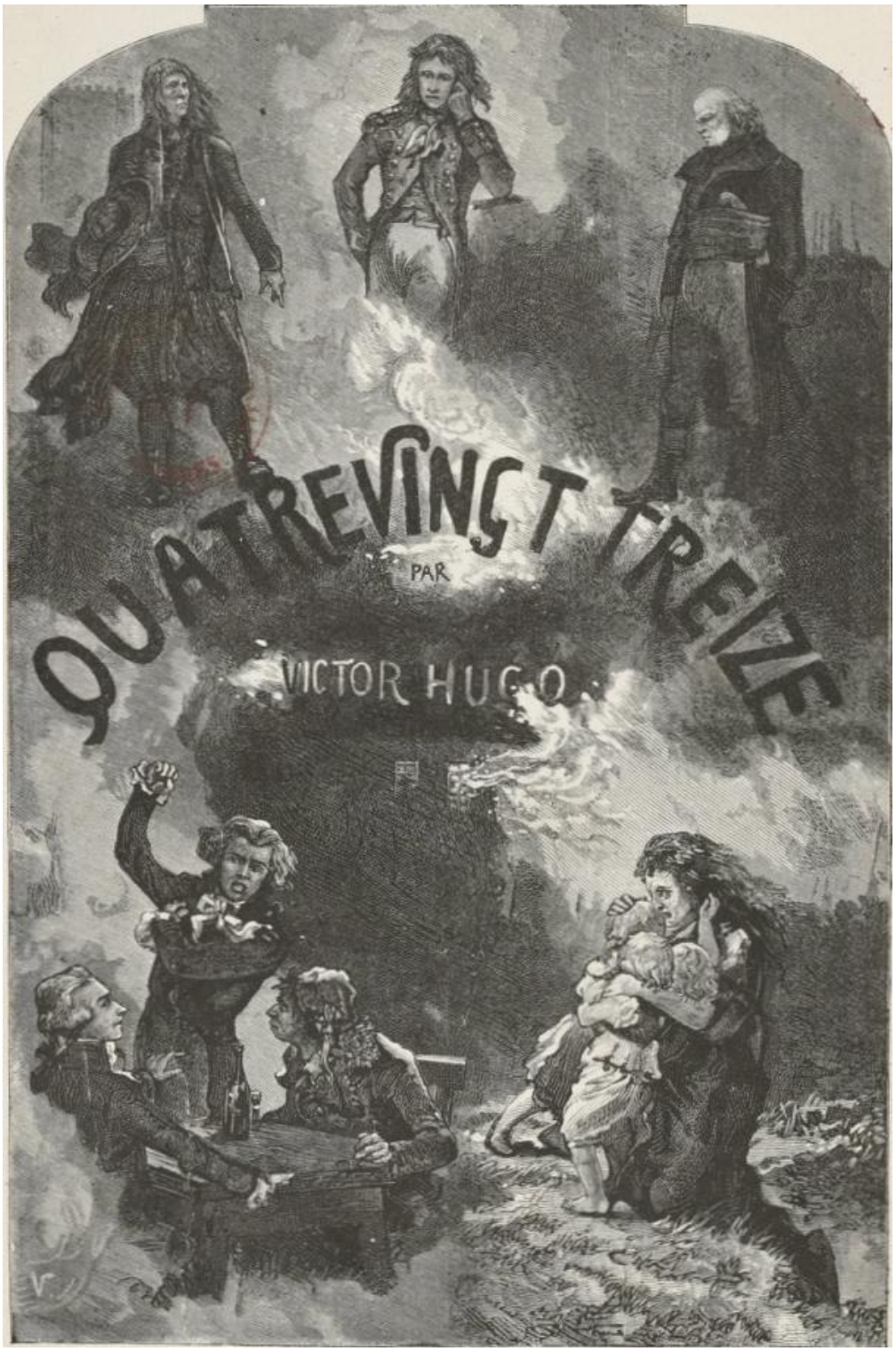

NINETY-THREE

By

VICTOR HUGO

Translated by Mrs. Aline Delano

BOSTON

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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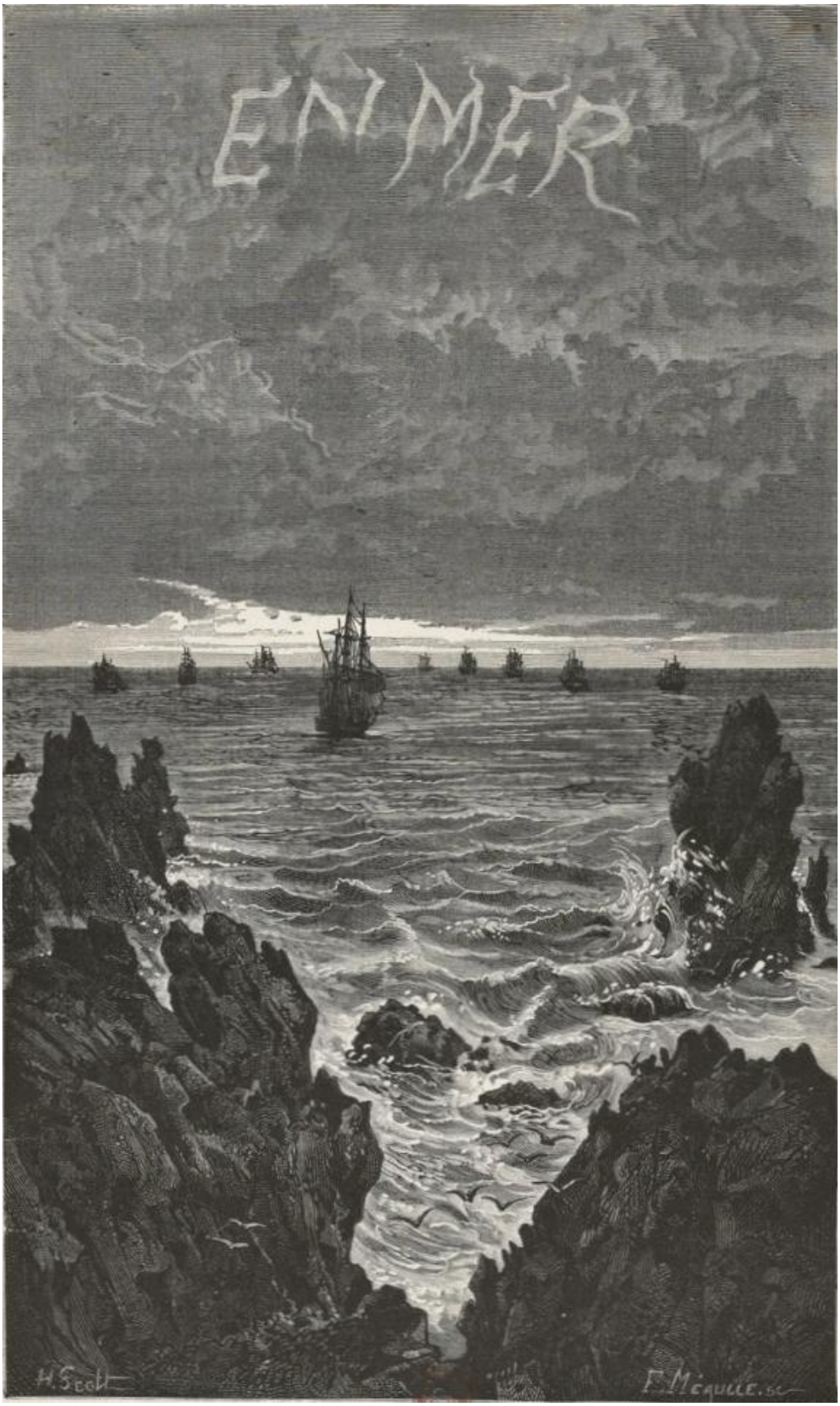
NINETY-THREE


EN MER
H. Scott
F. Méaulle. sc

PART I.

AT SEA.


G. Bruon
LE BOIS DE LA SAUDRAIE

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 aide 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 Bicorneau, 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 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?"

"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.

