

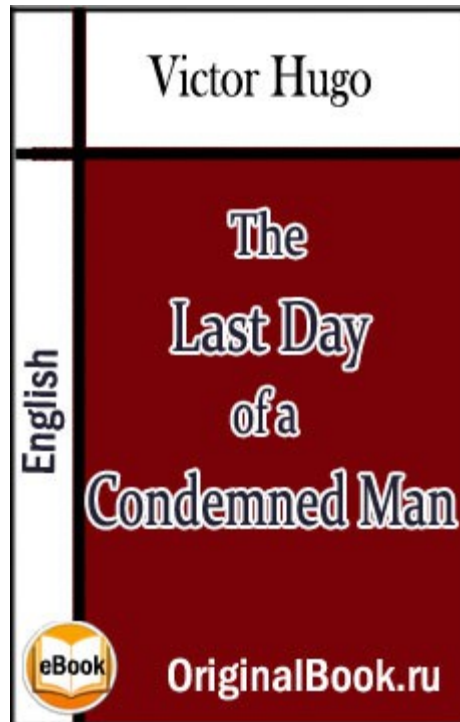
# THE LAST DAY OF A CONDEMNED MAN

## VICTOR HUGO

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Original:

[Le Dernier Jour D'un Condamné](#)



1829

Translated by Eugenia De B.

The Last Day of a Condemned Man is a short novel by [Victor Hugo](#) first published in 1829. The novel recounts the thoughts of a man condemned to die.

Victor Hugo wrote this novel to express his feelings that the death penalty should be abolished.

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## **The Last Day Of A Condemned Man. Victor Hugo**

### **PREFACE TO THE 1832 EDITION**

At the head of the earlier editions of this work, published at first without the name of the author, there was nothing but the following lines.

"There are two ways of accounting for the existence of this work. Either there really has been found a bundle of yellow, ragged, papers, on which were inscribed, exactly as they came, the last thoughts of a wretched being; or else there has been a man, a dreamer, occupied in observing nature for the advantage of art, a philosopher, a poet, who, having been seized with these forcible ideas, could not rest until he had given them the tangible form of a volume. Of these two explanations, the reader will choose that which he prefers."

As is seen, at the time when this book was first published, the author did not deem fit to give publicity to the full extent of his thoughts. He preferred waiting to see whether the work would be fully understood. It has been. The author may now, therefore, unmask the political and social ideas, which he wished to render popular under this harmless literary guise. He avows openly, that *The Last Day of a Condemned* is only a pleading, direct or indirect, as is preferred, for the abolition of the penalty of death. His design herein and what he would wish posterity to see in his work, if its attention should ever be given to so slight a production, is, not to make out the special defense of any particular criminal, such defense being transitory as it is easy; he would plead generally and permanently for all accused persons, present and future; it is the great point of human right, stated and pleaded before society at large, that highest judicial court; it is the sombre and fatal question which breathes obscurely in the depths of each capital offense, under the triple envelopes of pathos in which legal eloquence wraps them; it is the question of life and death, I say, laid bare, denuded and despoiled of the sonorous twistings of the bar, revealed in daylight, and placed where it should be seen; in its true and hideous position, not in the law courts, but on the scaffold, not among the judges, but with the executioner!

This is what he has desired to effect. If futurity should award him the glory of having succeeded, which he dares not hope, he desires no other crown.

He proclaims and repeats it, then, in the name of all accused persons, innocent or guilty, before all courts, all juries, and all judges. And in order that his pleading should be as

universal as his cause, he has been careful, while writing *The Last Day of a Condemned*, to omit anything of a special, individual, contingent, relative, or modifiable nature, as also any episode, anecdote, known event, or real name, keeping to the limit (if "limit" it may be termed!) of pleading the cause of any condemned prisoner whatever, executed at any time, for any offense. Happy if, with no other aid than his thoughts, he has mined sufficiently into the subject to make a heart bleed, under the Æs triplex of a magistrate! Happy if he could render merciful those who consider themselves just! Happy if, penetrating sufficiently deep within the judge, he has sometimes reached the man.

Three years ago, when this book first appeared, some people thought it was worth while to dispute the authorship! Some asserted that it was an English book, and others thmt it was an American book. What a singular mania there is for seeking the origin of matters at a great distance; trying to trace from the source of the Nile, the streamlet which washes one's street. Alas! this work is neither English, neither American nor Chinese. The author found the idea of *The Last Day of a Condemned*, not in a book, for he is not accustomed to seek his ideas so far afield, but where you all might find it, where perhaps you may all have found it, (for who is there that has not reflected and had reveries of *The Last Day of a Condemned* ,) there, on the public walk, on the Place de Grève.

It was there, while passing casually during an execution, that this forcible idea occurred to him; and, since then, after those funereal Thursdays of the Court of Cassation, which send forth through Paris the intelligence of an approaching execution, the hoarse voices of the spectators going to the Grève, as they hurried past his windows, filled his mind with the prolonged misery of the person about to suffer, which he pictured to himself from hour to hour, according to what he conceived was its actual progress. It was a torture which commenced from daybreak and lasted, like that of the miserable being who was tortured at the same moment, until four o'clock. Then only, when once the ponens caput expiravit was announced by the heavy toll of the clock bell, he breathed again freely, and regained comparative peace of mind. Finally, one day, he thinks it was after the execution of Ulbach, he commenced writing this work; and since then he has felt relieved. When one of those public crimes, called legal executions, are committed, his conscience now acquits him of participation therein.

All this, however, is not sufficient; it is well to be freed from self-accusation, but it would be still better to endeavor to save human life.

Also, he does not know any aim more elevated, more holy, than that of seeking the abolition of capital punishment; with sincere devotion he joins the wishes and efforts of those philanthropic men of all nations, who have labored, of late years, to throw down patibulary tree, the only tree which revolution fails to uproot! It is with pleasure that he

takes his turn, to give his feeble stroke, after the all-powerful blow which, sixty-seven years ago, Beccaria gave to the ancient gibbet which had been standing during so many centuries of Christianity.

We have just said that the scaffold is the only edifice which revolutions do not demolish. It is rare indeed that revolutions are temperate in spilling blood; and although they are sent to prune, to lop, to reform society, the punishment of death is a branch which they have never removed!

We own, however, if any revolution ever appeared to us capable and worthy of abolishing capital punishment, it was the revolution of July. It seemed, indeed, as if it belonged to the merciful popular rising of modern times to erase the barbarous enactments of Louis XI., of Richelieu, and of Robespierre, and to inscribe at the head of the code the inviolability of human life! 1830 was worthy of breaking the axe of '93.

At one time we really hoped for it. In August, 1830, there seemed so much generosity afloat, such a spirit of gentleness and civilization in the multitude, that we almost fancied the punishment of death was abolished, by a tacit and unanimous consent, with the rest of the evils which had oppressed us. For some weeks confiding and credulous, we had faith in the inviolability of life, for the future, as in the inviolability of liberty.

And, indeed, two months had scarcely passed, when an attempt was made to resolve into a legal reality the sublime Utopia of Cæsar Bonesana.

Unfortunately this attempt: was awkward, imperfect, almost hypocritical; and made in a different spirit from the general interest.

It was in the month of October, 1830, as may be remembered; some days after France had been startled by the proposition to bury Napoleon under the column, that the question of capital punishment was brought before the Chamber, and discussed with much talent, energy, and apparent feeling. During two days, there was a continued succession of impressive eloquence on this momentous subject.

And what was the subject?--to abolish the punishment of death?

Yes, and No!

Here is the truth:

Four men of the world, four persons well known in society, --had attempted, in the higher

range of politics, one of those daring strokes which Bacon calls crimes, and which Machiavel calls enterprises . Well! crime or enterprise,--the law, brutal for all, would punish it by death; and the four unfortunates were prisoners, legal captives guarded by three hundred tri-colored cockades, under the fine ogives at Vincennes. What was now to be done? You understand the impossibility of sending to the Grève, in a common cart, ignobly bound with coarse ropes, seated back to back with that functionary who must not be named,--four men of our own rank,--"four men of the world!"

Still, if there had even been a mahogany guillotine!

Well, to settle the matter, they need only abolish the punishment of death!

And thereupon the Chamber set to work!

Notice, gentlemen, that only yesterday they had treated this abolition as Utopian, as a theory, a dream, a poetic folly. This was not the first time that an endeavor had been made to draw their attention to the cart, the coarse ropes, and the fatal machine. How strange it is, that these hideous details suddenly acquired such sudden force in their minds!

Bah! they had good reason to be excited, it was not on account of the general good that they sought to abolish capital punishment; but for their own sakes,--as Deputies, who might become Ministers. And thus an alloy of egotism alters and destroys the fairest social combinations. It is the dark vein in marble, which, crossing everywhere, comes forth at each moment unexpectedly under the chisel!

It is surely unnecessary for us to declare that we were not among those who desired the death of the four ministers. When once they were imprisoned, the indignant anger we had felt at their attempt, changed with us as with every one else, into profound pity. We reflected on the prejudices of education of some among them: on the ill-developed head of their chief, fanatic and obstinate relapse of the conspiracies of 1804, whitened before its time, in the damp cells of state prisons; on the fatal necessity of their common position; the impossibility of their placing a drag on that rapid slope, down which monarchy rushed blindly on the 8th of August, 1829; on the influence of personal intercourse with royalty over them, which we had hitherto underrated; and finally we reflected, above all, on the dignity which one among them spread, like a purple mantle, over their misfortunes! We were among those who sincerely wished their lives saved, and would have readily lent our aid to that effect. If a scaffold had been raised for them in Paris, we feel quite certain--and if it be an illusion, we would preserve it--that there would have been an insurrection to pull it down; and we should have been of the rioters. Here I must add that, in each social crisis, of all scaffolds, the political one is the most

abominable, the most fatal, the most mischievous, the most necessary to extirpate.

In revolutionary times, beware of the first head that falls. It excites the sanguinary appetite of the mob.

We therefore agreed thoroughly with those who wished to spare the four ministers, both as a matter of feeling, and of political reasoning. But we should have liked better that the Chamber had chosen another occasion for proposing the abolition of capital punishment.

If they had suggested this desirable change, not with reference to those four ministers, fallen from the Tuileries to Vincennes, but in the instance of the first highwayman--in the case of one of those wretches to whom you neither give word nor look, and from whom you drink as they pass. Miserable beings, who, during their ragged infancy, ran barefoot in the mud of the crossings; shivering in winter near the quays, or seeking to warm themselves from the kitchens of M. Véfour, where you happen to be dining; scratching out, here and there, a crust of bread from the heaps of filth, and wiping it before eating; scraping in the gutter all day, with a rusty nail, in the hopes of finding a farthing; having no other amusement than the gratuitous sight of the king's fête, and the : executions--that other gratuitous sight: poor devils! whom hunger forces to theft, and theft to all the rest; children disinherited by their step-mother, the world; who are adopted by the house of correction, in their twelfth year, by the galleys at eighteen, and by the guillotine at forty! Unfortunate beings, whom, by means of a school and a workshop, you might have rendered good, moral, useful; and with whom you now know not what to do; iflinging them away like a useless burthen, sometimes into the red antheaps of Toulon, sometimes into the silent cemetery of Clamart; cutting off life after taking away liberty. If it had been in the instance of one of these miteasts that you had proposed to abolish the punishment of death, oh! then your councils would have indeed been noble, great, holy, majestic! It has ever belonged to those who are truly great and truly powerful, to protect the lowly and weak. Were the august fathers of Trent assisting the heretics to repent in the name of the entrails of God, per viscera Dei, because they hoped for their conversion, quoniam sancta synodis sperat hærellicorum conversionem, no assembly of men has ever presented to the world a spectacle more sublime, more illustrious and more merciful. How grand would be a council of Brahmins, advocating the cause of the Pariah! And with us the cause of the Pariah is the cause of the people. In abolishing the penalty of death, for sake of the people, and without waiting until you were personally interested in the question, you would have done more than a political work, you would have conferred a social benefit.

Instead of this, you have not yet even completed a political act, while seeking to abolish it, not for the abolition's sake, but to save four unfortunate ministers, caught with their

hands in the sack of coups d'etat.

What has happened? As you were not sincere, the people were distrustful; when they suspected the cause of your change, they became angry at the question altogether; and, strange to say, they declared in favor of that condign punishment, the weight of which presses entirely on themselves.

Immediately after the famous discussion in the Chamber, orders were given to respite, indefinitely, all executions. This was apparently a great step gained; the opponents of punishment by death breathed again; but the illusion was of short duration. The trial of the ministers was ended. I know not what judgment was rendered.

The four lives were spared, and the fortress of Ham was selected as a medium between death and liberty. These different arrangements once completed, all fear was banished from the minds of the ruling statesmen; and along with fear, humanity was also banished. There was no further question of abolishing capital punishment; and, when they no longer wished to prove to the contrary, Utopia became again Utopia, theory was theory, and poetry, poetry.

There were still in the prisons, however, some unfortunate condemned wretches, who, having been allowed during five or six months to walk about the prison-yards and breathe the fresh air, felt tranquil for the future, sure of life, mistaking their reprieve for pardon. But wait.

There had indeed been a reprieve of six months for these hapless captives, whose sufferings were thus gratuitously aggravated, by making them cling again to life: then, without reason, without necessity, without well knowing why, the respites were all revoked and all these human beings were launched into eternity.

Let us add, that never were executions accompanied by more atrocious circumstances, than since that revocation of the reprieve of July. Never have the anecdotes of the Grève been more revolting, or more effectual to prove the execration of capital punishment.

We will cite here two or three examples of the horrors which have attended recent executions. We must shock the nerves of the wives of king's council. A wife is sometimes a conscience.

In the South, towards the close of last September, the following circumstance occurred; I think it was at Pamiers. Towards the end of September the officers went to a man in prison, whom they found quietly playing at cards, and gave him notice that he was to die

in two hours. The wretched creature was horror-struck; for, during the six months he had been forgotten, he had no longer thought on death; he was confessed, bound, his hair cut off, he was placed in the fatal cart, and taken to the place of execution: the executioner took him from the priest: laid him down and on the see-saw, put him in the oven, to use slang, and then let loose the axe. The heavy triangle of iron slowly detached itself, falling by jerks down the slides, until, horrible to relate, it gashed the man, but without killing him! The poor creature uttered a frightful cry. The disconcerted executioner hauled up the axe, and let it slide down again. A second time, the neck of the malefactor was cut, without being severed. Again he shrieked, the crowd joining him. The executioner raised the axe a third time, hoping to do better at the third stroke, but, no! The third stroke only started a third stream of blood on the prisoner's neck, but the head did not fall. Let us cut short these fearful details. Five times the axe was raised and let fall, and after the fifth stroke, the condemned was still shrieking for mercy. The indignant populace began in justice to stone the executioner, who hid himself beneath the guillotine, away behind the gendarmes' horses: but we have not yet finished. The hapless culprit seeing he was left alone on the scaffold, raised himself on the plank, and there standing, frightful, streaming with blood, he demanded with feeble cries that some one would unbind him. The populace, full of pity, were on the point of forcing the gendarmes to help the hapless wretch, who had five times undergone his sentence. At this moment the servant of the executioner, a youth under twenty, mounted on the scaffold, told the sufferer to turn round, that he might unbind him: then, taking advantage of the posture of the dying man, who had yielded himself without any mistrust, sprang, on him, and slowly cut through the neck with a knife! All this happened; all this was seen. Yes.

According to law, a judge was obliged to be present at this execution: by a sign he could have stopped all. Why was he leaning back in his carriage then, this man, while they massacred another man? What was he doing, this punisher of assassins, while they thus assassinated, in open daylight, his fellow-creature?

And the judge was not tried for this: nor was the executioner tried for it: and no tribunal inquired into this monstrous violation of all law on one of God's creatures!

In the seventeenth century, that epoch of barbarity in the criminal code, under Richelieu, under Christophe Fouquet, when Monsieur de Chalais was put to death at Nantes, by an awkward soldier, who, instead of a sword-stroke, gave him thirty-four strokes of a cooper's adze, thus at least it seemed irregular to the parliament of Paris; there was an inquest and a trial; and, although Richelieu and Fouquet were not punished the soldier was. An injustice doubtless, but in which there was some show of justice.

In the modern instance, nothing was done: the thing took place after July, in times of



civilization and march of intellect, a year after the celebrated lamentation of the Chamber on the penalty of death. The circumstance attracted no attention; the Paris papers published it as an anecdote, and no one cared about it. It was only known that the guillotine had been put out of order by some one who wished to annoy the executioner. A dismissed servant of the executioner, to revenge himself, had taken this method of action.

It was only imagination. Let us continue.

At Dijon, only three months ago, they brought to the scaffold a woman--a woman! This time again, the axe of the guillotine failed of its effect, and the head was not quite detached. Then the executioner's servants pulled the feet of the woman; and, amidst the yells of the populace, thus fulfilled the law!

At Paris, we have come back to the time of secret executions; since July they no longer dare to decapitate in the Grève; as they are afraid, as they are cowardly, here is what they do. They took lately from the Bicêtre prison, a man, under sentence of death, named Désamdreux, I think; they put him in a sort of panier on two wheels, closed on every side, bolted and padlocked: then with a gendarme in front, and another at the back, without noise or crowd, they proceeded to the deserted barrier Saint-Jacques. It was eight in the morning when they arrived, with but little light. There was a newly erected guillotine, and, for spectators, some dozens of little boys, grouped on the heaps of stones around the unexpected machine. Quickly they withdrew the man from the basket; and, without giving him time to breathe, they furtively, secretly, shamefully, deprived him of life! And that is called a public and solemn act of high justice! Infamous derision!

