—s—sit down—there!' cried the tyrant, as he pointed to the seat. Gringalet obeyed in silence, and Cut-in-Half, without another word, twisted the rope around him, and finally secured him in the chair so firmly that, even if poor Gringalet had dared to struggle, it would have been impossible for him to have extricated himself. 'Great and good God!' murmured the wretched child, 'this time no one will come to deliver me from my danger!' And the poor little fellow was right, for, indeed, it was utterly impossible, and for this reason, that no sooner had Le Doyen gone away with the idea of all being comfortably arranged between the boy and his master than Cut-in-Half hastened to double-lock and bolt the entrance to his premises, so that no person could gain admission without his knowledge."

"Oh, poor little Gringalet!" exclaimed all the prisoners, deeply excited by the recital, "it's all up with him, that's quite sure."

"I'd give my last franc-piece to get him out of the hands of that blackguard—that I would!" cried a multitude of voices, as though one unanimous sympathy actuated each breast.

"I wonder what that beggar of a Cut-in-Half is going to do with the poor little chap!" added they, in almost breathless interest; "come, push on, and let's hear."

Pique-Vinaigre continued:

"When Gringalet was well secured in the chair, his master said to him" (and here the narrator imitated most naturally the thick speech and stammering tones of a drunken man): 'Ah—you scoundrel!—you—you are the—cause of—my being thrashed by Le Doyen!—you shall—die—for it—you shall—you—young—devil!' Then he took from his pocket a freshly sharpened razor, opened it, and seized Gringalet by the hair of his head. At the sight of the razor the child began to weep. 'Pardon, master! Pardon! Do not kill me!' 'Cry away, you infernal brat! You shall not cry long!' replied Cut-in-Half. 'Golden fly, golden fly, come to my help!' exclaimed poor Gringalet, almost mad, and remembering the dream that had had such an effect upon him, 'for the spider is going to kill me!' 'What!—you call—call—me a spider—do you?' said Cut-in-Half; 'for this—and—other—many other things—you shall die—die, I tell you—but not by my hand—because that wouldn't do—and besides—they'd "scrag" me—and so I'll say and prove that it was the ape. I have managed it all—and so—never mind—for that's all about it!' he added,

preserving his equilibrium with the greatest difficulty. Then calling the monkey, which, at the end of his chain, was grinning and looking at his master and the boy, 'Here, Gargousse,' he said, pointing to the razor, and then to Gringalet, whom he had seized by the hair of his head, 'do so to him;' and then drawing the back of the razor several times over Gringalet's throat, he feigned to cut his throat. The devil of a monkey was such a close imitator—so wicked and so sly—that he understood what his master desired, and as if to prove to him that he did so, he took his chin in his left paw, put his head back, and, with his right paw, pretended to cut his throat. 'That's it, Gargousse—that's it!' said Cut-in-Half, stammering, with his eyes half closed, and staggering so much that he almost fell with Gringalet and the chair. 'Yes, that's it! I'll unfasten you, and you'll slice his weasand—won't you, Gargousse?' The ape shrieked as he ground his teeth, as much as to say yes, and put out his paw as if to take the razor that Cut-in-Half handed to him. 'Golden fly, come to my rescue!' murmured Gringalet, in a faint voice, and assured that his last hour was come. Alas! he called the golden fly without any hopes of its coming to his rescue; he did so as a drowning man exclaims, 'Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!' Yet at this very moment Gringalet saw enter into the room one of those small gold and green flies, which look like a spangle of gold flying and flitting around and about; and at the very moment when Cut-in-Half was going to give the razor to Gargousse, the gold fly went plump into the eye of this horrible ruffian. A fly in the eye is no great thing, but at the moment it hurts like the prick of a pin, and thus Cut-in-Half, who could scarcely support himself, raised his hand to his eye so suddenly that he staggered and fell at full length, rolling on the ground like a log to the foot of the bed, to which Gargousse was fastened. 'Golden fly, many thanks! You have saved me!' cried Gringalet, who, seated and fastened to the chair, had observed all."

"Ma foi! It really was true, then, and the golden fly prevented his having his throat cut," exclaimed the prisoners, overjoyed.

"The golden fly for ever!" cried the Blue Cap.

