

VICTOR HUGO

NINETY-THREE

Виктор Мари Гюго

Ninety-Three

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Victor Hugo

Ninety-Three

PART I

AT SEA

BOOK I

THE FOREST OF LA SAUDRAIE

During the last days of May, 1793, one of the Parisian battalions introduced into Brittany by Santerre was reconnoitring the formidable La Saudraie Woods in Astillé. Decimated by this cruel war, the battalion was reduced to about three hundred men. This was at the time when, after Argonne, Jemmapes, and Valmy, of the first battalion of Paris, which had numbered six hundred volunteers, only twenty-seven men remained, thirty-three of the second, and fifty-seven of the third, – a time of epic combats. The battalion sent from Paris into La Vendée numbered nine hundred and twelve men. Each regiment had three pieces of cannon. They had been quickly mustered. On the 25th of April, Gohier being Minister of Justice, and Bouchotte Minister of War, the section of Bon Conseil had offered to send volunteer battalions into La Vendée; the report was made by Lubin, a member of the Commune. On the 1st of May, Santerre was ready to send off twelve thousand men, thirty field-pieces, and one battalion of gunners. These battalions, notwithstanding they were so quickly formed, serve as models even at the present day, and regiments of the line are formed on the same plan; they altered the former proportion between the number of soldiers and that of non-commissioned officers.

On the 28th of April the Paris Commune had given to the volunteers of Santerre the following order: "No mercy, no quarter." Of the twelve thousand that had left Paris, at the end of May eight thousand were dead. The battalion which was engaged in La Saudraie held itself on its guard. There was no hurrying: every man looked at once to right and to left, before him, behind him. Kléber has said: "The soldier has an eye in his back." They had been marching a long time. What o'clock could it be? What time of the day was it? It would have been hard to say; for there is always a sort of dusk in these wild thickets, and it was never light in that wood. The forest of La Saudraie was a tragic one. It was in this coppice that from the month of November, 1792, civil war began its crimes; Mousqueton, the fierce cripple, had come forth from those fatal thickets; the number of murders that had been committed there made one's hair stand on end. No spot was more terrible.

The soldiers forced cautiously. Everything was in full bloom; they were surrounded by a quivering wall of branches, whose leaves diffused a delicious freshness. Here and there sunbeams pierced, these green shades. At their feet the gladiolus, the German iris, the wild narcissus, the wood-daisy, that tiny flower, forerunner of the warm weather, the spring crocus, – all these embroidered and adorned a thick carpet of vegetation, abounding in every variety of moss, from the kind that looks like a caterpillar to that resembling a star.

The soldiers advanced silently, step by step, gently pushing aside the underbrush. The birds twittered above the bayonets.

La Saudraie was one of those thickets where formerly, in time of peace, they had pursued the Houicheba, – the the hunting of birds by night; now it was a place for hunting men.

The coppice consisted entirely of birch-trees, beeches, and oaks; the ground was level; the moss and the thick grass deadened the noise of footsteps; no paths at all, or paths no sooner found than

lost; holly, wild sloe, brakes, hedges of rest-harrow, and tall brambles; it was impossible to see a man ten paces distant.

Now and then a heron or a moor-hen flew through the branches, showing the vicinity of a swamp. They marched along at haphazard, uneasy, and fearing lest they might find what they sought.

From time to time they encountered traces of encampments, – a burnt place, trampled grass, sticks arranged in the form of a cross, or branches spattered with blood. Here, soup had been made; there, Mass had been said; yonder, wounds had been dressed. But whoever had passed that way had vanished. Where were they? Far away, perhaps; and yet they might be very near, hiding, blunderbuss in hand. The wood seemed deserted. The battalion redoubled its precaution. Solitude, therefore distrust. No one was to be seen; all the more reason to fear some one. They had to do with a forest of ill-repute.

An ambush was probable.

Thirty grenadiers, detached as scouts and commanded by a sergeant, marched ahead, at a considerable distance from the main body. The vivandière of the battalion accompanied them. The vivandières like to join the vanguard; they run risks, but then they stand a chance of seeing something. Curiosity is one of the forms of feminine courage.

Suddenly the soldiers of this little advanced guard received that shock familiar to hunters, which shows them that they are close upon the lair of their prey. They heard something like breathing in the middle of the thicket, and it seemed as if they caught sight of some commotion among the leaves. The soldiers made signs to each other.

When this mode of watching and reconnoitring is confided to the scouts, officers have no need to interfere; what has to be done is done instinctively.

In less than a minute the spot where the movement had been observed was surrounded by a circle of levelled muskets, aimed simultaneously from every side at the dusky centre of the thicket; and the soldiers, with finger on trigger and eye on the suspected spot, awaited only the sergeant's command to fire.

Meanwhile, the vivandière ventured to peer through the underbush; and just as the sergeant was about to cry, "Fire!" this woman cried, "Halt!"

And turning to the soldiers, "Do not fire!" she cried, and rushed into the thicket, followed by the men.

There was indeed some one there.

In the thickest part of the copse on the edge of one of those small circular clearings made in the woods by the charcoal-furnaces that are used to burn the roots of trees, in a sort of hole formed by the branches, – a bower of foliage, so to speak, half-open, like an alcove, – sat a woman on the moss, with a nursing child at her breast and the fair heads of two sleeping children resting against her knees.

This was the ambush.

"What are you doing here?" called out the vivandière.

The woman raised her head, and the former added angrily, —

"Are you insane to remain there!"

She went on, —

"A little more, and you would have been blown to atoms!" Then addressing the soldiers, she said, "It's a woman."

"Pardieu! That's plain to be seen," replied a grenadier.

The vivandière continued, — "To come into the woods to get oneself massacred. Can you conceive of any one so stupid as that?"

The woman, surprised, bewildered, and stunned, was gazing around, as though in a dream, at these muskets, sabres, bayonets, and savage faces. The two children awoke and began to cry.

"I am hungry," said one.

"I am afraid," said the other.

The baby went on nursing.

The vivandière addressed it.

"You are the wise one," she said.

The mother was dumb with terror.

"Don't be afraid," exclaimed the sergeant, "we are the battalion of the Bonnet Rouge."

The woman trembled from head to foot. She looked at the sergeant, of whose rough face she could see only the eyebrows, moustache, and eyes like two coals of fire.

"The battalion formerly known as the Red-Cross," added the vivandière.

The sergeant continued, —

"Who are you, madam?"

The woman looked at him in terror. She was thin, young, pale, and in tatters. She wore the large hood and woollen cloak of the Breton peasants, fastened by a string around her neck. She left her bosom exposed with the indifference of an animal. Her feet, without shoes or stockings, were bleeding.

"It's a beggar," said the sergeant.

The vivandière continued in her martial yet womanly voice, — a gentle voice withal, —

"What is your name?"

The woman stammered in a scarce audible whisper:

"Michelle Fléchard."

Meanwhile the vivandière stroked the little head of the nursing baby with her large hand.

"How old is this midget?" she asked.

The mother did not understand. The vivandière repeated, — "I ask you how old it is?"

"Oh, eighteen months," said the mother.

"That's quite old," said the vivandière; "it ought not to nurse any longer, you must wean it. We will give him soup."

The mother began to feel more at ease. The two little ones, who had awakened, were rather interested than frightened; they admired the plumes of the soldiers.

"Ah, they are very hungry!" said the mother.

And she added, —

"I have no more milk."

"We will give them food," cried the sergeant, "and you also. But there is something more to be settled. What are your political opinions?"

The woman looked at him and made no reply.

"Do you understand my question?"

She stammered, —

"I was put into a convent when I was quite young, but I married; I am not a nun. The Sisters taught me to speak French. The village was set on fire. We escaped in such haste that I had no time to put my shoes on."

"I ask you what are your political opinions?"

"I don't know anything about that."

The sergeant continued, —

"There are female spies. That kind of person we shoot. Come, speak. You are not a gypsy, are you? What is your native land?"

She still looked at him as though unable to comprehend.

The sergeant repeated, —

"What is your native land?"

"I do not know," she said.

"How is that? You do not know your country?"

"Ah! Do you mean my country? I know that."

"Well, what is your country?"

The woman replied, —

"It is the farm of Siscoignard, in the parish of Azé."

It was the sergeant's turn to be surprised. He paused for a moment, lost in thought; then he went on, —

"What was it you said?"

"Siscoignard."

"You cannot call that your native land."

"That is my country."

Then after a minute's consideration she added, —

"I understand you, sir. You are from France, but I am from Brittany."

"Well?"

"It is not the same country."

"But it is the same native land," exclaimed the sergeant.

The woman only replied, —

"I am from Siscoignard."

"Let it be. Siscoignard, then," said the sergeant. "Your family belong there, I suppose?"

"Yes!"

"What is their business?"

"They are all dead. I have no one left."

The sergeant, who was quite loquacious, continued to question her.

"Devil take it, every one has relations, or one has had them! Who are you? Speak!"

The woman listened bewildered; this "or one has had them" sounded more like the cry of a wild beast than the speech of a human being.

The vivandière felt obliged to interfere. She began to caress the nursing child, and patted the other two on the cheeks.

"What is the baby's name? It's a little girl, isn't it?"

The mother replied, "Georgette."

"And the oldest one? For he is a man, the rogue!"

"René-Jean."

"And the younger one? For he is a man too, and a chubby one into the bargain."

"Gros-Alain," replied the mother.

"They are pretty children," said the vivandière. "They look already as if they were somebody."

Meanwhile the sergeant persisted.

"Come! Speak, madam! Have you a house?"

"I had one once."

"Where was it?"

"At Azé."

"Why are you not at home?"

"Because my house was burned."

"Who burned it?"

"I do not know. There was a battle."

"Were do you come from?"

"From over there."

"Where are you going?"

"I do not know."

"Come, to the point! Who are you?"

"I do not know."

"Don't know who you are?"

"We are people running away."

"To what party do you belong?"

"I do not know."

"To the Blues, or the Whites? Which side are you on?"

"I am with my children."

There was a pause. The vivandière spoke.

"For my part I never had any children. I have not had time."

The sergeant began again.

"But what about your parents? See here, madam, tell me the facts about your parents. Now, my name is Radoub. I am a sergeant. I live on the Rue Cherche-Midi. My father and my mother lived there. I can talk of my parents. Tell us about yours. Tell us who your parents were."

"Their name was Fléchard. That's all."

"Yes. The Fléchards are the Fléchards, just as the Radoubs are the Radoubs. But people have a trade. What was your parents' trade? What did they do, these Fléchards of yours?"¹

"They were laborers. My father was feeble and could not work, on account of a beating which the lord, his lord, our lord, gave him: it was really a mercy, for my father had poached a rabbit, a crime of which the penalty is death; but the lord was merciful and said, 'You may give him only a hundred blows with a stick;' and my father was left a cripple."

"And then?"

"My grandfather was a Huguenot. The curé had him sent to the galleys. I was very young then."

"And then?"

"My husband's father was a salt smuggler. The king had him hung."

"And what did your husband do?"

"He used to fight in those times."

"For whom?"

"For the king."

"And after that?"

"Ah! For his lord."

"And then?"

"For the curé."

"By all the names of beasts!" cried the grenadier. The woman jumped in terror.

"You see, madam, we are Parisians," said the vivandière, affably.

The woman clasped her hands, exclaiming, —

"Oh, my God and Lord Jesus!"

"No superstitions here!" rejoined the sergeant.

The vivandière sat down beside the woman and drew the oldest child between her knees; he yielded readily. Children are quite as easily reassured as they are frightened, with no apparent reason. They seem to possess instinctive perceptions. "My poor worthy woman of this neighborhood, you have pretty little children, at all events. One can guess their age. The big one is four years, and his brother is three. Just see how greedily the little rascal sucks. The wretch! Stop eating up your mother! Come madam, do not be frightened. You ought to join the battalion. You should do as I do. My name is Housarde. It's a nickname, but I had rather be called Housarde than Mamzelle Bicornéau, like my mother. I am the canteen woman, which is the same as saying, she who gives the men to drink when they are firing grape-shot and killing each other. The devil and all his train. Our feet are about the same size. I will give you a pair of my shoes. I was in Paris on the 10th of August. I gave Westerman a drink. Everything went with a rush in those days! I saw Louis XVI. guillotined, — Louis Capet, as

¹ The sergeant makes a pun on the name Fléchard which is untranslatable. Flèche means arrow, and he asks whether the Fléchards made arrows. — TR.

they call him. I tell you he didn't like it. You just listen now. To think that on the 13th of January he was roasting chestnuts and enjoying himself with his family! When he was made to lie down on what is called the see-saw, he wore neither coat nor shoes; only a shirt, a quilted waistcoat, gray cloth breeches, and gray silk stockings. I saw all that with my own eyes. The fiacre which he rode in was painted green. Now then, you come with us; they are kind lads in the battalion; you will be canteen number two; I will teach you the trade. Oh, it's very simple! You will have a can and a bell; you are right in the racket, amid the firing of the platoons and the cannons, in all that hubbub, calling out, 'Who wants a drink, my children?' It is no harder task than that. I offer a drink to all, you may take my word for it, – to the Whites as well as to the Blues, although I am a Blue, and a true Blue at that. But I serve them all alike. Wounded men are thirsty. People die without difference of opinions. Dying men ought to shake hands. How foolish to fight! Come with us. If I am killed you will fill my place. You see I am not much to look at, but I am a kind woman, and a good fellow. Don't be afraid."

When the vivandière ceased speaking, the woman muttered to herself, —

"Our neighbor's name was Marie-Jeanne, and it was our servant who was Marie-Claude."

Meanwhile Sergeant Radoub was reprimanding the grenadier.

"Silence! You frighten madam. A man should not swear before ladies."

"I say this is a downright butchery for an honest man to hear about," replied the grenadier; "and to see Chinese Iroquois, whose father-in-law was crippled by the lord, whose grandfather was sent to the galleys by the curé, and whose father was hung by the king, and who fight, – zounds! – and who get entangled in revolts, and are crushed for the sake of the lord, the curé, and the king!"

"Silence in the ranks!" exclaimed the sergeant.

"One may be silent, sergeant," continued the grenadier; "but it is all the same provoking to see a pretty woman like that running the risk of getting her neck broken for the sake of a calotin."²

"Grenadier," said the sergeant, "we are not in the Pike Club. Save your eloquence!" And turning to the woman, "And your husband, madam? What does he do? What has become of him?"

"Nothing; since he was killed."

"Where was that?"

"In the hedge."

"When?"

"Three days ago."

"Who killed him?"

"I do not know."

"How is that? You don't know who killed your husband?"

"No."

"Was it a Blue, or a White?"

"It was a bullet."

"Was that three days ago?"

"Yes."

"In what direction?"

"Towards Ernée. My husband fell. That was all."

"And since your husband died, what have you been doing?"

"I have been taking my little ones along."

"Where are you taking them?"

"Straight along."

"Where do you sleep?"

"On the ground."

"What do you eat?"

² An opprobrious epithet for an ecclesiastic. – TR.

"Nothing."

The sergeant made that military grimace which elevates the moustache to the nose. "Nothing?"

"Well, nothing but sloes, blackberries when I found any left over from last year, whortle-berries, and fern-shoots."

"Yes, you may well call it nothing."

The oldest child, who seemed to understand, said:

"I am hungry."

The sergeant pulled from his pocket a piece of ration bread, and handed it to the mother.

Taking the bread, she broke it in two and gave it to the children, who bit into it greedily.

"She has not saved any for herself," growled the sergeant.

"Because she is not hungry," remarked a soldier.

"Because she is a mother," said the sergeant.

The children broke in.

"Give me something to drink," said one.

"To drink," repeated the other.

"Is there no brook in this cursed wood?" said the sergeant.

The vivandière took the copper goblet suspended at her belt together with a bell, turned the cock of the can that was strapped across her shoulder, and pouring several drops into the goblet, held it to the children's lips.

The first drank and made a grimace.

The second drank and spit it out

"It is good, all the same," said the vivandière.

"Is that some of the old cut-throat?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes, some of the best. But they are peasants."

She wiped the goblet.

"And so, madam, you are running away?" resumed the sergeant.

"I couldn't help it."

"Across the fields? With no particular object?"

"Sometimes I run with all my might, and then I walk, and once in a while I fall."

"Poor countrywoman!" said the vivandière.

"They were fighting," stammered the woman. "I was in the middle of the firing. I don't know what they want. They killed my husband, – that was all I know about it."

The sergeant banged the butt of his musket on the ground, exclaiming, —

"What a beast of a war! In the name of all that is idiotic!"

The woman continued, —

"Last night we went to bed in an *émousse*."

"All four of you?"

"All four."

"Went to bed?"

"Went to bed."

"Then you must have gone to bed standing." And he turned to the soldiers.

"Comrades, a dead tree, old and hollow, wherein a man can sheathe himself like a sword in a scabbard, is what these savages call an *émousse*. But what would you have? All are not obliged to be Parisians."

"The idea of sleeping in the hollow of a tree, – and with three children!" exclaimed the vivandière.

"And when the little one bawled, it must have seemed queer to the passers-by, who could see nothing, to hear the tree calling out, 'Papa! mamma!'"

"Fortunately, it is summer-time," said the woman, with a sigh.

She looked down resigned, with an expression in her eyes of one who had known surprising calamities.

The silent soldiers surrounded this wretched group. A widow, three orphans, flight, desolation, solitude, the rumblings of war on the horizon, hunger, thirst, no food but herbs, no roof but the sky.

The sergeant drew near the woman and gazed upon the nursing infant. The baby left the breast, turned her head, and looked with her lovely blue eyes on the dreadful hairy face, bristling and fierce, that was bending over her, and began to smile.

The sergeant drew back, and a large tear was seen to roll down his cheek, clinging to the end of his moustache like a pearl.

He raised his voice.

"Comrades, I have come to the conclusion that this battalion is about to become a father. Are you willing? We adopt these three children."

"Hurrah for the Republic!" shouted the grenadiers.

"So be it!" exclaimed the sergeant; and he stretched out both hands over the mother and the children.

"Behold the children of the battalion of the Bonnet-Rouge!" he said.

The vivandière jumped for joy.

"Three heads under one cap!" she cried.

Then she burst out sobbing, and embraced the widow excitedly, saying, —

"She looks like a rogue already, that little girl!"

