

MISERABLES VOLUME II--COSETTE BOOK FIRST--WATERLOO CHAPTER I--WHAT IS MET WITH ON NIVELLES Last year (1861), on a beautiful May morning, a traveller, the person who is telling this story, was coming from Nivelles, and directing his course to the hills which succeed each other, raise the road and let it fall again, and produce something in the nature of enormous waves. He had passed Lillois and Bois-Saint-Jean. In the west he perceived the slate-roofed tower of Braine-l'Alleud, which has the form of a reversed vase. He had just left behind a wood upon an eminence; and at the angle of the cross-road, by the side of a sort of mouldy gibbet bearing the inscription Ancient Barrière No. 4, a public house, bearing on its front this sign: At the Four Winds (Aux Quatre Vents). Echabeau, Private Cafe. A quarter of a league further on, he arrived at the bottom of a little valley, where there is water which passes beneath an arch made through the embankment of the road. The clump of sparsely planted but very green trees, which fills the valley on one side of the road, is dispersed over the meadows on the other, and disappears gracefully and as in order in the direction of Braine-l'Alleud. On the right, close to the road, was an inn, with a four-wheeled cart at the door, a large bundle of hop-poles, a plough, a heap of dried brushwood near a flourishing hedge, lime smoking in a square hole, and a ladder suspended along an old penthouse with straw partitions. A young girl was weeding in a field, where a huge yellow poster, probably of some outside spectacle, such as a parish festival, was fluttering in the wind. At one corner of the inn, beside a pool in which a flotilla of ducks was navigating, a badly paved path plunged into the bushes. The wayfarer struck into this. After traversing a hundred paces, skirting a wall of the fifteenth century, surmounted by a pointed gable, with bricks set in contrast, he found himself before a large door of arched stone, with a rectilinear impost, in the sombre style of Louis XIV., flanked by two flat medallions. A severe facade rose above this door; a wall, perpendicular to the facade, almost touched the door, and flanked it with an abrupt right angle. In the meadow before the door lay three harrows, through which, in disorder, grew all the flowers of May. The door was closed. The two decrepit leaves which barred it were ornamented with an old rusty knocker. The sun was charming; the branches had that soft shivering of May, which seems to proceed rather from the nests than from the wind. A brave little bird, probably a lover, was carolling in a distracted manner in a large tree. The wayfarer bent over and examined a rather large circular excavation, resembling the hollow of a sphere, in the stone on the left, at the foot of the pier of the door. At this moment the leaves of the door parted, and a peasant woman emerged. She saw the wayfarer, and perceived what he was looking at. "It was a French cannon-ball which made that," she said to him. And she added-- "That which you see there, higher up in the door, near a nail, is the hole of a big iron bullet as large as an egg. The bullet did not pierce the wood." "What is the name of this place?" inquired the wayfarer. "Hougomont," said the peasant woman. The traveller straightened himself up. He walked on a few paces, and went off to look over the tops of the hedges. On the horizon through the trees, he perceived a sort of little elevation, and on this elevation something which at that distance resembled a lion. He was on the battle-field of Waterloo. CHAPTER II--HOUGOMONT Hougomont,--this was a funereal spot, the beginning of the obstacle, the first resistance, which that great wood-cutter of Europe, called Napoleon, encountered at Waterloo, the first knot under the blows of his axe. It was a chateau; it is no longer anything but a farm. For the antiquary, Hougomont is Hugomons. This manor was built by Hugo, Sire of Somerel, the same who endowed the sixth chaplaincy of the Abbey of Villiers. The traveller pushed open the door, elbowed an ancient calash under the porch, and entered the courtyard. The first thing which struck him in this paddock was a door of the sixteenth century, which here simulates an arcade, everything else having fallen prostrate around it. A monumental aspect often has its birth in ruin. In a wall near the arcade opens another arched door, of the time of Henry IV., permitting a glimpse of the trees of an orchard; beside this door, a manure-hoek, some pickaxes, some shovels, some carts, an old well, with its flagstone and its iron reel, a chicken jumping, and a turkey spreading its tail, a chapel surmounted by a small bell-tower, a blossoming pear-tree trained in espalier against the