BOOK ELEVENTH.--THE ATOM FRATERNIZES WITH THE HURRICANE

CHAPTER I--SOME EXPLANATIONS WITH REGARD TO THE ORIGIN OF GAVROCHE'S POETRY. THE INFLUENCE OF AN ACADEMICIAN ON THIS POETRY

At the instant when the insurrection, arising from the shock of the populace and the military in front of the Arsenal, started a movement in advance and towards the rear in the multitude which was following the hearse and which, through the whole length of the boulevards, weighed, so to speak, on the head of the procession, there arose a frightful ebb. The rout was shaken, their ranks were broken, all ran, fled, made their escape, some with shouts of attack, others with the pallor of flight. The great river which covered the boulevards divided in a twinkling, overflowed to right and left, and spread in torrents over two hundred streets at once with the roar of a sewer that has broken loose.

At that moment, a ragged child who was coming down through the Rue Menilmontant, holding in his hand a branch of blossoming laburnum which he had just plucked on the heights of Belleville, caught sight of an old holster-pistol in the show-window of a bric-a-brac merchant's shop.

"Mother What's-your-name, I'm going to borrow your machine."

And off he ran with the pistol.

Two minutes later, a flood of frightened bourgeois who were fleeing through the Rue Amelot and the Rue Basse, encountered the lad brandishing his pistol and singing:--

La nuit on ne voit rien,
Le jour on voit tres bien,
D'un ecrit apocrypha
Le bourgeois s'ebouriffe,
Pratiquez la vertu,
Tutu, chapeau pointu![44]

It was little Gavroche on his way to the wars.

On the boulevard he noticed that the pistol had no trigger.

Who was the author of that couplet which served to punctuate his march, and of all the other songs which he was fond of singing on occasion? We know not. Who does know? Himself, perhaps. However, Gavroche was well up in all the popular tunes in circulation, and he mingled with them his own chirpings. An observing urchin and a rogue, he made a potpourri of the voices of nature and the voices of Paris. He combined the repertory of the birds with the repertory of the workshops. He was acquainted with thieves, a tribe contiguous to his own. He had, it appears, been

for three months apprenticed to a printer. He had one day executed a commission for M. Baour-Lormian, one of the Forty. Gavroche was a gamin of letters.

Moreover, Gavroche had no suspicion of the fact that when he had offered the hospitality of his elephant to two brats on that villainously rainy night, it was to his own brothers that he had played the part of Providence. His brothers in the evening, his father in the morning; that is what his night had been like. On quitting the Rue des Ballets at daybreak, he had returned in haste to the elephant, had artistically extracted from it the two brats, had shared with them some sort of breakfast which he had invented, and had then gone away, confiding them to that good mother, the street, who had brought him up, almost entirely. On leaving them, he had appointed to meet them at the same spot in the evening, and had left them this discourse by way of a farewell: "I break a cane, otherwise expressed, I cut my stick, or, as they say at the court, I file off. If you don't find papa and mamma, young 'uns, come back here this evening. I'll scramble you up some supper, and I'll give you a shakedown." The two children, picked up by some policeman and placed in the refuge, or stolen by some mountebank, or having simply strayed off in that immense Chinese puzzle of a Paris, did not return. The lowest depths of the actual social world are full of these lost traces. Gavroche did not see them again. Ten or twelve weeks had elapsed since that night. More than once he had scratched the back of his head and said: "Where the devil are my two children?"

In the meantime, he had arrived, pistol in hand, in the Rue du Pont-aux-Choux. He noticed that there was but one shop open in that street, and, a matter worthy of reflection, that was a pastry-cook's shop. This presented a providential occasion to eat another apple-turnover before entering the unknown. Gavroche halted, fumbled in his fob, turned his pocket inside out, found nothing, not even a sou, and began to shout: "Help!"

It is hard to miss the last cake.

Nevertheless, Gavroche pursued his way.

Two minutes later he was in the Rue Saint-Louis. While traversing the Rue du Parc-Royal, he felt called upon to make good the loss of the apple-turnover which had been impossible, and he indulged himself in the immense delight of tearing down the theatre posters in broad daylight.

A little further on, on catching sight of a group of comfortable-looking persons, who seemed to be landed proprietors, he shrugged his shoulders and spit out at random before him this mouthful of philosophical bile as they passed:

"How fat those moneyed men are! They're drunk! They just wallow in good dinners. Ask 'em what they do with their money. They don't know. They eat it, that's what they do! As much as their bellies will hold."

