

The Hunchback of Notre Dame

by

Victor Hugo

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Preface.....	4
Book I.....	5
1. The Grand Hall	5
2. Pierre Gringoire	15
3. Monsieur The Cardinal	22
4. Master Jacques Coppenole.....	27
5. Quasimodo	34
6. Esmeralda.....	39
Book II	41
1. From Charybdis To Scylla	41
2. The Place De Greve	43
3. Kisses For Blows	45
4. The Inconveniences Of Following A Pretty Woman Through The Streets In The Evening	52
5. Result Of The Dangers.....	55
6. The Broken Jug.....	57
7. A Bridal Night.....	70
Book III.....	77
1. Notre-Dame.....	77
2. A Bird's-Eye View Of Paris.....	83
Book IV.....	100
1. Good Souls.....	100
2. Claude Frollo	103
3. Immanis Pecoris Custos, Immanior Ipse	107
4. The Dog And His Master.....	112
5. More About Claude Frollo.....	113
6. Unpopularity	118
Book V	119
1. Abbas Beati Martini.....	119
2. This Will Kill That.....	126
Book VI.....	136
1. An Impartial Glance At The Ancient Magistracy.....	136
2. The Rat-Hole.....	144
3. History Of A Leavened Cake Of Maize	147
4. A Tear For A Drop Of Water.....	162
5. End Of The Story Of The Cake	169
Book VII	170
1. The Danger Of Confiding One's Secret To A Goat	170
2. A Priest And A Philosopher Are Two Different Things.....	181
3. The Bells	188
4. ANArKH.....	190

5.	The Two Men Clothed In Black	200
6.	The Effect Which Seven Oaths In The Open Air Can Produce.....	204
7.	The Mysterious Monk.....	208
8.	The Utility Of Windows Which Open On The River.....	214
Book VIII.....		220
1.	The Crown Changed Into A Dry Leaf	220
2.	Continuation Of The Crown Which Was Changed Into A Dry Leaf	227
3.	End Of The Crown Which Was Turned Into A Dry Leaf.....	231
4.	Lasciate Ogni Speranza--Leave All Hope Behind, Ye Who Enter Here.....	233
5.	The Mother.....	243
6.	Three Human Hearts Differently Constructed.....	246
Book IX.....		258
1.	Delirium	258
2.	Hunchbacked, One Eyed, Lame.....	266
3.	Deaf.....	269
4.	Earthenware And Crystal.....	271
5.	The Key To The Red Door	279
6.	Continuation Of The Key To The Red Door	281
Book X.....		284
1.	Gringoire Has Many Good Ideas In Succession.--Rue Des Bernardins	284
2.	Turn Vagabond	292
3.	Long Live Mirth.....	294
4.	An Awkward Friend	300
5.	The Retreat In Which Monsieur Louis Of France Says His Prayers	313
6.	Little Sword In Pocket	334
7.	Chateaupers To The Rescue.....	335
Book XI.....		337
1.	The Little Shoe.....	337
2.	The Beautiful Creature Clad In White (Dante).....	360
3.	The Marriage Of Phoebus.....	366
4.	The Marriage Of Quasimodo	367
Note Added To The Definitive Edition		369

Preface

A few years ago, while visiting or, rather, rummaging about Notre-Dame, the author of this book found, in an obscure nook of one of the towers, the following word, engraved by hand upon the wall:--

ANArKH.

These Greek capitals, black with age, and quite deeply graven in the stone, with I know not what signs peculiar to Gothic caligraphy imprinted upon their forms and upon their attitudes, as though with the purpose of revealing that it had been a hand of the Middle Ages which had inscribed them there, and especially the fatal and melancholy meaning contained in them, struck the author deeply.

He questioned himself; he sought to divine who could have been that soul in torment which had not been willing to quit this world without leaving this stigma of crime or unhappiness upon the brow of the ancient church.

Afterwards, the wall was whitewashed or scraped down, I know not which, and the inscription disappeared. For it is thus that people have been in the habit of proceeding with the marvellous churches of the Middle Ages for the last two hundred years. Mutilations come to them from every quarter, from within as well as from without. The priest whitewashes them, the archdeacon scrapes them down; then the populace arrives and demolishes them.