"Hurrah for the Republic!" repeated the soldiers.

"Come, citizeness," said the sergeant to the mother.

BOOK II

THE CORVETTE "CLAYMORE."

I

ENGLAND AND FRANCE UNITED

In the spring of 1793, when France, attacked at one and the same time on all her frontiers, experienced the pathetic diversion of the downfall of the Girondists, the following events were taking place in the Channel Islands. In Jersey, one evening on the first of June, about an hour before sunset, from the lovely little Bay of Bonnenuit, a corvette set sail in that foggy kind of weather dangerous for navigation, and for that very reason better suited for escape than for pursuit. The ship, although it was manned by a French crew, belonged to the English squadron which had been stationed to watch the eastern point of the island. The prince of Tour d'Auvergne, of the house of Bouillon, commanded the English fleet, and it was by his order, and for a special and pressing service, that the corvette had been detached.

This corvette entered at the Trinity House under the name of the "Claymore," and, apparently a freight vessel, was in point of fact a man-of-war. She looked like a heavy and peaceable merchant-ship; but it would not have been wise to trust to that, for she had been built to serve two purposes, – cunning and strength; to deceive if possible, to fight if necessary. For the service on hand that night the freight between decks had been replaced by thirty carronades of heavy caliber. Either for the sake of giving the ship a peaceable appearance, or possibly because a storm was anticipated, these thirty carronades were housed; that is, they were firmly fastened inside by triple chains, with their muzzles tightly braced against the port-holes. Nothing could be seen from the outside. The port-holes were closed. It was as though the corvette wore a mask. These guns were mounted on old-fashioned bronzed wheels, called the "radiating model." The regular naval corvettes carry their guns on the upper deck; but this ship, built for surprise and ambush, had its decks clear, having been arranged, as we have just seen, to carry a masked battery between decks. The "Claymore," although built in a heavy and clumsy fashion, was nevertheless a good sailer, her hull being one of the strongest in the English Navy; and in an engagement she was almost equal to a frigate, although her mizzen-mast was only a small one, with a fore and aft rig. Her rudder, of an odd and scientific shape, had a curved frame, quite unique, which had cost fifty pounds sterling in the Southampton shipyards. The crew, entirely French, was composed of refugee officers and sailors who were deserters. They were experienced men; there was not one among them who was not a good sailor, a good soldier, and a good royalist. A threefold fanaticism possessed them, – for the ship, the sword, and the king.

Half a battalion of marines, which could in case of necessity be disembarked, was added to the crew.

The captain of the "Claymore" was a chevalier of Saint-Louis, Count Boisberthelot, one of the best officers of the old Royal Navy; the first officer was the Chevalier de la Vieuville, who had commanded in the French Guards the company of which Hoche was sergeant; and the pilot, Philip Gacquoil, was one of the most experienced in Jersey.

It was easy to guess that the ship had some unusual work to do. In fact, a man had just stepped on board, who had the look of one starting out for an adventure. He was an old man, tall, upright, and strong, with a severe countenance, – a man whose age it would have been difficult to determine, for he seemed both young and old, advanced in years yet abounding in vigor; one of those men whose eyes flash lightning though the hair is white. Judging from his energy, he was about forty years old; his air of authority was that of a man of eighty.

At the moment when he stepped on board the corvette, his sea-cloak was half-open, revealing beneath wide breeches called *bragoubbras*, high boots, and a goat-skin waistcoat embroidered with silk on the right side, while the rough and bristling fur was left on the wrong side, – the complete costume of a Breton peasant. These old-fashioned Breton waist-coats answered two purposes, being worn both on holidays and week-days, and could be reversed at the option of the wearer, with either the hairy or the smooth side out, – fur on a week-day, and gala attire for holidays. And as if to increase a carefully studied resemblance, the peasant dress worn by the old man was well worn on the knees and elbows, showing signs of long usage, and his cloak, made of coarse cloth, looked like the garb of a fisherman. He wore the round hat of the period, tall and broad-brimmed, which when turned down looks countrified, but when caught up on one side by a loop and a cockade has quite a military effect. He wore it turned down, country fashion, with neither loop nor cockade.

Lord Balcarras, the governor of the island, and the Prince de La Tour d'Auvergne had in person escorted him on board. The secret agent of the Prince Gélambre, an old body-guard of the Count d'Artois, himself a nobleman, had personally superintended the arrangement of his cabin, showing his attention and courtesy even so far as to carry the old man's valise. When about to leave him, to return to the land, M. de Gélambre had made a deep bow to this peasant; Lord Balcarras exclaimed, "Good luck to you, general;" and the Prince de La Tour d'Auvergne said, "Au revoir, cousin."

"The peasant" was the name by which the sailors at once called their passenger in the short dialogues which sailors hold among themselves; yet, without further information on the subject, they understood that this peasant was no more a genuine peasant than the man-of-war was a merchantman.

There was scarcely any wind. The "Claymore" left Bonnenuit, passed Boulay Bay, remaining for some time in sight, tacking, gradually diminishing in the gathering darkness, and finally disappeared.

All hour later, Gélambre, having returned home to Saint-Hélier, sent to the Count d'Artois, at the headquarters of the Duke of York, by the Southampton express, the following lines: —

"MY LORD, – The departure has just taken place. Success is certain. In eight days the whole coast, from Granville to St. Malo, will be ablaze."

Four days previously the representative of the Marne, Prieur, on a mission to the army on the coast of Cherbourg, and just then stopping at Granville, received by a secret emissary the following message, in the same handwriting as the previous one: —

"CITIZEN REPRESENTATIVE, – The 1st of June, at high tide, the war corvette 'Claymore,' with a masked battery, will set sail, to land on the coast of France a man who answers to the following description: Tall, aged, gray-haired, dressed like a peasant, and with the hands of an aristocrat. Tomorrow I will send you further details. He will land on the morning of the 2d. Communicate this to the cruiser, capture the corvette, guillotine the man."

II

NIGHT WITH THE SHIP AND THE PASSENGER

The corvette, instead of sailing south, in the direction of St. Catherine, headed to the north, then, veering towards the west, had boldly entered that arm of the sea between Sark and Jersey called the Passage of the Déroute. There was then no lighthouse, at any point on either coast. It had been a clear sunset: the night was darker than summer nights usually are; it was moonlight, but large clouds, rather of the equinox than of the solstice, overspread the sky, and, judging by appearances the moon would not be visible until she reached the horizon at the moment of setting. A few clouds hung low near the surface of the sea and covered it with vapor.

All this darkness was favorable. Gacquoil, the pilot, intended to leave Jersey on the left, Guernsey on the right, and by boldly sailing between Hanois and Dover, to reach some bay on the coast near St. Malo, a longer but safer route than the one through Minquiers; for the French coaster had standing orders to keep an unusually sharp lookout between St. Hélier and Granville.

If the wind were favorable, and nothing happened, by dint of setting all sail Gacquoil hoped to reach the coast of France at daybreak.

All went well. The corvette had just passed Gros Nez. Towards nine o'clock the weather looked sullen, as the sailors express it, both wind and sea rising; but the wind was favorable, and the sea was rough, yet not heavy, waves now and then dashing over the bow of the corvette. "The peasant," whom Lord Balcarras had called general, and whom the Prince de La Tour d'Auvergne had addressed as cousin, was a good sailor, and paced the deck of the corvette with calm dignity. He did not seem to notice that she rocked considerably. From time to time he took out of his waistcoat pocket a cake of chocolate, and breaking off a piece, munched it. Though his hair was gray, his teeth were sound.

He spoke to no one, except that from time to time he made a few concise remarks in an undertone to the captain, who listened to him deferentially, apparently regarding his passenger as the commander, rather than himself. Unobserved in the fog, and skilfully piloted, the "Claymore" coasted along the steep shore to the north of Jersey, hugging the land to avoid the formidable reef of Pierres-de-Leeq, which lies in the middle of the strait between Jersey and Sark. Gacquoil, at the helm, sighting in turn Grove de Leeq, Gros Nez, and Plémont, making the corvette glide in among those chains of reefs, felt his way along to a certain extent, but with the self-confidence of one familiar with the ways of the sea.

The corvette had no light forward, fearing to betray its passage through these guarded waters. They congratulated themselves on the fog. The Grande Étape was reached; the mist was so dense that the lofty outlines of the Pinnacle were scarcely visible. They heard it strike ten from the belfry of Saint-Ouen, – a sign that the wind was still aft. All was going well; the sea grew rougher, because they were drawing near La Corbière.

A little after ten, the Count Boisberthelot and the Chevalier de la Vieuville escorted the man in the peasant garb to the door of his cabin, which was the captain's own room. As he was about to enter, he remarked, lowering his voice: —

"You understand the importance of keeping the secret, gentlemen. Silence up to the moment of explosion. You are the only ones here who know my name."

"We will carry it to the grave," replied Boisberthelot.

"And for my part, I would not reveal it were I face to face with death," remarked the old man. And he entered his state-room.

III

PATRICIAN AND PLEBEIAN UNITED

The commander and the first officer returned on deck, and began to pace up and down side by side, talking as they walked. The theme was evidently their passenger; and this was the substance of the conversation which the wind wafted through the darkness. Boisberthelot grumbled half audibly to La Vieuville, —

"It remains to be seen whether or no he is a leader."

La Vieuville replied, —

"Meanwhile he is a prince."

"Almost."

"A nobleman in France, but a prince in Brittany."

"Like the Trémoilles and the Rohans."

"With whom he is connected."

Boisberthelot resumed, —

"In France and in the carriages of the king he is a marquis, – as I am a count, and you a chevalier."

"The carriages are far away!" exclaimed Vieuville. "We are living in the time of the tumbril."

A silence ensued.

Boisberthelot went on, —

"For lack of a French prince we take one from Brittany."

"For lack of thrushes — No: since an eagle is not to be found, we take a crow."

"I should prefer a vulture," remarked Boisberthelot.

La Vieuville replied, —

"Yes, indeed, with a beak and talons."

"We shall see."

"Yes," replied Vieuville, "it is time there was a leader. I agree with Tinténiaç, — a leader and gun-power! See here, commander, I know nearly all the possible and impossible leaders, — those of yesterday, those of to-day, and those of to-morrow. Not one of them has the head required for war. In this cursed Vendée a general is needed who would be a lawyer as well as a leader. He must harass the enemy, dispute every bush, ditch, and stone; he must force unlucky quarrels upon him, and take advantage of everything; vigilant and pitiless, he must watch incessantly, slaughter freely, and make examples. Now, in this army of peasants there are heroes, but no captains. D'Elbée is a nonentity, Lescure an invalid; Bonchamps is merciful, — he is kind, and that implies folly; La Rochejaquelein is a superb sub-lieutenant; Silz is an officer good for the open field, but not suited for a war that needs a man of expedients; Cathelineau is a simple teamster; Stofflet is a crafty game-keeper; Bérard is inefficient; Boulainvilliers is absurd; Charette is horrible. I make no mention of Gaston the barber. Mordemonbleu! what is the use of opposing revolution, and what is the difference between ourselves and the republicans, if we set barbers over the heads of noblemen! The fact is, that this beastly revolution has contaminated all of us."

"It is the itch of France."

"It is the itch of the Tiers État," rejoined Boisberthelot. "England alone can help us."

"And she will, captain, undoubtedly."

"Meanwhile it is an ugly state of affairs."

"Yes, — rustics everywhere. A monarchy that has Stofflet, the game-keeper of M. de Maulevrier, for a commander has no reason to envy a republic whose minister is Pache, the son of the Duke de Castries' porter. What men this Vendean war brings face to face, — on one side Santerre the brewer; on the other Gaston the hairdresser!"

"My dear La Vieuville, I feel some respect for this Gaston. He behaved well in his command of Guéménée. He had three hundred Blues neatly shot after making them dig their own graves."

"Well enough done; but I could have done quite as well as he."

"Pardieu, to be sure; and I too."

"The great feats of war," said Vieuville, "require noble blood in those who perform them. These are matters for knights, and not for hairdressers."

"But yet there are estimable men in this 'Third Estate,'" rejoined Vieuville. "Take that watchmaker, Joly, for instance. He was formerly a sergeant in a Flanders regiment; he becomes a Vendean chief and commander of a coast band. He has a son, a republican; and while the father serves in the ranks of the Whites, the son serves in those of the Blues. An encounter, a battle: the father captures the son and blows out his brains."

"He did well," said La Vieuville.

"A royalist Brutus," answered Boisberthelot. "Nevertheless, it is unendurable to be under the command of a Coquereau, a Jean-Jean, a Moulin, a Focart, a Bouju, a Chouppes!"

"My dear chevalier, the opposite party is quite as indignant. We are crowded with plebeians; they have an excess of nobles. Do you think the sans-culottes like to be commanded by the Count de Canclaux, the Viscount de Miranda, the Viscount de Beauharnais, the Count de Valence, the Marquis de Custine, and the Duke de Biron?"

"What a combination!"

"And the Duke de Chartres!"

"Son of Égalité. By the way, when will he be king?"

"Never!"

"He aspires to the throne, and his very crimes serve to promote his interests."

"And his vices will injure his cause," said Boisberthelot.

Then, after another pause, he continued, —

"Nevertheless, he was anxious to be reconciled. He came to see the king. I was at Versailles when some one spit on his back."

"From the top of the grand staircase?"

"Yes."

"I am glad of it."

"We called him Bourbon le Bourbeux."

"He is bald-headed; he has pimples; he is a regicide. Poh!"

And La Vieuville added: —

"I was with him at Ouessant."

"On the 'Saint Esprit'?"

"Yes."

"Had he obeyed Admiral d'Orvillier's signal to keep to the windward, he would have prevented the English from passing."

"True."

"Was he really hidden in the bottom of the hold?"

"No; but we must say so all the same."

And La Vieuville burst out laughing.

Boisberthelot continued: —

"Fools are plentiful. Look here, I have known this Boulainvilliers of whom you were speaking; I knew him well. At first the peasants were armed with pikes; would you believe it, he took it into his head to form them into pike-men. He wanted to drill them in crossing pikes and repelling a charge. He dreamed of transforming these barbarians into regular soldiers. He undertook to teach them how to round in the corners of their squares, and to mass battalions with hollow squares. He jabbered the antiquated military dialect to them; he called the chief of a squad a 'cap d'escade' — which was what corporals under Louis XIV. were called. He persisted in forming a regiment of all those poachers. He had regular companies whose sergeants ranged themselves in a circle every evening, and, receiving the sign and countersign from the colonel's sergeant, repeated it in a whisper to the lieutenant's sergeant, who repeated it to his next neighbor, who in his turn transmitted it to the next man, and so on from ear to ear until it reached the last man. He cashiered an officer for not standing bareheaded to receive the watchword from the sergeant. You may imagine how he succeeded. This simpleton could not understand that peasants have to be led peasant fashion, and that it is impossible to transform rustics into soldiers. Yes, I have known Boulainvilliers."

They walked along a few steps, each one engrossed in his own thoughts.

Then the conversation was resumed: —

"By the way, has the report of Dampierre's death been confirmed?"

"Yes, commander."

"Before Condé?"

"At the camp of Pamars; he was hit by a cannon-ball."

Boisberthelot sighed.

"Count Dampierre, — another of our men, who took sides with them."

"May he prosper wherever he may be!" said Vieuville.

"And the ladies, — where are they?"

"At Trieste."

"Still there?"

"Yes."

"Ah, this republic!" exclaimed La Vieuville. "What havoc from so slight a cause! To think that this revolution was the result of a deficit of only a few millions!"

"Insignificant beginnings are not always to be trusted."

"Everything goes wrong," replied La Vieuville.

"Yes; La Rouarie is dead. Du Dresnay is an idiot. What wretched leaders are all those bishops, — this Coucy, bishop of La Rochelle; Beaupoil Saint-Aulaire, bishop of Poitiers; Mercy, bishop of Luzon, a lover of Madame de l'Eschasserie —"

"Whose name is Servanteau, you know, commander. Eschasserie is the name of an estate."

"And that false bishop of Agra, who is a curé of I know not what!"

"Of Dol. His name is Guillot de Folleville. But then he is brave, and knows how to fight."

"Priests when one needs soldiers! bishops who are no bishops at all! generals who are no generals!"

La Vieuville interrupted Boisberthelot.

"Have you the 'Moniteur' in your state-room, commander?"

"Yes."

"What are they giving now in Paris?"

"'Adèle and Pauline' and 'La Caverne.'"

"I should like to see that."

"You may. We shall be in Paris in a month." Boisberthelot thought a moment, and then added:

"At the latest, — so Mr. Windham told Lord Hood."

"Then, commander, I take it affairs are not going so very badly?"

"All would go well, provided that the Breton war were well managed."

De Vieuville shook his head.

"Commander," he said, "are we to land the marines?"

"Certainly, if the coast is friendly, but not otherwise. In some cases war must force the gates; in others it can slip through them. Civil war must always keep a false key in its pocket. We will do all we can; but one must have a chief."

And Boisberthelot added thoughtfully, —

"What do you think of the Chevalier de Dieuzie, La Vieuville?"

"Do you mean the younger?"

"Yes."

"For a commander?"

"Yes."

"He is only good for a pitched battle in the open field. It is only the peasant who knows the underbrush."

"In that case, you may as well resign yourself to Generals Stofflet and Cathelineau."

La Vieuville meditated for a moment; then he said, —

"What we need is a prince, — a French prince, a prince of the blood, a real prince."

"How can that be? He who says 'prince' —"

"Says 'coward.' I know it, commander. But we need him for the impression he would produce upon the herd."

"My dear chevalier, the princes don't care to come."

"We will do without them."

Boisberthelot pressed his hand mechanically against his forehead, as if striving to evoke an idea. He resumed, —

"Then let us try this general."

"He is a great nobleman."

"Do you think he will do?"

"If he is one of the right sort," said La Vieuville.

"You mean relentless?" said Boisberthelot.

The count and the chevalier looked at each other.

"Monsieur Boisberthelot, you have defined the meaning of the word. Relentless, – yes, that's what we need. This is a war that shows no mercy. The bloodthirsty are in the ascendant. The regicides have beheaded Louis XVI.; we will quarter the regicides. Yes, the general we need is General Relentless. In Anjou and Upper Poitou the leaders play the magnanimous; they trifle with generosity, and they are always defeated. In the Marais and the country of Retz, where the leaders are ferocious, everything goes bravely forward. It is because Charette is fierce that he stands his ground against Parrein, – hyena pitted against hyena."