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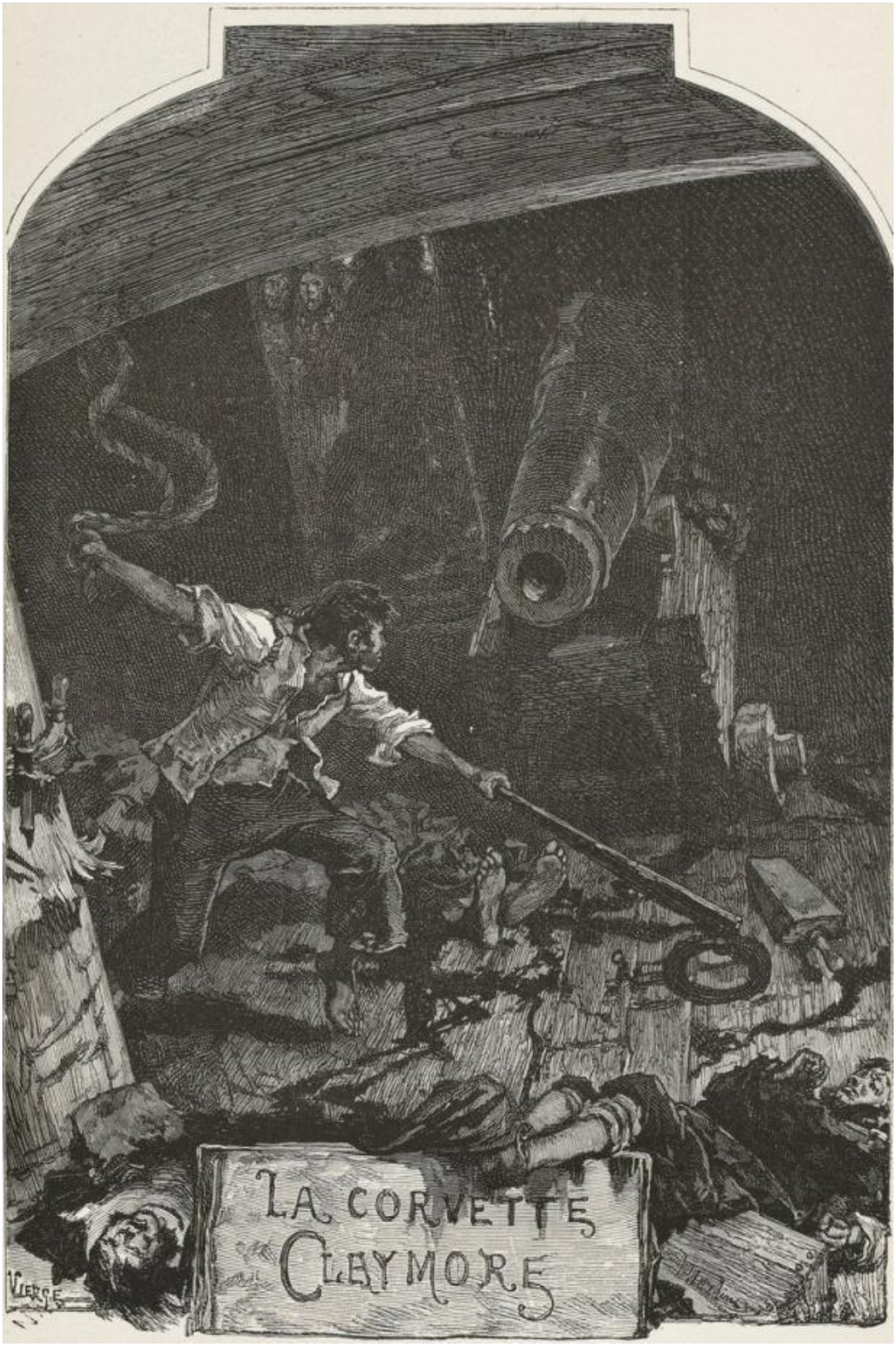
[1]The sergeant makes a pun on the name Fléchard which is untranslatable. Flèche means arrow, and he asks whether the Fléchards made arrows.—TR.

[2]An opprobrious epithet for an ecclesiastic.—TR.


LA CORVETTE
CLAYMORE

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 *bragoubras*, 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. To-morrow 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 Tinténiac,—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!"