Thus, with the exception of the fragile memory which the author of this book here consecrates to it, there remains to-day nothing whatever of the mysterious word engraved within the gloomy tower of Notre-Dame,--nothing of the destiny which it so sadly summed up. The man who wrote that word upon the wall disappeared from the midst of the generations of man many centuries ago; the word, in its turn, has been effaced from the wall of the church; the church will, perhaps, itself soon disappear from the face of the earth.

It is upon this word that this book is founded.

March, 1831.

Book I

1. The Grand Hall

Three hundred and forty-eight years, six months, and nineteen days ago to-day, the Parisians awoke to the sound of all the bells in the triple circuit of the city, the university, and the town ringing a full peal.

The sixth of January, 1482, is not, however, a day of which history has preserved the memory. There was nothing notable in the event which thus set the bells and the bourgeois of Paris in a ferment from early morning. It was neither an assault by the Picards nor the Burgundians, nor a hunt led along in procession, nor a revolt of scholars in the town of Laas, nor an entry of "our much dread lord, monsieur the king," nor even a pretty hanging of male and female thieves by the courts of Paris. Neither was it the arrival, so frequent in the fifteenth century, of some plumed and bedizened embassy. It was barely two days since the last cavalcade of that nature, that of the Flemish ambassadors charged with concluding the marriage between the dauphin and Marguerite of Flanders, had made its entry into Paris, to the great annoyance of M. le Cardinal de Bourbon, who, for the sake of pleasing the king, had been obliged to assume an amiable mien towards this whole rustic rabble of Flemish burgomasters, and to regale them at his Hôtel de Bourbon, with a very "pretty morality, allegorical satire, and farce," while a driving rain drenched the magnificent tapestries at his door.

What put the "whole population of Paris in commotion," as Jehan de Troyes expresses it, on the sixth of January, was the double solemnity, united from time immemorial, of the Epiphany and the Feast of Fools.

On that day, there was to be a bonfire on the Place de Grève, a maypole at the Chapelle de Braque, and a mystery at the Palais de Justice. It had been cried, to the sound of the trumpet, the preceding evening at all the cross roads, by the provost's men, clad in handsome, short, sleeveless coats of violet camelot, with large white crosses upon their breasts.

So the crowd of citizens, male and female, having closed their houses and shops, thronged from every direction, at early morn, towards some one of the three spots designated.

Each had made his choice; one, the bonfire; another, the maypole; another, the mystery play. It must be stated, in honor of the good sense of the loungers of Paris, that the greater part of this crowd directed their steps towards the bonfire, which was quite in season, or towards the mystery play, which was to be presented in the grand hall of the Palais de Justice (the courts of law), which was well roofed and walled; and that the curious left the poor, scantily flowered maypole to shiver all alone beneath the sky of January, in the cemetery of the Chapel of Braque.

The populace thronged the avenues of the law courts in particular, because they knew that the Flemish ambassadors, who had arrived two days previously, intended to be present at the representation of the mystery, and at the election of the Pope of the Fools, which was also to take place in the grand hall.

It was no easy matter on that day, to force one's way into that grand hall, although it was then reputed to be the largest covered enclosure in the world (it is true that Sauval had not yet measured the grand hall of the Château of Montargis). The palace place, encumbered with people, offered to the curious gazers at the windows the aspect of a sea; into which five or six streets, like so many mouths of rivers, discharged every moment fresh floods of heads. The waves of this crowd, augmented incessantly, dashed against the angles of the houses which projected here and there, like so many promontories, into the irregular basin of the place. In the centre of the lofty Gothic* façade of the palace, the grand staircase, incessantly ascended and descended by a double current, which, after parting on the intermediate landing-place, flowed in broad waves along its lateral slopes,—the grand staircase, I say, trickled incessantly into the place, like a cascade into a lake. The cries, the laughter, the trampling of those thousands of feet, produced a great noise and a great clamor. From time to time, this noise and clamor redoubled; the current which drove the crowd towards the grand staircase flowed backwards, became troubled, formed whirlpools. This was produced by the buffet of an archer, or the horse of one of the provost's sergeants, which kicked to restore order; an admirable tradition which the provostship has bequeathed to the constabulary, the constabulary to the *maréchaussée*, the *maréchaussée* to our *gendarmerie* of Paris.

