BOOK SIXTH.--LITTLE GAVROCHE

CHAPTER I--THE MALICIOUS PLAYFULNESS OF THE WIND

Since 1823, when the tavern of Montfermeil was on the way to shipwreck and was being gradually engulfed, not in the abyss of a bankruptcy, but in the cesspool of petty debts, the Thenardier pair had had two other children; both males. That made five; two girls and three boys.

Madame Thenardier had got rid of the last two, while they were still young and very small, with remarkable luck.

Got rid of is the word. There was but a mere fragment of nature in that woman. A phenomenon, by the way, of which there is more than one example extant. Like the Marechale de La Mothe-Houdancourt, the Thenardier was a mother to her daughters only. There her maternity ended. Her hatred of the human race began with her own sons. In the direction of her sons her evil disposition was uncompromising, and her heart had a lugubrious wall in that quarter. As the reader has seen, she detested the eldest; she cursed the other two. Why? Because. The most terrible of motives, the most unanswerable of retorts--Because. "I have no need of a litter of squalling brats," said this mother.

Let us explain how the Thenardiers had succeeded in getting rid of their last two children; and even in drawing profit from the operation.

The woman Magnon, who was mentioned a few pages further back, was the same one who had succeeded in making old Gillenormand support the two children which she had had. She lived on the Quai des Celestins, at the corner of this ancient street of the Petit-Musc which afforded her the opportunity of changing her evil repute into good odor. The reader will remember the great epidemic of croup which ravaged the river districts of the Seine in Paris thirty-five years ago, and of which science took advantage to make experiments on a grand scale as to the efficacy of inhalations of alum, so beneficially replaced at the present day by the external tincture of iodine. During this epidemic, the Magnon lost both her boys, who were still very young, one in the morning, the other in the evening of the same day. This was a blow. These children were precious to their mother; they represented eighty francs a month. These eighty francs were punctually paid in the name of M. Gillenormand, by collector of his rents, M. Barge, a retired tip-staff, in the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile. The children dead, the income was at an end. The Magnon sought an expedient. In that dark free-masonry of evil of which she formed a part, everything is known, all secrets are kept, and all lend mutual aid. Magnon needed two children; the Thenardiers had two. The same sex, the same age. A good arrangement for the one, a good investment for the other. The little Thenardiers became little Magnons. Magnon quitted the Quai des Celestins and went to live in the Rue Clocheperce. In Paris, the identity which binds an individual to himself

is broken between one street and another.

The registry office being in no way warned, raised no objections, and the substitution was effected in the most simple manner in the world. Only, the Thenardier exacted for this loan of her children, ten francs a month, which Magnon promised to pay, and which she actually did pay. It is unnecessary to add that M. Gillenormand continued to perform his compact. He came to see the children every six months. He did not perceive the change. "Monsieur," Magnon said to him, "how much they resemble you!"

Thenardier, to whom avatars were easy, seized this occasion to become Jondrette. His two daughters and Gavroche had hardly had time to discover that they had two little brothers. When a certain degree of misery is reached, one is overpowered with a sort of spectral indifference, and one regards human beings as though they were spectres. Your nearest relations are often no more for you than vague shadowy forms, barely outlined against a nebulous background of life and easily confounded again with the invisible.

On the evening of the day when she had handed over her two little ones to Magnon, with express intention of renouncing them forever, the Thenardier had felt, or had appeared to feel, a scruple. She said to her husband: "But this is abandoning our children!" Thenardier, masterful and phlegmatic, cauterized the scruple with this saying: "Jean Jacques Rousseau did even better!" From scruples, the mother proceeded to

uneasiness: "But what if the police were to annoy us? Tell me, Monsieur Thenardier, is what we have done permissible?" Thenardier replied: "Everything is permissible. No one will see anything but true blue in it. Besides, no one has any interest in looking closely after children who have not a sou."

Magnon was a sort of fashionable woman in the sphere of crime. She was careful about her toilet. She shared her lodgings, which were furnished in an affected and wretched style, with a clever gallicized English thief. This English woman, who had become a naturalized Parisienne, recommended by very wealthy relations, intimately connected with the medals in the Library and Mademoiselle Mar's diamonds, became celebrated later on in judicial accounts. She was called Mamselle Miss.

The two little creatures who had fallen to Magnon had no reason to complain of their lot. Recommended by the eighty francs, they were well cared for, as is everything from which profit is derived; they were neither badly clothed, nor badly fed; they were treated almost like "little gentlemen,"--better by their false mother than by their real one. Magnon played the lady, and talked no thieves' slang in their presence.

Thus passed several years. Thenardier augured well from the fact. One day, he chanced to say to Magnon as she handed him his monthly stipend of ten francs: "The father must give them some education."

All at once, these two poor children, who had up to that time been protected tolerably well, even by their evil fate, were abruptly hurled into life and forced to begin it for themselves.

A wholesale arrest of malefactors, like that in the Jondrette garret, necessarily complicated by investigations and subsequent incarcerations, is a veritable disaster for that hideous and occult counter-society which pursues its existence beneath public society; an adventure of this description entails all sorts of catastrophes in that sombre world. The Thenardier catastrophe involved the catastrophe of Magnon.

One day, a short time after Magnon had handed to Eponine the note relating to the Rue Plumet, a sudden raid was made by the police in the Rue Clocheperce; Magnon was seized, as was also Mamselle Miss; and all the inhabitants of the house, which was of a suspicious character, were gathered into the net. While this was going on, the two little boys were playing in the back yard, and saw nothing of the raid. When they tried to enter the house again, they found the door fastened and the house empty. A cobbler opposite called them to him, and delivered to them a paper which "their mother" had left for them. On this paper there was an address: M. Barge, collector of rents, Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, No. 8. The proprietor of the stall said to them: "You cannot live here any longer. Go there. It is near by. The first street on the left. Ask your way from this paper."

The children set out, the elder leading the younger, and holding in his hand the paper which was to guide them. It was cold, and his benumbed little fingers could not close very firmly, and they did not keep a very good hold on the paper. At the corner of the Rue Clocheperce, a gust of wind tore it from him, and as night was falling, the child was not able to find it again.

They began to wander aimlessly through the streets.

CHAPTER II--IN WHICH LITTLE GAVROCHE EXTRACTS PROFIT FROM NAPOLEON THE GREAT

Spring in Paris is often traversed by harsh and piercing breezes which do not precisely chill but freeze one; these north winds which sadden the most beautiful days produce exactly the effect of those puffs of cold air which enter a warm room through the cracks of a badly fitting door or window. It seems as though the gloomy door of winter had remained ajar, and as though the wind were pouring through it. In the spring of 1832, the epoch when the first great epidemic of this century broke out in Europe, these north gales were more harsh and piercing than ever. It was a door even more glacial than that of winter which was ajar. It was the door of the sepulchre. In these winds one felt the breath of the cholera.

From a meteorological point of view, these cold winds possessed this peculiarity, that they did not preclude a strong electric tension. Frequent storms, accompanied by thunder and lightning, burst forth at this epoch.

One evening, when these gales were blowing rudely, to such a degree that January seemed to have returned and that the bourgeois had resumed their cloaks, Little Gavroche, who was always shivering gayly under his rags, was standing as though in ecstasy before a wig-maker's shop in the vicinity of the Orme-Saint-Gervais. He was adorned with a woman's woollen shawl, picked up no one knows where, and which he had converted

into a neck comforter. Little Gavroche appeared to be engaged in intent admiration of a wax bride, in a low-necked dress, and crowned with orange-flowers, who was revolving in the window, and displaying her smile to passers-by, between two argand lamps; but in reality, he was taking an observation of the shop, in order to discover whether he could not "prig" from the shop-front a cake of soap, which he would then proceed to sell for a sou to a "hair-dresser" in the suburbs. He had often managed to breakfast off of such a roll. He called his species of work, for which he possessed special aptitude, "shaving barbers."

While contemplating the bride, and eyeing the cake of soap, he muttered between his teeth: "Tuesday. It was not Tuesday. Was it Tuesday? Perhaps it was Tuesday. Yes, it was Tuesday."

No one has ever discovered to what this monologue referred.

Yes, perchance, this monologue had some connection with the last occasion on which he had dined, three days before, for it was now Friday.

The barber in his shop, which was warmed by a good stove, was shaving a customer and casting a glance from time to time at the enemy, that freezing and impudent street urchin both of whose hands were in his pockets, but whose mind was evidently unsheathed.