CHAPTER II--GAVROCHE ON THE MARCH

The brandishing of a triggerless pistol, grasped in one's hand in the open street, is so much of a public function that Gavroche felt his fervor increasing with every moment. Amid the scraps of the Marseillaise which he was singing, he shouted:--

"All goes well. I suffer a great deal in my left paw, I'm all broken up with rheumatism, but I'm satisfied, citizens. All that the bourgeois have to do is to bear themselves well, I'll sneeze them out subversive couplets. What are the police spies? Dogs. And I'd just like to have one of them at the end of my pistol. I'm just from the boulevard, my friends. It's getting hot there, it's getting into a little boil, it's simmering. It's time to skim the pot. Forward march, men! Let an impure blood inundate the furrows! I give my days to my country, I shall never see my concubine more, Nini, finished, yes, Nini? But never mind! Long live joy! Let's fight, crebleu! I've had enough of despotism."

At that moment, the horse of a lancer of the National Guard having fallen, Gavroche laid his pistol on the pavement, and picked up the man, then he assisted in raising the horse. After which he picked up his pistol and resumed his way. In the Rue de Thorigny, all was peace and silence. This apathy, peculiar to the Marais, presented a contrast with the vast surrounding uproar. Four gossips were chatting in a doorway.

Scotland has trios of witches, Paris has quartettes of old gossiping

hags; and the "Thou shalt be King" could be quite as mournfully hurled at Bonaparte in the Carrefour Baudoyer as at Macbeth on the heath of Armuyr. The croak would be almost identical.

The gossips of the Rue de Thorigny busied themselves only with their own concerns. Three of them were portresses, and the fourth was a rag-picker with her basket on her back.

All four of them seemed to be standing at the four corners of old age, which are decrepitude, decay, ruin, and sadness.

The rag-picker was humble. In this open-air society, it is the rag-picker who salutes and the portress who patronizes. This is caused by the corner for refuse, which is fat or lean, according to the will of the portresses, and after the fancy of the one who makes the heap. There may be kindness in the broom.

This rag-picker was a grateful creature, and she smiled, with what a smile! on the three portresses. Things of this nature were said:--

"Ah, by the way, is your cat still cross?"

"Good gracious, cats are naturally the enemies of dogs, you know. It's the dogs who complain."

"And people also."

"But the fleas from a cat don't go after people."

"That's not the trouble, dogs are dangerous. I remember one year when there were so many dogs that it was necessary to put it in the newspapers. That was at the time when there were at the Tuileries great sheep that drew the little carriage of the King of Rome. Do you remember the King of Rome?"

"I liked the Duc de Bordeau better."

"I knew Louis XVIII. I prefer Louis XVIII."

"Meat is awfully dear, isn't it, Mother Patagon?"

"Ah! don't mention it, the butcher's shop is a horror. A horrible horror--one can't afford anything but the poor cuts nowadays."

Here the rag-picker interposed:--

"Ladies, business is dull. The refuse heaps are miserable. No one throws anything away any more. They eat everything."

"There are poorer people than you, la Vargouleme."

"Ah, that's true," replied the rag-picker, with deference, "I have a

profession."

A pause succeeded, and the rag-picker, yielding to that necessity for boasting which lies at the bottom of man, added:--

"In the morning, on my return home, I pick over my basket, I sort my things. This makes heaps in my room. I put the rags in a basket, the cores and stalks in a bucket, the linen in my cupboard, the woollen stuff in my commode, the old papers in the corner of the window, the things that are good to eat in my bowl, the bits of glass in my fireplace, the old shoes behind my door, and the bones under my bed."

Gavroche had stopped behind her and was listening.

"Old ladies," said he, "what do you mean by talking politics?"

He was assailed by a broadside, composed of a quadruple howl.

"Here's another rascal."

"What's that he's got in his paddle? A pistol?"

"Well, I'd like to know what sort of a beggar's brat this is?"

"That sort of animal is never easy unless he's overturning the authorities."

Gavroche disdainfully contented himself, by way of reprisal, with elevating the tip of his nose with his thumb and opening his hand wide.

The rag-picker cried:--

"You malicious, bare-pawed little wretch!"

The one who answered to the name of Patagon clapped her hands together in horror.

