VICTOR HUGO, LASCELLES WRAXALL

LES MISÉRABLES, V. 2

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Содержание

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BOOK I
WATERLOO

CHAPTER I
ON THE NIVELLES ROAD

On a fine May morning last year (1861) a wayfarer, the person who is telling this story, was coming from Nivelles, and was proceeding toward La Hulpe. He was on foot and following, between two rows of trees, a wide paved road which undulates over a constant succession of hills, that raise the road and let it fall again, and form, as it were, enormous waves. He had passed Lillois and Bois-Seigneur Isaac, and noticed in the west the slate-covered steeple of Braine l'Alleud, which looks like an overturned vase. He had just left behind him a wood upon a hill, and at the angle of a cross-road, by the side of a sort of worm-eaten gallows which bore the inscription, "Old barrier, No. 4," a wine-shop, having on its front the following notice: "The Four Winds, Échabeau, private coffee-house."

About half a mile beyond this pot-house, he reached a small valley, in which there is a stream that runs through an arch formed in the causeway. The clump of trees, wide-spread but very green, which fills the valley on one side of the road, is scattered on the other over the fields, and runs gracefully and capriciously toward Braine l'Alleud. On the right, and skirting the road, were an inn, a four-wheeled cart in front of the door, a large bundle of hop-poles, a plough, a pile of dry shrubs near a quick-set hedge, lime smoking in a square hole, and a ladder lying along an old shed with straw partitions. A girl was hoeing in a field, where a large yellow bill – probably of a show at some Kermesse – was flying in the wind. At the corner of the inn, a badly-paved path ran into the bushes by the side of a pond, on which a flotilla of ducks was navigating. The wayfarer turned into this path.

After proceeding about one hundred yards, along a wall of the 15th century, surmounted by a coping of crossed bricks, he found himself in front of a large arched stone gate, with a rectangular moulding, in the stern style of Louis XIV., supported by two flat medallions. A severe façade was over this gate; a wall perpendicular to the façade almost joined the gate and flanked it at a right angle. On the grass-plat in front of the gate lay three harrows, through which the May flowers were growing pell-mell. The gate was closed by means of two decrepit folding-doors, ornamented by an old rusty hammer.

The sun was delightful, and the branches made that gentle May

rustling, which seems to come from nests even more than from the wind. A little bird, probably in love, was singing with all its might. The wayfarer stooped and looked at a rather large circular excavation in the stone to the right of the gate, which resembled a sphere. At this moment the gates opened and a peasant woman came out. She saw the wayfarer and noticed what he was looking at.

"It was a French cannon-ball that made it," she said, and then added: "What you see higher up there, on the gate near a nail, is the hole of a heavy shell, which did not penetrate the wood."

"What is the name of this place?" the wayfarer asked.

"Hougomont," said the woman.

The wayfarer drew himself up, he walked a few steps, and then looked over the hedge. He could see on the horizon through the trees a species of mound, and on this mound something which, at a distance, resembled a lion. He was on the battlefield of Waterloo.

CHAPTER II
HOUGOMONT

Hougomont was a mournful spot, the beginning of the obstacle, the first resistance which that great woodman of Europe, called Napoleon, encountered at Waterloo; the first knot under the axe-blade. It was a château, and is now but a farm. For the antiquarian Hougomont is Hugo-mons: it was built by Hugo, Sire de Sommeril, the same who endowed the sixth chapelry of the Abbey of Villers. The wayfarer pushed open the door, elbowed an old carriage under a porch, and entered the yard. The first thing that struck him in this enclosure was a gate of the 16th century, which now resembles an arcade, as all has fallen around it. A monumental aspect frequently springs up from ruins. Near the arcade there is another gateway in the wall, with key-stones in the style of Henri IV., through which can be seen the trees of an orchard. By the side of this gateway a dung-hill, mattocks, and shovels, a few carts, an old well with its stone slab and iron windlass, a frisking colt, a turkey displaying its tail, a chapel surmounted by a little belfry, and a blossoming pear-tree growing in *espalier* along the chapel wall, – such is this yard, the conquest of which was a dream of Napoleon's. This nook of earth, had he been able to take it, would probably have given him the world. Chickens are scattering the dust there with their beaks, and you hear a growl, – it is a large dog, which shows its teeth and fills

the place of the English. The English did wonders here; Cooke's four companies of Guards resisted at this spot for seven hours the obstinate attack of an army.

Hougomont, seen on a map, buildings and enclosures included, presents an irregular quadrangle, of which one angle has been broken off. In this angle is the southern gate within point-blank range of this wall. Hougomont has two gates, – the southern one which belongs to the château, and the northern which belongs to the farm. Napoleon sent against Hougomont his brother Jérôme; Guilleminot's, Foy's, and Bachelie's divisions were hurled at it; nearly the whole of Reille's corps was employed there and failed; and Kellermann's cannon-balls rebounded from this heroic wall. Bauduin's brigade was not strong enough to force Hougomont on the north, and Soye's brigade could only attack it on the south without carrying it.

The farm-buildings border the court-yard on the south, and a piece of the northern gate, broken by the French, hangs from the wall. It consists of four planks nailed on two cross-beams, and the scars of the attack may still be distinguished upon it. The northern gate, which was broken down by the French, and in which a piece has been let in to replace the panel hanging to the wall, stands, half open, at the extremity of the yard; it is cut square in a wall which is stone at the bottom, brick at the top, and which closes the yard on the north side. It is a simple gate, such as may be seen in all farm-yards, with two large folding-doors made of rustic planks; beyond it are fields. The dispute for this

entrance was furious; for a long time all sorts of marks of bloody hands could be seen on the side-post of the gate, and it was here that Bauduin fell. The storm of the fight still lurks in the court-yard: horror is visible there; the incidents of the fearful struggle are petrified in it; people are living and dying in it, – it was only yesterday. The walls are in the pangs of death, the stones fall, the breaches cry out, the holes are wounds, the bent and quivering trees seem making an effort to fly.

This yard was more built upon in 1815 than it is now; buildings which have since been removed, formed in it redans and angles. The English barricaded themselves in it; the French penetrated, but could not hold their ground there. By the side of the chapel stands a wing of the château, the sole relic left of the Manor of Hougomont, in ruins; we might almost say gutted. The château was employed as a keep, the chapel served as a block-house. Men exterminated each other there. The French, fired upon from all sides, from behind walls, from granaries, from cellars, from every window, from every air-hole, from every crack in the stone, brought up fascines, and set fire to the walls and men; the musketry fire was replied to by arson.

In the ruined wing you can look through windows defended by iron bars, into the dismantled rooms of a brick building; the English Guards were ambuscaded in these rooms, and the spiral staircase, hollowed out from ground-floor to roof, appears like the interior of a broken shell. The staircase has two landings; the English, besieged on this landing and massed on the upper stairs,

broke away the lowest. They are large slabs of blue stone which form a pile among the nettles. A dozen steps still hold to the wall; on the first the image of a trident is carved, and these inaccessible steps are solidly set in their bed. All the rest resemble a toothless jaw. There are two trees here, one of them dead, and the other, which was wounded at the root, grows green again in April. Since 1815 it has taken to growing through the staircase.

Men massacred each other in the chapel, and the interior, which is grown quiet again, is strange. Mass has not been said in it since the carnage, but the altar has been left, – an altar of coarse wood supported by a foundation of rough stone. Four whitewashed walls, a door opposite the altar, two small arched windows, a large wooden crucifix over the door, above the crucifix a square air-hole stopped up with hay; in a corner, on the ground, an old window sash, with the panes all broken, – such is the chapel. Near the altar is a wooden statue of St. Anne, belonging to the 15th century; the head of the infant Saviour has been carried away by a shot. The French, masters for a moment of the chapel and then dislodged, set fire to it. The flames filled the building, and it became a furnace; the door burned, the flooring burned, but the wooden Christ was not burned; the fire nibbled away the feet, of which only the blackened stumps can now be seen, and then stopped. It was a miracle, say the country people. The walls are covered with inscriptions. Near the feet of Christ you read the name Henquinez; then these others, Conde de Rio Maïor, Marquis y Marquisa de Almagro (Habana). There

are French names with marks of admiration, signs of anger. The wall was whitewashed again in 1849, for the nations insulted each other upon it. It was at the door of this chapel that a body was picked up, holding an axe in its hand; it was the body of Sub-lieutenant Legros.

On leaving the chapel you see a well on your left hand. As there are two wells in this yard, you ask yourself why this one has no bucket and windlass? Because water is no longer drawn from it. Why is it not drawn? Because it is full of skeletons. The last man who drew water from this well was a man called William van Kylsom: he was a peasant who lived at Hougomont, and was gardener there. On June 18, 1815, his family took to flight and concealed themselves in the woods. The forest round the Abbey of Villers sheltered for several days and nights the dispersed luckless country people. Even at the present day certain vestiges, such as old burnt trunks of trees, mark the spot of these poor encampments among the thickets. Van Kylsom remained at Hougomont to "take care of the château," and concealed himself in a cellar. The English discovered him there; he was dragged from his lurking-place, and the frightened man was forced by blows with the flat of a sabre to wait on the combatants. They were thirsty, and he brought them drink, and it was from this well he drew the water. Many drank there for the last time, and this well, from which so many dead men drank, was destined to die too. After the action, the corpses were hastily interred; death has a way of its own of harassing victory, and it causes pestilence

to follow glory. Typhus is an annex of triumph. This well was deep and was converted into a tomb. Three hundred dead were thrown into it, perhaps with too much haste. Were they all dead? The legend says no. And it seems that, on the night following the burial, weak voices were heard calling from the well.

This well is isolated in the centre of the yard; three walls, half of brick, half of stone, folded like the leaves of a screen, and forming a square tower, surround it on three sides, while the fourth is open. The back wall has a sort of shapeless peep-hole, probably made by a shell. This tower once had a roof of which only the beams remain, and the iron braces of the right-hand wall form a cross. You bend over and look down into a deep brick cylinder full of gloom. All round the well the lower part of the wall is hidden by nettles. This well has not in front of it the large blue slab usually seen at all Belgian wells. Instead of it, there is a frame-work, supporting five or six shapeless logs of knotted wood which resemble large bones. There is no bucket, chain, or windlass remaining: but there is still the stone trough, which served to carry off the water. The rain-water collects in it, and from time to time a bird comes from the neighboring forest to drink from it and then fly away.

One house in this ruin, the farm-house, is still inhabited, and the door of this house opens on the yard. By the side of a pretty Gothic lock on this gate there is an iron handle. At the moment when the Hanoverian lieutenant Wilda seized this handle in order to take shelter in the farm, a French sapper cut off his hand with

a blow of his axe. The old gardener Van Kylsom, who has long been dead, was grandfather of the family which now occupies the house. A gray-headed woman said to me: "I was here, I was three years old, and my sister, who was older, felt frightened and cried. I was carried away to the woods in my mother's arms, and people put their ears to the ground to listen. I imitated the cannon and said, 'Boom, boom.'" A door on the left hand of the yard, as we said, leads into the orchard, which is terrible. It is in three parts, we might almost say, in three acts. The first part is a garden, the second the orchard, the third a wood. These three parts have one common *enceinte*; near the entrance, the buildings of the château and the farm, on the left a hedge, on the right a wall, and at the end a wall. The right-hand wall is of brick, the bottom one of stone. You enter the garden first; it slopes, is planted with gooseberry-bushes, is covered with wild vegetation, and is closed by a monumental terrace of cut stones with balustrades. It was a Seigneurial garden in the French style, that preceded Le Notre: now it is ruins and briers. The pilasters are surmounted by globes that resemble stone cannon-balls. Forty-three balustrades are still erect; the others are lying in the grass, and nearly all have marks of musket-balls. One fractured balustrade is laid upon the stem like a broken leg.

It was in this garden, which is lower than the orchard, that six voltigeurs of the 1st light regiment, having got in and unable to get out, and caught like bears in a trap, accepted combat with two Hanoverian companies, one of which was armed with rifles. The

Hanoverians lined the balustrade and fired down: the voltigeurs, firing up, six intrepid men against two hundred, and having no shelter but the gooseberry-bushes, took a quarter of an hour in dying. You climb up a few steps and reach the orchard, properly so called. Here, on these few square yards, fifteen hundred men fell in less than an hour. The wall seems ready to recommence the fight, for the thirty-eight loop-holes pierced by the English at irregular heights may still be seen. In front of the wall are two English tombs made of granite. There are only loop-holes in the south wall, for the principal attack was on that side. This wall is concealed on the outside by a quickset hedge. The French came up under the impression that they had only to carry this hedge, and found the wall an obstacle and an ambuscade; the English Guards, behind the thirty-eight loop-holes, firing at once a storm of canister and bullets; and Soye's brigade was dashed to pieces against it. Waterloo began thus.

The orchard, however, was taken; as the French had no ladders, they climbed up with their nails. A hand-to-hand fight took place under the trees, and all the grass was soaked with blood, and a battalion of Nassau, 700 strong, was cut to pieces here. On the outside the wall, against which Kellermann's two batteries were pointed, is pock-marked with cannon-balls. This orchard is sensitive, like any other, to the month of May; it has its buttercups and its daisies, the grass is tall in it, the plough-horses browse in it, hair ropes on which linen is hung to dry occupy the space between the trees, and make the visitor bow

his head, and as you walk along your foot sinks in mole-holes. In the middle of the grass you notice an uprooted, outstretched, but still flourishing tree. Major Blackman leaned against it to die. Under another large tree close by fell the German General Duplat, a French refugee belonging to a family that fled upon the revocation of the edict of Nantes. Close at hand an old sickly apple-tree, poulticed with a bandage of straw and clay, hangs its head. Nearly all the apple-trees are dying of old age, and there is not one without its cannon-ball or bullet. Skeletons of dead trees abound in this orchard, ravens fly about in the branches, and at the end is a wood full of violets.

