BOOK THIRD.--ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE PROMISE MADE TO THE DEAD WOMAN

CHAPTER I--THE WATER QUESTION AT MONTFERMEIL

Montfermeil is situated between Livry and Chelles, on the southern edge of that lofty table-land which separates the Ourcq from the Marne. At the present day it is a tolerably large town, ornamented all the year through with plaster villas, and on Sundays with beaming bourgeois. In 1823 there were at Montfermeil neither so many white houses nor so many well-satisfied citizens: it was only a village in the forest. Some pleasure-houses of the last century were to be met with there, to be sure, which were recognizable by their grand air, their balconies in twisted iron, and their long windows, whose tiny panes cast all sorts of varying shades of green on the white of the closed shutters; but Montfermeil was none the less a village. Retired cloth-merchants and rusticating attorneys had not discovered it as yet; it was a peaceful and charming place, which was not on the road to anywhere: there people lived, and cheaply, that peasant rustic life which is so bounteous and so easy; only, water was rare there, on account of the elevation of the plateau.

It was necessary to fetch it from a considerable distance; the end of

the village towards Gagny drew its water from the magnificent ponds which exist in the woods there. The other end, which surrounds the church and which lies in the direction of Chelles, found drinking-water only at a little spring half-way down the slope, near the road to Chelles, about a quarter of an hour from Montfermeil.

Thus each household found it hard work to keep supplied with water. The large houses, the aristocracy, of which the Thenardier tavern formed a part, paid half a farthing a bucketful to a man who made a business of it, and who earned about eight sous a day in his enterprise of supplying Montfermeil with water; but this good man only worked until seven o'clock in the evening in summer, and five in winter; and night once come and the shutters on the ground floor once closed, he who had no water to drink went to fetch it for himself or did without it.

This constituted the terror of the poor creature whom the reader has probably not forgotten,--little Cosette. It will be remembered that Cosette was useful to the Thenardiers in two ways: they made the mother pay them, and they made the child serve them. So when the mother ceased to pay altogether, the reason for which we have read in preceding chapters, the Thenardiers kept Cosette. She took the place of a servant in their house. In this capacity she it was who ran to fetch water when it was required. So the child, who was greatly terrified at the idea of going to the spring at night, took great care that water should never be lacking in the house.

Christmas of the year 1823 was particularly brilliant at Montfermeil. The beginning of the winter had been mild; there had been neither snow nor frost up to that time. Some mountebanks from Paris had obtained permission of the mayor to erect their booths in the principal street of the village, and a band of itinerant merchants, under protection of the same tolerance, had constructed their stalls on the Church Square, and even extended them into Boulanger Alley, where, as the reader will perhaps remember, the Thenardiers' hostelry was situated. These people filled the inns and drinking-shops, and communicated to that tranquil little district a noisy and joyous life. In order to play the part of a faithful historian, we ought even to add that, among the curiosities displayed in the square, there was a menagerie, in which frightful clowns, clad in rags and coming no one knew whence, exhibited to the peasants of Montfermeil in 1823 one of those horrible Brazilian vultures, such as our Royal Museum did not possess until 1845, and which have a tricolored cockade for an eye. I believe that naturalists call this bird Caracara Polyborus; it belongs to the order of the Apicides, and to the family of the vultures. Some good old Bonapartist soldiers, who had retired to the village, went to see this creature with great devotion. The mountebanks gave out that the tricolored cockade was a unique phenomenon made by God expressly for their menagerie.

On Christmas eve itself, a number of men, carters, and peddlers, were seated at table, drinking and smoking around four or five candles in the public room of Thenardier's hostelry. This room resembled all drinking-shop rooms,--tables, pewter jugs, bottles, drinkers, smokers;

but little light and a great deal of noise. The date of the year 1823 was indicated, nevertheless, by two objects which were then fashionable in the bourgeois class: to wit, a kaleidoscope and a lamp of ribbed tin. The female Thenardier was attending to the supper, which was roasting in front of a clear fire; her husband was drinking with his customers and talking politics.

Besides political conversations which had for their principal subjects the Spanish war and M. le Duc d'Angouleme, strictly local parentheses, like the following, were audible amid the uproar:--

"About Nanterre and Suresnes the vines have flourished greatly. When ten pieces were reckoned on there have been twelve. They have yielded a great deal of juice under the press." "But the grapes cannot be ripe?" "In those parts the grapes should not be ripe; the wine turns oily as soon as spring comes." "Then it is very thin wine?" "There are wines poorer even than these. The grapes must be gathered while green." Etc.

Or a miller would call out:--

"Are we responsible for what is in the sacks? We find in them a quantity of small seed which we cannot sift out, and which we are obliged to send through the mill-stones; there are tares, fennel, vetches, hempseed, fox-tail, and a host of other weeds, not to mention pebbles, which abound in certain wheat, especially in Breton wheat. I am not fond of grinding Breton wheat, any more than long-sawyers like to saw beams with

nails in them. You can judge of the bad dust that makes in grinding. And then people complain of the flour. They are in the wrong. The flour is no fault of ours."

In a space between two windows a mower, who was seated at table with a landed proprietor who was fixing on a price for some meadow work to be performed in the spring, was saying:--

"It does no harm to have the grass wet. It cuts better. Dew is a good thing, sir. It makes no difference with that grass. Your grass is young and very hard to cut still. It's terribly tender. It yields before the iron." Etc.

Cosette was in her usual place, seated on the cross-bar of the kitchen table near the chimney. She was in rags; her bare feet were thrust into wooden shoes, and by the firelight she was engaged in knitting woollen stockings destined for the young Thenardiers. A very young kitten was playing about among the chairs. Laughter and chatter were audible in the adjoining room, from two fresh children's voices: it was Eponine and Azelma.

In the chimney-corner a cat-o'-nine-tails was hanging on a nail.

At intervals the cry of a very young child, which was somewhere in the house, rang through the noise of the dram-shop. It was a little boy who had been born to the Thenardiers during one of the preceding

winters,--"she did not know why," she said, "the result of the cold,"--and who was a little more than three years old. The mother had nursed him, but she did not love him. When the persistent clamor of the brat became too annoying, "Your son is squalling," Thenardier would say; "do go and see what he wants." "Bah!" the mother would reply, "he bothers me." And the neglected child continued to shriek in the dark.

CHAPTER II--TWO COMPLETE PORTRAITS

So far in this book the Thenardiers have been viewed only in profile; the moment has arrived for making the circuit of this couple, and considering it under all its aspects.

Thenardier had just passed his fiftieth birthday; Madame Thenardier was approaching her forties, which is equivalent to fifty in a woman; so that there existed a balance of age between husband and wife.

Our readers have possibly preserved some recollection of this Thenardier woman, ever since her first appearance,--tall, blond, red, fat, angular, square, enormous, and agile; she belonged, as we have said, to the race of those colossal wild women, who contort themselves at fairs with paving-stones hanging from their hair. She did everything about the house,--made the beds, did the washing, the cooking, and everything else. Cosette was her only servant; a mouse in the service of an elephant. Everything trembled at the sound of her voice,--window panes, furniture, and people. Her big face, dotted with red blotches, presented the appearance of a skimmer. She had a beard. She was an ideal market-porter dressed in woman's clothes. She swore splendidly; she boasted of being able to crack a nut with one blow of her fist. Except for the romances which she had read, and which made the affected lady peep through the ogress at times, in a very queer way, the idea would never have occurred to any one to say of her, "That is a woman." This Thenardier female was like the product of a wench engrafted on a

fishwife. When one heard her speak, one said, "That is a gendarme"; when one saw her drink, one said, "That is a carter"; when one saw her handle Cosette, one said, "That is the hangman." One of her teeth projected when her face was in repose.

Thenardier was a small, thin, pale, angular, bony, feeble man, who had a sickly air and who was wonderfully healthy. His cunning began here; he smiled habitually, by way of precaution, and was almost polite to everybody, even to the beggar to whom he refused half a farthing. He had the glance of a pole-cat and the bearing of a man of letters. He greatly resembled the portraits of the Abbe Delille. His coquetry consisted in drinking with the carters. No one had ever succeeded in rendering him drunk. He smoked a big pipe. He wore a blouse, and under his blouse an old black coat. He made pretensions to literature and to materialism. There were certain names which he often pronounced to support whatever things he might be saying,--Voltaire, Raynal, Parny, and, singularly enough, Saint Augustine. He declared that he had "a system." In addition, he was a great swindler. A filousophe [philosophe], a scientific thief. The species does exist. It will be remembered that he pretended to have served in the army; he was in the habit of relating with exuberance, how, being a sergeant in the 6th or the 9th light something or other, at Waterloo, he had alone, and in the presence of a squadron of death-dealing hussars, covered with his body and saved from death, in the midst of the grape-shot, "a general, who had been dangerously wounded." Thence arose for his wall the flaring sign, and for his inn the name which it bore in the neighborhood, of "the cabaret

of the Sergeant of Waterloo." He was a liberal, a classic, and a Bonapartist. He had subscribed for the Champ d'Asile. It was said in the village that he had studied for the priesthood.

We believe that he had simply studied in Holland for an inn-keeper. This rascal of composite order was, in all probability, some Fleming from Lille, in Flanders, a Frenchman in Paris, a Belgian at Brussels, being comfortably astride of both frontiers. As for his prowess at Waterloo, the reader is already acquainted with that. It will be perceived that he exaggerated it a trifle. Ebb and flow, wandering, adventure, was the leven of his existence; a tattered conscience entails a fragmentary life, and, apparently at the stormy epoch of June 18, 1815, Thenardier belonged to that variety of marauding sutlers of which we have spoken, beating about the country, selling to some, stealing from others, and travelling like a family man, with wife and children, in a rickety cart, in the rear of troops on the march, with an instinct for always attaching himself to the victorious army. This campaign ended, and having, as he said, "some quibus," he had come to Montfermeil and set up an inn there.

This quibus, composed of purses and watches, of gold rings and silver crosses, gathered in harvest-time in furrows sown with corpses, did not amount to a large total, and did not carry this sutler turned eating-house-keeper very far.

Thenardier had that peculiar rectilinear something about his gestures

which, accompanied by an oath, recalls the barracks, and by a sign of the cross, the seminary. He was a fine talker. He allowed it to be thought that he was an educated man. Nevertheless, the schoolmaster had noticed that he pronounced improperly.[12]

He composed the travellers' tariff card in a superior manner, but practised eyes sometimes spied out orthographical errors in it. Thenardier was cunning, greedy, slothful, and clever. He did not disdain his servants, which caused his wife to dispense with them. This giantess was jealous. It seemed to her that that thin and yellow little man must be an object coveted by all.

Thenardier, who was, above all, an astute and well-balanced man, was a scamp of a temperate sort. This is the worst species; hypocrisy enters into it.

It is not that Thenardier was not, on occasion, capable of wrath to quite the same degree as his wife; but this was very rare, and at such times, since he was enraged with the human race in general, as he bore within him a deep furnace of hatred. And since he was one of those people who are continually avenging their wrongs, who accuse everything that passes before them of everything which has befallen them, and who are always ready to cast upon the first person who comes to hand, as a legitimate grievance, the sum total of the deceptions, the bankruptcies, and the calamities of their lives,--when all this leaven was stirred up in him and boiled forth from his mouth and eyes, he was terrible. Woe to

the person who came under his wrath at such a time!

In addition to his other qualities, Thenardier was attentive and penetrating, silent or talkative, according to circumstances, and always highly intelligent. He had something of the look of sailors, who are accustomed to screw up their eyes to gaze through marine glasses. Thenardier was a statesman.