"Listen now," continued the story-teller, "for this is the most beautiful and terrible of the history I had promised you. Cut-in-Half had fallen like a lump of lead, and was so drunk that he could move no more than a log,—he was dead drunk and perfectly senseless; but in his fall he very nearly crushed Gargousse, and almost broke his hind paw. You know how savage and revengeful this infernal brute was, and he still held in his paw the razor which his master had given him to cut Gringalet's throat. What do you suppose the animal did when he saw his master on his back and within his reach? Why, he jumped upon him, squatted on his breast, and whilst with

one paw he pushed up his chin to expose his neck, with the other he cut his throat as clean as a whistle, just as Cut-in-Half had taught him to do with poor Gringalet a few minutes before."

"Bravo, bravo! Well done!"

"Gargousse for ever!"

"The little golden fly for ever!"

"Gringalet for ever! Gargousse for ever!"

"Well, my friends, I assure you, as you shout now, so did the whole population of La Petite Pologne shout an hour afterwards," said Pique-Vinaigre, delighted at the success of his story and the enthusiasm of his hearers.

"In what way?"

"I told you that, in order to complete his wicked purpose at his ease, the vagabond Cut-in-Half had closed the door inside. Towards the evening, the boys came in one after the other with their animals. The first rapped, but no answer; then, when they had all arrived, they knocked at the door, but no reply; so one went to find Le Doyen to tell him how they had knocked in vain, and that their master did not open to them. 'The fellow must be as drunk as an Englishman,' said he; 'I sent him some wine just now. We must break open the door, for the children cannot pass the night out-of-doors.' So they burst in the door, and then they went up the stairs, and what should they see but Gargousse chained and crouching on his master's body, playing with the razor! Poor Gringalet was fortunately out of Gargousse's reach and still on the chair, not daring to look on Cut-in-Half's body, but gazing at,—guess what, the little golden fly, which, after having flitted round and round the child as if to congratulate him, had, at last, come and settled on his poor little hand.

"Gringalet related all to Le Doyen and the crowd that came in, and, as it really appeared like the interposition of Providence, Le Doyen cried, 'A triumph for Gringalet! A triumph to Gargousse who killed the infamous Cut-in-Half! He cut others, it was his turn to be cut himself.' 'Yes, yes,' cried the assembled mob, for the beast-shower was universally detested, 'a triumph to Gargousse! A triumph for Gringalet!' It was night, and they lighted straw torches, fastened Gargousse to a bench, which four chaps carried on their shoulders; and the blackguard of an ape seemed as if he felt his consequence, and gave himself the airs of a conquering hero, by showing his

teeth to the multitude. After the ape came Le Doyen, carrying Gringalet in his arms; then all the little fellows, each carrying his beast, followed him, one with his fox, another his marmotte, another his guinea-pig; and those who played on the hurdy-gurdy played now; then there were the charcoal-sellers who had their bells, and there was such an uproar, such joy, such a fête as can be scarcely imagined. Behind the musicians and animal-showers came all the dwellers in La Petite Pologne, men, women, and children, all holding straw torches, and halloaing like mad, 'Vive Gringalet! Vive Gargousse!' The procession advanced in this way around the place in which Cut-in-Half dwelt. It was a very singular sight to see the old buildings lighted up by the red light of the straw torches, which flared and flared. As to Gringalet, the first thing he did when he was at liberty was to put the little golden fly in a paper bag, and he exclaimed during his triumph, 'Little flies, I did very right in preventing the spiders from eating you, for—'

Pique-Vinaigre was interrupted by a voice from without, exclaiming:

"Père Roussel, come to your soup; it only wants ten minutes to four!"

"Ma foi! The story is nearly finished, and I must go. Many thanks, my lad, you have amused me very much, and that you may tell everybody," said the superintendent to Pique-Vinaigre, going to the door; then pausing, "Mind and be quiet," he said, turning towards the prisoners.

"We shall hear the end of the story," said the Skeleton, breathless with suppressed rage; then, adding in a whisper to Gros-Boiteux, "Follow him to the door, and, when you see him leave the yard, cry Gargousse, and the informer is a dead man."

"All right," said Le Gros-Boiteux, who accompanied the guardian, and remained at the door watching his steps as he went away.

"I tell you, then," resumed Pique-Vinaigre, "that Gringalet, during the whole time of his triumph, said, 'Little flies, I have—'"

"Gargousse!" cried Gros-Boiteux, as the turnkey quitted the yard.

"I'm here, Gringalet, and I will be your spider!" cried the Skeleton, instantly, and darting so suddenly on Germain that he could not make a struggle or utter a cry. His voice expired under the tremendous gripe of the Skeleton's iron fingers.

