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

CHAPTER I--A WOUND WITHOUT, HEALING WITHIN

Thus their life clouded over by degrees.

But one diversion, which had formerly been a happiness, remained to them, which was to carry bread to those who were hungry, and clothing to those who were cold. Cosette often accompanied Jean Valjean on these visits to the poor, on which they recovered some remnants of their former free intercourse; and sometimes, when the day had been a good one, and they had assisted many in distress, and cheered and warmed many little children, Cosette was rather merry in the evening. It was at this epoch that they paid their visit to the Jondrette den.

On the day following that visit, Jean Valjean made his appearance in the pavilion in the morning, calm as was his wont, but with a large wound on his left arm which was much inflamed, and very angry, which resembled a burn, and which he explained in some way or other. This wound resulted in his being detained in the house for a month with fever. He would not call in a doctor. When Cosette urged him, "Call the dog-doctor," said he.

Cosette dressed the wound morning and evening with so divine an air and such angelic happiness at being of use to him, that Jean Valjean felt all his former joy returning, his fears and anxieties dissipating, and he gazed at Cosette, saying: "Oh! what a kindly wound! Oh! what a good misfortune!"

Cosette on perceiving that her father was ill, had deserted the pavilion and again taken a fancy to the little lodging and the back courtyard. She passed nearly all her days beside Jean Valjean and read to him the books which he desired. Generally they were books of travel. Jean Valjean was undergoing a new birth; his happiness was reviving in these ineffable rays; the Luxembourg, the prowling young stranger, Cosette's coldness,--all these clouds upon his soul were growing dim. He had reached the point where he said to himself: "I imagined all that. I am an old fool."

His happiness was so great that the horrible discovery of the Thenardiers made in the Jondrette hovel, unexpected as it was, had, after a fashion, glided over him unnoticed. He had succeeded in making his escape; all trace of him was lost--what more did he care for! he only thought of those wretched beings to pity them. "Here they are in prison, and henceforth they will be incapacitated for doing any harm," he thought, "but what a lamentable family in distress!"

As for the hideous vision of the Barriere du Maine, Cosette had not

referred to it again.

Sister Sainte-Mechtilde had taught Cosette music in the convent; Cosette had the voice of a linnet with a soul, and sometimes, in the evening, in the wounded man's humble abode, she warbled melancholy songs which delighted Jean Valjean.

Spring came; the garden was so delightful at that season of the year, that Jean Valjean said to Cosette:--

"You never go there; I want you to stroll in it."

"As you like, father," said Cosette.

And for the sake of obeying her father, she resumed her walks in the garden, generally alone, for, as we have mentioned, Jean Valjean, who was probably afraid of being seen through the fence, hardly ever went there.

Jean Valjean's wound had created a diversion.

When Cosette saw that her father was suffering less, that he was convalescing, and that he appeared to be happy, she experienced a contentment which she did not even perceive, so gently and naturally had it come. Then, it was in the month of March, the days were growing longer, the winter was departing, the winter always bears away with it a

portion of our sadness; then came April, that daybreak of summer, fresh as dawn always is, gay like every childhood; a little inclined to weep at times like the new-born being that it is. In that month, nature has charming gleams which pass from the sky, from the trees, from the meadows and the flowers into the heart of man.

Cosette was still too young to escape the penetrating influence of that April joy which bore so strong a resemblance to herself. Insensibly, and without her suspecting the fact, the blackness departed from her spirit. In spring, sad souls grow light, as light falls into cellars at midday. Cosette was no longer sad. However, though this was so, she did not account for it to herself. In the morning, about ten o'clock, after breakfast, when she had succeeded in enticing her father into the garden for a quarter of an hour, and when she was pacing up and down in the sunlight in front of the steps, supporting his left arm for him, she did not perceive that she laughed every moment and that she was happy.

Jean Valjean, intoxicated, beheld her growing fresh and rosy once more.

"Oh! What a good wound!" he repeated in a whisper.

And he felt grateful to the Thenardiers.

His wound once healed, he resumed his solitary twilight strolls.

It is a mistake to suppose that a person can stroll alone in that

fashion in the uninhabited regions of Paris without meeting with some adventure.

CHAPTER II--MOTHER PLUTARQUE FINDS NO DIFFICULTY IN EXPLAINING A PHENOMENON

One evening, little Gavroche had had nothing to eat; he remembered that he had not dined on the preceding day either; this was becoming tiresome. He resolved to make an effort to secure some supper. He strolled out beyond the Salpetriere into deserted regions; that is where windfalls are to be found; where there is no one, one always finds something. He reached a settlement which appeared to him to be the village of Austerlitz.