While Gavroche was scrutinizing the shop-window and the cakes of windsor

soap, two children of unequal stature, very neatly dressed, and still smaller than himself, one apparently about seven years of age, the other five, timidly turned the handle and entered the shop, with a request for something or other, alms possibly, in a plaintive murmur which resembled a groan rather than a prayer. They both spoke at once, and their words were unintelligible because sobs broke the voice of the younger, and the teeth of the elder were chattering with cold. The barber wheeled round with a furious look, and without abandoning his razor, thrust back the elder with his left hand and the younger with his knee, and slammed his door, saying: "The idea of coming in and freezing everybody for nothing!"

The two children resumed their march in tears. In the meantime, a cloud had risen; it had begun to rain.

Little Gavroche ran after them and accosted them:--

"What's the matter with you, brats?"

"We don't know where we are to sleep," replied the elder.

"Is that all?" said Gavroche. "A great matter, truly. The idea of bawling about that. They must be greenies!"

And adopting, in addition to his superiority, which was rather bantering, an accent of tender authority and gentle patronage:--

"Come along with me, young 'uns!"

"Yes, sir," said the elder.

And the two children followed him as they would have followed an archbishop. They had stopped crying.

Gavroche led them up the Rue Saint-Antoine in the direction of the Bastille.

As Gavroche walked along, he cast an indignant backward glance at the barber's shop.

"That fellow has no heart, the whiting,"[35] he muttered. "He's an Englishman."

A woman who caught sight of these three marching in a file, with Gavroche at their head, burst into noisy laughter. This laugh was wanting in respect towards the group.

"Good day, Mamselle Omnibus," said Gavroche to her.

An instant later, the wig-maker occurred to his mind once more, and he added:--

"I am making a mistake in the beast; he's not a whiting, he's a serpent. Barber, I'll go and fetch a locksmith, and I'll have a bell hung to your tail."

This wig-maker had rendered him aggressive. As he strode over a gutter, he apostrophized a bearded portress who was worthy to meet Faust on the Brocken, and who had a broom in her hand.

"Madam," said he, "so you are going out with your horse?"

And thereupon, he spattered the polished boots of a pedestrian.

"You scamp!" shouted the furious pedestrian.

Gavroche elevated his nose above his shawl.

"Is Monsieur complaining?"

"Of you!" ejaculated the man.

"The office is closed," said Gavroche, "I do not receive any more complaints."

In the meanwhile, as he went on up the street, he perceived a beggar-girl, thirteen or fourteen years old, and clad in so short a gown that her knees were visible, lying thoroughly chilled under a

porte-cochere. The little girl was getting to be too old for such a thing. Growth does play these tricks. The petticoat becomes short at the moment when nudity becomes indecent.

"Poor girl!" said Gavroche. "She hasn't even trousers. Hold on, take this."

And unwinding all the comfortable woollen which he had around his neck, he flung it on the thin and purple shoulders of the beggar-girl, where the scarf became a shawl once more.

The child stared at him in astonishment, and received the shawl in silence. When a certain stage of distress has been reached in his misery, the poor man no longer groans over evil, no longer returns thanks for good.

That done: "Brrr!" said Gavroche, who was shivering more than Saint Martin, for the latter retained one-half of his cloak.

At this brrr! the downpour of rain, redoubled in its spite, became furious. The wicked skies punish good deeds.

"Ah, come now!" exclaimed Gavroche, "what's the meaning of this? It's re-raining! Good Heavens, if it goes on like this, I shall stop my subscription."

And he set out on the march once more.

"It's all right," he resumed, casting a glance at the beggar-girl, as she coiled up under the shawl, "she's got a famous peel."

And looking up at the clouds he exclaimed:--

"Caught!"

The two children followed close on his heels.

As they were passing one of these heavy grated lattices, which indicate a baker's shop, for bread is put behind bars like gold, Gavroche turned round:--

"Ah, by the way, brats, have we dined?"

"Monsieur," replied the elder, "we have had nothing to eat since this morning."

"So you have neither father nor mother?" resumed Gavroche majestically.

"Excuse us, sir, we have a papa and a mamma, but we don't know where they are."

"Sometimes that's better than knowing where they are," said Gavroche,

who was a thinker.

"We have been wandering about these two hours," continued the elder, "we have hunted for things at the corners of the streets, but we have found nothing."

"I know," ejaculated Gavroche, "it's the dogs who eat everything."

He went on, after a pause:--

"Ah! we have lost our authors. We don't know what we have done with them. This should not be, gamins. It's stupid to let old people stray off like that. Come now! we must have a snooze all the same."

However, he asked them no questions. What was more simple than that they should have no dwelling place!

The elder of the two children, who had almost entirely recovered the prompt heedlessness of childhood, uttered this exclamation:--

"It's queer, all the same. Mamma told us that she would take us to get a blessed spray on Palm Sunday."

"Bosh," said Gavroche.

"Mamma," resumed the elder, "is a lady who lives with Mamselle Miss."

"Tanflute!" retorted Gavroche.

Meanwhile he had halted, and for the last two minutes he had been feeling and fumbling in all sorts of nooks which his rags contained.

At last he tossed his head with an air intended to be merely satisfied, but which was triumphant, in reality.

"Let us be calm, young 'uns. Here's supper for three."

And from one of his pockets he drew forth a sou.

Without allowing the two urchins time for amazement, he pushed both of them before him into the baker's shop, and flung his sou on the counter, crying:--

"Boy! five centimes' worth of bread."

The baker, who was the proprietor in person, took up a loaf and a knife.

"In three pieces, my boy!" went on Gavroche.

And he added with dignity:--

"There are three of us."

And seeing that the baker, after scrutinizing the three customers, had taken down a black loaf, he thrust his finger far up his nose with an inhalation as imperious as though he had had a pinch of the great Frederick's snuff on the tip of his thumb, and hurled this indignant apostrophe full in the baker's face:--

"Keksekca?"

Those of our readers who might be tempted to espy in this interpellation of Gavroche's to the baker a Russian or a Polish word, or one of those savage cries which the Yoways and the Botocudos hurl at each other from bank to bank of a river, athwart the solitudes, are warned that it is a word which they [our readers] utter every day, and which takes the place of the phrase: "Qu'est-ce que c'est que cela?" The baker understood perfectly, and replied:--

"Well! It's bread, and very good bread of the second quality."

"You mean larton brutal [black bread]!" retorted Gavroche, calmly and coldly disdainful. "White bread, boy! white bread [larton savonne]! I'm standing treat."

The baker could not repress a smile, and as he cut the white bread he surveyed them in a compassionate way which shocked Gavroche.

"Come, now, baker's boy!" said he, "what are you taking our measure like that for?"

All three of them placed end to end would have hardly made a measure.

When the bread was cut, the baker threw the sou into his drawer, and Gavroche said to the two children:--

"Grub away."

The little boys stared at him in surprise.

Gavroche began to laugh.

"Ah! hullo, that's so! they don't understand yet, they're too small."

And he repeated:--

"Eat away."

At the same time, he held out a piece of bread to each of them.

And thinking that the elder, who seemed to him the more worthy of his conversation, deserved some special encouragement and ought to be relieved from all hesitation to satisfy his appetite, he added, as be handed him the largest share:--

"Ram that into your muzzle."

One piece was smaller than the others; he kept this for himself.

The poor children, including Gavroche, were famished. As they tore their bread apart in big mouthfuls, they blocked up the shop of the baker, who, now that they had paid their money, looked angrily at them.

"Let's go into the street again," said Gavroche.

They set off once more in the direction of the Bastille.

From time to time, as they passed the lighted shop-windows, the smallest halted to look at the time on a leaden watch which was suspended from his neck by a cord.

"Well, he is a very green 'un," said Gavroche.

Then, becoming thoughtful, he muttered between his teeth:--

"All the same, if I had charge of the babes I'd lock 'em up better than that."

Just as they were finishing their morsel of bread, and had reached the angle of that gloomy Rue des Ballets, at the other end of which the low

and threatening wicket of La Force was visible:--

"Hullo, is that you, Gavroche?" said some one.

"Hullo, is that you, Montparnasse?" said Gavroche.

A man had just accosted the street urchin, and the man was no other than Montparnasse in disguise, with blue spectacles, but recognizable to Gavroche.

"The bow-wows!" went on Gavroche, "you've got a hide the color of a linseed plaster, and blue specs like a doctor. You're putting on style, 'pon my word!"

"Hush!" ejaculated Montparnasse, "not so loud."

And he drew Gavroche hastily out of range of the lighted shops.

The two little ones followed mechanically, holding each other by the hand.

When they were ensconced under the arch of a portecochere, sheltered from the rain and from all eyes:--

"Do you know where I'm going?" demanded Montparnasse.

"To the Abbey of Ascend-with-Regret,"[36] replied Gavroche.

