VIII.

DOLOROSA.

Meanwhile the mother was searching for her little ones, walking straight onward; and how she subsisted we cannot tell, since she did not know herself. She walked day and night, begging as she went, often living on herbs and sleeping upon the ground in the open air, among the bushes, under the stars, and sometimes mid the rain and the wind. Thus she wandered from village to village and from farm to farm, making inquiries as she went along, but, tattered and torn as she was, never venturing beyond the threshold. Sometimes she found a welcome, sometimes she was turned away; and when they refused to let her come in, she would go into the woods.

Unfamiliar as she was with the country beyond Siscoignard and the parish of Azé, and having nothing to serve as guide, she would retrace her steps, going over and over the same ground, thus wasting both time and strength. Sometimes she followed the highway, sometimes the cart-ruts, and then again she would turn into the paths in the woods. In this wandering life she had worn out her wretched garments. At first she had her shoes, then she went barefoot, and it was not long before her feet were bleeding.

Unconsciously she travelled on, mid bloodshed and warfare, neither hearing, seeing, nor trying to shield herself, simply looking for her children. As the entire country was in rebellion, there were no longer any gendarmes, or mayors, or authorities of any kind. Only such persons as she encountered on the way would she stop to ask.

"Have you seen three little children anywhere?"

And when the passers-by lifted their heads she would say,—

"Two boys and a girl," and go on to name them:

"René-Jean, Gros-Alain, Georgette. Have you not seen them?"

And again,—

"The oldest one was four and a half and the youngest twenty months."

Presently she would add,—

"Do you know where they are? They have been taken from me."

People gazed at her, and that was all.

Perceiving that she was not understood, she would explain,—

"It is because they are mine. That is the reason."

And then seeing the passers-by continue their way, she would stand speechless, tearing her breast with her nails. One day, however, a peasant stopped to listen to her. The worthy man set his wits at work.

"Let us see. Did you say three children?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Two boys?"

"And a girl."

"And you are looking for them?"

"Yes."

"I was told that a nobleman had carried off three little children and keeps them with him."

"Where is that man? Where are they?" she cried.

"Yon must go to the Tourgue," answered the peasant.

"And shall I find my children there?"

"Very likely you will."

"What did you say the name was?"

"The Tourgue."

"What is the Tourgue?"

"It is a place."

"Is it a village, a castle, or a farm?"

"I never was there."

"Is it far?"

"I should say so."

"In what direction?"

"In the direction of Fougères."

"Which way shall I go?"

"You are now at Ventortes," replied the peasant. "You will leave Ernée on your left and Coxelles on your right; you must pass through Longchamps, and cross the Leroux."

The peasant raised his hand and pointed westward.