In one of his preceding lounges he had noticed there an old garden haunted by an old man and an old woman, and in that garden, a passable apple-tree. Beside the apple-tree stood a sort of fruit-house, which was not securely fastened, and where one might contrive to get an apple. One apple is a supper; one apple is life. That which was Adam's ruin might prove Gavroche's salvation. The garden abutted on a solitary, unpaved lane, bordered with brushwood while awaiting the arrival of houses; the garden was separated from it by a hedge.

Gavroche directed his steps towards this garden; he found the lane, he recognized the apple-tree, he verified the fruit-house, he examined the hedge; a hedge means merely one stride. The day was declining, there was not even a cat in the lane, the hour was propitious. Gavroche began the operation of scaling the hedge, then suddenly paused. Some one was talking in the garden. Gavroche peeped through one of the breaks in the

hedge.

A couple of paces distant, at the foot of the hedge on the other side, exactly at the point where the gap which he was meditating would have been made, there was a sort of recumbent stone which formed a bench, and on this bench was seated the old man of the garden, while the old woman was standing in front of him. The old woman was grumbling. Gavroche, who was not very discreet, listened.

"Monsieur Mabeuf!" said the old woman.

"Mabeuf!" thought Gavroche, "that name is a perfect farce."

The old man who was thus addressed, did not stir. The old woman repeated:--

"Monsieur Mabeuf!"

The old man, without raising his eyes from the ground, made up his mind to answer:--

"What is it, Mother Plutarque?"

"Mother Plutarque!" thought Gavroche, "another farcical name."

Mother Plutarque began again, and the old man was forced to accept the conversation:--

"The landlord is not pleased."

"Why?"

"We owe three quarters rent."

"In three months, we shall owe him for four quarters."

"He says that he will turn you out to sleep."

"I will go."

"The green-grocer insists on being paid. She will no longer leave her fagots. What will you warm yourself with this winter? We shall have no wood."

"There is the sun."

"The butcher refuses to give credit; he will not let us have any more meat."

"That is quite right. I do not digest meat well. It is too heavy."

"What shall we have for dinner?"

"Bread."

"The baker demands a settlement, and says, 'no money, no bread.'"

"That is well."

"What will you eat?"

"We have apples in the apple-room."

"But, Monsieur, we can't live like that without money."

"I have none."

The old woman went away, the old man remained alone. He fell into thought. Gavroche became thoughtful also. It was almost dark.

The first result of Gavroche's meditation was, that instead of scaling the hedge, he crouched down under it. The branches stood apart a little at the foot of the thicket.

"Come," exclaimed Gavroche mentally, "here's a nook!" and he curled up in it. His back was almost in contact with Father Mabeuf's bench. He could hear the octogenarian breathe.

Then, by way of dinner, he tried to sleep.

It was a cat-nap, with one eye open. While he dozed, Gavroche kept on the watch.

The twilight pallor of the sky blanched the earth, and the lane formed a livid line between two rows of dark bushes.

All at once, in this whitish band, two figures made their appearance. One was in front, the other some distance in the rear.

"There come two creatures," muttered Gavroche.

The first form seemed to be some elderly bourgeois, who was bent and thoughtful, dressed more than plainly, and who was walking slowly because of his age, and strolling about in the open evening air.

The second was straight, firm, slender. It regulated its pace by that of the first; but in the voluntary slowness of its gait, suppleness and agility were discernible. This figure had also something fierce and disquieting about it, the whole shape was that of what was then called an elegant; the hat was of good shape, the coat black, well cut, probably of fine cloth, and well fitted in at the waist. The head was held erect with a sort of robust grace, and beneath the hat the pale profile of a young man could be made out in the dim light. The profile

had a rose in its mouth. This second form was well known to Gavroche; it was Montparnasse.

He could have told nothing about the other, except that he was a respectable old man.

Gavroche immediately began to take observations.

One of these two pedestrians evidently had a project connected with the other. Gavroche was well placed to watch the course of events. The bedroom had turned into a hiding-place at a very opportune moment.

Montparnasse on the hunt at such an hour, in such a place, betokened something threatening. Gavroche felt his gamin's heart moved with compassion for the old man.

What was he to do? Interfere? One weakness coming to the aid of another! It would be merely a laughing matter for Montparnasse. Gavroche did not shut his eyes to the fact that the old man, in the first place, and the child in the second, would make but two mouthfuls for that redoubtable ruffian eighteen years of age.

