BOOK EIGHTH.--FADING AWAY OF THE TWILIGHT

CHAPTER I--THE LOWER CHAMBER

On the following day, at nightfall, Jean Valjean knocked at the carriage gate of the Gillenormand house. It was Basque who received him. Basque was in the courtyard at the appointed hour, as though he had received his orders. It sometimes happens that one says to a servant: "You will watch for Mr. So and So, when he arrives."

Basque addressed Jean Valjean without waiting for the latter to approach him:

"Monsieur le Baron has charged me to inquire whether monsieur desires to go upstairs or to remain below?"

"I will remain below," replied Jean Valjean.

Basque, who was perfectly respectful, opened the door of the waiting-room and said:

"I will go and inform Madame."

The room which Jean Valjean entered was a damp, vaulted room on the ground floor, which served as a cellar on occasion, which opened on the street, was paved with red squares and was badly lighted by a grated window.

This chamber was not one of those which are harassed by the feather-duster, the pope's head brush, and the broom. The dust rested tranquilly there. Persecution of the spiders was not organized there. A fine web, which spread far and wide, and was very black and ornamented with dead flies, formed a wheel on one of the window-panes. The room, which was small and low-ceiled, was furnished with a heap of empty bottles piled up in one corner.

The wall, which was daubed with an ochre yellow wash, was scaling off in large flakes. At one end there was a chimney-piece painted in black with a narrow shelf. A fire was burning there; which indicated that Jean Valjean's reply: "I will remain below," had been foreseen.

Two arm-chairs were placed at the two corners of the fireplace. Between the chairs an old bedside rug, which displayed more foundation thread than wool, had been spread by way of a carpet.

The chamber was lighted by the fire on the hearth and the twilight falling through the window.

Jean Valjean was fatigued. For days he had neither eaten nor slept. He

threw himself into one of the arm-chairs.

Basque returned, set a lighted candle on the chimney-piece and retired. Jean Valjean, his head drooping and his chin resting on his breast, perceived neither Basque nor the candle.

All at once, he drew himself up with a start. Cosette was standing beside him.

He had not seen her enter, but he had felt that she was there.

He turned round. He gazed at her. She was adorably lovely. But what he was contemplating with that profound gaze was not her beauty but her soul.

"Well," exclaimed Cosette, "father, I knew that you were peculiar, but I never should have expected this. What an idea! Marius told me that you wish me to receive you here."

"Yes, it is my wish."

"I expected that reply. Good. I warn you that I am going to make a scene for you. Let us begin at the beginning. Embrace me, father."

And she offered him her cheek.

Jean Valjean remained motionless.

"You do not stir. I take note of it. Attitude of guilt. But never mind, I pardon you. Jesus Christ said: Offer the other cheek. Here it is."

And she presented her other cheek.

Jean Valjean did not move. It seemed as though his feet were nailed to the pavement.

"This is becoming serious," said Cosette. "What have I done to you? I declare that I am perplexed. You owe me reparation. You will dine with us."

"I have dined."

"That is not true. I will get M. Gillenormand to scold you. Grandfathers are made to reprimand fathers. Come. Go upstairs with me to the drawing-room. Immediately."

"Impossible."

Here Cosette lost ground a little. She ceased to command and passed to questioning.

"But why? and you choose the ugliest chamber in the house in which to

see me. It's horrible here."

"Thou knowest . . ."

Jean Valjean caught himself up.

"You know, madame, that I am peculiar, I have my freaks."

Cosette struck her tiny hands together.

"Madame! . . . You know! . . . more novelties! What is the meaning of this?"

Jean Valjean directed upon her that heartrending smile to which he occasionally had recourse:

"You wished to be Madame. You are so."

"Not for you, father."

"Do not call me father."

"What?"

"Call me 'Monsieur Jean.' 'Jean,' if you like."

"You are no longer my father? I am no longer Cosette? 'Monsieur Jean'? What does this mean? why, these are revolutions, aren't they? what has taken place? come, look me in the face. And you won't live with us! And you won't have my chamber! What have I done to you? Has anything happened?"