Every new-comer who entered the tavern said, on catching sight of Madame Thenardier, "There is the master of the house." A mistake. She was not even the mistress. The husband was both master and mistress. She worked; he created. He directed everything by a sort of invisible and constant magnetic action. A word was sufficient for him, sometimes a sign; the mastodon obeyed. Thenardier was a sort of special and sovereign being in Madame Thenardier's eyes, though she did not thoroughly realize it. She was possessed of virtues after her own kind; if she had ever had a disagreement as to any detail with "Monsieur Thenardier,"--which was an inadmissible hypothesis, by the way,--she would not have blamed her husband in public on any subject whatever. She would never have committed "before strangers" that mistake so often committed by women, and which is called in parliamentary language, "exposing the crown." Although their concord had only evil as its result, there was contemplation in Madame Thenardier's submission to her husband. That mountain of noise and of flesh moved under the little finger of that frail despot. Viewed on its dwarfed and grotesque side, this was that grand and universal thing, the adoration of mind by matter; for certain

ugly features have a cause in the very depths of eternal beauty. There was an unknown quantity about Thenardier; hence the absolute empire of the man over that woman. At certain moments she beheld him like a lighted candle; at others she felt him like a claw.

This woman was a formidable creature who loved no one except her children, and who did not fear any one except her husband. She was a mother because she was mammiferous. But her maternity stopped short with her daughters, and, as we shall see, did not extend to boys. The man had but one thought,--how to enrich himself.

He did not succeed in this. A theatre worthy of this great talent was lacking. Thenardier was ruining himself at Montfermeil, if ruin is possible to zero; in Switzerland or in the Pyrenees this penniless scamp would have become a millionaire; but an inn-keeper must browse where fate has hitched him.

It will be understood that the word inn-keeper is here employed in a restricted sense, and does not extend to an entire class.

In this same year, 1823, Thenardier was burdened with about fifteen hundred francs' worth of petty debts, and this rendered him anxious.

Whatever may have been the obstinate injustice of destiny in this case, Thenardier was one of those men who understand best, with the most profundity and in the most modern fashion, that thing which is a virtue

among barbarous peoples and an object of merchandise among civilized peoples,--hospitality. Besides, he was an admirable poacher, and quoted for his skill in shooting. He had a certain cold and tranquil laugh, which was particularly dangerous.

His theories as a landlord sometimes burst forth in lightning flashes. He had professional aphorisms, which he inserted into his wife's mind. "The duty of the inn-keeper," he said to her one day, violently, and in a low voice, "is to sell to the first comer, stews, repose, light, fire, dirty sheets, a servant, lice, and a smile; to stop passers-by, to empty small purses, and to honestly lighten heavy ones; to shelter travelling families respectfully: to shave the man, to pluck the woman, to pick the child clean; to quote the window open, the window shut, the chimney-corner, the arm-chair, the chair, the ottoman, the stool, the feather-bed, the mattress and the truss of straw; to know how much the shadow uses up the mirror, and to put a price on it; and, by five hundred thousand devils, to make the traveller pay for everything, even for the flies which his dog eats!"

This man and this woman were ruse and rage wedded--a hideous and terrible team.

While the husband pondered and combined, Madame Thenardier thought not of absent creditors, took no heed of yesterday nor of to-morrow, and lived in a fit of anger, all in a minute.

Such were these two beings. Cosette was between them, subjected to their double pressure, like a creature who is at the same time being ground up in a mill and pulled to pieces with pincers. The man and the woman each had a different method: Cosette was overwhelmed with blows--this was the woman's; she went barefooted in winter--that was the man's doing.

Cosette ran up stairs and down, washed, swept, rubbed, dusted, ran, fluttered about, panted, moved heavy articles, and weak as she was, did the coarse work. There was no mercy for her; a fierce mistress and venomous master. The Thenardier hostelry was like a spider's web, in which Cosette had been caught, and where she lay trembling. The ideal of oppression was realized by this sinister household. It was something like the fly serving the spiders.

The poor child passively held her peace.

What takes place within these souls when they have but just quitted God, find themselves thus, at the very dawn of life, very small and in the midst of men all naked!

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

Four new travellers had arrived.

Cosette was meditating sadly; for, although she was only eight years old, she had already suffered so much that she reflected with the lugubrious air of an old woman. Her eye was black in consequence of a blow from Madame Thenardier's fist, which caused the latter to remark from time to time, "How ugly she is with her fist-blow on her eye!"

Cosette was thinking that it was dark, very dark, that the pitchers and caraffes in the chambers of the travellers who had arrived must have been filled and that there was no more water in the cistern.

She was somewhat reassured because no one in the Thenardier establishment drank much water. Thirsty people were never lacking there; but their thirst was of the sort which applies to the jug rather than to the pitcher. Any one who had asked for a glass of water among all those glasses of wine would have appeared a savage to all these men. But there came a moment when the child trembled; Madame Thenardier raised the cover of a stew-pan which was boiling on the stove, then seized a glass and briskly approached the cistern. She turned the faucet; the child had raised her head and was following all the woman's movements. A thin stream of water trickled from the faucet, and half filled the glass. "Well," said she, "there is no more water!" A momentary silence ensued. The child did not breathe.

"Bah!" resumed Madame Thenardier, examining the half-filled glass, "this will be enough."

Cosette applied herself to her work once more, but for a quarter of an hour she felt her heart leaping in her bosom like a big snow-flake.

She counted the minutes that passed in this manner, and wished it were the next morning.

From time to time one of the drinkers looked into the street, and exclaimed, "It's as black as an oven!" or, "One must needs be a cat to go about the streets without a lantern at this hour!" And Cosette trembled.

All at once one of the pedlers who lodged in the hostelry entered, and said in a harsh voice:--

"My horse has not been watered."

"Yes, it has," said Madame Thenardier.

"I tell you that it has not," retorted the pedler.

Cosette had emerged from under the table.

"Oh, yes, sir!" said she, "the horse has had a drink; he drank out of a bucket, a whole bucketful, and it was I who took the water to him, and I spoke to him."

It was not true; Cosette lied.

"There's a brat as big as my fist who tells lies as big as the house," exclaimed the pedler. "I tell you that he has not been watered, you little jade! He has a way of blowing when he has had no water, which I know well."

Cosette persisted, and added in a voice rendered hoarse with anguish, and which was hardly audible:--

"And he drank heartily."

"Come," said the pedler, in a rage, "this won't do at all, let my horse be watered, and let that be the end of it!"

Cosette crept under the table again.

"In truth, that is fair!" said Madame Thenardier, "if the beast has not been watered, it must be."

Then glancing about her:--

"Well, now! Where's that other beast?"

She bent down and discovered Cosette cowering at the other end of the table, almost under the drinkers' feet.

"Are you coming?" shrieked Madame Thenardier.

Cosette crawled out of the sort of hole in which she had hidden herself. The Thenardier resumed:--

"Mademoiselle Dog-lack-name, go and water that horse."

"But, Madame," said Cosette, feebly, "there is no water."

The Thenardier threw the street door wide open:--

"Well, go and get some, then!"

Cosette dropped her head, and went for an empty bucket which stood near the chimney-corner.

This bucket was bigger than she was, and the child could have set down in it at her ease.

The Thenardier returned to her stove, and tasted what was in the stewpan, with a wooden spoon, grumbling the while:--

"There's plenty in the spring. There never was such a malicious creature as that. I think I should have done better to strain my onions."

Then she rummaged in a drawer which contained sous, pepper, and shallots.

"See here, Mam'selle Toad," she added, "on your way back, you will get a big loaf from the baker. Here's a fifteen-sou piece."

Cosette had a little pocket on one side of her apron; she took the coin without saying a word, and put it in that pocket.

Then she stood motionless, bucket in hand, the open door before her. She seemed to be waiting for some one to come to her rescue.

"Get along with you!" screamed the Thenardier.

Cosette went out. The door closed behind her.

CHAPTER IV--ENTRANCE ON THE SCENE OF A DOLL

The line of open-air booths starting at the church, extended, as the reader will remember, as far as the hostelry of the Thenardiers. These booths were all illuminated, because the citizens would soon pass on their way to the midnight mass, with candles burning in paper funnels, which, as the schoolmaster, then seated at the table at the Thenardiers' observed, produced "a magical effect." In compensation, not a star was visible in the sky.

The last of these stalls, established precisely opposite the Thenardiers' door, was a toy-shop all glittering with tinsel, glass, and magnificent objects of tin. In the first row, and far forwards, the merchant had placed on a background of white napkins, an immense doll, nearly two feet high, who was dressed in a robe of pink crepe, with gold wheat-ears on her head, which had real hair and enamel eyes. All that day, this marvel had been displayed to the wonderment of all passers-by under ten years of age, without a mother being found in Montfermeil sufficiently rich or sufficiently extravagant to give it to her child. Eponine and Azelma had passed hours in contemplating it, and Cosette herself had ventured to cast a glance at it, on the sly, it is true.

At the moment when Cosette emerged, bucket in hand, melancholy and overcome as she was, she could not refrain from lifting her eyes to that wonderful doll, towards the lady, as she called it. The poor child paused in amazement. She had not yet beheld that doll close to. The

whole shop seemed a palace to her: the doll was not a doll; it was a vision. It was joy, splendor, riches, happiness, which appeared in a sort of chimerical halo to that unhappy little being so profoundly engulfed in gloomy and chilly misery. With the sad and innocent sagacity of childhood, Cosette measured the abyss which separated her from that doll. She said to herself that one must be a queen, or at least a princess, to have a "thing" like that. She gazed at that beautiful pink dress, that beautiful smooth hair, and she thought, "How happy that doll must be!" She could not take her eyes from that fantastic stall. The more she looked, the more dazzled she grew. She thought she was gazing at paradise. There were other dolls behind the large one, which seemed to her to be fairies and genii. The merchant, who was pacing back and forth in front of his shop, produced on her somewhat the effect of being the Eternal Father.

In this adoration she forgot everything, even the errand with which she was charged.

All at once the Thenardier's coarse voice recalled her to reality: "What, you silly jade! you have not gone? Wait! I'll give it to you! I want to know what you are doing there! Get along, you little monster!"

The Thenardier had cast a glance into the street, and had caught sight of Cosette in her ecstasy.

Cosette fled, dragging her pail, and taking the longest strides of which

she was capable.

CHAPTER V--THE LITTLE ONE ALL ALONE

As the Thenardier hostelry was in that part of the village which is near the church, it was to the spring in the forest in the direction of Chelles that Cosette was obliged to go for her water.

She did not glance at the display of a single other merchant. So long as she was in Boulanger Lane and in the neighborhood of the church, the lighted stalls illuminated the road; but soon the last light from the last stall vanished. The poor child found herself in the dark. She plunged into it. Only, as a certain emotion overcame her, she made as much motion as possible with the handle of the bucket as she walked along. This made a noise which afforded her company.

The further she went, the denser the darkness became. There was no one in the streets. However, she did encounter a woman, who turned around on seeing her, and stood still, muttering between her teeth: "Where can that child be going? Is it a werewolf child?" Then the woman recognized Cosette. "Well," said she, "it's the Lark!"

In this manner Cosette traversed the labyrinth of tortuous and deserted streets which terminate in the village of Montfermeil on the side of Chelles. So long as she had the houses or even the walls only on both sides of her path, she proceeded with tolerable boldness. From time to time she caught the flicker of a candle through the crack of a shutter--this was light and life; there were people there, and it

reassured her. But in proportion as she advanced, her pace slackened mechanically, as it were. When she had passed the corner of the last house, Cosette paused. It had been hard to advance further than the last stall; it became impossible to proceed further than the last house. She set her bucket on the ground, thrust her hand into her hair, and began slowly to scratch her head,--a gesture peculiar to children when terrified and undecided what to do. It was no longer Montfermeil; it was the open fields. Black and desert space was before her. She gazed in despair at that darkness, where there was no longer any one, where there were beasts, where there were spectres, possibly. She took a good look, and heard the beasts walking on the grass, and she distinctly saw spectres moving in the trees. Then she seized her bucket again; fear had lent her audacity. "Bah!" said she; "I will tell him that there was no more water!" And she resolutely re-entered Montfermeil.

Hardly had she gone a hundred paces when she paused and began to scratch her head again. Now it was the Thenardier who appeared to her, with her hideous, hyena mouth, and wrath flashing in her eyes. The child cast a melancholy glance before her and behind her. What was she to do? What was to become of her? Where was she to go? In front of her was the spectre of the Thenardier; behind her all the phantoms of the night and of the forest. It was before the Thenardier that she recoiled. She resumed her path to the spring, and began to run. She emerged from the village, she entered the forest at a run, no longer looking at or listening to anything. She only paused in her course when her breath failed her; but she did not halt in her advance. She went straight

before her in desperation.