Boisberthelot had no time to answer. Vieuville's words were suddenly cut short by a desperate cry, and at the same instant they heard a noise unlike all other sounds. This cry and the unusual sounds came from the interior of the vessel.

The captain and the lieutenant rushed to the gun-deck, but were unable to enter. All the gunners came running up, beside themselves with terror.

A frightful thing had just happened.

IV TORMENTUM BELLI

One of the carronades of the battery, a twenty-four pound cannon, had become loose.

This is perhaps the most dreadful thing that can take place at sea. Nothing more terrible can happen to a man-of-war under full sail.

A cannon that breaks loose from its fastenings is suddenly transformed into a supernatural beast. It is a monster developed from a machine. This mass runs along on its wheels as easily as a billiard ball; it rolls with the rolling, pitches with the pitching, comes and goes, stops, seems to meditate, begins anew, darts like an arrow from one end of the ship to the other, whirls around, turns aside, evades, rears, hits out, crushes, kills, exterminates. It is a ram battering a wall at its own pleasure. Moreover, the battering-ram is iron, the wall is wood. It is matter set free; one might say that this eternal slave is wreaking its vengeance; it would seem as though the evil in what we call inanimate objects had found vent and suddenly burst forth; it has the air of having lost its patience, and of taking a mysterious, dull revenge; nothing is so inexorable as the rage of the inanimate. The mad mass leaps like a panther; it has the weight of an elephant, the agility of a mouse, the obstinacy of the axe; it takes one by surprise, like the surge of the sea; it flashes like lightning; it is deaf as the tomb; it weighs ten thousand pounds, and it bounds like a child's ball; it whirls as it advances, and the circles it describes are intersected by right angles. And what help is there? How can it be overcome? A calm succeeds the tempest, a cyclone passes over, a wind dies away, we replace the broken mass, we check the leak, we extinguish the fire; but what is to be done with this enormous bronze beast? How can it be subdued? You can reason with a mastiff, take a bull by surprise, fascinate a snake, frighten a tiger, mollify a lion; but there is no resource with the monster known as a loosened gun. You cannot kill it, – it is already dead; and yet it lives. It breathes a sinister life bestowed on it by the Infinite. The plank beneath sways it to and fro; it is moved by the ship; the sea lifts the ship, and the wind keeps the sea in motion. This destroyer is a toy. Its terrible vitality is fed by the ship, the waves, and the wind, each lending its aid. What is to be done with this complication? How fetter this monstrous mechanism of shipwreck? How foresee its comings and goings, its recoils, its halts, its shocks? Any one of those blows may stave in the side of the vessel. How can one guard against these terrible gyrations? One has to do with a projectile that reflects, that has ideas, and changes its direction at any moment. How can one arrest an object in its course, whose onslaught must be avoided? The dreadful cannon rushes

about, advances, recedes, strikes to right and to left, flies here and there, baffles their attempts at capture, sweeps away obstacles, crushing men like flies.

The extreme danger of the situation comes from the unsteadiness of the deck. How is one to cope with the caprices of an inclined plane? The ship had within its depths, so to speak, imprisoned lightning struggling for escape; something like the rumbling of thunder during an earthquake. In an instant the crew was on its feet. It was the chief gunner's fault, who had neglected to fasten the screw-nut of the breeching chain, and had not thoroughly chocked the four trucks of the carronade, which allowed play to the frame and bottom of the gun-carriage, thereby disarranging the two platforms and parting the breeching. The lashings were broken, so that the gun was no longer firm on its carriage. The stationary breeching which prevents the recoil was not in use at that time. As a wave struck the ship's side the cannon, insufficiently secured, had receded, and having broken its chain, began to wander threateningly over the deck. In order to get an idea of this strange sliding, fancy a drop of water sliding down a pane of glass.

When the fastening broke, the gunners were in the battery, singly and in groups, clearing the ship for action. The carronade, thrown forward by the pitching, dashed into a group of men, killing four of them at the first blow; then, hurled back by the rolling, it cut in two an unfortunate fifth man, and struck and dismounted one of the guns of the larboard battery. Hence the cry of distress which had been heard. All the men rushed to the ladder. The gun-deck was empty in the twinkling of an eye.

The monstrous gun was left to itself. It was its own mistress, and mistress of the ship. It could do with it whatsoever it wished. This crew, accustomed to laugh in battle, now trembled. It would be impossible to describe their terror.

Captain Boisberthelot and Lieutenant la Vieuville, brave men though they were, paused at the top of the ladder, silent, pale, and undecided, looking down on the deck. Some one pushed them aside with his elbow, and descended. It was their passenger, the peasant, the man about whom they were talking a moment ago.

Having reached the bottom of the ladder he halted.

V VIS ET VIR

The cannon was rolling to and fro on the deck. It might have been called the living chariot of the Apocalypse. A dim wavering of lights and shadows was added to this spectacle by the marine lantern, swinging under the deck. The outlines of the cannon were indistinguishable, by reason of the rapidity of its motion; sometimes it looked black when the light shone upon it, then again it would cast pale, glimmering reflections in the darkness.

It was still pursuing its work of destruction. It had already shattered four other pieces, and made two breaches in the ship's side, fortunately above the water-line, but which would leak in case of rough weather. It rushed frantically against the timbers; the stout riders resisted, – curved timbers have great strength; but one could hear them crack under this tremendous assault brought to bear simultaneously on every side, with a certain omnipresence truly appalling.

A bullet shaken in a bottle could not produce sharper or more rapid sounds. The four wheels were passing and repassing over the dead bodies, cutting and tearing them to pieces, and the five corpses had become five trunks rolling hither and thither; the heads seemed to cry out; streams of blood flowed over the deck, following the motion of the ship. The ceiling, damaged in several places, had begun to give way. The whole ship was filled with a dreadful tumult.

The captain, who had rapidly recovered his self-possession, had given orders to throw down the hatchway all that could abate the rage and check the mad onslaught of this infuriated gun; mattresses, hammocks, spare sails, coils of rope, the bags of the crew, and bales of false assignats, with which the corvette was laden, – that infamous stratagem of English origin being considered a fair trick in war.

But what availed these rags? No one dared to go down to arrange them, and in a few moments they were reduced to lint.

There was just sea enough to render this accident as complete as possible. A tempest would have been welcome. It might have upset the cannon, and with its four wheels once in the air, it could easily have been mastered. Meanwhile the havoc increased. There were even incisions and fractures in the masts, that stood like pillars grounded firmly in the keel, and piercing the several decks of the vessel. The mizzen-mast was split, and even the main-mast was damaged by the convulsive blows of the cannon. The destruction of the battery still went on. Ten out of the thirty pieces were useless. The fractures in the side increased, and the corvette began to leak.

The old passenger, who had descended to the gun-deck, looked like one carved in stone as he stood motionless at the foot of the stairs and glanced sternly over the devastation. It would have been impossible to move a step upon the deck.

Each bound of the liberated carronade seemed to threaten the destruction of the ship. But a few moments longer, and shipwreck would be inevitable.

They must either overcome this calamity or perish; some decisive action must be taken. But what?

What a combatant was this carronade!

Here was this mad creature to be arrested, this flash of lightning to be seized, this thunderbolt to be crushed. Boisberthelot said to Vieuville: —

"Do you believe in God, chevalier?"

"Yes and no, sometimes I do!" replied La Vieuville.

"In a tempest?"

"Yes, and in moments like these."

"Truly God alone can save us," said Boisberthelot.

All were silent, leaving the carronade to its horrible uproar.

The waves beating the ship from without answered the blows of the cannon within, very much like a couple of hammers striking in turn.

Suddenly in the midst of this inaccessible circus, where the escaped cannon was tossing from side to side, a man appeared, grasping an iron bar. It was the author of the catastrophe, the chief gunner, whose criminal negligence had caused the accident, — the captain of the gun. Having brought about the evil, his intention was to repair it. Holding a handspike in one hand, and in the other a tiller rope with the slip-noose in it, he had jumped through the hatchway to the deck below.

Then began a terrible struggle; a titanic spectacle; a combat between cannon and cannoneer; a contest between mind and matter; a duel between man and the inanimate. The man stood in one corner in an attitude of expectancy, leaning on the rider and holding in his hands the bar and the rope; calm, livid, and tragic, he stood firmly on his legs, that were like two pillars of steel.

He was waiting for the cannon to approach him.

The gunner knew his piece, and he felt as though it must know him. They had lived together a long time. How often had he put his hand in its mouth. It was his domestic monster. He began to talk to it as he would to a dog. "Come," said he. Possibly he loved it.

He seemed to wish for its coming, and yet its approach meant sure destruction for him. How to avoid being crushed was the question. All looked on in terror.

Not a breath was drawn freely, except perhaps by the old man, who remained on the gun-deck gazing sternly on the two combatants.

He himself was in danger of being crushed by the piece; still he did not move.

Beneath them the blind sea had command of the battle. When, in the act of accepting this awful hand-to-hand struggle, the gunner approached to challenge the cannon, it happened that the surging sea held the gun motionless for an instant, as though stupefied. "Come on!" said the man. It seemed to listen.

Suddenly it leaped towards him. The man dodged. Then the struggle began, – a contest unheard of; the fragile wrestling with the invulnerable; the human warrior attacking the brazen beast; blind force on the one side, soul on the other.

All this was in the shadow. It was like an indistinct vision of a miracle.

A soul! – strangely enough it seemed as if a soul existed within the cannon, but one consumed with hate and rage. The blind thing seemed to have eyes. It appeared as though the monster were watching the man. There was, or at least one might have supposed it, cunning in this mass. It also chose its opportunity. It was as though a gigantic insect of iron was endowed with the will of a demon. Now and then this colossal grasshopper would strike the low ceiling of the gun-deck, then falling back on its four wheels, like a tiger on all fours, rush upon the man. He – supple, agile, adroit – writhed like a serpent before these lightning movements. He avoided encounters; but the blows from which he escaped fell with destructive force upon the vessel. A piece of broken chain remained attached to the carronade. This bit of chain had twisted in some incomprehensible way around the breech-button.

One end of the chain was fastened to the gun-carriage; the other end thrashed wildly around, aggravating the danger with every bound of the cannon. The screw held it as in a clenched hand, and this chain, multiplying the strokes of the battering-ram by those of the thong, made a terrible whirlwind around the gun, – a lash of iron in a fist of brass. This chain complicated the combat.

Despite all this, the man fought. He even attacked the cannon at times, crawling along by the side of the ship and clutching his handspike and the rope; the cannon seemed to understand his movements, and fled as though suspecting a trap. The man, nothing daunted, pursued his chase.

Such a struggle must necessarily be brief. Suddenly the cannon seemed to say to itself: Now, then, there must be an end to this. And it stopped. A crisis was felt to be at hand. The cannon, as if in suspense, seemed to meditate, or – for to all intents and purposes it was a living creature – it really did meditate, some furious design. All at once it rushed on the gunner, who sprang aside with a laugh, crying out, "Try it again!" as the cannon passed him. The gun in its fury smashed one of the larboard carronades; then, by the invisible sling in which it seemed to be held, it was thrown to the starboard, towards the man, who escaped. Three carronades were crushed by its onslaught; then, as though blind and beside itself, it turned from the man, and rolled from stern to stem, splintering the latter, and causing a breach in the walls of the prow. The gunner took refuge at the foot of the ladder, a short distance from the old man, who stood watching. He held his handspike in readiness. The cannon seemed aware of it, and without taking the trouble to turn, it rushed backward on the man, as swift as the blow of an axe. The gunner, if driven up against the side of the ship, would be lost.

One cry arose from the crew.

The old passenger – who until this moment had stood motionless – sprang forward more swiftly than all those mad whirls. He had seized a bale of the false assignats, and at the risk of being crushed succeeded in throwing it between the wheels of the carronade. This decisive and perilous manoeuvre could not have been executed with more precision and adroitness by an adept in all the exercises given in the work of Durosels' "Manual of Naval Gunnery."

The bale had the effect of a plug. A pebble may block a log; a branch sometimes changes the course of an avalanche. The carronade stumbled, and the gunner, availing himself of the perilous opportunity, thrust his iron bar between the spokes of the back wheels. Pitching forward, the cannon stopped; and the man, using his bar for a lever, rocked it backward and forward. The heavy mass upset, with the resonant sound of a bell that crashes in its fall. The man, reeking with perspiration, threw himself upon it, and passed the slip-noose of the tiller-rope around the neck of the defeated monster.

The combat was ended. The man had conquered. The ant had overcome the mastodon; the pygmy had imprisoned the thunderbolt.

The soldiers and sailors applauded.

The crew rushed forward with chains and cables, and in an instant the cannon was secured.

Saluting the passenger, the gunner exclaimed, —

"Sir, you have saved my life!"

The old man had resumed his impassible attitude, and made no reply.

VI THE TWO ENDS OF THE SCALE

The man had conquered; but it might be affirmed that the cannon also had gained a victory. Immediate shipwreck was averted; but the corvette was still in danger. The injuries the ship had sustained seemed irreparable. There were five breaches in the sides, one of them — a very large one — in the bow, and twenty carronades out of thirty lay shattered in their frames. The recaptured gun, which had been secured by a chain, was itself disabled. The screw of the breech-button being wrenched, it would consequently be impossible to level the cannon. The battery was reduced to nine guns; there was a leakage in the hold. All these damages must be repaired without loss of time, and the pumps set in operation. Now that the gun-deck had become visible, it was frightful to look upon. The interior of a mad elephant's cage could not have been more thoroughly devastated. However important it might be for the corvette to avoid observation, the care for its immediate safety was still more imperative. They were obliged to light the deck with lanterns placed at intervals along the sides.

In the mean time, while this tragic entertainment had lasted, the crew, entirely absorbed by a question of life and death, had not noticed what was going on outside of the ship. The fog had thickened, the weather had changed, the wind had driven the vessel at will; they were out of their course, in full sight of Jersey and Guernsey, much farther to the south than they ought to have been, and confronting a tumultuous sea. The big waves kissed the wounded sides of the corvette with kisses that savored of danger. The heaving of the sea grew threatening; the wind had risen to a gale; a squall, perhaps a tempest, was brewing. One could not see four oars' length before one.

While the crew made haste with their temporary repairs on the gun-deck, stopping the leaks and setting up the cannons that had escaped uninjured, the old passenger returned to the deck.

He stood leaning against the main-mast.

He had taken no notice of what was going on in the ship. The Chevalier de la Vieuville had drawn up the marines on either side of the main-mast, and at a signal-whistle of the boatswain the sailors, who had been busy in the rigging, stood up on the yards. Count Boisberthelot approached the passenger. The captain was followed by a man, who, haggard and panting, with his dress in disorder, still wore on his countenance an expression of content.

It was the gunner who had so opportunely displayed his power as a tamer of monsters, and gained the victory over the cannon.

The count made a military salute to the old man in the peasant garb, and said to him: —

"Here is the man, general."

The gunner, with downcast eyes, stood erect in a military attitude.

"General," resumed Count Boisberthelot, "considering what this man has done, do you not think that his superiors have a duty to perform?"

"I think so," replied the old man.

"Be so good as to give your orders," resumed Boisberthelot.

"It is for you to give them; you are the captain."

"But you are the general," answered Boisberthelot.

The old man looked at the gunner.

"Step forward," he said.

The gunner advanced a step.

Turning to Count Boisberthelot, the old man removed the cross of Saint Louis from the captain's breast, and fastened it on the jacket of the gunner. The sailors cheered, and the marines presented arms.

Then pointing to the bewildered gunner he added:

"Now let the man be shot!"

Stupor took the place of applause.

Then, amid a tomb-like silence, the old man, raising his voice, said: —

"The ship has been endangered by an act of carelessness, and may even yet be lost. It is all the same whether one be at sea or face to face with the enemy. A ship at sea is like an army in battle. The tempest, though unseen, is ever present; the sea is an ambush. Death is the fit penalty for every fault committed when facing the enemy. There is no fault that can be retrieved. Courage must be rewarded and negligence punished."

These words fell one after the other slowly and gravely, with a certain implacable rhythm, like the strokes of the axe upon an oak-tree. Looking at the soldiers, the old man added, —

"Do your duty!"

The man on whose breast shone the cross of Saint Louis bowed his head, and at a sign of Count Boisberthelot two sailors went down to the gun-deck, and presently returned bringing the hammock-shroud; the two sailors were accompanied by the ship's chaplain, who since the departure had been engaged in saying prayers in the officers' quarters. A sergeant detached from the ranks twelve soldiers, whom he arranged in two rows, six men in a row. The gunner placed himself between the two lines. The chaplain, holding a crucifix, advanced and took his place beside the man. "March!" came from the lips of the sergeant; and the platoon slowly moved towards the bow, followed by two sailors canning the shroud.

A gloomy silence fell on the corvette. In the distance a hurricane was blowing. A few moments later, a report echoed through the gloom; one flash, and all was still. Then came the splash of a body falling into the water. The old passenger, still leaning against the main-mast, his hands crossed on his breast, seemed lost in thought. Boisberthelot, pointing towards him with the forefinger of his left hand, remarked in an undertone to La Vieuville, —

"The Vendée has found a leader."

VII HE WHO SETS SAIL INVESTS IN A LOTTERY

But what was to become of the corvette? The clouds that had mingled all night with the waves had now fallen so low that they overspread the sea like a mantle, and completely shut out the horizon. Nothing but fog, — always a dangerous situation, even for a seaworthy vessel.

A heavy swell was added to the mist.

They had improved their time; the corvette had been lightened by throwing into the sea everything that they had been able to clear away after the havoc caused by the carronade, — dismantled cannons, gun-carriages, twisted or loosened timbers, splintered pieces of wood and iron; the port-holes were opened, and the corpses and parts of human bodies, wrapped in tarpaulin, were slid down on planks into the sea.

The sea was running high. Not that the tempest was imminent. On the other hand, it seemed as if the hurricane, that was rumbling afar off on the horizon, and the wind were both decreasing and moving northward; but the waves were still high, showing an angry sea, and the corvette in its disabled condition could with difficulty resist the shocks, so that the high waves might prove fatal to it. Gacquoil, absorbed in thought, remained at the helm. To show a bold front in the presence of danger is the habit of commanders.

