BOOK SEVENTH.--THE LAST DRAUGHT FROM THE CUP

CHAPTER I--THE SEVENTH CIRCLE AND THE EIGHTH HEAVEN

The days that follow weddings are solitary. People respect the meditations of the happy pair. And also, their tardy slumbers, to some degree. The tumult of visits and congratulations only begins later on.
On the morning of the 17th of February, it was a little past midday when Basque, with napkin and feather-duster under his arm, busy in setting his antechamber to rights, heard a light tap at the door. There had been no ring, which was discreet on such a day. Basque opened the door, and beheld M. Fauchelevent. He introduced him into the drawing-room, still encumbered and topsy-turvy, and which bore the air of a field of battle after the joys of the preceding evening.

"Dame, sir," remarked Basque, "we all woke up late."

"Is your master up?" asked Jean Valjean.

"How is Monsieur's arm?" replied Basque.

"Better. Is your master up?"

"Which one? the old one or the new one?"

"Monsieur Pontmercy."

"Monsieur le Baron," said Basque, drawing himself up.

A man is a Baron most of all to his servants. He counts for something with them; they are what a philosopher would call, bespattered with the title, and that flatters them. Marius, be it said in passing, a militant republican as he had proved, was now a Baron in spite of himself. A small revolution had taken place in the family in connection with this title. It was now M. Gillenormand who clung to it, and Marius who detached himself from it. But Colonel Pontmercy had written: "My son will bear my title." Marius obeyed. And then, Cosette, in whom the woman was beginning to dawn, was delighted to be a Baroness.

"Monsieur le Baron?" repeated Basque. "I will go and see. I will tell him that M. Fauchelevent is here."

"No. Do not tell him that it is I. Tell him that some one wishes to speak to him in private, and mention no name."

"Ah!" ejaculated Basque.

"I wish to surprise him."

"Ah!" ejaculated Basque once more, emitting his second "ah!" as an explanation of the first.

And he left the room.

Jean Valjean remained alone.

The drawing-room, as we have just said, was in great disorder. It seemed as though, by lending an air, one might still hear the vague noise of the wedding. On the polished floor lay all sorts of flowers which had fallen from garlands and head-dresses. The wax candles, burned to stumps, added stalactites of wax to the crystal drops of the chandeliers. Not a single piece of furniture was in its place. In the corners, three or four arm-chairs, drawn close together in a circle, had the appearance of continuing a conversation. The whole effect was cheerful. A certain grace still lingers round a dead feast. It has been a happy thing. On the chairs in disarray, among those fading flowers, beneath those extinct lights, people have thought of joy. The sun had succeeded to the chandelier, and made its way gayly into the drawing-room.

Several minutes elapsed. Jean Valjean stood motionless on the spot where Basque had left him. He was very pale. His eyes were hollow, and so sunken in his head by sleeplessness that they nearly disappeared in their orbits. His black coat bore the weary folds of a garment that has been up all night. The elbows were whitened with the down which the

friction of cloth against linen leaves behind it.

Jean Valjean stared at the window outlined on the polished floor at his feet by the sun.

There came a sound at the door, and he raised his eyes.

Marius entered, his head well up, his mouth smiling, an indescribable light on his countenance, his brow expanded, his eyes triumphant. He had not slept either.

"It is you, father!" he exclaimed, on catching sight of Jean Valjean; "that idiot of a Basque had such a mysterious air! But you have come too early. It is only half past twelve. Cosette is asleep."

That word: "Father," said to M. Fauchelevent by Marius, signified: supreme felicity. There had always existed, as the reader knows, a lofty wall, a coldness and a constraint between them; ice which must be broken or melted. Marius had reached that point of intoxication when the wall was lowered, when the ice dissolved, and when M. Fauchelevent was to him, as to Cosette, a father.

He continued: his words poured forth, as is the peculiarity of divine paroxysms of joy.

"How glad I am to see you! If you only knew how we missed you yesterday!

Good morning, father. How is your hand? Better, is it not?"

And, satisfied with the favorable reply which he had made to himself, he pursued:

"We have both been talking about you. Cosette loves you so dearly! You must not forget that you have a chamber here, We want nothing more to do with the Rue de l'Homme Arme. We will have no more of it at all. How could you go to live in a street like that, which is sickly, which is disagreeable, which is ugly, which has a barrier at one end, where one is cold, and into which one cannot enter? You are to come and install yourself here. And this very day. Or you will have to deal with Cosette. She means to lead us all by the nose, I warn you. You have your own chamber here, it is close to ours, it opens on the garden; the trouble with the clock has been attended to, the bed is made, it is all ready, you have only to take possession of it. Near your bed Cosette has placed a huge, old, easy-chair covered with Utrecht velvet and she has said to it: 'Stretch out your arms to him.' A nightingale comes to the clump of acacias opposite your windows, every spring. In two months more you will have it. You will have its nest on your left and ours on your right. By night it will sing, and by day Cosette will prattle. Your chamber faces due South. Cosette will arrange your books for you, your Voyages of Captain Cook and the other,--Vancouver's and all your affairs. I believe that there is a little valise to which you are attached, I have fixed upon a corner of honor for that. You have conquered my grandfather, you suit him. We will live together. Do you play whist? you will overwhelm

my grandfather with delight if you play whist. It is you who shall take Cosette to walk on the days when I am at the courts, you shall give her your arm, you know, as you used to, in the Luxembourg. We are absolutely resolved to be happy. And you shall be included in it, in our happiness, do you hear, father? Come, will you breakfast with us to-day?"

"Sir," said Jean Valjean, "I have something to say to you. I am an ex-convict."