* The word Gothic, in the sense in which it is generally employed, is wholly unsuitable, but wholly consecrated. Hence we accept it and we adopt it, like all the rest of the world, to characterize the architecture of the second half of the Middle Ages, where the ogive is the principle which succeeds the architecture of the first period, of which the semi-circle is the father.

Thousands of good, calm, bourgeois faces thronged the windows, the doors, the dormer windows, the roofs, gazing at the palace, gazing at the populace, and asking nothing more; for many Parisians content themselves with the spectacle of the spectators, and a wall behind which something is going on becomes at once, for us, a very curious thing indeed.

If it could be granted to us, the men of 1830, to mingle in thought with those Parisians of the fifteenth century, and to enter with them, jostled, elbowed, pulled about, into that immense hall of the palace, which was so cramped on that sixth of January, 1482, the spectacle would not be devoid of either interest or charm, and we should have about us only things that were so old that they would seem new.

With the reader's consent, we will endeavor to retrace in thought, the impression which he would have experienced in company with us on crossing the threshold of that grand hall, in the midst of that tumultuous crowd in surcoats, short, sleeveless jackets, and doublets.

And, first of all, there is a buzzing in the ears, a dazzlement in the eyes. Above our heads is a double ogive vault, panelled with wood carving, painted azure, and sown with golden fleurs-de-lis; beneath our feet a pavement of black and white marble, alternating. A few paces distant, an enormous pillar, then another, then another; seven pillars in all, down the length of the hall, sustaining the spring of the arches of the double vault, in the centre of its width. Around four of

the pillars, stalls of merchants, all sparkling with glass and tinsel; around the last three, benches of oak, worn and polished by the trunk hose of the litigants, and the robes of the attorneys. Around the hall, along the lofty wall, between the doors, between the windows, between the pillars, the interminable row of all the kings of France, from Pharamond down: the lazy kings, with pendent arms and downcast eyes; the valiant and combative kings, with heads and arms raised boldly heavenward. Then in the long, pointed windows, glass of a thousand hues; at the wide entrances to the hall, rich doors, finely sculptured; and all, the vaults, pillars, walls, jambs, panelling, doors, statues, covered from top to bottom with a splendid blue and gold illumination, which, a trifle tarnished at the epoch when we behold it, had almost entirely disappeared beneath dust and spiders in the year of grace, 1549, when du Breul still admired it from tradition.

Let the reader picture to himself now, this immense, oblong hall, illuminated by the pallid light of a January day, invaded by a motley and noisy throng which drifts along the walls, and eddies round the seven pillars, and he will have a confused idea of the whole effect of the picture, whose curious details we shall make an effort to indicate with more precision.

It is certain, that if Ravailac had not assassinated Henri IV., there would have been no documents in the trial of Ravailac deposited in the clerk's office of the Palais de Justice, no accomplices interested in causing the said documents to disappear; hence, no incendiaries obliged, for lack of better means, to burn the clerk's office in order to burn the documents, and to burn the Palais de Justice in order to burn the clerk's office; consequently, in short, no conflagration in 1618. The old Palais would be standing still, with its ancient grand hall; I should be able to say to the reader, "Go and look at it," and we should thus both escape the necessity,--I of making, and he of reading, a description of it, such as it is. Which demonstrates a new truth: that great events have incalculable results.

It is true that it may be quite possible, in the first place, that Ravailac had no accomplices; and in the second, that if he had any, they were in no way connected with the fire of 1618. Two other very plausible explanations exist: First, the great flaming star, a foot broad, and a cubit high, which fell from heaven, as every one knows, upon the law courts, after midnight on the seventh of March; second, Théophile's quatrain,--

"Sure, 'twas but a sorry game
When at Paris, Dame Justice,
Through having eaten too much spice,
Set the palace all aflame."