How then do the law-givers understand the word civilization? To what point have we attained? Justice reduced to stratagems and frauds! The law reduced to expedient! Monstrous!

A man condemned to death, it would seem, was greatly to be feared, since they put an end to him in this traitorous fashion!

Let us be just, however; the execution was not quite secret. In the morning people hawked and sold, as usual, the sentence of death through the streets. It appears, there are people who live by such sales. The crime of a hapless fellow-creature, its punishment, his torture, his agony, forms their stock in trade: a paper that they sell for a penny. Can one conceive anything more hideous than this coin, verdigrised in blood? Who can it be that picks it up?

Here are enough of facts: here are too many. Is not all this horrible?

What can be alleged in favor of punishment by death?

I put this question seriously. I ask it that it may be answered; I ask it of legislators, and not of literary gossips. I know there are people who take the excellence of punishment by death for a text of paradoxes, like any other theme; there are others who only advocate capital punishment because they hate so-and-so who attack it. It is for them almost a literary question, a question of persons, and proper names; these are the envious, who do not find more fault with good lawyers than with good artists. The Joseph Grippas are no more wanting to the Filangieri, than the Torregiani to the Michael-Angelos, and the Scuderias to the Corneilles.

It is not to these that I address myself; but to men of law properly so called--to logicians, to reasoners; to those who love the penalty of death, for its beauty, its goodness, its grace!

See, let them give their reasons.

Those who judge and condemn, say that punishment by death is necessary, first-- because it is requisite to remove from the social community a member which has already injured it, and might injure it again. If this be all, perpetual imprisonment would suffice. What is the use of inflicting death? You argue that a prisoner may escape from jail--keep watch more strictly! If you do not believe in the solidity of iron bars, how do you venture to have menageries?

Let there be no executioner where the jailer can be sufficient.

But, they answer: "Society must avenge itself, society must punish." Neither one nor the other: vengeance is an individual act, and punishment belongs to God.

Society is between the two; punishment is above its power, retaliation beneath it. Society should not punish, to avenge itself; it should correct, to ameliorate others!

Their third and last reason remains, the theory of example. "We must make examples. By the sight of the fate inflicted on criminals, we must shock those who might otherwise be tempted to imitate them!" Well; in the first place we deny, the power of the example. We deny, that the sight of executions produces the desired effect. Far from edifying the common people, it demoralizes and ruins their feeling, injuring every virtue: proofs of this abound and would encumber our argument if we chose to cite them. We will allude to only one fact, amongst a thousand, because it is of recent occurrence. It happened only ten days back from the present moment, viz., on the 5th of March, the last day of the

Carnival. At St. Poi, immediately after the execution of an incendiary named Louis Camus, a group of masqueraders came and danced round the still reeking scaffold! Make then your fine examples! Mardi-Gras will turn them into jest!

If, notwithstanding all experience, you still hold to the theory of example, then give us back the Sixteenth Century; be in reality formidable: restore to us a variety of suffering; restore us, Farinacci; restore us the sworn torturers; restore us the gibbet, the wheel, the block, the rack, the thumb-screw, the live-burial vault, the burning cauldron; restore us in the streets of Paris, as the most open shop among the rest, the hideous stall of the executioner, constantly full of human flesh; give us back Montfaucon, its caves of bones, its beams, its crooks, its chains, its rows of skeletons; give us back, in its permanence and power, that gigantic outhouse of the Paris executioner! This indeed would be wholesale example, this would be punishment by death, well understood; this would be a system of execution in some proportion--which, while it is horrible, is also terrible!

Or better, do as in England. In England, land of commerce, they capture a smuggler on the coast near Dover, and use him for an example--far an example they leave him swinging on the gibbet; but as the weather might destroy the corpse, they wrap it carefully in canvas soaked in tar, in order not to have to renew it too often. Oh, land of economy! Tar the hanged ones!

However there is still some logic in that. It is the most human way of using the theory of example.

But do you seriously suppose you are making an example, when you take the life of a poor wretch, in the most deserted part of the exterior boulevards? On the Grève in open daylight it might be so, but at the barrier Saint-Jacques, at eight o'clock in the morning--can it be that that is an example? An example for whom? For the trees of the boulevard apparently.

Do not you see then, that your public executions are done in private? That fear is with the execution, and not among the multitude? One is sometimes tempted to believe, that the advocates for capital punishment have not thoroughly considered in what it consists. But place in the scales, against any crime whatever, this exorbitant right, which society arrogates to itself, of taking away that which it did not bestow: that most irreparable of evils!

The alternatives are these: first, the man you destroy is without family, relations, or friends, in the world. In this case, he has received neither education nor instruction; no care has been bestowed either on his mind or heart; then, by what right would you kill

this miserable orphan? You punish him because his infancy trailed on the ground, without stem, or support: you make him pay the penalty of the isolated position in which you left him! you make a crime of his misfortune! No one taught him to know what he was doing; this man lived in ignorance: the fault was in his destiny, not himself. You destroy one who is innocent.

Or, secondly; the man has a family; and then do you think the fatal stroke wounds him alone? that his father, his mother, or his children will not suffer by it? No, in killing him, you vitally injure all his family. And thus again you punish the innocent.

Blind and ill-directed penalty; which, on whatever side it turns, strikes the innocent!

Imprison for life this culprit who has a family: in his cell he can still work for those who belong to him. But how can he help them from the depth of the tomb? And can you reflect without shuddering, on what will become of those little boys, of those little girls, from whom you take away their father, their support? Do you not feel that in fifteen years the one may be in the galleys, the other in the dancing halls?

In the colonies, when a slave is condemned to public execution, there are a thousand francs of indemnity paid to the proprietor of the man! What, you compensate a master, and you do not indemnify a family? In this country, do you not take the man from those who possess him? Is he not, by a much more sacred tie than master and slave, the property of his father, the wealth of his wife, the fortune of his children?

We have already proved your law guilty of assassination; now we have convicted it of robbery!

And then another consideration. Do you consider the soul of this man? Do you know in what state it is, that you dismiss it so hastily?

This may be called sentimental reasoning, by some disdainful logicians, who draw their arguments only from their minds. I often prefer the reasonings of the heart; and certainly the two should always go together. Reason is on our side, feeling is on our side, and experience is on our side. In those States where punishment by death is abolished, the mass of capital crime has yearly a progressive decrease. Let this fact have its weight.

I do not advocate, however, a sudden and complete abolition of the penalty of death, such as was so heedlessly attempted in the Chamber of Deputies. On the contrary, I desire every precaution, every experiment, every suggestion of prudence: besides, in addition to this gradual change, I would have the whole penal code examined, and reformed; and

time is a great ingredient requisite to make such a work complete. But independently of a partial abolition of death in cases of forgery, incendiarism, minor thefts, et cætera, I would wish that, from the present time, in all the greater offenses, the Judge should be obliged to propose the following question to the Jury: "Has the accused acted from Passion or from Interest?" And in case the Jury decide "the accused acted from Passion," then there should be no sentence of death.

Let not the opposite party deceive themselves; this question of the penalty of death gains ground every day. Before long, the world will unanimously solve it on the side of mercy. During the past century, punishments have become gradually milder: the rack has disappeared, the wheel has disappeared; and now the guillotine is shaken.

This mistaken punishment will leave France, we hope; and, please God, it will depart limping, for we itch to give it some good kicks.

It must ask hospitality of some barbarous people,--not of Turkey, which is becoming civilized, not of the savages, for they will not have it: but let it descend some steps of the ladder of civilization, and seek refuge in Spain, or in Russia!

In the early ages, the social edifice rested on three columns, the priest, the king and the headsman. It is a long time since a voice exclaimed, "The gods have departed!" Lately another voice has cried, "The kings have departed!" It is now full time that a third voice shall be raised to say, "The executioner must go!"

Thus the barbarous usages of the olden times fall one by one; thus Providence completes modern regeneration.

To those who regret the gods, we say, "God remains!" To those who regret the Kings, we say, "Our Country remains!" But to those who could regret the Executioner we can say nothing.

Let it not be supposed that social order will depart with the scaffold; the social building will not fall from wanting this hideous keystone. Civilization is nothing but a series of transformations. For what then do I ask your aid? The civilization of penal laws. The gentle laws of Christ will penetrate at last into the Code, and shine through its enactments. We shall look on crime as a disease, and its physicians shall displace the judges, its hospitals displace the galleys. Liberty and health shall be alike. We shall pour balm and oil where we formerly applied iron and fire; evil will be treated in charity, instead of in anger. This change will be simple and sublime. The Cross shall displace the Gibbet. That is all.

15 March, 1832..

## A COMEDY APROPOS OF A TRAGEDY

### PERSONAGES

Madame de Blinval  
The Chevalier  
Ergaste  
An Elegaic Poet  
A Philosopher  
A Fat Man  
A Thin Man  
Women  
A Lackey

### A SALON

**AN ELEGIAC POET**, reading.

*The next day, footsteps were seen in the forest,  
A dog, whining, wandered along the banks of the  
river,  
And when the damsel all in tears  
Returned, her heart full of fears,  
To watch from the very old tower of an antique  
châtel,  
She heard her sad sobs, the sad Isaure,  
But she heard no more, the mandore  
Of the handsome minstrel!*

**ALL THE AUDIENCE.**

Bravo! Charming! Ravishing!

They clap their hands.

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

There is in that ending an indefinable mystery which brings tears to the eyes.

**THE ELEGIAC POET**, modestly.

The catastrophe is hidden.

**THE CHEVALIER**, throwing up his head.

Mandore, minstrel, so romantic!

**THE ELEGIAC POET.**

Yes, sir, but only the reasonably romantic, the true romantic. What would you have?

We must make some concessions.

**THE CHEVALIER.**

Concessions! concessions! That is how taste declines. I would give all the romantic verses in the world for this simple quatrain:

*So by Pride and by Cythere,  
Handsome Bernard is warned  
That the Art of Loving would on Saturday  
Come to sup with the Art of Pleasing.*

There is true poetry. The Art of Loving supping on Saturday with the Art of Pleasing! Well and good! But to-day it is the mandore, the minstrel. We no longer have fugitive poetry. If I were a poet, I would write fugitive poetry, but I, I am not a poet.

**THE ELEGIAC POET.**

However, the elegies...

**THE CHEVALIER.**

Fugitive poetry, sir! (Aside to Madame de Blinval) And then châtel is not French; we

say castel.

**SOMEONE**, to the Elegiac Poet.

Note, sir. You say the antique châtel, why not the Gothic?

**THE ELEGIAC POET**.

Gothic is not in the verse.

**SOMEONE**.

Ah! That is different.

**THE ELEGIAC POET**, continuing.

You see, sir, we must limit ourselves. I am not one of those who wish to disorganize French verse, and lead us back to the time of Rousard and of Brébeuf. I am romantic, but in moderation. And so in the emotions.

I like the soft, the dreamy, the melancholy, but never the bloody, never the horrible. Veil the catastrophes. I know there are people, fools, with delirious imaginations who--Stop, ladies, have you read the new novel?

**THE LADIES**.

What novel?

**THE ELEGIAC POET**.

The Last Day...

**THE FAT MAN**.

Enough, sir! I know what you are going to say. The title alone upsets my nerves.

**MADAME DE BLINVAL**.

And mine too. It is a frightful book. I have it here.



**THE LADIES.**

Let us see, let us see.

They pass the book from hand to hand.

**SOMEONE**, reading.

The Last Day of a...

**THE FAT MAN.**

Pray, madame!

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

Indeed, it is an abominable book, a book which gives one the nightmare, a book that makes one ill.

**A WOMAN**, aside.

I must read it.

**THE FAT MAN.**

We must confess that custom is becoming more depraved day by day. My God, what a horrible idea, to develop, to analyze, one after another, all the physical sufferings, all the moral tortures of a man condemned to death, on the day of execution. Is it not atrocious? Can you believe, ladies, that a writer has taken this for a theme, and that there is a public for this writer?

**THE CHEVALIER.**

It is indeed supremely impertinent.

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

And who is this author?

**THE FAT MAN.**

There was no name on the first edition.

**THE ELEGIAC POET.**

It is the same who has written two other novels; 'pon my honor, I forget the titles. The first began at the Morgue and ended on the scaffold. In each chapter, there was an ogre who ate a child.

**THE FAT MAN.**

You have read that, sir?

**THE ELEGIAC POET.**

Yes, sir, the scene was laid in Iceland.

**THE FAT MAN.**

In Iceland,--it is frightful.

**THE ELEGIAC POET.**

In the other he has odes, ballads, and I know not what all, he has also monsters who have corps bleus.

**THE CHEVALIER, laughing.**

Corbleu! That ought to make a glorious rhyme.

**THE ELEGIAC POET.**

He has also published a drama--he calls it

A drama--in which is found this beautiful line:

Tomorrow, the twenty-fifth of June one thousand six hundred and fifty-seven.

**SOMEONE.**

Ah, what verse!

**THE ELEGIAC POET.**

It could be written in figures, you see, ladies:

To-morrow, 25 June, 1657.

He laughs. They laugh.

**THE CHEVALIER.**

That is something peculiar to the poetry of to-day.

**THE FAT MAN.**

Ah! He does not know how to versify,

That fellow! What is his name?

**THE ELEGIAC POET.**

He has a name as difficult to pronounce as it is to remember. It has Goth, Visigoth, and Ostrogoth in it.

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

He is a nasty man.

**THE FAT MAN**

An abominable man.

**A YOUNG WOMAN.**

Some one who knows him has told me...

**THE FAT MAN.**

You know some some one who knows him?

**THE YOUNG WOMAN.**

Yes, and who told me that he is a sweet simple man who lives in retirement, and who passes his days in playing with his little children.

**THE POET.**

And his nights in dreaming of works of darkness. It is singular there is a verse that I found quite naturally:

And his nights in dreaming of works of ténèbres (darkness). With a good pause. I have only the other line to find. Good!

Funebres (funereal).

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

Quidquid tenabat dicere, versus erat.

**THE FAT MAN.**

You say that this author has little children.

Impossible, madame. When he has written such a work as that! Such an atrocious novel!

**SOMEONE.**

But what is the object of the work?

**THE POET.**

How should I know?

**A PHILOSOPHER.**

It seems to have for an object the abolition of capital punishment.

**THE FAT MAN.**

A horror, say I!

**THE CHEVALIER.**

Ah! so it is a duel with the executioner.

**THE POET.**

He wishes the guillotine all sorts of terrible things.

**THE THIN MAN.**

I can imagine it; full of denunciations.

**THE FAT MAN.**

Not at all. There is hardly two pages of it about capital punishment. All the rest is about the sensations.

**THE PHILOSOPHER.**

There is the mistake. The subject merits reasoning. A drama or a novel proves nothing. And besides, I have read the book, and it is bad.

**THE POET.**

Detestable! Is that art? And then too, this criminal, do I know him ? No. What has he done? No one knows. Perhaps he is a very bad rascal. No one has the right to interest me in some one I do not know.

**THE FAT MAN.**

He certainly has not the right to shock his reader by physical suffering. When I see a tragedy, some one kills himself, very good !

That makes no difference to me. But a novel makes your hair stand on end, gives you goose-flesh and bad dreams. I was laid up in bed for two days after having read it.

**THE PHILOSOPHER.**

Added to that it is a cold and stiff book.

**THE POET.**

Book! Book!

**THE PHILOSOPHER.**

Yes--and as you said a while ago, sir, it is not of the genuine æsthetic sort. I am interested in the abstract. I see no personality in it equal to my own, and the style is neither simple nor clear. That is how you put it, is it not?

**THE POET.**

Undoubtedly, undoubtedly. Personalities are not necessary.

**THE PHILOSOPHER.**

The condemned man is not interesting.

**THE POET.**

How is he interesting? He has committed crime and has no remorse, I would have done differently. I would have related the story of my condemned. Born of honest parents. A good education. Love. Jealousy.

A crime which is not a crime. And then, remorse! remorse! plenty of remorse! But the human laws are implacable; he must die.

And then I would have treated the question of capital punishment. All in good season.

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

Ah! Ah!

**THE PHILOSOPHER.**

Pardon me. The book, according to you, proves nothing. A special case does not govern all.

**THE POET.**

Well! so much the better; why not have chosen for a hero, for instance---Malesherbes, the virtuous Malesherbes? his last day, his prayers? Oh I then, we would have had a fine and noble spectacle! I would have cried, I would have shuddered, I would have wanted to mount the scaffold with him.

**THE PHILOSOPHER.**

Not I.

**THE CHEVALIER.**

Nor I. He was a revolutionary, at the bottom, your M. de Malesherbes.

**THE PHILOSOPHER.**

Malesherbes' scaffold proves nothing against capital punishment in general.

**THE FAT MAN.**

Capital punishment! Why should we bother about that. What has it done to you? This author must certainly be very ill-bred to come and give us the nightmare on this subject with his book!

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

Ah! Yes, he must have a very bad heart!

**THE FAT MAN.**

He forces us to look into prisons, into the galleys, into Bicêtre. It is very disagreeable. We know very well that they are filthy places; but what does it matter to society?

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

Those who have made the laws are not children.

**THE PHILOSOPHER.**

Ah! meanwhile, in presenting things truthfully...