"There's going to be evil doings, that's certain. The errand-boy next door has a little pointed beard, I have seen him pass every day with a young person in a pink bonnet on his arm; to-day I saw him pass, and he had a gun on his arm. Mame Bacheux says, that last week there was a revolution at--at--at--where's the calf!--at Pontoise. And then, there you see him, that horrid scamp, with his pistol! It seems that the Celestins are full of pistols. What do you suppose the Government can do with good-for-nothings who don't know how to do anything but contrive ways of upsetting the world, when we had just begun to get a little quiet after all the misfortunes that have happened, good Lord! to that poor queen whom I saw pass in the tumbril! And all this is going to make tobacco dearer. It's infamous! And I shall certainly go to see him beheaded on the guillotine, the wretch!"

"You've got the sniffles, old lady," said Gavroche. "Blow your

promontory."

And he passed on. When he was in the Rue Pavee, the rag-picker occurred to his mind, and he indulged in this soliloquy:--

"You're in the wrong to insult the revolutionists, Mother Dust-Heap-Corner. This pistol is in your interests. It's so that you may have more good things to eat in your basket."

All at once, he heard a shout behind him; it was the portress Patagon who had followed him, and who was shaking her fist at him in the distance and crying:--

"You're nothing but a bastard."

"Oh! Come now," said Gavroche, "I don't care a brass farthing for that!"

Shortly afterwards, he passed the Hotel Lamoignon. There he uttered this appeal:--

"Forward march to the battle!"

And he was seized with a fit of melancholy. He gazed at his pistol with an air of reproach which seemed an attempt to appease it:--

"I'm going off," said he, "but you won't go off!"

One dog may distract the attention from another dog.[45] A very gaunt poodle came along at the moment. Gavroche felt compassion for him.

"My poor doggy," said he, "you must have gone and swallowed a cask, for all the hoops are visible."

Then he directed his course towards l'Orme-Saint-Gervais.

CHAPTER III--JUST INDIGNATION OF A HAIR-DRESSER

The worthy hair-dresser who had chased from his shop the two little fellows to whom Gavroche had opened the paternal interior of the elephant was at that moment in his shop engaged in shaving an old soldier of the legion who had served under the Empire. They were talking. The hair-dresser had, naturally, spoken to the veteran of the riot, then of General Lamarque, and from Lamarque they had passed to the Emperor. Thence sprang up a conversation between barber and soldier which Prudhomme, had he been present, would have enriched with arabesques, and which he would have entitled: "Dialogue between the razor and the sword."

"How did the Emperor ride, sir?" said the barber.

"Badly. He did not know how to fall--so he never fell."

"Did he have fine horses? He must have had fine horses!"

"On the day when he gave me my cross, I noticed his beast. It was a racing mare, perfectly white. Her ears were very wide apart, her saddle deep, a fine head marked with a black star, a very long neck, strongly articulated knees, prominent ribs, oblique shoulders and a powerful crupper. A little more than fifteen hands in height."

"A pretty horse," remarked the hair-dresser.

"It was His Majesty's beast."

The hair-dresser felt, that after this observation, a short silence would be fitting, so he conformed himself to it, and then went on:--

"The Emperor was never wounded but once, was he, sir?"

The old soldier replied with the calm and sovereign tone of a man who had been there:--

"In the heel. At Ratisbon. I never saw him so well dressed as on that day. He was as neat as a new sou."

"And you, Mr. Veteran, you must have been often wounded?"

"I?" said the soldier, "ah! not to amount to anything. At Marengo, I received two sabre-blows on the back of my neck, a bullet in the right arm at Austerlitz, another in the left hip at Jena. At Friedland, a thrust from a bayonet, there,--at the Moskowa seven or eight lance-thrusts, no matter where, at Lutzen a splinter of a shell crushed one of my fingers. Ah! and then at Waterloo, a ball from a biscaien in the thigh, that's all."

"How fine that is!" exclaimed the hair-dresser, in Pindaric accents, "to die on the field of battle! On my word of honor, rather than die in bed,

of an illness, slowly, a bit by bit each day, with drugs, cataplasms, syringes, medicines, I should prefer to receive a cannon-ball in my belly!"

"You're not over fastidious," said the soldier.

He had hardly spoken when a fearful crash shook the shop. The show-window had suddenly been fractured.

The wig-maker turned pale.

"Ah, good God!" he exclaimed, "it's one of them!"

"What?"

"A cannon-ball."

"Here it is," said the soldier.

And he picked up something that was rolling about the floor. It was a pebble.

The hair-dresser ran to the broken window and beheld Gavroche fleeing at the full speed, towards the Marche Saint-Jean. As he passed the hair-dresser's shop Gavroche, who had the two brats still in his mind, had not been able to resist the impulse to say good day to him, and had

flung a stone through his panes.