As she ran she felt like crying.

The nocturnal quivering of the forest surrounded her completely.

She no longer thought, she no longer saw. The immensity of night was facing this tiny creature. On the one hand, all shadow; on the other, an atom.

It was only seven or eight minutes' walk from the edge of the woods to the spring. Cosette knew the way, through having gone over it many times in daylight. Strange to say, she did not get lost. A remnant of instinct guided her vaguely. But she did not turn her eyes either to right or to left, for fear of seeing things in the branches and in the brushwood. In this manner she reached the spring.

It was a narrow, natural basin, hollowed out by the water in a clayey soil, about two feet deep, surrounded with moss and with those tall, crimped grasses which are called Henry IV.'s frills, and paved with several large stones. A brook ran out of it, with a tranquil little noise.

Cosette did not take time to breathe. It was very dark, but she was in the habit of coming to this spring. She felt with her left hand in the dark for a young oak which leaned over the spring, and which usually

served to support her, found one of its branches, clung to it, bent down, and plunged the bucket in the water. She was in a state of such violent excitement that her strength was trebled. While thus bent over, she did not notice that the pocket of her apron had emptied itself into the spring. The fifteen-sou piece fell into the water. Cosette neither saw nor heard it fall. She drew out the bucket nearly full, and set it on the grass.

That done, she perceived that she was worn out with fatigue. She would have liked to set out again at once, but the effort required to fill the bucket had been such that she found it impossible to take a step. She was forced to sit down. She dropped on the grass, and remained crouching there.

She shut her eyes; then she opened them again, without knowing why, but because she could not do otherwise. The agitated water in the bucket beside her was describing circles which resembled tin serpents.

Overhead the sky was covered with vast black clouds, which were like masses of smoke. The tragic mask of shadow seemed to bend vaguely over the child.

Jupiter was setting in the depths.

The child stared with bewildered eyes at this great star, with which she was unfamiliar, and which terrified her. The planet was, in fact, very

near the horizon and was traversing a dense layer of mist which imparted to it a horrible ruddy hue. The mist, gloomily empurpled, magnified the star. One would have called it a luminous wound.

A cold wind was blowing from the plain. The forest was dark, not a leaf was moving; there were none of the vague, fresh gleams of summertide. Great boughs uplifted themselves in frightful wise. Slender and misshapen bushes whistled in the clearings. The tall grasses undulated like eels under the north wind. The nettles seemed to twist long arms furnished with claws in search of prey. Some bits of dry heather, tossed by the breeze, flew rapidly by, and had the air of fleeing in terror before something which was coming after. On all sides there were lugubrious stretches.

The darkness was bewildering. Man requires light. Whoever buries himself in the opposite of day feels his heart contract. When the eye sees black, the heart sees trouble. In an eclipse in the night, in the sooty opacity, there is anxiety even for the stoutest of hearts. No one walks alone in the forest at night without trembling. Shadows and trees--two formidable densities. A chimerical reality appears in the indistinct depths. The inconceivable is outlined a few paces distant from you with a spectral clearness. One beholds floating, either in space or in one's own brain, one knows not what vague and intangible thing, like the dreams of sleeping flowers. There are fierce attitudes on the horizon. One inhales the effluvia of the great black void. One is afraid to glance behind him, yet desirous of doing so. The cavities of night,

things grown haggard, taciturn profiles which vanish when one advances, obscure dishevelments, irritated tufts, livid pools, the lugubrious reflected in the funereal, the sepulchral immensity of silence, unknown but possible beings, bendings of mysterious branches, alarming torsos of trees, long handfuls of quivering plants,--against all this one has no protection. There is no hardihood which does not shudder and which does not feel the vicinity of anguish. One is conscious of something hideous, as though one's soul were becoming amalgamated with the darkness. This penetration of the shadows is indescribably sinister in the case of a child.

Forests are apocalypses, and the beating of the wings of a tiny soul produces a sound of agony beneath their monstrous vault.

Without understanding her sensations, Cosette was conscious that she was seized upon by that black enormity of nature; it was no longer terror alone which was gaining possession of her; it was something more terrible even than terror; she shivered. There are no words to express the strangeness of that shiver which chilled her to the very bottom of her heart; her eye grew wild; she thought she felt that she should not be able to refrain from returning there at the same hour on the morrow.

Then, by a sort of instinct, she began to count aloud, one, two, three, four, and so on up to ten, in order to escape from that singular state which she did not understand, but which terrified her, and, when she had finished, she began again; this restored her to a true perception of

the things about her. Her hands, which she had wet in drawing the water, felt cold; she rose; her terror, a natural and unconquerable terror, had returned: she had but one thought now,--to flee at full speed through the forest, across the fields to the houses, to the windows, to the lighted candles. Her glance fell upon the water which stood before her; such was the fright which the Thenardier inspired in her, that she dared not flee without that bucket of water: she seized the handle with both hands; she could hardly lift the pail.

In this manner she advanced a dozen paces, but the bucket was full; it was heavy; she was forced to set it on the ground once more. She took breath for an instant, then lifted the handle of the bucket again, and resumed her march, proceeding a little further this time, but again she was obliged to pause. After some seconds of repose she set out again. She walked bent forward, with drooping head, like an old woman; the weight of the bucket strained and stiffened her thin arms. The iron handle completed the benumbing and freezing of her wet and tiny hands; she was forced to halt from time to time, and each time that she did so, the cold water which splashed from the pail fell on her bare legs. This took place in the depths of a forest, at night, in winter, far from all human sight; she was a child of eight: no one but God saw that sad thing at the moment.

And her mother, no doubt, alas!

For there are things that make the dead open their eyes in their graves.

She panted with a sort of painful rattle; sobs contracted her throat, but she dared not weep, so afraid was she of the Thenardier, even at a distance: it was her custom to imagine the Thenardier always present.

However, she could not make much headway in that manner, and she went on very slowly. In spite of diminishing the length of her stops, and of walking as long as possible between them, she reflected with anguish that it would take her more than an hour to return to Montfermeil in this manner, and that the Thenardier would beat her. This anguish was mingled with her terror at being alone in the woods at night; she was worn out with fatigue, and had not yet emerged from the forest. On arriving near an old chestnut-tree with which she was acquainted, made a last halt, longer than the rest, in order that she might get well rested; then she summoned up all her strength, picked up her bucket again, and courageously resumed her march, but the poor little desperate creature could not refrain from crying, "O my God! my God!"

At that moment she suddenly became conscious that her bucket no longer weighed anything at all: a hand, which seemed to her enormous, had just seized the handle, and lifted it vigorously. She raised her head. A large black form, straight and erect, was walking beside her through the darkness; it was a man who had come up behind her, and whose approach she had not heard. This man, without uttering a word, had seized the handle of the bucket which she was carrying.

There are instincts for all the encounters of life.

The child was not afraid.

CHAPTER VI--WHICH POSSIBLY PROVES BOULATRUELLE'S INTELLIGENCE

On the afternoon of that same Christmas Day, 1823, a man had walked for rather a long time in the most deserted part of the Boulevard de l'Hopital in Paris. This man had the air of a person who is seeking lodgings, and he seemed to halt, by preference, at the most modest houses on that dilapidated border of the faubourg Saint-Marceau.

We shall see further on that this man had, in fact, hired a chamber in that isolated quarter.

This man, in his attire, as in all his person, realized the type of what may be called the well-bred mendicant,--extreme wretchedness combined with extreme cleanliness. This is a very rare mixture which inspires intelligent hearts with that double respect which one feels for the man who is very poor, and for the man who is very worthy. He wore a very old and very well brushed round hat; a coarse coat, worn perfectly threadbare, of an ochre yellow, a color that was not in the least eccentric at that epoch; a large waistcoat with pockets of a venerable cut; black breeches, worn gray at the knee, stockings of black worsted; and thick shoes with copper buckles. He would have been pronounced a preceptor in some good family, returned from the emigration. He would have been taken for more than sixty years of age, from his perfectly white hair, his wrinkled brow, his livid lips, and his countenance, where everything breathed depression and weariness of life. Judging from his firm tread, from the singular vigor which stamped all his movements,

he would have hardly been thought fifty. The wrinkles on his brow were well placed, and would have disposed in his favor any one who observed him attentively. His lip contracted with a strange fold which seemed severe, and which was humble. There was in the depth of his glance an indescribable melancholy serenity. In his left hand he carried a little bundle tied up in a handkerchief; in his right he leaned on a sort of a cudgel, cut from some hedge. This stick had been carefully trimmed, and had an air that was not too threatening; the most had been made of its knots, and it had received a coral-like head, made from red wax: it was a cudgel, and it seemed to be a cane.

There are but few passers-by on that boulevard, particularly in the winter. The man seemed to avoid them rather than to seek them, but this without any affectation.

At that epoch, King Louis XVIII. went nearly every day to Choisy-le-Roi: it was one of his favorite excursions. Towards two o'clock, almost invariably, the royal carriage and cavalcade was seen to pass at full speed along the Boulevard de l'Hopital.

This served in lieu of a watch or clock to the poor women of the quarter who said, "It is two o'clock; there he is returning to the Tuileries."

And some rushed forward, and others drew up in line, for a passing king always creates a tumult; besides, the appearance and disappearance of Louis XVIII. produced a certain effect in the streets of Paris. It was

rapid but majestic. This impotent king had a taste for a fast gallop; as he was not able to walk, he wished to run: that cripple would gladly have had himself drawn by the lightning. He passed, pacific and severe, in the midst of naked swords. His massive coach, all covered with gilding, with great branches of lilies painted on the panels, thundered noisily along. There was hardly time to cast a glance upon it. In the rear angle on the right there was visible on tufted cushions of white satin a large, firm, and ruddy face, a brow freshly powdered a l'oiseau royal, a proud, hard, crafty eye, the smile of an educated man, two great epaulets with bullion fringe floating over a bourgeois coat, the Golden Fleece, the cross of Saint Louis, the cross of the Legion of Honor, the silver plaque of the Saint-Esprit, a huge belly, and a wide blue ribbon: it was the king. Outside of Paris, he held his hat decked with white ostrich plumes on his knees enwrapped in high English gaiters; when he re-entered the city, he put on his hat and saluted rarely; he stared coldly at the people, and they returned it in kind. When he appeared for the first time in the Saint-Marceau quarter, the whole success which he produced is contained in this remark of an inhabitant of the faubourg to his comrade, "That big fellow yonder is the government."

This infallible passage of the king at the same hour was, therefore, the daily event of the Boulevard de l'Hopital.

The promenader in the yellow coat evidently did not belong in the quarter, and probably did not belong in Paris, for he was ignorant as to

this detail. When, at two o'clock, the royal carriage, surrounded by a squadron of the body-guard all covered with silver lace, debouched on the boulevard, after having made the turn of the Salpetriere, he appeared surprised and almost alarmed. There was no one but himself in this cross-lane. He drew up hastily behind the corner of the wall of an enclosure, though this did not prevent M. le Duc de Havre from spying him out.

M. le Duc de Havre, as captain of the guard on duty that day, was seated in the carriage, opposite the king. He said to his Majesty, "Yonder is an evil-looking man." Members of the police, who were clearing the king's route, took equal note of him: one of them received an order to follow him. But the man plunged into the deserted little streets of the faubourg, and as twilight was beginning to fall, the agent lost trace of him, as is stated in a report addressed that same evening to M. le Comte d'Angles, Minister of State, Prefect of Police.

When the man in the yellow coat had thrown the agent off his track, he redoubled his pace, not without turning round many a time to assure himself that he was not being followed. At a quarter-past four, that is to say, when night was fully come, he passed in front of the theatre of the Porte Saint-Martin, where The Two Convicts was being played that day. This poster, illuminated by the theatre lanterns, struck him; for, although he was walking rapidly, he halted to read it. An instant later he was in the blind alley of La Planchette, and he entered the Plat d'Etain [the Pewter Platter], where the office of the coach for Lagny

was then situated. This coach set out at half-past four. The horses were harnessed, and the travellers, summoned by the coachman, were hastily climbing the lofty iron ladder of the vehicle.