**THE THIN MAN.**

That is precisely what he lacks; truth.

What can a poet know of such things? He must be at least a public prosecutor. Stop, I have read, in a review which a journal had on this book, that the condemned said nothing when they read his sentence; very good, but I have seen a condemned man, who, at a loud cry--you see.

**THE PHILOSOPHER.**

Allow me...

**THE THIN MAN.**

Wait; gentlemen, the guillotine, the Grève, are in bad taste;--and that proves that this is a book that corrupts the taste, and renders you incapable of pure fresh emotions. These are the supporters of wholesome literature. I would like to be a member of the Academie Française...But here is Ergaste, who is one already. What do you think of The Last Day of a Condemned?

**ERGASTE.**

Upon my word, sir, I have not, and will not, read it. I dined to-day with Madame de Sénange, and the Marquise de Morival spoke of it to the Duc de Melcourt. They say there are personalities against the magistracy, and, above all, against President d'Alimont.

The Abbè de Horicour has been insulted. It seems that there is a chapter against religion, and a chapter against monarchy. If I were the royal prosecutor!...

**THE CHEVALIER.**

Ah! yes, indeed, royal prosecutor! How about the charter, and the liberty of the press? Meanwhile a poet tries to suppress capital punishment and you agree that it is odious. Ah! ah! under the old régime, who would have been allowed to publish a work against torture!... But, since the fall of the Bastille, we can write anything. Books do frightful harm.



**THE FAT MAN.**

Frightful!--We were all calm, thinking of nothing. It is true that in France we occasionally cut off a head here and there; but only two or three, at the most, in a week.

And all is done without noise and without scandal. No one says anything. No one thinks of it. Not at all, until this book appears .... This book which gives you a horrible headache!

**THE THIN MAN.**

Think of the feelings of a juryman after having read it!

**ERGASTE.**

It would trouble his conscience.

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

Ah! books! books! Who said that of a novel?

**THE POET.**

It is certain that books are very often a poison ruinous to social order.

**THE THIN MAN.**

Without taking in consideration speech, which the romantiques would also like to revolutionize.

**THE POET.**

Consider, sir, there are romantiques and romantiques.

**THE THIN MAN.**

Bad taste, bad taste.

**ERGASTE.**

You are right. Very bad taste.

**THE THIN MAN.**

There is no answering that.

**THE PHILOSOPHER**, leaning on a ladies' armchair.

There are things said in it that are not mentioned even in the rue Mouffetard.

**ERGASTE.**

Ah! The abominable book!

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

Hi! don't throw it into the fire. It is borrowed.

**THE CHEVALIER.**

Talk of to-day. All is depraved; taste and manners. Does it remind you of our days, Madame de Blinval?

**MADAME DE BLINVAL.**

No, sir, not at all.

**THE SUITOR.**

We were the gayest, easy going, set of people. Always beautiful fêtes, and pretty verses. It was charming. Was there ever any thing so gallant as the madrigal which M. de la Harpe composed in honor of the grand ball which Madame la Maréchale de Mailly gave in seventeen hundred and...the year of the execution of Damlens?

**THE FAT MAN**, sighing.

Happy days! Now manners are horrible, and books are likewise. It is Boileau's beautiful line:

And the fall of the sas follows the decadence of manners.

**THE PHILOSOPHER**, aside to the poet.

Do they sup in this house?

**THE POET**.

Yes, by and by.

**THE THIN MAN**.

Meanwhile they wish to abolish capital punishment, and in order to do so write novels that are cruel, immoral and in bad taste, such as *The Last Day of a Condemned*.

**THE FAT MAN**.

Stop, my dear fellow, let us speak no more of this atrocious book; and, since I have met you, tell me, what are you going to do about the man whose petition We rejected three weeks ago?

**THE THIN MAN**.

Ah! Have a little patience! I must go.

I must have air. On my return. If that is too late, however, I will write to my deputy ...

**A LACKEY**, entering.

Supper is served.

## **THE LAST DAY OF A CONDEMNED MAN PART I**

### **I**

BICÊTRE  
Condemned to death!

These five weeks have I dwelt with this idea: always alone with it, always frozen by its presence; always bent under its weight.

Formerly--for it seems to me rather years than weeks since I was a being like any other: each day, each hour, each minute had its idea. My mind, youthful and rich, was full of fancies, which it developed successively, without order or aim, but weaving inexhaustible arabesques on the poor and coarse web of life. Sometimes it was of young girls, sometimes of unbounded possessions, then of battles gained, next of theatres full of sound and light, and then again the young girls and shadowy walks at night beneath spreading chestnut-trees. There was a perpetual revel in my imagination: I might think on what I chose, I was free.

But now, I am a captive! Bodily in irons in a dungeon, and mentally imprisoned in one idea. One horrible, one hideous, one unconquerable idea! I have only one thought, one conviction, one certitude: Condemned to death!

Whatever I do, that frightful thought is always here, like a spectre, beside me, solitary and jealous, banishing all else, haunting me forever, and shaking me with its two icy hands whenever I wish to turn my head away, or to close my eyes. It glides into all forms in which my mind seeks to shun it; mixes itself, like a horrible chant, with all the words which are addressed to me: presses against me even to the odious gratings of my prison. It haunts me while awake,--spies on my convulsive slumbers, and reappears, a vivid incubus, in my dreams under the form of a knife.

I have just started from a troubled sleep, in which I was pursued by this thought: and I made an effort to say to myself, "Oh! it was but a dream!" Well, even before my heavy eyes could read the fatal truth in the dreadful reality which surrounds me, on the damp and reeking dungeon-walls, in the pale rays of my night-lamp, in the rough material of my prison-garb, on the sombre visage of the sentry whose cap gleams through the grating of the door,--it seems to me that already a voice has murmured in my ear: Condemned to death!

## II

It was a beautiful morning at the close of August.

My trial had already lasted three days; my name and accusation had collected each morning a knot of spectators, who crowded the benches of the court, as ravens surround a corpse. During three days all the assembly of judges, witnesses, lawyers, and officers,

had passed and repassed as a phantasmagoria before my troubled vision. The first two nights, through uneasiness and terror, I had been unable to sleep; on the third, I had slept, from fatigue and exhaustion. I had left the jury deliberating at midnight, and was taken back to the heap of straw in my prison, where I instantly fell into a profound sleep, the sleep of forgetfulness. These were the first hours of repose I had obtained, after long watchfulness.

I was still buried in this oblivion when they sent to have me awakened, and my sound slumber was not broken by the heavy step and iron shoes of the jailer, by the clanking of his keys, or the rusty grating of the lock, to rouse me from my lethargy, it required his harsh voice in my ear, his rough hand on my arm. "Come, rise directly!" I opened my eyes, and started up from my straw bed: it was already daylight. At this moment, through the high and narrow window of my cell, I saw on the ceiling of the next corridor (the only firmament I was allowed to see) that yellow reflection by which eyes, accustomed to the darkness of a prison, recognize sunshine. And oh! how I love sunshine!

"It is a fine day I" said I to the jailer.

He remained a moment without answering me, as if uncertain whether it was worth while to expend a word; then, as if with an effort he coolly murmured:

"Very likely."

I remained motionless, my senses half sleeping, with smiling lips, and my eyes fixed on that soft golden reflection which reverberated on the ceiling.

"What a lovely day!" I repeated.

"Yes," answered the man, "they are waiting for you."

These few words, like a web which stops the flight of an insect, flung me back into the reality of my position. I pictured to myself instantly, as in a flash of lightning, that sombre court of justice, the bench of judges, in their robes of sanguine hue, the three rows of stupid-looking witnesses, two gendarmes at the extremity of my bench; black robes waving, and the heads of the crowd clustering in the depth of the shadow, while I fancied that I felt upon me the fixed look of the twelve jurymen, who had sat up while I slept.

I rose; my teeth chattered, my hands trembled, my limbs were so weak that at the first step I had nearly fallen: however, I followed the jailer.

The two gendarmes waited for me at the door-way of the cell. They replaced my fetters. They had a small complicated lock which they closed carefully. I yield mechanically to them. It was like placing a machine on a machine.

We traversed an interior court: and the balmy air of morning reanimated me. I raised my head. The sky was cloudless, and the warm rays of the sun partially intercepted by the tall chimneys traced brilliant angles of light on the high and sombre walls of the prison. It was indeed a delicious day.

We ascended a winding staircase; we passed a corridor; then another; then a third: and then a low door was opened. A current of hot air, laden with noise, rushed from it: it was the breath of the crowd in the court of assizes which I then entered.

On my appearance, the hall resounded with the clank of arms, and the hum of voices: benches were moved noisily; and while I crossed that long chamber between two masses of people who were walled in by soldiers, I painfully felt myself the centre of attraction to all those fixed and gaping looks.

At this moment I perceived that I was without fetters; but I could not recall where or when they had been removed.

Then there was deep silence. I had reached my place at the bar. The instant that the tumult ceased in the crowd, it ceased also in my ideas: a sudden dearness of perception came to me, and I at once understood plainly, what until then I could not discover in my confused state of mind, that the decisive moment was come! I was brought there to hear my sentence!

Explain it who can, from the manner in which this idea came to my mind, it caused me no terror! The windows were open; the air, and the sounds of the city came freely through them: the room was as light as for a wedding; the cheerful rays of the sun traced here and there the luminous forms of the windows, sometimes lengthened on the flooring, sometimes spreading on a table, sometimes broken by the angles of the walls; and from the brilliant square of each window, the rays' fell through the air in dancing golden beams. The judges, at the extremity of the hall, bore a satisfied appearance,--probably from the anticipation of their labors being soon completed. The face of the president, softly lighted by a reflected sunbeam, had a calm and amiable expression; and a young counsel conversed almost gaily with a handsome woman in a rose bonnet who sat near him.

The jury alone looked wan and exhanilted; but this was apparently from the fatigue of having sat up all night. Nothing in their countenances indicated men who would pass sentence of death; and in the faces of these good bourgeois I could divine nothing but a great desire to sleep.

Opposite to me, a window stood wide open, I heard laughter in the flower market on the quay--beneath; and on the sill of the window, a graceful plant, illumined by sunshine, played in the breeze.

How could any sinister idea be formed amongst so many soothing sensations? Surrounded by air and sunshine, I could think, of naught save liberty; hope shone within me; as the day shone around me; and I awaited my sentence with confidence, as one daily calculates on life and liberty.

In the meantime my counsel arrived, They had been waiting for him. He had just breakfasted freely and with a good appetite. Taking his place he leaned towards me with a smile.

"I have hopes!" said he.

"Oh, surely!" I replied, in the same light tone and smiling also.

"Yes," returned he; "I know nothing as yet of the verdict, but they have doubtless acquitted you of premeditation, and then it will be :only hard labor for life."

What do you mean, sir?" replied I, indignantly; "I would a hundred times prefer death!"

Yes, death! and, besides, said an inward voice, what do I risk in saying that? Has a sentence of death ever been pronounced except at midnight, in a dark and sombre hall lighted only by torches, and, whilst a cold winter's rain, was pouring? But in the month of August, at eight o'clock in the morning, on such a fine day, and with such good jurymen it is impossible! And my eyes wandered to the pretty yellow flower in the sun.

Suddenly the president, who had only waited for my counsel, desired me to rise. The soldiers carried arms; and, with an electric movement all the assembly rose at the same instant. An insignificant: nobody placed at a table below the tribunal, who was, I think, the recorder, read the verdict which the jury had pronounced during my absence. A sickly chill passed over my frame; I leaned against the wall to avoid falling.

"Counsel, have you anything to say why this sentence should not be passed?" demanded

the president.

I felt that I had much to say; but I had not the power--my tongue was cleaving to my palate.

My counsel then rose.

His endeavor appeared to be, to mitigate the verdict of the jury, and to substitute the punishment of hard labor for life--by naming which he had rendered me so indignant!

This-indignation must again have been powerful within me, to conquer the thousand emotions which distracted my thoughts. I wished to, repeat aloud what I had already said to him: "Rather a hundred times, death," but my breath failed, and I could only grasp him by the arm, crying, with convulsive strength, "No!"

The attorney-general replied against my counsel's arguments; and I listened to him with a stupid satisfaction. The judges then left the court, soon returned, and the president read my sentence.

"Condemned to death!" cried the crowd: and as I was led away, the assembly pressed on my steps with avidity, while I walked on, confused and nearly in unconsciousness. A revolution had taken place within me. Until that sentence of death I had felt myself breathe, palpitate, exist, like other beings. Now I felt clearly that a barrier existed between me and the world. Nothing appeared to me under the same aspect as hitherto. Those large and luminous windows, that fair sunshine, that pure sky,--all was pale and ghastly, the color of a winding sheet. Those men, women and children, who pressed on my path, seemed to me like phantoms.

At the foot of the stairs, a black and dirty prison-cart was waiting: as I entered it, I happened to look around. "A condemned man!" shouted the people, running towards the cart. Through the cloud which seemed to me to interpose between me and all things, I distinguished two young girls who gazed at me with eager eyes. "Good!" said the youngest, clapping her hands. "It will take place in six weeks!"

### III

Condemned to death!

Well, why not? All mankind, I remember once reading, are condemned to death, with



indefinite respites. How then is my position altered?

Since the hour when my sentence was pronounced, how many are dead who calculated upon a long life! How many are gone before me, who, young, free, and in good health, had fully intended to be present when my head fell in the Place de Grève. How many, between this and then, perhaps, who now walk and breathe in the fresh air anywhere they please, will die before me!

And then, what has life for me, that I should regret? In truth, only the dull twilight and black bread of a prison, a portion of watery soup from the trough of the convicts; to be treated rudely, I, who have been refined by education, to be brutalized by turnkeys without feeling; not to see a human being who thinks me worthy of a word, or whom I could address: incessantly to shudder at what I have done, and what may be done to me: these are nearly the only advantages of which the executioner can deprive me.

Ah! nevertheless, it is horrible!

#### IV

The black cart brought me here, to this hideous Bicêtre.

Seen from afar, the appearance of that edifice is rather majestic. It spreads to the horizon in front of a hill; and at a distance retains something of its ancient look of a royal château. But as you approach it, the palace changes to a ruin; and the dilapidated gables shock the sight. There is a mixture of poverty and royal faces: without glass or shutters to the windows, but massive crossed-bars of iron instead; against which are pressed, here and there, the ghastly face, of felon, or madmen!

It is life seen close at hand.

#### V

I had no sooner arrived here. than the hand of force was laid on me, and numerous precautions were taken: neither knife nor fork was allowed for my repasts; and the camisole de force (strait-jacket), a species of sack made of sail-cloth, imprisoned my arms. They were answerable for my life, so the jailers would have for six or seven weeks their responsibilities; as it was requisite to keep me safe and in good condition for the Place de Grève.

For the first few days, I was treated with a degree of attention which was horrible to me; the civilities of a turnkey savor of a scaffold. Luckily, at the end of some days, habit resumed its influence; they mixed me with the other prisoners in a general brutality, and made no more of those unusual distinctions of politeness which continually kept the executioner in my memory. This was not the only amelioration. My youth, my docility, the cares of the chaplain of the prison, and above all some words in Latin which I addressed to the keeper, who did not understand them, procured for me a walk once a week with the other prisoners, and removed the strait-jacket with which I was paralyzed. After considerable hesitation, they have also given me pens, paper, ink, and a night-lamp.

Every Sunday after mass, I am allowed to walk in the prison-court at the hour of recreation: there I talk with the prisoners, which is inevitable. They are good fellows, these wretches; they tell me their adventures, enough to horrify one; but I know they are proud of them.

They taught me their argot, a *rouscailler bigorne*, as they called it. A hideous abortion of the language. On hearing it spoken, the effect is like the shaking of dusty rags before one.

These men at least pity me; and they alone do so. The jailers, the turnkeys--and I wish them no harm--gossip and latigh, and speak of me in my presence, as though I were a thing.

## VI

I said to myself:

As I have the means of writing, why should I not do it? But of what shall I write? placed between four walls of cold and bare stone, without freedom for my steps, without horizon for my eyes, my sole occupation to watch mechanically the progress of that square of light which the grating of my door marks on the sombre wall opposite, and, as I said before, ever alone with one idea, an idea of crime, punishment, death! Can I have anything to say, I who have no more to do in this world? And what shall I find in this dry and empty brain which is worthy the trouble of being written?

Why not? If all around me is monotonous and colorless, is there not within me a tempest, a struggle, a tragedy? This fixed idea which possesses me, does it not take every hour, every instant a new form, becoming more hideous as the time approaches? Why should I not try to describe for myself all the violent and unknown feelings I experience in my

outcast situation? Certainly the material is plentiful; and, however shortened my life may be, there will still be sufficient in the anguish, the terrors, the tortures, which will fill it from this hour until my last, to exhaust my pen and ink! Besides, the only means to decrease my suffering in this anguish will be to observe it closely; and to describe it will give me an occupation.

And then what I write may not be without its use. This journal of my sufferings, hour by hour, minute by minute, torment after torment, if I have strength to carry it on to the moment when it will be physically impossible for me to continue--this history necessarily unfinished, yet as complete as possible, of my sensations, may it not give a grand and deep lesson? will not there be in this process of agonizing thought, in this ever increasing progress of pain, in this intellectual dissection of a condemned man, more than one lesson for those who condemned? Perhaps the perusal may render them less heedless, when throwing a human life into what they call "the scale of justice?" Perhaps they have never reflected on the slow succession of tortures conveyed in the expeditious formula of a sentence of death! Have they ever paused on the important idea, that, in the man whose days they shorten, there is an immortal spirit which had calculated on life, a soul which is not prepared for death? No! they see nothing but the execution; and doubtless think that, for the condemned, there is nothing anterior or subsequent!