"Joker!"

And Montparnasse went on:--

"I'm going to find Babet."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gavroche, "so her name is Babet."

Montparnasse lowered his voice:--

"Not she, he."

"Ah! Babet."

"Yes, Babet."

"I thought he was buckled."

"He has undone the buckle," replied Montparnasse.

And he rapidly related to the gamin how, on the morning of that very day, Babet, having been transferred to La Conciergerie, had made his escape, by turning to the left instead of to the right in "the police office."

Gavroche expressed his admiration for this skill.

"What a dentist!" he cried.

Montparnasse added a few details as to Babet's flight, and ended with:--

"Oh! That's not all."

Gavroche, as he listened, had seized a cane that Montparnasse held in his hand, and mechanically pulled at the upper part, and the blade of a dagger made its appearance.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, pushing the dagger back in haste, "you have brought along your gendarme disguised as a bourgeois."

Montparnasse winked.

"The deuce!" resumed Gavroche, "so you're going to have a bout with the bobbies?"

"You can't tell," replied Montparnasse with an indifferent air. "It's always a good thing to have a pin about one."

Gavroche persisted:--

"What are you up to to-night?"

Again Montparnasse took a grave tone, and said, mouthing every syllable: "Things."

And abruptly changing the conversation:--

"By the way!"

"What?"

"Something happened t'other day. Fancy. I meet a bourgeois. He makes me a present of a sermon and his purse. I put it in my pocket. A minute later, I feel in my pocket. There's nothing there."

"Except the sermon," said Gavroche.

"But you," went on Montparnasse, "where are you bound for now?"

Gavroche pointed to his two proteges, and said:--

"I'm going to put these infants to bed."

"Whereabouts is the bed?"

"At my house."

"Where's your house?"

"At my house."

"So you have a lodging?"

"Yes, I have."

"And where is your lodging?"

"In the elephant," said Gavroche.

Montparnasse, though not naturally inclined to astonishment, could not restrain an exclamation.

"In the elephant!"

"Well, yes, in the elephant!" retorted Gavroche. "Kekcaa?"

This is another word of the language which no one writes, and which every one speaks.

Kekcaa signifies: Quest que c'est que cela a? [What's the matter with that?]

The urchin's profound remark recalled Montparnasse to calmness and good sense. He appeared to return to better sentiments with regard to Gavroche's lodging.

"Of course," said he, "yes, the elephant. Is it comfortable there?"

"Very," said Gavroche. "It's really bully there. There ain't any draughts, as there are under the bridges."

"How do you get in?"

"Oh, I get in."

"So there is a hole?" demanded Montparnasse.

"Parbleu! I should say so. But you mustn't tell. It's between the fore legs. The bobbies haven't seen it."

"And you climb up? Yes, I understand."

"A turn of the hand, cric, crac, and it's all over, no one there."

After a pause, Gavroche added:--

"I shall have a ladder for these children."

Montparnasse burst out laughing:--

"Where the devil did you pick up those young 'uns?"

Gavroche replied with great simplicity:--

"They are some brats that a wig-maker made me a present of."

Meanwhile, Montparnasse had fallen to thinking:--

"You recognized me very readily," he muttered.

He took from his pocket two small objects which were nothing more than two quills wrapped in cotton, and thrust one up each of his nostrils. This gave him a different nose.

"That changes you," remarked Gavroche, "you are less homely so, you ought to keep them on all the time."

Montparnasse was a handsome fellow, but Gavroche was a tease.

"Seriously," demanded Montparnasse, "how do you like me so?"

The sound of his voice was different also. In a twinkling, Montparnasse had become unrecognizable.

"Oh! Do play Porrichinelle for us!" exclaimed Gavroche.

The two children, who had not been listening up to this point, being occupied themselves in thrusting their fingers up their noses, drew near at this name, and stared at Montparnasse with dawning joy and admiration.

Unfortunately, Montparnasse was troubled.

He laid his hand on Gavroche's shoulder, and said to him, emphasizing his words: "Listen to what I tell you, boy! if I were on the square with my dog, my knife, and my wife, and if you were to squander ten sous on me, I wouldn't refuse to work, but this isn't Shrove Tuesday."

This odd phrase produced a singular effect on the gamin. He wheeled round hastily, darted his little sparkling eyes about him with profound attention, and perceived a police sergeant standing with his back to them a few paces off. Gavroche allowed an: "Ah! good!" to escape him, but immediately suppressed it, and shaking Montparnasse's hand:--

"Well, good evening," said he, "I'm going off to my elephant with my brats. Supposing that you should need me some night, you can come and hunt me up there. I lodge on the entresol. There is no porter. You will inquire for Monsieur Gavroche."

"Very good," said Montparnasse.

And they parted, Montparnasse betaking himself in the direction of the Greve, and Gavroche towards the Bastille. The little one of five, dragged along by his brother who was dragged by Gavroche, turned his head back several times to watch "Porrichinelle" as he went.

The ambiguous phrase by means of which Montparnasse had warned Gavroche of the presence of the policeman, contained no other talisman than the assonance dig repeated five or six times in different forms. This syllable, dig, uttered alone or artistically mingled with the words of a phrase, means: "Take care, we can no longer talk freely." There was besides, in Montparnasse's sentence, a literary beauty which was lost upon Gavroche, that is mon dogue, ma dague et ma digue, a slang expression of the Temple, which signifies my dog, my knife, and my wife, greatly in vogue among clowns and the red-tails in the great century when Moliere wrote and Callot drew.

Twenty years ago, there was still to be seen in the southwest corner of the Place de la Bastille, near the basin of the canal, excavated in the ancient ditch of the fortress-prison, a singular monument, which has already been effaced from the memories of Parisians, and which deserved to leave some trace, for it was the idea of a "member of the Institute, the General-in-chief of the army of Egypt."

We say monument, although it was only a rough model. But this model itself, a marvellous sketch, the grandiose skeleton of an idea of

Napoleon's, which successive gusts of wind have carried away and thrown, on each occasion, still further from us, had become historical and had acquired a certain definiteness which contrasted with its provisional aspect. It was an elephant forty feet high, constructed of timber and masonry, bearing on its back a tower which resembled a house, formerly painted green by some dauber, and now painted black by heaven, the wind, and time. In this deserted and unprotected corner of the place, the broad brow of the colossus, his trunk, his tusks, his tower, his enormous crupper, his four feet, like columns produced, at night, under the starry heavens, a surprising and terrible form. It was a sort of symbol of popular force. It was sombre, mysterious, and immense. It was some mighty, visible phantom, one knew not what, standing erect beside the invisible spectre of the Bastille.

Few strangers visited this edifice, no passer-by looked at it. It was falling into ruins; every season the plaster which detached itself from its sides formed hideous wounds upon it. "The aediles," as the expression ran in elegant dialect, had forgotten it ever since 1814. There it stood in its corner, melancholy, sick, crumbling, surrounded by a rotten palisade, soiled continually by drunken coachmen; cracks meandered athwart its belly, a lath projected from its tail, tall grass flourished between its legs; and, as the level of the place had been rising all around it for a space of thirty years, by that slow and continuous movement which insensibly elevates the soil of large towns, it stood in a hollow, and it looked as though the ground were giving way beneath it. It was unclean, despised, repulsive, and superb, ugly in the

eyes of the bourgeois, melancholy in the eyes of the thinker. There was something about it of the dirt which is on the point of being swept out, and something of the majesty which is on the point of being decapitated. As we have said, at night, its aspect changed. Night is the real element of everything that is dark. As soon as twilight descended, the old elephant became transfigured; he assumed a tranquil and redoubtable appearance in the formidable serenity of the shadows. Being of the past, he belonged to night; and obscurity was in keeping with his grandeur.

This rough, squat, heavy, hard, austere, almost misshapen, but assuredly majestic monument, stamped with a sort of magnificent and savage gravity, has disappeared, and left to reign in peace, a sort of gigantic stove, ornamented with its pipe, which has replaced the sombre fortress with its nine towers, very much as the bourgeoisie replaces the feudal classes. It is quite natural that a stove should be the symbol of an epoch in which a pot contains power. This epoch will pass away, people have already begun to understand that, if there can be force in a boiler, there can be no force except in the brain; in other words, that which leads and drags on the world, is not locomotives, but ideas. Harness locomotives to ideas,--that is well done; but do not mistake the horse for the rider.

At all events, to return to the Place de la Bastille, the architect of this elephant succeeded in making a grand thing out of plaster; the architect of the stove has succeeded in making a pretty thing out of bronze.