"Nothing."

"Well then?"

"Everything is as usual."

"Why do you change your name?"

"You have changed yours, surely."

He smiled again with the same smile as before and added:

"Since you are Madame Pontmercy, I certainly can be Monsieur Jean."

"I don't understand anything about it. All this is idiotic. I shall ask permission of my husband for you to be 'Monsieur Jean.' I hope that he will not consent to it. You cause me a great deal of pain. One does have freaks, but one does not cause one's little Cosette grief. That is wrong. You have no right to be wicked, you who are so good."

He made no reply.

She seized his hands with vivacity, and raising them to her face with an irresistible movement, she pressed them against her neck beneath her chin, which is a gesture of profound tenderness.

"Oh!" she said to him, "be good!"

And she went on:

"This is what I call being good: being nice and coming and living here,--there are birds here as there are in the Rue Plumet,--living with us, quitting that hole of a Rue de l'Homme Arme, not giving us riddles to guess, being like all the rest of the world, dining with us, breakfasting with us, being my father."

He loosed her hands.

"You no longer need a father, you have a husband."

Cosette became angry.

"I no longer need a father! One really does not know what to say to things like that, which are not common sense!"

"If Toussaint were here," resumed Jean Valjean, like a person who is

driven to seek authorities, and who clutches at every branch, "she would be the first to agree that it is true that I have always had ways of my own. There is nothing new in this. I always have loved my black corner."

"But it is cold here. One cannot see distinctly. It is abominable, that it is, to wish to be Monsieur Jean! I will not have you say 'you' to me.

"Just now, as I was coming hither," replied Jean Valjean, "I saw a piece of furniture in the Rue Saint Louis. It was at a cabinet-maker's. If I were a pretty woman, I would treat myself to that bit of furniture. A very neat toilet table in the reigning style. What you call rosewood, I think. It is inlaid. The mirror is quite large. There are drawers. It is pretty."

"Hou! the villainous bear!" replied Cosette.

And with supreme grace, setting her teeth and drawing back her lips, she blew at Jean Valjean. She was a Grace copying a cat.

"I am furious," she resumed. "Ever since yesterday, you have made me rage, all of you. I am greatly vexed. I don't understand. You do not defend me against Marius. Marius will not uphold me against you. I am all alone. I arrange a chamber prettily. If I could have put the good God there I would have done it. My chamber is left on my hands. My lodger sends me into bankruptcy. I order a nice little dinner of Nicolette. We will have nothing to do with your dinner, Madame. And my

father Fauchelevent wants me to call him 'Monsieur Jean,' and to receive him in a frightful, old, ugly cellar, where the walls have beards, and where the crystal consists of empty bottles, and the curtains are of spiders' webs! You are singular, I admit, that is your style, but people who get married are granted a truce. You ought not to have begun being singular again instantly. So you are going to be perfectly contented in your abominable Rue de l'Homme Arme. I was very desperate indeed there, that I was. What have you against me? You cause me a great deal of grief. Fi!"

And, becoming suddenly serious, she gazed intently at Jean Valjean and added:

"Are you angry with me because I am happy?"

Ingenuousness sometimes unconsciously penetrates deep. This question, which was simple for Cosette, was profound for Jean Valjean. Cosette had meant to scratch, and she lacerated.

Jean Valjean turned pale.

He remained for a moment without replying, then, with an inexpressible intonation, and speaking to himself, he murmured:

"Her happiness was the object of my life. Now God may sign my dismissal. Cosette, thou art happy; my day is over."

"Ah, you have said thou to me!" exclaimed Cosette.

And she sprang to his neck.

Jean Valjean, in bewilderment, strained her wildly to his breast. It almost seemed to him as though he were taking her back.

"Thanks, father!" said Cosette.

This enthusiastic impulse was on the point of becoming poignant for Jean Valjean. He gently removed Cosette's arms, and took his hat.

"Well?" said Cosette.

"I leave you, Madame, they are waiting for you."