These sheets shall undeceive them. Published, perhaps, some day, they will call their attention a few moments to the suffering of the mind, for it is this which they do not consider. They triumph in the power of being able to destroy the body, almost without making it suffer. What an inferior consideration is this! What is mere physical pain, compared to that of the mind? A day will come--and perhaps these memoirs, the last revelations of a solitary wretch, will have contributed...

Unless after my death the wind carries away these sheets of paper into the muddy court; or unless they melt with rain when pasted to the broken windows of a jailer.

## VII

Suppose that what I write might one day be useful to others--might make the judge pause in his decision, and might save the wretched, innocent or guilty, from the agony to which I am condemned--why should I do it? What matters it? When my life has been taken, what will it be to me if they take the lives of others? Have I really thought of such folly? To throw down the scaffold which I had fatally mounted!

What! sunshine, spring-time, fields full of flowers and birds, the clouds, trees, nature,

liberty, life, these are to be mine no more!

Ah! it is myself I must try to save! Is it really true that this cannot be, that I must die soon, to-morrow, to-day perhaps; is it all thus? Oh, God! a dreadful idea of dashing my head against the prison wall!

## VIII

Let us consider what time remains to me.

Three days of delay, after sentence is pronounced, for the prisoner's final plea to annul it.

Forgotten for a week in the court of assizes, after which the pieces, as they are called, are sent to the minister.

Forgotten for a fortnight at the minister's, who does not even know that there are such papers, although he is supposed to transmit after examination, to the Cour de Cassation.

Then classification, numbering, registering; the guillotine-list is loaded, and none must go before their turn!

A fortnight more waiting to see that no injustice is done.

At last the court assembles, usually on Tuesday, rejects twenty pleas together, and sends all back to the minister, who sends them back to the attorney-general, who sends them back to the executioner. Three more days.

On the morning of the fourth day, the deputy of the attorney-general says to himself as he arranges his cravat: "This business certainly must be finished;" then if the recorder's deputy has no breakfast with friends which prevents him, the order of the execution is drafted, revised, engrossed, and sent out; and the following morning, from day-break, the noise of erecting the scaffold, in the Place de Grève is heard, and in the cross-streets a commotion of hoarse voices.

Altogether six weeks. The young girl's calculation was right! Thus I have now been at least five weeks, perhaps six, for I dare not reckon I in this cell at Bicêtre: nay, I think I have been even three days more!

## IX

I have just made my will.

What was the use of this? I have to pay my expenses; and all I possess will scarcely suffice. The guillotine is expensive.

I leave a mother, I leave a wife, I leave a child.

A little girl three years old, gentle, delicate, with large black eyes, and Chestnut hair.

She was two years and one month old when I saw her the last time.

Thus, after my death, there will be three women without son, without husband, without father; three orphans in different degrees; three widows by act of law.

I admit that I am justly punished; but these innocent creatures, what have they done? No matter; they are dishonored, they are ruined; and this is justice.

It is not so much on account of my poor old mother, that I feel thus wretched; she is so advanced in years, she will not survive the blow; or if she still linger a short time, her feelings are so blunted, that she will suffer but little.

Nor is it for my wife that I feel the most; she is already in miserable health, and weak in mind.

Her reason will give way, in which case her spirit will not suffer while the mind slumber as in death.

But my daughter, my child, my poor little Marie, who is laughing, playing, singing at this moment, and who dreams of no evil! Ah! it is the thought of her which unmans me!

## X

Here is a description of my prison.

Eight feet square; four walls of granite, with a flagged pavement.

To the right of the door is a kind of nook by way of alcove, in which is thrown a bundle

of straw, where the prisoner is supposed to rest and sleep, dressed, winter, as in summer, in slight linen clothing.

Over my head, instead of a ceiling, is a black ogive vault, and instead of curtains, a thick canopy of cobwebs, hanging like tattered pennons.

For the rest, no windows, not even a ventllator; and only one door, where iron hides the wood.

I mistake; towards the top of the door there is a sort of window, or rather an opening of nine inches square, crossed by a grating, and which the turnkey can close at night.

Outside there is a long corridor lighted and sired by means of narrow ventilators high in the wall. It is divided into compartments of masonry, which communicate by a series of doors; each of these compartments serves as an ante-chamber to a dungeon, like mine; in these dungeons are confined felons condemned by the governor of the prison to hard labor. The first three cells are kept for prisoners under sentence of death, as being nearest to the jail, therefore most convenient for the jailer.

These dungeons are the only remains of the ancient château of Bicêtre, such as it was built in the fifteenth century by the Cardinal of Winchester, he who caused Jeanne of Arc to be burned. I overheard this description from some sightseers who came to my den, yesterday, and who stared at me from a distance, as at a wild beast in a menagerie. The turnkey had had five sous.

I have omitted to say, that, night and day there is a sentry on guard outside the door of my cell; and I never raised ny eyes towards the square grating, without encountering his eyes, open, and fixed on me.

For the rest, we may suppose that there is air and daylight in this box of stone.

## XI

As there is yet no appearance of daylight, what could be done during the night? An idea just occurred to me. I would arise and examine, by my lamp, the walls of my cell. They are covered with writings, with drawings, fantastic figures, and names which mix with and efface each other. It would appear that each prisoner had wished to leave behind him some trace here at least. Pencil, chalk, charcoal--black, white, gray letters. Sometimes deep carvings upon the stone, if my mind were at ease, I could take an interest in this

strange book, which is developed, page by page, to my eyes, on each stone of this dungeon. I should like to recompose these fragments of thought; to trace a character for each name; to give sense and life to these mutilated inscriptions, to these dismembered phrases.

Above my pillow there are two flaming hearts, pierced with an arrow; and beneath is written: *Amour pour la vie*. Poor wretch! it was not a long engagement!

Beside this, a three-sided cocked hat, with a small figure coarsely done beneath, and the words: *Vive l' Empereur!* 1824.

More flaming hearts, with this inscription, characteristic in a prison: I love and adore Mathieu Danvin. *JAQUES*.

On the opposite wall is the name of Papavoine. The P is worked in arabesques and embellished with care.

A couplet of an obscene song.

A cap of liberty, cut rather deeply into the stone, with the words *Bories, La Republique!* beneath. He was one of the four subaltern officers of la Rochelle. Poor young man! How horrible is the idea of their fancied political necessity, to give the frightful reality of the guillotine for an opinion, a reverie, an abstraction! And I! I have complained of its severity! I who have really committed crime, who have spilled blood!

I can go no farther in my research! I have just discovered, drawn with chalk in the corner of the wall, that dreadful image, the representation of that scaffold, which even at this moment is perhaps being put up for my execution! The lamp had nearly fallen out of my hands!

## XII

I returned precipitately to sit on my straw-bed; my head sunk on my knees. Then my childish fear was dissipated, and a wild curiosity forced me to continue the examination of my walls.

Beside the name of Papavoine, I tore away an enormous cobweb, thick with dust, and filling the angle of the wall. Under this web, there were four or five names perfectly legible, among others of which nothing remained but a smear on the wall--*DAUTIN*,

1815.--POULAN, 1818.--JEAN MARTIN, 1821.--CASTAING, 1823. I have read these names, and frightful recollections crowded on me. Dautan was the man who cut his brother in quarters, and who went at night to Paris and threw the head into a fountain, and the body into a sewer. Poulain assassinated his wife. Jean Martin shot his father with a pistol as the old man opened a window: and Castaing was the physician who poisoned his friend; and, while attending the illness he had caused, instead of an antidote, gave him more poison. Then, next to these names, was Papavoine, the horrible madman who killed children by blows upon the head with a knife.

These, said I, as a shudder passed over me, these, then, have been my predecessors in this cell. Here, on the same pavement where I am, they conceived their last thoughts, these fearful homicides! Within these walls, in this narrow square, their last steps have turned like those of a caged wild beast. They succeeded each other at short intervals; it seems that this dungeon does not remain empty. They have left the place warm, and it is to me they have left it. In my turn I shall join them in the felons' cemetery of Clamart, where the grass grows so well!

I am neither visionary nor superstitious: but it is probable these ideas caused in my brain a feverish excitement: for, whilst I thus wandered, all at once these five fatal names appeared as though written in flames on the dark wall; noises, louder and louder, burst on my ears: a dull, red light, filled my eyes, and it seemed to me that my cell became full of men--strangers to me; each bore his severed head in his left hand; and carried it by the mouth, for the hair had been removed: each raised his right hand at me, except the parricide.

I shut my eyes in horror: and then I saw all, even more distinctly!

Dream, vision or reality, I should have gone mad, if a sudden impression had not recalled me in time. I was near fainting, when I felt something cold crawling over my naked foot. It was the bloated Spider, whom I had disturbed.

This recalled my wandering senses. Those dreadful spectres, then, were only the fumes of an empty and convulsed brain. Chimera like Macbeth's! The dead are dead, these men certainly, They are safely jailed in the grave. The sepulchre is a prison from whence none escape. The door of the tomb opens not from within.

### XIII

I have lately witnessed a hideous sight.



As soon as it was day, the prison was full of noise. I heard heavy doors open and shut; the grating of locks and bolts; the clanking of bunches of keys; the stairs creaking from top to bottom with quick steps; and voices calling and answering from the opposite extremes of the long corridors. My neighbors in the dungeons, the felons at hard labor, were more gay than usual. All Bicêtre seemed laughing, singing, running or dancing. I, alone silent in this uproar, alone motionless in this tumult, astonished and attentive I listened.

A jailer passed.

I ventured to call and ask him "if there were a fête in the prison?"

"A fête, if you choose to call it so," answered he; "this is the day that they fetter the galley-slaves, who are to set off to-morrow for Toulon. Would you like to see them? It would amuse you."

For a solitary recluse, indeed, a spectacle of any kind was an event of interest, however odious it might be; and I accepted the amusement.

The jailer, after taking the usual precautions to secure me, conducted me into a little empty cell, without a vestige of furniture; and only a grated window,--but still a real window,--against which one could lean, and through which one could actually perceive the sky.

"Here," said he, "you will see and hear all that happens. You will be alone in your box, like the king!"

He then went out, closing on me locks, bolts and bars.

The window looked into a square and rather wide court, on every side of which was a large six-storied stone edifice. Nothing could seem more wretched, naked and miserable to the eye, than this quadruple façade, pierced by a multitude of grated windows, against which were pressed a crowd of thin and wan faces, placed one above the other, like the stones of a wall; and all as it were, framed in the inter-crossings of iron bars. They were prisoners, spectators of the ceremony, until their turn came to be the actors. One might have called them spirits in agony of purgatory looking into hell.

All looked in silence into the still empty court. Among these faded and dull countenances there shone, here and there, some eyes which gleamed like sparks of fire.

The block of prisons that surround the court was not complete. One of the fronts, that

facing me, was cut about the middle, and was joined together by an iron grating. This grating-opened, upon a second court smaller than the first, and, like, surrounded by black walls.

All around the principal court were stone benches. In the centre rose an iron post, intended to support a lantern.

At twelve o'clock, a large gateway in the court was opened. A cart, escorted by soldiers, rolled heavily into the court, with a rattling of irons. It was the convict-guard with the chains.

At the same instant, as if this sound awaked all the noise of the prison, the spectators of the windows, who had hitherto been silent and motionless, burst forth into cries of joy, songs, menaces, and imprecations, mixed with hoarse laughter. It was like witnessing a masque of demons; each visage bore a grimace, every hand was thrust through the bars, their voices yelled, their eyes flashed, and I was startled to see so many gleams amidst these ashes.

Meanwhile the galley warders quietly began their work. One mounted on the cart, and threw to his comrades the fetters, the iron collars, and the linen clothing; while others stretched long chains to the end of the court, and the captain tried each link, by striking it on the pavement; all of which took place under the mocking raillery of the prisoners, and the loud laughter of the convicts for whom they were being prepared.

When all was ready, a fellow in silver braid, who was called Monsieur l' Inspecteur, gave an order to the superintendent of the prison, and two or three low doors poured forth into the court a collection of hideous, yelling, ragged men; these were the galley convicts.

Their entry caused increased pleasure at the windows. Some of them, being well known in the galleys, were saluted with applause and acclamation, which they received with a sort of proud modesty. Several wore a kind of hat of prison straw, plaited by themselves, and formed into some fantastic shape; these men were always the most applauded. One in particular excited transports of enthusiasm; a youth of seventeen, with quite a girlish face. He had just come out of his cell where he had been a week in solitary confinement. From his straw bedding he had made himself a dress, which enveloped him from head to foot; and he entered the court, jumping a somersault with the agility of a serpent. He was a mountebank condemned for theft, and there was a furious clapping of hands and a volley of cheers for him. The galley convicts responded, and there was something frightful in this exchange of compliments between those who were galley convicts and those who hoped to be.

As they arrived they were pushed between two rows of guards into the little grated courts where they awaited the visit of the doctors. It was there that all tried a last effort to avoid the journey, alleging some excuse of ill-health, sore eyes, lame leg, mutilated hand. But they are almost always found good for the galleys, and then each carelessly resigns himself to his fate, forgetting in a few minutes all his pretended infirmity.

At length, the little grating opens. A warden calls the names in alphabetical order, and they went to stand two and two, companions by similar initials; so that even if a convict had a friend, most likely their chains would divide them from suffering together! Worst of miseries!

When at least thirty have come out they close the grating. A warder drives them in line with his baton and throws in front of each a shirt, jacket and pantaloons of coarse canvas, then makes a sign and all commence to undress. An unexpected incident happens to turn this humiliation into torture.

Up to now the day had been fine enough, and, if the October breeze was rather cool, occasionally the clouds broke and allowed the sun to shine. But no sooner were the convicts undressed and at the moment when they stood naked, awaiting the inspection of the warders, a cold autumn shower suddenly fell in torrents on the uncovered heads and naked bodies of the convicts and on their miserable clothes upon the pavement.

In the twinkling of an eye the court was deserted by all except the warders and the convicts. The sightseers sought shelter under the door-ways.

Meanwhile the rain fell in sheets, a dull silence succeeded the noisy bravadoes; they shivered, their teeth chattered, and their limbs shook in the wet clothes.

One convict only, an old man, retained a sort of gayety: he exclaimed laughing, While wiping himself with his coarse shirt, "This was not in the play-bill!" and shook his fist at the skies.

When they had put on their traveling suits, they were taken in bands of twenty or thirty to the corner of the court where the long chains were extended. At every interval of two feet in these long chains were fastened short transverse chains, and at the extremity of each of the latter was attached a square iron collar, which opened by means of a hinge in the centre and closed by an iron bolt, which is riveted for the whole journey, on the convict's neck.

The convicts were ordered to sit down in the mud on the inundated pavement; the iron collars were fitted on them, and two prison-blacksmiths, with portable anvils, riveted the hard, unheated metal, with heavy iron hammers. This was a frightful operation, and even the most hardy turned Pale! Each stroke of the hammer, aimed on the anvil resting on their backs, makes the whole form yield: the failure of aim, or the least movement and the skull would be Crushed like a walnut-shell.

After this operation they became sombre. Nothing was heard. but the rattle of hains and at intervals a heavy blow from a warden's baton and a cry from one of the unruly. There were some who cried; the old shuddered and bit their lips. I look with terror at all these sinister profiles in their iron frames.

Thus, after the visit of the doctors, was the visit of the warders, and after the warders, that of the blacksmiths. Three acts of this spectacle.

A ray from the sun appeared. It seemed to set fire to their brains. The convicts rose simultaneously. The five gangs joined hands, so as to form an immense circle, and thus ran round and round in the court, with a rapidity that the eye could hardly follow. They sung some couplets, in their own idiom, to a melody which was sometimes plaintive, sometimes furious, often interrupted by hoarse cries and broken laughter, like delirious ravings: while the chains, clanking together in cadence, formed an accompaniment to a song more harsh than their own noise.

A large trough was now brought in: the guards striking the convicts to make them discontinue their dance, took them to the trough in which was swimming I know not what sort of herbs in some smoking-and dirty-looking liquid. They were to eat it.

Then, having partaken of it, they threw the remainder on the pavement, with their black bread, and began again to dance and sing. This is a liberty which is allowed them on the day they are fettered and the succeeding night.

I gazed on this strange spectacle with such eager and breathless attention, that I totally forgot my own misery. The deepest pity filled my heart, and their laughter made me weep.

Suddenly, in the midst of a profound reverie into which I had fallen, I observed the yelling circle had stopped, and was silent. Then every eye was turned to the window which I occupied. "The Condemned! the Condemned!" Shouted they, pointing their fingers at me; and their bursts of laughter were redoubled.

I was thunderstruck.

I know not where they knew me, or how I was recognized.

"Good-day! good-night!" cried they, with their mocking sneer. One of the youngest, condemned to the galleys for life, turned his shining, leaden face on me, with a look of envy, saying, "He is lucky! he is to be clipped! Good-bye, comrade!"

I cannot describe what passed within me. I was indeed their "comrade!" The Grève is sister to Toulon. Nay, I was even lower than they were; the convicts had done me an honor. I shuddered.