"If you are the spider, I'm the golden fly, Skeleton of evil," cried a voice, at the moment when Germain, surprised at the violent and sudden attack of

his implacable enemy, had fallen back on the bench entirely at the mercy of the ruffian, who, with his knee on his breast, held him by the neck. "Yes, I will be the fly, and a fly of the right sort!" repeated the man in the blue cap, of whom we have already spoken, and then, with a fierce spring, he dashed upon the Skeleton, and assailed him on the skull and between his eyes with a shower of blows from his fist, so tremendous that it sounded like the noise of a smith's hammer ringing on an anvil.

"The Skeleton Staggered at First"

Original Etching by Marcel

The man in the blue cap, who was no other than the Chourineur, added, as he redoubled the quickness of his hammering on the Skeleton's head:

"It is the shower of blows which M. Rodolph drummed on my sconce, and I have recollected them."

At this unexpected assault the prisoners were all struck with surprise, and did not take part either for or against the Chourineur. Several of them, still under the influence of the salutary impression made on them by Pique-Vinaigre's story, were even glad of an event which saved Germain. The Skeleton staggered at first, and, reeling like an ox under the butcher's poleaxe, mechanically extended his hands to try and ward off his adversary's blows, and Germain, thus freed from the deadly clutch of the Skeleton, half raised himself.

"What does this mean? Who is this scoundrel?" exclaimed Le Gros-Boiteux, and, rushing at the Chourineur, he endeavoured to seize his arms from behind, whilst the latter was making violent efforts to keep the Skeleton down on the bench. Germain's defender replied to Le Gros-Boiteux's attack by a kind of kick, so violent that it sent the cripple rolling on the ground to the farther end of the circle formed by the prisoners.

Germain, whose face was livid and purple, half suffocated, and on his knees by the bench, seemed unconscious of all that was passing around him. The strangulation had been so violent that he could scarcely breathe.

After his first surprise was over, the Skeleton, by a desperate effort, contrived to keep the Chourineur off and regain his feet. Breathless, drunk with rage and hatred, he was fearful to look upon. His cadaverous face streamed with blood, his upper lip curled like that of a furious wolf, exposed his teeth clenched against each other. At last he exclaimed, in a voice palpitating with anger and exertion, for his struggle had been very violent:

"Stab him,—the ruffian!—you cowards, who let me be traitorously attacked, or the informer will escape!"

During this momentary truce, the Chourineur, raising Germain half fainting, had managed very cleverly to put him in an angle of the wall, and, availing himself of this advantageous position of defence, he was able, without fear of surprise from behind, to resist any attack of the prisoners, on whom the skill and herculean powers he had displayed had imposed considerable respect.

Pique-Vinaigre, greatly alarmed, had disappeared without his absence being remarked.

Seeing hesitation amongst the majority of prisoners, the Skeleton exclaimed:

"Aid me now, let us do for both, the big 'un as well as the little 'un!"

"Look out for squalls, then," replied the Chourineur, preparing for a struggle, with his two hands squared, and standing well-balanced on his loins; "and mind your eye, Skeleton! If you mean to play the Cut-in-Half, I'll serve you as Gargousse did, and slit your weasand."

"Fall on him!" said Le Gros-Boiteux, getting up.

"Why does this vagabond defend spies? Death to the informer, and to him, too! If he defends Germain he is a traitor!"

"Yes, yes, death to the spy! Death!"

"Yes, and death to the traitor who defends him!"

Such were the cries uttered by the fiercest of the détenus. Another party, more merciful, exclaimed:

"No, let's hear him first!"

"Yes, let him explain; we mustn't kill a man without a hearing!"

"And without means of defence, too! Must we be Cut-in-Halves?"

"So much the better!" replied the Skeleton's partisans.

"Nothing's too bad for a spy!"

"Let's fall on him! Let us support the Skeleton!"

"Yes, let's at the Blue Cap!"

"No, let's support the Blue Cap, and let's at the Skeleton!" retorted the Chourineur's party.

"No, down with the Blue Cap!"

"Down with the Skeleton!"

"Well done, my boys!" cried the Chourineur, addressing the prisoners who sided with him. "You're good fellows, and would not massacre a half dead man; none but cowards would do that. The Skeleton does not care what evil he does; he is sentenced beforehand, and that is why he urges you on; but if you help to kill Germain, you will be severely punished for it. Besides, I have something to propose. The Skeleton is desirous of doing for this young man; well, let him come and take him if he thinks he has the pluck to do it; let us two settle it; leave us to ourselves, and see what turns up. But he's afraid; he's like Cut-in-Half, only strong with the weak."