And, from the threshold, he added:

"I have said thou to you. Tell your husband that this shall not happen again. Pardon me."

Jean Valjean quitted the room, leaving Cosette stupefied at this enigmatical farewell.

CHAPTER II--ANOTHER STEP BACKWARDS

On the following day, at the same hour, Jean Valjean came.

Cosette asked him no questions, was no longer astonished, no longer exclaimed that she was cold, no longer spoke of the drawing-room, she avoided saying either "father" or "Monsieur Jean." She allowed herself to be addressed as you. She allowed herself to be called Madame. Only, her joy had undergone a certain diminution. She would have been sad, if sadness had been possible to her.

It is probable that she had had with Marius one of those conversations in which the beloved man says what he pleases, explains nothing, and satisfies the beloved woman. The curiosity of lovers does not extend very far beyond their own love.

The lower room had made a little toilet. Basque had suppressed the bottles, and Nicolette the spiders.

All the days which followed brought Jean Valjean at the same hour. He came every day, because he had not the strength to take Marius' words otherwise than literally. Marius arranged matters so as to be absent at the hours when Jean Valjean came. The house grew accustomed to the novel ways of M. Fauchelevent. Toussaint helped in this direction: "Monsieur has always been like that," she repeated. The grandfather issued this decree:--"He's an original." And all was said. Moreover, at the age of

ninety-six, no bond is any longer possible, all is merely juxtaposition; a newcomer is in the way. There is no longer any room; all habits are acquired. M. Fauchelevent, M. Tranchelevent, Father Gillenormand asked nothing better than to be relieved from "that gentleman." He added:--"Nothing is more common than those originals. They do all sorts of queer things. They have no reason. The Marquis de Canaples was still worse. He bought a palace that he might lodge in the garret. These are fantastic appearances that people affect."

No one caught a glimpse of the sinister foundation. And moreover, who could have guessed such a thing? There are marshes of this description in India. The water seems extraordinary, inexplicable, rippling though there is no wind, and agitated where it should be calm. One gazes at the surface of these causeless ebullitions; one does not perceive the hydra which crawls on the bottom.

Many men have a secret monster in this same manner, a dragon which gnaws them, a despair which inhabits their night. Such a man resembles other men, he goes and comes. No one knows that he bears within him a frightful parasitic pain with a thousand teeth, which lives within the unhappy man, and of which he is dying. No one knows that this man is a gulf. He is stagnant but deep. From time to time, a trouble of which the onlooker understands nothing appears on his surface. A mysterious wrinkle is formed, then vanishes, then re-appears; an air-bubble rises and bursts. It is the breathing of the unknown beast.

Certain strange habits: arriving at the hour when other people are taking their leave, keeping in the background when other people are displaying themselves, preserving on all occasions what may be designated as the wall-colored mantle, seeking the solitary walk, preferring the deserted street, avoiding any share in conversation, avoiding crowds and festivals, seeming at one's ease and living poorly, having one's key in one's pocket, and one's candle at the porter's lodge, however rich one may be, entering by the side door, ascending the private staircase,--all these insignificant singularities, fugitive folds on the surface, often proceed from a formidable foundation.

Many weeks passed in this manner. A new life gradually took possession of Cosette: the relations which marriage creates, visits, the care of the house, pleasures, great matters. Cosette's pleasures were not costly, they consisted in one thing: being with Marius. The great occupation of her life was to go out with him, to remain with him. It was for them a joy that was always fresh, to go out arm in arm, in the face of the sun, in the open street, without hiding themselves, before the whole world, both of them completely alone.

Cosette had one vexation. Toussaint could not get on with Nicolette, the soldering of two elderly maids being impossible, and she went away. The grandfather was well; Marius argued a case here and there; Aunt Gillenormand peacefully led that life aside which sufficed for her, beside the new household. Jean Valjean came every day.

The address as thou disappeared, the you, the "Madame," the "Monsieur Jean," rendered him another person to Cosette. The care which he had himself taken to detach her from him was succeeding. She became more and more gay and less and less tender. Yet she still loved him sincerely, and he felt it.