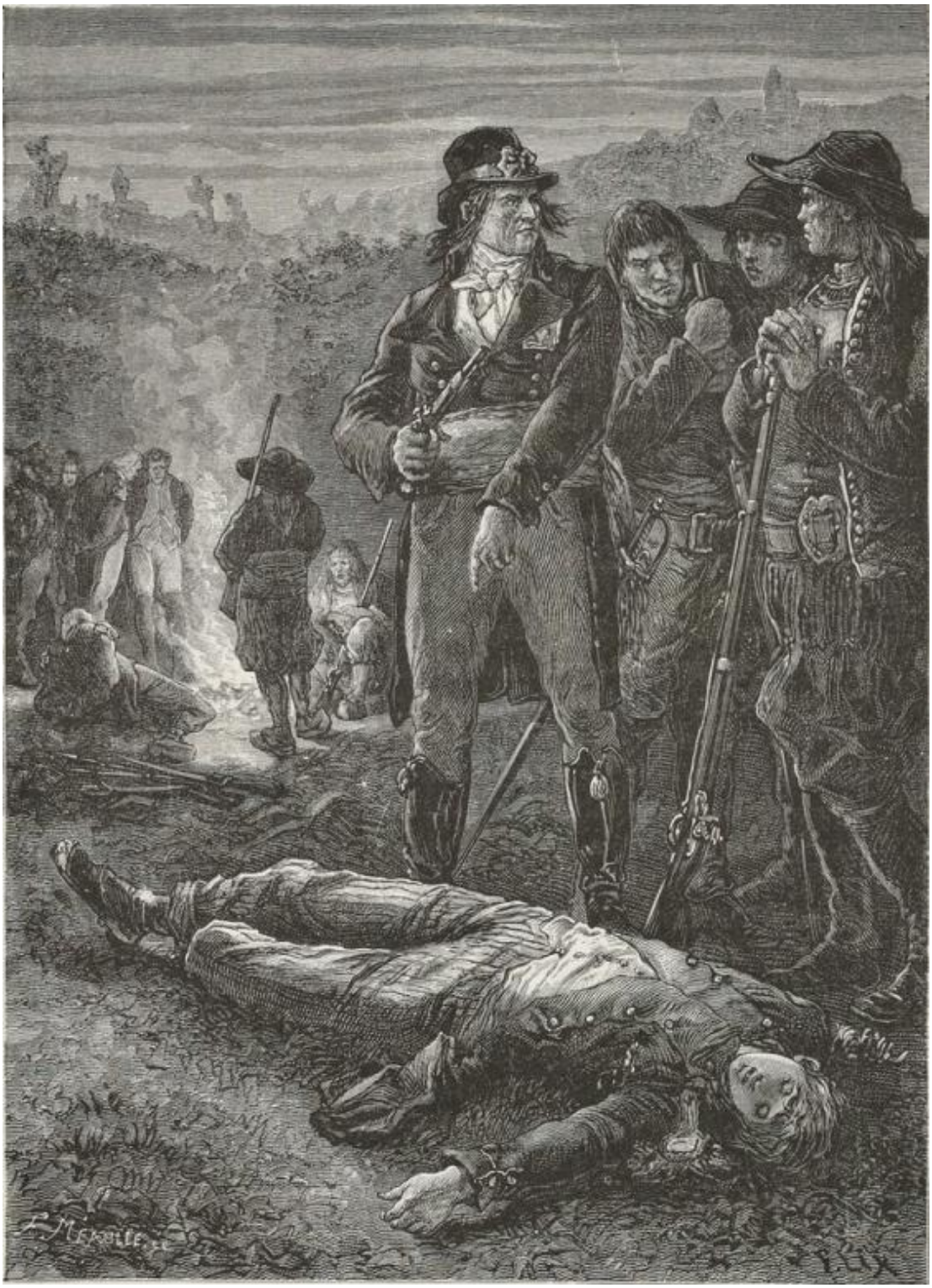
"My dear La Vieuville, I feel some respect for this Gaston. He behaved well in his command of Guéménée. He had three hundred Blues neatly shot after making them dig their own graves."

"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."