Bauduin killed; Foy wounded; arson, massacre, carnage, a stream composed of English, French, and German blood furiously mingled; a well filled with corpses; the Nassau regiment and the Brunswick regiment destroyed; Duplat killed; Blackman killed; the English Guards mutilated; twenty French battalions of the forty composing Reille's corps decimated; three thousand men in this château of Hougomont alone, sabred, gashed, butchered, shot, and burnt, – all this that a peasant may say to a traveller at the present day, "If you like to give me three francs, sir, I will tell you all about the battle of Waterloo."

CHAPTER III
JUNE 18, 1815

Let us go back, for that is one of the privileges of the narrator, and place ourselves once again in the year 1815, a little prior to the period when the matters related in the first part of this book begin. If it had not rained on the night between the 17th and 18th June, 1815, the future of Europe would have been changed; a few drops of rain more or less made Napoleon oscillate. In order to make Waterloo the end of Austerlitz, Providence only required a little rain, and a cloud crossing the sky at a season when rain was not expected was sufficient to overthrow an empire. The battle of Waterloo could not begin till half-past eleven, and that gave Blücher time to come up. Why? Because the ground was moist and it was necessary for it to become firmer, that the artillery might manœuvre. Napoleon was an artillery officer, and always showed himself one; all his battle plans are made for projectiles. Making artillery converge on a given point was his key to victory. He treated the strategy of the opposing general as a citadel, and breached it; he crushed the weak point under grape-shot, and he began and ended his battles with artillery. Driving in squares, pulverizing regiments, breaking lines, destroying and dispersing masses, – all this must be done by striking, striking, striking incessantly, and he confided the task to artillery. It was a formidable method, and, allied to genius, rendered this gloomy

pugilist of war invincible for fifteen years.

On June 18, 1815, he counted the more on his artillery, because he held the numerical superiority. Wellington had only one hundred and fifty-nine guns, while Napoleon had two hundred and forty. Had the earth been dry and the artillery able to move, the action would have begun at six A.M. It would have been won and over by two P.M., three hours before the Prussians changed the fortune of the day. How much blame was there on Napoleon's side for the loss of this battle? Is the shipwreck imputable to the pilot? Was the evident physical decline of Napoleon at that period complicated by a certain internal diminution? Had twenty years of war worn out the blade as well as the scabbard, the soul as well as the body? Was the veteran being awkwardly displayed in the captain? In a word, was the genius, as many historians of reputation have believed, eclipsed? Was he becoming frenzied, in order to conceal his own weakening from himself? Was he beginning to oscillate and veer with the wind? Was he becoming unconscious of danger, which is a serious thing in a general? In that class of great material men who may be called the giants of action, is there an age when genius becomes short-sighted? Old age has no power over ideal genius; with the Dantes and the Michael Angelos old age is growth, but is it declension for the Hannibals and the Buonapartes? Had Napoleon lost the direct sense of victory? Had he reached a point where he no longer saw the reef, guessed the snare, and could not discern the crumbling edge

of the abyss? Could he not scent catastrophes? Had the man who formerly knew all the roads to victory, and pointed to them with a sovereign finger, from his flashing car, now a mania for leading his tumultuous team of legions to the precipices? Was he attacked at the age of forty-six by a supreme madness? Was the Titanic charioteer of destiny now only a Phaëton?

We do not believe it.

His plan of action, it is allowed by all, was a masterpiece. Go straight at the centre of the allied line, make a hole through the enemy, cut him in two, drive the British half over Halle, and the Prussians over Tingres, carry Mont St. Jean, seize Brussels, drive the German into the Rhine and the Englishman into the sea. All this was contained for Napoleon in this battle; afterwards he would see.

We need hardly say that we do not pretend to tell the story of Waterloo here; one of the generating scenes of the drama we are recounting is connected with this battle; but the story of Waterloo has been already told, and magisterially discussed, from one point of view by Napoleon, from another by a galaxy of historians. For our part, we leave the historians to contend; we are only a distant witness, a passer-by along the plain, a seeker bending over the earth made of human flesh, and perhaps taking appearances for realities; we possess neither the military practice nor the strategic competency that authorizes a system; in our opinion, a chain of accidents governed both captains at Waterloo; and when destiny, that mysterious accused, enters on the scene,

we judge like the people, that artless judge.

CHAPTER IV
A

Those who wish to form a distinct idea of the battle of Waterloo, need only imagine a capital A laid on the ground. The left leg of the A is the Nivelles road, the right one the Genappe road, while the string of the A is the broken way running from Ohain to Braine l'Alleud. The top of the A is Mont St. Jean, where Wellington is; the left lower point is Hougomont, where Reille is with Jérôme Bonaparte; the right lower point is La Belle Alliance, where Napoleon is. A little below the point where the string of the A meets and cuts the right leg, is La Haye Sainte; and in the centre of this string is the exact spot where the battle was concluded. It is here that the lion is placed, the involuntary symbol of the heroism of the old Guard.

The triangle comprised at the top of the A between the two legs and the string, is the plateau of Mont St. Jean; the dispute for this plateau was the whole battle. The wings of the two armies extend to the right and left of the Genappe and Nivelles roads, d'Erlon facing Picton, Reille facing Hill. Behind the point of the A, behind the plateau of St. Jean, is the forest of Soignies. As for the plan itself, imagine a vast undulating ground; each ascent commands the next ascent, and all the undulations ascend to Mont St. Jean, ending there in the forest.

Two hostile armies on a battle-field are two wrestlers. It is a

body-grip. One tries to throw the other; they cling to everything; a thicket is a basis; an angle in the wall is a breastwork; for want of a village to support it, a regiment gives way; a fall in the plain, a transverse hedge in a good position, a wood, a ravine, may arrest the heel of that column which is called an army, and prevent it slipping. The one who leaves the field is beaten; and hence the necessity for the responsible chief to examine the smallest clump of trees, and investigate the slightest rise in the ground. The two generals had attentively studied the plain of Mont St. Jean, which is called at the present day the field of Waterloo. In the previous year, Wellington, with prescient sagacity, had examined it as suitable for a great battle. On this ground and for this duel of June 18, Wellington had the good side and Napoleon the bad; for the English army was above, the French army below.

It is almost superfluous to sketch here the appearance of Napoleon, mounted and with his telescope in his hand, as he appeared on the heights of Rossomme at the dawn of June 18. Before we show him, all the world has seen him. The calm profile under the little hat of the Brienne school, the green uniform, the white facings concealing the decorations, the great coat concealing the epaulettes, the red ribbon under the waistcoat, the leather breeches, the white horse with its housings of purple velvet, having in the corners crowned N's and eagles, the riding-boots drawn over silk stockings, the silver spurs, the sword of Marengo, – the whole appearance of the last of the Cæsars rises before every mind, applauded by some, and

regarded sternly by others. This figure has for a long time stood out all light; this was owing to a certain legendary obscuration which most heroes evolve, and which always conceals the truth for a longer or shorter period, but at the present day we have history and light. That brilliancy called history is pitiless; it has this strange and divine thing about it, that, all light as it is, and because it is light, it often throws shadows over spots before luminous, it makes of the same man two different phantoms, and one attacks the other, and the darkness of the despot struggles with the lustre of the captain. Hence comes a truer proportion in the definitive appreciation of nations; Babylon violated, diminishes Alexander; Rome enchained, diminishes Cæsar; Jerusalem killed, diminishes Titus. Tyranny follows the tyrant, and it is a misfortune for a man to leave behind him a night which has his form.

CHAPTER V
THE QUID OBSCURUM OF BATTLES

All the world knows the first phase of this battle; a troubled, uncertain, hesitating opening, dangerous for both armies, but more so for the English than the French. It had rained all night; the ground was saturated; the rain had collected in hollows of the plain as in tubs; at certain points the ammunition wagons had sunk in up to the axle-trees and the girths of the horses; if the wheat and barley laid low by this mass of moving vehicles had not filled the ruts, and made a litter under the wheels, any movement, especially in the valleys, in the direction of Papelotte, would have been impossible. The battle began late; for Napoleon, as we have explained, was accustomed to hold all his artillery in hand like a pistol, aiming first at one point, then at another of the battle, and he resolved to wait until the field batteries could gallop freely, and for this purpose it was necessary that the sun should appear and dry the ground. But the sun did not come out; it was no longer the rendezvous of Austerlitz. When the first cannon-shot was fired, the English General Colville drew out his watch, and saw that it was twenty-five minutes to twelve.

The action was commenced furiously, more furiously perhaps than the Emperor desired, by the French left wing on Hougomont. At the same time Napoleon attacked the centre by hurling Quiot's brigade on La Haye Sainte, and Ney pushed the

French right wing against the English left, which was leaning upon Papelotte. The attack on Hougomont was, to a certain extent, a feint, for the plan was to attract Wellington there, and make him strengthen his left. This plan would have succeeded had not the four companies of Guards and Perponcher's Belgian division firmly held the position; and Wellington, instead of massing his troops, found it only necessary to send as a reinforcement four more companies of Guards and a battalion of Brunswickers. The attack of the French right on Papelotte was serious; to destroy the English left, cut the Brussels road, bar the passage for any possible Prussians, force Mont St. Jean, drive back Wellington on Hougomont, then on Braine l'Alleud, and then on Halle, – nothing was more distinct. Had not a few incidents supervened; this attack would have succeeded, for Papelotte was taken and La Haye Sainte carried.

There is a detail to be noticed here. In the English Infantry, especially in Kempt's brigade, there were many recruits, and these young soldiers valiantly withstood our formidable foot, and they behaved excellently as sharp-shooters. The soldier when thrown out *en tirailleur*, being left to some extent to his own resources, becomes as it were his own general; and these recruits displayed something of the French invention and fury. These novices displayed an impulse, and it displeased Wellington.

After the taking of La Haye Sainte, the battle vacillated. There is an obscure interval in this day, between twelve and four; the middle of this battle is almost indistinct, and participates

in the gloom of the *mêlée.* A twilight sets in, and we perceive vast fluctuations in this mist, a dizzying mirage, the panoply of war at that day, unknown in our times; flaming colpacks; flying sabretaches; cross-belts; grenade pouches; Hussar dolmans; red boots with a thousand wrinkles; heavy shakos enwreathed with gold twist; the nearly black Brunswick infantry mingled with the scarlet infantry of England; the English soldiers wearing clumsy round white cushions for epaulettes; the Hanoverian light horse with their leathern helmets, brass bands, and red horse-tails; the Highlanders with their bare knees and checkered plaids, and the long white gaiters of our grenadiers, – pictures but not strategic lines; what a Salvator Rosa, but not a Gribeauval, would have revelled in.

A certain amount of tempest is always mingled with a battle, *quid obscurum, quid divinum.* Every historian traces to some extent the lineament that pleases him in the hurly-burly. Whatever the combination of the generals may be, the collision of armed masses has incalculable ebbs and flows; in action the two plans of the leaders enter into each other and destroy their shape. The line of battle floats and winds like a thread, the streams of blood flow illogically, the fronts of armies undulate, the regiments in advancing or retiring form capes or gulfs, and all these reefs are continually shifting their position; where infantry was, artillery arrives; where artillery was, cavalry dash in; the battalions are smoke. There was something there, but when you look for it, it has disappeared; the gloomy masses advance and

retreat; a species of breath from the tomb impels, drives back, swells, and disperses these tragic multitudes. What is a battle? An oscillation. The immobility of a mathematical plan expresses a minute and not a day. To paint a battle, those powerful painters who have chaos in their pencils are needed. Rembrandt is worth more than Vandermeulin, for Vandermeulin, exact at mid-day, is incorrect at three o'clock. Geometry is deceived, and the hurricane alone is true, and it is this that gives Folard the right to contradict Polybius. Let us add that there is always a certain moment in which the battle degenerates into a combat, is particularized and broken up into countless detail facts which, to borrow the expression of Napoleon himself, "belong rather to the biography of regiments than to the history of the army." The historian, in such a case, has the evident right to sum up; he can only catch the principal outlines of the struggle, and it is not given to any narrator, however conscientious he may be, absolutely to fix the form of that horrible cloud which is called a battle.

This, which is true of all great armed collisions, is peculiarly applicable to Waterloo; still, at a certain moment in the afternoon, the battle began to assume a settled shape.

CHAPTER VI
FOUR O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON

At about four o'clock P.M. the situation of the English army was serious. The Prince of Orange commanded the centre, Hill the right, and Picton the left. The Prince of Orange, wild and intrepid, shouted to the Dutch Belgians: "Nassau! Brunswick! never yield an inch." Hill, fearfully weakened, had just fallen back on Wellington, while Picton was dead. At the very moment when the English took from the French the flag of the 105th line regiment, the French killed General Picton with a bullet through his head. The battle had two bases for Wellington, Hougomont and La Haye Sainte. Hougomont still held out, though on fire, while La Haye Sainte was lost. Of the German battalion that defended it, forty-two men only survived; all the officers but five were killed or taken prisoners. Three thousand combatants had been massacred in that focus; a sergeant of the English Guards, the first boxer of England, and reputed invulnerable by his comrades, had been killed there by a little French drummer. Baring was dislodged, and Alten was sabred; several flags had been lost, one belonging to Alten's division and one to the Luxembourg battalion, which was borne by a Prince of the Deux-ponts family. The Scotch Grays no longer existed; Ponsonby's

heavy dragoons were cut to pieces, – this brave cavalry had given way before the lancers of Bro and the cuirassiers of Travers. Of twelve hundred sabres only six hundred remained; of three lieutenant-colonels, two were kissing the ground, Hamilton wounded, and Mather killed. Ponsonby had fallen, pierced by seven lance wounds; Gordon was dead, March was dead, and two divisions, the fifth and sixth, were destroyed. Hougomont attacked, La Haye Sainte taken; there was only one knot left, the centre, which still held out, Wellington reinforced it; he called in Hill from Merbe-Braine and Chassé from Braine l'Alleud.