The vigour, energy, and rough manner of the Chourineur had powerful effect on the prisoners, and a considerable number of them had ranged themselves on his side, and surrounded Germain, whilst the Skeleton's party drew around that ruffian. A bloody fray would have ensued, when there was heard in the yard the sonorous and measured tread of a piquet of infantry, always on guard in the prison. Pique-Vinaigre, profiting by the general stir and noise, had gained the yard, and, having knocked at the wicket of the entrance, had told the turnkeys what was passing in the day-room. The arrival of the soldiers put an end to this scene. Germain, the Skeleton, and the Chourineur were taken before the governor of La Force; the first to make his complaint, the two others to answer for creating a disturbance inside the gaol.

The fright and suffering of Germain had been so great, his weakness so extreme, that he was obliged to lean on two of the turnkeys, in order to reach a chamber next to the governor's room. There he was very ill. His neck, excoriated as it was, bore the livid and bleeding imprint of the Skeleton's iron grasp; a few minutes more, and Rigolette's betrothed would have been strangled. The turnkey, who had taken an interest in Germain, gave him first assistance. When he had recovered, his first thought was of his deliverer.

"Thanks for your kind cares, sir," he said to the turnkey. "But for that brave man, I must have been killed. Where is he?"

"In the governor's room, telling him how the disturbance arose. It appears that but for him—"

"I must have been killed. Oh, tell me his name! Who is he?"

"His name I do not know, but they call him the Chourineur; he is an old offender."

"And is his crime now very serious?"

"Very; burglary in the night in an inhabited house," replied the turnkey. "He will probably have a similar dose to Pique-Vinaigre, fifteen or twenty years of hard labour."

Germain shuddered; he would have preferred being bound by gratitude to a man less criminal.

"How dreadful!" he said. "And yet this man without knowing me defended me; such courage, such generosity!"

"Ah, these men have sometimes a touch of good! The main point is that you are saved. To-morrow you will have your private cell, and to-night you will sleep in the infirmary. So, courage, sir. The bad time is over; and when your pretty little visitor comes to see you, you can comfort her, for once in a cell you have nothing to fear; only you will do wisely, I think, not to tell her of this affair."

"Certainly not; but I should like to thank my defender."

"I have just been leaving the governor, who will now interrogate the Skeleton, and I shall take them both, the Skeleton to his dungeon directly, and the Chourineur to the Fosse aux Lions; he will be, besides, somewhat rewarded for what he has done for you; as he is a determined and stout fellow, he will probably replace the Skeleton as captain of the ward."

The Chourineur, having crossed a small passage from the governor's apartment, entered the room in which Germain was.

"Wait for me here," said the turnkey to the Chourineur. "I will go and ask the governor what he decides upon as to the Skeleton, and I will return and let you know. Our young man has quite recovered, and wishes to thank you,

and so he should, for otherwise it would have been all over with him." And the turnkey went out.

The Chourineur's countenance was very joyous, and he advanced towards Germain, saying, with a cheerful air:

"Thunder! How glad I am! How glad I saved you!" and he extended his hand to Germain, who, by a feeling of involuntary repulsion, withdrew somewhat, instead of taking the hand which the Chourineur offered to him; then, remembering that he owed his life to this man, he was desirous of repairing this display of repugnance. But the Chourineur perceived it; his features became overcast, and, retreating in his turn, he said, with bitter sorrow, "Oh, it is right; your pardon, sir!"

"No, it is I who ought to ask your pardon; am I not a prisoner like yourself? Ought I not to think of the service you have rendered me? You have saved my life. Your hand, sir, I beg—I entreat—your hand!"

"Thanks; but it is useless now. The first feeling is everything. If you had directly given me a grasp of the hand, it would have afforded me pleasure, but, when I reflect, I would not desire it. Not because I am a prisoner like you," he added, with a sombre and hesitating air, "because, before I came here, I have been—"

"The turnkey told me all," said Germain, interrupting him; "but yet you saved my life."

"I have done no more than my duty and pleasure, for I know who you are—Monsieur Germain."

"You know me!"

"A little, my lad," said the Chourineur, resuming his usual tone of habitual carelessness; "and, pardieu! you would have been very wrong to have attributed my arrival at La Force to chance. If I had not known you, I should not have been in prison."

Germain looked at the Chourineur with amazement.

"What! It was because you knew me?"

"That I am here a prisoner in La Force."