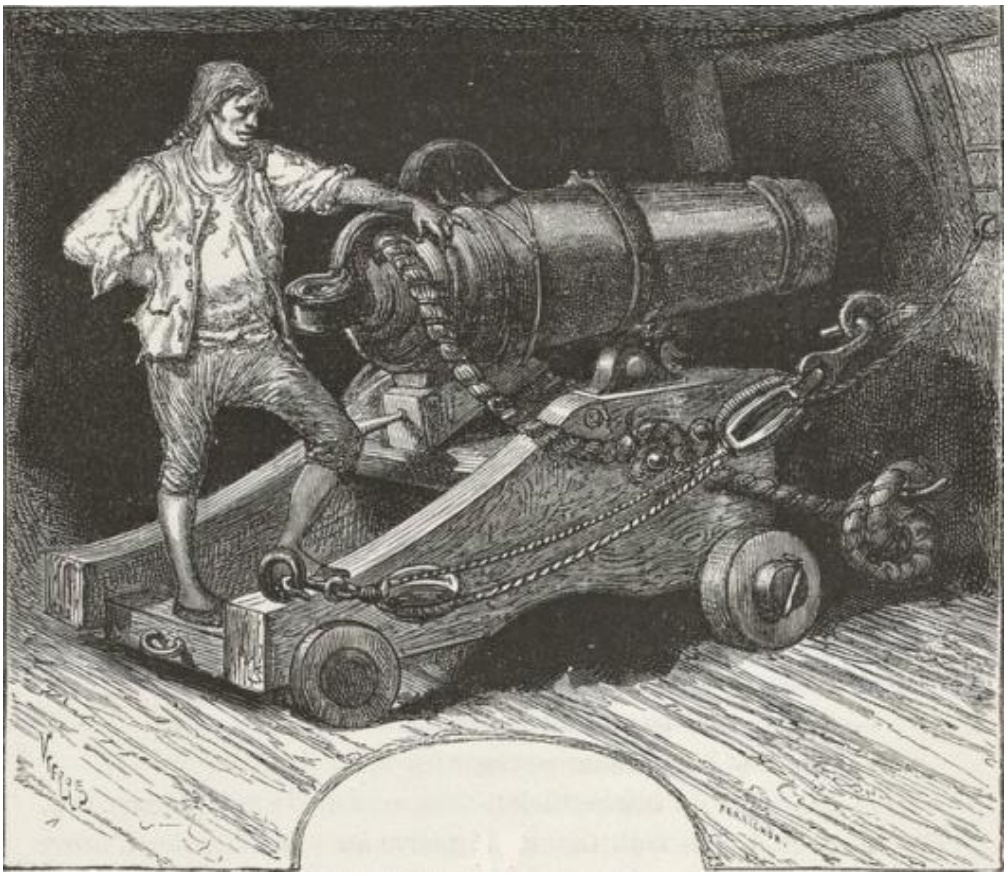
Boisberthelot had no time to answer. Vieuville's words were suddenly cut short by a desperate cry, and at the same instant they heard a noise unlike all other sounds. This cry and the unusual sounds came from the interior of the vessel.

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 threatningly 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.

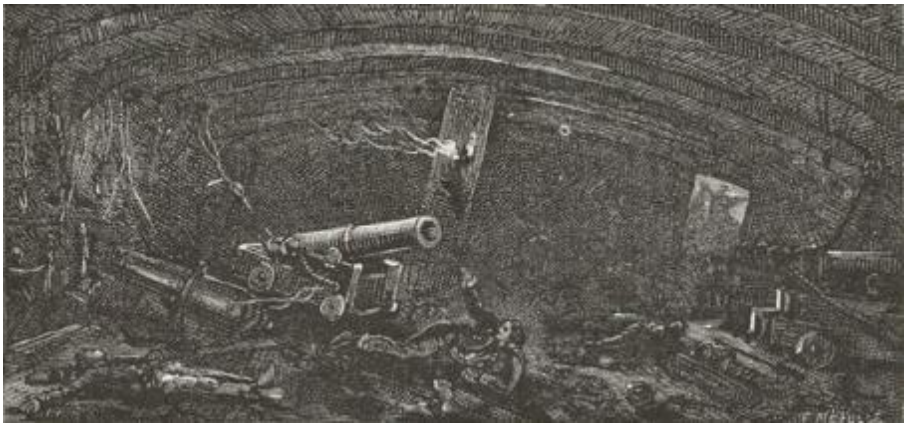
The monstrous gun was left to itself. It was its own mistress, and mistress of the ship. It could do with it whatsoever it wished. This crew, accustomed to laugh in battle, now trembled. It would be impossible to describe their terror.

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 Durosel's "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.

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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."