This stove-pipe, which has been baptized by a sonorous name, and called the column of July, this monument of a revolution that miscarried, was still enveloped in 1832, in an immense shirt of woodwork, which we regret, for our part, and by a vast plank enclosure, which completed the task of isolating the elephant.

It was towards this corner of the place, dimly lighted by the reflection of a distant street lamp, that the gamin guided his two "brats."

The reader must permit us to interrupt ourselves here and to remind him that we are dealing with simple reality, and that twenty years ago, the tribunals were called upon to judge, under the charge of vagabondage, and mutilation of a public monument, a child who had been caught asleep in this very elephant of the Bastille. This fact noted, we proceed.

On arriving in the vicinity of the colossus, Gavroche comprehended the effect which the infinitely great might produce on the infinitely small, and said:--

"Don't be scared, infants."

Then he entered through a gap in the fence into the elephant's enclosure and helped the young ones to clamber through the breach. The two children, somewhat frightened, followed Gavroche without uttering a word, and confided themselves to this little Providence in rags which

had given them bread and had promised them a shelter.

There, extended along the fence, lay a ladder which by day served the laborers in the neighboring timber-yard. Gavroche raised it with remarkable vigor, and placed it against one of the elephant's forelegs. Near the point where the ladder ended, a sort of black hole in the belly of the colossus could be distinguished.

Gavroche pointed out the ladder and the hole to his guests, and said to them:--

"Climb up and go in."

The two little boys exchanged terrified glances.

"You're afraid, brats!" exclaimed Gavroche.

And he added:--

"You shall see!"

He clasped the rough leg of the elephant, and in a twinkling, without deigning to make use of the ladder, he had reached the aperture. He entered it as an adder slips through a crevice, and disappeared within, and an instant later, the two children saw his head, which looked pale, appear vaguely, on the edge of the shadowy hole, like a wan and whitish

spectre.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "climb up, young 'uns! You'll see how snug it is here! Come up, you!" he said to the elder, "I'll lend you a hand."

The little fellows nudged each other, the gamin frightened and inspired them with confidence at one and the same time, and then, it was raining very hard. The elder one undertook the risk. The younger, on seeing his brother climbing up, and himself left alone between the paws of this huge beast, felt greatly inclined to cry, but he did not dare.

The elder lad climbed, with uncertain steps, up the rungs of the ladder; Gavroche, in the meanwhile, encouraging him with exclamations like a fencing-master to his pupils, or a muleteer to his mules.

"Don't be afraid!--That's it!--Come on!--Put your feet there!--Give us your hand here!--Boldly!"

And when the child was within reach, he seized him suddenly and vigorously by the arm, and pulled him towards him.

"Nabbed!" said he.

The brat had passed through the crack.

"Now," said Gavroche, "wait for me. Be so good as to take a seat,

Monsieur."

And making his way out of the hole as he had entered it, he slipped down the elephant's leg with the agility of a monkey, landed on his feet in the grass, grasped the child of five round the body, and planted him fairly in the middle of the ladder, then he began to climb up behind him, shouting to the elder:--

"I'm going to boost him, do you tug."

And in another instant, the small lad was pushed, dragged, pulled, thrust, stuffed into the hole, before he had time to recover himself, and Gavroche, entering behind him, and repulsing the ladder with a kick which sent it flat on the grass, began to clap his hands and to cry:--

"Here we are! Long live General Lafayette!"

This explosion over, he added:--

"Now, young 'uns, you are in my house."

Gavroche was at home, in fact.

Oh, unforeseen utility of the useless! Charity of great things! Goodness of giants! This huge monument, which had embodied an idea of the Emperor's, had become the box of a street urchin. The brat had been

accepted and sheltered by the colossus. The bourgeois decked out in their Sunday finery who passed the elephant of the Bastille, were fond of saying as they scanned it disdainfully with their prominent eyes: "What's the good of that?" It served to save from the cold, the frost, the hail, and rain, to shelter from the winds of winter, to preserve from slumber in the mud which produces fever, and from slumber in the snow which produces death, a little being who had no father, no mother, no bread, no clothes, no refuge. It served to receive the innocent whom society repulsed. It served to diminish public crime. It was a lair open to one against whom all doors were shut. It seemed as though the miserable old mastodon, invaded by vermin and oblivion, covered with warts, with mould, and ulcers, tottering, worm-eaten, abandoned, condemned, a sort of mendicant colossus, asking alms in vain with a benevolent look in the midst of the cross-roads, had taken pity on that other mendicant, the poor pygmy, who roamed without shoes to his feet, without a roof over his head, blowing on his fingers, clad in rags, fed on rejected scraps. That was what the elephant of the Bastille was good for. This idea of Napoleon, disdained by men, had been taken back by God. That which had been merely illustrious, had become august. In order to realize his thought, the Emperor should have had porphyry, brass, iron, gold, marble; the old collection of planks, beams and plaster sufficed for God. The Emperor had had the dream of a genius; in that Titanic elephant, armed, prodigious, with trunk uplifted, bearing its tower and scattering on all sides its merry and vivifying waters, he wished to incarnate the people. God had done a grander thing with it, he had lodged a child there.

The hole through which Gavroche had entered was a breach which was hardly visible from the outside, being concealed, as we have stated, beneath the elephant's belly, and so narrow that it was only cats and homeless children who could pass through it.

"Let's begin," said Gavroche, "by telling the porter that we are not at home."

And plunging into the darkness with the assurance of a person who is well acquainted with his apartments, he took a plank and stopped up the aperture.

Again Gavroche plunged into the obscurity. The children heard the crackling of the match thrust into the phosphoric bottle. The chemical match was not yet in existence; at that epoch the Fumade steel represented progress.

A sudden light made them blink; Gavroche had just managed to ignite one of those bits of cord dipped in resin which are called cellar rats. The cellar rat, which emitted more smoke than light, rendered the interior of the elephant confusedly visible.

Gavroche's two guests glanced about them, and the sensation which they experienced was something like that which one would feel if shut up in the great tun of Heidelberg, or, better still, like what Jonah must have

felt in the biblical belly of the whale. An entire and gigantic skeleton appeared enveloping them. Above, a long brown beam, whence started at regular distances, massive, arching ribs, represented the vertebral column with its sides, stalactites of plaster depended from them like entrails, and vast spiders' webs stretching from side to side, formed dirty diaphragms. Here and there, in the corners, were visible large blackish spots which had the appearance of being alive, and which changed places rapidly with an abrupt and frightened movement.

Fragments which had fallen from the elephant's back into his belly had filled up the cavity, so that it was possible to walk upon it as on a floor.

The smaller child nestled up against his brother, and whispered to him:--

"It's black."

This remark drew an exclamation from Gavroche. The petrified air of the two brats rendered some shock necessary.

"What's that you are gabbling about there?" he exclaimed. "Are you scoffing at me? Are you turning up your noses? Do you want the tuileries? Are you brutes? Come, say! I warn you that I don't belong to the regiment of simpletons. Ah, come now, are you brats from the Pope's establishment?"

A little roughness is good in cases of fear. It is reassuring. The two children drew close to Gavroche.

Gavroche, paternally touched by this confidence, passed from grave to gentle, and addressing the smaller:--

"Stupid," said he, accenting the insulting word, with a caressing intonation, "it's outside that it is black. Outside it's raining, here it does not rain; outside it's cold, here there's not an atom of wind; outside there are heaps of people, here there's no one; outside there ain't even the moon, here there's my candle, confound it!"

The two children began to look upon the apartment with less terror; but Gavroche allowed them no more time for contemplation.

"Quick," said he.

And he pushed them towards what we are very glad to be able to call the end of the room.

There stood his bed.

Gavroche's bed was complete; that is to say, it had a mattress, a blanket, and an alcove with curtains.

The mattress was a straw mat, the blanket a rather large strip of gray woollen stuff, very warm and almost new. This is what the alcove consisted of:--

Three rather long poles, thrust into and consolidated, with the rubbish which formed the floor, that is to say, the belly of the elephant, two in front and one behind, and united by a rope at their summits, so as to form a pyramidal bundle. This cluster supported a trellis-work of brass wire which was simply placed upon it, but artistically applied, and held by fastenings of iron wire, so that it enveloped all three holes. A row of very heavy stones kept this network down to the floor so that nothing could pass under it. This grating was nothing else than a piece of the brass screens with which aviaries are covered in menageries. Gavroche's bed stood as in a cage, behind this net. The whole resembled an Esquimaux tent.

This trellis-work took the place of curtains.

Gavroche moved aside the stones which fastened the net down in front, and the two folds of the net which lapped over each other fell apart.

"Down on all fours, brats!" said Gavroche.

He made his guests enter the cage with great precaution, then he crawled in after them, pulled the stones together, and closed the opening hermetically again.