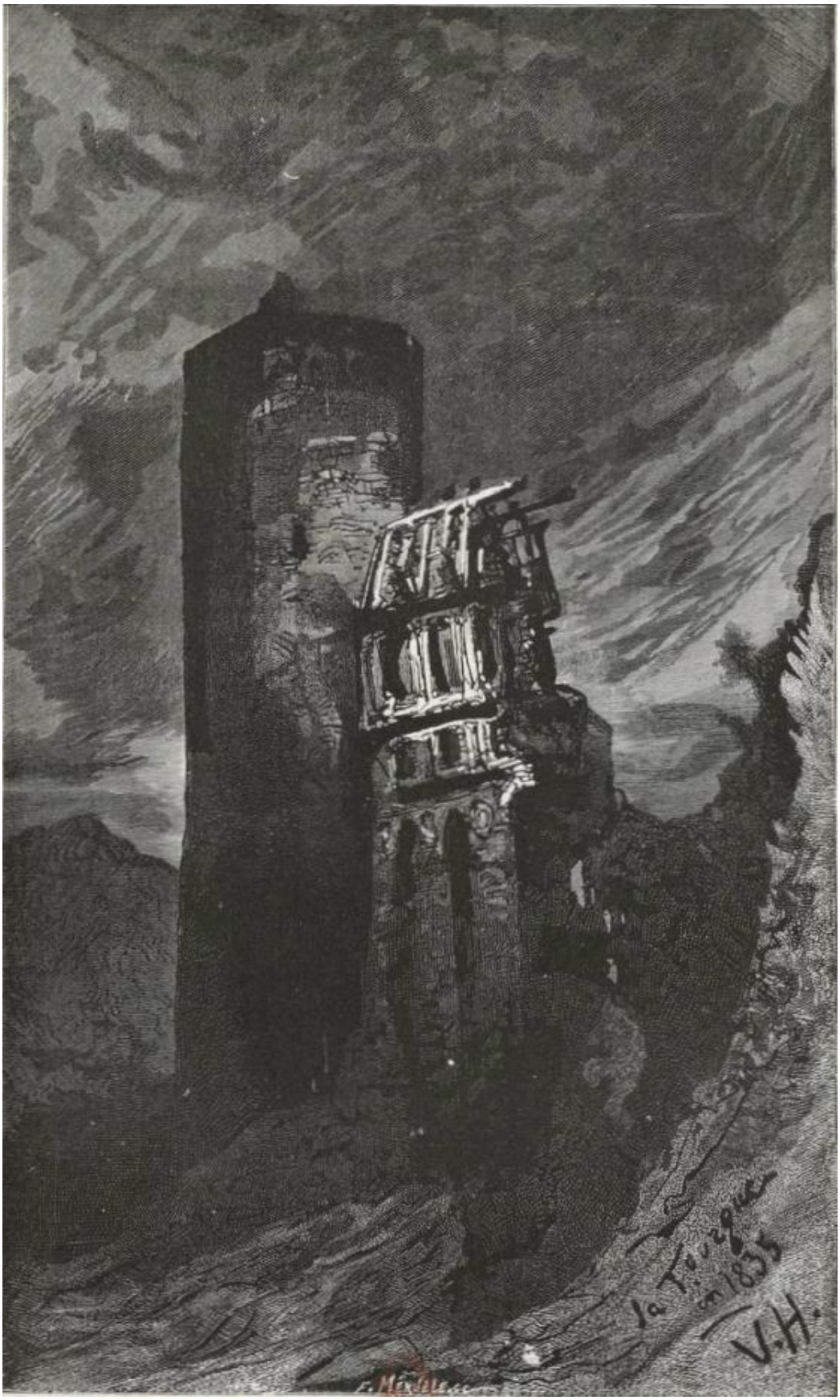
"Keep straight ahead, facing the sunset."

She had already started before he had time to lower his arm.

He called out to her.

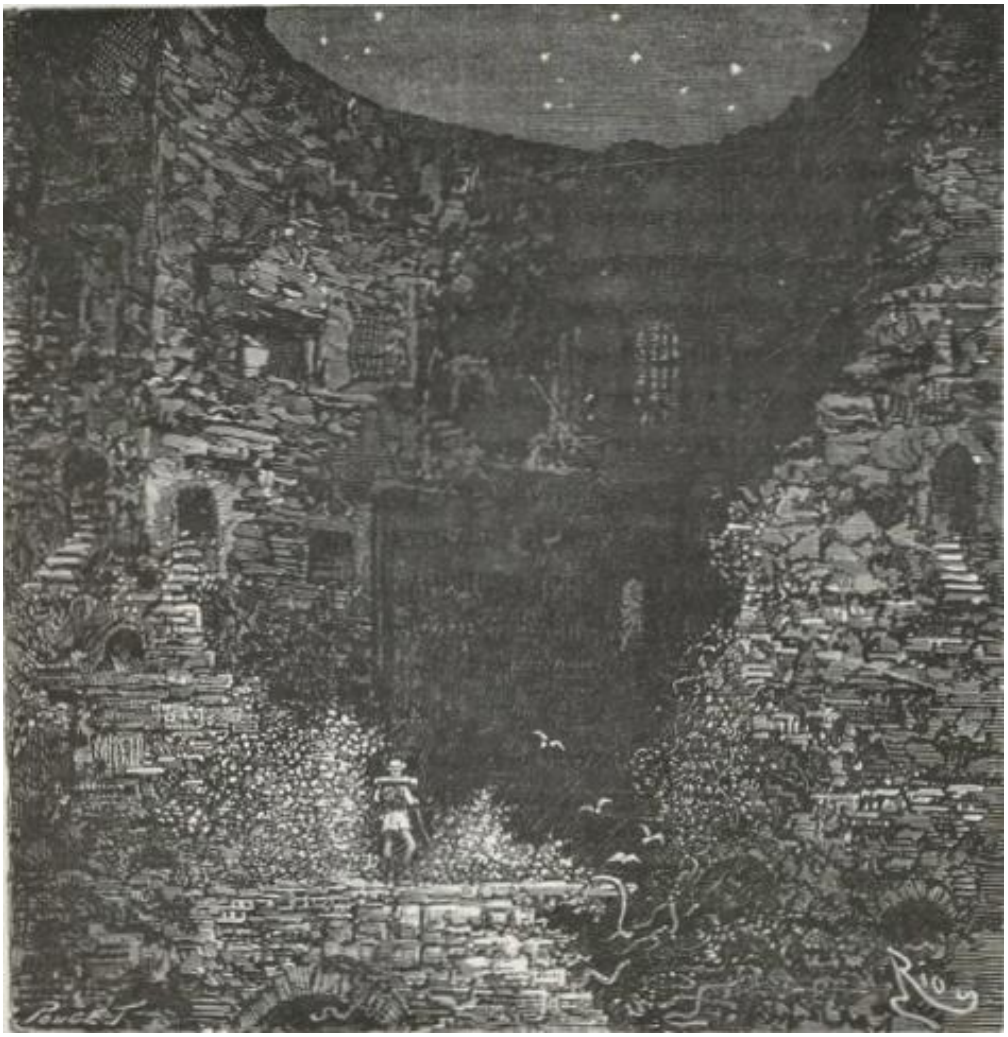
"You must be careful; they are fighting over there."