Yes! their "comrade!" and a few days later, I would be a spectacle for them.

I remained at the window, motionless, as if paralyzed: but when I saw the five gangs advance, rushing toward me with phrases of disgusting cordiality, when I heard the horrible din of their chains, their clamors, their steps at the foot of my wall, it seemed to me that this knot of demons were scaling my cell! I uttered a shriek; I threw myself against the door violently; but there was no means of flight. I knocked, I called with mad fury. Then I thought I heard, still nearer, the horrid voices of the convicts. I thought I saw their hideous heads, appearing on a level with the window; I uttered another shriek of anguish, and fainted.

#### XIV

When my consciousness Returned, it was night: I was lying on a pallet; a lamp swung from the ceiling, enabled me line of beds similar to mine, and I judged that I had been taken to the infirmary.

I remained a few, moments awake, but without thought or recollection, totally engrossed by the happiness of being again in a bed. Certainly, in former days, this prison-hospital bed would have made me shrink with disgust; but I am no longer the same individual. The sheets were brown, and coarse to the touch; the blanket thin and ragged; and there was but one straw mattress. No matter! I could stretch my limbs at their ease, between these coarse sheets; and under this blanket, thin as it was, I felt the gradual decrease of horrible chill in the marrow of my bones to which I. had lately been accustomed.--I slept again.

A loud noise awakened me, at daylight; the noise came from without; my bed was beside

the window, and I sat up to see from what it arose.

The window looked into the large court of the Bicêtre, which was full of people. Two lines of veterans had difficulty in keeping the crowd away from a narrow passage across the court. Between this double rank of soldiers, five long wagons, loaded with men, were driven slowly, jolting at each stone; it was the departure of the convicts.

These wagons were open, and each gang occupied one. The convicts, in consequence of their iron collars being attached to the centre chain, are obliged to sit back to back, their feet hanging over the sides of the wagon; the centre chain stretched the whole length of the cart, and on its unfastened end, the warder stood with his loaded musket. There was a continual clanking of the prisoners' chains, and at each plunge of the wagon their heads and pendent limbs were jolted violently.

A fine penetrating rain chilled the air, and made their wet pantaloons cling to their shivering knees. Their long beards and short hair streamed with wet; their complexions were saturnine; they were shivering, and grinding their teeth with mingled rage and cold! But they had no power of moving: once riveted to that chain, each becomes a mere fraction of that hideous whole which is called the cordon (literally string, freely the gang). Intellect must abdicate, the fetters condemn it to death, and the mere animal must not even hunger but at certain hours. Thus fixed, the greater part half clad, with bare heads, and no rest for their feet, they begin their journey of twenty-five days; the same sort of wagons, the same portion of dress being used in scorching July as in the cold rains of November. One might say that man wished Heaven to take a part of Office of executioner.

Between the crowd and the convicts, a horrible dialogue was maintained: abuse on one side, bravadoes on the other, imprecations from both; but at a sign from the captain, I saw the sticks of the guard, raining incuscriminate blows into the wagon, on heads or shoulders; and all returned to that kind of external calm which is called order. But their eyes were full of vengeance; and their powerless hands were clenched on their knees.

The five wagons, escorted by mounted gendarmes and guards on foot, passed slowly under the high arched door of Bicêtre. A sixth followed them, in which were heaped pell-mell the cooking stoves, the copper pots and the extra chains. Some of the warders who had been delayed in the canteen came running out to join their squad. The crowd followed them: all vanished like a phantasmagoria, and by degrees the sounds of the heavy wheels on the Fontainebleau road diminished, clanking fetters, and the yells of the multitude uttering maledictions on the journey of the convicts.

And that was their beginning!

What a proposition my counsel had made! The galleys! Ah! yes, rather a thousand times death, rather the scaffold than the galley, rather the end than hell; rather give up my neck to the knife of the guillotine than to the pillory of the convict gang! The galleys, good heavens!

## PART II

### XV

Unfortunately I was not ill. The next day I was obliged to leave the infirmary..My dungeon again received me.

Not ill! indeed, I am young, healthful, and strong; the blood flows freely in my veins; my limbs obey my will; I am robust in mind and body, constituted for a long life. Yes, all this is true; and yet, nevertheless, I have an illness, a fatal illness, an illness given by the hand of man!

Since I came out of the infirmary, a vivid idea has occupied me; a thought which affects me to madness; it is, that I might have escaped, had they left me there! Those physicians, those sisters of charity seemed to take an interest in me. "To die so young! and by such a death!" One would have imagined they pitied me by their pressing round my bed. Bah! it was curiosity! and then, these people may very well cure one of a fever but not of a sentence of death. And it would be so easy for them! only an open door! What difference would it make to them?

I have no chance now! My plea will be rejected, because all was legal; the witnesses gave correct evidence, the counsel pleaded well, the judges decided carefully. I do not reckon upon it, unless...No, folly I there is no hope. The plea is a cord which holds you suspended over an abyss, and which you feel giving way at each instant until it breaks! It is as if the axe of the guillotine took six weeks to fall.

If I could obtain my pardon!--my pardon! From whom? for what? and by what means? It is impossible that I should be pardoned. An example as they say!

I have only three steps to make: Bicêtre, the Conciergerie, the Place de la Grève.

## XVI

During the few hours I passed at the infirmary, I seated myself at a window in the sunshine, for the afternoon had become fine, and I enjoyed all the sun which the gratings of the window would allow me.

I sat thus, my heavy and fevered head within my hands, my elbows on my knees, my feet on the bar of the chair; for dejection had made me stoop, and sink within myself, as if I had neither bone nor muscular power.

The stifling odor of the prison oppressed me more than ever; I still fancied the noise from the convicts' chains rung in my ears; I was almost overcome with disgust for Bicêtre. It seemed to me that the good God should take pity on me, and at least send a little bird to sing there, opposite, on the edge of the roof.

I know not if it was the good God or a demon which granted my wish; but almost at the moment I uttered it, I heard beneath my window a voice,--not that of a bird, but far better; the pure, fresh, velvet voice of young girl of fifteen!

I raised my head with a start; I listened with avidity to the song she sung. It was a slow and plaintive air, a sad yet beautiful melody; here are the words:

*C'est dans la rue du Mail  
Où j'ai été coltigé,  
Maluré,  
Par trois coquins de railles,  
Lirlonfa malurette,  
Sur mes -sique'ont foncé,  
Lirlonfa maluré.*

I cannot say how bitter was my disappointment. The voice continued:

*Sur mes sique'ont foncé,  
Maluré.  
Ils m'ont mis la tartouve,  
Lirlonfa malurette,  
Grand Meudon est aboulé,*



*Lirlonfa maluré.*  
*Dans mon trimin rencontre,*  
*Lirlonfa malurette,*  
*Un peigre du quartier*  
*Lirlonfa maluré.*

*Un peigre du quartier*  
*Maluré.*  
*- Va-t'en dire à ma largue,*  
*Lirlonfa malurette,*  
*Que je suis enfourraillé,*  
*Lirlonfa maluré.*  
*Ma largue tout en colère,*  
*Lirlonfa malurette,*  
*M'dit: Qu'as-tu donc morfillé?*  
*Lirlonfa maluré.*

*M'dit: Qu'as-tu donc morfillé?*  
*Maluré. – J'ai fait suer un chêne,*  
*Lirlonfa malurette,*  
*Son auberg j'ai enganté,*  
*Lirlonfa maluré,*  
*Son auberg et sa toquante,*  
*Lirlonfa malurette,*  
*Et ses attach's de cés,*  
*Lirlonfa maluré.*

*Et ses attach's de cés,*  
*Maluré.*  
*Ma largu'part pour Versailles,*  
*Lirlonfa malurette,*  
*Aux pieds d'sa majesté,*  
*Lirlonfa maluré.*  
*Elle lui fonce un babillard,*  
*Lirlonfa malurette,*

*Pour m'faire défourrailler  
Lirlonfa maluré.*

*Pour m'faire défourrailler  
Maluré.*

*- Ah! si j'en défourraille,  
Lirlonfa malurette,  
Ma largue j'entiferai,  
Lirlonfa maluré.  
J'li ferai porter fontange,  
Lirlonfa malurette,  
Et souliers galuchés,  
Lirlonfa maluré.*

*Et souliers galuchés,  
Maluré.  
Mais grand dabe qui s'fâche,  
Lirlonfa malurette,  
Dit: – Par mon caloquet,  
Lirlonfa maluré,  
J'li ferai danser une danse,  
Lirlonfa malurette,  
Où il n'y a pas de plancher  
Lirlonfa maluré.*

I heard no more and would not have been able to listen any longer. The meaning, half understood and half hidden, of this horrible lament; this struggle of the brigand with the watch, this robber whom he meets and sends for his wife,--this dreadful message, *J'ai fait suer un chêne et ce suis enfourraillé*; the wife who goes to Versailles with a petition, and this Majesé who indignantly exclaims that he will make the guilty man dance, *la danse ou il n'y a pas de plancher*; --and all this sung to the sweetest air, and by the sweetest voice that ever soothed human ear! I was shocked, disgusted, overcome. It was a repulsive idea, that all these monstrous words proceeded from a fresh rosy mouth: it was like the slime of a snail over a rosebud.

I cannot express what I felt; I was at once pained and gratified; the idiom of crime, a language at once sanguinary and grotesque,--united to the voice of a young girl, that

graceful transition, from the voice of childhood to the voice of woman. All these deformities of words, delightfully sung, cadenced, rounded !

Ah! what infamous thing is a prison! It contains a venom which assails all within its pestilential reach. Everything withers there, even the song of a girl of fifteen! If you find a bird within its courts, it has mud on its wing. If you gather a beauteous flower there, it exhales poison!

## XVII

Oh, if I could only escape, how I would fly across the fields!

No, I must not run--that would draw attention and make people suspicious. On the contrary, I must walk slowly, with my head up, humming a tune. I ought to have an old handkerchief round the lower part of my face, a blue one with a pattern in red on it. It is a capital disguise, all the market-gardeners in the suburbs wear them.

I know of a little clump of trees near Arcueil, by the side of a marsh. Once when I was at school I came there with my playmates to fish for frogs; I would hide myself there until night.

As it grew dark, I recommenced my journey. I would go to Vincennes. No, the river is in the way, I will go to Arpajon. Perhaps it would be better to go by Saint-Germain, and go to Hivre, there I could embark for England. No matter! I come to Longjumeau. A policeman passes me; he asks for my passport...I am lost!

Ah! hapless dreamer, first break through the three-foot wall that surrounds you! Death! Death!

I recollect when I was quite a child they brought me to Bicêtre to see the great wall, and the mad people!

## XVIII

Whilst I was writing this my lamp faded, daylight appeared, and the clock of the chapel struck six.

What can be the meaning of what has since happened? The jailer on duty came into my

cell; he took off his cap, bowed to me, apologized for disturbing me, and making an effort to soften his rough voice, inquired what I wished to have for my breakfast.

A shudder has come over me;--Is it to take place to-day?

## XIX

It is for to-day!

The governor of the prison himself came to visit me. He asked me how he could serve or accommodate me; he expressed a hope that I had no complaint to make respecting him, or his subordinates; and he inquired with interest regarding my health, and how I had passed the night. On leaving, he called me Sir!

It is for to-day!

## XX

The jailer thinks I have no cause of complaint against him or his subordinates. He is right, and it would be wrong of me to complain; they have done their duty, they have kept me safe; and then they have been complaisant at my arrival and departure. Ought I not to be satisfied?

This good jailer, with his benign smile, his soft words, his eye, which flatters and spies, his coarse heavy hands, is the incarnation of a prison! He is Bicêtre in the form of a man. Everything around me reminds me of a prison; I recognize it in everything, in the human figure, as in the iron bars and bolts: this wall is a prison in stone, this door a prison in wood, these turnkeys are prisoners in flesh and bone. The prison is a kind of horrible being complete and indivisible, half building and half man. I am its victim; it grasps me, it wraps me in its folds, it shuts me up in its granite walls, it padlocks me with its iron bolts, and it watches me through the eyes of its jailers.

Ah! unhappy wretch that I am, what is to become of me, what are they going to do with me?

## XXI

Now I am calm. All is finished, quite finished! I am relieved from the dreadful anxiety into which I was thrown by the director's visit. For I confess I still felt hope.

Now, thank God! Hope is gone. This is what has happened:

At half-past six, no, a quarter to seven, the door of my cell was opened: an old man with white hair entered, dressed in a brown great coat. He unfastened it, and beneath I saw a black cassock and bands. It was a priest.

He was not the usual chaplain to the prison. This was ominous.

He seated himself opposite to me, with a quiet smile: then shook his head, and raised his eyes to heaven. That is to say to the vault of my cell. I understood him.

"My son," said he, "are you prepared?" I answered, in a low tone:

"I am not prepared, but I am ready."

Then my sight became troubled; a chill damp pervaded my frame. I felt the veins on my temples swelling, and a confused murmur in my ears. Whilst I wavered on my chair as though asleep, the old man continued speaking. At least, so it appeared to me, for I think I remember seeing his lips move, and his hand raised.

The door was opened again; the noise of the lock roused me from my reverie, and the priest from his discourse. A person dressed in black entered, accompanied by the director of the prison, and bowed profoundly to me: he carried a roll of paper in his hand.

"Sir," said he, with a courteous smile, "I am an usher of the royal court at Paris. I have the honor to bring you a message from the prosecutor-general."

The first agitation was over~ all my presence of mind returned.

"The prosecutor-general," said I, "asks for my head at once? What an honor for him to write to me, I hope that my death will give him great pleasure, for he worked too hard for it not to be a matter of indifference to him."

I said all that, and then continued in a firm voice: "Read on, sir."

He then read in a sing-song voice, a long, technically-expressed paper, the purport of which was the rejection of my plea.

"The execution of the sentence will be today, in the Place de Grève," added he, when he had finished reading, without raising his eyes from the paper. "We shall leave for the Conciergerie at half-past seven precisely. My dear sir, will you have the extreme goodness to accompany me?"

For some instants I had no longer heard him; for while his eyes were fixed on, the paper, the director was occupied talking to the priest: and I looked at the door which they had left half open!...Ah! hapless me! Four sentinels in the corridor.

The usher repeated the question, looking at me this time.

"When you please," I said, "at your convenience."

He bowed and said:

"I shall have the honor of coming for you, then, in half an hour."

Then they left me alone.

Oh! for some means of escape. My God! any means whatever! I must make my escape! I must! immediately! By the doors, by the windows, by the roof! Even though I leave shreds of my flesh on the rafters.

Oh! rage! demons! malediction! It would take months to pierce this wall with efficient tools. And I have not one nail, nor one hour!

## XXII

### IN THE CONCIERGERIE

Here I am transferred, then, as they say In the order.

But the journey is worth being recorded.

At half-past seven, the usher again presented himself at the threshold of my dungeon. "Sir," said he, "I wait for you." Alas! and I saw four others with him! I rose, and advanced one step. It appeared to me I could not make a second. My head was so heavy, and my limbs so feeble: but I made an effort to conquer my weakness, and assumed an appearance of firmness. Prior to leaving the cell, I gave it a final look; I had almost

become attached to it. Besides, I left it empty and open, which gives so strange an appearance to a dungeon.

However, it will not be long untenanted. The turnkeys, said they expected some one this evening, a prisoner who was then being tried at the court of assizes.

At the turn of the corridor, the chaplain rejoined us; he had just breakfasted.

At the threshold of the jail, the director took me kindly by the hand,--he had reinforced my escort by four veterans.

By the door of the infirmary a dying old man exclaimed, "Until we meet again!"

We arrived in the court-yard, where I could breathe, again freely, and this refreshed me greatly.

We did not walk long in the open air. A carriage was stationed in the first court. It was the same which had brought me there. A sort of oblong van, divided into two sections by a transverse grating of close wire. Each of the two sections had a door; one in the front, one in the back of the cart. The whole so dirty, so black, so dusty, that the hearse for paupers is a state carriage by comparison.

Before I buried myself in this moving tomb, I cast a look round the yard,--one of those despairing looks which seem to ask a miracle. The court was already encumbered with spectators.

Like the day when the convicts departed, there was a slight, chilling shower of the season; it is raining still, and doubtless there will be rain all the day,--which will last when I am no more!

The roads were frightful, the court was drenched. I had the pleasure of seeing the crowd standing in the mud!

We entered the van. The messenger and a gendarme in the front compartment, the priest, myself, and a gendarme, in the other, with four mounted gendarmes around the carriage. Thus, not counting the postilion, there were eight against one.

As I entered it, an old gray-eyed woman who stood near exclaimed, "I like seeing this, even better than seeing the galley-convicts!"

I can conceive this. It is a spectacle more easily taken in at one view. Nothing divides the attention; there is but one man, and on this isolated being there is as much misery heaped as on all the other convicts together.

The van passed with a dull noise under the gateway, and the heavy doors of the Bicêtre were closed after us. I felt myself moving, but in stupor, like a man fallen into a lethargy, who can neither move nor cry out, and who fancies he feels that he is being buried alive. I listened vaguely to the peal of bells on the collars of the post-horses which drew the van, the iron wheels grating over various substances in the road, the clacking whips of the postilion, the galloping of the gendarmes round the carriage: all seemed like a whirlwind which bore me away.

Through the bars of a peep-hole in front of me my eyes were fixed mechanically on an inscription carved in large letters above the main door to Bicêtre: HOSPICE DE LA FIEILLESSE.