All three had stretched out on the mat. Gavroche still had the cellar rat in his hand.

"Now," said he, "go to sleep! I'm going to suppress the candelabra."

"Monsieur," the elder of the brothers asked Gavroche, pointing to the netting, "what's that for?"

"That," answered Gavroche gravely, "is for the rats. Go to sleep!"

Nevertheless, he felt obliged to add a few words of instruction for the benefit of these young creatures, and he continued:--

"It's a thing from the Jardin des Plantes. It's used for fierce animals. There's a whole shopful of them there. All you've got to do is to climb over a wall, crawl through a window, and pass through a door. You can get as much as you want."

As he spoke, he wrapped the younger one up bodily in a fold of the blanket, and the little one murmured:--

"Oh! how good that is! It's warm!"

Gavroche cast a pleased eye on the blanket.

"That's from the Jardin des Plantes, too," said he. "I took that from the monkeys."

And, pointing out to the eldest the mat on which he was lying, a very thick and admirably made mat, he added:--

"That belonged to the giraffe."

After a pause he went on:--

"The beasts had all these things. I took them away from them. It didn't trouble them. I told them: 'It's for the elephant.'"

He paused, and then resumed:--

"You crawl over the walls and you don't care a straw for the government. So there now!"

The two children gazed with timid and stupefied respect on this intrepid and ingenious being, a vagabond like themselves, isolated like themselves, frail like themselves, who had something admirable and all-powerful about him, who seemed supernatural to them, and whose physiognomy was composed of all the grimaces of an old mountebank, mingled with the most ingenuous and charming smiles.

"Monsieur," ventured the elder timidly, "you are not afraid of the

police, then?"

Gavroche contented himself with replying:--

"Brat! Nobody says 'police,' they say 'bobbies.'"

The smaller had his eyes wide open, but he said nothing. As he was on the edge of the mat, the elder being in the middle, Gavroche tucked the blanket round him as a mother might have done, and heightened the mat under his head with old rags, in such a way as to form a pillow for the child. Then he turned to the elder:--

"Hey! We're jolly comfortable here, ain't we?"

"Ah, yes!" replied the elder, gazing at Gavroche with the expression of a saved angel.

The two poor little children who had been soaked through, began to grow warm once more.

"Ah, by the way," continued Gavroche, "what were you bawling about?"

And pointing out the little one to his brother:--

"A mite like that, I've nothing to say about, but the idea of a big fellow like you crying! It's idiotic; you looked like a calf."

"Gracious," replied the child, "we have no lodging."

"Bother!" retorted Gavroche, "you don't say 'lodgings,' you say 'crib.'"

"And then, we were afraid of being alone like that at night."

"You don't say 'night,' you say 'darkmans.'"

"Thank you, sir," said the child.

"Listen," went on Gavroche, "you must never bawl again over anything. I'll take care of you. You shall see what fun we'll have. In summer, we'll go to the Glaciere with Navet, one of my pals, we'll bathe in the Gare, we'll run stark naked in front of the rafts on the bridge at Austerlitz,--that makes the laundresses raging. They scream, they get mad, and if you only knew how ridiculous they are! We'll go and see the man-skeleton. And then I'll take you to the play. I'll take you to see Frederick Lemaitre. I have tickets, I know some of the actors, I even played in a piece once. There were a lot of us fellers, and we ran under a cloth, and that made the sea. I'll get you an engagement at my theatre. We'll go to see the savages. They ain't real, those savages ain't. They wear pink tights that go all in wrinkles, and you can see where their elbows have been darned with white. Then, we'll go to the Opera. We'll get in with the hired applauders. The Opera claque is well managed. I wouldn't associate with the claque on the boulevard. At the

Opera, just fancy! some of them pay twenty sous, but they're ninnies. They're called dishclouts. And then we'll go to see the guillotine work. I'll show you the executioner. He lives in the Rue des Marais. Monsieur Sanson. He has a letter-box at his door. Ah! we'll have famous fun!"

At that moment a drop of wax fell on Gavroche's finger, and recalled him to the realities of life.

"The deuce!" said he, "there's the wick giving out. Attention! I can't spend more than a sou a month on my lighting. When a body goes to bed, he must sleep. We haven't the time to read M. Paul de Kock's romances. And besides, the light might pass through the cracks of the porte-cochere, and all the bobbies need to do is to see it."

"And then," remarked the elder timidly,--he alone dared talk to Gavroche, and reply to him, "a spark might fall in the straw, and we must look out and not burn the house down."

"People don't say 'burn the house down,'" remarked Gavroche, "they say 'blaze the crib.'"

The storm increased in violence, and the heavy downpour beat upon the back of the colossus amid claps of thunder. "You're taken in, rain!" said Gavroche. "It amuses me to hear the decanter run down the legs of the house. Winter is a stupid; it wastes its merchandise, it loses its labor, it can't wet us, and that makes it kick up a row, old

water-carrier that it is."

This allusion to the thunder, all the consequences of which Gavroche, in his character of a philosopher of the nineteenth century, accepted, was followed by a broad flash of lightning, so dazzling that a hint of it entered the belly of the elephant through the crack. Almost at the same instant, the thunder rumbled with great fury. The two little creatures uttered a shriek, and started up so eagerly that the network came near being displaced, but Gavroche turned his bold face to them, and took advantage of the clap of thunder to burst into a laugh.

"Calm down, children. Don't topple over the edifice. That's fine, first-class thunder; all right. That's no slouch of a streak of lightning. Bravo for the good God! Deuce take it! It's almost as good as it is at the Ambigu."

That said, he restored order in the netting, pushed the two children gently down on the bed, pressed their knees, in order to stretch them out at full length, and exclaimed:--

"Since the good God is lighting his candle, I can blow out mine. Now, babes, now, my young humans, you must shut your peepers. It's very bad not to sleep. It'll make you swallow the strainer, or, as they say, in fashionable society, stink in the gullet. Wrap yourself up well in the hide! I'm going to put out the light. Are you ready?"

"Yes," murmured the elder, "I'm all right. I seem to have feathers under my head."

"People don't say 'head,'" cried Gavroche, "they say 'nut'."

The two children nestled close to each other, Gavroche finished arranging them on the mat, drew the blanket up to their very ears, then repeated, for the third time, his injunction in the hieratical tongue:--

"Shut your peepers!"

And he snuffed out his tiny light.

Hardly had the light been extinguished, when a peculiar trembling began to affect the netting under which the three children lay.

It consisted of a multitude of dull scratches which produced a metallic sound, as if claws and teeth were gnawing at the copper wire. This was accompanied by all sorts of little piercing cries.

The little five-year-old boy, on hearing this hubbub overhead, and chilled with terror, jogged his brother's elbow; but the elder brother had already shut his peepers, as Gavroche had ordered. Then the little one, who could no longer control his terror, questioned Gavroche, but in a very low tone, and with bated breath:--

"Sir?"

"Hey?" said Gavroche, who had just closed his eyes.

"What is that?"

"It's the rats," replied Gavroche.

And he laid his head down on the mat again.

The rats, in fact, who swarmed by thousands in the carcass of the elephant, and who were the living black spots which we have already mentioned, had been held in awe by the flame of the candle, so long as it had been lighted; but as soon as the cavern, which was the same as their city, had returned to darkness, scenting what the good story-teller Perrault calls "fresh meat," they had hurled themselves in throngs on Gavroche's tent, had climbed to the top of it, and had begun to bite the meshes as though seeking to pierce this new-fangled trap.

Still the little one could not sleep.

"Sir?" he began again.

"Hey?" said Gavroche.

"What are rats?"

"They are mice."

This explanation reassured the child a little. He had seen white mice in the course of his life, and he was not afraid of them. Nevertheless, he lifted up his voice once more.

"Sir?"

"Hey?" said Gavroche again.

"Why don't you have a cat?"

"I did have one," replied Gavroche, "I brought one here, but they ate her."

This second explanation undid the work of the first, and the little fellow began to tremble again.

The dialogue between him and Gavroche began again for the fourth time:--

"Monsieur?"

"Hey?"

"Who was it that was eaten?"

"The cat."

"And who ate the cat?"

"The rats."

"The mice?"

"Yes, the rats."

The child, in consternation, dismayed at the thought of mice which ate cats, pursued:--

"Sir, would those mice eat us?"

"Wouldn't they just!" ejaculated Gavroche.

The child's terror had reached its climax. But Gavroche added:--

"Don't be afraid. They can't get in. And besides, I'm here! Here, catch hold of my hand. Hold your tongue and shut your peepers!"