La Vieuville, whose spirits rose in time of trouble, addressed Gacquoil.

"Well, pilot," he said, "the squall has subsided. Its sneezing-fit came to naught. We shall pull through. We shall get some wind, and nothing more."

"We can't have wind without waves."

A true sailor, neither gay nor sad; and his reply was charged with an anxious significance. For a leaking ship a high sea means a rapid sinking. Gacquoil had emphasized this prediction by frowning. Perhaps he thought that after the catastrophe with the cannon and the gunner, La Vieuville had been too quick to use light-hearted, almost cheerful, words. Certain things bring ill-luck at sea. The sea is reticent; one never knows its intentions, and it is well to be on one's guard.

La Vieuville felt obliged to resume his gravity.

"Where are we, pilot?" he asked.

"In the hands of God," replied the pilot.

A pilot is a master; he must always be allowed to do what pleases him, and often to say what he chooses. That kind of man is not apt to be loquacious. La Vieuville left him, after asking a question to which the horizon soon replied.

The sea had suddenly cleared.

The trailing fogs were rent; the dusky heaving waves stretched as far as the eye could penetrate into the dim twilight, and this was the sight that lay before them.

The sky was shut in by clouds, although they no longer touched the water. The dawn had begun to illumine the east, while in the west the setting moon still cast a pale glimmering light. These two pallid presences in opposite quarters of the sky outlined the horizon in two narrow bands of light between the dark sea and the gloomy sky. Black silhouettes were sketched against them, upright and motionless.

In the west, against the moonlit sky, three high cliffs stood forth, like Celtic cromlechs.

In the east, against the pale horizon of the morning, eight sails drawn up in a row in formidable array came in view. The three cliffs were a reef, the eight sails a squadron. Behind them was Minquiers, a cliff of ill-repute, and in front were the French cruisers. With an abyss on the left hand, and carnage on the right, they had to choose between shipwreck and a battle. The corvette must either encounter the cliffs with a damaged hull, a shattered rigging, and broken masts, or face a battle, knowing that twenty out of the thirty cannons of which her artillery consisted were disabled, and the best of her gunners dead.

The dawn was still feint, and the night not yet ended. This darkness might possibly last for quite a long time, as it was caused mostly by the clouds that hung high in the air, thick and dense, looking like a solid vault.

The wind had scattered the sea-fog, driving the corvette on Minquiers.

In her extreme weakness, and dilapidated as she was, she hardly obeyed the helm as she rolled helplessly along, lashed onward by the force of the waves.

The Minquiers – that tragic reef! – was more dangerous at that time than it is now. Several of the turrets of this marine fortress have been worn away by the incessant action of the sea. The form of reefs changes; waves are fitly likened unto swords; each tide is like the stroke of a saw. At that time, to be stranded on the Minquiers meant certain death. The cruisers composed the squadron of Cancale, – the one that afterwards became so famous under the command of Captain Duchesne, called by Lequinio "Père Duchesne."

The situation was critical. During the struggle with the carronade the ship had wandered unconsciously from her course, sailing more in the direction of Granville than of St. Malo. Even had her sailing power been unimpaired, the Minquiers would have barred her return to Jersey, while the cruisers hindered her passage towards France. Although there was no storm, yet, as the pilot had said, the sea was rough. Rolled by the heavy wind over a rocky bottom, it had grown savage.

The sea never tells what it wants at the first onset. Everything lies concealed in its abyss, even trickery. One might almost affirm that it has a scheme. It advances and recedes; it offers and refuses;

it arranges for a storm, and suddenly gives up its intention; it promises an abyss, and fails to keep its agreement; it threatens the north, and strikes the south. All night long the corvette "Claymore" labored with the fog and feared the storm; the sea had disappointed them in a savage sort of way. It had drawn a storm in outline, and filled in the picture with a reef.

It was to be a shipwreck in any event, but it had assumed another form, and with one enemy to supplement the work of the other, it was to combine a wreck on the surf with destruction by battle.

"A shipwreck on the one hand and a fight on the other!" exclaimed Vieuville amid his gallant laughter. "We have thrown double fives on both sides!"

VIII

9: 380

The corvette was little better than a wreck.

A sepulchral solemnity pervaded the dim twilight, the darkness of the clouds, the confused changes of the horizon, and the mysterious sullenness of the waves. There was no sound except the hostile blasts of the wind. The catastrophe rose majestic from the abyss. It looked more like an apparition than an attack. No stir on the rocks, no stir on the ships. The silence was overpowering beyond description. Were they dealing with reality? It was like a dream passing over the sea. There are legends that tell of such visions. The corvette lay, so to speak, between a demon reef and a phantom fleet.

Count Boisberthelot in a low voice gave orders to La Vieuville, who went down to the gun-deck, while the captain, seizing his telescope, stationed himself behind the pilot. Gacquoil's sole effort was to keep up the corvette to the wind; for if struck on her side by the sea and the wind, she would inevitably capsize.

"Pilot, where are we?" said the captain.

"On the Minquiers."

"On which side?"

"On the worst one."

"What kind of bottom?"

"Small rocks."

"Can we turn broadside on?"

"We can always die."

The captain turned his spy-glass towards the west and examined the Minquiers; then turning it to the east he watched the sails that were in sight.

The pilot went on, as though speaking to himself:

"Yonder is the Minquiers. That is where the laughing sea-mew and the great black-hooded gull stop to rest when they migrate from Holland."

Meanwhile the captain had counted the sails.

There were, indeed, eight ships drawn up in line, their warlike profiles rising above the water. In the centre was seen the stately outline of a three-decker.

The captain questioned the pilot.

"Do you know those ships?"

"Of course I do."

"What are they?"

"That's the squadron."

"Of the French?"

"Of the Devil."

A silence ensued; and again the captain resumed his questions.

"Are all the cruisers there?"

"No, not all."

In fact, on the 2d of April, Valazé had reported to the Convention that ten frigates and six ships of the line were cruising in the Channel. The captain remembered this.

"You are right," he said; "the squadron numbers sixteen ships, and only eight are here."

"The others are straggling along the coast down below, on the lookout," said Gacquoil.

Still gazing through his spy-glass the captain murmured, —

"One three-decker, two first-class and five second-class frigates."

"I too have seen them close at hand," muttered Gacquoil. "I know them too well to mistake one for the other."

The captain passed his glass to the pilot.

"Pilot, can you make out distinctly the largest ship?"

"Yes, commander. It is the 'Côte-d'Or.'"

"They have given it a new name. It used to be the 'États de Bourgogne,' — a new ship of a hundred and twenty-eight cannon."

He took a memorandum-book and pencil from his pocket, and wrote down the number "128."

"Pilot, what is the first ship on the port?"

"The 'Expérimentée.'"

"A frigate of the first class; fifty-two guns. She was fitting out at Brest two months ago."

The captain put down on his note-book the number "52."

"What is the second ship to port, pilot?"

"The 'Dryade.'"

"A frigate of the first class; forty eighteen-pounders. She has been in India, and has a glorious military record."

And below the "52" he wrote the number "40." Then, raising his head, he said, —

"Now, on the starboard?"

"They are all second-class frigates, commander; there are five of them."

"Which is the first one from the ship?"

"The 'Résolue.'"

"Thirty-two eighteen-pounders. The second?"

"The 'Richmond.'"

"Same. Next?"

"The 'Athée.'"

"A queer name to sail under. Next?"

"The 'Calypso.'"

"Next?"

"The 'Preneuse.'"

"Five frigates, each of thirty-two guns."

The captain wrote "160" under the first numbers.

"You are sure you recognize them, pilot?" he asked.

"You also know them well, commander. It is something to recognize them; but it is better to know them."

The captain, with his eyes on the note-book, was adding up the column to himself.

"One hundred and twenty-eight, fifty-two, forty, one hundred and sixty."

Just then La Vieuville came up on deck.

"Chevalier," exclaimed the captain, "we are facing three hundred and eighty cannon."

"So be it," replied La Vieuville.

"You have just been making an inspection, La Vieuville: how many guns have we fit for service?"

"Nine."

"So be it," responded Boisberthelot in his turn; and taking the telescope from the pilot, he scanned the horizon.

The eight black and silent ships, though they appeared immovable, continued to increase in size. They were gradually drawing nearer.

La Vieuville saluted the captain.

"Commander," he said, "here is my report. I mistrusted this corvette 'Claymore.' It is never pleasant to be suddenly ordered on board a ship that neither knows nor loves you. An English ship is a traitor to the French. That slut of a carronade proved this. I have made the inspection. The anchors are good; they are not made of inferior iron, but hammered out of solid bars; the flukes are solid; the cables are excellent, easy to pay out, and have the requisite length of one hundred and twenty fathoms. Plenty of ammunition; six gunners dead; each gun has one hundred and seventy-one rounds."

"Because there are only nine cannon left," grumbled the captain.

Boisberthelot levelled his glass to the horizon. The squadron continued its slow approach. Carronades have one advantage: three men are sufficient to man them. But they also have a disadvantage: they do not carry as far, and shoot with less precision than cannon. It was therefore necessary to let the squadron approach within the range of the carronades.

The captain gave his orders in a low voice. Silence reigned on the ship. No signal to clear the decks for action had been given, but still it had been done. The corvette was as helpless to cope with men as with the sea. They did their best with this remnant of a war-ship. Near the tiller-ropes on the gangway were piled spare hawsers and cables, to strengthen the mast in case of need. The quarters for the wounded were put in order. According to the naval practice of those days, they barricaded the deck, – which is a protection against balls, but not against bullets. The ball-gauges were brought, although it was rather late to ascertain the caliber; but they had not anticipated so many incidents. Cartridge-boxes were distributed among the sailors, and each one secured a pair of pistols and a dirk in his belt. Hammocks were stowed away, guns were pointed, and muskets, axes, and grapplings prepared. The cartridge and bullet stores were put in readiness; the powder-magazine was opened; every man stood at his post. Not a word was spoken while these preparations went on amid haste and gloom; and it seemed like the room of a dying person.

Then the corvette was turned broadside on. She carried six anchors, like a frigate, and all of them were cast, – the spare anchor forward, the kedger aft, the sea-anchor towards the open, the ebb-anchor towards the breakers, the bower-anchor to starboard, and the sheet-anchor to port. The nine uninjured carronades were placed as a battery on the side towards the enemy.

The squadron, equally silent, had also finished its evolutions. The eight ships now stood in a semicircle, of which Minquiers formed the chord. The "Claymore" enclosed within this semicircle, and held furthermore by its own anchors, was backed by the reef, – signifying shipwreck. It was like a pack of hounds surrounding a wild boar, not giving tongue, but showing its teeth.

It seemed as if each side were waiting for something.

The gunners of the "Claymore" stood to their guns.

Boisberthelot said to La Vieuville, —

"I should like to be the first to open fire."

"A coquette's fancy," replied La Vieuville.

IX SOME ONE ESCAPES

The passenger had not left the deck; he watched all that was going on with his customary impassibility.

Boisberthelot went up to him.

"Sir," he said, "the preparations are completed. We are now clinging to our grave; we shall not relax our hold. We must succumb either to the squadron or to the reef. The alternative is before us: either shipwreck among the breakers or surrender to the enemy. But the resource of death is still left; better to fight than be wrecked. I would rather be shot than drowned; fire before water, if the choice be left to me. But where it is our duty to die it is not yours. You are the man chosen by princes. You have an important mission, – that of directing the Vendean war. Your death might result in the failure of monarchy; therefore you must live. While honor requires us to stand by the ship, it calls on you to escape. You must leave us, General; I will provide you with a boat and a man. You may succeed in reaching the shore, by making a *détour*. It is not yet daylight; the waves are high and the sea dark. You will probably escape. There are occasions when to flee means to conquer."

The old man bent his stately head in token of acquiescence.

Count Boisberthelot raised his voice.

"Soldiers and sailors!" he called.

Every movement ceased, and from all sides faces were turned in the direction of the captain.

He continued: —

"This man who is among us represents the king. He has been intrusted to our care; we must save him. He is needed for the throne of France. As we have no prince, he is to be, – at least we hope so, – the leader of the Vendée. He is a great general. He was to land with us in France; now he must land without us. If we save the head we save all."

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried the voices of all the crew.

The captain went on: —

"He too is about to face a serious danger. It is not easy to reach the coast. The boat must be large enough to live in this sea, and small enough to escape the cruisers. He must land at some safe point, and it will be better to do so nearer Fougères than Coutances. We want a hardy sailor, a good oars-man and a strong swimmer, a man from that neighborhood, and one who knows the straits. It is still so dark that a boat can put off from the corvette without attracting attention; and later there will be smoke enough to hide it from view. Its size will be an advantage in the shallows. Where the panther is caught, the weasel escapes. Although there is no outlet for us, there may be for a small rowboat; the enemy's ships will not see it, and, what is more, about that time we shall be giving them plenty of diversion. Is it decided?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried the crew.

"Then there is not a moment to be lost," continued the captain. "Is there a man among you willing to undertake the business?"

In the darkness, a sailor stepped out of the ranks and said, —

"I am the man."

X

DOES HE ESCAPE?

A few minutes later, one of those small boats called a gig, which are always devoted to the use of the captain, pushed off from the ship. There were two men in this boat, – the passenger in the stern, and the volunteer sailor in the bow. The night was still very dark. The sailor, according to the captain's instructions, rowed energetically towards the Minquiers. For that matter, it was the only direction in which he could row. Some provisions had been placed in the bottom of the boat, – a bag of biscuits, a smoked tongue, and a barrel of water.

Just as they were lowering the gig, La Vieuville, a very scoffer in the presence of destruction, leaning over the stern-post of the corvette, cried out in his cool sneering voice a parting word: —

"Very good for escaping, and still better for drowning."

"Sir, let us joke no more," said the pilot.

They pushed off rapidly, and soon left the corvette far behind. Both wind and tide were in the oars-man's favor, and the small skiff flew rapidly along, wavering to and fro in the twilight, and hidden by the high crests of the waves.

A gloomy sense of expectation brooded over the sea.

Suddenly amid this illimitable, tumultuous silence a voice was heard; exaggerated by the speaking-trumpet, as by the brazen mask of ancient tragedy, it seemed almost superhuman.

It was Captain Boisberthelot speaking.

"Royal marines," he exclaimed, "nail the white flag to the mizzen-mast! We are about to look upon our last sunrise!"

And the corvette fired a shot.

"Long live the King!" shouted the crew.

Then from the verge of the horizon was heard another shout, stupendous, remote, confused, and yet distinct, —

"Long live the Republic!"

And a din like unto the roar of three hundred thunderbolts exploded in the depths of the sea.

The conflict began. The sea was covered with fire and smoke.

Jets of spray thrown up by the balls as they struck the water rose from the sea on all sides.

The "Claymore" was pouring forth flame on the eight vessels; the squadron, ranged in a semicircle around her, opened fire from all its batteries. The horizon was in a blaze. A volcano seemed to have sprung from the sea. The wind swept to and fro this stupendous crimson drapery of battle through which the vessels appeared and disappeared like phantoms. Against the red sky in the foreground were sketched the outlines of the corvette.

The fleur-de-lis flag could be seen floating from the main-mast.

The two men in the boat were silent. The triangular shoal of the Minquiers, a kind of submarine Trinacrium, is larger than the isle of Jersey. The sea covers it. Its culminating point is a plateau that is never submerged, even at the highest tide, and from which rise, towards the northeast, six mighty rocks standing in a line, producing the effect of a massive wall which has crumbled here and there. The strait between the plateau and the six reefs is accessible only to vessels drawing very little water. Beyond this strait is the open sea.

The sailor who had volunteered to manage the boat headed for the strait. Thus he had put Minquiers between the boat and the battle. He navigated skilfully in the narrow channel, avoiding rocks to starboard and port. The cliff now hid the battle from their view. The flaming horizon and the furious din of the cannonade were growing less distinct, by reason of the increased distance; but judging from the continued explosions one could guess that the corvette still held its own, and that it meant to use its hundred and ninety-one rounds to the very last. The boat soon found itself in smooth waters beyond the cliffs and the battle, and out of the reach of missiles. Gradually the surface of the sea lost something of its gloom; the rays of light that had been swallowed up in the shadows began to widen; the curling foam leaped forth in jets of light, and the broken waves sent back their pale reflections. Daylight appeared.

The boat was beyond reach of the enemy, but the principal difficulty still remained to be overcome. It was safe from grape-shot, but the danger of shipwreck was not yet past. It was on the open sea, a mere shell, with neither deck, sail, mast, nor compass, entirely dependent on its oars, face to face with the ocean and the hurricane, — a pygmy at the mercy of giants.

Then amid this infinite solitude, his face whitened by the morning light, the man in the bow of the boat raised his head and gazed steadily at the man in the stern as he said, —

"I am the brother of him whom you ordered to be shot."

BOOK III HALMALO

I SPEECH IS WORD

The old man slowly lifted his head.

He who had addressed him was about thirty years of age. The tan of the sea was upon his brow; there was something unusual about his eyes, as if the simple pupils of the peasant had taken on the keen expression of the sailor; he held his oars firmly in his hands. He looked gentle enough. In his belt he wore a dirk, two pistols, and a rosary.

"Who are you?" said the old man.

"I have just told you."

"What do you wish?"

The man dropped the oars, folded his arms, and replied, —

"To kill you."

"As you please!" replied the old man.

The man raised his voice.

"Prepare yourself."

"For what?"

"To die."

"Why?" inquired the old man.

A silence followed. For a moment the question seemed to abash the man. He continued, —

"I tell you that I mean to kill you."

"And I ask of you the reason."

The sailor's eyes flashed.

"Because you killed my brother."

The old man answered quietly, —

"I saved his life at first."

"True. You saved him first, but you killed him afterwards."

"It was not I who killed him."

"Who was it, then?"

"His own fault."

The sailor gazed on the old man open-mouthed; then once more his brows contracted savagely.

"What is your name?" asked the old man.

"My name is Halmalo, but I can kill you all the same, whether you know my name or not."

Just then the sun rose; a ray struck the sailor full in the face, vividly illumining that wild countenance.

The old man studied it closely. The cannonading, though not yet ended, was no longer continuous. A dense smoke had settled upon the horizon. The boat, left to itself, was drifting to leeward.