The centre of the English army, which was slightly concave, very dense and compact, was strongly situated; it occupied the plateau of Mont St. Jean, having the village behind it, and before it the slope, which at that time was rather steep. It was supported by that strong stone house, which at that period was a domainial property of Nivelles, standing at the cross-road, and an edifice dating from the 16th century, so robust that the cannon-balls rebounded without doing it any injury. All round the plateau the English had cut through the hedges at certain spots, formed embrasures in the hawthorns, thrust guns between branches and loop-holed the shrubs, – their artillery was ambuscaded under the brambles. This Punic task, incontestably authorized by the rules of war which permit snares, had been so well effected that Haxo, who had been sent by the Emperor at eight o'clock to reconnoitre the enemy's batteries, returned to tell Napoleon that there was no obstacle, with exception of the barricades blocking the Nivelles

and Genappe roads. It was the season when the wheat is still standing, and along the edge of the plateau a battalion of Kempt's brigade, the 95th, was lying in the tall corn. Thus assured and supported, the centre of the Anglo-Dutch army was in a good position.

The peril of this position was the forest of Soignies, at that time contiguous to the battle-field and intersected by the ponds of Groenendæl and Boitsford. An army could not have fallen back into it without being dissolved, regiments would have been broken up at once, and the artillery lost in the marshes. The retreat, according to the opinion of several professional men, contradicted, it is true, by others, would have been a flight. Wellington added to this centre a brigade of Chassé's removed from the right wing, one of Wicke's from the left wing, and Clinton's division. He gave his English – Halkett's regiments, Mitchell's brigade, and Maitland's guards – as epaulments and counterforts, the Brunswick infantry, the Nassau contingent, Kielmansegge's Hanoverians, and Ompteda's Germans. He had thus twenty-six battalions under his hand; as Charras says, "the right wing deployed behind the centre." An enormous battery was masked by earth-bags, at the very spot where what is called "the Museum of Waterloo" now stands, and Wellington also had in a little hollow Somerset's Dragoon Guards, counting one thousand four hundred sabres. They were the other moiety of the so justly celebrated English cavalry; though Ponsonby was destroyed, Somerset remained. The battery which, had it been

completed, would have been almost a redoubt, was arranged behind a very low wall, hastily lined with sand-bags and a wide slope of earth. This work was not finished, as there was not time to palisade it.

Wellington, restless but impassive, was mounted, and remained for the whole day in the same attitude, a little in front of the old mill of Mont St. Jean, which still exists, and under an elm-tree, which an Englishman, an enthusiastic Vandal, afterwards bought for two hundred francs, cut down, and carried away. Wellington was coldly heroic; there was a shower of cannon-balls, and his aide-de-camp Gordon was killed by his side. Lord Hill, pointing to a bursting shell, said to him, "My Lord, what are your instructions, and what orders do you leave us, if you are killed?" "Do as I am doing," Wellington answered. To Clinton he said laconically, "Hold out here to the last man." The day was evidently turning badly, and Wellington cried to his old comrades of Vittoria, Talavera, and Salamanca, "Boys, can you think of giving way? Remember old England."

About four o'clock the English line fell back all at once; nothing was visible on the crest of the plateau but artillery and sharp-shooters, the rest had disappeared. The regiments, expelled by the French shell and cannon-balls, fell back into the hollow, which at the present day is intersected by the lane that runs to the farm of Mont St. Jean. A retrograde movement began, the English front withdrew. Wellington was recoiling. "It is the beginning of the retreat," Napoleon cried.

CHAPTER VII
NAPOLEON IN GOOD HUMOR

The Emperor, although ill, and though a local pain made riding uncomfortable, had never been so good-tempered as on this day. From the morning his impenetrability had been smiling, and on June 18, 1815, this profound soul, coated with granite, was radiant. The man who had been sombre at Austerlitz was gay at Waterloo. The greatest predestined men offer these contradictions, for our joys are a shadow, and the supreme smile belongs to God. *Ridet Cæsar, Pompeius flebit*, the legionaries of the Fulminatrix legion used to say. On this occasion Pompey was not destined to weep, but it is certain that Cæsar laughed. At one o'clock in the morning, amid the rain and storm, he had explored with Bertrand the hills near Rossomme, and was pleased to see the long lines of English fires illumining the horizon from Frischemont to Braine l'Alleud. It seemed to him as if destiny had made an appointment with him on a fixed day and was punctual. He stopped his horse, and remained for some time motionless, looking at the lightning and listening to the thunder. The fatalist was heard to cast into the night the mysterious words, – "We are agreed." Napoleon was mistaken; they were no longer agreed.

He had not slept for a moment: all the instants of the past night had been marked with joy for him. He rode through the

entire line of main guards, stopping every now and then to speak to the videttes. At half-past two he heard the sound of a marching column near Hougomont, and believed for a moment in a retreat on the side of Wellington. He said to Bertrand, – "The English rear-guard is preparing to decamp. I shall take prisoners the six thousand English who have just landed at Ostend." He talked cheerfully, and had regained the spirits he had displayed during the landing of March 1st, when he showed the Grand Marshal the enthusiastic peasant of the Juan Gulf, and said, – "Well, Bertrand, here is a reinforcement already." On the night between June 17 and 18 he made fun of Wellington. "This little Englishman requires a lesson," said Napoleon. The rain became twice as violent, and it thundered while the Emperor was speaking. At half-past three A.M. he lost one illusion: officers sent to reconnoitre informed him that the enemy was making no movement. Nothing was stirring, not a single bivouac fire was extinguished, and the English army was sleeping. The silence was profound on earth, and there was only noise in the heavens. At four o'clock a peasant was brought to him by the scouts: this peasant had served as guide to a brigade of English cavalry, probably Vivian's, which had taken up a position on the extreme left in the village of Ohain. At five o'clock two Belgian deserters informed him that they had just left their regiments, and the English army meant fighting. "All the better," cried Napoleon; "I would sooner crush them than drive them back."

At daybreak he dismounted on the slope which forms the

angle of the Plancenoit road, had a kitchen table and a peasant chair brought from the farm of Rossomme, sat down with a truss of straw for a carpet, and laid on the table the map of the battlefield, saying to Soult, – "It is a pretty chess-board." Owing to the night rain, the commissariat wagons, which stuck in the muddy roads, did not arrive by daybreak. The troops had not slept, were wet through and fasting; but this did not prevent Napoleon from exclaiming cheerfully to Soult, – "We have ninety chances out of a hundred in our favor." At eight o'clock the Emperor's breakfast was brought, and he invited several generals to share it with him. While breakfasting, somebody said that Wellington had been the last evening but one at a ball in Brussels, and Soult, the rough soldier with his archbishop's face, remarked, "The ball will be to-day." The Emperor teased Ney for saying, – "Wellington will not be so simple as to wait for your Majesty." This was his usual manner. "He was fond of a joke," says Fleury de Chaboulon; "The basis of his character was a pleasant humor," says Gourgaud; "He abounded with jests, more peculiar than witty," says Benjamin Constant. This gayety of the giant is worth dwelling on: it was he who called his Grenadiers "Growlers;" he pinched their ears and pulled their moustachios. "The Emperor was always playing tricks with us," was a remark made by one of them. During the mysterious passage from Elba to France, on February 27, the French brig of war, the *Zephyr*, met the *Inconstant*, on board which Napoleon was concealed, and inquiring after Napoleon, the Emperor, who still had in his

hat the white and violet cockade studded with bees which he had adopted at Elba, himself laughingly took up the speaking-trumpet, and answered, – "The Emperor is quite well." A man who jests in this way is on familiar terms with events. Napoleon had several outbursts of this laughter during the breakfast of Waterloo: after breakfast he reflected for a quarter of an hour; then two generals sat down on the truss of straw with a pen in their hand and a sheet of paper on their knee, and the Emperor dictated to them the plan of the battle.

At nine o'clock, the moment when the French army, échelonned and moving in five columns, began to deploy, the divisions in two lines, the artillery between, the bands in front, drums rattling and bugles braying, – a powerful, mighty, joyous army, a sea of bayonets and helmets on the horizon, the Emperor, much affected, twice exclaimed, – "Magnificent! magnificent!"

Between nine and half-past ten, although it seems incredible, the whole army took up position, and was drawn up in six lines, forming, to repeat the Emperor's expression, "the figure of six V's." A few minutes after the formation of the line, and in the midst of that profound silence which precedes the storm of a battle, the Emperor, seeing three 12-pounder batteries defile, which had been detached by his orders from Erlon, Reille, and Lobau's brigades, and which were intended to begin the action at the spot where the Nivelles and Genappe roads crossed, tapped Haxo on the shoulder, and said, "There are twenty-four pretty girls, General." Sure of the result, he encouraged with a smile

the company of sappers of the first corps as it passed him, which he had selected to barricade itself in Mont St. Jean, so soon as the village was carried. All this security was only crossed by one word of human pity: on seeing at his left, at the spot where there is now a large tomb, the admirable Scotch Grays massed with their superb horses, he said, "It is a pity." Then he mounted his horse, rode toward Rossomme, and selected as his observatory a narrow strip of grass on the right of the road running from Genappe to Brussels, and this was his second station. The third station, the one he took at seven in the evening, is formidable, – it is a rather lofty mound which still exists, and behind which the guard was massed in a hollow. Around this mound the balls ricochetted on the pavement of the road and reached Napoleon. As at Brienne, he had round his head the whistle of bullets and canister. Almost at the spot where his horse's hoofs stood, cannon-balls, old sabre-blades, and shapeless rust-eaten projectiles, have been picked up; a few years ago a live shell was dug up, the fusee of which had broken off. It was at this station that the Emperor said to his guide, Lacoste, a hostile timid peasant, who was fastened to a hussar's saddle, and tried at each volley of canister to hide himself behind Napoleon, "You ass! it is shameful; you will be killed in the back." The person who is writing these lines himself found, while digging up the sand in the friable slope of this mound, the remains of a shell rotted by the oxide of forty-six years, and pieces of iron which broke like sticks of barley-sugar between his fingers.

Everybody is aware that the undulations of the plains on which the encounter between Napoleon and Wellington took place, are no longer as they were on June 18, 1815. On taking from this mournful plain the material to make a monument, it was deprived of its real relics, and history, disconcerted, no longer recognizes itself; in order to glorify, they disfigured. Wellington, on seeing Waterloo two years after, exclaimed, "My battle-field has been altered." Where the huge pyramid of earth surmounted by a lion how stands, there was a crest which on the side of the Nivelles road had a practicable ascent, but which on the side of the Genappe road was almost an escarpment. The elevation of this escarpment may still be imagined by the height of the two great tombs which skirt the road from Genappe to Brussels: the English tomb on the left, the German tomb on the right. There is no French tomb, – for France the whole plain is a sepulchre. Through the thousands of cart-loads of earth employed in erecting the mound, which is one hundred and fifty feet high and half a mile in circumference, the plateau of Mont St. Jean is now accessible by a gentle incline; but on the day of the battle, and especially on the side of La Haye Sainte, it was steep and abrupt. The incline was so sharp that the English gunners could not see beneath them the farm situated in the bottom of the valley, which was the centre of the fight. On June 18, 1815, the rain had rendered the steep road more difficult, and the troops not only had to climb up but slipped in the mud. Along the centre of the crest of the plateau ran a species of ditch, which it was

impossible for a distant observer to guess. We will state what this ditch was. Braine l'Alleud is a Belgian village and Ohain is another; these villages, both concealed in hollows, are connected by a road about a league and a half in length, which traverses an undulating plain, and frequently buries itself between hills, so as to become at certain spots a ravine. In 1815, as to-day, this road crossed the crest of the plateau of Mont St. Jean: but at the present day it is level with the ground, while at that time it was a hollow way. The two slopes have been carried away to form the monumental mound. This road was, and still is, a trench for the greater part of the distance, – a hollow trench, in some places twelve feet deep, whose scarped sides were washed down here and there by the winter rains. Accidents occurred there: the road was so narrow where it entered Braine l'Alleud, that a wayfarer was crushed there by a wagon, as is proved by a stone cross standing near the grave-yard, which gives the name of the dead man as "Monsieur Bernard Debrye, trader, of Brussels," and the date, "February, 1637." It was so deep on the plateau of Mont St. Jean, that a peasant, one Mathieu Nicaise, was crushed there in 1783 by a fall of earth, as is proved by another stone cross, the top of which disappeared in the excavations, but whose overthrown pedestal is still visible on the grass slope to the left of the road between La Haye Sainte and the farm of Mont St. Jean. On the day of the battle, this hollow way, whose existence nothing revealed, a trench on the top of the escarpment, a rut hidden in the earth, was invisible, that is to say, terrible.