One day she said to him suddenly: "You used to be my father, you are no longer my father, you were my uncle, you are no longer my uncle, you were Monsieur Fauchelevent, you are Jean. Who are you then? I don't like all this. If I did not know how good you are, I should be afraid of you."

He still lived in the Rue de l'Homme Arme, because he could not make up his mind to remove to a distance from the quarter where Cosette dwelt.

At first, he only remained a few minutes with Cosette, and then went away.

Little by little he acquired the habit of making his visits less brief. One would have said that he was taking advantage of the authorization of the days which were lengthening, he arrived earlier and departed later.

One day Cosette chanced to say "father" to him. A flash of joy illuminated Jean Valjean's melancholy old countenance. He caught her up: "Say Jean."--"Ah! truly," she replied with a burst of laughter, "Monsieur Jean."--"That is right," said he. And he turned aside so that

she might not see him wipe his eyes.

CHAPTER III--THEY RECALL THE GARDEN OF THE RUE PLUMET

This was the last time. After that last flash of light, complete extinction ensued. No more familiarity, no more good-morning with a kiss, never more that word so profoundly sweet: "My father!" He was at his own request and through his own complicity driven out of all his happinesses one after the other; and he had this sorrow, that after having lost Cosette wholly in one day, he was afterwards obliged to lose her again in detail.

The eye eventually becomes accustomed to the light of a cellar. In short, it sufficed for him to have an apparition of Cosette every day. His whole life was concentrated in that one hour.

He seated himself close to her, he gazed at her in silence, or he talked to her of years gone by, of her childhood, of the convent, of her little friends of those bygone days.

One afternoon,--it was on one of those early days in April, already warm and fresh, the moment of the sun's great gayety, the gardens which surrounded the windows of Marius and Cosette felt the emotion of waking, the hawthorn was on the point of budding, a jewelled garniture of gillyflowers spread over the ancient walls, snapdragons yawned through the crevices of the stones, amid the grass there was a charming beginning of daisies, and buttercups, the white butterflies of the year were making their first appearance, the wind, that minstrel of the

eternal wedding, was trying in the trees the first notes of that grand, auroral symphony which the old poets called the springtide,--Marius said to Cosette:--"We said that we would go back to take a look at our garden in the Rue Plumet. Let us go thither. We must not be ungrateful."--And away they flitted, like two swallows towards the spring. This garden of the Rue Plumet produced on them the effect of the dawn. They already had behind them in life something which was like the springtime of their love. The house in the Rue Plumet being held on a lease, still belonged to Cosette. They went to that garden and that house. There they found themselves again, there they forgot themselves. That evening, at the usual hour, Jean Valjean came to the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire.--"Madame went out with Monsieur and has not yet returned," Basque said to him. He seated himself in silence, and waited an hour. Cosette did not return. He departed with drooping head.

Cosette was so intoxicated with her walk to "their garden," and so joyous at having "lived a whole day in her past," that she talked of nothing else on the morrow. She did not notice that she had not seen Jean Valjean.

"In what way did you go thither?" Jean Valjean asked her."

"On foot."

"And how did you return?"

"In a hackney carriage."

For some time, Jean Valjean had noticed the economical life led by the young people. He was troubled by it. Marius' economy was severe, and that word had its absolute meaning for Jean Valjean. He hazarded a query:

"Why do you not have a carriage of your own? A pretty coupe would only cost you five hundred francs a month. You are rich."

"I don't know," replied Cosette.

"It is like Toussaint," resumed Jean Valjean. "She is gone. You have not replaced her. Why?"

"Nicolette suffices."

"But you ought to have a maid."

"Have I not Marius?"

"You ought to have a house of your own, your own servants, a carriage, a box at the theatre. There is nothing too fine for you. Why not profit by your riches? Wealth adds to happiness."

Cosette made no reply.

Jean Valjean's visits were not abridged. Far from it. When it is the heart which is slipping, one does not halt on the downward slope.