At the same time Gavroche grasped the little fellow's hand across his brother. The child pressed the hand close to him, and felt reassured. Courage and strength have these mysterious ways of communicating

themselves. Silence reigned round them once more, the sound of their voices had frightened off the rats; at the expiration of a few minutes, they came raging back, but in vain, the three little fellows were fast asleep and heard nothing more.

The hours of the night fled away. Darkness covered the vast Place de la Bastille. A wintry gale, which mingled with the rain, blew in gusts, the patrol searched all the doorways, alleys, enclosures, and obscure nooks, and in their search for nocturnal vagabonds they passed in silence before the elephant; the monster, erect, motionless, staring open-eyed into the shadows, had the appearance of dreaming happily over his good deed; and sheltered from heaven and from men the three poor sleeping children.

In order to understand what is about to follow, the reader must remember, that, at that epoch, the Bastille guard-house was situated at the other end of the square, and that what took place in the vicinity of the elephant could neither be seen nor heard by the sentinel.

Towards the end of that hour which immediately precedes the dawn, a man turned from the Rue Saint-Antoine at a run, made the circuit of the enclosure of the column of July, and glided between the palings until he was underneath the belly of the elephant. If any light had illuminated that man, it might have been divined from the thorough manner in which he was soaked that he had passed the night in the rain. Arrived beneath the elephant, he uttered a peculiar cry, which did not belong to any

human tongue, and which a paroquet alone could have imitated. Twice he repeated this cry, of whose orthography the following barely conveys an idea:--

"Kirikikiou!"

At the second cry, a clear, young, merry voice responded from the belly of the elephant:--

"Yes!"

Almost immediately, the plank which closed the hole was drawn aside, and gave passage to a child who descended the elephant's leg, and fell briskly near the man. It was Gavroche. The man was Montparnasse.

As for his cry of Kirikikiou,--that was, doubtless, what the child had meant, when he said:--

"You will ask for Monsieur Gavroche."

On hearing it, he had waked with a start, had crawled out of his "alcove," pushing apart the netting a little, and carefully drawing it together again, then he had opened the trap, and descended.

The man and the child recognized each other silently amid the gloom: Montparnasse confined himself to the remark:--

"We need you. Come, lend us a hand."

The lad asked for no further enlightenment.

"I'm with you," said he.

And both took their way towards the Rue Saint-Antoine, whence Montparnasse had emerged, winding rapidly through the long file of market-gardeners' carts which descend towards the markets at that hour.

The market-gardeners, crouching, half-asleep, in their wagons, amid the salads and vegetables, enveloped to their very eyes in their mufflers on account of the beating rain, did not even glance at these strange pedestrians.

CHAPTER III--THE VICISSITUDES OF FLIGHT

This is what had taken place that same night at the La Force:--

An escape had been planned between Babet, Brujon, Guelemer, and Thenardier, although Thenardier was in close confinement. Babet had arranged the matter for his own benefit, on the same day, as the reader has seen from Montparnasse's account to Gavroche. Montparnasse was to help them from outside.

Brujon, after having passed a month in the punishment cell, had had time, in the first place, to weave a rope, in the second, to mature a plan. In former times, those severe places where the discipline of the prison delivers the convict into his own hands, were composed of four stone walls, a stone ceiling, a flagged pavement, a camp bed, a grated window, and a door lined with iron, and were called dungeons; but the dungeon was judged to be too terrible; nowadays they are composed of an iron door, a grated window, a camp bed, a flagged pavement, four stone walls, and a stone ceiling, and are called chambers of punishment. A little light penetrates towards mid-day. The inconvenient point about these chambers which, as the reader sees, are not dungeons, is that they allow the persons who should be at work to think.

So Brujon meditated, and he emerged from the chamber of punishment with a rope. As he had the name of being very dangerous in the Charlemagne courtyard, he was placed in the New Building. The first thing he found

in the New Building was Guelemer, the second was a nail; Guelemer, that is to say, crime; a nail, that is to say, liberty. Brujon, of whom it is high time that the reader should have a complete idea, was, with an appearance of delicate health and a profoundly premeditated languor, a polished, intelligent sprig, and a thief, who had a caressing glance, and an atrocious smile. His glance resulted from his will, and his smile from his nature. His first studies in his art had been directed to roofs. He had made great progress in the industry of the men who tear off lead, who plunder the roofs and despoil the gutters by the process called double pickings.

The circumstance which put the finishing touch on the moment peculiarly favorable for an attempt at escape, was that the roofers were re-laying and re-jointing, at that very moment, a portion of the slates on the prison. The Saint-Bernard courtyard was no longer absolutely isolated from the Charlemagne and the Saint-Louis courts. Up above there were scaffoldings and ladders; in other words, bridges and stairs in the direction of liberty.

The New Building, which was the most cracked and decrepit thing to be seen anywhere in the world, was the weak point in the prison. The walls were eaten by saltpetre to such an extent that the authorities had been obliged to line the vaults of the dormitories with a sheathing of wood, because stones were in the habit of becoming detached and falling on the prisoners in their beds. In spite of this antiquity, the authorities committed the error of confining in the New Building the most

troublesome prisoners, of placing there "the hard cases," as they say in prison parlance.

The New Building contained four dormitories, one above the other, and a top story which was called the Bel-Air (Fine Air). A large chimney-flue, probably from some ancient kitchen of the Dukes de la Force, started from the groundfloor, traversed all four stories, cut the dormitories, where it figured as a flattened pillar, into two portions, and finally pierced the roof.

Guelemer and Brujon were in the same dormitory. They had been placed, by way of precaution, on the lower story. Chance ordained that the heads of their beds should rest against the chimney.

Thenardier was directly over their heads in the top story known as Fine-Air. The pedestrian who halts on the Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine, after passing the barracks of the firemen, in front of the porte-cochere of the bathing establishment, beholds a yard full of flowers and shrubs in wooden boxes, at the extremity of which spreads out a little white rotunda with two wings, brightened up with green shutters, the bucolic dream of Jean Jacques.

Not more than ten years ago, there rose above that rotunda an enormous black, hideous, bare wall by which it was backed up.

This was the outer wall of La Force.

This wall, beside that rotunda, was Milton viewed through Berquin.

Lofty as it was, this wall was overtopped by a still blacker roof, which could be seen beyond. This was the roof of the New Building. There one could descry four dormer-windows, guarded with bars; they were the windows of the Fine-Air.

A chimney pierced the roof; this was the chimney which traversed the dormitories.

The Bel-Air, that top story of the New Building, was a sort of large hall, with a Mansard roof, guarded with triple gratings and double doors of sheet iron, which were studded with enormous bolts. When one entered from the north end, one had on one's left the four dormer-windows, on one's right, facing the windows, at regular intervals, four square, tolerably vast cages, separated by narrow passages, built of masonry to about the height of the elbow, and the rest, up to the roof, of iron bars.

Thenardier had been in solitary confinement in one of these cages since the night of the 3d of February. No one was ever able to discover how, and by what connivance, he succeeded in procuring, and secreting a bottle of wine, invented, so it is said, by Desrues, with which a narcotic is mixed, and which the band of the Endormeurs, or Sleep-compellers, rendered famous.

There are, in many prisons, treacherous employees, half-jailers, half-thieves, who assist in escapes, who sell to the police an unfaithful service, and who turn a penny whenever they can.

On that same night, then, when Little Gavroche picked up the two lost children, Brujon and Guelemer, who knew that Babet, who had escaped that morning, was waiting for them in the street as well as Montparnasse, rose softly, and with the nail which Brujon had found, began to pierce the chimney against which their beds stood. The rubbish fell on Brujon's bed, so that they were not heard. Showers mingled with thunder shook the doors on their hinges, and created in the prison a terrible and opportune uproar. Those of the prisoners who woke, pretended to fall asleep again, and left Guelemer and Brujon to their own devices. Brujon was adroit; Guelemer was vigorous. Before any sound had reached the watcher, who was sleeping in the grated cell which opened into the dormitory, the wall had, been pierced, the chimney scaled, the iron grating which barred the upper orifice of the flue forced, and the two redoubtable ruffians were on the roof. The wind and rain redoubled, the roof was slippery.

"What a good night to leg it!" said Brujon.

An abyss six feet broad and eighty feet deep separated them from the surrounding wall. At the bottom of this abyss, they could see the musket of a sentinel gleaming through the gloom. They fastened one end of the

rope which Brujon had spun in his dungeon to the stumps of the iron bars which they had just wrenched off, flung the other over the outer wall, crossed the abyss at one bound, clung to the coping of the wall, got astride of it, let themselves slip, one after the other, along the rope, upon a little roof which touches the bath-house, pulled their rope after them, jumped down into the courtyard of the bath-house, traversed it, pushed open the porter's wicket, beside which hung his rope, pulled this, opened the porte-cochere, and found themselves in the street.