While Gavroche was deliberating, the attack took place, abruptly and hideously. The attack of the tiger on the wild ass, the attack of the spider on the fly. Montparnasse suddenly tossed away his rose, bounded upon the old man, seized him by the collar, grasped and clung to him,

and Gavroche with difficulty restrained a scream. A moment later one of these men was underneath the other, groaning, struggling, with a knee of marble upon his breast. Only, it was not just what Gavroche had expected. The one who lay on the earth was Montparnasse; the one who was on top was the old man. All this took place a few paces distant from Gavroche.

The old man had received the shock, had returned it, and that in such a terrible fashion, that in a twinkling, the assailant and the assailed had exchanged roles.

"Here's a hearty veteran!" thought Gavroche.

He could not refrain from clapping his hands. But it was applause wasted. It did not reach the combatants, absorbed and deafened as they were, each by the other, as their breath mingled in the struggle.

Silence ensued. Montparnasse ceased his struggles. Gavroche indulged in this aside: "Can he be dead!"

The goodman had not uttered a word, nor given vent to a cry. He rose to his feet, and Gavroche heard him say to Montparnasse:--

"Get up."

Montparnasse rose, but the goodman held him fast. Montparnasse's

attitude was the humiliated and furious attitude of the wolf who has been caught by a sheep.

Gavroche looked on and listened, making an effort to reinforce his eyes with his ears. He was enjoying himself immensely.

He was repaid for his conscientious anxiety in the character of a spectator. He was able to catch on the wing a dialogue which borrowed from the darkness an indescribably tragic accent. The goodman questioned, Montparnasse replied.

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"You are strong and healthy. Why do you not work?"

"It bores me."

"What is your trade?"

"An idler."

"Speak seriously. Can anything be done for you? What would you like to be?"

"A thief."

A pause ensued. The old man seemed absorbed in profound thought. He stood motionless, and did not relax his hold on Montparnasse.

Every moment the vigorous and agile young ruffian indulged in the twitchings of a wild beast caught in a snare. He gave a jerk, tried a crook of the knee, twisted his limbs desperately, and made efforts to escape.

The old man did not appear to notice it, and held both his arms with one hand, with the sovereign indifference of absolute force.

The old man's revery lasted for some time, then, looking steadily at Montparnasse, he addressed to him in a gentle voice, in the midst of the darkness where they stood, a solemn harangue, of which Gavroche did not lose a single syllable:--

"My child, you are entering, through indolence, on one of the most laborious of lives. Ah! You declare yourself to be an idler! prepare to toil. There is a certain formidable machine, have you seen it? It is the rolling-mill. You must be on your guard against it, it is crafty and ferocious; if it catches hold of the skirt of your coat, you will be drawn in bodily. That machine is laziness. Stop while there is yet time, and save yourself! Otherwise, it is all over with you; in a short time you will be among the gearing. Once entangled, hope for nothing more.

Toil, lazybones! there is no more repose for you! The iron hand of implacable toil has seized you. You do not wish to earn your living, to have a task, to fulfil a duty! It bores you to be like other men? Well! You will be different. Labor is the law; he who rejects it will find ennui his torment. You do not wish to be a workingman, you will be a slave. Toil lets go of you on one side only to grasp you again on the other. You do not desire to be its friend, you shall be its negro slave. Ah! You would have none of the honest weariness of men, you shall have the sweat of the damned. Where others sing, you will rattle in your throat. You will see afar off, from below, other men at work; it will seem to you that they are resting. The laborer, the harvester, the sailor, the blacksmith, will appear to you in glory like the blessed spirits in paradise. What radiance surrounds the forge! To guide the plough, to bind the sheaves, is joy. The bark at liberty in the wind, what delight! Do you, lazy idler, delve, drag on, roll, march! Drag your halter. You are a beast of burden in the team of hell! Ah! To do nothing is your object. Well, not a week, not a day, not an hour shall you have free from oppression. You will be able to lift nothing without anguish. Every minute that passes will make your muscles crack. What is a feather to others will be a rock to you. The simplest things will become steep acclivities. Life will become monstrous all about you. To go, to come, to breathe, will be just so many terrible labors. Your lungs will produce on you the effect of weighing a hundred pounds. Whether you shall walk here rather than there, will become a problem that must be solved. Any one who wants to go out simply gives his door a push, and there he is in the open air. If you wish to go out, you will be obliged