With his right hand the sailor seized one of the pistols at his belt, while in his left he held his rosary.

The old man rose to his feet.

"Do you believe in God?" he asked.

"Our Father who art in heaven." replied the sailor.

Then he made the sign of the cross.

"Have you a mother?"

He crossed himself again, saying, —

"I have said all I have to say. I give you one minute longer, my lord."

And he cocked the pistol.

"Why do you call me 'My lord'?"

"Because you are one. That is evident enough."

"Have you a lord yourself?"

"Yes, and a grand one too. Is one likely to be without a lord?"

"Where is he?"

"I do not know. He has left the country. His name is Marquis de Lantenac, Viscount de Fontenay, Prince in Brittany; he is lord of the Sept-Forêts. I never saw him, but he is my master all the same."

"If you were to see him, would you obey him?"

"Of course I should be a heathen were I not to obey him! We owe obedience to God, and after that to the king, who is like unto God, and then to the lord, who is like the king. But that has nothing to do with the question; you have killed my brother, and I must kill you."

The old man replied, —

"Let us say, then, that I did kill your brother; I did well."

The sailor had closed more firmly upon his pistol.

"Come!" he said.

"So be it," said the old man.

And he added composedly, —

"Where is the priest?"

The sailor looked at him.

"The priest?"

"Yes. I gave your brother a priest; therefore it is your duty to provide one for me."

"But I have none," replied the sailor.

And he continued, —

"How do you expect to find a priest here on the open sea?"

The convulsive explosions of the battle sounded more and more distant.

"Those who are dying yonder have their priest," said the old man.

"I know it," muttered the sailor; "they have the chaplain."

The old man went on, —

"If you make me lose my soul, it will be a serious matter."

The sailor thoughtfully bent his head.

"And if my soul is lost," continued the old man, "yours will be lost also. Listen to me; I feel pity for you. You shall do as you like. For my part, I only fulfilled my duty when I first saved your brother's life and afterwards took it from him; and at the present moment I am doing my duty in trying to save your soul. Reflect; for it is a matter that concerns you. Do you hear the cannon-shots? Men are dying over yonder; desperate men, in their last agony, husbands who will never see their wives, fathers who will never see their children, brothers who, like yourself, will never see their brothers. And who is to blame for it? Your own brother. You believe in God, do you not? If so, you know that God is suffering now. He is suffering in the person of his son, the most Christian king of France, who is a child like the child Jesus, and who is now imprisoned in the Temple; God is suffering in his Church of Brittany, in his desecrated cathedrals, in his Gospels torn to fragments, in his violated houses of prayer, in his murdered priests. What were we about to do with that ship which is perishing at this moment? We were going to the relief of the Lord. If your brother had been a trustworthy servant, if he had performed his duties faithfully, like a good and useful man, no misfortune would

have happened to the carronade, the corvette would not have been disabled, she would not have got out of her course and fallen into the hands of that cursed fleet, and we should all now be landing in France, brave sailors and soldiers as we were, sword in hand, with our white banner unfurled, a multitude of contented, happy men, advancing to the rescue of the brave Vendean peasants, on our way to save France, the king, and Almighty God. That is what we were intending to do, what we should have done, and what I, the only one remaining, still propose to do. But you intend to prevent me. In this struggle of impious men against priests, in this conflict of regicides against the king, of Satan against God, you range yourself in the ranks of Satan. Your brother was the Devil's first assistant, you are his second. What he began you mean to finish. You are for the regicides against the throne; you take sides with the impious against the Church. You take away the Lord's last resource. For, as I shall not be there, – I, who represent the king, – villages will continue to burn, families to mourn, priests to bleed, Brittany to suffer, the king to remain imprisoned, and Jesus Christ to grieve over his people. And who will have caused all this? You. Well, you are carrying out your own plans. I expected far different things from you, but I was mistaken. It is true that I killed your brother. He played a brave part, for that I rewarded him; he was guilty, therefore I punished him. He failed in his duty; I have not failed in mine. What I did I would do again; and I swear by the great Saint Anne of Auray, who looks down on us, that under like circumstances I would shoot my own son just as I shot your brother. Now you are the master. Indeed, I pity you. You have broken your word to the captain, – you, Christian without faith; you, Breton without honor. I was intrusted to your loyalty, and you accepted the trust meaning to betray it; you offer my death to those to whom you have promised my life. Do you realize whom you are destroying here? It is your own self. You rob the king of my life, and you consign yourself forever to the Devil. Go on, commit your crime. You set a low value on your share in Paradise. Thanks to you, the Devil will conquer; thanks to you, the churches will fall; thanks to you, the heathen will go on turning bells into cannon, – men will be shot with the very instrument that once brought to mind the salvation of their souls. Perhaps at this moment, while I still speak to you, the same bell that pealed for your baptism is killing your mother. Go on with the Devil's work. Do not pause. Yes, I have condemned your brother; but learn this, – I am but a tool in the hands of God. Ah I you pretend to judge God's ways? You will next sit in judgment on the thunderbolt in the heavens. Wretched man, you will be judged by it. Beware what you do. Do you even know whether I am in a state of grace? No. Never mind, go on; do your will. You have the power to hurl me to perdition, and yourself likewise. Your own damnation, as well as mine, rests in your hands. You will be answerable before God. We are alone, face to face with the abyss; complete your work, make an end of it. I am old, and you are young; I have no weapons, you are armed: kill me."

While the old man, standing erect, was uttering these words in a voice that rang above the tumult of the sea, the undulations of the waves showed him now in shadow, now in light. The sailor had turned ghostly pale; large drops of moisture fell from his brow; he trembled like a leaf; now and then he kissed his rosary. When the old man finished, he threw away his pistol and fell on his knees.

"Pardon, my lord! forgive me!" he cried. "You speak like our Lord himself. I have been wrong. My brother was guilty. I will do all I can to make amends for his crime. Dispose of me; command me: I will obey."

"I forgive you," said the old man.

II

A PEASANT'S MEMORY IS WORTH AS MUCH AS THE CAPTAIN'S SCIENCE

The provisions with which the boat had been stocked were far from superfluous; for the two fugitives were forced to make long détours, and were thirty-six hours in reaching the coast. They

passed the night at sea; but the night was fine, with more moonlight than is pleasing to people who wish to escape observation.

At first they were obliged to keep away from the French coast, and gain the open sea in the direction of Jersey. They heard the final volley from the unfortunate corvette, and it sounded like the roar of a lion whom the hunters are killing in the forest. Then a silence fell upon the sea.

The corvette "Claymore" perished like the "Vengeur;" but glory has kept no record of its deeds. One can win no laurels who fights against his native land.

Halmalo was a remarkable sailor. He performed miracles of skill and sagacity. The route that he improvised amid the reefs, the waves, and the vigilance of the enemy was a masterpiece. The wind had abated, and the struggle with the sea was over. Halmalo had avoided the Caux des Minquiers, and having rounded the Chaussée aux Boeufs, took refuge there, so as to get a few hours of rest in the little creek formed by the sea at low tide; then rowing southward, he continued to pass between Granville and the Chausey Islands without being noticed by the lookout either of Chausey or Granville. He entered the Bay of Saint-Michel, – a daring feat, considering that the cruising squadron was anchored at Cancale.

On the evening of the second day, about an hour before sunset, he passed the hill of Saint-Michel, and landed on a shore that is always avoided on account of the danger from its shifting sand.

Fortunately the tide was high.

Halmalo pushed the boat as far as he could, tried the sand, and, finding it firm, grounded the boat and jumped ashore, the old man following, with eyes turned anxiously towards the horizon.

"My lord," said Halmalo, "this is the mouth of the Couesnon. We have Beauvoir to starboard, and Huisnes to port. The belfry before us is Ardevon."

The old man bent over the boat, took from it a biscuit, which he put in his pocket, and said to Halmalo, —

"You may take the rest."

Halmalo put what remained of meat and biscuit in the bag, and hoisted it on his shoulder. Having done this, he said, —

"My lord, am I to lead the way, or to follow you?"

"You will do neither."

Halmalo looked at the old man in amazement.

The latter went on, —

"We are about to separate, Halmalo. Two men are of no use whatever. Unless they are a thousand, it is better for one man to be alone."

He stopped and pulled out of his pocket a knot of green silk resembling a cockade; with a fleur-de-lis embroidered in gold in the centre.

"Can you read?" he asked.

"No."

"That is fortunate. A man who knows how to read is embarrassing. Have you a good memory?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Listen, Halmalo. You will follow the road on the right, and I the one on the left. You are to turn in the direction of Bazouges, and I shall go towards Fougères. Keep your bag, because it makes you look like a peasant; hide your weapons; cut yourself a stick from the hedge; creep through the tall rye; glide behind the hedges; climb over fences and cross the fields: you will thus avoid the passers-by, as well as roads and bridges. Do not enter Pontorson. Ah! you will have to cross the Couesnon. How will you manage that?"

"I shall swim across."

"Excellent. Then you will come to a ford. Do you know where it is?"

"Between Nancy and Vieux-Viel."

"Correct. You are evidently familiar with the country."

"But night is coming on. Where will my lord sleep?"

"I can take care of myself. And where will you sleep?"

"There are plenty of *émousses*. I was a peasant before I was a sailor."

"Throw away your sailor hat; it would betray you. You can surely find some worsted head-covering."

"Oh, a cap is easily found. The first fisherman I meet will sell me his."

"Very well. Now listen. You are familiar with the woods?"

"All of them."

"Throughout this entire neighborhood?"

"From Noirmoutier to Laval."

"Do you know their names too?"

"I know the woods and their names; I know all about them."

"You will forget nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Good. Now mind. How many leagues can you walk in a day?"

"Ten, fifteen, eighteen, twenty, if need be."

"It will have to be done. Do not miss a word of what I am about to tell you. You will go to the woods of Saint-Aubin."

"Near Lamballe?"

"Yes. On the edge of a ravine between Saint-Rieul and Plédéliac there is a large chestnut-tree. You will stop there. No one will be in sight."

"But a man will be there nevertheless. On that I can depend."

"You will give the call. Do you know it?"

Halmalo puffed out his cheeks, turned towards the sea, and there rang the "to-whit-to-hoo" of the owl.

One would have supposed it came from the depths of a forest, so owl-like and sinister was the sound.

"Good!" said the old man. "You have it."

He extended to Halmalo the green silk knot.

"This is my commander's badge. Take it. No one must know my name at present; but this knot is sufficient. The fleur-de-lis was embroidered by Madame Royale in the Temple prison."

Halmalo knelt. Trembling with awe he received the knot embroidered with the fleur-de-lis, and in the act of raising it to his lips, he paused as if in fear.

"May I?" he asked.

"Yes, since you kiss the crucifix."

Halmalo kissed the fleur-de-lis.

"Rise," said the old man.

Halmalo obeyed him, placing the knot in his bosom.

"Listen carefully to what I am about to say. This is the order: 'Revolt! Give no quarter.' On the edge of the forest of Saint-Aubin you will give the call, repeating it three times. After the third time you will see a man rise from the ground."

"I know, from a hole under the trees."

"That man will be Planchenault, sometimes called Coeur-de-Roi. To him you will show this knot. He will know what it means. Then you are to go by ways that you must discover for yourself to the woods of Astillé, where you will see a cripple surnamed Mousqueton, a man who shows mercy to no human being. You are to tell him that I love him, and that he must stir up the parishes in his neighborhood. Thence you will go to the wood of Couesbon, which is one mile from Ploërmel. When you give the owl-cry, a man will come out of a hole; that will be M. Thuault, seneschal of Ploërmel, who formerly belonged to the Constitutional Assembly, but on the royalist side. You will direct him

to fortify the castle of Couesbon, that belongs to the Marquis de Guer, a refugee. Ravines, woods of moderate extent, uneven soil, a good spot. M. Thuault is an able and upright man. From there you will go to Saint-Guen-les-Toits, and speak to Jean Chouan, whom I look upon as the actual leader, and then to the woods of Ville-Anglose, where you will see Gutter, called Saint-Martin; you will tell him to keep his eye on a certain Courmesnil, son-in-law of the old Goupil de Préfel, and who is the head of the Jacobins of Argentan. Remember all this. I write nothing, because writing must be avoided. La Rouarie made out a list, which ruined everything. Thence you will go to the wood of Rougefeu, where Miélette lives, he who leaps across ravines by the help of a long pole."

"They call it a leaping-pole."

"Do you know how to use it?"

"Am I not a Breton peasant? The leaping-pole is our friend. It makes our arms bigger, our legs longer."

"That is to say, it reduces the enemy and shortens the way. An excellent machine."

"Once, with my leaping-pole, I stood my ground against three salt-tax men armed with sabres."

"When was that?"

"Ten years ago."

"Under the king?"

"Certainly."

"Against whom?"

"I really do not know. I was a salt-smuggler."

"Very good."

"It was called fighting against the collectors of the salt-tax. Is the tax on salt the same thing as the king?"

"Yes, and no. But it is not necessary for you to understand this."

"I ask monseigneur's pardon for having put a question to monseigneur."

"Let us go on. Do you know the Tourgue?"

"Do I know it! I came from there."

"How is that?"

"Why, because I come from Parigné."

"To be sure, the Tourgue borders on Parigné."

"Do I know the Tourgue! The great round castle belongs to the family of my lords. A large iron door separates the old building from the new part, which a cannon could not destroy. In the new building they keep the famous book on Saint-Barthélémy, which people come to see as a curiosity. The grass is full of frogs. When I was a boy I used to play with those frogs. And the underground passage, too. Perhaps I am the only one left who knows about that."

"What underground passage? I don't know what you are talking about."

"That was in old times, when the Tourgue was besieged. The people inside could escape through an underground passage which opened into the woods."

"I know there are subterranean passages of that kind in the châteaux of Jupellière and Hunaudaye, and in the tower of Champéon; but there is nothing like it in the Tourgue."

"But indeed there is, monseigneur. I do not know the passages of which monseigneur speaks; I only know the one in the Tourgue because I belong in the neighborhood; and besides, I am the only one who does know of it. It was never spoken of. It was forbidden, because this passage had been used in the wars of M. de Rohan. My father knew the secret and showed it to me. I know both the secret entrance and the outlet. If I am in the forest I can go into the tower; and if I am in the tower I can go into the forest without being seen, so that when the enemies enter there is no one to be found. That is the passage of the Tourgue. Oh, I know it well."

The old man remained silent for a moment.

"You must be mistaken. If there had been any such secret I should have known it."

"Monseigneur, I am sure of it. There is a stone that turns."

"Oh, yes! You peasants believe in turning-stones, in singing-stones, and in stones that go by night down to a neighboring brook to drink. A pack of idle tales!"

"But when I turned the stone myself –"

"Yes, just as others have heard it sing. My friend, the Tourgue is a Bastille, safe and strong, and easily defended; but he would be a simpleton indeed who depended for escape on a subterranean passage."

"But, monseigneur –"

The old man shrugged his shoulders, —

"Let us waste no more time, but speak of business."

This peremptory tone checked Halmalo's persistence.

The old man resumed: —

"Let us go on. Listen. From Rougefeu you are to go into the wood of Montchevrier, where you will find Bénédicité, the leader of the Twelve. He is another good man. He recites his *Bénédicite* while he has people shot. There is no room for sensibility in warfare. From Montchevrier you will go –"

He broke off.

"I had forgotten about the money."

He took from his pocket a purse and a pocket-book, which he put into Halmalo's hands.

"In this pocket-book you will find thirty thousand francs in paper money, which is worth about three livres and ten sous. The assignats are false, to be sure, but the real ones are no more valuable; and in this purse, mind, you will find one hundred louis d'ors. I give you all I have, because I have no need of anything here, and it is better that no money should be found on me. Now I will go on. From Montchevrier you are to go to Antrain, where you will meet M. de Frotté; from Antrain to Jupellière, where you will see M. de Rochecotte; from Jupellière to Noirieux, where you will find the Abbé Baudoin. Will you remember all this?"

"As I do my Pater Noster."

"You will see M. Dubois-Guy at Saint-Brice-en-Cogle, M. de Turpin at Morannes, which is a fortified town, and the Prince de Talmont at Château-Gonthier."

"Will a prince speak to me?"

"Am I not speaking to you?"

Halmalo took off his hat.

"You need but to show Madam's fleur-de-lis, and your welcome is assured. Remember that you will have to go to places where there are mountaineers and *patauds*.³ You will disguise yourself. That is an easy matter, since the republicans are so stupid that with a blue coat, a three-cornered hat, and a cockade, you may go anywhere. The day of regiments and uniforms has gone by; the regiments are not even numbered, and every man is at liberty to wear any rag he fancies. You will go to Saint-Mhervé. You will see Gaulier, called Grand-Pierre. You will go to the cantonment of Parné, where all the men have swarthy faces. They put gravel in their muskets and use a double charge of powder to make more noise. They do well; but be sure and tell them to kill, kill, and kill. You will go to the camp of the Vache-Noire, which is an elevation in the midst of the forest of La Charnie, from Vache-Noire to the camp of l'Avoine, then to the camp Vert, and afterwards to the camp of the Fourmis. You will go to Grand-Bordage, also called Haut-du-Pré, where lives the widow whose daughter married Treton the Englishman; that is in the parish of Quelaines. You will visit Épineux-le-Chevreuil, Sillé-le-Guillaume, Guillaume, Parannes, and all the men in hiding throughout the woods. You will make friends and you will send them to the borders of upper and lower Maine; you will see Jean Treton in the parish of Vaisges, Sans-Regret in Bignon, Chambord in Bonchamps, the Corbin brothers at Maisoncelles, and Petit-Sans-Peur at Saint-Jean-sur-Evre. He is the one who is called Bourdoiseau.

³ A name given by the Chouans to the republicans, a corruption of patriot. – TR.

Having done this, and uttered the watchwords, 'Revolt!' 'No quarter!' in all these places, you will join the royal and catholic grand army, wherever it may be. You will see d'Elbée, de Lescure, de la Rochejaquelein, and such leaders as may still be living. You will show them my commander's knot. They know what it means. You are only a sailor, but Cathelineau is nothing but a teamster. You will give them this message from me: It is time to join the two wars, the great and the small. The great one makes more noise, but the small one does the work. The Vendée does fairly well, but Chouannerie goes farther, and in civil war cruelty is a powerful agent. The success of a war depends on the amount of evil that it causes."