CHAPTER VIII
THE EMPEROR ASKS THE GUIDE A QUESTION

On the morning of Waterloo, then, Napoleon was cheerful, and had reason to be so, – for the plan he had drawn up was admirable. Once the battle had begun, its various incidents, – the resistance of Hougomont; the tenacity of La Haye Sainte; Bauduin killed, and Foy placed *hors de combat*; the unexpected wall against which Soye's brigade was broken; the fatal rashness of Guilleminot, who had no petards or powder-bags to destroy the farm gates; the sticking of the artillery in the mud; the fifteen guns without escort captured by Uxbridge in a hollow way; the slight effect of the shells falling in the English lines, which buried themselves in the moistened ground, and only produced a volcano of mud, so that the troops were merely plastered with mud; the inutility of Piret's demonstration on Braine l'Alleud, and the whole of his cavalry, fifteen squadrons, almost annihilated; the English right but slightly disquieted and the left poorly attacked; Ney's strange mistake in massing instead of échelonning the four divisions of the first corps; a depth of twenty-seven ranks and a line of two hundred men given up in this way to the canister; the frightful gaps made by the cannon-balls in these masses; the attacking columns disunited;

the oblique battery suddenly unmasked on their flank; Bourgeois, Donzelot, and Durutte in danger; Quiot repulsed; Lieutenant Viot, that Hercules who came from the Polytechnic school, wounded at the moment when he was beating in with an axe the gates of La Haye Sainte, under the plunging fire of the English barricade on the Genappe road; Marcognet's division caught between infantry and cavalry, shot down from the wheat by Best and Pack, and sabred by Ponsonby; its battery of seven guns spiked; the Prince of Saxe Weimar holding and keeping in defiance of Count d'Erlon, Frischemont and Smohain; the flags of the 105th and 45th regiments which he had captured; the Prussian black Hussar stopped by the scouts of the flying column of three hundred chasseurs, who were beating the country between Wavre and Plancenoit; the alarming things which this man said; Grouchy's delay; the fifteen hundred men killed in less than an hour in the orchard of Hougomont; the eighteen hundred laid low even in a shorter space of time round La Haye Sainte, – all these stormy incidents, passing like battle-clouds before Napoleon, had scarce disturbed his glance or cast a gloom over this imperial face. Napoleon was accustomed to look steadily at war; he never reckoned up the poignant details; he cared little for figures, provided that they gave the total – victory. If the commencement went wrong, he did not alarm himself, as he believed himself master and owner of the end; he knew how to wait, and treated Destiny as an equal. He seemed to say to fate, "You would not dare!"

One half light, one half shade, Napoleon felt himself protected in good, and tolerated in evil. There was, or he fancied there was, for him a connivance, we might say almost a complicity, on the part of events, equivalent to the ancient invulnerability; and yet, when a man has behind him the Beresina, Leipsic, and Fontainebleau, it seems as if he might distrust Waterloo. A mysterious frown becomes visible on the face of heaven. At the moment when Wellington retrograded, Napoleon quivered. He suddenly saw the plateau of Mont St. Jean deserted, and the front of the English army disappear. It was rallying, but was screened from sight. The Emperor half raised himself in his stirrups, and the flash of victory passed into his eyes. If Wellington were driven back into the forest of Soignies, and destroyed, it would be the definitive overthrow of England by France: it would be Cressy, Poictiers, Malplaquet, and Ramilies avenged; the man of Marengo would erase Agincourt. The Emperor, while meditating on this tremendous stroke, turned his telescope to all parts of the battle-field. His Guards, standing at ease behind him, gazed at him with a sort of religious awe. He was reflecting, he examined the slopes, noted the inclines, scrutinized the clumps of trees, the patches of barley, and the paths; he seemed to be counting every tuft of gorse. He looked with some fixity at the English barricades, – two large masses of felled trees, the one on the Genappe road defended by two guns, the only ones of all the English artillery which commanded the battlefield, and the one on the Nivelles road, behind which flashed the Dutch bayonets of

Chassé's brigade. He remarked near this barricade the old chapel of St. Nicholas, which is at the corner of the cross-road leading to Braine l'Alleud. He bent down and spoke in a low voice to the guide Lacoste. The guide shook his head with a probably perfidious negative.

The Emperor drew himself up and reflected; Wellington was retiring, and all that was needed now was to complete this retreat by an overthrow. Napoleon hurriedly turned and sent off a messenger at full speed to Paris to announce that the battle was gained. Napoleon was one of those geniuses from whom thunder issues, and he had just found his thunder-stroke; he gave Milhaud's cuirassiers orders to carry the plateau of Mont St. Jean.

CHAPTER IX
A SURPRISE

They were three thousand five hundred in number, and formed a front a quarter of a league in length; they were gigantic men mounted on colossal horses. They formed twenty-six squadrons, and had behind them, as a support, Lefebvre Desnouette's division, composed of one hundred and six picked gendarmes, the chasseurs of the Guard, eleven hundred and ninety-seven sabres, and the lancers of the Guard, eight hundred and eighty lances. They wore a helmet without a plume, and a cuirass of wrought steel, and were armed with pistols and a straight sabre. In the morning the whole army had admired them when they came up, at nine o'clock, with bugles sounding, while all the bands played, "Veillons au salut de l'Empire," in close column with one battery on their flank, the others in their centre, and deployed in two ranks, and took their place in that powerful second line, so skilfully formed by Napoleon, which having at its extreme left Kellermann's cuirassiers, and on its extreme right Milhaud's cuirassiers, seemed to be endowed with two wings of steel.

The aide-de-camp Bernard carried to them the Emperor's order: Ney drew his sabre and placed himself at their head, and the mighty squadrons started. Then a formidable spectacle was seen: the whole of this cavalry, with raised sabres, with standards

flying, and formed in columns of division, descended, with one movement and as one man, with the precision of a bronze battering-ram opening a breach, the hill of the Belle Alliance. They entered the formidable valley in which so many men had already fallen, disappeared in the smoke, and then, emerging from the gloom, reappeared on the other side of the valley, still in a close compact column, mounting at a trot, under a tremendous canister fire, the frightful muddy incline of the plateau of Mont St. Jean. They ascended it, stern, threatening, and imperturbable; between the breaks in the artillery and musketry fire the colossal tramp could be heard. As they formed two divisions, they were in two columns: Wathier's division was on the right, Delord's on the left. At a distance it appeared as if two immense steel snakes were crawling toward the crest of the plateau; they traversed the battle-field like a flash.

Nothing like it had been seen since the capture of the great redoubt of the Moskova by the heavy cavalry: Murat was missing, but Ney was there. It seemed as if this mass had become a monster, and had but one soul; each squadron undulated, and swelled like the rings of a polype. This could be seen through a vast smoke which was rent asunder at intervals; it was a pell-mell of helmets, shouts, and sabres, a stormy bounding of horses among cannon, and a disciplined and terrible array; while above it all flashed the cuirasses like the scales of the hydra. Such narratives seemed to belong to another age; something like this vision was doubtless traceable in the old Orphean epics

describing the men-horses, the ancient hippanthropists, those Titans with human faces and equestrian chest whose gallop escaladed Olympus, – horrible, invulnerable, sublime; gods and brutes. It was a curious numerical coincidence that twenty-six battalions were preparing to receive the charge of these twenty-six squadrons. Behind the crest of the plateau, in the shadow of the masked battery, thirteen English squares, each of two battalions and formed two deep, with seven men in the first lines and six in the second, were waiting, calm, dumb, and motionless, with their muskets, for what was coming. They did not see the cuirassiers, and the cuirassiers did not see them: they merely heard this tide of men ascending. They heard the swelling sound of three thousand horses, the alternating and symmetrical sound of the hoof, the clang of the cuirasses, the clash of the sabres, and a species of great and formidable breathing. There was a long and terrible silence, and then a long file of raised arms, brandishing sabres, and helmets, and bugles, and standards, and three thousand heads with great moustaches, shouting, "Long live the Emperor!" appeared above the crest. The whole of this cavalry debouched on the plateau, and it was like the commencement of an earthquake.

All at once, terrible to relate, the head of the column of cuirassiers facing the English left reared with a fearful clamor. On reaching the culminating point of the crest, furious and eager to make their exterminating dash on the English squares and guns, the cuirassiers noticed between them and the English a

trench, a grave. It was the sunken road of Ohain. It was a frightful moment, – the ravine was there, unexpected, yawning, almost precipitous, beneath the horses' feet, and with a depth of twelve feet between its two sides. The second rank thrust the first into the abyss; the horses reared, fell back, slipped with all four feet in the air, crushing and throwing their riders. There was no means of escaping; the entire column was one huge projectile. The force acquired to crush the English, crushed the French, and the inexorable ravine would not yield till it was filled up. Men and horses rolled into it pell-mell, crushing each other, and making one large charnel-house of the gulf, and when this grave was full of living men the rest passed over them. Nearly one-third of Dubois' brigade rolled into this abyss. This commenced the loss of the battle. A local tradition, which evidently exaggerates, says that two thousand horses and fifteen hundred men were buried in the sunken road of Ohain. These figures probably comprise the other corpses cast into the ravine on the day after the battle. It was this brigade of Dubois, so fatally tried, which an hour before, charging unsupported, had captured the flag of the Luxembourg battalion. Napoleon, before ordering this charge, had surveyed the ground, but had been unable to see this hollow way, which did not form even a ripple on the crest of the plateau. Warned, however, by the little white chapel which marks its juncture with the Nivelles road, he had asked Lacoste a question, probably as to whether there was any obstacle. The guide answered No, and we might almost say that Napoleon's catastrophe was brought about

by a peasant's shake of the head.

Other fatalities were yet to arise. Was it possible for Napoleon to win the battle? We answer in the negative. Why? On account of Wellington, on account of Blücher? No; on account of God. Buonaparte, victor at Waterloo, did not harmonize with the law of the 19th century. Another series of facts was preparing, in which Napoleon had no longer a place: the ill will of events had been displayed long previously. It was time for this vast man to fall; his excessive weight in human destiny disturbed the balance. This individual alone was of more account than the universal group: such plethoras of human vitality concentrated in a single head – the world, mounting to one man's brain – would be mortal to civilization if they endured. The moment had arrived for the incorruptible supreme equity to reflect, and it is probable that the principles and elements on which the regular gravitations of the moral order as of the material order depend, complained. Streaming blood, over-crowded grave-yards, mothers in tears, are formidable pleaders. When the earth is suffering from an excessive burden, there are mysterious groans from the shadow, which the abyss hears. Napoleon had been denounced in infinitude, and his fall was decided. He had angered God. Waterloo is not a battle, but a transformation of the Universe.

CHAPTER X
THE PLATEAU OF MONT ST. JEAN

The battery was unmasked simultaneously with the ravine, – sixty guns and the thirteen squares thundered at the cuirassiers at point-blank range. The intrepid General Delort gave a military salute to the English battery. The whole of the English field artillery had entered the squares at a gallop; the cuirassiers had not even a moment for reflection. The disaster of the hollow way had decimated but not discouraged them; they were of that nature of men whose hearts grow large when their number is diminished. Wathier's column alone suffered in the disaster: but Delort's column, which he had ordered to wheel to the left, as if he suspected the trap, arrived entire. The cuirassiers rushed at the English squares at full gallop, with hanging bridles, sabres in their mouths, and pistols in their hands. There are moments in a battle when the soul hardens a man, so that it changes the soldier into a statue, and all flesh becomes granite. The English battalions, though fiercely assailed, did not move. Then there was a frightful scene. All the faces of the English squares were attacked simultaneously, and a frenzied whirl surrounded them. But the cold infantry remained impassive; the front rank kneeling received the cuirassiers on their bayonets, while the second fired at them; behind the second rank the artillery-men loaded their guns, the front of the square opened to let an

eruption of canister pass, and then closed again. The cuirassiers responded by attempts to crush their foe; their great horses reared, leaped over the bayonets, and landed in the centre of the four living walls. The cannon-balls made gaps in the cuirassiers, and the cuirassiers made breaches in the squares. Files of men disappeared, trampled down by the horses, and bayonets were buried in the entrails of these centaurs. Hence arose horrible wounds, such as were probably never seen elsewhere. The squares, where broken by the impetuous cavalry, contracted without yielding an inch of ground; inexhaustible in canister they produced an explosion in the midst of the assailants. The aspect of this combat was monstrous: these squares were no longer battalions, but craters; these cuirassiers were no longer cavalry, but a tempest, – each square was a volcano attacked by a storm; the lava combated the lightning.

The extreme right square, the most exposed of all, as it was in the air, was nearly annihilated in the first attack. It was formed of the 75th Highlanders; the piper in the centre, while his comrades were being exterminated around him, was seated on a drum, with his bagpipe under his arm, and playing mountain airs. These Scotchmen died thinking of Ben Lothian, as the Greeks did remembering Argos. A cuirassier's sabre, by cutting through the pibroch and the arm that held it, stopped the tune by killing the player.

The cuirassiers, relatively few in number, and reduced by the catastrophe of the ravine, had against them nearly the whole

English army; but they multiplied themselves, and each man was worth ten. Some Hanoverian battalions, however, gave way: Wellington saw it and thought of his cavalry. Had Napoleon at this moment thought of his infantry, the battle would have been won, and this forgetfulness was his great and fatal fault. All at once the assailers found themselves assailed; the English cavalry were on their backs, before them the squares, behind them Somerset with the one thousand four hundred Dragoon Guards. Somerset had on his right Dornberg with the German chevau-legers, and on his left Trip with the Belgian carbineers; the cuirassiers, attacked on the flank and in front, before and behind, by infantry and cavalry, were compelled to make a front on all sides. But what did they care? They were a whirlwind; their bravery became indescribable.