The limit of shrill sounds perceptible can be overleaped, as well in the case of the mind as in that of the ear. These words: "I am an ex-convict," proceeding from the mouth of M. Fauchelevent and entering the ear of Marius overshot the possible. It seemed to him that something had just been said to him; but he did not know what. He stood with his mouth wide open.

Then he perceived that the man who was addressing him was frightful. Wholly absorbed in his own dazzled state, he had not, up to that moment, observed the other man's terrible pallor.

Jean Valjean untied the black cravat which supported his right arm, unrolled the linen from around his hand, bared his thumb and showed it to Marius.

"There is nothing the matter with my hand," said he.

Marius looked at the thumb.

"There has not been anything the matter with it," went on Jean Valjean.

There was, in fact, no trace of any injury.

Jean Valjean continued:

"It was fitting that I should be absent from your marriage. I absented myself as much as was in my power. So I invented this injury in order that I might not commit a forgery, that I might not introduce a flaw into the marriage documents, in order that I might escape from signing."

Marius stammered.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning of it is," replied Jean Valjean, "that I have been in the galleys."

"You are driving me mad!" exclaimed Marius in terror.

"Monsieur Pontmercy," said Jean Valjean, "I was nineteen years in the galleys. For theft. Then, I was condemned for life for theft, for a second offence. At the present moment, I have broken my ban."

In vain did Marius recoil before the reality, refuse the fact, resist the evidence, he was forced to give way. He began to understand, and, as always happens in such cases, he understood too much. An inward shudder of hideous enlightenment flashed through him; an idea which made him quiver traversed his mind. He caught a glimpse of a wretched destiny for himself in the future.

"Say all, say all!" he cried. "You are Cosette's father!"

And he retreated a couple of paces with a movement of indescribable horror.

Jean Valjean elevated his head with so much majesty of attitude that he seemed to grow even to the ceiling.

"It is necessary that you should believe me here, sir; although our oath to others may not be received in law . . ."

Here he paused, then, with a sort of sovereign and sepulchral authority, he added, articulating slowly, and emphasizing the syllables:

". . . You will believe me. I the father of Cosette! before God, no. Monsieur le Baron Pontmercy, I am a peasant of Faverolles. I earned my living by pruning trees. My name is not Fauchelevent, but Jean Valjean. I am not related to Cosette. Reassure yourself."

Marius stammered:

"Who will prove that to me?"

"I. Since I tell you so."

Marius looked at the man. He was melancholy yet tranquil. No lie could proceed from such a calm. That which is icy is sincere. The truth could be felt in that chill of the tomb.

"I believe you," said Marius.

Jean Valjean bent his head, as though taking note of this, and continued:

"What am I to Cosette? A passer-by. Ten years ago, I did not know that she was in existence. I love her, it is true. One loves a child whom one has seen when very young, being old oneself. When one is old, one feels oneself a grandfather towards all little children. You may, it seems to me, suppose that I have something which resembles a heart. She was an orphan. Without either father or mother. She needed me. That is why I began to love her. Children are so weak that the first comer, even a man like me, can become their protector. I have fulfilled this duty towards Cosette. I do not think that so slight a thing can be called a good action; but if it be a good action, well, say that I have done it. Register this attenuating circumstance. To-day, Cosette passes out of my

life; our two roads part. Henceforth, I can do nothing for her. She is Madame Pontmercy. Her providence has changed. And Cosette gains by the change. All is well. As for the six hundred thousand francs, you do not mention them to me, but I forestall your thought, they are a deposit. How did that deposit come into my hands? What does that matter? I restore the deposit. Nothing more can be demanded of me. I complete the restitution by announcing my true name. That concerns me. I have a reason for desiring that you should know who I am."

And Jean Valjean looked Marius full in the face.

All that Marius experienced was tumultuous and incoherent. Certain gusts of destiny produce these billows in our souls.

We have all undergone moments of trouble in which everything within us is dispersed; we say the first things that occur to us, which are not always precisely those which should be said. There are sudden revelations which one cannot bear, and which intoxicate like baleful wine. Marius was stupefied by the novel situation which presented itself to him, to the point of addressing that man almost like a person who was angry with him for this avowal.

"But why," he exclaimed, "do you tell me all this? Who forces you to do so? You could have kept your secret to yourself. You are neither denounced, nor tracked nor pursued. You have a reason for wantonly making such a revelation. Conclude. There is something more. In what

connection do you make this confession? What is your motive?"

"My motive?" replied Jean Valjean in a voice so low and dull that one would have said that he was talking to himself rather than to Marius. "From what motive, in fact, has this convict just said 'I am a convict'? Well, yes! the motive is strange. It is out of honesty. Stay, the unfortunate point is that I have a thread in my heart, which keeps me fast. It is when one is old that that sort of thread is particularly solid. All life falls in ruin around one; one resists. Had I been able to tear out that thread, to break it, to undo the knot or to cut it, to go far away, I should have been safe. I had only to go away; there are diligences in the Rue Bouloy; you are happy; I am going. I have tried to break that thread, I have jerked at it, it would not break, I tore my heart with it. Then I said: 'I cannot live anywhere else than here.' I must stay. Well, yes, you are right, I am a fool, why not simply remain here? You offer me a chamber in this house, Madame Pontmercy is sincerely attached to me, she said to the arm-chair: 'Stretch out your arms to him,' your grandfather demands nothing better than to have me, I suit him, we shall live together, and take our meals in common, I shall give Cosette my arm . . . Madame Pontmercy, excuse me, it is a habit, we shall have but one roof, one table, one fire, the same chimney-corner in winter, the same promenade in summer, that is joy, that is happiness, that is everything. We shall live as one family. One family!"