wall of the chapel--behold the court, the consequence of which was one of Napoleon's dreams. This corner of earth, could he but have seized it, would, perhaps, have given him the world likewise. Chickens are scattering its dust abroad with their beaks. A growl is audible; it is a huge dog, who shows his teeth and replaces the English. The English behaved admirably there. Cooke's four companies of guards there held out for seven hours against the fury of an army. Hougomont viewed on the map, as a geometrical plan, comprising buildings and enclosures, presents a sort of irregular rectangle, one angle of which is nicked out. It is this angle which contains the southern door, guarded by this wall, which commands it only a gun's length away. Hougomont has two doors,--the southern door, that of the chateau; and the northern door, belonging to the farm. Napoleon sent his brother Jerome against Hougomont; the divisions of Foy, Guillemont, and Bachelu hurled themselves against it; nearly the entire corps of Reille was employed against it, and miscarried; Kellermann's balls were exhausted on this heroic section of wall. Bauduin's brigade was not strong enough to force Hougomont on the north, and the brigade of Soye could not do more than effect the beginning of a breach on the south, without taking it. The farm buildings border the courtyard on the south. A bit of the north door, broken by the French, hangs suspended to the wall. It consists of four planks nailed to two cross-beams, on which the scars of the attack are visible. The northern door, which was broken in by the French, and which has had a piece applied to it to replace the panel suspended on the wall, stands half-open at the bottom of the paddock; it is cut squarely in the wall, built of stone below, of brick above which closes in the courtyard on the north. It is a simple door for carts, such as exist in all farms, with the two large leaves made of rustic planks; beyond lie the meadows. The dispute over this entrance was furious. For a long time, all sorts of imprints of bloody hands were visible on the door-posts. It was there that Bauduin was killed. The stone of the combat still lingers in this courtyard; its horror is visible there; the confusion of the fray was petrified there; it lives and it dies there; it was only yesterday. The walls are in the death agony, the stones fall; the breaches cry aloud; the holes are wounds; the drooping, quivering trees seem to be making an effort to flee. This courtyard was more built up in 1815 than it is to-day. Buildings which have since been pulled down then formed redans and angles. The English barricaded themselves there; the French made their way in, but could not stand their ground. Beside the chapel, one wing of the chateau, the only ruin now remaining of the manor of Hougomont, rises in a crumbling state,--dismembered, one might say. The chateau served for a dungeon, the chapel for a block-house. There men exterminated each other. The French, fired on from every point,--from behind the walls, from the summits of the garrets, from the depths of the cellars, through all the casements, through all the air-holes, through every crack in the stones,--fetched fagots and set fire to walls and men; the reply to the grape-shot was a volley on the inside of a broken shell. The staircase has two stories; the English, besieged on the staircase, and massed on its upper steps, had cut off the lower steps. These consisted of large slabs of blue stone, which form a heap among the nettles. Half a score of steps still cling to the wall, on the first is cut the figure of a trident. These inaccessible steps are solid in their niches. All the rest resembles a law which has been denuded of its teeth. There are two old trees there: one is dead; the other is wounded at its base, and is clothed with verdure in April. Since 1815 it has taken to growing through the staircase. A massacre took place in the chapel. The interior, which has recovered its calm, is singular. The mass has not been said there since the carnage. Nevertheless, the altar has been left there--an altar of unpolished wood, placed against a background of rough-hewn stone. Four whitewashed walls, a door opposite the altar, two small arched windows, over the door a large wooden crucifix, below the crucifix a square air-hole stopped up with a bundle of hay; on the ground, in one corner, an old window-frame with the glass all broken to pieces--such is the chapel. Near the altar there is nailed up a wooden statue of Saint Anne, of the fifteenth century; the head of the infant Jesus has been carried off by a large ball. The French, who were masters of the chapel for a moment, and were then dislodged, set fire to it. The flames filled