"I, who owe you—"

"A candle to the Virgin, for having procured me the advantage of being in La Force."

"Really," said Germain, passing his hand over his brow. "I do not know whether the terrible shock I have just undergone has weakened my senses, but it is impossible for me to understand you. The turnkey told me you were here under a charge of—of—" said Germain, with hesitation.

"Robbery, pardieu! And robbery with forcible entry, and moreover at night; nothing could be more complete!" cried the Chourineur, with a hearty laugh.

Germain, painfully excited at the bold hardihood of the Chourineur, could not forbear saying to him:

"What, you, so brave, so generous, and speak in this way! Are you not aware of the terrible punishment to which you are exposed?"

"Twenty years at the galleys; I know that. I am an out-and-out scoundrel, I know that, for taking it so easy. But what's the use when one has been and done it? And then, for me to say that it was you, M. Germain," added the Chourineur, heaving a tremendous sigh, and with an air of assumed contrition, "who are the cause of my misfortune."

"When you explain yourself more clearly, I shall understand you. Just as much as you please, but my gratitude for the service you have rendered me will never cease or diminish," added Germain, sorrowfully.

"Oh, pardon me, M. Germain!" replied the Chourineur, becoming serious. "You do not like to see me laugh at this; do not let us add another word. I must let all out with you, and so, perhaps, force you to shake my hand."

"I have no doubt of that; for, in spite of the crime of which you are accused, and of which you accuse yourself, all in you bespeaks so much courage and frankness that I am convinced you are charged unjustly; strong suspicions may exist, but I am sure that is all."

"Oh, as to that you are mistaken, M. Germain!" said the Chourineur, hastily; "on my word as a man, and as true as I have a protector,"—the Chourineur took off his cap,— "who is more than all the world to me, I robbed at night by forcing the shutter, and was caught in the fact and deprived of all I was endeavouring to carry off."

"But want—hunger—pushed you to such an extremity?"

"Hunger! I had one hundred and twenty francs when they apprehended me, the remains of a note of one thousand francs, without including the protector I have mentioned to you, who, by the way, does not know that I am here, but will not let me want for anything. Since, however, I have mentioned him to you, you must suppose I am in earnest, for you must know that he is a man to go on your knees before. So I must tell you, too, that the shower of blows which I drummed on the Skeleton's scone was a sketch after his style, copied from nature. The idea of the robbery was on his account; and, in fact, if you were not strangled by the Skeleton, it is through him."

"But this protector?"

"Is yours also."

"Mine!"

"Yes, M. Rodolph protects you. When I say monsieur, I should say monseigneur, for he is at least a prince; but I have a habit of calling him M. Rodolph, which he permits me to do."

"You are under some mistake," said Germain, more and more surprised; "I do not know the prince."

"Yes, but he knows you. You don't believe it? Well, that's possible, for that's his way. He knows that there is some worthy fellow in trouble, and then, in an instant, the good fellow is comforted, and, without being seen or known, he is at work, and kindness falls from the skies, like a tile from a house on your head. So patience, and one day or other you will have your tile."

"Really, what you say amazes me!"

"Ah, you'll have a great deal more to amaze you yet! To return to my protector: Some time ago, after a service which he persisted I had done him, he procured me a splendid position, I need not say where, or any more about it, for it would be a long tale to tell. Well, he sends me to Marseilles to embark and go to a capital appointment in Algeria. I left Paris as happy as a child; but, all of a sudden, a change comes over me."

"That was singular!"

"Why, you must know that once separated from M. Rodolph I was uneasy, disturbed, as fidgety as a dog who has lost his master. It was very stupid; but so are dogs, sometimes, but that does not prevent them from being at

least attached, and as well mindful of the nice bits given them as of the thumps and kicks they have had, and M. Rodolph had given me many nice bits, and, in truth, M. Rodolph is everything to me. From being a riotous, dare-devil, good-for-nothing blackguard, he made an honest man of me by only saying two words, just for all the world like magic."

"What were the words he said?"