At that word, Jean Valjean became wild. He folded his arms, glared at the floor beneath his feet as though he would have excavated an abyss

therein, and his voice suddenly rose in thundering tones:

"As one family! No. I belong to no family. I do not belong to yours. I do not belong to any family of men. In houses where people are among themselves, I am superfluous. There are families, but there is nothing of the sort for me. I am an unlucky wretch; I am left outside. Did I have a father and mother? I almost doubt it. On the day when I gave that child in marriage, all came to an end. I have seen her happy, and that she is with a man whom she loves, and that there exists here a kind old man, a household of two angels, and all joys in that house, and that it was well, I said to myself: 'Enter thou not.' I could have lied, it is true, have deceived you all, and remained Monsieur Fauchelevent. So long as it was for her, I could lie; but now it would be for myself, and I must not. It was sufficient for me to hold my peace, it is true, and all would go on. You ask me what has forced me to speak? a very odd thing; my conscience. To hold my peace was very easy, however. I passed the night in trying to persuade myself to it; you questioned me, and what I have just said to you is so extraordinary that you have the right to do it; well, yes, I have passed the night in alleging reasons to myself, and I gave myself very good reasons, I have done what I could. But there are two things in which I have not succeeded; in breaking the thread that holds me fixed, riveted and sealed here by the heart, or in silencing some one who speaks softly to me when I am alone. That is why I have come hither to tell you everything this morning. Everything or nearly everything. It is useless to tell you that which concerns only myself; I keep that to myself. You know the essential points. So I have

taken my mystery and have brought it to you. And I have disembowelled my secret before your eyes. It was not a resolution that was easy to take. I struggled all night long. Ah! you think that I did not tell myself that this was no Champmathieu affair, that by concealing my name I was doing no one any injury, that the name of Fauchelevent had been given to me by Fauchelevent himself, out of gratitude for a service rendered to him, and that I might assuredly keep it, and that I should be happy in that chamber which you offer me, that I should not be in any one's way, that I should be in my own little corner, and that, while you would have Cosette, I should have the idea that I was in the same house with her. Each one of us would have had his share of happiness. If I continued to be Monsieur Fauchelevent, that would arrange everything. Yes, with the exception of my soul. There was joy everywhere upon my surface, but the bottom of my soul remained black. It is not enough to be happy, one must be content. Thus I should have remained Monsieur Fauchelevent, thus I should have concealed my true visage, thus, in the presence of your expansion, I should have had an enigma, thus, in the midst of your full noonday, I should have had shadows, thus, without crying ''ware,' I should have simply introduced the galleys to your fireside, I should have taken my seat at your table with the thought that if you knew who I was, you would drive me from it, I should have allowed myself to be served by domestics who, had they known, would have said: 'How horrible!' I should have touched you with my elbow, which you have a right to dislike, I should have filched your clasps of the hand! There would have existed in your house a division of respect between venerable white locks and tainted white locks; at your most intimate hours, when

all hearts thought themselves open to the very bottom to all the rest, when we four were together, your grandfather, you two and myself, a stranger would have been present! I should have been side by side with you in your existence, having for my only care not to disarrange the cover of my dreadful pit. Thus, I, a dead man, should have thrust myself upon you who are living beings. I should have condemned her to myself forever. You and Cosette and I would have had all three of our heads in the green cap! Does it not make you shudder? I am only the most crushed of men; I should have been the most monstrous of men. And I should have committed that crime every day! And I should have had that face of night upon my visage every day! every day! And I should have communicated to you a share in my taint every day! every day! to you, my dearly beloved, my children, to you, my innocent creatures! Is it nothing to hold one's peace? is it a simple matter to keep silence? No, it is not simple. There is a silence which lies. And my lie, and my fraud and my indignity, and my cowardice and my treason and my crime, I should have drained drop by drop, I should have spit it out, then swallowed it again, I should have finished at midnight and have begun again at midday, and my 'good morning' would have lied, and my 'good night' would have lied, and I should have slept on it, I should have eaten it, with my bread, and I should have looked Cosette in the face, and I should have responded to the smile of the angel by the smile of the damned soul, and I should have been an abominable villain! Why should I do it? in order to be happy. In order to be happy. Have I the right to be happy? I stand outside of life, Sir."

Jean Valjean paused. Marius listened. Such chains of ideas and of anguishes cannot be interrupted. Jean Valjean lowered his voice once more, but it was no longer a dull voice--it was a sinister voice.

"You ask why I speak? I am neither denounced, nor pursued, nor tracked, you say. Yes! I am denounced! yes! I am tracked! By whom? By myself. It is I who bar the passage to myself, and I drag myself, and I push myself, and I arrest myself, and I execute myself, and when one holds oneself, one is firmly held."

And, seizing a handful of his own coat by the nape of the neck and extending it towards Marius:

"Do you see that fist?" he continued. "Don't you think that it holds that collar in such a wise as not to release it? Well! conscience is another grasp! If one desires to be happy, sir, one must never understand duty; for, as soon as one has comprehended it, it is implacable. One would say that it punished you for comprehending it; but no, it rewards you; for it places you in a hell, where you feel God beside you. One has no sooner lacerated his own entrails than he is at peace with himself."

And, with a poignant accent, he added:

"Monsieur Pontmercy, this is not common sense, I am an honest man. It is by degrading myself in your eyes that I elevate myself in my own. This

has happened to me once before, but it was less painful then; it was a mere nothing. Yes, an honest man. I should not be so if, through my fault, you had continued to esteem me; now that you despise me, I am so.

I have that fatality hanging over me that, not being able to ever have anything but stolen consideration, that consideration humiliates me, and crushes me inwardly, and, in order that I may respect myself, it is necessary that I should be despised. Then I straighten up again. I am a galley-slave who obeys his conscience. I know well that that is most improbable. But what would you have me do about it? it is the fact. I have entered into engagements with myself; I keep them. There are encounters which bind us, there are chances which involve us in duties. You see, Monsieur Pontmercy, various things have happened to me in the course of my life."