When Jean Valjean wished to prolong his visit and to induce forgetfulness of the hour, he sang the praises of Marius; he pronounced him handsome, noble, courageous, witty, eloquent, good. Cosette outdid him. Jean Valjean began again. They were never weary. Marius--that word was inexhaustible; those six letters contained volumes. In this manner, Jean Valjean contrived to remain a long time.

It was so sweet to see Cosette, to forget by her side! It alleviated his wounds. It frequently happened that Basque came twice to announce: "M. Gillenormand sends me to remind Madame la Baronne that dinner is served."

On those days, Jean Valjean was very thoughtful on his return home.

Was there, then, any truth in that comparison of the chrysalis which had presented itself to the mind of Marius? Was Jean Valjean really a chrysalis who would persist, and who would come to visit his butterfly?

One day he remained still longer than usual. On the following day he observed that there was no fire on the hearth.--"Hello!" he thought. "No fire."--And he furnished the explanation for himself.--"It is perfectly simple. It is April. The cold weather has ceased."

"Heavens! how cold it is here!" exclaimed Cosette when she entered.

"Why, no," said Jean Valjean.

"Was it you who told Basque not to make a fire then?"

"Yes, since we are now in the month of May."

"But we have a fire until June. One is needed all the year in this cellar."

"I thought that a fire was unnecessary."

"That is exactly like one of your ideas!" retorted Cosette.

On the following day there was a fire. But the two arm-chairs were arranged at the other end of the room near the door. "--What is the meaning of this?" thought Jean Valjean.

He went for the arm-chairs and restored them to their ordinary place near the hearth.

This fire lighted once more encouraged him, however. He prolonged the conversation even beyond its customary limits. As he rose to take his leave, Cosette said to him:

"My husband said a queer thing to me yesterday."

"What was it?"

"He said to me: 'Cosette, we have an income of thirty thousand livres. Twenty-seven that you own, and three that my grandfather gives me.' I replied: 'That makes thirty.' He went on: 'Would you have the courage to live on the three thousand?' I answered: 'Yes, on nothing. Provided that it was with you.' And then I asked: 'Why do you say that to me?' He replied: 'I wanted to know.'"

Jean Valjean found not a word to answer. Cosette probably expected some explanation from him; he listened in gloomy silence. He went back to the Rue de l'Homme Arme; he was so deeply absorbed that he mistook the door and instead of entering his own house, he entered the adjoining dwelling. It was only after having ascended nearly two stories that he perceived his error and went down again.

His mind was swarming with conjectures. It was evident that Marius had his doubts as to the origin of the six hundred thousand francs, that he feared some source that was not pure, who knows? that he had even, perhaps, discovered that the money came from him, Jean Valjean, that he hesitated before this suspicious fortune, and was disinclined to take it as his own,--preferring that both he and Cosette should remain poor, rather than that they should be rich with wealth that was not clean.

Moreover, Jean Valjean began vaguely to surmise that he was being shown the door.

On the following day, he underwent something like a shock on entering the ground-floor room. The arm-chairs had disappeared. There was not a single chair of any sort.

"Ah, what's this!" exclaimed Cosette as she entered, "no chairs! Where are the arm-chairs?"

"They are no longer here," replied Jean Valjean.

"This is too much!"

Jean Valjean stammered:

"It was I who told Basque to remove them."

"And your reason?"

"I have only a few minutes to stay to-day."

"A brief stay is no reason for remaining standing."

"I think that Basque needed the chairs for the drawing-room."

"Why?"

"You have company this evening, no doubt."

"We expect no one."

Jean Valjean had not another word to say.

Cosette shrugged her shoulders.

"To have the chairs carried off! The other day you had the fire put out. How odd you are!"

"Adieu!" murmured Jean Valjean.

He did not say: "Adieu, Cosette." But he had not the strength to say: "Adieu, Madame."

He went away utterly overwhelmed.

This time he had understood.

On the following day he did not come. Cosette only observed the fact in the evening.

"Why," said she, "Monsieur Jean has not been here today."