He broke off.

"Halmalo, I tell you all this, not that you can understand the words, but because your perceptions are keen, and you will comprehend the matters themselves. I have trusted you since I saw you managing that boat. Without knowing anything of geometry you execute wonderful sea manoeuvres. He who can pilot a boat can guide an insurrection. Judging from the way in which you managed our affair at sea, I feel sure that you will execute my instructions equally well. But to resume: So you will repeat to the chiefs all that I have told you, or words to the same effect, as near as you can remember; I am confident that you will convey to them my meaning. I prefer the warfare of the forest to that of the open field. I have no intention of exposing one hundred thousand peasants to the grape-shot of the soldiers in blue and the artillery of M. Carnot. In a month's time I expect to have five hundred sharp-shooters hidden in the woods. The republican army is my game. Poaching is one method of warfare. The strategy of the thickets for me! Ah, that is probably another word which you will not understand; but never mind, – you know what I mean when I say, No quarter! and ambushes on every side! Give me more Chouannerie rather than the regular Vendean warfare. You will add that the English are on our side. Let us catch the republic between two fires. Europe helps us: let us put down revolution. Kings are waging a war of kingdoms: we will wage a war of parishes. You will say all this. Do you understand me?"

"Yes: put all to fire and sword."

"That is it,"

"No quarter."

"None whatever. You understand?"

"I will go everywhere."

"And be always on your guard; for in these parts it is an easy matter to lose one's life."

"Death I have no fear of. He who takes his first step may be wearing his last shoes."

"You are a brave fellow."

"And if I am asked monseigneur's name?"

"It is not to be made known yet. You are to say that you do not know it, and you will say the truth."

"Where shall I see monseigneur again?"

"At the place where I am going."

"How shall I know where that is?"

"All the world will know it. Before eight days have gone by you will hear of me. I shall make examples; I shall avenge the king and religion; and you will know well enough that it is I of whom they are speaking."

"I understand."

"Do not forget anything."

"You may rest assured of that."

"Now go, and may God guide you! Go!"

"I will do all you bid me. I will go; I will speak; I will obey; I will command."

"Good."

"And if I succeed – "

"I will make you a knight of Saint-Louis."

"Like my brother. And if I fail, you will have me shot?"

"Like your brother."

"So be it, monseigneur."

The old man bent his head, and seemed to fall into a gloomy reverie. When he raised his eyes he was alone. Halmalo was only a black speck vanishing on the horizon.

The sun had just set; the sea-mews and hooded gulls were flying homeward from the ocean, and the atmosphere was charged with that well-known restlessness that precedes the night; the tree-frogs croaked, the kingfishers flew whistling from the pools, the gulls and rooks kept up their usual evening clamor, and the shore-birds called to each other, but not a human sound was to be heard. It was absolute solitude, – not a sail on the bay, not a peasant in the fields; only a bleak expanse as far as the eye could reach. The tall sand-thistles quivered; the pale twilight sky shed a livid light over all the shore; and the ponds far away on the dark plain looked like sheets of pewter laid flat upon the ground. A sea-wind was blowing.

BOOK IV TELLMARCH

I ON THE TOP OF THE DUNE

The old man waited until Halmalo was out of sight; then drawing his sea-cloak more closely around him, he started walking slowly, wrapt in thought. He took the direction of Huisnes; Halmalo had gone towards Beauvoir.

Behind him rose the enormous triangle of Mont Saint-Michel, with its cathedral tiara and its cuirass-like fortress, whose two great eastern towers – the one round, the other square – help the mountain to bear up under the burden of the church and the village. As the pyramid of Cheops is a landmark in the desert, so is Mont-Saint Michel a beacon to the sea.

The quicksands in the bay of Mont Saint-Michel act imperceptibly upon the dunes. At that time between Huisnes and Ardevon there was a very high one, which is no longer in existence. This dune, levelled by an equinoctial gale, was unusually old, and on its summit stood a milestone, erected in the twelfth century in memory of the council held at Avranches against the assassins of Saint Thomas of Canterbury. From its top one could see all the surrounding country, and ascertain the points of the compass.

The old man directed his steps to this dune, and ascended it.

When he reached the summit, he seated himself on one of the four projecting stones, and leaning back against the monument, began to examine the land that lay spread out like a geographical map at his feet. He seemed to be looking for a route in a country that had once been familiar to him. In this broad landscape, obscured by the twilight, nothing was distinctly visible but the dark line of the horizon against the pale sky.

One could see the clustered roofs of eleven hamlets and villages; and all the belfries of the coast were visible several miles away, standing high that they might serve as beacons to the sailors in time of need.

Some minutes later the old man seemed to have found what he was looking for in this dim light; his eye rested on an enclosure of trees, walls, and roofs, partially visible between the valley and the wood: it was a farm. He nodded his head with an expression of satisfaction, like one who says to himself, "There it is!" and began to trace with his finger the outlines of a route across the hedges and the fields. From time to time he gazed intently at a shapeless and somewhat indistinct object that was moving above the principal roof of the farm, and seemed to ask himself what it could be. It was colorless and dim, in consequence of the time of day. It was not a weather-vane, because it was floating; and there seemed to be no reason why it should be a flag.

He felt weary; and grateful to rest on the stone where he was sitting, he yielded to that vague sense of oblivion which the first moment of repose brings to weary men. There is one hour of the day which may be called noiseless, – the peaceful hour of early evening; that hour had come, and he was enjoying it. He gazed, he listened. To what? To perfect tranquillity. Even savage natures have their moments of melancholy. Suddenly this tranquillity was – not exactly disturbed, but sharply defined by the voices of those who were passing below. They were the voices of women and children. It was like a joyous chime of bells heard unexpectedly in the darkness. The group from which the voices came could not be distinguished, on account of the underbrush; but it was evident that the persons were walking along the foot of the dune, in the direction of the plain and the forest. As those clear, fresh voices reached the old man where he sat absorbed in thought, they were so near that he lost not a word.

A woman's voice said, —

"Let us hurry, Flécharde. Is this the way?"

"No; it is over yonder."

And the dialogue went on between the two voices, the one high and shrill, the other low and timid.

"What is the name of this farm where we are living now?"

"Herbe-en-Pail."

"Are we still far from it?"

"Fully a quarter of an hour."

"Let us make haste and get there in time for the soup."

"Yes, I know we are late."

"We ought to run; but your mites are tired. We are only two women, and cannot carry three brats. And then, you, Flécharde, you are carrying one as it is, — a perfect lump of lead. You have weaned that little gormandizer, and you still carry it. That is a bad habit; you had better make it walk. Well, the soup will be cold, — worse luck!"

"Ah, what good shoes you gave me! They fit as though they were made for me."

"It's better than going barefooted."

"Do hurry, René-Jean."

"He is the one who makes us late; he has had to stop and speak to all the little village girls that we meet. He behaves like a man already."

"Of course he does; he is going on five years old."

"Tell us, René-Jean, why did you speak to that little girl in the village?"

A child's voice, that of a boy, replied, —

"Because I know her."

"How is that? You know her?" said the woman.

"Yes," answered the boy; "because we played games this morning."

"Well, I must say!" exclaimed the woman. "We have been here only three days; a boy no bigger than your fist, and he has found a sweetheart already!"

And the voices grew fainter in the distance, and every sound died away.

II

AURES HABET, ET NON AUDIET

The old man sat motionless. He was not consciously thinking, nor yet was he dreaming. Around him was peace, repose, assurance of safety, solitude. Although night had shut down upon the woods, and in the valley below it was nearly dark, broad daylight still rested on the dune. The moon was rising in the east, and several stars pricked the pale blue of the zenith. This man, although intensely absorbed in his own interests, surrendered himself to the unutterable peacefulness of nature. He felt the vague dawn of hope rising in his breast, — if the word "hope" may fitly be applied to projects of civil warfare. For the moment it seemed to him that in escaping from the inexorable sea he had left all danger behind him. No one knew his name; he was alone, — lost, as far as concerned the enemy; he had left no traces behind him, for the surface of the sea preserves no trace; all is hidden, ignored, and never even suspected. He felt unspeakably calm. A little more, and he would have fallen asleep.

It was the deep silence pervading both heaven and earth that lent to the hour a subtle charm to soothe the imagination of this man, stirred as he was by inward and outward agitations.

There was nothing to be heard but the wind blowing in from the sea, a prolonged monotonous bass, to which the ear becomes so used that it almost ceases to be noticed as a sound.

All at once he rose to his feet

His attention was suddenly awakened. An object on the horizon seemed to arrest his glance.

He was gazing at the belfry of Cormeray, at the farther end of the valley. Something unusual was going on in this belfry.

Its dark silhouette was clearly defined against the sky; the tower surmounted by the spire could be seen distinctly, and between the tower and the spire was the square cage for the bell, without a penthouse, and open on the four sides, after the fashion of Breton belfries. Now this cage seemed to open and shut by turns, and at regular intervals; its lofty aperture looked now perfectly white, and the next moment black, the sky constantly appearing and vanishing, eclipse following the light, as the opening and shutting succeeded each other with the regularity of a hammer striking an anvil.

This belfry of Cormeray lay before him at a distance of some two leagues. He looked towards the right in the direction of the belfry of Baguer-Pican, which also rose straight against the horizon, and the cage of that belfry was opening and closing like the belfry of Cormeray. He looked towards the left at the belfry of Tanis; the cage of Tanis opened and closed like that of Baguer-Pican. He examined all the belfries on the horizon, one after another, – the belfries of Courtils, of Précey, of Crollon, and of Croix-Avranchin on his right hand, those of Raz-sur-Couesnon, of Mordray, and of the Pas on his left, and before him the belfry of Pontorson. Every belfry cage was changing alternately from white to black.

What could it mean?

It meant that all the bells were ringing, and they must be ringing violently to cause the light to change so rapidly.

What was it, then? The tocsin, beyond a doubt. They were ringing, and frantically too, from all the belfries, in every parish, and in every village, and yet not a sound could be heard.

This was owing to the distance, combined with the sea-wind, which, blowing from the opposite direction, carried all sounds from the shore away beyond the horizon.

All these frantic bells ringing on every side, and at the same time this silence; what could be more appalling?

The old man looked and listened.

He could not hear the tocsin, but he could see it. Seeing the tocsin is rather a strange sensation.

Against whom was this fury directed?

Against whom was the tocsin ringing?

III

THE USEFULNESS OF BIG LETTERS

Some one was surely caught in a trap.

Who could it be?

A shudder shook this man of steel.

It could not be he. His arrival could not have been discovered. It was impossible for the representatives to have learned it already, for he had but just stepped on shore. The corvette had surely foundered with all on board; and even on the corvette Boisberthelot and La Vieuville were the only men who knew his name.

The bells kept up their savage sport. He counted them mechanically, and in the abrupt transition from the assurance of perfect safety to a terrible sense of danger, his thoughts wandered restlessly from one conjecture to another. However, after all, this ringing might be accounted for in many different ways, and he finally reassured himself by repeating, "In short, no one knows of my arrival here, or even my name."

For several minutes there had been a slight noise overhead and behind him, – a sound resembling the rustling of a leaf; at first he took no notice of it, but as it continued, persisted, one might almost say, he finally turned. It was really a leaf, – a leaf of paper. The wind was struggling to tear off a large placard that was pasted on the milestone above his head. The placard had but just

been pasted; for it was still moist, and had become a prey to the wind, which in its sport had partly detached it.

The old man had not perceived it, because he had ascended the dune on the opposite side.

He stepped up on the stone where he had been sitting, and placed his hand on the corner of the placard that fluttered in the wind. The sky was clear; in June the twilight lasts a long time, and although it was dark at the foot of the dune, the summit was still light. A part of the notice was printed in large letters; it was yet sufficiently light to read it, and this was what he read: —

THE FRENCH REPUBLIC, ONE AND INDIVISIBLE

We, Prieur of the Marne, representative of the people, in command of the army on the coast of Cherbourg, give notice, That the ci-devant Marquis of Lantenac, Viscount of Fontenay, calling himself a Breton prince, and who has secretly landed on the coast of Granville, is outlawed. A price has been set upon his head. Whoever captures him dead or alive will receive sixty thousand livres. This sum will be paid in gold, and not in paper money. A battalion of the army of the coast guards of Cherbourg will be at once despatched for the apprehension of the former Marquis of Lantenac. The inhabitants of the parishes are ordered to lend their aid.

Given at the Town Hall of Granville the second of June, 1793.

Signed:

PRIEUR, DE LA MARNE.

Below this name there was another signature written in smaller characters, which the fading light prevented him from deciphering. Pulling his hat down over his eyes, and muffling himself in his sea-cape up to his chin, the old man hastily descended the dune. Evidently it was not safe to tarry any longer on this lighted summit.

Perhaps he had stayed there too long already. The top of the dune was the only point of the landscape that still remained visible.

When he had descended and found himself in the darkness he slackened his pace.

He took the road leading to the farm which he had traced out, evidently believing himself safe in that direction. It was absolute solitude. There were no passers-by at this hour.

Stopping behind a clump of bushes, he unfastened his cloak, turned his waistcoat with the hairy side out, refastened his cloak, that was but a rag held by a string around his neck, and resumed his journey.

It was bright moonlight.

He came to a place where two roads forked, and on the pedestal of the old stone cross which stood there a white square could be distinguished, — undoubtedly another placard like the one he had lately read. As he drew near to it he heard a voice.

"Where are you going?" it said; and turning he beheld a man in the hedge-row, tall like himself, and of about the same age, with hair as white and garments even more ragged than his own, — almost his very double.

The man stood leaning on a long staff.

"I asked you where you were going?" he repeated.

"In the first place, tell me where I am," was the reply, uttered in tones of almost haughty composure.

And the man answered, —

"You are in the seigneurie of Tanis, of which I am the beggar and you the lord."

"I?"

"Yes, you, — monsieur le marquis de Lantenac."

IV THE CAIMAND

The Marquis de Lantenac (henceforth we shall call him by his name) replied gravely, —

"Very well. Then deliver me up."

The man continued, —

"We are both at home here, — you in the castle, I in the bushes."

"Let us put an end to this. Do what you have to do. Deliver me to the authorities," said the Marquis.

The man went on, —

"You were going to the farm Herbe-en-Pail, were you not?"

"Yes."

"Don't go there."

"Why not?"

"Because the Blues are there."

"How long have they been there?"

"These three days past."

"Did the inhabitants of the farm and village resist?"

"No; they opened all the doors."

"Ah!" said the Marquis.

The man indicated with his finger the roof of the farm, which was visible in the distance above the trees.

"Do you see that roof, Marquis?"

"Yes."

"Do you see what there is above it?"

"Something waving?"

"Yes."

"It is a flag."

"The tricolor," said the man.

It was the object that had attracted the attention of the Marquis when he stood on the top of the dune.

"Isn't the tocsin ringing?" inquired the Marquis.

"Yes."

"On what account?"

"Evidently on yours."

"But one cannot hear it?"

"The wind prevents it from being heard."

The man continued, —

"Did you see that notice about yourself?"

"Yes."

"They are searching for you."

Then glancing towards the farm, he added, —

"They have a demi-battalion over there."

"Of republicans?"

"Of Parisians."

"Well," said the Marquis, "let us go on."

And he made a step in the direction of the farm. The man seized him by the arm.

"Don't go there!"

"Where would you have me go?"

"With me."

The Marquis looked at the beggar.

"Listen to me, Marquis: My home is not a fine one, but it is safe, – a hut lower than a cellar, seaweed for a floor, and for a ceiling a roof of branches and of grass. Come. They would shoot you at the farm, and at my house you will have a chance to sleep; you must be weary. To-morrow the Blues start out again, and you can go where you choose."

The Marquis studied the man.

"On which side are you, then?" asked the Marquis. "Are you a royalist, or a republican?"

"I am a beggar."

"Neither royalist nor republican?"

"I believe not."

"Are you for or against the king?"

"I have no time for that sort of thing."

"What do you think of what is transpiring?"

"I think that I have not enough to live on."

"Yet you come to my aid."

"I knew that you were outlawed. What is this law, then, that one can be outside of it? I do not understand. Am I inside the law, or outside of it? I have no idea. Does dying of hunger mean being inside the law?"

"How long have you been dying of hunger?"

"All my life."

"And you propose to save me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I said to myself, 'There is a man who is poorer than I, for he has not even the right to breathe.'"

"True. And so you mean to save me?"

"Certainly. Now we are brothers, my lord, – beggars both; I for bread, and you for life."

"But do you know there is a price set on my head?"

"Yes."

"How did you know it?"

"I have read the notice."

"Then you can read?"

"Yes, and write also. Did you think I was like the beasts of the field?"

"But since you can read, and have seen the notice, you must know that he who delivers me up will receive sixty thousand francs."

"I know it."

"Not in assignats."

"Yes, I know, – in gold."

"You realize that sixty thousand francs is a fortune?"

"Yes."

"And that the man who arrests me will make his fortune?"

"Yes; and what then?"

"His fortune!"

"That is exactly what I thought. When I saw you, I said to myself, 'To think that whoever arrests this man will earn sixty thousand francs, and make his fortune! Let us make haste to hide him.'"

The Marquis followed the beggar.

They entered a thicket. There was the beggar's den, a sort of chamber in which a large and ancient oak had allowed the man to take up his abode; it was hollowed out under its roots, and covered with its branches, – dark, low, hidden, actually invisible, – and in it there was room for two.

"I foresaw that I might have a guest," said the beggar.

This kind of subterranean lodging, less rare in Brittany than one might imagine, is called a *carnichot*. The same name is also given to hiding-places built in thick walls. The place was furnished with a few jugs, a bed of straw or sea-weed, washed and dried, a coarse kersey blanket, and a few tallow dips, together with a flint and steel, and twigs of furze to be used as matches.

They stooped, crawling for a moment, and penetrated into a chamber divided by the thick roots of the tree into fantastic compartments, and seated themselves on the heap of dry sea-weed that served as a bed. The space between the two roots through which they had entered, and which served as a door, admitted a certain amount of light. Night had fallen; but the human eye adapts itself to the change of light, and even in the darkness it sometimes seems as if the daylight lingered still. The reflection of a moonbeam illumined the entrance. In the corner was a jug of water, a loaf of buckwheat bread, and some chestnuts.