The man inquired:--

"Have you a place?"

"Only one--beside me on the box," said the coachman.

"I will take it."

"Climb up."

Nevertheless, before setting out, the coachman cast a glance at the traveller's shabby dress, at the diminutive size of his bundle, and made him pay his fare.

"Are you going as far as Lagny?" demanded the coachman.

"Yes," said the man.

The traveller paid to Lagny.

They started. When they had passed the barrier, the coachman tried to enter into conversation, but the traveller only replied in

monosyllables. The coachman took to whistling and swearing at his horses.

The coachman wrapped himself up in his cloak. It was cold. The man did not appear to be thinking of that. Thus they passed Gournay and Neuilly-sur-Marne.

Towards six o'clock in the evening they reached Chelles. The coachman drew up in front of the carters' inn installed in the ancient buildings of the Royal Abbey, to give his horses a breathing spell.

"I get down here," said the man.

He took his bundle and his cudgel and jumped down from the vehicle.

An instant later he had disappeared.

He did not enter the inn.

When the coach set out for Lagny a few minutes later, it did not encounter him in the principal street of Chelles.

The coachman turned to the inside travellers.

"There," said he, "is a man who does not belong here, for I do not know him. He had not the air of owning a sou, but he does not consider money;

he pays to Lagny, and he goes only as far as Chelles. It is night; all the houses are shut; he does not enter the inn, and he is not to be found. So he has dived through the earth."

The man had not plunged into the earth, but he had gone with great strides through the dark, down the principal street of Chelles, then he had turned to the right before reaching the church, into the cross-road leading to Montfermeil, like a person who was acquainted with the country and had been there before.

He followed this road rapidly. At the spot where it is intersected by the ancient tree-bordered road which runs from Gagny to Lagny, he heard people coming. He concealed himself precipitately in a ditch, and there waited until the passers-by were at a distance. The precaution was nearly superfluous, however; for, as we have already said, it was a very dark December night. Not more than two or three stars were visible in the sky.

It is at this point that the ascent of the hill begins. The man did not return to the road to Montfermeil; he struck across the fields to the right, and entered the forest with long strides.

Once in the forest he slackened his pace, and began a careful examination of all the trees, advancing, step by step, as though seeking and following a mysterious road known to himself alone. There came a moment when he appeared to lose himself, and he paused in indecision. At

last he arrived, by dint of feeling his way inch by inch, at a clearing where there was a great heap of whitish stones. He stepped up briskly to these stones, and examined them attentively through the mists of night, as though he were passing them in review. A large tree, covered with those excrescences which are the warts of vegetation, stood a few paces distant from the pile of stones. He went up to this tree and passed his hand over the bark of the trunk, as though seeking to recognize and count all the warts.

Opposite this tree, which was an ash, there was a chestnut-tree, suffering from a peeling of the bark, to which a band of zinc had been nailed by way of dressing. He raised himself on tiptoe and touched this band of zinc.

Then he trod about for awhile on the ground comprised in the space between the tree and the heap of stones, like a person who is trying to assure himself that the soil has not recently been disturbed.

That done, he took his bearings, and resumed his march through the forest.

It was the man who had just met Cosette.

As he walked through the thicket in the direction of Montfermeil, he had espied that tiny shadow moving with a groan, depositing a burden on the ground, then taking it up and setting out again. He drew near, and

perceived that it was a very young child, laden with an enormous bucket of water. Then he approached the child, and silently grasped the handle of the bucket.

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

Cosette, as we have said, was not frightened.

The man accosted her. He spoke in a voice that was grave and almost bass.

"My child, what you are carrying is very heavy for you."

Cosette raised her head and replied:--

"Yes, sir."

"Give it to me," said the man; "I will carry it for you."

Cosette let go of the bucket-handle. The man walked along beside her.

"It really is very heavy," he muttered between his teeth. Then he added:--

"How old are you, little one?"

"Eight, sir."

"And have you come from far like this?"

"From the spring in the forest."

"Are you going far?"

"A good quarter of an hour's walk from here."

The man said nothing for a moment; then he remarked abruptly:--

"So you have no mother."

"I don't know," answered the child.

Before the man had time to speak again, she added:--

"I don't think so. Other people have mothers. I have none."

And after a silence she went on:--

"I think that I never had any."

The man halted; he set the bucket on the ground, bent down and placed both hands on the child's shoulders, making an effort to look at her and to see her face in the dark.

Cosette's thin and sickly face was vaguely outlined by the livid light in the sky.

"What is your name?" said the man.

"Cosette."

The man seemed to have received an electric shock. He looked at her once more; then he removed his hands from Cosette's shoulders, seized the bucket, and set out again.

After a moment he inquired:--

"Where do you live, little one?"

"At Montfermeil, if you know where that is."

"That is where we are going?"

"Yes, sir."

He paused; then began again:--

"Who sent you at such an hour to get water in the forest?"

"It was Madame Thenardier."

The man resumed, in a voice which he strove to render indifferent, but

in which there was, nevertheless, a singular tremor:--

"What does your Madame Thenardier do?"

"She is my mistress," said the child. "She keeps the inn."

"The inn?" said the man. "Well, I am going to lodge there to-night. Show me the way."

"We are on the way there," said the child.

The man walked tolerably fast. Cosette followed him without difficulty. She no longer felt any fatigue. From time to time she raised her eyes towards the man, with a sort of tranquillity and an indescribable confidence. She had never been taught to turn to Providence and to pray; nevertheless, she felt within her something which resembled hope and joy, and which mounted towards heaven.

Several minutes elapsed. The man resumed:--

"Is there no servant in Madame Thenardier's house?"

"No, sir."

"Are you alone there?"

"Yes, sir."

Another pause ensued. Cosette lifted up her voice:--

"That is to say, there are two little girls."

"What little girls?"

"Ponine and Zelma."

This was the way the child simplified the romantic names so dear to the female Thenardier.

"Who are Ponine and Zelma?"

"They are Madame Thenardier's young ladies; her daughters, as you would say."

"And what do those girls do?"

"Oh!" said the child, "they have beautiful dolls; things with gold in them, all full of affairs. They play; they amuse themselves."

"All day long?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you?"

"I? I work."

"All day long?"

The child raised her great eyes, in which hung a tear, which was not visible because of the darkness, and replied gently:--

"Yes, sir."

After an interval of silence she went on:--

"Sometimes, when I have finished my work and they let me, I amuse myself, too."

"How do you amuse yourself?"

"In the best way I can. They let me alone; but I have not many playthings. Ponine and Zelma will not let me play with their dolls. I have only a little lead sword, no longer than that."

The child held up her tiny finger.

"And it will not cut?"

"Yes, sir," said the child; "it cuts salad and the heads of flies."

They reached the village. Cosette guided the stranger through the streets. They passed the bakeshop, but Cosette did not think of the bread which she had been ordered to fetch. The man had ceased to ply her with questions, and now preserved a gloomy silence.

When they had left the church behind them, the man, on perceiving all the open-air booths, asked Cosette:--

"So there is a fair going on here?"

"No, sir; it is Christmas."

As they approached the tavern, Cosette timidly touched his arm:--

"Monsieur?"

"What, my child?"

"We are quite near the house."

"Well?"

"Will you let me take my bucket now?"

"Why?"

"If Madame sees that some one has carried it for me, she will beat me."

The man handed her the bucket. An instant later they were at the tavern door.

CHAPTER VIII--THE UNPLEASANTNESS OF RECEIVING INTO ONE'S HOUSE A POOR MAN WHO MAY BE A RICH MAN

Cosette could not refrain from casting a sidelong glance at the big doll, which was still displayed at the toy-merchant's; then she knocked. The door opened. The Thenardier appeared with a candle in her hand.

"Ah! so it's you, you little wretch! good mercy, but you've taken your time! The hussy has been amusing herself!"

"Madame," said Cosette, trembling all over, "here's a gentleman who wants a lodging."

The Thenardier speedily replaced her gruff air by her amiable grimace, a change of aspect common to tavern-keepers, and eagerly sought the new-comer with her eyes.

"This is the gentleman?" said she.

"Yes, Madame," replied the man, raising his hand to his hat.

Wealthy travellers are not so polite. This gesture, and an inspection of the stranger's costume and baggage, which the Thenardier passed in review with one glance, caused the amiable grimace to vanish, and the

gruff mien to reappear. She resumed dryly:--

"Enter, my good man."

The "good man" entered. The Thenardier cast a second glance at him, paid particular attention to his frock-coat, which was absolutely threadbare, and to his hat, which was a little battered, and, tossing her head, wrinkling her nose, and screwing up her eyes, she consulted her husband, who was still drinking with the carters. The husband replied by that imperceptible movement of the forefinger, which, backed up by an inflation of the lips, signifies in such cases: A regular beggar.
Thereupon, the Thenardier exclaimed:--

"Ah! see here, my good man; I am very sorry, but I have no room left."

"Put me where you like," said the man; "in the attic, in the stable. I will pay as though I occupied a room."

"Forty sous."

"Forty sous; agreed."

"Very well, then!"

"Forty sous!" said a carter, in a low tone, to the Thenardier woman; "why, the charge is only twenty sous!"

"It is forty in his case," retorted the Thenardier, in the same tone. "I don't lodge poor folks for less."

"That's true," added her husband, gently; "it ruins a house to have such people in it."

In the meantime, the man, laying his bundle and his cudgel on a bench, had seated himself at a table, on which Cosette made haste to place a bottle of wine and a glass. The merchant who had demanded the bucket of water took it to his horse himself. Cosette resumed her place under the kitchen table, and her knitting.

The man, who had barely moistened his lips in the wine which he had poured out for himself, observed the child with peculiar attention.

Cosette was ugly. If she had been happy, she might have been pretty. We have already given a sketch of that sombre little figure. Cosette was thin and pale; she was nearly eight years old, but she seemed to be hardly six. Her large eyes, sunken in a sort of shadow, were almost put out with weeping. The corners of her mouth had that curve of habitual anguish which is seen in condemned persons and desperately sick people. Her hands were, as her mother had divined, "ruined with chilblains." The fire which illuminated her at that moment brought into relief all the angles of her bones, and rendered her thinness frightfully apparent. As she was always shivering, she had acquired the habit of pressing her

knees one against the other. Her entire clothing was but a rag which would have inspired pity in summer, and which inspired horror in winter. All she had on was hole-ridden linen, not a scrap of woollen. Her skin was visible here and there and everywhere black and blue spots could be descried, which marked the places where the Thenardier woman had touched her. Her naked legs were thin and red. The hollows in her neck were enough to make one weep. This child's whole person, her mien, her attitude, the sound of her voice, the intervals which she allowed to elapse between one word and the next, her glance, her silence, her slightest gesture, expressed and betrayed one sole idea,--fear.

Fear was diffused all over her; she was covered with it, so to speak; fear drew her elbows close to her hips, withdrew her heels under her petticoat, made her occupy as little space as possible, allowed her only the breath that was absolutely necessary, and had become what might be called the habit of her body, admitting of no possible variation except an increase. In the depths of her eyes there was an astonished nook where terror lurked.

Her fear was such, that on her arrival, wet as she was, Cosette did not dare to approach the fire and dry herself, but sat silently down to her work again.

The expression in the glance of that child of eight years was habitually so gloomy, and at times so tragic, that it seemed at certain moments as though she were on the verge of becoming an idiot or a demon.

As we have stated, she had never known what it is to pray; she had never set foot in a church. "Have I the time?" said the Thenardier.

The man in the yellow coat never took his eyes from Cosette.

All at once, the Thenardier exclaimed:--

"By the way, where's that bread?"

Cosette, according to her custom whenever the Thenardier uplifted her voice, emerged with great haste from beneath the table.

She had completely forgotten the bread. She had recourse to the expedient of children who live in a constant state of fear. She lied.

"Madame, the baker's shop was shut."

"You should have knocked."

"I did knock, Madame."

"Well?"

"He did not open the door."

"I'll find out to-morrow whether that is true," said the Thenardier; "and if you are telling me a lie, I'll lead you a pretty dance. In the meantime, give me back my fifteen-sou piece."