She never turned to reply, but walked straight ahead without pausing.


la Tour de
en 1835
V.H.

IX.

A PROVINCIAL BASTILE.



I.

LA TOURGUE.

The traveller who forty years ago entered the forest of Fougères from the direction of Laignelet and came out towards Parigné, might have beheld on the edge of this dense forest a sinister sight, for emerging from the thicket he would come directly upon the Tourgue, and not the living Tourgue, but the dead one.

The Tourgue cracked, battered, scarred, dismantled. A ruin may be called the ghost of an edifice. Nothing could be more lugubrious than the aspect of the Tourgue. A high circular tower stood alone like a malefactor on the edge of the wood, and rising as it did from a precipitous rock, its severe and solid architecture gave it the appearance of a Roman structure, combining within itself the elements of power and of decay. In fact, it might in one sense be called Roman, since it was Romance. It was begun in the ninth century and finished in the twelfth, after the time of the third crusade. The style of the imposts of its embrasures indicated its period. If one approached it and cared to climb the slope, he might perceive a breach in the wall; and if he ventured to enter in, he would find a vacant space and nothing more. It was not unlike the inside of a stone trumpet set upright on the ground. From top to bottom there were no partitions, and neither ceilings nor floors; here and there arches and chimneys had evidently been torn away, and falconet embrasures were still seen; at different heights, rows of granite corbels and a few cross-beams covered with the ordure of the night birds marked the separate stories; a colossal wall, fifteen feet thick at its base and twelve at its summit; cracks here and there, and holes which once were doors, and through which one caught glimpses of staircases within the gloomy walls. One who passing by at evening might venture in, would hear the cry of the wood-owl, the goat-suckers, and the night-herons; would find brambles, stones, and reptiles beneath his feet; and overhead, through a dark circular opening at the top of the tower which looked like the mouth of an enormous well, he might see the stars.

Local tradition relates that there were secret doors in the upper stories of this tower, like those in the tombs of the kings of Judah, composed of one large stone turning on a pivot, which when closed could not be distinguished from the wall itself,—a fashion in architecture brought home by the crusaders, together with the pointed arch. When these doors were closed, it was impossible to discover them, so skilfully were they fitted into the rest of the stones. Such doors can be found to-day in those mysterious Libyan cities which escaped the earthquakes that buried the twelve cities in the time of Tiberius.

II.

THE BREACH.