In addition, they had behind them the still thundering battery, and it was only in such a way that these men could be wounded in the back. One of these cuirasses with a hole through the left scapula is in the Waterloo Museum. For such Frenchmen, nothing less was required than such Englishmen. It was no longer a *mêlée*; it was a headlong fury, a hurricane of flashing swords. In an instant the one thousand four hundred Dragoons were only eight hundred; and Fuller, their lieutenant-colonel, was dead. Ney dashed up with Lefebvre Desnouette's lancers and chasseurs; the plateau of Mont St. Jean was taken and retaken, and taken again. The cuirassiers left the cavalry to attack the infantry, or, to speak more correctly, all these men collared one another and

did not loose their hold. The squares still held out after twelve assaults. Ney had four horses killed under him, and one half of the cuirassiers remained on the plateau. This struggle lasted two hours. The English army was profoundly shaken; and there is no doubt that, had not the cuirassiers been weakened in their attack by the disaster of the sunken road, they would have broken through the centre and decided the victory. This extraordinary cavalry petrified Clinton, who had seen Talavera and Badajoz. Wellington, three parts vanquished, admired heroically; he said in a low voice, "Splendid!" The cuirassiers annihilated seven squares out of thirteen, captured or spiked sixty guns, and took six English regimental flags, which three cuirassiers and three chasseurs of the Guard carried to the Emperor before the farm of La Belle Alliance.

Wellington's situation had grown worse. This strange battle resembled a fight between two savage wounded men, who constantly lose their blood while continuing the struggle. Which would be the first to fall? The combat for the plateau continued. How far did the cuirassiers get? No one could say; but it is certain that on the day after the battle, a cuirassier and his horse were found dead on the weighing machine of Mont St. Jean, at the very spot where the Nivelles, Genappe, La Hulpe, and Brussels roads intersect and meet. This horseman had pierced the English lines. One of the men who picked up this corpse still lives at Mont St. Jean; his name is Dehaye, and he was eighteen years of age at the time. Wellington felt himself giving

way, and the crisis was close at hand. The cuirassiers had not succeeded, in the sense that the English centre had not been broken. Everybody held the plateau, and nobody held it; but, in the end, the greater portion remained in the hands of the English. Wellington had the village and the plain; Ney, only the crest and the slope. Both sides seemed to have taken root in this mournful soil. But the weakness of the English seemed irremediable, for the hemorrhage of this army was horrible. Kempt on the left wing asked for reinforcements. "There are none," Wellington replied. Almost at the same moment, by a strange coincidence which depicts the exhaustion of both armies, Ney asked Napoleon for infantry, and Napoleon answered, "Infantry? where does he expect me to get them? Does he think I can make them?"

Still the English army was the worse of the two; the furious attacks of these great squadrons with their iron cuirasses and steel chests had crushed their infantry. A few men round the colors marked the place of a regiment, and some battalions were only commanded by a captain or a lieutenant. Alten's division, already so maltreated at La Haye Sainte, was nearly destroyed; the intrepid Belgians of Van Kluze's brigade lay among the wheat along the Nivelles road: hardly any were left of those Dutch Grenadiers who, in 1811, fought Wellington in Spain, on the French side, and who, in 1815, joined the English and fought Napoleon. The loss in officers was considerable; Lord Uxbridge, who had his leg interred the next day, had a fractured knee. If on the side of the French, in this contest of the cuirassiers, Delord,

l'Heretier, Colbert, Duof, Travers, and Blancard were *hors de combat*, on the side of the English, Alten was wounded, Barnes was wounded, Delancey killed, Van Meeren killed, Ompteda killed, Wellington's staff decimated, – and England had the heaviest scale in this balance of blood. The 2d regiment of foot-guards had lost five lieutenant-colonels, four captains, and three ensigns; the first battalion of the 30th had lost twenty-four officers, and one hundred and twelve men; the 79th Highlanders had twenty-four officers wounded, and eighteen officers and four hundred and fifty men killed. Cumberland's Hanoverian Hussars, an entire regiment, having their Colonel Hacke at their head, who at a later date was tried and cashiered, turned bridle during the flight and fled into the forest of Soignies, spreading the rout as far as Brussels. The wagons, ammunition trains, baggage trains, and ambulance carts full of wounded, on seeing the French, gave ground, and approaching the forest, rushed into it; the Dutch, sabred by the French cavalry, broke in confusion. From Vert Coucou to Groenendæl, a distance of two leagues on the Brussels roads, there was, according to the testimony of living witnesses, a dense crowd of fugitives, and the panic was so great that it assailed the Prince de Condé at Mechlin and Louis XVIII. at Ghent. With the exception of the weak reserve échelonned behind the field hospital established at the farm of Mont St. Jean, and Vivian's and Vandeleur's brigades, which flanked the left wing, Wellington had no cavalry left, and many of the guns lay dismounted. These facts are confessed by Siborne;

and Pringle, exaggerating the danger, goes so far as to state that the Anglo-Dutch army was reduced to thirty-four thousand men. The Iron Duke remained firm, but his lips blanched. The Austrian commissioner Vincent, and the Spanish commissioner Alava, who were present at the battle, thought the Duke lost; at five o'clock Wellington looked at his watch, and could be heard muttering, "Blücher or night!"

It was this moment that a distant line of bayonets glistened on the heights on the side of Frischemont. This was the climax of the gigantic drama.

CHAPTER XI
BÜLOW TO THE RESCUE

Everybody knows Napoleon's awful mistake; Grouchy expected, Blücher coming up, death instead of life. Destiny has such turnings as this: men anticipate the throne of the world, and perceive St. Helena. If the little shepherd who served as guide to Bülow, Blücher's lieutenant, had advised him to debouche from the forest above Frischemont, instead of below Plancenoit, the form of the 19th century would have been different, for Napoleon would have won the battle of Waterloo. By any other road than that below Plancenoit the Prussian army would have come upon a ravine impassable by artillery, and Bülow would not have arrived. Now one hour's delay – the Prussian general Muffling declares it – and Blücher would not have found Wellington erect, – "the battle was lost." It was high time, as we see, for Bülow to arrive, and as it was he had been greatly delayed. He had bivouacked at Dion-le-Mont and started at daybreak but the roads were impracticable, and his divisions stuck in the mud. The ruts came up to the axle-tree of the guns; moreover, he was compelled to cross the Dyle by the narrow bridge of Wavre: the street leading to the bridge had been burned by the French, and artillery train and limbers, which could not pass between two rows of blazing houses, were compelled to wait till the fire was extinguished. By mid-day Bülow's vanguard had scarce reached

Chapelle Saint Lambert.

Had the action begun two hours sooner, it would have been over at four o'clock, and Blücher would have fallen upon the battle gained by Napoleon. At mid-day, the Emperor had been the first to notice through his telescope, on the extreme horizon, something which fixed his attention, and he said, "I see over there a cloud which appears to me to be troops." Then he asked the Duke of Dalmatia, "Soult, what do you see in the direction of Chapelle Saint Lambert?" The Marshal, after looking through his telescope, replied, "Four or five thousand men, Sire." It was evidently Grouchy; still they remained motionless in the mist. All the staff examined the cloud pointed out by the Emperor, and some said, "They are columns halting;" but the majority were of opinion that they were trees. The truth is that the cloud did not move, and the Emperor detached Doncoul's division of light cavalry to reconnoitre in the direction of this dark point.

Bülow, in fact, had not stirred, for his vanguard was very weak and could effect nothing. He was obliged to wait for the main body of the army, and had orders to concentrate his troops before forming line; but at five o'clock, Blücher, seeing Wellington's danger, ordered Bülow to attack, and employed the remarkable phrase, "We must let the English army breathe." A short time after, Losthin's, Hiller's, Hacke's, and Ryssel's brigades deployed in front of Lobau's corps, the cavalry of Prince William of Prussia debouched from the Bois de Paris, Plancenoit was in flames, and the Prussian cannon-balls began pouring even upon

the ranks of the guard held in reserve behind Napoleon.

CHAPTER XII
THE GUARD

The rest is known, – the irruption of a third army; the battle dislocated; eighty-six cannon thundering simultaneously; Pirch I. coming up with Bülow; Ziethen's cavalry led by Blücher in person: the French driven back; Marcognet swept from the plateau of Ohain; Durutte dislodged from Papelotte; Donzelot and Quiot falling back; Lobau attacked on the flank; a new battle rushing at nightfall on the weakened French regiments; the whole English line resuming the offensive, and pushed forward; the gigantic gap made in the French army by the combined English and Prussian batteries; the extermination, the disaster in front, the disaster on the flank, and the guard forming line amid this fearful convulsion. As they felt they were going to death, they shouted, "Long live the Emperor!" History has nothing more striking than this death-rattle breaking out into acclamations. The sky had been covered the whole day, but at this very moment – eight o'clock in the evening – the clouds parted in the horizon, and the sinister red glow of the setting sun was visible through the elms on the Nivelles road. It had been seen to rise at Austerlitz.

Each battalion of the Guard, for this *dénouement*, was commanded by a general; Friant, Michel, Roguet, Harlot, Mallet, and Pont de Morvan were there. When the tall bearskins of the Grenadiers of the Guard with the large eagle device appeared,

symmetrical in line, and calm, in the twilight of this fight, the enemy felt a respect for France; they fancied they saw twenty victories entering the battlefield with outstretched wings, and the men who were victors, esteeming themselves vanquished, fell back; but Wellington shouted, "Up, Guards, and take steady aim!" The red regiment of English Guards, which had been lying down behind the hedges, rose; a storm of canister rent the tricolor flag waving above the heads of the French; all rushed forward, and the supreme carnage commenced. The Imperial Guard felt in the darkness the army giving way around them, and the vast staggering of the rout: they heard the cry of "Sauve qui peut!" substituted for the "Vive l'Empereur!" and with flight behind them they continued to advance, hundreds falling at every step they took. None hesitated or evinced timidity; the privates were as heroic as the generals, and not one attempted to escape suicide.

Ney, wild, and grand in the consciousness of accepted death, offered himself to every blow in this combat. He had his fifth horse killed under him here. Bathed in perspiration, with a flame in his eye and foam on his lips, his uniform unbuttoned, one of his epaulettes half-cut through by the sabre-cut of a horse-guard, and his decoration of the great Eagle dinted by a bullet, – bleeding, muddy, magnificent, and holding a broken sword in his hand, he shouted, "Come and see how a marshal of France dies on the battle-field!" But it was in vain; he did not die. He was haggard and indignant, and hurled at Drouet d'Erlon the question, "Are you not going to get yourself killed?" He yelled amid the roar of

all this artillery, crushing a handful of men, "Oh, there is nothing for me! I should like all these English cannon-balls to enter my chest!" You were reserved for French bullets, unfortunate man.

CHAPTER XIII
THE CATASTROPHE

The rout in the rear of the guard was mournful; the army suddenly gave way on all sides simultaneously, – at Hougomont, La Haye Sainte, Papelotte, and Plancenoit. The cry of "Treachery!" was followed by that of "Sauve qui peut!" An army which disbands is like a thaw, – all gives way, cracks, floats, rolls, falls, comes into collision, and dashes forward. Ney borrows a horse, leaps on it, and without hat, stock, or sword, dashes across the Brussels road, stopping at once English and French. He tries to hold back the army, he recalls it, he insults it, he clings wildly to the rout to hold it back. The soldiers fly from him, shouting, "Long live Marshal Ney!" Two regiments of Durutte's move backward and forward in terror, and as it were tossed between the sabres of the Hussars and the musketry fire of Kempt's, Best's, and Pack's brigades. A rout is the highest of all confusions, for friends kill one another in order to escape, and squadrons and battalions dash against and destroy one another. Lobau at one extremity and Reille at the other are carried away by the torrent. In vain does Napoleon build a wall of what is left of the Guard; in vain does he expend his own special squadrons in a final effort. Quiot retires before Vivian, Kellermann before Vandeleur, Lobau before Bülow, Moraud before Pirch, and Domor and Subervie before Prince William of Prussia. Guyot,

who led the Emperor's squadrons to the charge, falls beneath the horses of English Dragoons. Napoleon gallops along the line of fugitives, harangues, urges, threatens, and implores them; all the mouths that shouted "Long live the Emperor!" in the morning, remained wide open; they hardly knew him. The Prussian cavalry, who had come up fresh, dash forward, cut down, kill, and exterminate. The artillery horses dash forward with the guns; the train soldiers unharness the horses from the caissons and escape on them; wagons overthrown, and with their four wheels in the air, block up the road and supply opportunities for massacre. Men crush one another and trample over the dead and over the living. A multitude wild with terror fill the roads, the paths, the bridges, the plains, the hills, the valleys, and the woods, which are thronged by this flight of forty thousand men. Cries, desperation; knapsacks and muskets cast into the wheat; passages cut with the edge of the sabres; no comrades, no officers, no generals recognized, – an indescribable terror. Ziethen sabring France at his ease. The lions become kids. Such was this fight.

At Genappe an effort was made to turn and rally; Lobau collected three hundred men; the entrance of the village was barricaded, but at the first round of Prussian canister all began flying again, and Lobau was made prisoner. This volley of shot may still be seen, buried in the gable of an old brick house on the right of the road, just before you reach Genappe. The Prussians dashed into Genappe, doubtless furious at being such small victors, and the pursuit was monstrous, for Blücher commanded

extermination. Roguet had given the mournful example of threatening with death any French Grenadier who brought in a Prussian prisoner, and Blücher surpassed Roguet Duchesme, general of the young guard, who was pursued into the doorway of an inn in Genappe, surrendered his sword to an Hussar of death, who took the sword and killed the prisoner. The victory was completed by the assassination of the vanquished. Let us punish, as we are writing history, – old Blücher dishonored himself. This ferocity set the seal on the disaster; the desperate rout passed through Genappe, passed through Quatre Bras, passed through Sombreffe, passed through Frasnes, passed through Thuin, passed through Charleroi, and only stopped at the frontier. Alas! and who was it flying in this way? The grand army.