"Ha," said I to myself, "it seems that there are some people who grow there," and, as my mind was so stupefied with grief, I only conceived ideas as in a dream. Suddenly the van changed its course and I saw the towers of Notre-Dame in the distance, blue and half hidden in the smoke of Paris.

At once my ideas changed from Bicêtre to Notre-Dame. "Those who will be on the tower with the flag will see my execution well," said I to myself smiling stupidly.

I think it was at that moment that the priest addressed me again; I patiently let him speak; I had already in my ears the noise of the wheels, the galloping horses, and the postilion's whip; therefore it was only one more incomprehensible noise.

I listened in silence to that flow of monotonous words, which deadened my thoughts like the murmur of a brook; and they passed before my torpid mind, always varied yet always the same, like the crooked elms we passed by the roadside. The short and jerking voice of the messenger in the front of the van suddenly aroused me.

"Well, Monsieur l'Abbé," said he, in almost a gay tone, "what news have you to-day?"

It was to the chaplain that he turned and spoke thus.

The chaplain, who talked to me without ceasing, and who was deafened by the carriage made no answer.



"Hé, hé" resumed the usher, raising his voice to drown the sound of the wheels, "what an infernal carriage this is!"

Infernal, indeed, for I found it so.

He continued:

"It is the jolting and the rumbling, no doubt, that prevents your hearing me--what was I saying? Ah! your reverence, have you heard to-day's news that is exciting all Paris?"

I trembled; was he speaking of me?

"No," answered the priest, who had at last heard him, "I have not had time to read the morning papers; but I suppose I shall see it all in the evening. When I am much engaged, I tell our porter to keep them for me, and I read them on my return."

"Bah!" replied the usher, "it is impossible that you have not heard what I mean. The news of Paris--the news of this morning.

I interrupted him: "I believe I know."

The usher looked at me.

"You? really! and, pray what is your opinion about it?"

"You are inquisitive," said I.

"How so, sir?" replied he. "Everyone should have a political opinion: I esteem you too much to suppose that you are without one. As to myself, I am quite in favor of re-establishing the National Guard. I was a sergeant in my company; and, faith! it was very agreeable to..."

I interrupted him.

"I did not think this was the subject in question!"

"What did you suppose, then? You said you knew the news."

"I spoke of something else with which Paris is also occupied to-day."

The fool did not understand, his curiosity was awakened.

"More news! Where the deuce could you learn news? What is it, my dear sir? Do you know what it is, Monsieur l'Abbé? Do let me hear all about it, I beg. I like news, you see, to relate to the president; it amuses him."

And so on. He turned to the priest, and then to me, and I only answered by shrugging my shoulders.

"Well," said he, "what are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking," said I, "that I shall be past thinking this evening."

"Oh, that's it," returned he. "Come, come, you are too sad. Mr. Castaing conversed on the day of his execution."

Then, after a pause:

"I accompanied Mr. Papavoine on his last day. He wore his otter-skin cap, and smoked his cigar. As for the young men of la Rochelle, they only spoke among themselves, but still they spoke."

Another pause, and then he continued;

"Fools! Enthusiasts! they seemed to scorn the whole world. As for you, I really think you are too pensive, young man."

"Young man?" I repeated. "I am older than you; every quarter of an hour which passes makes me a year older."

He turned round, looked at me some minutes with stupid astonishment, and then began to titter.

"Come, you are joking; older than I am? why I might be your grandfather."

"I have no wish to jest," I answered gravely.

He opened his snuff-box.

"Here, my good sir, don't be angry. Take a pinch of snuff, and don't bear malice."

"Do not fear," said I, "I shall not have long to bear it against you."

At this moment the snuff-box which he extended to me rattled against the grating which separated us. A jolt caused it to strike rather violently, and it fell, wide open, under the feet of the gendarme.

"Cursed grating!" cried the usher.

Then, turning to me, he added:

"Now, am I not unlucky? I have lost all my snuff. "

"I lose more than you," said I, smiling. He had tried to pick up his snuff, muttering between his teeth:

"More than I! that's very easily said. No more snuff until I reach Paris! it's terrible."

The chaplain then addressed him with some words of consolation; and I know not if I were pre-occupied, but it seemed to me to be part of the exhortation of which the commencement, had been addressed to me. By degrees conversation increased between the chaplain and the officer; and I became again lost in thought.

We approached the barrier, and although I was still very pre-occupied, I noticed that Paris was noisier than usual.

The van was stopped for a minute before the toll-gate, and the inspector examined it. Had it contained a sheep or an ox, which was going to be slaughtered, they would have required some money; but a human head pays no duty! We passed.

Crossing the boulevard, the carriage trotted quickly through those old and crooked streets of the Faubourg Saint-Marceau and of the Cité, which twist and cross each other like the many paths of an ant-hill. On the pavement of these narrow streets the rolling of the wheels became so noisy and rapid, that I could hear no other sound, though that people exclaimed, as the van passed, and bands of children followed its track. I also fancied also I occasionally saw in the cross-streets ragged men displaying in their hands a bundle of printed papers, their mouths, open as if vociferating something, while the passers stopped to purchase.

The clock of the Palais struck half past eight as we arrived in the court of the

Conciergerie. The sight of its wide staircase, its dark chapel, its sombre gates, made me shudder; and when the carriage stopped, I fancied the beatings of my heart stopped also.

But I collected my strength; the door was opened; with the rapidity of lightning I jumped from the, moving prison, and passed between two lines of soldiers: already, there was a crowd formed on my path.

### XXIII

As I walked through the public galleries of the Palais de Justice I felt almost free and at ease, but all my resolution abandoned me when I reached the low doors, private stairs, and interior corridors, which are only entered by the condemned.

The usher still accompanied me: the priest had left me for a couple of hours; he had some business to attend to.

I was then taken to the director, into whose charge the usher gave me. They made an exchange. The director told him to wait a moment, as he had some game for him to take back in the van to the Bicêtre. No doubt it was the man condemned to-day. He is to sleep to-night on the bundle of straw which I have not had time to wear out.

"Oh! very well," said the usher to the director, "I will wait with pleasure; we can make out the two papers together, and it will be very convenient."

They then placed me in a small room, adjoining the director's office; and left me alone, well locked up.

I know not of what I was thinking, or how long I had been there, when a sudden and loud burst of laughter in my ear, dispersed my reverie.

I raised my eyes with a start. I was no longer alone in the cell; a man was beside me. He was about fifty-five years old, middle-sized, wrinkled, stooping and bald: with sinister cast in his gray eyes, and a bitter sneer on his countenance; he was dirty, half-clothed, ragged, disgusting.

It seemed that the door had been opened, and he had been thrust in without my having perceived it. If death would only come thus.

We looked at each other steadfastly for some moments; he prolonging his bitter laugh,

while I felt half astonished, half alarmed.

"Who are you?" said I, to him at last.

"That is a funny question," said he. "I am a friauche."

"A friauche?" said I. "what do you mean?"

This question redoubled his merriment.

"Why" cried he, in the midst of a shout of laughter, "it means that the knife will play with my head in a basket six weeks hence, as it will with thine in six hours! Ha! ha! thou seemst to understand now!"

Indeed I was pale, and my hair stood on end. This then was the other condemned for life, with three letters branded on my shoulder;--I'll show them to you if you like; They call that sort of justice the relapse. So here I was, a cheval de retour (return horse--sent back to the galleys). I was brought back to Toulon: this time put among the bonnets verts (Green caps--condemned for life) so now I decided to escape. I had only three wails to pierce, two chains to break, and I had one nail! I escaped. They fired the signal gun, for we convicts are like the cardinals of Rome, dressed in red, and they fire cannons when we depart! Their powder went to the sparrows! This time, no yellow passport, but then no money either: I met some comrades in the neighborhood who also served their time, or broken their chains. Their coire (chief) proposed to me to join the band, They killed on the trimar (highway). I accepted, and I began to kill, so as to live. Sometimes we attacked a diligence, sometimes it was a post-chaise, sometimes a grazier on holeback, We took the money, we let the horses go, and buried the bodies under a tree, taking care that their feet did not appear; and then we danced on the graves, so that the ground might not seem fresh broken. I grew old this way, hiding in the bushes, sleeping in the air, hunted from wood to wood, but at least free and my own master. Everything has an end, and this like the rest; the marchands de lacets (gendarmes) one night caught us at our tricks: my fanandels (comrades) escaped; but I, the oldest, remained under the claw of these cats in cocked hats. They brought me here. I had already mounted all the steps of the ladder, except one. Whether I had now taken a handkerchief or a life, was all the same for me. There was but one relapse to give me. I only had to pass the faucher (executioner). My business has been short: faith, I began to grow old and good for nothing. My father had married la veuve, (the gibbet--been hanged.) I am going to retire to the Abbay de Monte-a-Regret (the guillotine): that's all, comrade!"

I remained stupefied during the recital, He laughed louder than at the beginning, and tried

to take my hand. I drew back in horror.

"Friend," cried he, "you don't seem game. Don't flinch on the carline (scaffold). See, there is one bad moment to pass on the placarde (the Place de Grève), but that's so soon done. I should like to be there to show you the step! Faith, I've a great mind not to plead, if they will finish me with you to-day. The same priest will serve us both. You see I'm a good fellow, eh? I say, shall we be friends?"

Again he advanced a step nearer to me.

"Sir," I answered, repulsing him, "I thank you."

Fresh bursts of laughter at my answer.

"Ah! ha! sir, you must be a marquis! A marquis, at least!"

I interrupted him:

"My friend, I require reflection: leave me in peace."

The gravity of my tone rendered him instantly thoughtful. He shook his gray and nearly bald head.

"I understand now," he murmured between his teeth--"the sanglier (the priest.)"

After a few minutes' silence, he said to me, almost timidly: "Sir, you are a marquis; that is all very well;--but you have on such a nice great coat, which will not be of much use to you. The executioner will take it. Give it to me, and I will sell it for tobacco."

I took off my great coat and gave it to him. He began to clap his hands with childish joy; then looking at my shirt sleeves, and seeing that I shivered:

"You are cold, sir; put on this; it rains, and you will be wet through: besides you ought to go decently on the wagon!"

While saying this, he took off his coarse gray woolen jacket, and put my arms into it, which I allowed him to do unconsciously.

Then I leaned against the wall, and I cannot describe the effect this man had on me. He was examining the coat which I had given him, and uttered each moment an exclamation

of delight.

"The pockets are quite new! The collar is not in the least worn! It will bring me at least fifteen francs. What luck! I shall have tobacco during all my six weeks."

The door opened again. They had come for both of us; to conduct me to the room where the condemned finally await their execution: and to lead him away to Bicêtre. He placed himself, laughingly, amongst them, and said to the gendarmes:

"I say! don't make a mistake; we have changed skins, the gentleman and I; but don't take me in his place. The devil! That wouldn't suit me at all, now that I can have tobacco!"

#### XXIV

That old scoundrel! he took my great coat from me, for I did not give it to him; and then he left me this rag, his odious jacket. For whom shall I be taken?

It was not from indifference, or from charity, that I let him take it. No: but because he was stronger than I! If I had refused, he would have beaten me with those great hands. Ah! indeed, charity, I was full of bad feeling.

I should like to have strangled him with my own hands, the old thief! To have trampled him under my feet.

I feel my heart full of rage and bitterness: and my nature turned to gall. Death renders one wicked.

#### XXV

They led me into a cell furnished with nothing but four walls, with plenty of bars to the window and many bolts on the door; all of which was to be expected.

I asked for a table, a chair and writing materials. They brought me all these.

Then I asked for a bed, The turnkey eyed me with astonishment, and seemed mentally to say: "What will be the use of it?"

However they made up a chaff bed in a corner. But at the same time a gendarme came to

install himself in what was my room. Are they afraid that I will strangle myself with the mattress?

## XXVI

It is ten o'clock.

Oh! my poor little girl. Six hours more, and I will be dead. I will be some senseless thing to be stretched out on a cold table in an amphitheatre; a head to be cast by one party, a trunk to be dissected by another: then all to be thrown together into a bier, and dispatched to Clamart.

This is what they are going to do with your father; by men, none of whom hate me; who all pity me, and all of whom could save me! They, are going to kill me. Do you understand that, Marie? To kill me in cold blood; a ceremonial for the general good Ah, good God!

Poor little girl! your father, who loved you so well, your father who kissed your little white neck, who passed his hands so fondly through the ringlets of your silken hair; who danced you on his knee, and every evening joined your two little hands to pray to God!

Who will do all this for you in future? Who now will love you? All children of your age have fathers, except you. How will you become accustomed to do without New Years, presents, pretty toys, bonbons and kisses. How will you, unfortunate orphan, do without food and drink?

Oh! if the jury had only seen you, my pretty little Marie, they would have understood it was wrong to kill the father of a child three years old.

And when she grows up, what will become of her? Her father will be one of the bywords of the people of Paris. She will blush for me and my name; she will be despised; rejected, reviled, on account of him who loved her with all the tenderness of his heart. Oh! my little beloved Marie. Can it be true that you will have shame and horror of me?

Wretch! what crime have I committed, and what crime will I commit against society!

Oh! can it be true that I am to die before the close of day? Can it really be that this is me? Those distant shouts which I hear, that mass of animated spectators who are already hastening to the quays, those gendarmes preparing in their barracks, this priest in the



black robe, this other man with the red hands! Is it all for me? Is it I who am going to die? This same self which is here, which lives, moves, breathes, which is seated at this table, this self which I touch and can feel, and whose clothing hangs in folds here!

## XXVII

If I Only knew how it is built, and in what way one dies upon it;--but it is horrible, I do not know this. The very name of it is frightful, and I cannot understand how I have hitherto been able to write and utter it.

The combination of these ten letters, their aspect, their appearance are, well calculated to awaken a frightful idea, and the unlucky doctor, who invented the thing had a name predestined for it.

The idea I attach to this hateful name is vague, undefined, and therefore more sinister. I construct and demolish in my mind continually its hideous scaffolding.

I dare not ask a question about it, yet it is dreadful not to know what it is, and how to behave upon it. It seems there is a sort of see-saw, and that you are laid on your stomach--ah! my hair will be white before my head falls!

## XXVIII

I had a glimpse of it once.

I was crossing the Place de Grève in a carriage, about eleven o' clock one morning. Suddenly the carriage stopped. There was a crowd the square; I looked out of the window: a dense throng of men, women and children filled the square and the neighboring streets. Above the crowd, I saw a kind of frame of red wood, which three men were building.

A criminal was to be executed the same day, and they were building the machine.

I turned away my head before seeing it. Close to the carriage there was a woman, who said to a child,--

"Now, look! the axe slides badly: they are going to grease the slide with a candle-end."

They are probably doing the same to-day. Eleven o'clock has just struck. No doubt they are greasing the slide.

Oh! unhappy creature, this time I shall not turn away my head.

## XXIX

Oh! for a pardon! My reprieve! perhaps I shall be pardoned. The king has no dislike to me. Let some one seek my lawyer! Quick, the lawyer! He was right, and I should prefer the galleys. Five years of the galleys, or twenty years,--or even the galleys for life, branded with the red-hot iron. But give me my life!

A galley-slave can move, come and go, and see the sunshine.

## XXX

The priest has returned.

He has white hair, a very gentle look, a good and respectable countenance, and is indeed an excellent and charitable man. This morning I saw him empty his purse into the hands of the prisoners. How comes it then that his voice causes no emotion, and he does not ever seem affected by his own theme? How is it that he has as yet said nothing which has won on my intellect or my heart?

This morning, I was bewildered. I scarcely heard what he said; his words seemed to me useless, and I remained indifferent: they glided away like those drops of rain off the window-panes of my cell.

Nevertheless, when he came just now to my room, his appearance did me good. Amongst all mankind he is the only one to whom I am still a man, said I to myself. And I felt an ardent thirst for good and consoling words.

When we were seated, he on the chair, and I on the bed, he said to me, "My son,--" This word opened, my heart. He continued:

"My son, do you believe in God?"

"Yes, father," I answered him.

"Do you believe in the holy Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church?"

"Willingly," said I.

"My son," returned he, "you have an air of doubt."

Then he began to speak; he spoke a long time; he uttered a quantity of words; then when he had finished, he rose, and looked at me for the first time since the beginning of his discourse; and said:

"Well?"

I declare I had listened to him with avidity at first, then with attention, then with devotion.

I rose, and said:

"Sir, leave me for a time, I beg of you."

He asked me:

"When shall I return?"

"I will let you know."

Then he withdrew in silence, but shaking his head as though inwardly exclaiming:

"An Unbeliever."

No! low as I have fallen, I am not an unbeliever. God is my witness, that I believe in Him. But how did that old man address me? Nothing to be felt, nothing to affect me, nothing to draw forth tears, nothing which sprung from his heart to enter into mine--nothing which was addressed from himself to myself. On the contrary, there was something vague, inaccented, applicable to any case, and to none in particular: emphatic, where it should have been profound, flat where it ought to have been simple; a species of sentimental sermon, and theological elegy. Now and then a quotation in Latin; here and there, the names of Saint Augustine and Saint Gregory; and others of the calendar. And throughout he had the air of reciting a lesson which he had already twenty times repeated; seeming to go over a theme almost obliterated in his memory from being so long known. Not a look in his eyes, not an accent in his voice, not a gesture of his

hands.