The breach by which one gained access to the ruin was the opening of a mine. A connoisseur familiar with Errard, Sardi, and Pagan would have appreciated the skill with which this mine was planned. The fire-chamber, in the shape of a biretta, was of a size accurately proportioned to the strength of the keep which it was intended to

destroy. It was capable of containing at least two hundred-weight of powder. The winding passage which led to it was more effective than a straight one. The saucisse, laid bare among the broken stones as the result of the crumbling caused by the mine, was seen to have the requisite diameter of a hen's-egg. The explosion had made a deep rent in the wall, by which the assailants were enabled to enter. It was evident that this tower must have sustained formal sieges from time to time. It was riddled with balls, and these were not all of the same epoch; every missile has its own special way of marking a rampart, and each one, from the stone bullets of the fourteenth century to the iron ones of the eighteenth, had left a scar upon this donjon-keep.

The breach opened into what must have been the ground-floor; and directly opposite, in the wall of the tower, was the gateway of a crypt, cut in the rock and extending under the hall of the lower floor throughout the foundation of the tower.

This crypt, three-fourths filled up, was cleared out in 1835, under the direction of Auguste Le Provost, the antiquary of Bernay.

III.

THE OUBLIETTE.

This crypt was the oubliette. Every keep possessed one, and this, like many other penal dungeons of the same period, had two stories. The first story, accessible through the gate, consisted of a good-sized vaulted chamber, on a level with the hall of the ground-floor. On the walls of this room might be seen two vertical furrows, parallel with each other, reaching from wall to wall and passing along the vault, where they had left a deep rut, reminding one of wheel-tracks,—and such in fact they were; for these two furrows were hollowed out by two wheels. In old feudal times men had been torn limb from limb here in this very room, by a process less noisy than that of being drawn and quartered. They had a pair of wheels so large and powerful that they filled the entire room, touching both walls and ceiling, and to each wheel was attached an arm and a leg of the victim; and when these wheels were turned in opposite directions, the man was torn asunder. It required great power; hence the ruts worn in the stone by the grazing of the wheels. A room of this kind may be seen at Vianden.

Above this room there was another, the actual oubliette, whose only entrance was a hole which served the purpose of a door; the victim, stripped of his clothes, was let down, by means of a rope tied under his armpits, into the room below, through an opening made in the middle of the flagging of the upper room. If he persisted in living, food was thrown to him through this aperture. A similar hole may still be seen at Bouillon.

This chamber below, excavated under the hall of the ground-floor to such a depth that it reached water, and constantly swept by an icy wind, was more like a well than a room. But the wind so fatal to the prisoner in the depths was, on the other hand, favorable to the one overhead, groping about beneath the vault, who could breathe the easier on account of it; indeed, all the air he had, came up through this hole. But then any man who entered, or rather fell, into this tomb, never came out again. It behooved the prisoner to look out for himself in the darkness, for it needed but one false step to change the scene of his sufferings. That, however, was his own affair. If he

were tenacious of life, this hole was his danger; but if he were weary of it, it was his resource. The upper story was the dungeon, the lower one the tomb,—a superposition not unlike that of the society of the period.

This is what our ancestors called a moat-dungeon; but since the thing itself has disappeared, the name has no longer any meaning for us. Thanks to the Revolution, we can listen with indifference to the sound of these words. On the outside of the tower, and above the breach, which forty years ago was its only entrance, might be seen an embrasure somewhat wider than the other loopholes, from which hung an iron grating, loosened and broken.

IV.

THE BRIDGE-CASTLE.

A stone bridge whose three arches were but slightly damaged, was connected with this tower on the side opposite to the breach. This bridge had once supported a building whose few remaining fragments bore the traces of a conflagration; it was only the framework that was left standing, and as the light shone through its interstices as it rose side by side with the tower, it had the effect of a skeleton beside a phantom.

To-day this ruin is utterly demolished, leaving no trace whatever behind. A single peasant can destroy in one day structures that kings have labored for centuries to erect. La Tourgue, a peasant abbreviation, signifies La Tour-Gauvain, just as La Jupelle stands for La Jupellière, and Pinson le Tort, the name of a hunchback leader, for Pinson le Tortu.

La Tourgue, which even forty years ago was a ruin, and which to-day is but a shadow, was a fortress in 1793. It was the old Bastile of the Gauvains, and served to guard, towards the west, the entrance of the forest of Fougères, which is now little more than a grove.