Did this vertigo, this terror, this overthrow of the greatest bravery that ever astonished history, take place without a cause? No. The shadow of a mighty right hand is cast over Waterloo; it is the day of destiny, and the force which is above man produced that day. Hence the terror, hence all those great souls laying down their swords. Those who had conquered Europe, fell crushed, having nothing more to say or do, and feeling a terrible presence in the shadow. *Hoc erat in fatis.* On that day the perspective of the human race was changed, and Waterloo is the hinge of the 19th century. The disappearance of the great man was necessary for the advent of the great age, and He who cannot be answered undertook the task. The panic of the heroes admits of explanation: in the battle of Waterloo there is more than a

storm, – there is a meteor.

At nightfall, Bernard and Bertrand seized by the skirt of his coat, in a field near Genappe, a haggard, thoughtful, gloomy man, who, carried so far by the current of the rout, had just dismounted, passed the bridle over his arm, and was now, with wandering eye, returning alone to Waterloo. It was Napoleon, the immense somnambulist of the shattered dream, still striving to advance.

CHAPTER XIV
THE LAST SQUARE

A few squares of the Guard, standing motionless in the swash of the rout, like rocks in running water, held out till night. They awaited the double shadow of night and death, and let them surround them. Each regiment, isolated from the others, and no longer connected with the army which was broken on all sides, died where it stood. In order to perform this last exploit, they had taken up a position, some on the heights of Rossomme, others on the plain of Mont St. Jean. The gloomy squares, deserted, conquered, and terrible, struggled formidably with death, for Ulm, Wagram, Jena, and Friedland were dying in it. When twilight set in at nine in the evening, one square still remained at the foot of the plateau of Mont St. Jean. In this mournful valley, at the foot of the slope scaled by the cuirassiers, now inundated by the English masses, beneath the converging fire of the hostile and victorious artillery, under a fearful hailstorm of projectiles, this square still resisted. It was commanded by an obscure officer of the name of Cambronne. At each volley the square diminished, but continued to reply to the canister with musketry fire, and each moment contracted its four walls. Fugitives in the distance, stopping at moments to draw breath, listened in the darkness to this gloomy diminishing thunder.

When this legion had become only a handful, when their

colors were but a rag, when their ammunition was exhausted, and muskets were clubbed, and when the pile of corpses was greater than the living group, the victors felt a species of sacred awe, and the English artillery ceased firing. It was a sort of respite; these combatants had around them an army of spectres, outlines of mounted men, the black profile of guns, and the white sky visible through the wheels; the colossal death's-head which heroes ever glimpse in the smoke of a battle, advanced and looked at them. They could hear in the twilight gloom that the guns were being loaded; the lighted matches, resembling the eyes of a tiger in the night, formed a circle round their heads. The linstocks of the English batteries approached the guns, and at this moment an English general, – Colville according to some, Maitland according to others, – holding the supreme moment suspended over the heads of these men, shouted to them, "Brave Frenchmen, surrender!"

Cambronne answered, "Merde!"

CHAPTER XV
CAMBRONNE

Out of respect for the French reader, the grandest word that any Frenchman has ever uttered must not be repeated. Dump no sublimity into the stream of history.

At our own risk, we shall disregard this notice.

Among these giants, then, there was one Titan, Cambronne.

To speak out this word and then die, what could be more sublime than this! For to be ready to die is to die, and it was no fault of his if amid a storm of grape-shot he still lived.

The man who won the battle of Waterloo was not Napoleon routed; it was not Wellington giving ground at four o'clock, driven to despair at five; it was not Blücher, who had not fought at all: the man who won the battle of Waterloo was Cambronne.

To overwhelm with such a word the thunder-bolt which kills you, is to win the victory.

To reply thus to disaster, to say this to fate, to lay such a foundation for the lion which was to mark the spot, to hurl this reply to the night's rain, to the masked wall of Hougomont, to the sunken road of Ohain, to the delay of Grouchy, to the arrival of Blücher, to be Irony in the tomb, to struggle to his feet again after having fallen, to drown in two syllables the European coalition, to offer to kings these latrines already used by the Cæsars, to make the last of words the first, lending it the splendor of France, to

end Waterloo with the jeers of the Mardi-Gras, to supplement Leonidas with Rabelais, to sum up this victory in one last word impossible to repeat, to lose ground and preserve history, after such carnage to have the laugh on his side, this is grand.

This insult to the lightning reaches the sublimity of Æschylus.

Cambronne's exclamation has the effect of an explosion. It is the bursting of a bosom with disdain; it is the surcharge of agony which breaks out. Who did conquer? Was it Wellington? No. Without Blücher he was lost. Was it Blücher? No. If Wellington had not begun, Blücher could not have finished. This Cambronne, this new-comer upon the scene, this unknown soldier, this infinitesimal atom of the war, feels that there is a lie somewhere in the disaster, which doubles its bitterness; and at the moment when he is bursting with rage, they offer him this mockery, life! How could he help bursting out? They are there, – all the kings of Europe, the conquering generals, the thundering Jupiters; they have a hundred thousand victorious soldiers, and behind the hundred thousand, a million; their cannon, the matches lighted, are yawning; they have trampled under foot the Imperial Guard and the Grand Army; they have just crushed Napoleon; only Cambronne is left; only this earthworm remains to protest. He will protest. Then he looks about for a word, as he would for a sword. Froth rises to his lips, and this froth is the word. Before this victory, stupendous but commonplace, before this victory without victors, driven to despair, he stands erect again. He yields to its weight, but he proves its nothingness; and

he does more than spit upon it; and weighed down by numbers, by force, by matter, he finds for his soul one expression, "Merde!" We repeat – to say this, to do this, to find this, is to win the victory.

The spirit of the great past entered into this unknown man at this fatal moment. Cambronne finds the word of Waterloo just as Rouget de l'Isle finds the Marseillaise – by an inspiration from above. A magnetic current from the divine whirlwind passes through these men and they vibrate, and one sings the grand song, the other utters the terrible cry. This word of superhuman scorn Cambronne hurls not alone at Europe in the name of the Empire, – that would be little; he hurls it at the past in the name of the Revolution. In Cambronne is heard and is recognized the old soul of the giants. It seems as if it were Danton speaking or Kleber roaring.

To this word of Cambronne's, the English voice replied, "Fire!" The batteries blazed, the hill trembled, from all these brazen mouths leaped a last fearful belching of grape, a dense cloud of smoke rolled forth silvered in waves by the rising moon, and when the smoke cleared away, there was nothing left there. This dreaded remnant was annihilated. The four walls of the living redoubt lay low, there being hardly perceptible here and there a quivering among the corpses; and thus the French legions, greater than those of Rome, died at Mont St. Jean, on the earth drenched with rain and blood, in the gloomy wheat-fields, at the spot where now there passes at four o'clock in the morning,

whistling and gayly flicking his horse with the whip, Joseph, who drives the Nivelles mail-cart.

CHAPTER XVI
QUOT LIBRAS IN DUCE

The Battle of Waterloo is an enigma as obscure for those who gained it as for him who lost it. To Napoleon it is a panic; Blücher sees nothing in it but fire; Wellington does not understand it at all. Look at the reports: the bulletins are confused; the commentaries are entangled; the latter stammer, the former stutter. Jomini divides the battle of Waterloo into four moments; Muffling cuts it into three acts; Charras, although we do not entirely agree with him in all his appreciations, has alone caught with his haughty eye the characteristic lineaments of this catastrophe of human genius contending with divine chance. All the other historians suffer from a certain bedazzlement in which they grope about. It was a flashing day; in truth, the overthrow of the military monarchy which, to the great stupor of the kings, has dragged down all kingdoms, – the downfall of strength and the rout of war.

In this event, which bears the stamp of superhuman necessity, men play but a small part. If we take Waterloo from Wellington and Blücher, does that deprive England and Germany of anything? No. Neither illustrious England nor august Germany is in question in the problem of Waterloo; for, thank Heaven! nations are great without the mournful achievements of the sword. Neither Germany nor England nor France is held in a scabbard; at this day, when Waterloo is only a clash of sabres,

Germany has Goethe above Blücher, and England Byron above Wellington. A mighty dawn of ideas is peculiar to our age; and in this dawn England and Germany have their own magnificent flash. They are majestic because they think; the high level they bring to civilization is intrinsic to them; it comes from themselves and not from an accident. Any aggrandizement the 19th century may have cannot boast of Waterloo as its fountain-head; for only barbarous nations grow suddenly after a victory: it is the transient vanity of torrents swollen by a storm. Civilized nations, especially at the present day, are not elevated or debased by the good or evil fortune of a captain, and their specific weight in the human family results from something more than a battle. Their honor, dignity, enlightenment, and genius are not numbers which those gamblers, heroes, and conquerors can stake in the lottery of battles. Very often a battle lost is progress gained, and less of glory more of liberty. The drummer is silent and reason speaks; it is the game of who loses wins. Let us, then, speak of Waterloo coldly from both sides, and render to chance the things that belong to chance, and to God what is God's. What is Waterloo, – a victory? No; a great prize in the lottery. A prize won by Europe and paid by France. It was hardly worth while erecting a lion for it.

Waterloo, by the way, is the strangest encounter recorded in history; Napoleon and Wellington are not enemies, but contraries. Never did God, who delights in antitheses, produce a more striking contrast or a more extraordinary confrontation.

On one side precision, foresight, geometry, prudence, a retreat assured, reserves prepared, an obstinate coolness, an imperturbable method, strategy profiting by the ground, tactics balancing battalions, carnage measured by a plumb-line, war regulated watch in hand, nothing left voluntarily to accident, old classic courage and absolute correctness. On the other side we have intuition, divination, military strangeness, superhuman instinct, a flashing glance; something that gazes like the eagle and strikes like lightning, all the mysteries of a profound mind, association with destiny; the river, the plain, the forest, and the hill summoned, and to some extent compelled, to obey, the despot going so far as even to tyrannize over the battle-field; faith in a star blended with strategic science, heightening but troubling it. Wellington was the Barême of war, Napoleon was its Michael Angelo, and this true genius was conquered by calculation. On both sides somebody was expected; and it was the exact calculator who succeeded. Napoleon waited for Grouchy, who did not come; Wellington waited for Blücher, and he came.

Wellington is the classical war taking its revenge; Bonaparte, in his dawn, had met it in Italy and superbly defeated it, – the old owl fled before the young vulture. The old tactics had been not only overthrown, but scandalized. Who was this Corsican of six-and-twenty years of age? What meant this splendid ignoramus who, having everything against him, nothing for him, without provisions, ammunition, guns, shoes, almost without an army, with a handful of men against masses, dashed at allied Europe,

and absurdly gained impossible victories? Whence came this mad thunderer, who, almost without taking breath, pulverized one after another the five armies of the Emperor of Germany, upsetting Beaulieu upon Alvinzi, Wurmser upon Beaulieu, Mélas upon Wurmser, Mack upon Mélas? Who was this new-comer of war who possessed the effrontery of a planet? The academic military school excommunicated him, while bolting, and hence arose an implacable rancor of the old Cæsarism against the new, of the old sabre against the flashing sword, and of the chess-board against genius. On June 18, 1815, this rancor got the best; and beneath Lodi, Montebello, Montenotte, Mantua, Marengo, and Arcola, it wrote, – Waterloo. It was a triumph of mediocrity, sweet to majorities, and destiny consented to this irony. In his decline, Napoleon found a young Wurmser before him, – in fact, it is only necessary to whiten Wellington's hair in order to have a Wurmser. Waterloo is a battle of the first class, gained by a captain of the second.

What must be admired in the battle of Waterloo is England, the English firmness, the English resolution, the English blood; and what England had really superb in it is (without offence) herself; it is not her captain, but her army. Wellington, strangely ungrateful, declares in his despatch to Lord Bathurst, that his army, the one which fought on June 18, 1815, was a "detestable army." What does the gloomy pile of bones buried in the trenches of Waterloo think of this? England has been too modest to herself in her treatment of Wellington; for making him so great

is making herself small. Wellington is merely a hero like any other man. The Scotch Grays, the Life Guards, Maitland and Mitchell's regiments, Pack and Kempt's infantry, Ponsonby and Somerset's cavalry, the Highlanders playing the bagpipes under the shower of canister, Ryland's battalions, the fresh recruits who could hardly manage a musket and yet held their ground against the old bands of Essling and Rivoli, – all this is grand. Wellington was tenacious, that was his merit, and we do not deny it to him; but the lowest of his privates and his troopers was quite as solid as he, and the iron soldier is as good as the iron duke. For our part, all our glorification is offered to the English soldier, the English army, the English nation; and if there must be a trophy, it is to England that this trophy is owing. The Waterloo column would be more just if, instead of the figure of a man, it raised to the clouds the statue of a people.