"You see!" shrieked the hair-dresser, who from white had turned blue, "that fellow returns and does mischief for the pure pleasure of it. What has any one done to that gamin?"

CHAPTER IV--THE CHILD IS AMAZED AT THE OLD MAN

In the meantime, in the Marche Saint-Jean, where the post had already been disarmed, Gavroche had just "effected a junction" with a band led by Enjolras, Courfeyrac, Combeferre, and Feuilly. They were armed after a fashion. Bahorel and Jean Prouvaire had found them and swelled the group. Enjolras had a double-barrelled hunting-gun, Combeferre the gun of a National Guard bearing the number of his legion, and in his belt, two pistols which his unbuttoned coat allowed to be seen, Jean Prouvaire an old cavalry musket, Bahorel a rifle; Courfeyrac was brandishing an unsheathed sword-cane. Feuilly, with a naked sword in his hand, marched at their head shouting: "Long live Poland!"

They reached the Quai Morland. Cravatless, hatless, breathless, soaked by the rain, with lightning in their eyes. Gavroche accosted them calmly:--

"Where are we going?"

"Come along," said Courfeyrac.

Behind Feuilly marched, or rather bounded, Bahorel, who was like a fish in water in a riot. He wore a scarlet waistcoat, and indulged in the sort of words which break everything. His waistcoat astounded a passer-by, who cried in bewilderment:--

"Here are the reds!"

"The reds, the reds!" retorted Bahorel. "A queer kind of fear, bourgeois. For my part I don't tremble before a poppy, the little red hat inspires me with no alarm. Take my advice, bourgeois, let's leave fear of the red to horned cattle."

He caught sight of a corner of the wall on which was placarded the most peaceable sheet of paper in the world, a permission to eat eggs, a Lenten admonition addressed by the Archbishop of Paris to his "flock."

Bahorel exclaimed:--

"'Flock'; a polite way of saying geese."

And he tore the charge from the nail. This conquered Gavroche. From that instant Gavroche set himself to study Bahorel.

"Bahorel," observed Enjolras, "you are wrong. You should have let that charge alone, he is not the person with whom we have to deal, you are wasting your wrath to no purpose. Take care of your supply. One does not fire out of the ranks with the soul any more than with a gun."

"Each one in his own fashion, Enjolras," retorted Bahorel. "This bishop's prose shocks me; I want to eat eggs without being permitted. Your style is the hot and cold; I am amusing myself. Besides, I'm not

wasting myself, I'm getting a start; and if I tore down that charge, Hercle! 'twas only to whet my appetite."

This word, Hercle, struck Gavroche. He sought all occasions for learning, and that tearer-down of posters possessed his esteem. He inquired of him:--

"What does Hercle mean?"

Bahorel answered:--

"It means cursed name of a dog, in Latin."

Here Bahorel recognized at a window a pale young man with a black beard who was watching them as they passed, probably a Friend of the A B C. He shouted to him:--

"Quick, cartridges, para bellum."

"A fine man! that's true," said Gavroche, who now understood Latin.

A tumultuous retinue accompanied them,--students, artists, young men affiliated to the Cougourde of Aix, artisans, longshoremen, armed with clubs and bayonets; some, like Combeferre, with pistols thrust into their trousers.

An old man, who appeared to be extremely aged, was walking in the band.

He had no arms, and he made great haste, so that he might not be left behind, although he had a thoughtful air.

Gavroche caught sight of him:--

"Keksekca?" said he to Courfeyrac.

"He's an old duffer."

It was M. Mabeuf.

CHAPTER V--THE OLD MAN

Let us recount what had taken place.

Enjolras and his friends had been on the Boulevard Bourdon, near the public storehouses, at the moment when the dragoons had made their charge. Enjolras, Courfeyrac, and Combeferre were among those who had taken to the Rue Bassompierre, shouting: "To the barricades!" In the Rue Lesdiguieres they had met an old man walking along. What had attracted their attention was that the goodman was walking in a zig-zag, as though he were intoxicated. Moreover, he had his hat in his hand, although it had been raining all the morning, and was raining pretty briskly at the very time. Courfeyrac had recognized Father Mabeuf. He knew him through having many times accompanied Marius as far as his door. As he was acquainted with the peaceful and more than timid habits of the old beadle-book-collector, and was amazed at the sight of him in the midst of that uproar, a couple of paces from the cavalry charges, almost in the midst of a fusillade, hatless in the rain, and strolling about among the bullets, he had accosted him, and the following dialogue had been exchanged between the rioter of fire and the octogenarian:--

"M. Mabeuf, go to your home."