Again Jean Valjean paused, swallowing his saliva with an effort, as though his words had a bitter after-taste, and then he went on:

"When one has such a horror hanging over one, one has not the right to make others share it without their knowledge, one has not the right to make them slip over one's own precipice without their perceiving it, one has not the right to let one's red blouse drag upon them, one has no right to slyly encumber with one's misery the happiness of others. It is hideous to approach those who are healthy, and to touch them in the dark with one's ulcer. In spite of the fact that Fauchelevent lent me his name, I have no right to use it; he could give it to me, but I could not

take it. A name is an I. You see, sir, that I have thought somewhat, I have read a little, although I am a peasant; and you see that I express myself properly. I understand things. I have procured myself an education. Well, yes, to abstract a name and to place oneself under it is dishonest. Letters of the alphabet can be filched, like a purse or a watch. To be a false signature in flesh and blood, to be a living false key, to enter the house of honest people by picking their lock, never more to look straightforward, to forever eye askance, to be infamous within the I, no! no! no! no! no! It is better to suffer, to bleed, to weep, to tear one's skin from the flesh with one's nails, to pass nights writhing in anguish, to devour oneself body and soul. That is why I have just told you all this. Wantonly, as you say."

He drew a painful breath, and hurled this final word:

"In days gone by, I stole a loaf of bread in order to live; to-day, in order to live, I will not steal a name."

"To live!" interrupted Marius. "You do not need that name in order to live?"

"Ah! I understand the matter," said Jean Valjean, raising and lowering his head several times in succession.

A silence ensued. Both held their peace, each plunged in a gulf of thoughts. Marius was sitting near a table and resting the corner of his

mouth on one of his fingers, which was folded back. Jean Valjean was pacing to and fro. He paused before a mirror, and remained motionless. Then, as though replying to some inward course of reasoning, he said, as he gazed at the mirror, which he did not see:

"While, at present, I am relieved."

He took up his march again, and walked to the other end of the drawing-room. At the moment when he turned round, he perceived that Marius was watching his walk. Then he said, with an inexpressible intonation:

"I drag my leg a little. Now you understand why!"

Then he turned fully round towards Marius:

"And now, sir, imagine this: I have said nothing, I have remained Monsieur Fauchelevent, I have taken my place in your house, I am one of you, I am in my chamber, I come to breakfast in the morning in slippers, in the evening all three of us go to the play, I accompany Madame Pontmercy to the Tuileries, and to the Place Royale, we are together, you think me your equal; one fine day you are there, and I am there, we are conversing, we are laughing; all at once, you hear a voice shouting this name: 'Jean Valjean!' and behold, that terrible hand, the police, darts from the darkness, and abruptly tears off my mask!"

Again he paused; Marius had sprung to his feet with a shudder. Jean Valjean resumed:

"What do you say to that?"

Marius' silence answered for him.

Jean Valjean continued:

"You see that I am right in not holding my peace. Be happy, be in heaven, be the angel of an angel, exist in the sun, be content therewith, and do not trouble yourself about the means which a poor damned wretch takes to open his breast and force his duty to come forth; you have before you, sir, a wretched man."

Marius slowly crossed the room, and, when he was quite close to Jean Valjean, he offered the latter his hand.

But Marius was obliged to step up and take that hand which was not offered, Jean Valjean let him have his own way, and it seemed to Marius that he pressed a hand of marble.

"My grandfather has friends," said Marius; "I will procure your pardon."

"It is useless," replied Jean Valjean. "I am believed to be dead, and that suffices. The dead are not subjected to surveillance. They are

supposed to rot in peace. Death is the same thing as pardon."

And, disengaging the hand which Marius held, he added, with a sort of inexorable dignity:

"Moreover, the friend to whom I have recourse is the doing of my duty; and I need but one pardon, that of my conscience."

At that moment, a door at the other end of the drawing-room opened gently half way, and in the opening Cosette's head appeared. They saw only her sweet face, her hair was in charming disorder, her eyelids were still swollen with sleep. She made the movement of a bird, which thrusts its head out of its nest, glanced first at her husband, then at Jean Valjean, and cried to them with a smile, so that they seemed to behold a smile at the heart of a rose:

"I will wager that you are talking politics. How stupid that is, instead of being with me!"

Jean Valjean shuddered.

"Cosette! . . ." stammered Marius.

And he paused. One would have said that they were two criminals.

Cosette, who was radiant, continued to gaze at both of them. There was

something in her eyes like gleams of paradise.

"I have caught you in the very act," said Cosette. "Just now, I heard my father Fauchelevent through the door saying: 'Conscience . . . doing my duty . . .' That is politics, indeed it is. I will not have it. People should not talk politics the very next day. It is not right."

"You are mistaken. Cosette," said Marius, "we are talking business. We are discussing the best investment of your six hundred thousand francs . . ."

"That is not it at all," interrupted Cosette. "I am coming. Does any body want me here?"

And, passing resolutely through the door, she entered the drawing-room. She was dressed in a voluminous white dressing-gown, with a thousand folds and large sleeves which, starting from the neck, fell to her feet. In the golden heavens of some ancient gothic pictures, there are these charming sacks fit to clothe the angels.

She contemplated herself from head to foot in a long mirror, then exclaimed, in an outburst of ineffable ecstasy:

"There was once a King and a Queen. Oh! how happy I am!"

That said, she made a curtsey to Marius and to Jean Valjean.

"There," said she, "I am going to install myself near you in an easy-chair, we breakfast in half an hour, you shall say anything you like, I know well that men must talk, and I will be very good."

Marius took her by the arm and said lovingly to her:

"We are talking business."