Three-quarters of an hour had not elapsed since they had risen in bed in the dark, nail in hand, and their project in their heads.

A few moments later they had joined Babet and Montparnasse, who were prowling about the neighborhood.

They had broken their rope in pulling it after them, and a bit of it remained attached to the chimney on the roof. They had sustained no other damage, however, than that of scratching nearly all the skin off their hands.

That night, Thenardier was warned, without any one being able to explain how, and was not asleep.

Towards one o'clock in the morning, the night being very dark, he saw two shadows pass along the roof, in the rain and squalls, in front of the dormer-window which was opposite his cage. One halted at the window,

long enough to dart in a glance. This was Brujon.

Thenardier recognized him, and understood. This was enough.

Thenardier, rated as a burglar, and detained as a measure of precaution under the charge of organizing a nocturnal ambush, with armed force, was kept in sight. The sentry, who was relieved every two hours, marched up and down in front of his cage with loaded musket. The Fine-Air was lighted by a skylight. The prisoner had on his feet fetters weighing fifty pounds. Every day, at four o'clock in the afternoon, a jailer, escorted by two dogs,--this was still in vogue at that time,--entered his cage, deposited beside his bed a loaf of black bread weighing two pounds, a jug of water, a bowl filled with rather thin bouillon, in which swam a few Mayagan beans, inspected his irons and tapped the bars. This man and his dogs made two visits during the night.

Thenardier had obtained permission to keep a sort of iron bolt which he used to spike his bread into a crack in the wall, "in order to preserve it from the rats," as he said. As Thenardier was kept in sight, no objection had been made to this spike. Still, it was remembered afterwards, that one of the jailers had said: "It would be better to let him have only a wooden spike."

At two o'clock in the morning, the sentinel, who was an old soldier, was relieved, and replaced by a conscript. A few moments later, the man with the dogs paid his visit, and went off without noticing anything, except,

possibly, the excessive youth and "the rustic air" of the "raw recruit." Two hours afterwards, at four o'clock, when they came to relieve the conscript, he was found asleep on the floor, lying like a log near Thenardier's cage. As for Thenardier, he was no longer there. There was a hole in the ceiling of his cage, and, above it, another hole in the roof. One of the planks of his bed had been wrenched off, and probably carried away with him, as it was not found. They also seized in his cell a half-empty bottle which contained the remains of the stupefying wine with which the soldier had been drugged. The soldier's bayonet had disappeared.

At the moment when this discovery was made, it was assumed that Thenardier was out of reach. The truth is, that he was no longer in the New Building, but that he was still in great danger.

Thenardier, on reaching the roof of the New Building, had found the remains of Brujon's rope hanging to the bars of the upper trap of the chimney, but, as this broken fragment was much too short, he had not been able to escape by the outer wall, as Brujon and Guelemer had done.

When one turns from the Rue des Ballets into the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, one almost immediately encounters a repulsive ruin. There stood on that spot, in the last century, a house of which only the back wall now remains, a regular wall of masonry, which rises to the height of the third story between the adjoining buildings. This ruin can be recognized by two large square windows which are still to be seen there; the middle

one, that nearest the right gable, is barred with a worm-eaten beam adjusted like a prop. Through these windows there was formerly visible a lofty and lugubrious wall, which was a fragment of the outer wall of La Force.

The empty space on the street left by the demolished house is half-filled by a fence of rotten boards, shored up by five stone posts. In this recess lies concealed a little shanty which leans against the portion of the ruin which has remained standing. The fence has a gate, which, a few years ago, was fastened only by a latch.

It was the crest of this ruin that Thenardier had succeeded in reaching, a little after one o'clock in the morning.

How had he got there? That is what no one has ever been able to explain or understand. The lightning must, at the same time, have hindered and helped him. Had he made use of the ladders and scaffoldings of the slaters to get from roof to roof, from enclosure to enclosure, from compartment to compartment, to the buildings of the Charlemagne court, then to the buildings of the Saint-Louis court, to the outer wall, and thence to the hut on the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile? But in that itinerary there existed breaks which seemed to render it an impossibility. Had he placed the plank from his bed like a bridge from the roof of the Fine-Air to the outer wall, and crawled flat, on his belly on the coping of the outer wall the whole distance round the prison as far as the hut? But the outer wall of La Force formed a crenellated and unequal line;

it mounted and descended, it dropped at the firemen's barracks, it rose towards the bath-house, it was cut in twain by buildings, it was not even of the same height on the Hotel Lamoignon as on the Rue Pavee; everywhere occurred falls and right angles; and then, the sentinels must have espied the dark form of the fugitive; hence, the route taken by Thenardier still remains rather inexplicable. In two manners, flight was impossible. Had Thenardier, spurred on by that thirst for liberty which changes precipices into ditches, iron bars into wattles of osier, a legless man into an athlete, a gouty man into a bird, stupidity into instinct, instinct into intelligence, and intelligence into genius, had Thenardier invented a third mode? No one has ever found out.

The marvels of escape cannot always be accounted for. The man who makes his escape, we repeat, is inspired; there is something of the star and of the lightning in the mysterious gleam of flight; the effort towards deliverance is no less surprising than the flight towards the sublime, and one says of the escaped thief: "How did he contrive to scale that wall?" in the same way that one says of Corneille: "Where did he find the means of dying?"

At all events, dripping with perspiration, drenched with rain, with his clothes hanging in ribbons, his hands flayed, his elbows bleeding, his knees torn, Thenardier had reached what children, in their figurative language, call the edge of the wall of the ruin, there he had stretched himself out at full length, and there his strength had failed him. A steep escarpment three stories high separated him from the pavement of

the street.

The rope which he had was too short.

There he waited, pale, exhausted, desperate with all the despair which he had undergone, still hidden by the night, but telling himself that the day was on the point of dawning, alarmed at the idea of hearing the neighboring clock of Saint-Paul strike four within a few minutes, an hour when the sentinel was relieved and when the latter would be found asleep under the pierced roof, staring in horror at a terrible depth, at the light of the street lanterns, the wet, black pavement, that pavement longed for yet frightful, which meant death, and which meant liberty.

He asked himself whether his three accomplices in flight had succeeded, if they had heard him, and if they would come to his assistance. He listened. With the exception of the patrol, no one had passed through the street since he had been there. Nearly the whole of the descent of the market-gardeners from Montreuil, from Charonne, from Vincennes, and from Bercy to the markets was accomplished through the Rue Saint-Antoine.

Four o'clock struck. Thenardier shuddered. A few moments later, that terrified and confused uproar which follows the discovery of an escape broke forth in the prison. The sound of doors opening and shutting, the creaking of gratings on their hinges, a tumult in the guard-house, the hoarse shouts of the turnkeys, the shock of musket-butts on the pavement

of the courts, reached his ears. Lights ascended and descended past the grated windows of the dormitories, a torch ran along the ridge-pole of the top story of the New Building, the firemen belonging in the barracks on the right had been summoned. Their helmets, which the torch lighted up in the rain, went and came along the roofs. At the same time, Thenardier perceived in the direction of the Bastille a wan whiteness lighting up the edge of the sky in doleful wise.

He was on top of a wall ten inches wide, stretched out under the heavy rains, with two gulfs to right and left, unable to stir, subject to the giddiness of a possible fall, and to the horror of a certain arrest, and his thoughts, like the pendulum of a clock, swung from one of these ideas to the other: "Dead if I fall, caught if I stay." In the midst of this anguish, he suddenly saw, the street being still dark, a man who was gliding along the walls and coming from the Rue Pavee, halt in the recess above which Thenardier was, as it were, suspended. Here this man was joined by a second, who walked with the same caution, then by a third, then by a fourth. When these men were re-united, one of them lifted the latch of the gate in the fence, and all four entered the enclosure in which the shanty stood. They halted directly under Thenardier. These men had evidently chosen this vacant space in order that they might consult without being seen by the passers-by or by the sentinel who guards the wicket of La Force a few paces distant. It must be added, that the rain kept this sentinel blocked in his box. Thenardier, not being able to distinguish their visages, lent an ear to their words with the desperate attention of a wretch who feels himself

lost.

Thenardier saw something resembling a gleam of hope flash before his eyes,--these men conversed in slang.

The first said in a low but distinct voice:--

"Let's cut. What are we up to here?"

The second replied: "It's raining hard enough to put out the very devil's fire. And the bobbies will be along instanter. There's a soldier on guard yonder. We shall get nabbed here."