"He said I had still heart and honour, although I have been at the galleys, not for having stolen, it is true,—ah, never that,—but what perhaps is worse, for having killed,—yes," said the Chourineur, in a gloomy tone, "killed in a moment of passion, because formerly growing up like a brute beast, or, rather, as a vagabond, without father or mother, and left abandoned in the streets of Paris, I knew neither God nor devil—neither good nor evil. Sometimes the blood mounted to my eyes, and I saw red, and if I had a knife in my hands I slashed and hacked,—I was a real savage—a beast, and only lived amongst thieves and scoundrels. I was in the mud, and in the mud I lived as well as I could. But when M. Rodolph said to me that since, in spite of the contempt of all the world and my misery, instead of plundering like others I had preferred working as long as I could, and for what I could, that showed I had still heart and honour—thunder!—you see these two words had the same effect on me as if I had been seized by the hair of my head and lifted a thousand feet into the air above the vermin with whom I dwelt, and showed me the filth in which my life was spent. So I said, 'Thank ye, I've had enough of this!' Then my heart beat with something else besides anger, and I took an oath to myself always to preserve that honour which M. Rodolph spoke of. You see, M. Germain, that when M. Rodolph told me so kindly that I was not so bad as I believed myself to be, that encouraged me, and, thanks to him, I became better than I had been."

When he heard this language, Germain comprehended less and less how the Chourineur had committed the robbery of which he accused himself.

"No," he said to himself, "it is impossible; the man who was so exalted at the two words honour and heart cannot have committed the robbery of which he talks with so much self-complacency."

The Chourineur continued, without remarking the astonishment of Germain:

"To say the truth, what made me be like a dog to his master to M. Rodolph was that he raised me in my own opinion. Before I knew him I never felt but on my skin, but he moved me inwardly, and to the bottom of my heart. Once

away from him and the place he inhabited, I felt like a body without a soul. In proportion as I proceeded farther I said to myself, 'He leads such a strange life,—mixes with such scamps (I can answer for that), that he risks his body twenty times a day, and, under some such circumstances, I may be his dog and defend my master, for I am strong in the jaws;' but then he had said to me, 'My good fellow, you must become useful to others, therefore go where you can be serviceable.' I was very nearly replying, 'I have no one to serve but you, M. Rodolph,' but I daredn't. He said to me, 'Go,' and I went, and have gone as far as I could; but, thunder! when I ought to have gone on board the ship, left France, and put the sea between M. Rodolph and myself, I had not the courage. He had desired his correspondent to give me a great lump of money when I sailed, so I went to the gentleman, and said to him, 'Sir, I can't do it—I'd rather do anything, so please to give me enough to pay my journey on foot; I have good legs, and I will return to Paris, for I cannot leave France. M. Rodolph will be angry, and, perhaps, refuse to see me,—that's possible; but I shall see him, know where he is, and if he goes on as usual, sooner or later I may, perhaps, arrive in time to come between him and a stab with a knife; and then I really cannot go so far away from him! Something I cannot account for attracts me to his side.' Well, they gave me sufficient to pay my way, and I reached Paris. Then I really was frightened. What could I say to M. Rodolph to excuse myself? But, after all, he would not eat me up; so I went to find his friend, a tall, bald-headed man, but a right sort of fellow as ever broke bread. When I saw M. Murphy, I said, 'Now my fate will be decided;' and my throat was dry, and my heart beat such a pace! I expected to catch it pretty handsomely, but, what d'ye think? Why, the worthy gentleman received me just as if we had only parted the previous evening, and told me that M. Rodolph, instead of being angry, wished to see me as soon as possible. Well, so I went at once to my protector,—him with such a stout fist and good heart,—and when I was face to face with him he who is as terrible as a lion and as gentle as a child—he who is a prince, and yet puts on a blouse like me—and once on a time (I bless the day, or night, rather) laid on me such a shower of blows that I saw nothing but fire, why, M. Germain, when I reflected on all the agreeable qualities he is master of, I felt completely overcome, and I snivelled like a woman. Well, instead of laughing at me, for I must be a rum-looking lot when I pipe my eye, M. Rodolph said to me, seriously, 'Here you are back again, my good fellow, eh?' 'Yes, M. Rodolph, and pray excuse me if I have done wrong, but I could not help it. Give me some corner in your courtyard, give me a crust and a glass, or let me earn it here,—that's all I ask, and pray don't be angry with me for coming back.' 'So far from it, my man, you have come back just in time to do me a service.' 'I, M. Rodolph? Is that possible? Well, there must have been something above, for if not, how could I explain how it was I must come back here at the very moment when you wanted me? What can I do for you,

M. Rodolph?' 'An honest, worthy young man, in whom I take the interest I should do in a son, has been unjustly accused of robbery, and is a prisoner in La Force. His name is Germain; he is of a gentle, quiet disposition. The wretches with whom he is confined have conceived a great aversion for him, and he is in great danger. You unfortunately have known what a prison life is, and a great many prisoners; could not you, in case there may be any of your old companions in La Force (we will find that out), go and see them, and, by promises of money, which shall be duly performed, induce them to protect this unfortunate young man?'"