"By the way," said Cosette, "I have opened my window, a flock of pierrots has arrived in the garden,--Birds, not maskers. To-day is Ash-Wednesday; but not for the birds."

"I tell you that we are talking business, go, my little Cosette, leave us alone for a moment. We are talking figures. That will bore you."

"You have a charming cravat on this morning, Marius. You are very dandified, monseigneur. No, it will not bore me."

"I assure you that it will bore you."

"No. Since it is you. I shall not understand you, but I shall listen to you. When one hears the voices of those whom one loves, one does not need to understand the words that they utter. That we should be here together--that is all that I desire. I shall remain with you, bah!"

"You are my beloved Cosette! Impossible."

"Impossible!"

"Yes."

"Very good," said Cosette. "I was going to tell you some news. I could have told you that your grandfather is still asleep, that your aunt is at mass, that the chimney in my father Fauchelevent's room smokes, that Nicolette has sent for the chimney-sweep, that Toussaint and Nicolette have already quarrelled, that Nicolette makes sport of Toussaint's stammer. Well, you shall know nothing. Ah! it is impossible? you shall see, gentlemen, that I, in my turn, can say: It is impossible. Then who will be caught? I beseech you, my little Marius, let me stay here with you two."

"I swear to you, that it is indispensable that we should be alone."

"Well, am I anybody?"

Jean Valjean had not uttered a single word. Cosette turned to him:

"In the first place, father, I want you to come and embrace me. What do you mean by not saying anything instead of taking my part? who gave me such a father as that? You must perceive that my family life is very unhappy. My husband beats me. Come, embrace me instantly."

Jean Valjean approached.

Cosette turned toward Marius.

"As for you, I shall make a face at you."

Then she presented her brow to Jean Valjean.

Jean Valjean advanced a step toward her.

Cosette recoiled.

"Father, you are pale. Does your arm hurt you?"

"It is well," said Jean Valjean.

"Did you sleep badly?"

"No."

"Are you sad?"

"No."

"Embrace me if you are well, if you sleep well, if you are content, I

will not scold you."

And again she offered him her brow.

Jean Valjean dropped a kiss upon that brow whereon rested a celestial gleam.

"Smile."

Jean Valjean obeyed. It was the smile of a spectre.

"Now, defend me against my husband."

"Cosette! . . ." ejaculated Marius.

"Get angry, father. Say that I must stay. You can certainly talk before me. So you think me very silly. What you say is astonishing! business, placing money in a bank a great matter truly. Men make mysteries out of nothing. I am very pretty this morning. Look at me, Marius."

And with an adorable shrug of the shoulders, and an indescribably exquisite pout, she glanced at Marius.

"I love you!" said Marius.

"I adore you!" said Cosette.

And they fell irresistibly into each other's arms.

"Now," said Cosette, adjusting a fold of her dressing-gown, with a triumphant little grimace, "I shall stay."

"No, not that," said Marius, in a supplicating tone. "We have to finish something."

"Still no?"

Marius assumed a grave tone:

"I assure you, Cosette, that it is impossible."

"Ah! you put on your man's voice, sir. That is well, I go. You, father, have not upheld me. Monsieur my father, monsieur my husband, you are tyrants. I shall go and tell grandpapa. If you think that I am going to return and talk platitudes to you, you are mistaken. I am proud. I shall wait for you now. You shall see, that it is you who are going to be bored without me. I am going, it is well."

And she left the room.

Two seconds later, the door opened once more, her fresh and rosy head was again thrust between the two leaves, and she cried to them:

"I am very angry indeed."

The door closed again, and the shadows descended once more.

It was as though a ray of sunlight should have suddenly traversed the night, without itself being conscious of it.

Marius made sure that the door was securely closed.

"Poor Cosette!" he murmured, "when she finds out . . ."

At that word Jean Valjean trembled in every limb. He fixed on Marius a bewildered eye.

"Cosette! oh yes, it is true, you are going to tell Cosette about this. That is right. Stay, I had not thought of that. One has the strength for one thing, but not for another. Sir, I conjure you, I entreat now, sir, give me your most sacred word of honor, that you will not tell her. Is it not enough that you should know it? I have been able to say it myself without being forced to it, I could have told it to the universe, to the whole world,--it was all one to me. But she, she does not know what it is, it would terrify her. What, a convict! we should be obliged to explain matters to her, to say to her: 'He is a man who has been in the galleys.' She saw the chain-gang pass by one day. Oh! My God!" . . . He dropped into an arm-chair and hid his face in his hands.

His grief was not audible, but from the quivering of his shoulders it was evident that he was weeping. Silent tears, terrible tears.

There is something of suffocation in the sob. He was seized with a sort of convulsion, he threw himself against the back of the chair as though to gain breath, letting his arms fall, and allowing Marius to see his face inundated with tears, and Marius heard him murmur, so low that his voice seemed to issue from fathomless depths:

"Oh! would that I could die!"

"Be at your ease," said Marius, "I will keep your secret for myself alone." And, less touched, perhaps, than he ought to have been, but forced, for the last hour, to familiarize himself with something as unexpected as it was dreadful, gradually beholding the convict superposed before his very eyes, upon M. Fauchelevent, overcome, little by little, by that lugubrious reality, and led, by the natural inclination of the situation, to recognize the space which had just been placed between that man and himself, Marius added:

"It is impossible that I should not speak a word to you with regard to the deposit which you have so faithfully and honestly remitted. That is an act of probity. It is just that some recompense should be bestowed on you. Fix the sum yourself, it shall be counted out to you. Do not fear to set it very high."

"I thank you, sir," replied Jean Valjean, gently.

He remained in thought for a moment, mechanically passing the tip of his fore-finger across his thumb-nail, then he lifted up his voice:

"All is nearly over. But one last thing remains for me . . ."