"Why?"

"There's going to be a row."

"That's well."

"Thrusts with the sword and firing, M. Mabeuf."

"That is well."

"Firing from cannon."

"That is good. Where are the rest of you going?"

"We are going to fling the government to the earth."

"That is good."

And he had set out to follow them. From that moment forth he had not uttered a word. His step had suddenly become firm; artisans had offered him their arms; he had refused with a sign of the head. He advanced nearly to the front rank of the column, with the movement of a man who is marching and the countenance of a man who is sleeping.

"What a fierce old fellow!" muttered the students. The rumor spread through the troop that he was a former member of the Convention,--an old regicide. The mob had turned in through the Rue de la Verrerie.

Little Gavroche marched in front with that deafening song which made of

him a sort of trumpet.

He sang: "Voici la lune qui paratt,
Quand irons-nous dans la foret?
Demandait Charlot a Charlotte.

Tou tou tou
Pour Chatou.
Je n'ai qu'un Dieu, qu'un roi, qu'un liard, et qu'une botte.

"Pour avoir bu de grand matin
La rosee a meme le thym,
Deux moineaux etaient en ribotte.

Zi zi zi
Pour Passy.
Je n'ai qu'un Dieu, qu'un roi, qu'un liard, et qu'une botte.

"Et ces deux pauvres petits loups,
Comme deux grives estaient souls;
Une tigre en riait dans sa grotte.

Don don don
Pour Meudon.
Je n'ai qu'un Dieu, qu'un roi, qu'un liard, et qu'une botte.

"L'un jurait et l'autre sacrait.

Quand irons nous dans la foret?

Demandait Charlot a Charlotte.

Tin tin tin

Pour Pantin.

Je n'ai qu'un Dieu, qu'un roi, qu'un liard, et qu'une botte."[46]

They directed their course towards Saint-Merry.

CHAPTER VI--RECRUITS

The band augmented every moment. Near the Rue des Billettes, a man of lofty stature, whose hair was turning gray, and whose bold and daring mien was remarked by Courfeyrac, Enjolras, and Combeferre, but whom none of them knew, joined them. Gavroche, who was occupied in singing, whistling, humming, running on ahead and pounding on the shutters of the shops with the butt of his triggerless pistol; paid no attention to this man.

It chanced that in the Rue de la Verrerie, they passed in front of Courfeyrac's door.

"This happens just right," said Courfeyrac, "I have forgotten my purse, and I have lost my hat."

He quitted the mob and ran up to his quarters at full speed. He seized an old hat and his purse.

He also seized a large square coffer, of the dimensions of a large valise, which was concealed under his soiled linen.

As he descended again at a run, the portress hailed him:--

"Monsieur de Courfeyrac!"

"What's your name, portress?"

The portress stood bewildered.

"Why, you know perfectly well, I'm the concierge; my name is Mother Veuvain."

"Well, if you call me Monsieur de Courfeyrac again, I shall call you Mother de Veuvain. Now speak, what's the matter? What do you want?"

"There is some one who wants to speak with you."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know."

"Where is he?"

"In my lodge."

"The devil!" ejaculated Courfeyrac.

"But the person has been waiting your return for over an hour," said the portress.

At the same time, a sort of pale, thin, small, freckled, and youthful

artisan, clad in a tattered blouse and patched trousers of ribbed velvet, and who had rather the air of a girl accoutred as a man than of a man, emerged from the lodge and said to Courfeyrac in a voice which was not the least in the world like a woman's voice:--

"Monsieur Marius, if you please."

"He is not here."

"Will he return this evening?"

"I know nothing about it."

And Courfeyrac added:--

"For my part, I shall not return."

The young man gazed steadily at him and said:--

"Why not?"

"Because."

"Where are you going, then?"

"What business is that of yours?"

"Would you like to have me carry your coffer for you?"

"I am going to the barricades."

"Would you like to have me go with you?"

"If you like!" replied Courfeyrac. "The street is free, the pavements belong to every one."

And he made his escape at a run to join his friends. When he had rejoined them, he gave the coffer to one of them to carry. It was only a quarter of an hour after this that he saw the young man, who had actually followed them.

A mob does not go precisely where it intends. We have explained that a gust of wind carries it away. They overshot Saint-Merry and found themselves, without precisely knowing how, in the Rue Saint-Denis.