"But who can this generous and unknown man be, who takes so much interest in my fate?" asked Germain, more and more surprised.

"You will learn, perhaps, hereafter,—as for me, I do not know. To return to my conversation with M. Rodolph. Whilst he was speaking to me there came an idea into my head, so curious, so whimsical, that I could not forbear laughing outright before him. 'What is it, my lad?' said he. 'Why, M. Rodolph, I laugh because I am so happy, and I am happy because I have the means of putting your M. Germain quite safe from any ill-will on the part of the prisoners, of giving him a protector who will defend him boldly, for when once the young fellow is under the care of the man I mean, not one will dare look at him impertinently.' 'Very good—one of your old comrades, no doubt?' 'Exactly so, M. Rodolph; he has been in La Force some days, that I know. But I must have some money.' 'How much shall you require,—a note for a thousand francs? Here it is.' 'Thank ye, M. Rodolph; in two days you will have some news.'"

"I begin to understand, or, rather, I'm afraid to understand," exclaimed Germain. "To come and protect me in this prison you have, perhaps, committed a robbery? Oh, what remorse will beset all my life!"

"Hold hard! M. Rodolph had said I had heart and honour,—these words are my law, you must know; and he may still say it to me, for if I am no better than I was before, at least I am no worse."

"But this robbery, if you have not committed it, why are you here?"

"Listen! There is a capital joke with my thousand francs, I bought myself a black wig, shaved my whiskers, put on blue spectacles, bent my head on one side, and made up my back as if it were humped, and then went in search of two apartments to let, on the ground floor, in a bustling part of the city. I found what I looked for in the Rue de Provence, and paid a month in advance, under the name of M. Grégoire. Next day I went to the Temple to

buy furniture for my two rooms, with my black wig, my hump, and blue glasses, so that I might be easily recognised. Well, I sent the goods to the Rue de Provence, and, moreover, six silver spoons, which I bought in the Boulevard St. Denis, still disguised with my hump. I returned then to arrange all my affairs in my residence. I told the porter I should not sleep there until the following night, and took away my key. The windows of the two rooms were closed with strong shutters. Before I went away I had purposely left one with the bolt undrawn. The night came, and I put off my wig, my spectacles, my hump, and the clothes in which I had made my purchases and hired my apartments, putting this suit in a portmanteau, which I forwarded to M. Murphy, M. Rodolph's friend, begging him to take care of it for me. I then bought this blouse, and the blue cotton cap, and a bar of iron two feet long; and at one o'clock in the morning I went into the Rue de Provence, where I lurked about before my lodging, awaiting the moment when the patrol would pass and prevent my robbing myself,—committing a burglary on my own premises, in order to be caught and apprehended."

And the Chourineur burst into a fit of hearty laughter.

"I begin to understand," cried Germain.

"But I was nearly getting in a 'fix,' for no patrol passed. I might have robbed myself twenty times with the greatest ease and safety. At last, about two o'clock in the morning, I heard the tread of the soldier boys, and then I pushed open the window, jumped into the room, pocketed the silver spoons and some other trifles. Fortunately the lively patrol had heard the smash of the windows, and just as I leaped out of the window they laid hands upon me. They knocked at the door, which the porter opened, they sent for the sergeant of police, who came. The porter told him that the two rooms had been hired that morning by a humpbacked gentleman, with black hair and blue spectacles, whose name was Grégoire. I had the thick head of hair which you now see, and my eyes were as wide open as a hare's on the watch, was as upright as a Russian sentinel, and could not be taken for a humpbacked gentleman, with blue glasses and black hair. I confessed all, and was conducted to the station, and from the station to this prison, where I arrived in the nick of time to snatch from the clutch of the Skeleton the young man of whom M. Rodolph had said to me, 'I am interested in him as much as if he were my own son.'"

"What do I not owe you for such devotion?"

"Not to me,—you owe it to M. Rodolph."

"But whence arises his interest in me?"

"That is for him to tell you, or, perhaps, he will not tell you, for he very often chooses to do good, and if you ask him why, he will not let you know."

"M. Rodolph, then, knows you are here?"

"I'm not such a fool as to tell him my plans; perhaps he would not have consented to my whim, and, really, I must say it was capital."

"But what risks you have run,—indeed, still run."