"What is it?"

Jean Valjean struggled with what seemed a last hesitation, and, without voice, without breath, he stammered rather than said:

"Now that you know, do you think, sir, you, who are the master, that I ought not to see Cosette any more?"

"I think that would be better," replied Marius coldly.

"I shall never see her more," murmured Jean Valjean. And he directed his steps towards the door.

He laid his hand on the knob, the latch yielded, the door opened. Jean Valjean pushed it open far enough to pass through, stood motionless for a second, then closed the door again and turned to Marius.

He was no longer pale, he was livid. There were no longer any tears

in his eyes, but only a sort of tragic flame. His voice had regained a strange composure.

"Stay, sir," he said. "If you will allow it, I will come to see her. I assure you that I desire it greatly. If I had not cared to see Cosette, I should not have made to you the confession that I have made, I should have gone away; but, as I desired to remain in the place where Cosette is, and to continue to see her, I had to tell you about it honestly. You follow my reasoning, do you not? it is a matter easily understood. You see, I have had her with me for more than nine years. We lived first in that hut on the boulevard, then in the convent, then near the Luxembourg. That was where you saw her for the first time. You remember her blue plush hat. Then we went to the Quartier des Invalides, where there was a railing on a garden, the Rue Plumet. I lived in a little back court-yard, whence I could hear her piano. That was my life. We never left each other. That lasted for nine years and some months. I was like her own father, and she was my child. I do not know whether you understand, Monsieur Pontmercy, but to go away now, never to see her again, never to speak to her again, to no longer have anything, would be hard. If you do not disapprove of it, I will come to see Cosette from time to time. I will not come often. I will not remain long. You shall give orders that I am to be received in the little waiting-room. On the ground floor. I could enter perfectly well by the back door, but that might create surprise perhaps, and it would be better, I think, for me to enter by the usual door. Truly, sir, I should like to see a little more of Cosette. As rarely as you please. Put yourself in my place,

I have nothing left but that. And then, we must be cautious. If I no longer come at all, it would produce a bad effect, it would be considered singular. What I can do, by the way, is to come in the afternoon, when night is beginning to fall."

"You shall come every evening," said Marius, "and Cosette will be waiting for you."

"You are kind, sir," said Jean Valjean.

Marius saluted Jean Valjean, happiness escorted despair to the door, and these two men parted.

CHAPTER II--THE OBSCURITIES WHICH A REVELATION CAN CONTAIN

Marius was quite upset.

The sort of estrangement which he had always felt towards the man beside whom he had seen Cosette, was now explained to him. There was something enigmatic about that person, of which his instinct had warned him.

This enigma was the most hideous of disgraces, the galleys. This M. Fauchelevent was the convict Jean Valjean.

To abruptly find such a secret in the midst of one's happiness resembles the discovery of a scorpion in a nest of turtledoves.

Was the happiness of Marius and Cosette thenceforth condemned to such a neighborhood? Was this an accomplished fact? Did the acceptance of that man form a part of the marriage now consummated? Was there nothing to be done?

Had Marius wedded the convict as well?

In vain may one be crowned with light and joy, in vain may one taste the grand purple hour of life, happy love, such shocks would force even the archangel in his ecstasy, even the demigod in his glory, to shudder.

As is always the case in changes of view of this nature, Marius asked

himself whether he had nothing with which to reproach himself. Had he been wanting in divination? Had he been wanting in prudence? Had he involuntarily dulled his wits? A little, perhaps. Had he entered upon this love affair, which had ended in his marriage to Cosette, without taking sufficient precautions to throw light upon the surroundings? He admitted,--it is thus, by a series of successive admissions of ourselves in regard to ourselves, that life amends us, little by little,--he admitted the chimerical and visionary side of his nature, a sort of internal cloud peculiar to many organizations, and which, in paroxysms of passion and sorrow, dilates as the temperature of the soul changes, and invades the entire man, to such a degree as to render him nothing more than a conscience bathed in a mist. We have more than once indicated this characteristic element of Marius' individuality.

He recalled that, in the intoxication of his love, in the Rue Plumet, during those six or seven ecstatic weeks, he had not even spoke to Cosette of that drama in the Gorbeau hovel, where the victim had taken up such a singular line of silence during the struggle and the ensuing flight. How had it happened that he had not mentioned this to Cosette? Yet it was so near and so terrible! How had it come to pass that he had not even named the Thenardiers, and, particularly, on the day when he had encountered Eponine? He now found it almost difficult to explain his silence of that time. Nevertheless, he could account for it. He recalled his benumbed state, his intoxication with Cosette, love absorbing everything, that catching away of each other into the ideal, and perhaps also, like the imperceptible quantity of reason mingled with this

violent and charming state of the soul, a vague, dull instinct impelling him to conceal and abolish in his memory that redoubtable adventure, contact with which he dreaded, in which he did not wish to play any part, his agency in which he had kept secret, and in which he could be neither narrator nor witness without being an accuser.

Moreover, these few weeks had been a flash of lightning; there had been no time for anything except love.

In short, having weighed everything, turned everything over in his mind, examined everything, whatever might have been the consequences if he had told Cosette about the Gorbeau ambush, even if he had discovered that Jean Valjean was a convict, would that have changed him, Marius? Would that have changed her, Cosette? Would he have drawn back? Would he have adored her any the less? Would he have refrained from marrying her? No. Then there was nothing to regret, nothing with which he need reproach himself. All was well. There is a deity for those drunken men who are called lovers. Marius blind, had followed the path which he would have chosen had he been in full possession of his sight. Love had bandaged his eyes, in order to lead him whither? To paradise.

But this paradise was henceforth complicated with an infernal accompaniment.