Whatever may be thought of this triple explanation, political, physical, and poetical, of the burning of the law courts in 1618, the unfortunate fact of the fire is certain. Very little to-day remains, thanks to this catastrophe,--thanks, above all, to the successive restorations which have completed what it spared,--very little remains of that first dwelling of the kings of France,--of that elder palace of the Louvre, already so old in the time of Philip the Handsome, that they sought there for the traces of the magnificent buildings erected by King Robert and described by Helgaldus. Nearly everything has disappeared. What has become of the chamber of the chancellery, where Saint Louis consummated his marriage? the

garden where he administered justice, "clad in a coat of camelot, a surcoat of linsey-woolsey, without sleeves, and a sur-mantle of black sandal, as he lay upon the carpet with Joinville?" Where is the chamber of the Emperor Sigismund? and that of Charles IV.? that of Jean the Landless? Where is the staircase, from which Charles VI. promulgated his edict of pardon? the slab where Marcel cut the throats of Robert de Clermont and the Marshal of Champagne, in the presence of the dauphin? the wicket where the bulls of Pope Benedict were torn, and whence those who had brought them departed decked out, in derision, in copes and mitres, and making an apology through all Paris? and the grand hall, with its gilding, its azure, its statues, its pointed arches, its pillars, its immense vault, all fretted with carvings? and the gilded chamber? and the stone lion, which stood at the door, with lowered head and tail between his legs, like the lions on the throne of Solomon, in the humiliated attitude which befits force in the presence of justice? and the beautiful doors? and the stained glass? and the chased ironwork, which drove Biscornette to despair? and the delicate woodwork of Hancy? What has time, what have men done with these marvels? What have they given us in return for all this Gallic history, for all this Gothic art? The heavy flattened arches of M. de Brosse, that awkward architect of the Saint-Gervais portal. So much for art; and, as for history, we have the gossiping reminiscences of the great pillar, still ringing with the tattle of the Patru.

It is not much. Let us return to the veritable grand hall of the veritable old palace. The two extremities of this gigantic parallelogram were occupied, the one by the famous marble table, so long, so broad, and so thick that, as the ancient land rolls--in a style that would have given Gargantua an appetite--say, "such a slice of marble as was never beheld in the world"; the other by the chapel where Louis XI. had himself sculptured on his knees before the Virgin, and whither he caused to be brought, without heeding the two gaps thus made in the row of royal statues, the statues of Charlemagne and of Saint Louis, two saints whom he supposed to be great in favor in heaven, as kings of France. This chapel, quite new, having been built only six years, was entirely in that charming taste of delicate architecture, of marvellous sculpture, of fine and deep chasing, which marks with us the end of the Gothic era, and which is perpetuated to about the middle of the sixteenth century in the fairylike fancies of the Renaissance. The little open-work rose window, pierced above the portal, was, in particular, a masterpiece of lightness and grace; one would have pronounced it a star of lace. In the middle of the hall, opposite the great door, a platform of gold brocade, placed against the wall, a special entrance to which had been effected through a window in the corridor of the gold chamber, had been erected for the Flemish emissaries and the other great personages invited to the presentation of the mystery play.

It was upon the marble table that the mystery was to be enacted, as usual. It had been arranged for the purpose, early in the morning; its rich slabs of marble, all scratched by the heels of law clerks, supported a cage of carpenter's work of considerable height, the upper surface of which, within view of the whole hall, was to serve as the theatre, and whose interior, masked by tapestries, was to take the place of dressing-rooms for the personages of the piece. A ladder,

naively placed on the outside, was to serve as means of communication between the dressing-room and the stage, and lend its rude rungs to entrances as well as to exits. There was no personage, however unexpected, no sudden change, no theatrical effect, which was not obliged to mount that ladder. Innocent and venerable infancy of art and contrivances!

Four of the bailiff of the palace's sergeants, perfunctory guardians of all the pleasures of the people, on days of festival as well as on days of execution, stood at the four corners of the marble table.

The piece was only to begin with the twelfth stroke of the great palace clock sounding midday. It was very late, no doubt, for a theatrical representation, but they had been obliged to fix the hour to suit the convenience of the ambassadors.