"Oh, what risk? I might not have been brought to La Force,—that was the worst risk,—but I relied on M. Rodolph's interest to have my prison changed, so that I might have got to you."

"But at your trial?"

"Well, I shall beg M. Murphy to send me the portmanteau. Before the judge I shall appear in my black wig, blue spectacles, and hump, and shall be again M. Grégoire for the porter who let me the chambers and the tradespeople who sold me the goods. So much for the robbery. If they wish to see the thief again, I'll put off my suit, and then it will be as clear as daylight that the robber and the robbed together only make a total of the Chourineur and no more. And what the devil would you expect when it is proved that I robbed myself?"

"Why, indeed," said Germain, more assured; "but since you take so much interest in me, why did you not speak to me when you came first into the prison?"

"I knew instantly of the scheme against you by the prisoners, and I might have denounced them before Pique-Vinaigre began or ended his story; but to denounce such ruffians did not suit my ideas,—I preferred trusting only to my fist in order to snatch you from the clutch of the Skeleton; and when I saw that scoundrel I said to myself, 'This is a fine opportunity for putting in practice that shower of blows to which I owe the honour of M. Rodolph's acquaintance.'"

"But if all the prisoners had taken part against you, alone, what could you have done?"

"Why, then, I should have shrieked like an eagle and called lustily for help. But I preferred having my little affair all to myself, that I might be able to

say to M. Rodolph, 'I was all alone in the matter. I have defended and will defend your friend,—be easy on that subject.'"

At this moment the turnkey suddenly returned to the apartment.

"Monsieur Germain, go to the governor; he wishes to speak to you immediately. And you, Chourineur, go down into the Fosse-aux-Lions; you are to be prévôt, if you like, for you have all the qualifications for that duty, and the prisoners will not joke with a man of your sort."

"It is all the same to me, I'd as soon be captain as private."

"Will you refuse my hand now?" said Germain, cordially.

"Ma foi! no, M. Germain! I'll shake hands with all my heart."

"We shall see one another again, for I am now under your protection. I shall have nothing more to fear, and shall, therefore, come down every day from my cell into the yard."

"Make yourself quite easy on that score. But now I think of it, write a line to M. Rodolph, who will then no longer be uneasy about you, and will also learn that I am here for a good reason, for if he were to hear that I had committed a robbery, and did not know all the real facts,—thunder! That would not do by any means."

"Make your mind easy. I will write this very evening to my unknown protector. Once more, good-bye, and thanks most heartily, my worthy friend."

"Good-bye, M. Germain. I must return to those scoundrels, and I'll make them go right; if not, let them look out for squalls!"

"When I reflect that it is on my account that you must remain some time longer with these wretches—"

"What consequence is that? There is no fear of their turning on me;" and the Chourineur followed the turnkey.

Germain went to the governor. What was his surprise to find Rigolette there! pale, agitated, and her eyes bathed in tears; and yet smiling through her tears, her countenance expressing unutterable happiness.

"I have good news for you, sir," said the governor to Germain; "justice has declared that no prosecution can be instituted against you; and in consequence of the withdrawing of this, and explanations that have taken place, I have received an order to set you at liberty immediately."

"Sir! What do you say? Can it be possible?"

Rigolette tried to speak, but her extreme emotion prevented her, and she could only make an affirmative sign to Germain with her head, and clasp her hands.

"Mademoiselle arrived a few minutes after I had received the order to set you at liberty," added the governor. "A very powerful letter of recommendation which she brought to me informed me of the touching devotion she had shown to you in prison; and it is with extreme pleasure that I sent for you, certain that you will be very happy to offer your arm to mademoiselle, and lead her hence."

"A dream! It must be a dream!" said Germain. "Ah, sir, how can I thank you? Excuse my astonishment,—joy prevents me from thanking you as I ought."

"And I, too, M. Germain,—I cannot find a word to say," said Rigolette; "only imagine my delight when I left you on finding the friend of M. Rodolph, who was waiting for me."

"Again M. Rodolph!" exclaimed Germain, astonished.

"Yes, and M. Murphy said to me, 'Germain is free—here is a letter for the governor of the prison; when you arrive there he will have received the order for Germain's release, and you may take him away with you.' I could not believe what I heard, and yet it was true. Well, as quick as possible, I took a hackney-coach, and came here; it is waiting for us at the gate."

We will not attempt to paint the delight of the two lovers when they quitted La Force, and the evening they passed together in Rigolette's small apartment, which Germain quitted at eleven o'clock to go to a humble furnished room.

END OF VOLUME V.