Cosette plunged her hand into the pocket of her apron, and turned green. The fifteen-sou piece was not there.

"Ah, come now," said Madame Thenardier, "did you hear me?"

Cosette turned her pocket inside out; there was nothing in it. What could have become of that money? The unhappy little creature could not find a word to say. She was petrified.

"Have you lost that fifteen-sou piece?" screamed the Thenardier, hoarsely, "or do you want to rob me of it?"

At the same time, she stretched out her arm towards the cat-o'-nine-tails which hung on a nail in the chimney-corner.

This formidable gesture restored to Cosette sufficient strength to shriek:--

"Mercy, Madame, Madame! I will not do so any more!"

The Thenardier took down the whip.

In the meantime, the man in the yellow coat had been fumbling in the fob of his waistcoat, without any one having noticed his movements. Besides, the other travellers were drinking or playing cards, and were not paying attention to anything.

Cosette contracted herself into a ball, with anguish, within the angle of the chimney, endeavoring to gather up and conceal her poor half-nude limbs. The Thenardier raised her arm.

"Pardon me, Madame," said the man, "but just now I caught sight of something which had fallen from this little one's apron pocket, and rolled aside. Perhaps this is it."

At the same time he bent down and seemed to be searching on the floor for a moment.

"Exactly; here it is," he went on, straightening himself up.

And he held out a silver coin to the Thenardier.

"Yes, that's it," said she.

It was not it, for it was a twenty-sou piece; but the Thenardier found it to her advantage. She put the coin in her pocket, and confined herself to casting a fierce glance at the child, accompanied with the remark, "Don't let this ever happen again!"

Cosette returned to what the Thenardier called "her kennel," and her large eyes, which were riveted on the traveller, began to take on an expression such as they had never worn before. Thus far it was only an innocent amazement, but a sort of stupefied confidence was mingled with it.

"By the way, would you like some supper?" the Thenardier inquired of the traveller.

He made no reply. He appeared to be absorbed in thought.

"What sort of a man is that?" she muttered between her teeth. "He's some frightfully poor wretch. He hasn't a sou to pay for a supper. Will he even pay me for his lodging? It's very lucky, all the same, that it did not occur to him to steal the money that was on the floor."

In the meantime, a door had opened, and Eponine and Azelma entered.

They were two really pretty little girls, more bourgeois than peasant in looks, and very charming; the one with shining chestnut tresses, the other with long black braids hanging down her back, both vivacious, neat, plump, rosy, and healthy, and a delight to the eye. They were warmly clad, but with so much maternal art that the thickness of the stuffs did not detract from the coquetry of arrangement. There was a hint of winter, though the springtime was not wholly effaced. Light

emanated from these two little beings. Besides this, they were on the throne. In their toilettes, in their gayety, in the noise which they made, there was sovereignty. When they entered, the Thenardier said to them in a grumbling tone which was full of adoration, "Ah! there you are, you children!"

Then drawing them, one after the other to her knees, smoothing their hair, tying their ribbons afresh, and then releasing them with that gentle manner of shaking off which is peculiar to mothers, she exclaimed, "What frights they are!"

They went and seated themselves in the chimney-corner. They had a doll, which they turned over and over on their knees with all sorts of joyous chatter. From time to time Cosette raised her eyes from her knitting, and watched their play with a melancholy air.

Eponine and Azelma did not look at Cosette. She was the same as a dog to them. These three little girls did not yet reckon up four and twenty years between them, but they already represented the whole society of man; envy on the one side, disdain on the other.

The doll of the Thenardier sisters was very much faded, very old, and much broken; but it seemed none the less admirable to Cosette, who had never had a doll in her life, a real doll, to make use of the expression which all children will understand.

All at once, the Thenardier, who had been going back and forth in the room, perceived that Cosette's mind was distracted, and that, instead of working, she was paying attention to the little ones at their play.

"Ah! I've caught you at it!" she cried. "So that's the way you work! I'll make you work to the tune of the whip; that I will."

The stranger turned to the Thenardier, without quitting his chair.

"Bah, Madame," he said, with an almost timid air, "let her play!"

Such a wish expressed by a traveller who had eaten a slice of mutton and had drunk a couple of bottles of wine with his supper, and who had not the air of being frightfully poor, would have been equivalent to an order. But that a man with such a hat should permit himself such a desire, and that a man with such a coat should permit himself to have a will, was something which Madame Thenardier did not intend to tolerate. She retorted with acrimony:--

"She must work, since she eats. I don't feed her to do nothing."

"What is she making?" went on the stranger, in a gentle voice which contrasted strangely with his beggarly garments and his porter's shoulders.

The Thenardier deigned to reply:--

"Stockings, if you please. Stockings for my little girls, who have none, so to speak, and who are absolutely barefoot just now."

The man looked at Cosette's poor little red feet, and continued:--

"When will she have finished this pair of stockings?"

"She has at least three or four good days' work on them still, the lazy creature!"

"And how much will that pair of stockings be worth when she has finished them?"

The Thenardier cast a glance of disdain on him.

"Thirty sous at least."

"Will you sell them for five francs?" went on the man.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed a carter who was listening, with a loud laugh; "five francs! the deuce, I should think so! five balls!"

Thenardier thought it time to strike in.

"Yes, sir; if such is your fancy, you will be allowed to have that pair

of stockings for five francs. We can refuse nothing to travellers."

"You must pay on the spot," said the Thenardier, in her curt and peremptory fashion.

"I will buy that pair of stockings," replied the man, "and," he added, drawing a five-franc piece from his pocket, and laying it on the table, "I will pay for them."

Then he turned to Cosette.

"Now I own your work; play, my child."

The carter was so much touched by the five-franc piece, that he abandoned his glass and hastened up.

"But it's true!" he cried, examining it. "A real hind wheel! and not counterfeit!"

Thenardier approached and silently put the coin in his pocket.

The Thenardier had no reply to make. She bit her lips, and her face assumed an expression of hatred.

In the meantime, Cosette was trembling. She ventured to ask:--

"Is it true, Madame? May I play?"

"Play!" said the Thenardier, in a terrible voice.

"Thanks, Madame," said Cosette.

And while her mouth thanked the Thenardier, her whole little soul thanked the traveller.

Thenardier had resumed his drinking; his wife whispered in his ear:--

"Who can this yellow man be?"

"I have seen millionaires with coats like that," replied Thenardier, in a sovereign manner.

Cosette had dropped her knitting, but had not left her seat. Cosette always moved as little as possible. She picked up some old rags and her little lead sword from a box behind her.

Eponine and Azelma paid no attention to what was going on. They had just executed a very important operation; they had just got hold of the cat. They had thrown their doll on the ground, and Eponine, who was the elder, was swathing the little cat, in spite of its mewing and its contortions, in a quantity of clothes and red and blue scraps. While performing this serious and difficult work she was saying to her sister

in that sweet and adorable language of children, whose grace, like the splendor of the butterfly's wing, vanishes when one essays to fix it fast.

"You see, sister, this doll is more amusing than the other. She twists, she cries, she is warm. See, sister, let us play with her. She shall be my little girl. I will be a lady. I will come to see you, and you shall look at her. Gradually, you will perceive her whiskers, and that will surprise you. And then you will see her ears, and then you will see her tail and it will amaze you. And you will say to me, 'Ah! Mon Dieu!' and I will say to you: 'Yes, Madame, it is my little girl. Little girls are made like that just at present.'"

Azelma listened admiringly to Eponine.

In the meantime, the drinkers had begun to sing an obscene song, and to laugh at it until the ceiling shook. Thenardier accompanied and encouraged them.

As birds make nests out of everything, so children make a doll out of anything which comes to hand. While Eponine and Azelma were bundling up the cat, Cosette, on her side, had dressed up her sword. That done, she laid it in her arms, and sang to it softly, to lull it to sleep.

The doll is one of the most imperious needs and, at the same time, one of the most charming instincts of feminine childhood. To care for, to

clothe, to deck, to dress, to undress, to redress, to teach, scold a little, to rock, to dandle, to lull to sleep, to imagine that something is some one,--therein lies the whole woman's future. While dreaming and chattering, making tiny outfits, and baby clothes, while sewing little gowns, and corsages and bodices, the child grows into a young girl, the young girl into a big girl, the big girl into a woman. The first child is the continuation of the last doll.

A little girl without a doll is almost as unhappy, and quite as impossible, as a woman without children.

So Cosette had made herself a doll out of the sword.

Madame Thenardier approached the yellow man; "My husband is right," she thought; "perhaps it is M. Laffitte; there are such queer rich men!"

She came and set her elbows on the table.

"Monsieur," said she. At this word, Monsieur, the man turned; up to that time, the Thenardier had addressed him only as brave homme or bonhomme.

"You see, sir," she pursued, assuming a sweetish air that was even more repulsive to behold than her fierce mien, "I am willing that the child should play; I do not oppose it, but it is good for once, because you are generous. You see, she has nothing; she must needs work."

"Then this child is not yours?" demanded the man.

"Oh! mon Dieu! no, sir! she is a little beggar whom we have taken in through charity; a sort of imbecile child. She must have water on the brain; she has a large head, as you see. We do what we can for her, for we are not rich; we have written in vain to her native place, and have received no reply these six months. It must be that her mother is dead."

"Ah!" said the man, and fell into his revery once more.

"Her mother didn't amount to much," added the Thenardier; "she abandoned her child."

During the whole of this conversation Cosette, as though warned by some instinct that she was under discussion, had not taken her eyes from the Thenardier's face; she listened vaguely; she caught a few words here and there.

Meanwhile, the drinkers, all three-quarters intoxicated, were repeating their unclean refrain with redoubled gayety; it was a highly spiced and wanton song, in which the Virgin and the infant Jesus were introduced. The Thenardier went off to take part in the shouts of laughter. Cosette, from her post under the table, gazed at the fire, which was reflected from her fixed eyes. She had begun to rock the sort of baby which she had made, and, as she rocked it, she sang in a low voice, "My mother is dead! my mother is dead! my mother is dead!"

On being urged afresh by the hostess, the yellow man, "the millionaire," consented at last to take supper.

"What does Monsieur wish?"

"Bread and cheese," said the man.

"Decidedly, he is a beggar" thought Madame Thenardier.

The drunken men were still singing their song, and the child under the table was singing hers.

All at once, Cosette paused; she had just turned round and caught sight of the little Thenardiers' doll, which they had abandoned for the cat and had left on the floor a few paces from the kitchen table.

Then she dropped the swaddled sword, which only half met her needs, and cast her eyes slowly round the room. Madame Thenardier was whispering to her husband and counting over some money; Ponine and Zelma were playing with the cat; the travellers were eating or drinking or singing; not a glance was fixed on her. She had not a moment to lose; she crept out from under the table on her hands and knees, made sure once more that no one was watching her; then she slipped quickly up to the doll and seized it. An instant later she was in her place again, seated motionless, and only turned so as to cast a shadow on the doll which she held in her

arms. The happiness of playing with a doll was so rare for her that it contained all the violence of voluptuousness.

No one had seen her, except the traveller, who was slowly devouring his meagre supper.

This joy lasted about a quarter of an hour.

But with all the precautions that Cosette had taken she did not perceive that one of the doll's legs stuck out and that the fire on the hearth lighted it up very vividly. That pink and shining foot, projecting from the shadow, suddenly struck the eye of Azelma, who said to Eponine, "Look! sister."

The two little girls paused in stupefaction; Cosette had dared to take their doll!

Eponine rose, and, without releasing the cat, she ran to her mother, and began to tug at her skirt.

"Let me alone!" said her mother; "what do you want?"

"Mother," said the child, "look there!"

And she pointed to Cosette.

Cosette, absorbed in the ecstasies of possession, no longer saw or heard anything.

Madame Thenardier's countenance assumed that peculiar expression which is composed of the terrible mingled with the trifles of life, and which has caused this style of woman to be named megaeras.

On this occasion, wounded pride exasperated her wrath still further. Cosette had overstepped all bounds; Cosette had laid violent hands on the doll belonging to "these young ladies." A czarina who should see a muzhik trying on her imperial son's blue ribbon would wear no other face.