And she felt a slight twinge at her heart, but she hardly perceived it, being immediately diverted by a kiss from Marius.

On the following day he did not come.

Cosette paid no heed to this, passed her evening and slept well that night, as usual, and thought of it only when she woke. She was so happy! She speedily despatched Nicolette to M. Jean's house to inquire whether he were ill, and why he had not come on the previous evening. Nicolette brought back the reply of M. Jean that he was not ill. He was busy. He would come soon. As soon as he was able. Moreover, he was on the point of taking a little journey. Madame must remember that it was his custom to take trips from time to time. They were not to worry about him. They were not to think of him.

Nicolette on entering M. Jean's had repeated to him her mistress' very words. That Madame had sent her to inquire why M. Jean bad not come on the preceding evening."--It is two days since I have been there," said Jean Valjean gently.

But the remark passed unnoticed by Nicolette, who did not report it to Cosette.

CHAPTER IV--ATTRACTION AND EXTINCTION

During the last months of spring and the first months of summer in 1833, the rare passersby in the Marais, the petty shopkeepers, the loungers on thresholds, noticed an old man neatly clad in black, who emerged every day at the same hour, towards nightfall, from the Rue de l'Homme Arme, on the side of the Rue Sainte-Croix-de-la-Bretonnerie, passed in front of the Blancs Manteaux, gained the Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine, and, on arriving at the Rue de l'Echarpe, turned to the left, and entered the Rue Saint-Louis.

There he walked at a slow pace, with his head strained forward, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, his eye immovably fixed on a point which seemed to be a star to him, which never varied, and which was no other than the corner of the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. The nearer he approached the corner of the street the more his eye lighted up; a sort of joy illuminated his pupils like an inward aurora, he had a fascinated and much affected air, his lips indulged in obscure movements, as though he were talking to some one whom he did not see, he smiled vaguely and advanced as slowly as possible. One would have said that, while desirous of reaching his destination, he feared the moment when he should be close at hand. When only a few houses remained between him and that street which appeared to attract him his pace slackened, to such a degree that, at times, one might have thought that he was no longer advancing at all. The vacillation of his head and the fixity of his eyeballs suggested the thought of the magnetic needle seeking the pole.

Whatever time he spent on arriving, he was obliged to arrive at last; he reached the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire; then he halted, he trembled, he thrust his head with a sort of melancholy timidity round the corner of the last house, and gazed into that street, and there was in that tragic look something which resembled the dazzling light of the impossible, and the reflection from a paradise that was closed to him. Then a tear, which had slowly gathered in the corner of his lids, and had become large enough to fall, trickled down his cheek, and sometimes stopped at his mouth. The old man tasted its bitter flavor. Thus he remained for several minutes as though made of stone, then he returned by the same road and with the same step, and, in proportion as he retreated, his glance died out.

Little by little, this old man ceased to go as far as the corner of the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire; he halted half way in the Rue Saint-Louis; sometimes a little further off, sometimes a little nearer.

One day he stopped at the corner of the Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine and looked at the Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire from a distance. Then he shook his head slowly from right to left, as though refusing himself something, and retraced his steps.

Soon he no longer came as far as the Rue Saint-Louis. He got as far as the Rue Pavee, shook his head and turned back; then he went no further than the Rue des Trois-Pavillons; then he did not overstep the Blancs-Manteaux. One would have said that he was a pendulum which was

no longer wound up, and whose oscillations were growing shorter before ceasing altogether.

Every day he emerged from his house at the same hour, he undertook the same trip, but he no longer completed it, and, perhaps without himself being aware of the fact, he constantly shortened it. His whole countenance expressed this single idea: What is the use?--His eye was dim; no more radiance. His tears were also exhausted; they no longer collected in the corner of his eye-lid; that thoughtful eye was dry. The old man's head was still craned forward; his chin moved at times; the folds in his gaunt neck were painful to behold. Sometimes, when the weather was bad, he had an umbrella under his arm, but he never opened it.

The good women of the quarter said: "He is an innocent." The children followed him and laughed.