to pierce your wall. What does every one who wants to step into the street do? He goes down stairs; you will tear up your sheets, little by little you will make of them a rope, then you will climb out of your window, and you will suspend yourself by that thread over an abyss, and it will be night, amid storm, rain, and the hurricane, and if the rope is too short, but one way of descending will remain to you, to fall. To drop hap-hazard into the gulf, from an unknown height, on what? On what is beneath, on the unknown. Or you will crawl up a chimney-flue, at the risk of burning; or you will creep through a sewer-pipe, at the risk of drowning; I do not speak of the holes that you will be obliged to mask, of the stones which you will have to take up and replace twenty times a day, of the plaster that you will have to hide in your straw pallet. A lock presents itself; the bourgeois has in his pocket a key made by a locksmith. If you wish to pass out, you will be condemned to execute a terrible work of art; you will take a large sou, you will cut it in two plates; with what tools? You will have to invent them. That is your business. Then you will hollow out the interior of these plates, taking great care of the outside, and you will make on the edges a thread, so that they can be adjusted one upon the other like a box and its cover. The top and bottom thus screwed together, nothing will be suspected. To the overseers it will be only a sou; to you it will be a box. What will you put in this box? A small bit of steel. A watch-spring, in which you will have cut teeth, and which will form a saw. With this saw, as long as a pin, and concealed in a sou, you will cut the bolt of the lock, you will sever bolts, the padlock of your chain, and the bar at your window, and the fetter on your leg. This masterpiece finished, this prodigy

accomplished, all these miracles of art, address, skill, and patience executed, what will be your recompense if it becomes known that you are the author? The dungeon. There is your future. What precipices are idleness and pleasure! Do you know that to do nothing is a melancholy resolution? To live in idleness on the property of society! to be useless, that is to say, pernicious! This leads straight to the depth of wretchedness. Woe to the man who desires to be a parasite! He will become vermin! Ah! So it does not please you to work? Ah! You have but one thought, to drink well, to eat well, to sleep well. You will drink water, you will eat black bread, you will sleep on a plank with a fetter whose cold touch you will feel on your flesh all night long, riveted to your limbs. You will break those fetters, you will flee. That is well. You will crawl on your belly through the brushwood, and you will eat grass like the beasts of the forest. And you will be recaptured. And then you will pass years in a dungeon, riveted to a wall, groping for your jug that you may drink, gnawing at a horrible loaf of darkness which dogs would not touch, eating beans that the worms have eaten before you. You will be a wood-louse in a cellar. Ah! Have pity on yourself, you miserable young child, who were sucking at nurse less than twenty years ago, and who have, no doubt, a mother still alive! I conjure you, listen to me, I entreat you. You desire fine black cloth, varnished shoes, to have your hair curled and sweet-smelling oils on your locks, to please low women, to be handsome. You will be shaven clean, and you will wear a red blouse and wooden shoes. You want rings on your fingers, you will have an iron necklet on your neck. If you glance at a woman, you will receive a blow. And you will enter there at

the age of twenty. And you will come out at fifty! You will enter young, rosy, fresh, with brilliant eyes, and all your white teeth, and your handsome, youthful hair; you will come out broken, bent, wrinkled, toothless, horrible, with white locks! Ah! my poor child, you are on the wrong road; idleness is counselling you badly; the hardest of all work is thieving. Believe me, do not undertake that painful profession of an idle man. It is not comfortable to become a rascal. It is less disagreeable to be an honest man. Now go, and ponder on what I have said to you. By the way, what did you want of me? My purse? Here it is."

And the old man, releasing Montparnasse, put his purse in the latter's hand; Montparnasse weighed it for a moment, after which he allowed it to slide gently into the back pocket of his coat, with the same mechanical precaution as though he had stolen it.

All this having been said and done, the goodman turned his back and tranquilly resumed his stroll.

"The blockhead!" muttered Montparnasse.

Who was this goodman? The reader has, no doubt, already divined.

Montparnasse watched him with amazement, as he disappeared in the dusk. This contemplation was fatal to him.

While the old man was walking away, Gavroche drew near.

Gavroche had assured himself, with a sidelong glance, that Father Mabeuf was still sitting on his bench, probably sound asleep. Then the gamin emerged from his thicket, and began to crawl after Montparnasse in the dark, as the latter stood there motionless. In this manner he came up to Montparnasse without being seen or heard, gently insinuated his hand into the back pocket of that frock-coat of fine black cloth, seized the purse, withdrew his hand, and having recourse once more to his crawling, he slipped away like an adder through the shadows. Montparnasse, who had no reason to be on his guard, and who was engaged in thought for the first time in his life, perceived nothing. When Gavroche had once more attained the point where Father Mabeuf was, he flung the purse over the hedge, and fled as fast as his legs would carry him.

The purse fell on Father Mabeuf's foot. This commotion roused him.

He bent over and picked up the purse.

He did not understand in the least, and opened it.

The purse had two compartments; in one of them there was some small change; in the other lay six napoleons.

M. Mabeuf, in great alarm, referred the matter to his housekeeper.

"That has fallen from heaven," said Mother Plutarque.