She shrieked in a voice rendered hoarse with indignation:--

"Cosette!"

Cosette started as though the earth had trembled beneath her; she turned round.

"Cosette!" repeated the Thenardier.

Cosette took the doll and laid it gently on the floor with a sort of veneration, mingled with despair; then, without taking her eyes from it, she clasped her hands, and, what is terrible to relate of a child of that age, she wrung them; then--not one of the emotions of the day,

neither the trip to the forest, nor the weight of the bucket of water, nor the loss of the money, nor the sight of the whip, nor even the sad words which she had heard Madame Thenardier utter had been able to wring this from her--she wept; she burst out sobbing.

Meanwhile, the traveller had risen to his feet.

"What is the matter?" he said to the Thenardier.

"Don't you see?" said the Thenardier, pointing to the corpus delicti which lay at Cosette's feet.

"Well, what of it?" resumed the man.

"That beggar," replied the Thenardier, "has permitted herself to touch the children's doll!"

"All this noise for that!" said the man; "well, what if she did play with that doll?"

"She touched it with her dirty hands!" pursued the Thenardier, "with her frightful hands!"

Here Cosette redoubled her sobs.

"Will you stop your noise?" screamed the Thenardier.

The man went straight to the street door, opened it, and stepped out.

As soon as he had gone, the Thenardier profited by his absence to give Cosette a hearty kick under the table, which made the child utter loud cries.

The door opened again, the man re-appeared; he carried in both hands the fabulous doll which we have mentioned, and which all the village brats had been staring at ever since the morning, and he set it upright in front of Cosette, saying:--

"Here; this is for you."

It must be supposed that in the course of the hour and more which he had spent there he had taken confused notice through his revery of that toy shop, lighted up by fire-pots and candles so splendidly that it was visible like an illumination through the window of the drinking-shop.

Cosette raised her eyes; she gazed at the man approaching her with that doll as she might have gazed at the sun; she heard the unprecedented words, "It is for you"; she stared at him; she stared at the doll; then she slowly retreated, and hid herself at the extreme end, under the table in a corner of the wall.

She no longer cried; she no longer wept; she had the appearance of no

longer daring to breathe.

The Thenardier, Eponine, and Azelma were like statues also; the very drinkers had paused; a solemn silence reigned through the whole room.

Madame Thenardier, petrified and mute, recommenced her conjectures: "Who is that old fellow? Is he a poor man? Is he a millionaire? Perhaps he is both; that is to say, a thief."

The face of the male Thenardier presented that expressive fold which accentuates the human countenance whenever the dominant instinct appears there in all its bestial force. The tavern-keeper stared alternately at the doll and at the traveller; he seemed to be scenting out the man, as he would have scented out a bag of money. This did not last longer than the space of a flash of lightning. He stepped up to his wife and said to her in a low voice:--

"That machine costs at least thirty francs. No nonsense. Down on your belly before that man!"

Gross natures have this in common with naive natures, that they possess no transition state.

"Well, Cosette," said the Thenardier, in a voice that strove to be sweet, and which was composed of the bitter honey of malicious women, "aren't you going to take your doll?"

Cosette ventured to emerge from her hole.

"The gentleman has given you a doll, my little Cosette," said Thenardier, with a caressing air. "Take it; it is yours."

Cosette gazed at the marvellous doll in a sort of terror. Her face was still flooded with tears, but her eyes began to fill, like the sky at daybreak, with strange beams of joy. What she felt at that moment was a little like what she would have felt if she had been abruptly told, "Little one, you are the Queen of France."

It seemed to her that if she touched that doll, lightning would dart from it.

This was true, up to a certain point, for she said to herself that the Thenardier would scold and beat her.

Nevertheless, the attraction carried the day. She ended by drawing near and murmuring timidly as she turned towards Madame Thenardier:--

"May I, Madame?"

No words can render that air, at once despairing, terrified, and ecstatic.

"Pardi!" cried the Thenardier, "it is yours. The gentleman has given it to you."

"Truly, sir?" said Cosette. "Is it true? Is the 'lady' mine?"

The stranger's eyes seemed to be full of tears. He appeared to have reached that point of emotion where a man does not speak for fear lest he should weep. He nodded to Cosette, and placed the "lady's" hand in her tiny hand.

Cosette hastily withdrew her hand, as though that of the "lady" scorched her, and began to stare at the floor. We are forced to add that at that moment she stuck out her tongue immoderately. All at once she wheeled round and seized the doll in a transport.

"I shall call her Catherine," she said.

It was an odd moment when Cosette's rags met and clasped the ribbons and fresh pink muslins of the doll.

"Madame," she resumed, "may I put her on a chair?"

"Yes, my child," replied the Thenardier.

It was now the turn of Eponine and Azelma to gaze at Cosette with envy.

Cosette placed Catherine on a chair, then seated herself on the floor in front of her, and remained motionless, without uttering a word, in an attitude of contemplation.

"Play, Cosette," said the stranger.

"Oh! I am playing," returned the child.

This stranger, this unknown individual, who had the air of a visit which Providence was making on Cosette, was the person whom the Thenardier hated worse than any one in the world at that moment. However, it was necessary to control herself. Habituated as she was to dissimulation through endeavoring to copy her husband in all his actions, these emotions were more than she could endure. She made haste to send her daughters to bed, then she asked the man's permission to send Cosette off also; "for she has worked hard all day," she added with a maternal air. Cosette went off to bed, carrying Catherine in her arms.

From time to time the Thenardier went to the other end of the room where her husband was, to relieve her soul, as she said. She exchanged with her husband words which were all the more furious because she dared not utter them aloud.

"Old beast! What has he got in his belly, to come and upset us in this manner! To want that little monster to play! to give away forty-franc dolls to a jade that I would sell for forty sous, so I would! A little

more and he will be saying Your Majesty to her, as though to the Duchess de Berry! Is there any sense in it? Is he mad, then, that mysterious old fellow?"

"Why! it is perfectly simple," replied Thenardier, "if that amuses him! It amuses you to have the little one work; it amuses him to have her play. He's all right. A traveller can do what he pleases when he pays for it. If the old fellow is a philanthropist, what is that to you? If he is an imbecile, it does not concern you. What are you worrying for, so long as he has money?"

The language of a master, and the reasoning of an innkeeper, neither of which admitted of any reply.

The man had placed his elbows on the table, and resumed his thoughtful attitude. All the other travellers, both pedlers and carters, had withdrawn a little, and had ceased singing. They were staring at him from a distance, with a sort of respectful awe. This poorly dressed man, who drew "hind-wheels" from his pocket with so much ease, and who lavished gigantic dolls on dirty little brats in wooden shoes, was certainly a magnificent fellow, and one to be feared.

Many hours passed. The midnight mass was over, the chimes had ceased, the drinkers had taken their departure, the drinking-shop was closed, the public room was deserted, the fire extinct, the stranger still remained in the same place and the same attitude. From time to time he

changed the elbow on which he leaned. That was all; but he had not said a word since Cosette had left the room.

The Thenardiers alone, out of politeness and curiosity, had remained in the room.

"Is he going to pass the night in that fashion?" grumbled the Thenardier. When two o'clock in the morning struck, she declared herself vanquished, and said to her husband, "I'm going to bed. Do as you like." Her husband seated himself at a table in the corner, lighted a candle, and began to read the Courrier Francais.

A good hour passed thus. The worthy inn-keeper had perused the Courrier Francais at least three times, from the date of the number to the printer's name. The stranger did not stir.

Thenardier fidgeted, coughed, spit, blew his nose, and creaked his chair. Not a movement on the man's part. "Is he asleep?" thought Thenardier. The man was not asleep, but nothing could arouse him.

At last Thenardier took off his cap, stepped gently up to him, and ventured to say:--

"Is not Monsieur going to his repose?"

Not going to bed would have seemed to him excessive and familiar. To

repose smacked of luxury and respect. These words possess the mysterious and admirable property of swelling the bill on the following day. A chamber where one sleeps costs twenty sous; a chamber in which one reposes costs twenty francs.

"Well!" said the stranger, "you are right. Where is your stable?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Thenardier, with a smile, "I will conduct you, sir."

He took the candle; the man picked up his bundle and cudgel, and Thenardier conducted him to a chamber on the first floor, which was of rare splendor, all furnished in mahogany, with a low bedstead, curtained with red calico.

"What is this?" said the traveller.

"It is really our bridal chamber," said the tavern-keeper. "My wife and I occupy another. This is only entered three or four times a year."

"I should have liked the stable quite as well," said the man, abruptly.

Thenardier pretended not to hear this unamiable remark.

He lighted two perfectly fresh wax candles which figured on the chimney-piece. A very good fire was flickering on the hearth.

On the chimney-piece, under a glass globe, stood a woman's head-dress in silver wire and orange flowers.

"And what is this?" resumed the stranger.

"That, sir," said Thenardier, "is my wife's wedding bonnet."

The traveller surveyed the object with a glance which seemed to say, "There really was a time, then, when that monster was a maiden?"

Thenardier lied, however. When he had leased this paltry building for the purpose of converting it into a tavern, he had found this chamber decorated in just this manner, and had purchased the furniture and obtained the orange flowers at second hand, with the idea that this would cast a graceful shadow on "his spouse," and would result in what the English call respectability for his house.

When the traveller turned round, the host had disappeared. Thenardier had withdrawn discreetly, without venturing to wish him a good night, as he did not wish to treat with disrespectful cordiality a man whom he proposed to fleece royally the following morning.

The inn-keeper retired to his room. His wife was in bed, but she was not asleep. When she heard her husband's step she turned over and said to him:--

"Do you know, I'm going to turn Cosette out of doors to-morrow."

Thenardier replied coldly:--

"How you do go on!"

They exchanged no further words, and a few moments later their candle was extinguished.

As for the traveller, he had deposited his cudgel and his bundle in a corner. The landlord once gone, he threw himself into an arm-chair and remained for some time buried in thought. Then he removed his shoes, took one of the two candles, blew out the other, opened the door, and quitted the room, gazing about him like a person who is in search of something. He traversed a corridor and came upon a staircase. There he heard a very faint and gentle sound like the breathing of a child. He followed this sound, and came to a sort of triangular recess built under the staircase, or rather formed by the staircase itself. This recess was nothing else than the space under the steps. There, in the midst of all sorts of old papers and potsherds, among dust and spiders' webs, was a bed--if one can call by the name of bed a straw pallet so full of holes as to display the straw, and a coverlet so tattered as to show the pallet. No sheets. This was placed on the floor.

In this bed Cosette was sleeping.

The man approached and gazed down upon her.

Cosette was in a profound sleep; she was fully dressed. In the winter she did not undress, in order that she might not be so cold.

Against her breast was pressed the doll, whose large eyes, wide open, glittered in the dark. From time to time she gave vent to a deep sigh as though she were on the point of waking, and she strained the doll almost convulsively in her arms. Beside her bed there was only one of her wooden shoes.

A door which stood open near Cosette's pallet permitted a view of a rather large, dark room. The stranger stepped into it. At the further extremity, through a glass door, he saw two small, very white beds. They belonged to Eponine and Azelma. Behind these beds, and half hidden, stood an uncurtained wicker cradle, in which the little boy who had cried all the evening lay asleep.

The stranger conjectured that this chamber connected with that of the Thenardier pair. He was on the point of retreating when his eye fell upon the fireplace--one of those vast tavern chimneys where there is always so little fire when there is any fire at all, and which are so cold to look at. There was no fire in this one, there was not even ashes; but there was something which attracted the stranger's gaze, nevertheless. It was two tiny children's shoes, coquettish in shape and unequal in size. The traveller recalled the graceful and immemorial

custom in accordance with which children place their shoes in the chimney on Christmas eve, there to await in the darkness some sparkling gift from their good fairy. Eponine and Azelma had taken care not to omit this, and each of them had set one of her shoes on the hearth.

The traveller bent over them.

The fairy, that is to say, their mother, had already paid her visit, and in each he saw a brand-new and shining ten-sou piece.

