

Books to Know and Enjoy

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA is a very short, direct novel by Ernest Hemingway. It is the story of an old fisherman. This man is neither dramatic nor glamorous. He is the typical man. This adventure is not unique; it could happen to anyone. His story is not fantastic; it is realistic. The story unfolds in a little wharf town. The old fisherman has fished eighty-four days with little success.

A young boy, the old man's friend, encourages him on the eight-fifth day to try again. The old man was an expert fisherman in his youth, and he has never been discouraged. With ironic optimism he sets forth.

Eventually the old man feels a forceful tug on his line. His long anticipated fish has fallen prey to the lure. The catch does not give in easily; however, the difficult task of bringing the fish in is finally accomplished after a day and night of continuous trial.

After the old man has fastened the fish, whose measure is fifteen feet, to the side of the boat, sharks attack and eat the prize. The old man, after all hope and work, is left with only the skeleton of the fish. Actually he has gained more than a giant skeleton of the fish; he has regained his self-respect and self-confidence. He has proven to the village, the boy, and more important, to himself, that he is still the great fisherman that he once was.

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA is a very good, simple story. The story makes use of symbolism; the fish represents renewed hope, confidence, and vigor to the old man. The description is excellent. Hemingway writes in an appealing and realistic manner. This book is an excellent piece of literature to be read and enjoyed. It may be read in an hour, but its true value lives on.

LES MISERABLES

Victor Hugo is the French author of LES MISERABLES, a daring story which takes place in Paris. Jean Valjean is the leading character. He has just been released from the galleys where he has spent nineteen years as a galley slave. His original offense was the stealing of a loaf of bread to feed the seven children of his widowed sister.

Valjean is an outcast and is scorned when he regains his freedom. He is finally given board and food by a kindly old bishop. He steals two silver candlesticks from the bishop and is apprehended by the local police. Ironically the bishop tells the police that he has given Jean Valjean the candlesticks and thus saves his life. He then charges Valjean to take the candlesticks and go forth to a new way of life. The old convict takes the oath to heart and in a few years has established himself as the saintly mayor of a French town. He loses his position when he reveals his identity to protect another. He is returned to the galley, but escapes and is thought drowned.

Jean Valjean takes charge of an orphan, Cosette, to whom he devotes his life. The small girl is the first human whom he has ever loved. He lives for her; she is his very life. Cosette never learns of her "father's" true identity. She matures into a very beautiful young woman and marries a wealthy man.

The story is very lengthy and to give the minute details would require too much. The reader can hardly help but love the old convict who becomes a near saint. This novel is dramatic, full of fast-moving action, and very realistic. It gives a vivid account of the Napoleonic wars and contains a good deal of French history which helps one to understand the time and events of that historical period. As the book ends and Jean Valjean dies, the reader can but cry over the world's loss of a great man.

Anyone who has not read this tremendous novel would greatly profit from doing so. The story is one of the most interesting of all novels. The sacrifices, trials, and injustices suffered by Jean Valjean move one to love this unforgettable character.