Marius' ancient estrangement towards this man, towards this Fauchelevent who had turned into Jean Valjean, was at present mingled with horror.

In this horror, let us state, there was some pity, and even a certain surprise.

This thief, this thief guilty of a second offence, had restored that deposit. And what a deposit! Six hundred thousand francs.

He alone was in the secret of that deposit. He might have kept it all, he had restored it all.

Moreover, he had himself revealed his situation. Nothing forced him to this. If any one learned who he was, it was through himself. In this avowal there was something more than acceptance of humiliation, there was acceptance of peril. For a condemned man, a mask is not a mask, it is a shelter. A false name is security, and he had rejected that false name. He, the galley-slave, might have hidden himself forever in an honest family; he had withstood this temptation. And with what motive? Through a conscientious scruple. He himself explained this with the irresistible accents of truth. In short, whatever this Jean Valjean might be, he was, undoubtedly, a conscience which was awakening. There existed some mysterious re-habilitation which had begun; and, to all appearances, scruples had for a long time already controlled this man. Such fits of justice and goodness are not characteristic of vulgar natures. An awakening of conscience is grandeur of soul.

Jean Valjean was sincere. This sincerity, visible, palpable,

irrefragable, evident from the very grief that it caused him, rendered inquiries useless, and conferred authority on all that that man had said.

Here, for Marius, there was a strange reversal of situations. What breathed from M. Fauchelevent? distrust. What did Jean Valjean inspire? confidence.

In the mysterious balance of this Jean Valjean which the pensive Marius struck, he admitted the active principle, he admitted the passive principle, and he tried to reach a balance.

But all this went on as in a storm. Marius, while endeavoring to form a clear idea of this man, and while pursuing Jean Valjean, so to speak, in the depths of his thought, lost him and found him again in a fatal mist.

The deposit honestly restored, the probity of the confession--these were good. This produced a lightening of the cloud, then the cloud became black once more.

Troubled as were Marius' memories, a shadow of them returned to him.

After all, what was that adventure in the Jondrette attic? Why had that man taken to flight on the arrival of the police, instead of entering a complaint?

Here Marius found the answer. Because that man was a fugitive from justice, who had broken his ban.

Another question: Why had that man come to the barricade?

For Marius now once more distinctly beheld that recollection which had re-appeared in his emotions like sympathetic ink at the application of heat. This man had been in the barricade. He had not fought there. What had he come there for? In the presence of this question a spectre sprang up and replied: "Javert."

Marius recalled perfectly now that funereal sight of Jean Valjean dragging the pinioned Javert out of the barricade, and he still heard behind the corner of the little Rue Mondetour that frightful pistol shot. Obviously, there was hatred between that police spy and the galley-slave. The one was in the other's way. Jean Valjean had gone to the barricade for the purpose of revenging himself. He had arrived late. He probably knew that Javert was a prisoner there. The Corsican vendetta has penetrated to certain lower strata and has become the law there; it is so simple that it does not astonish souls which are but half turned towards good; and those hearts are so constituted that a criminal, who is in the path of repentance, may be scrupulous in the matter of theft and unscrupulous in the matter of vengeance. Jean Valjean had killed Javert. At least, that seemed to be evident.

This was the final question, to be sure; but to this there was no reply.

This question Marius felt like pincers. How had it come to pass that Jean Valjean's existence had elbowed that of Cosette for so long a period?

What melancholy sport of Providence was that which had placed that child in contact with that man? Are there then chains for two which are forged on high? and does God take pleasure in coupling the angel with the demon? So a crime and an innocence can be room-mates in the mysterious galleys of wretchedness? In that defiling of condemned persons which is called human destiny, can two brows pass side by side, the one ingenuous, the other formidable, the one all bathed in the divine whiteness of dawn, the other forever blemished by the flash of an eternal lightning? Who could have arranged that inexplicable pairing off? In what manner, in consequence of what prodigy, had any community of life been established between this celestial little creature and that old criminal?

Who could have bound the lamb to the wolf, and, what was still more incomprehensible, have attached the wolf to the lamb? For the wolf loved the lamb, for the fierce creature adored the feeble one, for, during the space of nine years, the angel had had the monster as her point of support. Cosette's childhood and girlhood, her advent in the daylight, her virginal growth towards life and light, had been sheltered by that hideous devotion. Here questions exfoliated, so to speak, into innumerable enigmas, abysses yawned at the bottoms of abysses, and Marius could no longer bend over Jean Valjean without becoming dizzy.

What was this man-precipice?

The old symbols of Genesis are eternal; in human society, such as it now exists, and until a broader day shall effect a change in it, there will always be two men, the one superior, the other subterranean; the one which is according to good is Abel; the other which is according to evil is Cain. What was this tender Cain? What was this ruffian religiously absorbed in the adoration of a virgin, watching over her, rearing her, guarding her, dignifying her, and enveloping her, impure as he was himself, with purity?

What was that cess-pool which had venerated that innocence to such a point as not to leave upon it a single spot? What was this Jean Valjean educating Cosette? What was this figure of the shadows which had for its only object the preservation of the rising of a star from every shadow and from every cloud?

That was Jean Valjean's secret; that was also God's secret.

In the presence of this double secret, Marius recoiled. The one, in some sort, reassured him as to the other. God was as visible in this affair as was Jean Valjean. God has his instruments. He makes use of the tool which he wills. He is not responsible to men. Do we know how God sets about the work? Jean Valjean had labored over Cosette. He had, to some extent, made that soul. That was incontestable. Well, what then? The workman was horrible; but the work was admirable. God produces his

miracles as seems good to him. He had constructed that charming Cosette, and he had employed Jean Valjean. It had pleased him to choose this strange collaborator for himself. What account have we to demand of him? Is this the first time that the dung-heap has aided the spring to create the rose?