The man straightened himself up, and was on the point of withdrawing, when far in, in the darkest corner of the hearth, he caught sight of another object. He looked at it, and recognized a wooden shoe, a frightful shoe of the coarsest description, half dilapidated and all covered with ashes and dried mud. It was Cosette's sabot. Cosette, with that touching trust of childhood, which can always be deceived yet never discouraged, had placed her shoe on the hearth-stone also.

Hope in a child who has never known anything but despair is a sweet and touching thing.

There was nothing in this wooden shoe.

The stranger fumbled in his waistcoat, bent over and placed a louis d'or in Cosette's shoe.

Then he regained his own chamber with the stealthy tread of a wolf.

CHAPTER IX--THENARDIER AND HIS MANOEUVRES

On the following morning, two hours at least before day-break, Thenardier, seated beside a candle in the public room of the tavern, pen in hand, was making out the bill for the traveller with the yellow coat.

His wife, standing beside him, and half bent over him, was following him with her eyes. They exchanged not a word. On the one hand, there was profound meditation, on the other, the religious admiration with which one watches the birth and development of a marvel of the human mind. A noise was audible in the house; it was the Lark sweeping the stairs.

After the lapse of a good quarter of an hour, and some erasures, Thenardier produced the following masterpiece:--

BILL OF THE GENTLEMAN IN No. 1.

Supper	3 francs.
Chamber	10 "
Candle	5 "
Fire	4 "
Service	1 "
Total	23 francs.

Service was written servisse.

"Twenty-three francs!" cried the woman, with an enthusiasm which was mingled with some hesitation.

Like all great artists, Thenardier was dissatisfied.

"Peuh!" he exclaimed.

It was the accent of Castlereagh auditing France's bill at the Congress of Vienna.

"Monsieur Thenardier, you are right; he certainly owes that," murmured the wife, who was thinking of the doll bestowed on Cosette in the presence of her daughters. "It is just, but it is too much. He will not pay it."

Thenardier laughed coldly, as usual, and said:--

"He will pay."

This laugh was the supreme assertion of certainty and authority. That which was asserted in this manner must needs be so. His wife did not insist.

She set about arranging the table; her husband paced the room. A moment

later he added:--

"I owe full fifteen hundred francs!"

He went and seated himself in the chimney-corner, meditating, with his feet among the warm ashes.

"Ah! by the way," resumed his wife, "you don't forget that I'm going to turn Cosette out of doors to-day? The monster! She breaks my heart with that doll of hers! I'd rather marry Louis XVIII. than keep her another day in the house!"

Thenardier lighted his pipe, and replied between two puffs:--

"You will hand that bill to the man."

Then he went out.

Hardly had he left the room when the traveller entered.

Thenardier instantly reappeared behind him and remained motionless in the half-open door, visible only to his wife.

The yellow man carried his bundle and his cudgel in his hand.

"Up so early?" said Madame Thenardier; "is Monsieur leaving us already?"

As she spoke thus, she was twisting the bill about in her hands with an embarrassed air, and making creases in it with her nails. Her hard face presented a shade which was not habitual with it,--timidity and scruples.

To present such a bill to a man who had so completely the air "of a poor wretch" seemed difficult to her.

The traveller appeared to be preoccupied and absent-minded. He replied:--

"Yes, Madame, I am going."

"So Monsieur has no business in Montfermeil?"

"No, I was passing through. That is all. What do I owe you, Madame," he added.

The Thenardier silently handed him the folded bill.

The man unfolded the paper and glanced at it; but his thoughts were evidently elsewhere.

"Madame," he resumed, "is business good here in Montfermeil?"

"So so, Monsieur," replied the Thenardier, stupefied at not witnessing another sort of explosion.

She continued, in a dreary and lamentable tone:--

"Oh! Monsieur, times are so hard! and then, we have so few bourgeois in the neighborhood! All the people are poor, you see. If we had not, now and then, some rich and generous travellers like Monsieur, we should not get along at all. We have so many expenses. Just see, that child is costing us our very eyes."

"What child?"

"Why, the little one, you know! Cosette--the Lark, as she is called hereabouts!"

"Ah!" said the man.

She went on:--

"How stupid these peasants are with their nicknames! She has more the air of a bat than of a lark. You see, sir, we do not ask charity, and we cannot bestow it. We earn nothing and we have to pay out a great deal. The license, the imposts, the door and window tax, the hundredths! Monsieur is aware that the government demands a terrible deal of money. And then, I have my daughters. I have no need to bring up other people's

children."

The man resumed, in that voice which he strove to render indifferent, and in which there lingered a tremor:--

"What if one were to rid you of her?"

"Who? Cosette?"

"Yes."

The landlady's red and violent face brightened up hideously.

"Ah! sir, my dear sir, take her, keep her, lead her off, carry her away, sugar her, stuff her with truffles, drink her, eat her, and the blessings of the good holy Virgin and of all the saints of paradise be upon you!"

"Agreed."

"Really! You will take her away?"

"I will take her away."

"Immediately?"

"Immediately. Call the child."

"Cosette!" screamed the Thenardier.

"In the meantime," pursued the man, "I will pay you what I owe you. How much is it?"

He cast a glance on the bill, and could not restrain a start of surprise:--

"Twenty-three francs!"

He looked at the landlady, and repeated:--

"Twenty-three francs?"

There was in the enunciation of these words, thus repeated, an accent between an exclamation and an interrogation point.

The Thenardier had had time to prepare herself for the shock. She replied, with assurance:--

"Good gracious, yes, sir, it is twenty-three francs."

The stranger laid five five-franc pieces on the table.

"Go and get the child," said he.

At that moment Thenardier advanced to the middle of the room, and said:--

"Monsieur owes twenty-six sous."

"Twenty-six sous!" exclaimed his wife.

"Twenty sous for the chamber," resumed Thenardier, coldly, "and six sous for his supper. As for the child, I must discuss that matter a little with the gentleman. Leave us, wife."

Madame Thenardier was dazzled as with the shock caused by unexpected lightning flashes of talent. She was conscious that a great actor was making his entrance on the stage, uttered not a word in reply, and left the room.

As soon as they were alone, Thenardier offered the traveller a chair. The traveller seated himself; Thenardier remained standing, and his face assumed a singular expression of good-fellowship and simplicity.

"Sir," said he, "what I have to say to you is this, that I adore that child."

The stranger gazed intently at him.

"What child?"

Thenardier continued:--

"How strange it is, one grows attached. What money is that? Take back your hundred-sou piece. I adore the child."

"Whom do you mean?" demanded the stranger.

"Eh! our little Cosette! Are you not intending to take her away from us? Well, I speak frankly; as true as you are an honest man, I will not consent to it. I shall miss that child. I saw her first when she was a tiny thing. It is true that she costs us money; it is true that she has her faults; it is true that we are not rich; it is true that I have paid out over four hundred francs for drugs for just one of her illnesses! But one must do something for the good God's sake. She has neither father nor mother. I have brought her up. I have bread enough for her and for myself. In truth, I think a great deal of that child. You understand, one conceives an affection for a person; I am a good sort of a beast, I am; I do not reason; I love that little girl; my wife is quick-tempered, but she loves her also. You see, she is just the same as our own child. I want to keep her to babble about the house."

The stranger kept his eye intently fixed on Thenardier. The latter continued:--

"Excuse me, sir, but one does not give away one's child to a passer-by, like that. I am right, am I not? Still, I don't say--you are rich; you have the air of a very good man,--if it were for her happiness. But one must find out that. You understand: suppose that I were to let her go and to sacrifice myself, I should like to know what becomes of her; I should not wish to lose sight of her; I should like to know with whom she is living, so that I could go to see her from time to time; so that she may know that her good foster-father is alive, that he is watching over her. In short, there are things which are not possible. I do not even know your name. If you were to take her away, I should say: 'Well, and the Lark, what has become of her?' One must, at least, see some petty scrap of paper, some trifle in the way of a passport, you know!"

The stranger, still surveying him with that gaze which penetrates, as the saying goes, to the very depths of the conscience, replied in a grave, firm voice:--

"Monsieur Thenardier, one does not require a passport to travel five leagues from Paris. If I take Cosette away, I shall take her away, and that is the end of the matter. You will not know my name, you will not know my residence, you will not know where she is; and my intention is that she shall never set eyes on you again so long as she lives. I break the thread which binds her foot, and she departs. Does that suit you? Yes or no?"

Since geniuses, like demons, recognize the presence of a superior God by certain signs, Thenardier comprehended that he had to deal with a very strong person. It was like an intuition; he comprehended it with his clear and sagacious promptitude. While drinking with the carters, smoking, and singing coarse songs on the preceding evening, he had devoted the whole of the time to observing the stranger, watching him like a cat, and studying him like a mathematician. He had watched him, both on his own account, for the pleasure of the thing, and through instinct, and had spied upon him as though he had been paid for so doing. Not a movement, not a gesture, on the part of the man in the yellow great-coat had escaped him. Even before the stranger had so clearly manifested his interest in Cosette, Thenardier had divined his purpose. He had caught the old man's deep glances returning constantly to the child. Who was this man? Why this interest? Why this hideous costume, when he had so much money in his purse? Questions which he put to himself without being able to solve them, and which irritated him. He had pondered it all night long. He could not be Cosette's father. Was he her grandfather? Then why not make himself known at once? When one has a right, one asserts it. This man evidently had no right over Cosette. What was it, then? Thenardier lost himself in conjectures. He caught glimpses of everything, but he saw nothing. Be that as it may, on entering into conversation with the man, sure that there was some secret in the case, that the latter had some interest in remaining in the shadow, he felt himself strong; when he perceived from the stranger's clear and firm retort, that this mysterious personage was mysterious in so simple a way, he became conscious that he was weak. He had expected

nothing of the sort. His conjectures were put to the rout. He rallied his ideas. He weighed everything in the space of a second. Thenardier was one of those men who take in a situation at a glance. He decided that the moment had arrived for proceeding straightforward, and quickly at that. He did as great leaders do at the decisive moment, which they know that they alone recognize; he abruptly unmasked his batteries.

"Sir," said he, "I am in need of fifteen hundred francs."

The stranger took from his side pocket an old pocketbook of black leather, opened it, drew out three bank-bills, which he laid on the table. Then he placed his large thumb on the notes and said to the inn-keeper:--

"Go and fetch Cosette."

While this was taking place, what had Cosette been doing?

On waking up, Cosette had run to get her shoe. In it she had found the gold piece. It was not a Napoleon; it was one of those perfectly new twenty-franc pieces of the Restoration, on whose effigy the little Prussian queue had replaced the laurel wreath. Cosette was dazzled. Her destiny began to intoxicate her. She did not know what a gold piece was; she had never seen one; she hid it quickly in her pocket, as though she had stolen it. Still, she felt that it really was hers; she guessed whence her gift had come, but the joy which she experienced was full of

fear. She was happy; above all she was stupefied. Such magnificent and beautiful things did not appear real. The doll frightened her, the gold piece frightened her. She trembled vaguely in the presence of this magnificence. The stranger alone did not frighten her. On the contrary, he reassured her. Ever since the preceding evening, amid all her amazement, even in her sleep, she had been thinking in her little childish mind of that man who seemed to be so poor and so sad, and who was so rich and so kind. Everything had changed for her since she had met that good man in the forest. Cosette, less happy than the most insignificant swallow of heaven, had never known what it was to take refuge under a mother's shadow and under a wing. For the last five years, that is to say, as far back as her memory ran, the poor child had shivered and trembled. She had always been exposed completely naked to the sharp wind of adversity; now it seemed to her she was clothed. Formerly her soul had seemed cold, now it was warm. Cosette was no longer afraid of the Thenardier. She was no longer alone; there was some one there.

She hastily set about her regular morning duties. That louis, which she had about her, in the very apron pocket whence the fifteen-sou piece had fallen on the night before, distracted her thoughts. She dared not touch it, but she spent five minutes in gazing at it, with her tongue hanging out, if the truth must be told. As she swept the staircase, she paused, remained standing there motionless, forgetful of her broom and of the entire universe, occupied in gazing at that star which was blazing at the bottom of her pocket.