But this great England will be irritated by what we are writing here; for she still has feudal illusions, after her 1688, and the French 1789. This people believes in inheritance and hierarchy; and while no other excels it in power and glory, it esteems itself as a nation and not as a people. As a people, it readily subordinates itself, and takes a lord as its head; the workman lets himself be despised; the soldier puts up with flogging. It will be remembered that, at the battle of Inkermann, a sergeant who, as it appears, saved the British army, could not be mentioned by Lord Raglan, because the military hierarchy does not allow any hero below the rank of officer to be mentioned in despatches. What we admire

before all, in an encounter like Waterloo, is the prodigious skill of chance. The night rain, the wall of Hougomont, the sunken road of Ohain, Grouchy deaf to the cannon, Napoleon's guide deceiving him, Bülow's guide enlightening him, – all this cataclysm is marvellously managed.

Altogether, we will assert, there is more of a massacre than of a battle in Waterloo. Waterloo, of all pitched battles, is the one which had the smallest front for such a number of combatants, – Napoleon's, three quarters of a league, Wellington's, half a league, and seventy-two thousand combatants on either side. From this density came the carnage. The following calculation has been made and proportion established: loss of men at Austerlitz, French, fourteen per cent; Russian, thirty per cent; Austrian, forty-four per cent: at Wagram, French, thirteen per cent; Austrian, fourteen per cent: at Moskova, French, thirty-seven per cent; Russian, forty-four per cent: at Bautzen, French, thirteen per cent; Russian and Prussian, fourteen per cent: at Waterloo, French, fifty-six per cent; Allies, thirty-one per cent, – total for Waterloo, forty-one per cent, or out of one hundred and forty-four thousand fighting men, sixty thousand killed and wounded. The field of Waterloo has at the present day that calmness which belongs to the earth, and resembles all plains. At night, a sort of visionary mist rises from it, and if any traveller walk about it, and listen and dream like Virgil on the mournful plain of Philippi, the hallucination of the catastrophe seizes upon him. The frightful June 18 lives again, the false

monumental hill is levelled, the wondrous lion is dissipated, the battle-field resumes its reality, lines of infantry undulate on the plain, furious galloping crosses the horizon; the startled dreamer sees the flash of sabres, the sparkle of bayonets, the red light of shells, the monstrous collision of thunderbolts; he hears, like a death-groan from the tomb, the vague clamor of the phantom battle. These shadows are grenadiers; these flashes are cuirassiers; this skeleton is Napoleon; this skeleton is Wellington; all this is non-existent, and yet still combats, and the ravines are stained purple, and the trees rustle, and there is fury even in the clouds and in the darkness, while all the stern heights – Mont St. Jean, Hougomont, Frischemont, Papelotte, and Plancenoit – seem confusedly crowned by hosts of spectres exterminating one another.

CHAPTER XVII
OUGHT WATERLOO TO BE APPLAUDED?

There exists a highly respectable liberal school, which does not detest Waterloo, but we do not belong to it. For us Waterloo is only the stupefied date of liberty; for such an eagle to issue from such a shell is assuredly unexpected. Waterloo, if we place ourselves at the culminating point of the question, is intentionally a counter-revolutionary victory, – it is Europe against France; it is Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna against Paris; it is the *statu quo* opposed to the initiative; it is the 14th July, 1789, attacked through March 20, 1815; it is all the monarchies clearing the decks to conquer the indomitable French spirit of revolt. The dream was to extinguish this vast people which had been in a state of eruption for six-and-twenty years; and for this purpose, Brunswick, Nassau, the Romanoffs, Hohenzollern, and the Hapsburger coalesced with the Bourbons, and Waterloo carries divine right on its pillion. It is true that as the Empire was despotic, Royalty, by the natural reaction of things, was compelled to be liberal, and a constitutional order issued from Waterloo, much to the regret of the conquerors. The fact is, that the Revolution can never be really conquered, and being providential and absolutely fatal, it constantly reappears, –

before Waterloo in Napoleon overthrowing the old thrones; after Waterloo in Louis XVIII. granting and enduring the charter. Bonaparte places a postilion on the throne of Naples, and a sergeant on the throne of Sweden, employing inequality to demonstrate equality; Louis XVIII. at St. Ouen countersigns the declaration of the rights of man. If you wish to understand what revolution is, call it progress; and if you wish to understand what progress is, call it to-morrow. To-morrow ever does its work irresistibly and does it to-day, and it ever strangely attains its object. It employs Wellington to make an orator of Foy who was only a soldier. Foy falls at Hougomont and raises himself in the tribune. Such is the process of progress, and that workman has no bad tools: it fits to its divine work the man who bestrode the Alps and the old tottering patient of Père Élysée, and it employs both the gouty man and the conqueror, – the conqueror externally, the gouty man at home. Waterloo, by cutting short the demolition of thrones by the sword, had no other effect than to continue the revolutionary work on another side. The sabres have finished, and the turn of the thinkers arrives; the age which Waterloo wished to arrest marched over it, and continued its route, and this sinister victory was gained by liberty.

Still it is incontestable that what triumphed at Waterloo; what smiled behind Wellington; what procured him all the marshals' staffs of Europe, including, by the way, that of Marshal of France; what rolled along joyously the wheelbarrows of earth mingled with bones to erect the foundation for the lion, on whose

pedestal is inscribed the date June 18, 1815; what encouraged Blücher in cutting down the routed army; and what from the plateau of Mont St. Jean hovered over France like a prey, – was the counter-revolution. It is the counter-revolution that muttered the hideous word "Dismemberment"; but on reaching Paris it had a close view of the crater, it felt that the ashes burned its feet, and it reflected. It went back to the job of stammering a charter.

Let us only see in Waterloo what there really is in it. There is no intentional liberty, for the counter-revolution was involuntarily liberal in the same way as Napoleon, through a corresponding phenomenon, was involuntarily a Revolutionist. On June 18, 1815, Robespierre on horseback was thrown.

CHAPTER XVIII
RESTORATION OF DIVINE RIGHT

With the fall of the Dictatorship, an entire European system crumbled away, and the Empire vanished in a shadow which resembled that of the expiring Roman world. Nations escaped from the abyss as in the time of the Barbarians; but the Barbarism of 1815, which could be called by its familiar name the counter-revolution, had but little breath, soon began to pant, and stopped. The Empire, we confess, was lamented, and by heroic eyes, and its glory consists in the sword-made sceptre; the Empire was glory itself. It had spread over the whole earth all the light that tyranny can give, – a dim light, we will say, an obscure light; for when compared with real day, it is night. This disappearance of the night produced the effect of an eclipse.

Louis XVIII. re-entered Paris, and the dances of July 8 effaced the enthusiasm of March 20. The Corsican became the antithesis of the Bearnais, and the flag on the dome of the Tuileries was white. The exile was enthroned, and the deal table of Hartwell was placed before the fleur-de-lysed easy-chair of Louis XIV. People talked of Bouvines and Fontenoy as if they had occurred yesterday, while Austerlitz was antiquated. The throne and the altar fraternized majestically, and one of the most indubitable forms of the welfare of society in the 19th century was established in France and on the Continent, – Europe took

the white cockade. Trestaillon was celebrated, and the motto, *nec pluribus impar*, reappeared in the stone beams representing a sun on the front of the barracks, on the Quai d'Orsay. Where there had been an Imperial Guard, there was a "red household;" and the arch of the Carrousel, if loaded with badly endured victories, feeling not at home in these novelties, and perhaps slightly ashamed of Marengo and Arcola, got out of the difficulty by accepting the statue of the Duc d'Angoulême. The cemetery of the Madeleine, a formidable public grave in '93, was covered with marble and jasper, because the bones of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette were mingled with that dust. In the moat of Vincennes a tomb emerged from the ground, as a reminder that the Duc d'Enghien died there in the same month in which Napoleon was crowned. Pope Pius VII., who had performed the ceremony very close upon that death, tranquilly blessed the downfall, as he had blessed the elevation. There was at Schönbrunn a shadow four years of age, whom it was seditious to call the King of Rome. And these things took place, and these kings regained their thrones, and the master of Europe was put in a cage, and the old regime became the new, and the light and the shadow of the earth changed places, because on the afternoon of a summer day a peasant boy said to a Prussian in a wood, "Go this way and not that!"

That 1815 was a sort of melancholy April; the old unhealthy and venomous realities assumed a new aspect. Falsehood espoused 1789; divine right put on the mask of a charter;

fictions became constitutional; prejudices, superstitions, and after-thoughts, having article fourteen in their hearts, varnished themselves with liberalism. The snakes cast their slough. Man had been at once aggrandized and lessened by Napoleon; idealism, in this reign of splendid materialism, received the strange name of ideology. It was a grave imprudence of a great man to ridicule the future; but the people, that food for powder, so fond of the gunner, sought him. "Where is he? What is he doing?" "Napoleon is dead," said a passer-by to an invalid of Marengo and Waterloo. "He dead!" the soldier exclaimed; "much you know about him!" Imaginations deified this thrown man. Europe after Waterloo was dark, for some enormous gap was long left unfilled after the disappearance of Napoleon. The kings placed themselves in this gap, and old Europe took advantage of it to effect a reformation. There was a holy alliance, – Belle Alliance, the fatal field of Waterloo had said beforehand. In the presence of the old Europe reconstituted, the lineaments of a new France were sketched in. The future, derided by the Emperor, made its entry and wore on its brow the star – Liberty. The ardent eyes of the youthful generation were turned toward it; but, singular to say, they simultaneously felt equally attached to this future Liberty and to the past Napoleon. Defeat had made the conquered man greater; Napoleon fallen seemed better than Napoleon standing on his feet. Those who had triumphed were alarmed. England had him guarded by Hudson Lowe, and France had him watched by Montcheme. His folded arms became the

anxiety of thrones, and Alexander called him his insomnia. This terror resulted from the immense amount of revolution he had in him, and it is this which explains and excuses Buonapartistic liberalism. This phantom caused the old world to tremble, and kings sat uneasily on their thrones, with the rock of St. Helena on the horizon.

While Napoleon was dying at Longwood, the sixty thousand men who fell at Waterloo rotted calmly, and something of their peace spread over the world. The Congress of Vienna converted it into the treaties of 1815, and Europe called that the Restoration.

Such is Waterloo; but what does the Infinite care? All this tempest, all this cloud, this war, and then this peace. All this shadow did not for a moment disturb the flash of that mighty eye before which a grub, leaping from one blade of grass to another, equals the eagle flying from tower to tower at Notre Dame.

CHAPTER XIX
THE BATTLE-FIELD BY NIGHT

We must return, for it is a necessity of the story, to the fatal battle-field of June 18, 1815. The moon shone brightly, and this favored Blücher's ferocious pursuit, pointed out the trail of the fugitives, surrendered this sad crowd to the Prussian cavalry, and assisted the massacre. Such tragical complacency of the night is witnessed at times in catastrophes. After the last cannon was fired the plain of Mont St. Jean remained deserted. The English occupied the French encampment, for the usual confirmation of victory is to sleep in the beds of the conquered. They established their bivouac a little beyond Rossomme, and while the Prussians followed up the fugitives, Wellington proceeded to the village of Waterloo, to draw up his report for Lord Bathurst. Were ever the *Sic vos non vobis* applicable, it is most certainly to this village of Waterloo, which did nothing, and was half a league away from the action. Mont St. Jean was cannonaded, Hougomont burned, Papelotte burned, Plancenoit burned, La Haye Sainte carried by storm, and La Belle Alliance witnessed the embrace of the two victors; but these names are scarce known, and Waterloo, which did nothing during the battle, has all the honor of it.

We are not of those who flatter war, and when the opportunity offers, we tell it the truth. War has frightful beauties which we have not concealed; but it has also, we must allow, some ugly

features. One of the most surprising is the rapid stripping of the dead after victory; the dawn that follows a battle always rises on naked corpses. Who does this? Who sullies the triumph in this way? Whose is the hideous furtive hand which slips into the pocket of victory? Who are the villains dealing their stroke behind the glory? Some philosophers, Voltaire among them, assert that they are the very men who have made the glory; they say that those who keep their feet plunder those lying on the ground, and the hero of the day is the vampire of the night. After all, a man has the right to strip a corpse of which he is the author. We do not believe it, however; reaping a crop of laurels and stealing the shoes of a dead man do not seem to us possible from the same hand. One thing is certain, that, as a usual rule, after the conquerors come the thieves; but we must leave the soldier, especially the soldier of to-day, out of the question.

Every army has a tail; and it is that which must be accused. Batlike beings, half servants, half brigands, all the species of the vespertilio which the twilight called war engenders, wearers of uniform who do not fight, malingerers, formidable invalids, interloping sutlers, trotting with their wives in small carts and stealing things which they sell again, beggars offering themselves as guides to officers, villains, marauders, – all these, armies marching in former times (we are not alluding to the present day) had with them, so that, in the special language, they were called "the stragglers." No army and no nation was responsible for these beings, – they spoke Italian, and followed the Germans; they

spoke French, and followed the English. It was by one of these scoundrels, a Spanish camp-follower who spoke French, that the Marquis de Fervacques, deceived by his Picardy accent, and taking him for a Frenchman, was killed and robbed on the battle-field during the night that followed the victory of Cerisolles. The detestable maxim, "Live on the enemy," produced this leprosy, which strict discipline alone could cure. There are some reputations which deceive, and we do not always know why certain generals, in other respects great, became so popular. Turenne was adored by his troops, because he tolerated plunder; evil permitted is kindness, and Turenne was so kind that he allowed the Palatinate to be destroyed by sword and fire. A larger or a smaller number of marauders followed an army, according as the chief was more or less severe. Hoche and Morceau had no camp-followers, and Wellington, we willingly do him the justice of stating, had but few.

