

CHAPTER III.

THE KNIGHTS OF THE BLACK CAP.

IN the very heart of Paris, near the quays and bordering upon the river, in the broad light of day and in a pleasant neighborhood is a street or rather a narrow lane, through the centre of which runs a muddy stream and where high dark walls shut out the rays of the sun. The Rue Git-le-Cœur, one of the oldest streets in that ancient Paris which has disappeared under the progress of modern improvements, remained what it was in the middle ages. But little more and it would require to have an iron chain stretched at either extremity of it, which together with the watch might enable honest citizens of Paris to sleep in peace.

About half way down this street, some four years before this story opens, stood a squalid shop, full of rubbish, rusty iron, broken or mended china, old clothes, curtains ready to fall into dust, copper vessels covered with verdigris, instruments of all trades which men may lawfully and openly pursue.

We say lawfully and openly, for in dark corners of the shop were huge bunches of keys of every conceivable form, finely pointed chisels, files of exquisite perfection, pincers that were masterpieces in their kind, in fine, a whole collection of disavowed articles or articles which were seldom called for in any other language than that of slang.

Father Methusalem, who owed his surname to his indefinite age, was, within the memory of a whole generation of men, already old when he became proprietor of this shop and all its belongings. These belongings, be-