this building; it was a perfect furnace; the door was burned, the floor was burned, the wooden Christ was not burned. The fire preyed upon his feet, of which only the blackened stumps are now to be seen; then it stopped,--a miracle, less fortunate than the Christ. The walls are covered with inscriptions. Near the feet of Christ this name is to be read: Henquinnez. Then it reads: There are French names with exclamations points,--a sign of wrath. The wall was freshly whitewashed in 1849. The nations insulted each other, and were picked up which held an axe in its hand; this corpse was Sub-Lieutenant Legros. On emerging from the chapel, a well is visible on the left. Why is there no bucket and pulley to this? It is because water is no longer drawn there. Why is water not drawn there? Because it is full of scum. He was a peasant who lived at Hougomont, and was gardener there. On the 18th of June, 1815, his family fled and concealed the scum in the cellar. The English discovered him there. They tore him from his hiding-place, and concealed himself in the cellar. The English discovered him there. They tore him from his hiding-place, and concealed himself in the cellar. They were thirsty; this Guillaume brought them water. It was from this well that he drew it. Many drank of it, and were thirsty; they were in haste to bury the dead bodies. Death has a fashion of harassing victory, and she causes the dead to be buried. Three hundred dead bodies were cast into it. With too much haste perhaps. Were they all dead? Legend says the well is open. It is there that the water was drawn. The wall at the bottom has a sort of shapeless loophole, through which the beams remain. The iron supports of the well on the right form a cross. On leaning over, the eye is lost in shadows. The base of the walls all about the well is concealed in a growth of nettles. This well has not in it any wells in Belgium. The slab has here been replaced by a cross-beam, against which lean five or six shovels which resemble huge bones. There is no longer either pail, chain, or pulley; but there is still the stone basin which collects there, and from time to time a bird of the neighboring forests comes thither to drink, and then flies away. O late, there is an iron handle, which hewed off his hair, and is still in the well. The door of this house opens on the courtyard. Upon this door, beside a pretty Gothic lock-pick, is a name: Hougomont. The door when the Hanoverian lieutenant, Wilda, grasped this handle in order to take refuge in the house had for their grandfather Guillaume van Kylsom, the old gardener, dead long ago. My sister, who was older, was terrified and wept. They carried us off to the woods. I imitated the cannon, and went boom! boom!" A door opening from the courtyard on the left is in three parts; one might almost say, in three acts. The first part is a garden, then a common enclosure; on the side of the entrance, the buildings of the chateau and at the end, a wall. The wall on the right is of brick, the wall at the bottom is of stone, is planted with gooseberry bushes, choked with the wild growth of vegetation, and terminated with a double curve. It was a seigniorial garden in the first French style which precedes the chateau; the rest lie prostrate in the grass. Almost all bear scratches of bullets. One broken balustrade was in this garden, further down than the orchard, that six light-infantry men of the 1st, hunted down and caught like bears in their dens, accepted the combat with two Hanoverians lined this balustrade and fired from above. The infantry men, replying from below, ushes, took a quarter of an hour to die. One mounts a few steps and passes from the garden into the courtyard, fifteen hundred men fell in less than an hour. The wall set sh at irregular heights, are there still. In front of the sixth are placed two English tombs of stone, one on each side of the wall. The wall is hidden on the outside by a tall hedge; the French came up, it crossed it, and found the wall both an obstacle and an ambushade, with the English guard g at once a shower of grape-shot and balls, and Soye's brigade was broken against it. Thurgard was taken. As they had no ladders, the French scaled it with their nails. They fought h as been soaked in blood. A battalion of Nassau, seven hundred strong, was overwhelmed by the French. Kellermann's two batteries were trained, is gnawed by grape-shot. This orchard is sentient, its buttercups and its daisies; the grass is tall there; the cart-horses browse there; cords erse the spaces between the trees and force the passer-by to bend his head; one walks o mole-holes. In the middle of the grass one observes an uprooted tree-bole which lies the ainst it to die. Beneath a great