Still, on the night of June 18, the dead were stripped. Wellington was strict; he ordered that everybody caught in the act should be shot, but rapine is tenacious, and marauders plundered in one corner of the field while they were being shot in the other. The moon frowned upon this plain. About midnight a man was prowling, or rather crawling, about the hollow road of Ohain: he was, according to all appearance, one of those whom we have just described, neither English nor French, nor peasant nor soldier, less a man than a ghoul, attracted by the smell of the dead, whose victory was robbery, and who had come to plunder Waterloo.

He was dressed in a blouse, which looked something like a gown, was anxious and daring, and looked behind while he went onwards. Who was this man? Night knew probably more about him than did day. He had no bag, but evidently capacious pockets under his blouse. From time to time he stopped, examined the plain around him as if to see whether he was watched, bent down quickly, disturbed something lying silent and motionless on the ground, and then drew himself up again and stepped away. His attitude, and his rapid mysterious movements, made him resemble those twilight *larvæ* which haunt ruins, and which the old Norman legends call "les alleurs;" certain nocturnal fowlers display the same outline on the marshes.

Any one who had attentively examined would have seen behind the house which stands at the intersection of the Nivelles and Mont St. Jean roads, a sort of small vivandière's cart with a tilt of tarpaulin stretched over wicker-work, drawn by a hungry-looking, staggering horse, which was nibbling the nettles. In this cart, a woman was seated on chests and bundles, and there was probably some connection between this cart and the prowler. There was not a cloud in the sky, and though the ground may be blood red, the moon remains white; that is the indifference of nature. In the fields branches of trees broken by cannon-balls, but still holding on by the bark, waved softly in the night breeze. A breath shook the brambles, and there was a quiver in the grass that resembled the departure of souls. In the distance could be confusedly heard the march of the English patrols

and rounds. Hougomont and La Haye Sainte continued to burn, making, one in the west, the other in the east, two large bodies of flames, to which were joined the English bivouac fires, stretching along the hills on the horizon, in an immense semicircle. The scene produced the effect of an unfastened ruby necklace, with a carbuncle at either end.

We have described the catastrophe of the Ohain road; the heart is chilled by the thought of what this death had been for so many brave men. If there be anything frightful, if there exist a reality which surpasses dreaming, it is this, – to live; to see the sun; to be in full possession of manly vigor; to have health and joy; to laugh valiantly; to run toward a glory glittering before you; to feel in your chest lungs that breathe, a heart that beats, and a will that reasons; to speak, to think, to hope, to love; to have a mother, a wife, and children; to have light, and then suddenly, before there is time for a cry, to be hurled into an abyss; to fall, roll, crush, and be crushed; to see corn-stalks, flowers, leaves, and branches, and to be unable to hold on to anything; to feel your sabre useless, men under you and horses over you; to struggle in vain; to have your ribs fractured by some kick in the gloom; to feel a heel on your eyes; to bite with rage the horses' bits; to stifle, to yell, to writhe; to be underneath, and to say to yourself, "A moment ago I was a living man!"

At the spot where this lamentable disaster occurred, all was now silence. The hollow way was filled with an inextricable pile of horses and their riders. There was no slope now, for

the corpses levelled the road with the plain, and came up flush to the top, like a fairly measured bushel of barley. A pile of dead atop, a stream of blood at bottom, – such was the road on the night of June 18, 1815. The blood ran as far as the Nivelles road, and extravasated there in a wide pool, in front of the barricade, at a spot which is still pointed out. It will be remembered that the destruction of the cuirassiers took place at the opposite point, near the Genappe road. The depth of the corpses was proportionate to that of the hollow way; toward the middle, at the spot where Delord's division passed, the layer of dead was thinner.

The nocturnal prowler, at whom we have allowed the reader a glance, proceeded in that direction, searching this immense tomb. He looked around and held a hideous review of the dead; he walked with his feet in the blood. All at once he stopped. A few paces before him in the hollow way, at the point where the pile of dead ended, an open hand, illumined by the moon, emerged from a heap of men and horses. This hand had on one finger something that glittered, and was a gold ring. The man bent down, and when he rose again there was no longer a ring on this finger. He did not exactly rise; he remained in a savage and shy attitude, turning his back to the pile of dead, investigating the horizon, supporting himself on his two forefingers, and his head spying over the edge of the hollow way. The four paws of the jackal are suited for certain actions. Then, making up his mind, he rose, but at the same moment he started, for he felt that some

one was holding him behind. He turned and found that it was the open hand, which had closed and seized the skirt of his coat. An honest man would have been frightened, but this one began laughing.

"Hilloh!" he said, "it is only the dead man. I prefer a ghost to a gendarme."

The hand, however, soon relaxed its hold, for efforts are quickly exhausted in the tomb.

"Can this dead man be alive?" the marauder continued; "let me have a look."

He bent down again, removed all the obstacles, seized the hand, liberated the head, pulled out the body, and a few minutes later dragged an inanimate or at least fainting man into the shadow of the hollow way. He was an officer of cuirassiers of a certain rank, for a heavy gold epaulette peeped out from under his cuirass. This officer had lost his helmet, and a furious sabre-cut crossed his face, which was covered with blood. He did not appear, however, to have any bones broken, and through some fortunate accident, – if such a word be possible here, – the dead had formed an arch over him so as to save him from being crushed. His eyes were closed. He had on his cuirass the silver cross of the Legion of Honor, and the prowler tore away this cross, which disappeared in one of the gulfs he had under his blouse. After this he felt the officer's fob, found a watch, and took it; then he felt in his pockets and drew from them a purse. When he was at this stage of the assistance he was rendering the

dying man, the officer opened his eyes.

"Thanks," he said feebly.

The roughness of the man's movements, the freshness of the night, and the freely inhaled air had aroused him from his lethargy. The prowler did not answer, but raised his head. A sound of footsteps could be heard on the plain; it was probably some patrol approaching. The officer murmured, for there was still the agony of death in his voice, —

"Who won the battle?"

"The English," the marauder answered.

The officer continued, —

"Feel in my pockets; you will find a purse and a watch, which you can take."

Though this was already done, the prowler did what was requested, and said, —

"There is nothing in them."

"I have been robbed," the officer continued; "I am sorry for it, as I meant the things for you."

The footsteps of the patrol became more and more distinct.

"Some one is coming," the marauder said, preparing to go away.

The officer, raising his arm with difficulty, stopped him.

"You have saved my life; who are you?"

The prowler answered rapidly and in a low voice.

"I belong, like yourself, to the French army; but I must leave you, for if I were caught I should be shot. I have saved your life,

so now get out of the scrape as you can."

"What is your rank?"

"Sergeant."

"Your name?"

"Thénardier."

"I shall not forget that name," the officer said; "and do you remember mine; it is Pontmercy."

BOOK II
THE SHIP ORION

CHAPTER I
NO. 24,601 BECOMES NO. 9430

Jean Valjean was recaptured. As our readers will probably thank us for passing rapidly over painful details, we confine ourselves to the quotation of two paragraphs published by the newspapers of the day, a few months after the occurrence of the surprising events at M – . These articles are rather summary, but it must be remembered that no *Gazette des Tribunaux* existed at that period. The first we take from the *Drapeau Blanc*, dated July 25, 1823.

"A bailiwick of the Pas de Calais has just been the scene of an uncommon event. A man, who was a stranger to the department and called M. Madeleine, had some years previously revived by a new process an old local trade, – the manufacture of jet and black beads. He made his own fortune, and, let us add, that of the bailiwick, and in acknowledgment of his services he was appointed Mayor. The police discovered that M. Madeleine was no other than an ex-convict, who had broken his ban, condemned in 1796 for robbery, of the name of Jean Valjean. He has been

sent back to the Bagne. It appears that prior to his arrest he succeeded in withdrawing from M. Lafitte's a sum of more than half a million, which he had banked there, and which it is said that he had honestly acquired by his trade. Since his return to Toulon futile efforts have been made to discover where this amount is concealed."

The second article, which is rather more detailed, is extracted from the *Journal de Paris* of the same date: —

"An ex-convict of the name of Jean Valjean has just been tried at the Var assizes, under circumstances which attract attention. This villain had succeeded in deceiving the vigilance of the police, and had behaved so cleverly as to be made Mayor of one of our small towns in the north, where he established a rather considerable trade. He was at length unmasked, and arrested through the indefatigable zeal of the public authorities. He had, as his concubine, a girl of the town, who died of a fit at the moment of his arrest. This scoundrel, who is endowed with Herculean strength, managed to escape but three or four days later the police again captured him in Paris, at the moment when he was entering one of those small coaches which run from the capital to the village of Montfermeil (Seine et Oise). It is said that he took advantage of these three or four days of liberty to withdraw from one of our chief bankers an amount estimated at six or seven hundred thousand francs. According to the indictment he buried it at some spot only known to himself, and it has not been found; but however this may be, this Jean Valjean has just been tried

at Var assizes for a highway robbery committed with violence some eight years ago upon one of those honest lads, who, as the patriarch of Ferney has said in immortal verse, —

> 'De Savoie arrivent tous les ans
> Et dont la main légèrement essuie
> Ces longs canaux engorgés par la suie.'

This bandit made no defence, but it was proved by the skilful and eloquent organ of public justice that Jean Valjean was a member of a band of robbers in the south. Consequently Valjean was found guilty and sentenced to death. The criminal refused to appeal to the Court of Cassation, but the King, in his inexhaustible mercy, deigned to commute his sentence into penal servitude for life. Jean Valjean was immediately removed to the galleys at Toulon."

It will not be forgotten that Jean Valjean had displayed religious tendencies at M – , and some of the papers, among them the *Constitutionnel*, regarded this commutation as a triumph of the Priest party. Jean Valjean changed his number at Toulon, and was known as 9430. Let us state here once and for all that with M. Madeleine the prosperity of M – disappeared: all he had foreseen in his night of hesitation and fever was realized; his absence was in truth the absence of the soul. After his fall there took place at M – that selfish division of great fallen existences, that fatal break-up of flourishing things, which is daily accomplished obscurely in the human community, and which history has only

noticed once because it occurred after the death of Alexander. Lieutenants crown themselves kings; overseers suddenly became manufacturers, and envious rivalries sprang up. M. Madeleine's large work-shops were shut up; the buildings fell into a ruinous condition, and the artisans dispersed, some leaving the town, others the trade. All was henceforth done on a small scale instead of a large one, for lucre instead of the public welfare. There was no centre, but on all sides violent competition. M. Madeleine had commanded and directed everything. When he fell, a spirit of contest succeeded that of organization, bitterness succeeded cordiality, and mutual hatred the good-will of the common founder. The threads tied by M. Madeleine became knotted and broken; the process was falsified, the articles became worse, and confidence was destroyed; the outlets diminished, and there were fewer orders; wages fell, there were stoppages, and lastly came bankruptcy.

The State itself perceived that some one had been crushed somewhere, for less than four years after the sentence of the court identifying M. Madeleine and Jean Valjean, to the profit of the galleys, the cost of collecting the taxes was doubled in the bailiwick of M – . M. de Villèle made a remark to that effect in the House in February, 1827.

CHAPTER II
TWO LINES OF A DOUBTFUL ORIGIN

Before going further we will enter into some details about a strange fact that occurred at about the same period at Montfermeil, and which may possibly possess some coincidence with certain police conjectures. There is at Montfermeil a very old superstition, which is the more curious and valuable because a popular superstition in the neighborhood of Paris is like an aloe-tree in Siberia. We are of those who respect everything which is in the condition of a rare plant. This, then, is the Montfermeil superstition: it is believed that from time immemorial the fiend has selected the forest as the spot where he buries his treasure. Old women declare that it is not rare to meet at nightfall, and in remote parts of the forest, a black man resembling a wagoner or wood-cutter, dressed in wooden shoes and canvas trousers and blouse, and recognizable from the fact that he has on his head two enormous horns in place of cap or hat. This man is usually engaged in digging a hole, and there are three modes of action in the event of meeting him. The first is to go up to the man and address him; in that case you perceive that he is simply a peasant, that he appears black because it is twilight, that he is not digging a hole, but cutting grass for his kine, and that what

you had taken for horns is nothing but a dung-fork he carries on his back, whose prongs seem to grow out of his head. You go home and die within the week. The second plan is to watch him, wait till he has dug his hole and filled it up and gone away; then you run up to the hole and take out the treasure which the black man had necessarily deposited in it. In this case you die within the month. The last way is not to speak to the black man at all, not to look at him, but run away at full speed, and you die within the year.

All three modes have their inconveniences; but the second, which offers at any rate some advantages, among others that of possessing a treasure, if only for a month, is the one most generally adopted. Bold men whom chances tempt have consequently, so it is declared, frequently reopened the hole dug by the black man, and robbed the demon. It seems, however, as if the profits are small; at any rate if we may believe tradition, and particularly and especially two enigmatical lines in dog Latin, which a wicked Norman monk, a bit of a sorcerer, and of the name of Tryphon, left on the subject. This Tryphon lies at St. George's Abbey at Bocherville near Rouen, and frogs are born on his tomb. A man makes enormous exertions, then, for the holes are generally very deep: he perspires, works the whole night through (for the operation must be carried out at night), gets a wet shirt, burns out his candle, breaks his pick, and when he at last reaches the bottom of the hole and lays his hand on the treasure, what does he find? What is the fiend's treasure? A sou, at times

a crown-piece, a stone, a skeleton, a bleeding corpse, or a spectre folded up like a sheet of paper in a pocket-book, and sometimes nothing at all! This appears to be revealed to the searchers by Tryphon's lines, —

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.