Now, this whole multitude had been waiting since morning. A goodly number of curious, good people had been shivering since daybreak before the grand staircase of the palace; some even affirmed that they had passed the night across the threshold of the great door, in order to make sure that they should be the first to pass in. The crowd grew more dense every moment, and, like water, which rises above its normal level, began to mount along the walls, to swell around the pillars, to spread out on the entablatures, on the cornices, on the window-sills, on all the salient points of the architecture, on all the reliefs of the sculpture. Hence, discomfort, impatience, weariness, the liberty of a day of cynicism and folly, the quarrels which break forth for all sorts of causes--a pointed elbow, an iron-shod shoe, the fatigue of long waiting--had already, long before the hour appointed for the arrival of the ambassadors, imparted a harsh and bitter accent to the clamor of these people who were shut in, fitted into each other, pressed, trampled upon, stifled. Nothing was to be heard but imprecations on the Flemish, the provost of the merchants, the Cardinal de Bourbon, the bailiff of the courts, Madame Marguerite of Austria, the sergeants with their rods, the cold, the heat, the bad weather, the Bishop of Paris, the Pope of the Fools, the pillars, the statues, that closed door, that open window; all to the vast amusement of a band of scholars and lackeys scattered through the mass, who mingled with all this discontent their teasing remarks, and their malicious suggestions, and pricked the general bad temper with a pin, so to speak.

Among the rest there was a group of those merry imps, who, after smashing the glass in a window, had seated themselves hardily on the entablature, and from that point despatched their gaze and their railleries both within and without, upon the throng in the hall, and the throng upon the Place. It was easy to see, from their parodied gestures, their ringing laughter, the bantering appeals which they exchanged with their comrades, from one end of the hall to the other, that these young clerks did not share the weariness and fatigue of the rest of the spectators, and that they understood very well the art of extracting, for their own private diversion from that which they had under their eyes, a spectacle which made them await the other with patience.

"Upon my soul, so it's you, 'Joannes Frollo de Molendino!'" cried one of them, to a sort of little, light-haired imp, with a well-favored and malign countenance, clinging to the acanthus leaves of a capital; "you are well named John of the Mill,

for your two arms and your two legs have the air of four wings fluttering on the breeze. How long have you been here?"

"By the mercy of the devil," retorted Joannes Frolo, "these four hours and more; and I hope that they will be reckoned to my credit in purgatory. I heard the eight singers of the King of Sicily intone the first verse of seven o'clock mass in the Sainte-Chapelle."

"Fine singers!" replied the other, "with voices even more pointed than their caps! Before founding a mass for Monsieur Saint John, the king should have inquired whether Monsieur Saint John likes Latin droned out in a Provençal accent."

"He did it for the sake of employing those accursed singers of the King of Sicily!" cried an old woman sharply from among the crowd beneath the window. "I just put it to you! A thousand *livres parisi* for a mass! and out of the tax on sea fish in the markets of Paris, to boot!"

"Peace, old crone," said a tall, grave person, stopping up his nose on the side towards the fishwife; "a mass had to be founded. Would you wish the king to fall ill again?"

"Bravely spoken, Sire Gilles Lecornu, master furrier of king's robes!" cried the little student, clinging to the capital.

A shout of laughter from all the students greeted the unlucky name of the poor furrier of the king's robes.

"Lecornu! Gilles Lecornu!" said some.

"*Cornutus et hirsutus*, horned and hairy," another went on.

"He! of course," continued the small imp on the capital, "What are they laughing at? An honorable man is Gilles Lecornu, brother of Master Jehan Lecornu, provost of the king's house, son of Master Mahiet Lecornu, first porter of the Bois de Vincennes,--all bourgeois of Paris, all married, from father to son."

The gayety redoubled. The big furrier, without uttering a word in reply, tried to escape all the eyes riveted upon him from all sides; but he perspired and panted in vain; like a wedge entering the wood, his efforts served only to bury still more deeply in the shoulders of his neighbors, his large, apoplectic face, purple with spite and rage.

At length one of these, as fat, short, and venerable as himself, came to his rescue.

"Abomination! scholars addressing a bourgeois in that fashion in my day would have been flogged with a fagot, which would have afterwards been used to burn them."

The whole band burst into laughter.

"Holà hé! who is scolding so? Who is that screech owl of evil fortune?"

"Hold, I know him" said one of them; "'tis Master Andry Musnier."

"Because he is one of the four sworn booksellers of the university!" said the other.

"Everything goes by fours in that shop," cried a third; "the four nations, the four faculties, the four feasts, the four procurators, the four electors, the four booksellers."

"Well," began Jean Frolo once more, "we must play the devil with them."*

* *Faire le diable a quatre.*

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