"Let us sup," said the beggar.

They divided the chestnuts; the Marquis gave his bit of hard-tack; they ate of the same black loaf, and drank in turn out of the same jug of water, meanwhile conversing.

The Marquis questioned the man.

"So it is all one to you, whatever happens?"

"Pretty much. It is for you who are lords to look out for that sort of business."

"But then, what is going on now, for instance – "

"It is all going on over my head."

The beggar added, —

"Besides, there are things happening still higher; the sun rises, the moon waxes and wanes. That is the kind of thing that interests me."

He took a swallow from the jug and said, —

"Good fresh water!"

Then he continued, —

"How do you like this water, my lord?"

"What is your name?" asked the Marquis.

"My name is Tellmarch, but they call me the Caimand."

"I understand. *Caimand* is a local word."

"Which means beggar. I am also called Le Vieux."

He went on, —

"I have been called Le Vieux for forty years."

"Forty years! But you must have been young then!"

"I was never young. You are young still, Marquis. You have the legs of a man of twenty; you can climb the great dune, while I can hardly walk. A quarter of a mile tires me out. Yet we are of the same age; but the rich have an advantage over us, – they eat every day. Eating keeps up one's strength."

After a silence the beggar went on: —

"Wealth and poverty, – there's the mischief; it seems to me that that is the cause of all these catastrophes. The poor want to be rich, and the rich do not want to become poor. I think that is at the bottom of it all, but I do not trouble myself about such matters; let come what may, I am neither for the creditor nor for the debtor. I know that there is a debt, and somebody is paying it; that is all. I would rather they had not killed the king, and yet I hardly know why. And then one says to me, 'Think how they used to hang people for nothing at all! Think of it! For a miserable shot fired at one of the king's deer, I once saw a man hung: he had a wife and seven children.' There is something to be said on both sides."

He was silent again, then resumed: —

"Of course you understand. I do not pretend to know just how matters stand; men go to and fro, changes take place, while I live beneath the stars."

Again Tellmarch became thoughtful, then went on: —

"I know something of bone-setting and medicine. I am familiar with herbs and the use of plants; the peasants see me preoccupied for no apparent reason, and so I pass for a wizard. Because I dream, they think that I am wise."

"Do you belong to the neighborhood?" asked the Marquis.

"I have never left it."

"Do you know me?"

"Certainly. The last time I saw you, you were passing through this part of the country on your way to England; that was two years ago. Just now I saw a man on the top of the dune, — a tall man. Tall men are not common hereabouts; Brittany is a country of short men. I looked more closely; I had read the notice, and I said to myself, 'See here!' And when you came down, the moon was up and I recognized you."

"But I do not know you,"

"You have looked at me, but you never saw me." And Tellmarch the Caimand added, —

"I saw you. The passer-by and the beggar look with different eyes."

"Have I ever met you before?"

"Often, for I am your beggar. I used to beg on the road, below your castle. Sometimes you gave me alms; he who gives takes no notice, but he who receives looks anxiously and observes well. A beggar is a born spy. But though I am often sad, I try not to be a malicious spy. I used to hold out my hand, and you saw nothing but that, into which you threw the alms that I needed in the morning to keep me from dying of hunger at night. Frequently I went twenty-four hours without food. Sometimes a penny means life itself. I am paying you now for the life I owe you."

"True, you are saving my life."

"Yes, I am saving your life, monseigneur."

The voice of Tellmarch grew solemn: —

"On one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you have not come here to do harm."

"I have come here to do good."

"Let us sleep," said the beggar.

They lay down side by side on the bed of sea-weed. The beggar dropped to sleep at once. The Marquis, although much fatigued, remained awake for some time, thinking and watching his companion in the darkness; finally he lay back. Lying upon the bed was equivalent to lying on the earth, and he took advantage of this to put his ear to the ground and listen. He could hear a hollow subterranean rumbling. It is a fact that sound is transmitted into the bowels of the earth; he could hear the ringing of the bells.

The tocsin continued.

The Marquis fell asleep.

V

WHEN HE AWOKE IT WAS DAYLIGHT

The beggar was standing up, — not in his den, for it was impossible to stand erect there, but outside on the threshold. He was leaning on his staff, and the sunshine fell upon his face.

"Monseigneur," said Tellmarch, "it has just struck four from the belfry of Tanis. I heard it strike, — therefore the wind has changed; it comes from the land, and as I heard no other sound the

tocsin must have ceased. All is quiet at the farm and in the village of Herbe-en-Pail. The Blues are either sleeping or gone. The worst of the danger is over; it will be prudent for us to separate. This is my time for going out."

He indicated a point in the horizon.

"I am going this way;" then pointing in the opposite direction, he said, —

"You are to go that way."

The beggar gravely waved his hand to the Marquis.

"Take those chestnuts with you, if you are hungry," he added, pointing to the remains of the supper.

A moment after he had disappeared among the trees.

The Marquis rose and went in the direction indicated by Tellmarch.

It was that charming hour called in the old Norman peasant dialect the "peep of day." The chirping of the finches and of the hedge-sparrows was heard. The Marquis followed the path that they had traversed the day before, and as he emerged from the thicket he found himself at the fork of the roads marked by the stone cross. The placard was still there, looking white and almost festive in the rising sun. He remembered that there was something at the foot of this notice that he had not been able to read the evening before, on account of the small characters and the fading light. He went up to the pedestal of the cross. Below the signature "Prieur, de la Marne," the notice ended with the following lines in small characters: —

The identity of the ci-devant Marquis of Lantenac having been established,
he will be executed without delay.

Signed:

GAUVAIN,

Chief of Battalion in Command of Exploring Column

"Gauvain!" said the Marquis.

He paused, wrapt in deep thought, his eyes fixed on the placard.

"Gauvain!" he repeated.

He started once more, turned, looked at the cross, came back, and read the placard over again.

Then he slowly walked away. Had any one been near, he might have heard him mutter to himself in an undertone: —

"Gauvain!"

The roofs of the farm on his left were not visible from the sunken paths through which he was stealing. He skirted a precipitous hill, covered with blossoming furze, of the species known as the thorny furze. This eminence was crowned by one of those points of land called in this district a *hure*,⁴ and at its base the trees cut off the view at once. The foliage seemed bathed in light. All Nature felt the deep joy of morning.

Suddenly this landscape became terrible. It was like the explosion of an ambushade. An indescribable tornado of wild cries and musket-shots fell upon these fields and woods all radiant with the morning light, and from the direction of the farm rose a dense smoke mingled with bright flames, as though the village and the farm were but a truss of burning straw. It was not only startling but awful, — this sudden change from peace to wrath; like an explosion of hell in the very midst of dawn, a horror without transition. A fight was going on in the direction of Herbe-en-Pail. The Marquis paused.

⁴ A head. — TR.

No man in a case like this could have helped feeling as he did; curiosity is more powerful than fear. One must find out what is going on, even at the risk of life. He climbed the hill at the foot of which lay the sunken path. From there, although the chances were that he would be discovered, he could at least see what was taking place. In a few moments he stood on the *hure* and looked about him. In fact, there was both a fusillade and a fire. One could hear the cries and see the fire. The farm was evidently the centre of some mysterious catastrophe. What could it be? Was it attacked? And if so, by whom? Could it be a battle? Was it not more likely to be a military execution? By the orders of a revolutionary decree the Blues frequently punished refractory farms and villages by setting them on fire. For instance, every farm and hamlet which had neglected to fell the trees as prescribed by law, and had not opened roads in the thickets for the passage of republican cavalry, was burned. It was not long since the parish of Bourgon near Ernée had been thus punished. Was Herbe-en-Pail a case in point? It was evident that none of those strategic openings ordered by the decree had been cut, either in the thickets or in the environs of Tanis and Herbe-en-Pail. Was this the punishment thereof? Had an order been received by the advanced guard occupying the farm? Did not this advanced guard form a part of one of those exploring columns called *colonnes infernales*?

The eminence on which the Marquis had stationed himself was surrounded on all sides by a wild and bristling thicket called the grove of Herbe-en-Pail; it was about as large as a forest, however, and extended to the farm, concealing, as all Breton thickets do, a network of ravines, paths, and sunken roads, – labyrinths wherein the republican armies frequently went astray.

This execution, if execution it were, must have been a fierce one, for it had been rapid. Like all brutal deeds, it had been done like a flash. The atrocity of civil war admits of these savage deeds. While the Marquis, vainly conjecturing, and hesitating whether to descend or to remain, listened and watched, this crash of extermination ceased, or, to speak more accurately, vanished. The Marquis could see the fierce and jubilant troop as it scattered through the grove. There was a dreadful rushing to and fro beneath the trees. From the farm they had entered the woods. Drums beat an attack, but there was no more firing. It was like a *battue*; they seemed to be following a scent. They were evidently looking for some one; the noise was wide-spread and far-reaching. There were confused outcries of wrath and triumph, a clamor of indistinct sounds. Suddenly, as an outline is revealed in a cloud of smoke, one sound became clearly defined and audible in this tumult. It was a name, repeated by thousands of voices, and the Marquis distinctly heard the cry, —

"Lantenac, Lantenac! The Marquis of Lantenac!" They were looking for him.

VI THE VICISSITUDES OF CIVIL WAR

Around him suddenly, from all directions, the thicket was filled with muskets, bayonets, and sabres, a tricolored banner was unfurled in the dim light, and the cry, "Lantenac!" burst forth on his ears, while at his feet through the brambles and branches savage faces appeared.

The Marquis was standing alone on the top of the height, visible from every part of the wood. He could scarcely distinguish those who shouted his name, but he could be seen by all. Had there been a thousand muskets in the wood, he offered them a target. He could distinguish nothing in the coppice, but the fiery eyes of all were directed upon him.

He took off his hat, turned back the brim, and drawing from his pocket a white cockade, he pulled out a long dry thorn from a furze-bush, with which he fastened the cockade to the brim of his hat, then replaced it on his head, the upturned brim revealing his forehead and the cockade, and in a loud voice, as though addressing the wide forest, he said: —

"I am the man you seek. I am the Marquis de Lantenac, Viscount de Fontenay, Breton Prince, Lieutenant-General of the armies of the king. Make an end of it. Aim! Fire!"

And opening with both hands his goat-skin waistcoat, he bared his breast.

Lowering his eyes to see the levelled guns, he beheld himself surrounded by kneeling men.

A great shout went up, – "Long live Lantenac! Long live our lord! Long live the General!"

At the same time hats were thrown up and sabres whirled joyously, while from all sides brown woollen caps hoisted on long poles were waving in the air.

A Vendean band surrounded him.

At the sight of him they fell on their knees.

Legends tell us that the ancient Thuringian forests were inhabited by strange beings, – a race of giants, at once superior and inferior to men, – whom the Romans regarded as horrible beasts, and the Germans as divine incarnations, and who might chance to be exterminated or worshipped according to the race they encountered.

A sensation similar to that which may have been felt by one of those beings was experienced by the Marquis when, expecting to be treated like a monster, he was suddenly worshipped as a deity.

All those flashing eyes were fastened upon him with a kind of savage love.

The crowd were armed with guns, sabres, scythes, poles, and sticks. All wore large felt hats or brown caps, with white cockades, a profusion of rosaries and charms, wide breeches left open at the knee, jackets of skin, and leather gaiters; the calves of their legs were bare, and they wore their hair long; some looked fierce, but all had frank and open countenances.

A young man of noble bearing passed through the crowd of kneeling men and hastily approached the Marquis. He wore a felt hat with an upturned brim, a white cockade, and a skin jacket, like the peasants; but his hands were delicate and his linen was fine, and over his waistcoat was a white silk scarf, from which hung a sword with a golden hilt.

Having reached the *hure*, he threw aside his hat, unfastened his scarf, and kneeling, presented to the Marquis both scarf and sword.

"Indeed we were seeking for you," he said, "and we have found you. Receive the sword of command. These men are yours now. I was their commander; now am I promoted, since I become your soldier. Accept our devotion, my lord. General, give me your orders."

At a sign from him, men carrying the tricolored banner came forth from the woods, and going up to the Marquis, placed it at his feet. It was the one he had seen through the trees.

"General," said the young man who presented the sword and the scarf, "this is the flag which we took from the Blues who held the farm Herbe-en-Pail. My name is Gavard, my lord. I was with the Marquis de la Rouarie."

"Very well," said the Marquis.

And calm and composed he girded on the scarf.

Then he pulled out his sword, and waving it above his head, he cried, —

"Rise! And long live the king!"

All started to their feet. Then from the depth of the woods arose a tumultuous and triumphant cry, —

"Long live the king! Long live our Marquis! Long live Lantenac!"

The Marquis turned towards Gavard.

"How many are you?"

"Seven thousand."

While they were descending the hill, the peasants clearing away the furze-bushes to make a path for the Marquis de Lantenac, Gavard continued: —

"All this may be explained in a word, my lord: nothing could be more simple. It needed but a spark. The republican placard in revealing your presence has roused the country for the king. Besides, we have been secretly notified by the mayor of Granville, who is one of us, – the same who saved the Abbé Ollivier. They rang the tocsin last night."

"For whom?"

"For you."

"Ah!" said the Marquis.

"And here we are," continued Gavard.

"And you number seven thousand?"

"To-day. But we shall be fifteen thousand to-morrow. It is the Breton contingent. When Monsieur Henri de la Rochejaquelein went to join the catholic army they sounded the tocsin, and in one night six parishes – Isernay, Corqueux, Échaubroignes, Aubiers, Sainte Aubin, and Nueil – sent him ten thousand men. They had no munitions of war, but having found at a quarryman's house sixty pounds of blasting-powder, Monsieur de la Rochejaquelein took his departure with that. We felt sure you must be somewhere in these woods, and we were looking for you."

"And you attacked the Blues at the farm Herbe-en-Pail?"

"The wind prevented them from hearing the tocsin, and they mistrusted nothing; the population of the hamlet, a set of clowns, received them well. This morning we invested the farm while the Blues were sleeping, and the thing was over in a trice. I have a horse here; will you deign to accept it, general?"

"Yes."

A peasant led up a white horse with military housings. The Marquis mounted him without accepting Gavard's proffered assistance.

"Hurrah!" cried the peasants. The English fashion of cheering is much in vogue on the Breton coast, for the people have continual dealings with the Channel islands.

Gavard made the military salute, asking, as he did so, "Where will you establish your headquarters, my lord?"

"At first, in the forest of Fougères."

"It is one of the seven forests belonging to you."

"We need a priest."

"We have one."

"Who is it?"

"The curate of the Chapelle-Erbrée."

"I know him. He has made the trip to Jersey." A priest stepped out from the ranks and said, —

"Three times."

The Marquis turned his head.

"Good morning, Monsieur le Curé. There is work in store for you."

"So much the better, Monsieur le Marquis."

"You will have to hear the confessions of such as desire your services. No one will be forced."

"Marquis," said the priest, "at Guéménée, Gaston compels the republicans to confess."

"He is a hairdresser. The dying should be allowed free choice in such a matter."

Gavard, who had gone away to give certain orders, now returned.

"I await your commands, general."

"In the first place, the rendez-vous is in the forest of Fougères. Direct the men to separate and meet there."

"The order has been given."

"Did you not say that the people of Herbe-en-Pail were friendly to the Blues?"

"Yes, general."

"Was the farm burned?"

"Yes."

"Did you burn the hamlet?"

"No."

"Burn it."

"The Blues tried to defend themselves. But they numbered one hundred and fifty, while we were seven thousand."

"What Blues are they?"

"Those of Santerre."

"He who ordered the drums to beat while they were beheading the king? Then it is a Parisian battalion?"

"A demi-battalion."

"What was it called?"

"Their banner has on it, 'Battalion of the Bonnet-Rouge.'"

"Wild beasts."

"What is to be done with the wounded?"

"Put an end to them."

"What are we to do with the prisoners?"

"Shoot them."

"There are about eighty of them."

"Shoot them all."

"There are two women."

"Treat them all alike."

"And three children."

"Bring them along. We will decide what is to be done with them."

And the Marquis spurred his horse forward.

VII

NO MERCY! ⁵ NO QUARTER! ⁶

While these events were transpiring in the vicinity of Tanis, the beggar had gone towards Crollon. He plunged into the ravines, under wide leafy bowers, heedless of all things, noticing nothing; as he himself had expressed it, dreaming rather than thinking, – for the thinker has an object, but the dreamer has none; wandering, rambling, pausing, munching here and there a sprig of wild sorrel, drinking at the springs, raising his head from time to time as distant sounds attracted his attention, then yielding again to the irresistible fascination of nature; presenting his rags to the sunlight, hearing human sounds, by chance, but listening to the singing of birds.

He was old and slow; as he told the Marquis of Lantenac, he could not go far; a quarter of a mile fatigued him; he made a short circuit towards Croix-Avranchin, and it was evening when he returned.

A little beyond Macey, the path he followed led him to a sort of elevation, destitute of trees, which commanded a wide expanse of country, including the entire horizon from the west as far as the sea.

A smoke attracted his attention.

There is nothing more delightful than a smoke, and nothing more alarming. There are smokes signifying peace, and smokes that mean mischief. In the density and color of a column of smoke lies all the difference between war and peace, brotherly love and hatred, hospitality and the grave, life and death. A smoke rising among the trees may mean the sweetest thing in all the world, – the family hearth, or the most dreadful of calamities, – a conflagration. And the entire happiness or misery of a human being is sometimes centred in a vapor, scattered by the wind. The smoke which Tellmarch saw was of a kind to excite anxiety.

It was black with sudden flashes of red light, as though the furnace from whence it sprung burned fitfully and was gradually dying out, and it rose above Herbe-en-Pail. Tellmarch hurried along, walking towards the smoke. He was tired, but he wanted to know what it meant.

⁵ Watchword of the Commune.

⁶ Watchword of the Princes.

He reached the top of a hillock, behind which nestled a hamlet and the farm.

Neither farm nor hamlet was to be seen.

A heap of ruins was still burning, all that remained of Herbe-en-Pail.

It is much more heart-rending to see a cottage burn than a palace. A cottage in flames is a pitiful sight. Devastation swooping down on poverty, a vulture pouncing upon an earth-worm, – there is a sense of repugnance about it that makes one shudder.