Marius made himself these replies, and declared to himself that they were good. He had not dared to press Jean Valjean on all the points which we have just indicated, but he did not confess to himself that he did not dare to do it. He adored Cosette, he possessed Cosette, Cosette was splendidly pure. That was sufficient for him. What enlightenment did he need? Cosette was a light. Does light require enlightenment? He had everything; what more could he desire? All,--is not that enough? Jean Valjean's personal affairs did not concern him.

And bending over the fatal shadow of that man, he clung fast, convulsively, to the solemn declaration of that unhappy wretch: "I am nothing to Cosette. Ten years ago I did not know that she was in existence."

Jean Valjean was a passer-by. He had said so himself. Well, he had passed. Whatever he was, his part was finished.

Henceforth, there remained Marius to fulfil the part of Providence to Cosette. Cosette had sought the azure in a person like herself, in her lover, her husband, her celestial male. Cosette, as she took her flight,

winged and transfigured, left behind her on the earth her hideous and empty chrysalis, Jean Valjean.

In whatever circle of ideas Marius revolved, he always returned to a certain horror for Jean Valjean. A sacred horror, perhaps, for, as we have just pointed out, he felt a quid divinum in that man. But do what he would, and seek what extenuation he would, he was certainly forced to fall back upon this: the man was a convict; that is to say, a being who has not even a place in the social ladder, since he is lower than the very lowest rung. After the very last of men comes the convict. The convict is no longer, so to speak, in the semblance of the living. The law has deprived him of the entire quantity of humanity of which it can deprive a man.

Marius, on penal questions, still held to the inexorable system, though he was a democrat and he entertained all the ideas of the law on the subject of those whom the law strikes. He had not yet accomplished all progress, we admit. He had not yet come to distinguish between that which is written by man and that which is written by God, between law and right. He had not examined and weighed the right which man takes to dispose of the irrevocable and the irreparable. He was not shocked by the word vindicte. He found it quite simple that certain breaches of the written law should be followed by eternal suffering, and he accepted, as the process of civilization, social damnation. He still stood at this point, though safe to advance infallibly later on, since his nature was good, and, at bottom, wholly formed of latent progress.

In this stage of his ideas, Jean Valjean appeared to him hideous and repulsive. He was a man reproved, he was the convict. That word was for him like the sound of the trump on the Day of Judgment; and, after having reflected upon Jean Valjean for a long time, his final gesture had been to turn away his head. Vade retro.

Marius, if we must recognize and even insist upon the fact, while interrogating Jean Valjean to such a point that Jean Valjean had said: "You are confessing me," had not, nevertheless, put to him two or three decisive questions.

It was not that they had not presented themselves to his mind, but that he had been afraid of them. The Jondrette attic? The barricade? Javert? Who knows where these revelations would have stopped? Jean Valjean did not seem like a man who would draw back, and who knows whether Marius, after having urged him on, would not have himself desired to hold him back?

Has it not happened to all of us, in certain supreme conjunctures, to stop our ears in order that we may not hear the reply, after we have asked a question? It is especially when one loves that one gives way to these exhibitions of cowardice. It is not wise to question sinister situations to the last point, particularly when the indissoluble side of our life is fatally intermingled with them. What a terrible light might have proceeded from the despairing explanations of Jean Valjean, and who

knows whether that hideous glare would not have darted forth as far as Cosette? Who knows whether a sort of infernal glow would not have lingered behind it on the brow of that angel? The spattering of a lightning-flash is of the thunder also. Fatality has points of juncture where innocence itself is stamped with crime by the gloomy law of the reflections which give color. The purest figures may forever preserve the reflection of a horrible association. Rightly or wrongly, Marius had been afraid. He already knew too much. He sought to dull his senses rather than to gain further light.

In dismay he bore off Cosette in his arms and shut his eyes to Jean Valjean.

That man was the night, the living and horrible night. How should he dare to seek the bottom of it? It is a terrible thing to interrogate the shadow. Who knows what its reply will be? The dawn may be blackened forever by it.

In this state of mind the thought that that man would, henceforth, come into any contact whatever with Cosette was a heartrending perplexity to Marius.

He now almost reproached himself for not having put those formidable questions, before which he had recoiled, and from which an implacable and definitive decision might have sprung. He felt that he was too good, too gentle, too weak, if we must say the word. This weakness had led him

to an imprudent concession. He had allowed himself to be touched. He had been in the wrong. He ought to have simply and purely rejected Jean Valjean. Jean Valjean played the part of fire, and that is what he should have done, and have freed his house from that man.

He was vexed with himself, he was angry with that whirlwind of emotions which had deafened, blinded, and carried him away. He was displeased with himself.

What was he to do now? Jean Valjean's visits were profoundly repugnant to him. What was the use in having that man in his house? What did the man want? Here, he became dismayed, he did not wish to dig down, he did not wish to penetrate deeply; he did not wish to sound himself. He had promised, he had allowed himself to be drawn into a promise; Jean Valjean held his promise; one must keep one's word even to a convict, above all to a convict. Still, his first duty was to Cosette. In short, he was carried away by the repugnance which dominated him.

Marius turned over all this confusion of ideas in his mind, passing from one to the other, and moved by all of them. Hence arose a profound trouble.

It was not easy for him to hide this trouble from Cosette, but love is a talent, and Marius succeeded in doing it.

However, without any apparent object, he questioned Cosette, who was as

candid as a dove is white and who suspected nothing; he talked of her childhood and her youth, and he became more and more convinced that that convict had been everything good, paternal and respectable that a man can be towards Cosette. All that Marius had caught a glimpse of and had surmised was real. That sinister nettle had loved and protected that lily.