And how could it be otherwise? This priest has the title of chaplain of prison his business is to console and exhort; and he lives by that. Condemned felons are the spring of his eloquence. He receives confession and prays with them--because it is his place to do so. He has advanced in year in conducting men to death: from his youth he has grown accustomed to that which makes others shudder. The dungeon and scaffold are every-day matters with him. He is blasé. Probably he has a diary; one page for the galley-slaves, another for the condemned to death. He receives notice the preceding evening that he will have to attend some one the following day, at a certain hour: he asks, "Is it for the galleys or an execution?" and he asks no more respecting them, but comes next day as a matter of course. In this way it happens that those who go to Toulon and those who go to the Grève, are nothing to him, as he is nothing to them.

Oh! that they would bring me, instead of this man, some young curate, some aged priest, taken by chance from the nearest parish. Let them find him at his fireside, reading, and, without warning, say to him: "There is a man who is going to die, and it is reserved for you to console him. You must be there when they bind his hands; you must take a place in the fatal cart, with your crucifix, and conceal the executioner from him; you must be jolted with him over the paving to the Grève; you must pass with him through that horrible crowd which is thirsting for blood; you must embrace him at the foot of the scaffold, and you must remain there until his head is here and the body there!"

Then, when they have said this, let them bring him hither, agitated, palpitating, all shuddering from head to foot. Let me throw myself into his arms; then kneel at his feet, and he will weep, and we will weep together, and he will be eloquent, and I shall be consoled, and my heart will unburthen itself into his heart, and I will accept his God.

I am perhaps wrong to repulse him thus; since he is good and I am bad. Alas! it is not my fault. It is the brand of death which destroys and corrupts everything.

They have just brought me food: as though I should have need of it. A meal delicate, appetizing, a chicken, it seems, and something else. Well! I have tried to eat; but, at the first bite, everything fell from my mouth, so bitter and fetid did it seem.

### XXXI

A gentleman has just entered, his hat on his head, who, hardly noticing me, took out his foot-rule and measured the stones of the walls, meantime speaking to himself aloud,

sometimes saying "that is it," and sometimes "that is not it."

I asked the gendarme who he was. It seems that he is a sort of under-architect employed in the prison. His curiosity has awakened a slight interest in me; he exchanged a few words aside with the turnkeys who accompanied him; then fixed his eyes on me for an instant, gave his head a careless toss, and again began to speak in a loud voice and to continue taking measurements.

His task finished, he came over to me, saying, in his noisy way:

"My good fellow, in six months this prison will be much improved."

And his look seemed to add:

"And you will not enjoy it! so much the worse." He almost smiled. I almost expected him to jeer good-naturedly, as one jokes with a young wife on a wedding night.

My keeper, an old soldier who wears chevrons, undertook to reply:

"Sir," said he, "one does not speak so loudly in a death chamber."

The architect then went out.

I--I remained there like one of the stones which he had been measuring.

## **PART THREE**

### **XXXII**

And then a ridiculous thing happened. They came to relieve my good old gendarme, with whom, ungrateful egotist that I am, I did not even shake hands. Another took his place; a man with a low forehead, heavy features, and stupid countenance.

Beyond this I paid no attention, but seated myself at the table, my forehead resting on my hands, and my mind troubled by thought.

A light touch on my shoulder made me look round. It was the new gendarme, with whom

I was alone.

This is about the way he addressed me: "Criminal, have you a kind heart?"

"No!" answered I.

The abruptness of my answer seemed to disconcert him. Nevertheless, he began again hesitatingly:

"People are not wicked for the pleasure of being so."

"Why not?" answered I. "If you have nothing but that to say to me, leave me in peace. What are you driving at?"

I beg your pardon, criminal" he answered; "I will only say two words, which are these: If you could cause the happiness of a poor man, and what it cost you nothing, would you not do so?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Have you just come from Charnston? Surely, you cannot allude to me, as having power to confer happiness?"

He lowered his voice and assumed a mysterious air, which ill-suited with his idiotic countenance.

"Yes, criminal, yes,--happiness! fortune!" whispered he; "all this can come to me through you. See, I am a poor gendarme; the service is heavy, the pay is light; my horse is my own and ruins me. So I put into the lottery as a counterbalance. Hitherto I have only missed by not having the right numbers; I am always very near them. If I buy 76, number 77 comes out. Have a little patience, if you please, I have almost done. Well, here is a lucky opportunity for me. It appears, criminal, begging your pardon, that you are to be executed to-day. It is a certain fact that the dead who are destroyed that way, see the lottery before it is drawn on earth. Promise that your spirit shall appear to me to-morrow evening, to give me three numbers, three good ones, eh? What trouble will it be to you? and I am not afraid of ghosts. Be easy on that point. There is my address: Caserne Popincourt, escalier A, No. 26, the end of the corridor. You will know me again, won't you? Come even to-night, if it suits you better."

I would have disdained to reply to such an imbecile, if a mad hope had not crossed my

mind. In my desperate position, there are moments when one fancies that a chain may be broken by a hair.

"Listen," said I to him, acting my part as well, as a dying wretch could. "I can indeed render thee richer than the king. I can make thee gain millions--on one condition."

He opened, his stupid eyes.

"What? what? I will do anything to please you, criminal."

"Then instead of three numbers I promise to tell you four. Change coats with me."

"Oh! is that all?" cried he, undoing the first hooks of his uniform cheerfully.

I rose from my chair; I watched all his movements with a beating heart. I already fancied, the doors opening before the uniform of a gendarme; and then the prison--the street--the Palais de Justice--left far behind me!

But suddenly he turned round with indecision.

"I say,--it is not to get out of here?"

I saw that all was lost; nevertheless, I tried one last effort, useless as it was foolish!

"Yes, it is," said I to him; "but as thy fortune will be made..."

He interrupted me.

"Ah! no, indeed! stop! my numbers! To make them good, you must be dead, you know,

I sat down again, silent, and more desponding, from all the hope that I had conceived.

### XXXIII

I shut my eyes, covered them with my hands, and sought to forget the present in the past. In a rapid reverie, the recollections of childhood and youth came back one by one, soft, calm, smiling, like islands of flowers on the black gulf of confused thoughts which whirled through my brain.

I was again a child; a laughing, healthy schoolboy, playing, running, shouting with my brothers, in the broad green walks of the old enclosure dominated by the leaden dome of Val-de-Grâce, where my first years were passed.

And then, four years later, behold me there again, still a child, but a passionate dreamer. And there is a young girl in the solitary garden.

The little Spaniard, with large eyes and long hair, her dark polished skin, her rosy lips and cheeks, the Andalusian of fourteen, Pepa.

Our mothers had told us to "go and run together," we had come forth to walk.

They had told us to play, but we had talked instead, children of the same age but not of the same sex.

Only the year before, we used to play, and quarrel, and dispute together. I tyrannized over Pepita for the best apple in the orchard; I beat her for a bird's nest. She cried; I scolded her, and we went to complain of each other to our mothers.

Now she was leaning on my arm, and I felt proud and softened. We walked slowly, and we spoke low. I gathered for her some flowers, and our hands trembled on meeting. She spoke to me of the birds; of the sky above us, of the crimson sunset behind the trees, or else of her schoolfellows, her gown and ribbons. We talked in innocence, but we both blushed. The child had grown into a young girl.

That evening, a summer night, we were walking under the chestnut trees, at the end of the garden. After a long silence she suddenly dropped my arm and said: "Let us romp!"

I can see her yet; she was all in black, inmourning for her grandmother. A childish idea had come into her head and she had said: "Let us romp!"

And she began to run ahead of me; she with her wasp-like waist and her little feet throwing her dress half way up her leg. I followed her; she flew; the breeze sometimes lifting her black cape, showing me her brown and shining back.

I was beside myself. I at last captured her; and, like a conqueror, took her by the belt and made her sit down on a bench. She was breathless and smiling. I was very serious, and gazed at her black eyes through their dark lashes.

"Sit down there," said she, "there is still daylight; let us read something. Have you a



book?

I happened to have the second volume of the Voyages de Spallanzani with me. I drew near her, and opened it by chance. She leaned her shoulder against mine, and we began to read the same page. Before turning the leaf, she was always obliged to wait for me. My mind was less quick than hers.

"Have you finished? she would ask, when I had only just commenced.

Then our heads leaned together, our hair mixed, our breath gradually mingled, and at last our lips met.

When we again thought of continuing our reading, it was starlight.

"Oh! Mamma, mamma," said she on our return, "if you knew how we have romped!"

I was silent.

"You say nothing," said my mother, "you look sad."

I had paradise in my heart.

It was an evening which I will remember all my life.

All my life!

#### XXXIV

The clock had just struck some hour, I do not know which. I do not hear the stroke plainly. I seem to have the peal of an organ in my ears. It is the confusion of my last thoughts.

At this supreme moment, when I look back over the events of life, I recall my crime with horror; but I would like to have still longer to repent it. I felt more remorse before my condemnation: since then it seems as if there were no space, but for thoughts of death. But now, how I wish to repent thoroughly. When I had lingered for a minute on what had passed in my life, and then came back to the thought of its approaching termination, I shuddered as at something new. My happy childhood! my fair youth! a golden web with its end stained! Between then and now there is a river of blood; the blood of another

mingled with my own.

If any read my history, after so many years of innocence and happiness, they will not believe in this execrable year, which began by a crime, and will close with an execution; it would appear impossible.

And besides, miserable laws and miserable men! I was not ill-disposed.

Oh! to die in a few hours, and to think that a year ago, on this same day, I was innocent and at liberty, enjoying autumn walks, wandering beneath the trees tramping through the leaves!

### XXXV

To think that in this same moment, there are, in the houses which encircle the Palais de Justice and the Grève, men coming and going, laughing and talking; reading newspapers, thinking of business; shopkeepers selling their wares, young girls preparing their ball-dresses for the evening; and mothers playing with their children!

### XXXVI

I remember once, when a child, going alone to see the belfry of Notre-Dame.

I was already giddy from having ascended the dark winding staircase, from having crossed the slight open gallery which unites the two towers, and. from having seen Paris beneath my feet, when I entered the cage of stone and wood-work where the great bell is hung.

I advanced with trembling steps over the ill-joined planks, examining at a distance that bell, so famous amongst the children and the people of Paris; and it was not without terror that I observed the slated pent-houses, which surrounded the belfry with inclined planes, were just on a level with my feet. Through the openings I saw, in a bird's-eye view, the Place du Parvis--Notre-Dame beneath, and the ant-like passers-by.

Suddenly the enormous bell rang; its deep vibration shook the air, making the heavy tower rock. The flooring started from the beams. The noise nearly upset me. I tottered, ready to fall, and seemed on the point of slipping over the pent-houses, In an agony of

terror, I lay down on the planks, pressing them closely with both my arms, speechless, breathless, with this formidable sound in my ears, and beneath my eyes this precipice, this profound abyss, where so many quiet and envied passers were walking.

Well! it appears to me, as if I were again in that belfry. All my senses seem again giddy and dazzled: the booming of that bell seems to press on my brain, and around me I no longer see that tranquil and even life which I had quitted, and where other men walk still, except from a distance, and beyond a terrible abyss.

### XXXVII

The Hotel de Ville is a sinister edifice. With its sharp steep roof, its bizarre clock-tower, its great white dial, its tiers of little columns, its thousand windows, its foot-worn stairways, its arches to the right and the left, it is there, on a level with the Grève: sombre and funereal, its face all wrinkled with age, and so black, that it is black in full daylight.

On days of execution, it vomits forth gendarmes from all its doors, and stares at the condemned with all its windows.

And at night, the dial, showing the hour, is the only light on its black façade.

### XXXVIII

It is a quarter past one.

The following are my sensations at present:

A violent pain in my head, my frame chilled, my forehead burning. Every time that I rise, or bend forward, it seems to me that there is a fluid floating in my head, which makes my brain beat violently against the bone.

I have convulsive tremblings, and from time to time my pen falls from my hand as if by a galvanic shock.

My eyes sting as though full of smoke.

I suffer greatly in all my limbs.

Only two hours and forty-five minutes more and I will be cured.

### XXXIX

They say that it is, nothing, that one does not suffer, that it is an easy end; that death in this way is very much simplified.

Ah! then, what do they call they call this agony of six weeks, this summing up in one day? What then is the anguish of this irreparable day, which is passing so slowly and yet so fast? What is this ladder of tortures which terminates in the scaffold?

So this is not suffering.

Are not the convulsions the same whether life is taken away drop by drop, or intellect extinguished thought by thought?

And then, they say one does not suffer, but are they sure? Who told them so? Has a cut off head ever stood on the edge of the basket and cried to the people: That does not hurt!

Are there any who have been killed in this way who have come back to give thanks and say: "It is a great invention. You can depend on it. The mechanism is perfect."

Was it Robespierre? Was it Louis XVI?...

No! less than a minute, less than a second, and the thing is done. None have ever, except in mind, been in place of the one who is there, at the moment when the heavy knife falls, cutting the flesh, tearing the nerves, and breaking the vertebrae...But what of it! only half a second! The pain is avoided in horror!

### XL

It is singular that my mind so often reverts to the king. Whatever I do, there is always a voice within me which says:

"There is, in this same town, at this same hour, and not far from hence, in another Palais, a man who also has guards to all his gates, a man alone, like thee, in the crowd, with this difference, that he is as high, as thou art low. His entire life is glory, grandeur, delight. All

around him is love, respect, veneration. The loudest voices become low in speaking to him, and the proudest heads are bent. Everything about him is gold and silk. At this moment he is holding a council of ministers, where all coincide with his opinions. Or else he thinks of the chase tomorrow,--or the ball for this evening, feeling certain that the fête will come, and leaving to others the trouble of his pleasures. Well! this man is of flesh and blood like thee! And in order that at this instant the scaffold should fall, and thou be restored to life, liberty, fortune, family, it would only be requisite for him to write with this pen the seven letters of his name at the foot of a piece of paper; or even that his carriage should meet thy fatal cart! And he is good, and perhaps would like nothing better, and yet it will not be done!

## XLI

Well, then! Let us have courage with death, take this horrible idea and consider it face to face. Ask what it is, seek to know what it wants, turn it over in our minds, fathom the enigma and look ahead into the tomb.

It seems to me that, with my eyes closed, I see a great abyss of light in which my spirit revels with ease. It seems that heaven will be so luminous that the stars, instead of being brilliant points of gold on black velvet, will appear like black points on cloth of gold.

Or, wretch that I am, it will perhaps be a hideous gulf, bottomless, the walls of which will be hung with black, into which I will fall, and keep falling forever. Or, on rising after the blow, I will perhaps find myself on some great damp plain, where my head will roll about. It seems now as though a strong wind drove it here and there, jotted about by other rolling heads. There will be marshes and brooks of some unknown and fetid liquid; all will be black. When my eyes, in the rolling, are turned upwards, they will see nothing but the black heavens above; they will also see, darting about in the night, little red sparks, which, on approaching will become birds of fire. And it will be thus through all eternity.

It may also happen that at certain dates the victims of the Grève will assemble on dark nights on the place which is theirs. It will be a pale and bloody crowd, and I will not escape being one of it. There will be no moon and all will speak under their breath. The Hotel de' Ville will be there with its worm-eaten façade and its pitiless dial. A hellish guillotine will be there, upon which a demon will execute an executioner; it will be at four in the morning. We in our turn will be in the surrounding crowd.

It will probably be in this way. But if the dead come back, in what shape will return?

Who will have their incomplete and mutilated bodies? Will they have their choice? Will it be the head or the trunk which will be the spectre? Alas! what does death do with our soul? What is left of it? Does death sometimes lend its eyes so that it may look down on the earth and weep?

Ah! A priest! A priest who knows all this! I want a priest, and a crucifix to kiss!

My God, always the same one!

## XLII

I begged him to let me sleep; and I threw myself on the bed.

In fact, I had a rush of blood to the head, which made me sleep. It was my last sleep of that kind.

I dreamed.

I dreamed that it was night. It seemed to me that I was in my room with two or three of my friends, I do not know whom.

My wife was lying in her bedroom, asleep, beside her child.

We were talking in loud tones, my friends and I, and what we were speaking of was frightful.

Suddenly it seemed to me I heard some some in the other room; a feeble noise, strange, and indescribable. My friends had likewise heard. We listened; it was like a lock opening stiffly, like a bolt drawn carefully. It was something startling: it froze us with fear. We thought perhaps it was robbers who had got into the house, as it was far into the night.

We decided to go and investigate. I rose, and took a candle. My friends followed me, in single file.

We passed through the bedroom. My wife was sleeping with her child.

Then we came to the salon. Nothing. The portraits in their golden frames were motionless on the red hangings. It seemed to me that the door of the dining room had been moved.

We entered the dining room; we inspected it thoroughly. I went first. The door to the

stairs was tightly closed, the windows likewise. Near the stove, I saw that the door of the linen cupboard was open, and was turned against the wall as though to hide something.

That surprised me. We concluded there was some one behind the door.

I put out my hand to close the door; it resisted. Astonished, I pulled harder, it suddenly gave way, and we discovered a little old woman, her hands hanging by her side, her eyes closed, motionless, and standing as though glued to the angle of the wall.

There was something hideous about her, and my hair stands on end when I think of her.

I asked her:

"What are you doing there?"

She did not answer.

I asked:

"Who are you?"

She, neither answered, nor moved, and her eyes remained closed.

My friends said:

"She is no doubt an accomplice of some one who has entered with bad intent; they have escaped on hearing us approach; she was not able to, and has hidden there."