It was during one of these periods of contemplation that the Thenardier joined her. She had gone in search of Cosette at her husband's orders. What was quite unprecedented, she neither struck her nor said an insulting word to her.

"Cosette," she said, almost gently, "come immediately."

An instant later Cosette entered the public room.

The stranger took up the bundle which he had brought and untied it. This bundle contained a little woollen gown, an apron, a fustian bodice, a kerchief, a petticoat, woollen stockings, shoes--a complete outfit for a girl of seven years. All was black.

"My child," said the man, "take these, and go and dress yourself quickly."

Daylight was appearing when those of the inhabitants of Montfermeil who had begun to open their doors beheld a poorly clad old man leading a little girl dressed in mourning, and carrying a pink doll in her arms, pass along the road to Paris. They were going in the direction of Livry.

It was our man and Cosette.

No one knew the man; as Cosette was no longer in rags, many did not

recognize her. Cosette was going away. With whom? She did not know. Whither? She knew not. All that she understood was that she was leaving the Thenardier tavern behind her. No one had thought of bidding her farewell, nor had she thought of taking leave of any one. She was leaving that hated and hating house.

Poor, gentle creature, whose heart had been repressed up to that hour!

Cosette walked along gravely, with her large eyes wide open, and gazing at the sky. She had put her louis in the pocket of her new apron. From time to time, she bent down and glanced at it; then she looked at the good man. She felt something as though she were beside the good God.

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

Madame Thenardier had allowed her husband to have his own way, as was her wont. She had expected great results. When the man and Cosette had taken their departure, Thenardier allowed a full quarter of an hour to elapse; then he took her aside and showed her the fifteen hundred francs.

"Is that all?" said she.

It was the first time since they had set up housekeeping that she had dared to criticise one of the master's acts.

The blow told.

"You are right, in sooth," said he; "I am a fool. Give me my hat."

He folded up the three bank-bills, thrust them into his pocket, and ran out in all haste; but he made a mistake and turned to the right first. Some neighbors, of whom he made inquiries, put him on the track again; the Lark and the man had been seen going in the direction of Livry. He followed these hints, walking with great strides, and talking to himself the while:--

"That man is evidently a million dressed in yellow, and I am an animal.

First he gave twenty sous, then five francs, then fifty francs, then fifteen hundred francs, all with equal readiness. He would have given fifteen thousand francs. But I shall overtake him."

And then, that bundle of clothes prepared beforehand for the child; all that was singular; many mysteries lay concealed under it. One does not let mysteries out of one's hand when one has once grasped them. The secrets of the wealthy are sponges of gold; one must know how to subject them to pressure. All these thoughts whirled through his brain. "I am an animal," said he.

When one leaves Montfermeil and reaches the turn which the road takes that runs to Livry, it can be seen stretching out before one to a great distance across the plateau. On arriving there, he calculated that he ought to be able to see the old man and the child. He looked as far as his vision reached, and saw nothing. He made fresh inquiries, but he had wasted time. Some passers-by informed him that the man and child of whom he was in search had gone towards the forest in the direction of Gagny. He hastened in that direction.

They were far in advance of him; but a child walks slowly, and he walked fast; and then, he was well acquainted with the country.

All at once he paused and dealt himself a blow on his forehead like a man who has forgotten some essential point and who is ready to retrace his steps.

"I ought to have taken my gun," said he to himself.

Thenardier was one of those double natures which sometimes pass through our midst without our being aware of the fact, and who disappear without our finding them out, because destiny has only exhibited one side of them. It is the fate of many men to live thus half submerged. In a calm and even situation, Thenardier possessed all that is required to make--we will not say to be--what people have agreed to call an honest trader, a good bourgeois. At the same time certain circumstances being given, certain shocks arriving to bring his under-nature to the surface, he had all the requisites for a blackguard. He was a shopkeeper in whom there was some taint of the monster. Satan must have occasionally crouched down in some corner of the hovel in which Thenardier dwelt, and have fallen a-dreaming in the presence of this hideous masterpiece.

After a momentary hesitation:--

"Bah!" he thought; "they will have time to make their escape."

And he pursued his road, walking rapidly straight ahead, and with almost an air of certainty, with the sagacity of a fox scenting a covey of partridges.

In truth, when he had passed the ponds and had traversed in an oblique direction the large clearing which lies on the right of the Avenue de

Bellevue, and reached that turf alley which nearly makes the circuit of the hill, and covers the arch of the ancient aqueduct of the Abbey of Chelles, he caught sight, over the top of the brushwood, of the hat on which he had already erected so many conjectures; it was that man's hat. The brushwood was not high. Thenardier recognized the fact that the man and Cosette were sitting there. The child could not be seen on account of her small size, but the head of her doll was visible.

Thenardier was not mistaken. The man was sitting there, and letting Cosette get somewhat rested. The inn-keeper walked round the brushwood and presented himself abruptly to the eyes of those whom he was in search of.

"Pardon, excuse me, sir," he said, quite breathless, "but here are your fifteen hundred francs."

So saying, he handed the stranger the three bank-bills.

The man raised his eyes.

"What is the meaning of this?"

Thenardier replied respectfully:--

"It means, sir, that I shall take back Cosette."

Cosette shuddered, and pressed close to the old man.

He replied, gazing to the very bottom of Thenardier's eyes the while, and enunciating every syllable distinctly:--

"You are go-ing to take back Co-sette?"

"Yes, sir, I am. I will tell you; I have considered the matter. In fact, I have not the right to give her to you. I am an honest man, you see; this child does not belong to me; she belongs to her mother. It was her mother who confided her to me; I can only resign her to her mother. You will say to me, 'But her mother is dead.' Good; in that case I can only give the child up to the person who shall bring me a writing, signed by her mother, to the effect that I am to hand the child over to the person therein mentioned; that is clear."

The man, without making any reply, fumbled in his pocket, and Thenardier beheld the pocket-book of bank-bills make its appearance once more.

The tavern-keeper shivered with joy.

"Good!" thought he; "let us hold firm; he is going to bribe me!"

Before opening the pocket-book, the traveller cast a glance about him: the spot was absolutely deserted; there was not a soul either in the woods or in the valley. The man opened his pocket-book once more and

drew from it, not the handful of bills which Thenardier expected, but a simple little paper, which he unfolded and presented fully open to the inn-keeper, saying:--

"You are right; read!"

Thenardier took the paper and read:--

"M. SUR M., March 25, 1823.

"MONSIEUR THENARDIER:--

You will deliver Cosette to this person.
You will be paid for all the little things.
I have the honor to salute you with respect,
FANTINE."

"You know that signature?" resumed the man.

It certainly was Fantine's signature; Thenardier recognized it.

There was no reply to make; he experienced two violent vexations, the vexation of renouncing the bribery which he had hoped for, and the vexation of being beaten; the man added:--

"You may keep this paper as your receipt."

Thenardier retreated in tolerably good order.

"This signature is fairly well imitated," he growled between his teeth; "however, let it go!"

Then he essayed a desperate effort.

"It is well, sir," he said, "since you are the person, but I must be paid for all those little things. A great deal is owing to me."

The man rose to his feet, filliping the dust from his thread-bare sleeve:--

"Monsieur Thenardier, in January last, the mother reckoned that she owed you one hundred and twenty francs. In February, you sent her a bill of five hundred francs; you received three hundred francs at the end of February, and three hundred francs at the beginning of March. Since then nine months have elapsed, at fifteen francs a month, the price agreed upon, which makes one hundred and thirty-five francs. You had received one hundred francs too much; that makes thirty-five still owing you. I have just given you fifteen hundred francs."

Thenardier's sensations were those of the wolf at the moment when he feels himself nipped and seized by the steel jaw of the trap.

"Who is this devil of a man?" he thought.

He did what the wolf does: he shook himself. Audacity had succeeded with him once.

"Monsieur-I-don't-know-your-name," he said resolutely, and this time casting aside all respectful ceremony, "I shall take back Cosette if you do not give me a thousand crowns."

The stranger said tranquilly:--

"Come, Cosette."

He took Cosette by his left hand, and with his right he picked up his cudgel, which was lying on the ground.

Thenardier noted the enormous size of the cudgel and the solitude of the spot.

The man plunged into the forest with the child, leaving the inn-keeper motionless and speechless.

While they were walking away, Thenardier scrutinized his huge shoulders, which were a little rounded, and his great fists.

Then, bringing his eyes back to his own person, they fell upon his

feeble arms and his thin hands. "I really must have been exceedingly stupid not to have thought to bring my gun," he said to himself, "since I was going hunting!"

However, the inn-keeper did not give up.

"I want to know where he is going," said he, and he set out to follow them at a distance. Two things were left on his hands, an irony in the shape of the paper signed Fantine, and a consolation, the fifteen hundred francs.

The man led Cosette off in the direction of Livry and Bondy. He walked slowly, with drooping head, in an attitude of reflection and sadness. The winter had thinned out the forest, so that Thenardier did not lose them from sight, although he kept at a good distance. The man turned round from time to time, and looked to see if he was being followed. All at once he caught sight of Thenardier. He plunged suddenly into the brushwood with Cosette, where they could both hide themselves. "The deuce!" said Thenardier, and he redoubled his pace.

The thickness of the undergrowth forced him to draw nearer to them. When the man had reached the densest part of the thicket, he wheeled round. It was in vain that Thenardier sought to conceal himself in the branches; he could not prevent the man seeing him. The man cast upon him an uneasy glance, then elevated his head and continued his course. The inn-keeper set out again in pursuit. Thus they continued for two or

three hundred paces. All at once the man turned round once more; he saw the inn-keeper. This time he gazed at him with so sombre an air that Thenardier decided that it was "useless" to proceed further. Thenardier retraced his steps.

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

Jean Valjean was not dead.

When he fell into the sea, or rather, when he threw himself into it, he was not ironed, as we have seen. He swam under water until he reached a vessel at anchor, to which a boat was moored. He found means of hiding himself in this boat until night. At night he swam off again, and reached the shore a little way from Cape Brun. There, as he did not lack money, he procured clothing. A small country-house in the neighborhood of Balaguier was at that time the dressing-room of escaped convicts,--a lucrative specialty. Then Jean Valjean, like all the sorry fugitives who are seeking to evade the vigilance of the law and social fatality, pursued an obscure and undulating itinerary. He found his first refuge at Pradeaux, near Beausset. Then he directed his course towards Grand-Villard, near Briancon, in the Hautes-Alpes. It was a fumbling and uneasy flight,--a mole's track, whose branchings are untraceable. Later on, some trace of his passage into Ain, in the territory of Civrieux, was discovered; in the Pyrenees, at Accons; at the spot called Grange-de-Doumec, near the market of Chavailles, and in the environs of Perigueux at Brunies, canton of La Chapelle-Gonaguet. He reached Paris. We have just seen him at Montfermeil.

His first care on arriving in Paris had been to buy mourning clothes for a little girl of from seven to eight years of age; then to procure

a lodging. That done, he had betaken himself to Montfermeil. It will be remembered that already, during his preceding escape, he had made a mysterious trip thither, or somewhere in that neighborhood, of which the law had gathered an inkling.

However, he was thought to be dead, and this still further increased the obscurity which had gathered about him. At Paris, one of the journals which chronicled the fact fell into his hands. He felt reassured and almost at peace, as though he had really been dead.

On the evening of the day when Jean Valjean rescued Cosette from the claws of the Thenardiers, he returned to Paris. He re-entered it at nightfall, with the child, by way of the Barrier Monceaux. There he entered a cabriolet, which took him to the esplanade of the Observatoire. There he got out, paid the coachman, took Cosette by the hand, and together they directed their steps through the darkness,--through the deserted streets which adjoin the Ourcine and the Glaciere, towards the Boulevard de l'Hopital.

The day had been strange and filled with emotions for Cosette. They had eaten some bread and cheese purchased in isolated taverns, behind hedges; they had changed carriages frequently; they had travelled short distances on foot. She made no complaint, but she was weary, and Jean Valjean perceived it by the way she dragged more and more on his hand as she walked. He took her on his back. Cosette, without letting go of Catherine, laid her head on Jean Valjean's shoulder, and there fell

asleep.