If we believe the Biblical legend, the sight of a conflagration once turned a human being into a statue. For an instant a similar change came over Tellmarch. The sight before his eyes transfixed him to the spot. The work of destruction went on in silence. Not a cry was heard; not a human sigh mingled with the smoke. That furnace pursued its task of devouring the village with no other sound than the splitting of timbers and the crackling of thatch. From time to time the clouds of smoke were rent, the falling roofs revealed the gaping chambers, the fiery furnace displayed all its rubies, the poor rags turned scarlet, and the wretched old furniture, tinged with purple, stood out amid these dull red interiors; Tellmarch was dazed by the terrible calamity.

Several trees of a neighboring chestnut-grove had caught fire and were in a blaze.

He listened, trying to hear a voice, a call, or some kind of a noise. Nothing stirred but the flames; all was still save the fire. Had all the inhabitants fled?

Where was the community that lived and labored at Herbe-en-Pail? What had become of this little family?

Tellmarch descended the hillock.

A gloomy enigma lay before him. He approached it slowly, gazing at it steadily. He advanced towards the ruin with the deliberation of a shadow, feeling like a ghost in this tomb.

Having reached what had formerly been the door of the farm, he looked into the yard, whose ruined walls no longer separated it from the surrounding hamlet.

What he had seen before was nothing as compared with what he now beheld. From afar he had seen the terror of it; now all its horrors lay before him.

In the middle of the yard was a dark mass, vaguely outlined on one side by the flames, and on the other by the moonlight. It was a heap of men; and these men were dead. Around this mound lay a wide pool, still smoking, whose surface reflected the flames; but it needed not the fire to redden it; it was of blood.

Tellmarch went up to it. He examined, one after another, these prostrate bodies; all were corpses. Both the moon and the conflagration lighted up the scene.

The dead bodies were those of soldiers. Every man had bare feet; both their shoes and their weapons had been taken from them, but they still wore their blue uniforms. Here and there one could distinguish, amid the confusion of the limbs and heads, hats bearing the tricolor cockades riddled with bullets. They were republicans, – the same Parisians who the previous evening had been living, active men, garrisoned at the farm Herbe-en-Pail. The symmetrical arrangement of the fallen bodies proved the affair to have been an execution. They had been shot on the spot, and with precision. They were all dead. Not a sound came from the mass.

Tellmarch examined each individual corpse, and every man was riddled with shot.

Their executioners, doubtless in haste to depart, had not taken time to bury them.

Just as he was about to leave the place, his attention was attracted by the sight of four feet protruding beyond the corner of a low wall in the yard.

These feet were smaller than those which he had previously seen; there were shoes upon them, and as he drew near he perceived that they were the feet of women.

Two women were lying side by side behind the wall, also shot.

Tellmarch stooped over them. One of them wore a kind of uniform; beside her was a jug, broken and empty. She was a vivandière. She had four balls in her head. She was dead.

Tellmarch examined the other, who was a peasant woman. Her eyes were closed, her mouth open, her face discolored; but there were no wounds in her head. Her dress, undoubtedly worn to shreds by long marches, was rent by her fall, exposing her bosom. Tellmarch pushed it still further aside, and discovered on her shoulder a round wound made by a ball; the shoulder-blade was broken. He gazed upon her livid breast.

"A nursing mother," he murmured.

He touched her. She was not cold.

The broken bone and the wound in the shoulder were her only injuries. He placed his hand on her breast, and felt a faint throb. She was not dead.

Tellmarch raised himself, and cried out in a terrible voice, —

"Is there no one here?"

"Is that you, Caimand?" replied a voice, so low that it could scarcely be heard.

At the same time a head emerged from a hole in the ruin, and the next moment a second one peered forth from another aperture.

These were the sole survivors, — two peasants who had managed to hide themselves, and who now, reassured by the familiar voice of the Caimand, crept out of the hiding-places where they had been crouching.

They approached Tellmarch, still trembling violently.

The latter had found strength to utter his cry, but he could not speak; deep emotions always produce this effect.

He pointed to the woman lying at his feet.

"Is she still alive?" asked one of the peasants.

Tellmarch nodded.

"And the other woman, — is she living too?" asked the second peasant.

Tellmarch shook his head.

The peasant who had been the first to show himself continued: —

"All the others are dead, are they not? I saw it all. I was in my cellar. How grateful one is to God, in times like these, to have no family! My house was burned. Lord Jesus! everybody was killed. This woman had children, — three little ones! The children cried, 'Mother!' The mother cried, 'Oh, my children!' They killed the mother and carried away the children. I saw all, — oh, my God! my God! Those who murdered them went off well pleased. They carried away the little ones, and killed the mother. But she is not dead, is she? I say, Caimand, do you think you could save her? Don't you want us to help you carry her to your *carnichot*?"

Tellmarch nodded.

The woods were near the farm. They quickly made a litter with branches and ferns, and placing the woman, still motionless, upon it, they started towards the grove, the two peasants bearing the litter, one at the head, the other at the foot, while Tellmarch supported the woman's arm and constantly felt her pulse.

On the way the two peasants talked; and over the body of the bleeding woman, whose pale face was lighted by the moon, they exchanged their frightened exclamations.

"To kill all!"

"To burn all!"

"Oh, my Lord! Is that the way they are going to do now?"

"It was that tall old man who ordered it."

"Yes; he was the commander."

"I did not see him while the shooting went on. Was he there?"

"No, he was gone. But it was done by his order, all the same."

"Then it was he who did this."

"He said, 'Kill, burn! No quarter!'"

"Is he a marquis?"

"Yes, of course; he is our marquis."

"What is his name?"

"It is Monsieur de Lantenac."

Tellmarch raised his eyes to heaven, murmuring between his teeth, —

"Had I but known!"

PART II AT PARIS

BOOK I CIMOURDAIN

I THE STREETS OF PARIS AT THAT TIME

People lived in public; they ate at tables spread outside the doors; women sat on the church steps, making lint to the accompaniment of the Marseillaise; the park of Monceaux and the Luxembourg were turned into parade-grounds; at every street-corner there was a gun-maker's shop, where muskets were manufactured before the eyes of the passers-by, to their great admiration. "Patience: this is revolution" was on every lip. People smiled heroically. They went to the theatre as in Athens during the Peloponnesian war. At street-corners were seen such playbills as these, advertising: "The Siege of Thionville;" "A Mother saved from the Flames;" "The Club of Sans-Soucis;" "The oldest of the Popes Joan;" "The Military Philosophers;" "The Art of Love-making in the Village." The Germans were at the gates; it was rumored that the King of Prussia had secured boxes for the opera. Everything was terrible, yet no one was frightened. The gruesome law against the suspected, which was the crime of Merlin de Douai, held a vision of the guillotine suspended over every head. A lawyer, Séran by name, learning that he had been denounced, calmly awaited his arrest, arrayed in his dressing-gown and slippers, playing the flute at his window. No one seemed to have any spare time, every one was in a hurry; all the hats bore their cockades, and the women cried, "Are not red caps becoming to us?" All Paris seemed in the act of changing its abode. The curiosity shops were filled with crowns, mitres, gilded sceptres, and fleur-de-lis, spoils from royal dwellings, — the signs of the destruction of monarchy. Copes and surplices might be seen hanging on hooks offered for sale at the old-clothes shops. At the Porcherons and at Ramponneau's men decked out in surplices and stoles bestrode donkeys caparisoned with chasubles, and drank wine from ecclesiastical ciboria. In the Rue Saint-Jacques barefooted street-pavers once stopped the wheelbarrow of a shoe-pedler and clubbing together bought fifteen pairs of shoes to send to the Convention "for our soldiers." Busts of Rousseau, Franklin, Brutus, and even, be it added, of Marat, abounded. In the Rue Cloche-Perce, below one of Marat's busts, in a black wooden frame under glass, hung a formula of prosecution against Malouet, with facts in support of the charges and the following lines inscribed on the margin: —

These details were given to me by the mistress of Sylvain Bailly, a good patriot,
and who had a liking for me.

Signed:
MARAT.

The inscription on the Palais Royal fountain, "Quantos effundit in usus!" was hidden under two large canvases painted in distemper, one representing Cahier de Gerville denouncing to the National Assembly the rallying-cry of the "Chiffonistes" of Arles; the other, Louis XVI. brought back from Varennes in his royal carriage, and under the carriage a plank fastened by cords bearing on each end a grenadier with levelled bayonet. Very few large shops were open; perambulating carts containing haberdashery and toys, lighted by tallow candles, which, melting, dripped upon the merchandise, were dragged through the streets by women. Ex-nuns adorned with blond wigs kept open shop; this

woman, darning stockings in a stall, was a countess; that dressmaker, a marchioness; Madame de Boufflers lived in an attic from which she had a view of her own hotel. Venders ran about offering the news bulletins. People who muffled their chins in their neck-cloths were called "écrouelleux." Street singers swarmed. The crowd hooted Pitou, the royalist song-writer, a brave man, to boot, for he was imprisoned twenty-two times and was brought before the revolutionary tribunal for slapping himself behind when he uttered the word "civism;" seeing that his head was in danger, he exclaimed, "But my head is not the offending member!" which made the judges laugh, and saved his life. This Pitou ridiculed the fashion of Greek and Latin names; his favorite song was about a cobbler and his wife whom he called Cujus and Cujusdam. The Carmagnole was danced in circles; they no longer said "lady" and "gentleman," but "citizen" and "citizeness." They danced in the ruined cloisters, beneath a chandelier made of two sticks fastened crosswise to the vaulted roof, bearing four candles, while the church lamps burned upon the altar, and tombs lay beneath the dancers' feet. They wore "tyrant-blue" waistcoats, and shirt-pins called "liberty's cap," composed of red, white, and blue stones. The Rue de Richelieu was called Rue de la Loi; the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the Faubourg de Gloire; a statue of Nature stood in the Place de la Bastille. People pointed out to each other well-known personages, – Châtelet, Didier, Nicolas, and Gamier-Delaunay, who mounted guard at the doors of the joiner Duplay; Voullant, who never missed a day of guillotining, and who followed the tumbrils of the condemned, calling it "going to the red mass;" Montflabert, a revolutionary jurymen and marquis whom they called *Dix-Août*. They watched the pupils of the École Militaire file past, called "aspirants to the school of Mars" by the decrees of the Convention, and nicknamed by the people "Robespierre's pages." They read the proclamations of Fréron, denouncing those suspected of the crime of "négotiantisme." Young scapegraces gathered about the doors of the mayoralties crowding the brides and grooms as they came in sight, and shouting, "Municipal marriages," in derision of the civil ceremony. The statues of the saints and kings at the Invalides were crowned with Phrygian caps. They played cards on curbstones at the crossings, and the very cards themselves were totally revolutionized; kings were replaced by genii, queens by the Goddess of Liberty, knaves by Equality, aces by emblems of Law. The public gardens were tilled; they ploughed the Tuileries.

With all this was intermingled, especially among the conquered party, an indescribably haughty weariness of living. A man wrote to Fouquier-Tinville, "Be so kind as to lift from me the burden of life. This is my address." Champcenetz was arrested for exclaiming at the Palais Royal: "When are we to have a Turkish revolution? I should like to see the republic *à la Porte*."⁷ Newspapers abounded. Hair-dressers' apprentices curled the women's wigs in public while the master read the "Moniteur" aloud; others, surrounded by listeners, commented with expressive gesticulations on the journal "Entendons nous," of Dubois Crancé, or the "Trompette du père Bellerose." Sometimes a man was both a barber and a pork-dealer; and hams and chitterlings would hang side by side with a golden-haired doll. The wines of the Émigrés were sold by dealers on the streets. One merchant advertised wine of fifty-two different brands; others retailed lyre-shaped clocks and sofas *à la duchesse*. A hairdresser had the following notice printed on his sign: "I shave the clergy; I dress the hair of the nobility; I wait upon the Tiers-État." People went to Martin, at No. 173 in the Rue d'Anjou, formerly called Rue Dauphine, to have their fortune told. Bread, coal, and soap were scarce. Herds of milch-cows on their way from the provinces were constantly passing. At La Vallée, lamb was sold at fifteen francs a pound. An order of the Commune assigned to each person a pound of meat for every ten days. People stood in files at the shop-doors; one file that reached from the door of a grocer's shop in the Rue du Petit-Carreau to the middle of the Rue Montorgueil has become a matter of tradition. Forming a queue was called "holding the string," on account of the long cord held by those who stood in line one behind the other.

⁷ A pan meaning a Turkish republic, and the republic expelled. – TR.

In the midst of all this wretchedness women were brave and gentle. They passed whole nights waiting their turn to be served at the baker's. The revolution was successful in its expedients. It alleviated this wide-spread misery by two dangerous measures, – the assignat and the maximum; in other words, the lever and the fulcrum. France was actually saved by empiricism. The enemy, both in Coblenz and in London, speculated in assignats.

Girls went hither and thither offering lavender-water, garters, and false hair, and selling stocks at the same time; there were stock-jobbers on the steps of the Rue Vivienne, with muddy shoes, greasy hair, woollen caps with fox-tails, and the dandies of the Rue de Valois, with their polished boots, a toothpick in their mouths, and beaver hats on their heads, to whom the girls said "thee and thou." The people hunted them down as they did thieves, whom the royalists called "active citizens." Robbery, however, seldom occurred; the fearful destitution was matched by a stoical honesty. With downcast eyes the barefooted and the hungry went gravely past the shop-windows of the jewellers of the Palais Égalité. During a domiciliary visit made by the Section Antoine at Beaumarchais' house, a woman plucked a flower in the garden: the crowd boxed her ears. A cord of wood cost four hundred francs in coin. People were to be seen in the streets sawing up their wooden beds. In the winter the fountains froze, and two pails of water cost twenty sous; every man was his own water-carrier. A gold louis was worth three thousand nine hundred and fifty francs. A ride in a fiacre cost six hundred francs. After a day's ride the following dialogue might be heard: "How much do I owe you, coachman?" "Six thousand livres." The trade of a greengrocer woman amounted to twenty thousand francs a day. A beggar was known to have said: "Help me, for charity's sake! I want two hundred and thirty livres to pay for my shoes." At the entrance of the bridges might be seen colossal figures, sculptured and painted by David, which Mercier insultingly called "enormous wooden Punchinellos." These figures represented Federalism and Coalition overthrown. No infirmity of purpose among the people. There was a gloomy sense of pleasure in having put an end to thrones. No lack of volunteers ready to lay down their lives: every street furnished a battalion. The flags of the district went hither and thither, each one with its own device. On the banner of the Capuchin District might be read, "No one will shave us;" on another, "No other nobility save that of the heart." On the walls were placards, large and small, white, yellow, green, and red, printed and written, on all which might be read this war-cry: "Long live the Republic!" Little children lisped, "Ça ira."

These little children were the nucleus of a great future.

Later on, a cynical city took the place of the tragical one; the streets of Paris have displayed two distinct revolutionary aspects, – the one preceding the 9th Thermidor, and that which followed it. After the Paris of Saint-Just came the Paris of Tallien. Such are the constant antitheses of Almighty God. Immediately after Sinai, the Courtille appeared.

Paroxysms of popular folly may always be expected. The same thing had taken place eighty years before. After Louis XIV., as well as after Robespierre, the people needed breathing space; hence the Regency at the opening of the century and the Directory at its close, each reign of terror ending in a Saturnalia. France fled from the Puritan as well as from the monarchical cloister with the joy of a nation escaping from bondage.

After the 9th Thermidor, Paris was like one gone mad with gayety. An unwholesome joy prevailed, exceeding all bounds. The frenzy of life followed the frenzy of death, and grandeur eclipsed itself. They had a Trimalcion whom they called Grimod de la Reynière; also an "Almanach des Gourmands." People dined to the accompaniment of trumpets in the entresols of the Palais Royal; the orchestras were composed of women beating drums and blowing trumpets; the "rigadooner," bow in hand, reigned over all; they supped after the Oriental fashion at Méot's, surrounded by censers of perfume. The artist Boze painted his daughters, innocent and charming heads of sixteen, "en guillotiné," – that is, bare-necked and in red chemises. The wild dances in ruined churches were followed by the balls of Ruggieri, Luquet Wenzel, Mauduit, and the Montansier; to the dignified *citoyennes* making lint, succeeded sultanas, savages, and nymphs; to the bare feet of the soldiers,

disfigured by blood, mud, and dust, succeeded the bare feet of women adorned with diamonds; and together with shamelessness came dishonesty, – which had its purveyors in high places, and their imitators in the lower ranks. Paris was infested by swarms of sharpers, and every man had to watch his "luc," or in other words, his pocket-book. One of the amusements was to go to the Place of the Palais de Justice to see the female acrobats on the tabouret; they were forced to tie their skirts down. At the doors of the theatres street-urchins offered cabs, crying, "Citizen and Citizeness, there is room enough for two." They sold no more copies of "The Old Cordelier" or of "L'Ami du peuple;" but in their stead they offered "Punch's Letter" and "The Rogues' Petition." The Marquis de Sade presided at the section of the Pikes, Place Vendôme. The reaction was both jovial and ferocious. The Dragons of Liberty of '92 were revived under the name of Knights of the Dagger. At the same time there appeared on the stage the type Jocrisse. There were the "Merveilleuses," and after the "Merveilleuses," the "Inconcevables." People swore fantastic oaths by "sa paole victimée" and by "sa paole verte." This was the recoil from Mirabeau to Bobèche. Paris vibrates like an enormous pendulum of civilization; now it touches one pole, now the other, – Thermopylæ and Gomorrah. After '93, Revolution suffered a singular eclipse: the century apparently forgot to finish what it had begun; a strange orgie, interposing, took possession of the foreground, and thrusting the dread Apocalypse behind, it drew a veil over the monstrous vision, and shouted with laughter after its fright; tragedy vanished in parody; and rising from the horizon's edge the smoke of carnival obscured the outlines of Medusa.

But in the year '93 the streets of Paris still retained the imposing and fierce aspect of the beginning. They had their orators, like Varlot for instance, who travelled about in a booth on wheels, from the top of which he harangued the passers-by; their heroes, one of whom was called "the Captain of iron-shod poles;" their favorites, like Guffroy, the author of the pamphlet "Rougiff." Some of these celebrities were mischievous, others exerted a wholesome influence. One among all the rest was honest and filial, – it was Cimourdain.

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