These two words, icigo and icicaille, both of which mean ici, and which belong, the first to the slang of the barriers, the second to the slang of the Temple, were flashes of light for Thenardier. By the icigo he recognized Brujon, who was a prowler of the barriers, by the icicaille he knew Babet, who, among his other trades, had been an old-clothes broker at the Temple.

The antique slang of the great century is no longer spoken except in the Temple, and Babet was really the only person who spoke it in all its purity. Had it not been for the icicaille, Thenardier would not have recognized him, for he had entirely changed his voice.

In the meanwhile, the third man had intervened.

"There's no hurry yet, let's wait a bit. How do we know that he doesn't stand in need of us?"

By this, which was nothing but French, Thenardier recognized Montparnasse, who made it a point in his elegance to understand all slangs and to speak none of them.

As for the fourth, he held his peace, but his huge shoulders betrayed him. Thenardier did not hesitate. It was Guelemer.

Brujon replied almost impetuously but still in a low tone:--

"What are you jabbering about? The tavern-keeper hasn't managed to cut his stick. He don't tumble to the racket, that he don't! You have to be a pretty knowing cove to tear up your shirt, cut up your sheet to make a rope, punch holes in doors, get up false papers, make false keys, file your irons, hang out your cord, hide yourself, and disguise yourself! The old fellow hasn't managed to play it, he doesn't understand how to work the business."

Babet added, still in that classical slang which was spoken by Poulailler and Cartouche, and which is to the bold, new, highly colored and risky argot used by Brujon what the language of Racine is to the language of Andre Chenier:--

"Your tavern-keeper must have been nabbed in the act. You have to be knowing. He's only a greenhorn. He must have let himself be taken in by a bobby, perhaps even by a sheep who played it on him as his pal. Listen, Montparnasse, do you hear those shouts in the prison? You have seen all those lights. He's recaptured, there! He'll get off with twenty years. I ain't afraid, I ain't a coward, but there ain't anything more to do, or otherwise they'd lead us a dance. Don't get mad, come with us, let's go drink a bottle of old wine together."

"One doesn't desert one's friends in a scrape," grumbled Montparnasse.

"I tell you he's nabbed!" retorted Brujon. "At the present moment, the inn-keeper ain't worth a ha'penny. We can't do nothing for him. Let's be off. Every minute I think a bobby has got me in his fist."

Montparnasse no longer offered more than a feeble resistance; the fact is, that these four men, with the fidelity of ruffians who never abandon each other, had prowled all night long about La Force, great as was their peril, in the hope of seeing Thenardier make his appearance on the top of some wall. But the night, which was really growing too fine,--for the downpour was such as to render all the streets deserted,--the cold which was overpowering them, their soaked garments, their hole-ridden shoes, the alarming noise which had just burst forth in the prison, the hours which had elapsed, the patrol which they had encountered, the hope which was vanishing, all urged them to beat a retreat. Montparnasse himself, who was, perhaps, almost Thenardier's son-in-law, yielded. A

moment more, and they would be gone. Thenardier was panting on his wall like the shipwrecked sufferers of the Meduse on their raft when they beheld the vessel which had appeared in sight vanish on the horizon.

He dared not call to them; a cry might be heard and ruin everything. An idea occurred to him, a last idea, a flash of inspiration; he drew from his pocket the end of Brujon's rope, which he had detached from the chimney of the New Building, and flung it into the space enclosed by the fence.

This rope fell at their feet.

"A widow,"[37] said Babet.

"My tortouse!"[38] said Brujon.

"The tavern-keeper is there," said Montparnasse.

They raised their eyes. Thenardier thrust out his head a very little.

"Quick!" said Montparnasse, "have you the other end of the rope, Brujon?"

"Yes."

"Knot the two pieces together, we'll fling him the rope, he can fasten

it to the wall, and he'll have enough of it to get down with."

Thenardier ran the risk, and spoke:--

"I am paralyzed with cold."

"We'll warm you up."

"I can't budge."

"Let yourself slide, we'll catch you."

"My hands are benumbed."

"Only fasten the rope to the wall."

"I can't."

"Then one of us must climb up," said Montparnasse.

"Three stories!" ejaculated Brujon.

An ancient plaster flue, which had served for a stove that had been used in the shanty in former times, ran along the wall and mounted almost to the very spot where they could see Thenardier. This flue, then much damaged and full of cracks, has since fallen, but the marks of it are

still visible.

It was very narrow.

"One might get up by the help of that," said Montparnasse.

"By that flue?" exclaimed Babet, "a grown-up cove, never! it would take a brat."

"A brat must be got," resumed Brujon.

"Where are we to find a young 'un?" said Guelemer.

"Wait," said Montparnasse. "I've got the very article."

He opened the gate of the fence very softly, made sure that no one was passing along the street, stepped out cautiously, shut the gate behind him, and set off at a run in the direction of the Bastille.

Seven or eight minutes elapsed, eight thousand centuries to Thenardier; Babet, Brujon, and Guelemer did not open their lips; at last the gate opened once more, and Montparnasse appeared, breathless, and followed by Gavroche. The rain still rendered the street completely deserted.

Little Gavroche entered the enclosure and gazed at the forms of these ruffians with a tranquil air. The water was dripping from his hair.

Guelemer addressed him:--

"Are you a man, young 'un?"

Gavroche shrugged his shoulders, and replied:--

"A young 'un like me's a man, and men like you are babes."

"The brat's tongue's well hung!" exclaimed Babet.

"The Paris brat ain't made of straw," added Brujon.

"What do you want?" asked Gavroche.

Montparnasse answered:--

"Climb up that flue."

"With this rope," said Babet.

"And fasten it," continued Brujon.

"To the top of the wall," went on Babet.

"To the cross-bar of the window," added Brujon.

"And then?" said Gavroche.

"There!" said Guelemer.

The gamin examined the rope, the flue, the wall, the windows, and made that indescribable and disdainful noise with his lips which signifies:--

"Is that all!"

"There's a man up there whom you are to save," resumed Montparnasse.

"Will you?" began Brujon again.

"Greenhorn!" replied the lad, as though the question appeared a most unprecedented one to him.

And he took off his shoes.

Guelemer seized Gavroche by one arm, set him on the roof of the shanty, whose worm-eaten planks bent beneath the urchin's weight, and handed him the rope which Brujon had knotted together during Montparnasse's absence. The gamin directed his steps towards the flue, which it was easy to enter, thanks to a large crack which touched the roof. At the moment when he was on the point of ascending, Thenardier, who saw life and safety approaching, bent over the edge of the wall; the first light of dawn struck white upon his brow dripping with sweat, upon his livid

cheek-bones, his sharp and savage nose, his bristling gray beard, and Gavroche recognized him.

"Hullo! it's my father! Oh, that won't hinder."

And taking the rope in his teeth, he resolutely began the ascent.

He reached the summit of the hut, bestrode the old wall as though it had been a horse, and knotted the rope firmly to the upper cross-bar of the window.

A moment later, Thenardier was in the street.

As soon as he touched the pavement, as soon as he found himself out of danger, he was no longer either weary, or chilled or trembling; the terrible things from which he had escaped vanished like smoke, all that strange and ferocious mind awoke once more, and stood erect and free, ready to march onward.

These were this man's first words:--

"Now, whom are we to eat?"

It is useless to explain the sense of this frightfully transparent remark, which signifies both to kill, to assassinate, and to plunder. To eat, true sense: to devour.

"Let's get well into a corner," said Brujon. "Let's settle it in three words, and part at once. There was an affair that promised well in the Rue Plumet, a deserted street, an isolated house, an old rotten gate on a garden, and lone women."

"Well! why not?" demanded Thenardier.

"Your girl, Eponine, went to see about the matter," replied Babet.

"And she brought a biscuit to Magnon," added Guelemer. "Nothing to be made there."

"The girl's no fool," said Thenardier. "Still, it must be seen to."

"Yes, yes," said Brujon, "it must be looked up."

In the meanwhile, none of the men seemed to see Gavroche, who, during this colloquy, had seated himself on one of the fence-posts; he waited a few moments, thinking that perhaps his father would turn towards him, then he put on his shoes again, and said:--

"Is that all? You don't want any more, my men? Now you're out of your scrape. I'm off. I must go and get my brats out of bed."

And off he went.

The five men emerged, one after another, from the enclosure.

When Gavroche had disappeared at the corner of the Rue des Ballets, Babet took Thenardier aside.

"Did you take a good look at that young 'un?" he asked.

"What young 'un?"

"The one who climbed the wall and carried you the rope."

"Not particularly."

"Well, I don't know, but it strikes me that it was your son."

"Bah!" said Thenardier, "do you think so?"