I questioned her anew; she remained motionless and silent, without a look.

One of us gave her a push, and she fell to the floor. She fell all of a heap, like a piece of wood, like a dead thing.

We kicked her, then two of us lifted her and leaned her against the wall. She gave no sign of life whatever. Some one shouted in her ear, but she was as silent as though she had been deaf.

Meanwhile, we were losing, patience, and becoming more angry than afraid. One of us said:

"Put the candle under her chin."

I put the burning wick under her chin. Then she half-opened one eye; an empty, wan, frightful eye that saw nothing.

I took away the candle and said:

"Ah! at last! will you answer now, old sorceress?"

"Who are you?"

The eye closed again as before.

"Really, this is too much," said the others. Again the candle! Again! she must speak.

I again held the candle under the old woman's chin.

Then she opened both eyes slowly, looked at us all, one after the other,, then, stooping over suddenly blew out the candle. At that very moment, in the darkness, I felt three sharp teeth pressed into my hand.

I awoke, shivering, and bathed in a cold sweat.

The good priest was seated at the foot of my bed, reading his prayers.

"Have I slept long?" I asked him.

"My Son," said he, "you have slept an hour. They have brought your child. She is awaiting you in the adjoining room. I did not wish them to waken you.

"Oh!" I cried. "My daughter! Let them bring me my daughter!"

### XLIII

She is rosy and happy, and her large eyes are bright, she is so pretty!

They had put on a dress very becoming to her.

I drew her toward me, I raised her in my arms, and placing her on my knees, kissed her



hair.

Why is her mother not with her? She was very ill, and grandmother also.

She looked at me with astonishment. Caressed, embraced, devoured with kisses, she submitted quietly; but, from time to time, cast an uneasy look towards her nurse, who was crying in the corner.

At last I was able to speak.

"Marie," I exclaimed. "My little Mari!"

I pressed her violently against my breast which was heaving with sobs. She uttered a little cry. "Oh! you hurt me, sir," she said.

"Sir!" It is nearly a year since she has seen me, poor child! She has forgotten me, face, words, voice; and then who could know me with this beard, this dress, and this pallor! What? already effaced from that memory, the only one where I wished to survive! What! already, no longer a father, am I condemned to hear no more that word, in the language children so soft that it cannot remain in the vocabulary of men: Papa!

And yet to have heard it from that sweet mouth, once more, only once more, that is all that I would have asked in payment for the forty years of life they will take from me.

"Listen, Marie," said I to her, joining her two little hands in mine. "Do you know me?"

She looked at me with her bright eyes and answered:

"Oh, no, indeed!"

"Look at me well," I repeated. "What? dost thou not know who I am?"

"Yes, sir," she answered. "A gentleman."

Alas! while loving one being on earth, loving with all your deep affection, having that being before you, who sees and looks at you, speaks and answers you, and yet knows you not! You wish for consolation but from this one being, who is the only one that does not know, that you require it because you are going to die!

"Marie," I continued, "hast thou a papa?"

"Yes, sir," said the child.

"Well, then, where is he?"

She raised her large eyes in astonishment

Ah! then you don't know? He is dead."

Then she began to cry; I nearly let her fall.

"Dead!" I exclaimed: "Marie, knowest thou what it is to be dead?"

"Yes, sir," she answered. "He is in earth and in heaven."

She continued of her own accord:

"I pray to God for him morning and evening at mamma's knees."

I kissed her on the forehead.

"Marie, say to me thy prayer."

"I could not, sir; you do not say prayers in the middle of the day. Come to-night to my house, and you shall hear me say it."

This was enough. I interrupted her.

"Marie, it is I who am thy, papa."

"Ah!" returned she.

I added, "Wouldst thou like me for thy papa?"

The child turned away.

"No, sir; my papa was much prettier."

I covered her with kisses and tears, she tried to escape from my arms, crying:

"You scratch me with your beard."

Then, I replaced her on my knees; devouring her with my eyes, and continued: "Marie, canst thou read?"

"Yes," she answered, "I can read very well. Mamma makes me read my letters."

"Well, then, read a little to me," said I, pointing to a printed paper which she held crumpled in one of her little hands.

She shook her pretty head.

"Oh! I can only read fables."

"But try, come, read."

She unfolded the paper, and began to spell with her finger,

"S, E, N--sen, T, E, N, C, E--tence--SENTENCE."

I snatched it from her hands. It was a copy of my own sentence of death she was reading to me. Her nurse had bought the paper for a sou. It had cost me much more.

No words can convey what I felt; my violence had alarmed the child, who was ready to cry. Suddenly she said to me:

"Give me back my paper! I want to play with it!"

I restored her to her nurse.

"Take her away!"

And I fell back in my chair, gloomy, desolate, in despair! Now they may come; I care for nothing more; the last fibre of my heart is broken. I am ready for whatever they do.

#### XLIV

The priest is kind; so is the jailer. I believe tears came in their eyes when I sent away my child.

It is done. Now I must fortify myself, and think firmly of the executioner, of the cart, of the gendarmes, of the crowd on the bridge, of the crowd in the street and of the crowd at the windows, and of what they have erected for me in the Place de la Grève.

I believe I have still an hour to familiarize myself with these ideas.

#### **XLV**

All the people will laugh and clap their hands, and applaud. Yet among those men, now free, unknown to jailers, and who run with joy to an execution, in that throng is more than one man whose head is destined to follow mine sooner or later, into the red basket. More than one who is here to-day on my account, will come hereafter on his own.

For these fated beings there is a certain fascination in the fatal, spot on the Grève; a centre of attraction. They are drawn towards what they are to be.

#### **XLVI**

My little Marie! She is gone away to play; she will look at the crowd from the window of a cab, and already she thinks no more of the "Gentleman." Perhaps I may still have time to write a few page for her, so that she may read them hereafter; and weep, in fifteen years hence, for the sorrow of to-day.

Yes, she shall know my history from myself, and why the name I leave her is tarnished.

#### **XLVII**

MY HISTORY.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE--The pages which immediately followed this have not yet been found. Perhaps, as the next chapter seems to indicate, the condemned had not time to write his history. It was so late when he thought of it.

#### **XLVIII**

From a room in the Hotel de Ville.

The Hotel de Ville!...So I am here.

The execrable journey is over. The place of execution is before me, and beneath the window, a horrible throng, laughing and yelling, while they await my appearance.

My efforts at composure were vain. My heart failed me. When above the heads of the crowd, I saw the frightful scaffold, my heart failed. I asked to be allowed to make a last declaration. So they brought me in here, and have sent for some prosecutor to receive it. I am now waiting for him; so there is thus much gained.

Let us see.

At three o'clock, they came to tell me it was time. I trembled, as though I had thought of anything else during the last six hours, six weeks, six months. It produced on me the effect of something quite unexpected.

They made me cross corridors, and descend stairs, they pushed me through a low door into a sombre room, narrow, arched, and scarcely lighted on this rainy, foggy day. A chair was in the centre, on which they told me to sit; I seated myself.

Some persons were standing near the door; and, beside the priest, and gendarmes, there were three other men.

The first of these, the tallest and oldest, was stout, with a red face. He wore a long coat and a cocked hat. This was he.

This was the executioner; the servant of the guillotine: the others were his servants.

When I was seated, these walked quietly behind me: then suddenly I felt the cold of steel in my hair, and heard the grating act of scissors.

My hair, cut carelessly, fell in heavy locks on my shoulders, and the man with the three-cornered hat removed them gently with his coarse hand.

All in the room spoke in subdued tones.

There was a heavy dull sound from without, which I fancied at first was caused, by the river: but a shout of laughter soon proved to me that it was the crowd.

A young man near the window, who was writing with a pencil, in his pocket-book, asked one of the turnkeys, what was the name of the present operation?

"The Toilet of the Condemned," he was answered.

From this I understood that it would be in to-morrow's newspaper.

Suddenly one of the servants removed my vest and the other one taking my hands, placed them behind me, and I felt the knots of a cord rolled slowly round my wrists, at the same time the other took off my cravat.

My linen shirt, the only remains of former times, being of the finest quality, caused him a sort of hesitation for a moment: but at length he began to cut off the collar.

At this dreadful precaution, and the sensation of the steel touching my neck, a tremor passed over me, and a stifled groan escaped; the man's hand trembled.

"Sir," said he, "I beg your pardon! Have I hurt you?"

These executioners are gentle fellows.

The people shouted louder in the street.

The tall red-faced man offered a handkerchief, steeped in vinegar, for me to inhale.

"Thank you," said I, to him, in the firmest tone I was able to command, "it is needless; I am recovered."

Then one of the men stooped down and fastened a small cord to my ankles, which restricted my steps, and this was again tied to the cord around my wrists. Finally the tall man threw my vest over my shoulders, and tied the sleeves in front. All was now completed.

Then the priest drew near with his crucifix.

"Come, my son," said he.

The men raised me by my arms: and I walked; but my steps were weak and tottering.

At this moment the folding doors were thrown open. A furious clamor, a chill breeze, and

a strong white light, reached me in the shade. From the extreme of the dark chamber I saw through the rain a thousand yelling heads of the expectant mass. On the right of the door-way, a range of mounted gendarmes; in front a detachment of soldiers; on the left, the back of the cart, with a ladder. A hideous picture, with the appropriate frame of a prison-door.

It was for this dread moment that I had reserved my courage. I advanced a few steps, and appeared on the threshold.

"There he is! there he is!" Cried the crowd. "He is coming at last!"

And the nearest to me clapped their hands. Much as a king might be loved, there could not be more greeting for him.

It was an ordinary cart, the horse was lean, and the driver wore a blue smock coat with red pattern, like those worn by the market gardeners around Bicêtre.

The tall man with the three-cornered hat ascended the cart first.

"Good-morning, Mr. Sampson!" cried the children hanging by the lamp-posts. One of his servants followed.

"Bravo, Tuesday!" cried out the children, as the two placed themselves on the front seat.

It was now my turn. I mounted with a pretty firm step.

"He keeps up well!" said a woman beside the gendarmes.

This atrocious commendation gave me courage. The priest took his seat beside me. They had placed me on the hindmost seat, my back towards the horse. I shuddered at this last attention.

There was a mixture of humanity in it.

I wished to look around me; gendarmes in front, gendarmes behind: then crowd! crowd! crowd! A sea of heads in the street.

A detachment of mounted gendarmes were waiting for me at the gate of the Palais.

The officer gave the word, and the procession moved on, as if pushed forward by a yell

from the populace.

We passed the gate. At the moment the cart turned towards the Pont-au-Change a shout went up from the pavement to the roof.

Here the detachment gathered around me.

"Hats off! hats off!" cried a thousand voices together--as if for the king. Then I laughed horribly also myself, and said to the priest:

"They, their hats...me, my head."

The Quai-au-Fleurs was blooming; it was market-day. The dealers left their flowers to look at me.

Opposite the square there is a street full of cabarets, in which the windows were filled with spectators, seeming to enjoy their good places, particularly the women. That day should have been a good one for the cabarets.

There were also people letting out tables, chairs, and carts: and these dealers in human blood shouted at the top of their voices:

"Who wishes places?"

A strange rage seized me against these wretches. I longed to shout out to them:

"Who wishes mine?"

Meanwhile the cart still advanced. At each step, the crowd in the rear dispersed; and I saw, with my wandering eyes, that they collected again farther on, to have, another view.

Crossing the Pont-au-Change, I chanced to look back. My glance rested on another quay, where above the houses, stood a black tower, isolated, bristling with sculptures, at the top of which I saw two stone monsters. I do not know why I asked the priest what the tower was.

"Saint-Jacques-la-Boucherie," answered the executioner.

I do not know how it was; but: in the fog, and despite the fine rain, which hung over all like a curtain, nothing which happened escaped me. Every one of the details caused me



torture. Words failed to express my emotions.

Towards the middle of the Pont-au-Change, so steep that we mounted it with difficulty, horror came violently upon me. I feared I would faint, last: vanity! Then I tried to blind and deafen myself to all about, me, except to the priest, whose words I hardly heard, mingled with the tumult.

I took the crucifix and kissed it.

"Have mercy on me," said I, "oh! my God!" And I strove to engross myself with this thought.

But every shake of the cart disturbed me; and then I became excessively chilled, as the rain had penetrated my clothes, and my head was bare.

"Are you trembling with cold, my son?" demanded the priest.

"Yes," answered I.

Alas! not only from cold.

At the turn to the bridge, the women expressed pity at my being so young.

We approached the fatal quay: my hearing and sight seemed about to fail me: all those voices; all those heads at the windows, at doors, at shop fronts, on lamp-posts, these thirsting and cruel spectators; this crowd where all knew me, and I knew none; this road paved and walled with human visages; I was confounded, stupefied, senseless. There is something insupportable in the weight of so many looks being fixed upon one.

I swayed in my place on the seat; and paid no further attention to the priest, or the crucifix.

In the tumult which surrounded me, I no longer distinguished exclamations of pity from those of satisfaction, or the sounds of laughter, from those of complaint. All formed together a noise in my ears like sounding brass.

My eyes read mechanically the signs over the shops.

Once I felt a painful curiosity to look round on that which we were approaching. It was the last mental bravado, but the body would not aid it, for my neck remained paralyzed,

and as though dead.

I saw on my left, beyond the river, the tower of Notre-Dame, which, seen from this point, hid the other. There were many people on it, and they ought to have been able to see well.

And the cart went on,--on, and the shops passed away; the signs succeeded each other, written, painted, gilded; and the populace laughed, while they tramped through the mud,--and I yielded my mind, as persons do in sleeping.

Suddenly this series of shops ended as we turned into the square; the voice of the mob became still more loud, yelling, and joyous the cart stopped suddenly, and I had nearly fallen on my face on the planks. The priest held me up--"Courage! murmured he.--They next brought a ladder to the back of the cart. I leaned on the arm of the priest and descended. I made one step, and turned round to advance another; but I had not the power. Between the lamps of the quay, I saw something sinister.

Oh! it was the reality!

I stopped, as if staggered by a blow.

"I have a last declaration to make!" I cried feebly.

And then they brought me up here.

I asked them to let me write my last wishes. They unbound my hands, but the cord is here, ready to be replaced.

## XLIX

A judge, a commissioner, a magistrate, I know not what was his rank, has just been here. I entreated him to procure my pardon, I begged it, with clasped hands, and dragging myself on my knees at his feet. He asked, with a fatal smile, if that were all I had to say to him.

"My pardon! my pardon? I repeated, "or, for pity's sake, five minutes more!

"Who knows? my pardon may come! It is so horrible at my age to die in this manner!

Reprieves have frequently arrived, even at the last moment! And to whom would they show mercy, sir, if not to me?

That detestable executioner! He came in to tell the judge that the execution was ordered for a certain hour; that the hour was at hand, and that he was answerable for the event.

"Oh ! for pity's sake! one minute to wait for my pardon! or I will defend myself, I will bite!"

The judge and the executioner went out.

I am alone; alone with two gendarmes.

Oh! that horrible throng, with its hyena cry.--Who knows! but that I shall escape from it? That I shall be saved? If my pardon...It is impossible but that they will pardon me! Ah! the wretches! It seems to me some one is coming up-stairs...

FOUR O'CLOCK.

[Victor Hugo](#), 1829

### **Recommendations:**

[Emma](#), [Northanger Abbey](#), [Pride and Prejudice](#), [Mansfield Park](#) by Jane Austen

[Gobseck](#), [Father Goriot](#), [The Magic Skin](#) by Honoré de Balzac

[Uncle Tom's Cabin](#) by Harriet Beecher Stowe

[The Decameron](#) by Giovanni Boccaccio

[Wuthering Heights](#) by Emily Brontë

[Don Quixote of La Mancha](#) by Miguel de Cervantes

[The Divine Comedy](#) by Dante Alighieri

[Oliver Twist](#), [David Copperfield](#), [A Tale of Two Cities](#) by Charles Dickens

[The Idiot](#), [The Brothers Karamazov](#), [Crime And Punishment](#), [The Insulted And The Injured](#) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

[Faust Parts I & II](#) , [The Sorrows of Young Werther](#) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

[The Overcoat](#), [The Nose](#) by Nikolai Gogol

[The Hunchback of Notre-Dame](#) , [Les Misérables](#) , [The Man Who Laughs](#) by Victor Hugo

[Trois hommes dans un bateau. Sans oublier le chien!](#) by Jerome K. Jerome

[The Trial](#) , [Metamorphosis](#) by Franz Kafka

[A Hero of Our Time](#) by M. Y. Lermontov

[Martin Eden](#) , [The Call of the Wild](#), [White Fang](#) by Jack London

[Moby Dick Or The Whale](#) by Herman Melville

[Thus Spake Zarathustra](#) by Friedrich Nietzsche

[Eugene Onegin](#) , [The Queen of Spades](#), [Boris Godunov](#) by Alexander Pushkin

[Treasure Island](#) by Robert Louis Stevenson

[The Antiquary](#) by Walter Scott

[Othello](#), [King Lear](#) by William Shakespeare

[Fathers and Sons](#) , [A House of Gentlefolk](#) by Ivan Turgenev

[The Adventures of Tom Sawyer](#) by Mark Twain

[Dick Sands, the Boy Captain](#) by Jules Verne

[The Picture of Dorian Gray](#) by Oscar Wilde

[Amok](#), [Chess Story](#) by Stefan Zweig