tree in the neighborhood fell the German general, Duplat, d evocation of the Edict of Nantes. An aged and falling apple-tree leans far over to one side m. Nearly all the apple-trees are falling with age. There is not one which has not had its b about in this orchard. Crows fly through their branches, and at the end of it is a wood carnage, a rivulet formed of English blood, French blood, German blood mingled in f giment of Brunswick destroyed, Duplat killed, Blackman killed, the En he forty from Reille's corps, decimated, three thousand men in the shot, burned, with their throats cut,--and all this s oth at a peas r ack,--that is one of the story-teller's rights,--an d put oursel narrated in the first part of this book took place. If it had not rained i ace. If it had not rained i ee n different. A few drops of water, more or le ss, decided the downfall of season sufficed to ma re rain, and a cloud traversing the sky out her time to come up. Why? Because the g round was wet. The arti cts of this. The foundati on o f this wonderful captain wa attle were arranged fo r pro jectiles. The k ey t a citadel, and made a brea ch in it. He overv something of the s harpshoo ter in his genius. T im everything lay in this, to strike, strike, str ike in h genius, render ed this gloo my at hlete of th e pugil ers o ty. Suppo se the soil dry, and the artillery capable of mov d at two o'clock, three hours before the change of fortun eck due to the pilot? Was it the evident physical declin ears of war worn out the blade as it had worn the scabb rou sty left in the leader? In a word, was this genius, as e go into a frenzy in order to disguise his weakened pow dventure? Had he become--a grave matter in a general-- who may be called the giants of action, when genius gr Dantes and Michael Angelo to grow old is to victory in apole on lost the direct sense of victory gniz the crumbling brink of abysses? Had he lost his po ys known all the roads to triumph, and who, from a sovere ign finger, had he now re ach ultuou s legions ha rressed to an, reme madness? Was that tit ani -devil? We do not think so. He is plan of b att lles' line, to make a breach in the enemy, to cut th ongres, to make two shattered fragments of Wellin -Saint-Jean, to seize Brussels, to hurl the German i hman into the sea. All this wa s co g is connected with this battle, but this hist ory ; o and finished in a masterly manner, from one point o whole pleiad of historians.[7] As for us, we leave the h er-by on the plain, a seeker bending over the t ties, per chance; we have no rig ht t ain illus ions, no do ubt; we pos ses our opinio n, a chain o f accidents do estiny, that mysterious culprit, we judge like that ingeni a clear idea of the battle of Waterloo have only to place, to Nivelles, the right limb is the road to Genappe, the tie nt-Saint-Jean, where Wellington is; the lower left tip is H Alliance, where Napoleon was. At the centre of this chord s been plac ed, the invol untary symbol of the su two limbs and the ti e, is the p latea ies extend ed to the plat eau of M onte-lez-eeu, behind the plat eau of M onte-lez-eeu, and the re end s n th e wais t. The on e seeks to t o the sh oulder; the o ther la ck o ce turn i n the lan dscape, a cr m, that colossus which is cal led an a rmy, the responsible leader, of examining the most i nsig nerals had attentively studied the plain of Mont-Saint-Je mined it as the possible seat of a great battle. Upon this y was stationed above, th e French army b in hand, upon t he heig That calm profile under the little three-cor at coat hiding his epaulettes, the corner of red ribbon p ers crowned N's and eagles, Hessian boots over silk imaginations, saluted with acclamations by some, s olved by the majority of heroes, and which always v s peculiar and divine quality, that, pure light as it is, cts two different phantoms, and the one attacks the in the definitive judgments of nations. Babylon viola ine for a ma n to leave behind him the night which was trouble d, uncertain, hesi cut up by ks; at some poin liquid mud. If the wheat and rye trampled ement, particularly in the valleys, in the direction of P aeping all his artillery well in hand, like a pistol, aiming and gallop freely. In order to do that it was necessary tz. When the first cannon was fired, the English gen aps, than the Emperor would have wished, by the le nte, and Ney pushed forward the right wing of the o draw Wellington thither, and to make him swer n held the position solidly, and Wellington, ins one battalion from Brunswick. The attack of the passage against possible Prussians, to force M w incidents this attack succeeded Papelotte wa These young soldiers were valiant in the pres irmishers: the soldier skirmisher, left some