This fortress was built on one of those great blocks of slate which are found in abundance between Mayence and Dinan, scattered in all directions among the copses and along the heath like the missiles of some Titanic combat. The tower composed the entire fortress; and below the tower stood the rock at whose base flowed one of those water-courses which swells into a torrent in January and dries up in June.

Simple as were its means of defence, this tower was almost impregnable in the Middle Ages, but the bridge had proved a source of weakness. The Gauvains of Gothic

times had built it without a bridge. It was formerly accessible by means of one of those swinging bridges that could be instantly severed by the stroke of an axe. So long as the Gauvains remained Viscounts it pleased them just as it was, and they were satisfied with it. But when they became Marquises and exchanged the keep for the Court, they spanned the stream with three arches and thus offered access in the direction of the plain very much as they had yielded to the advances of the king. The marquises of the seventeenth century and the marchionesses of the seventeenth no longer prided themselves on their impregnability. They abandoned the traditions of their ancestors to follow the fashions of Versailles.

Facing the tower towards the west was a somewhat elevated plateau adjoining two plains; this plateau was very near the tower, only separated from it by a deep ravine through which flowed a stream tributary to the Couesnon. The bridge that connected the fortress with the plateau stood on lofty piles, and on these piles was constructed as at Chenonceaux a building in the Mansard style of architecture, but more comfortable than the tower. Customs were still very rude, and the lords continued to occupy chambers in the keep that were more like dungeons than bedrooms. As to the building on the bridge, which was a diminutive kind of castle, a long corridor had been added to it, by way of entrance, which was called the hall of the guards. Over this hall, which was like an entresol, was the library, and above that a granary. Separated by pillars stood the long windows with their small panes of Bohemian glass; medallions were sculptured on the walls. The fortress was three stories high; halberds and muskets were to be found below, books in the middle, and over all the bags of oats,—a somewhat barbarous arrangement, but princely to the last degree.

The tower loomed above this coquettish building presenting a stern and gloomy contrast.

The platform offered a point of attack from which the bridge could be destroyed.

Between these two buildings there was no harmony whatsoever; the roughness of the one jarred against the elegance of the other. It would seem as if two semicircles ought to be identical; yet no two styles have less in common than that of a Roman semicircle and a classic archivolt. That tower, a worthy companion for the forest, was a strange neighbor for the bridge, which might have come from Versailles. Fancy Louis XIV. leaning on the arm of Alain Barbe-Torte. There was something appalling in this juxtaposition. An inexpressible spirit of terror pervaded the combined majesty of these structures.

Let us repeat, that from a military point of view the bridge went far towards betraying the tower; for while it added to its beauty it diminished its strength, ornamenting it on

the one hand and weakening it on the other; by placing it on a level with the plateau, it had exposed it to attacks from that direction, although it still remained impregnable in the direction of the forest. Formerly it had commanded the plateau, but matters were now reversed. An enemy installed on the plain would speedily become master of the bridge. The library and the granary were advantageous to the besiegers rather than to the besieged, since the contents of both are of a combustible nature. For an assailant who knows how to avail himself of fire as a means of assault, it matters but little whether it be a Homer or a bundle of hay, provided it burns. The French offered a proof of this fact to the Germans when they burned the library at Heidelberg, as did the Germans in burning that of Strasbourg. In short, this bridge built on to the Tourgue was a strategic mistake; but in the seventeenth century, under Colbert and Louvois, the Princes Gauvain, like the Princes de Rohan or La Tremoille, believed themselves henceforth safe from assault. Still, the builders of the bridge had taken certain precautions. In the first place, anticipating the chances of fire, they had fastened crosswise below the three windows looking towards the stream, by iron clamps which no longer than fifty years ago were still to be seen, a strong ladder, equal in length to the height of the first two stories of the bridge,—a height surpassing that of three ordinary stories; secondly, foreseeing the possibility of a siege, they had isolated the bridge from the tower by means of a low and heavy iron door, arched at the top and locked with a large key, whose hiding-place was known to the master alone; once closed, it could defy the battering-ram and almost brave the cannon-ball.

One must cross the bridge to reach this door, which was the only means of access to the tower.

V.

THE IRON DOOR.

As a result of the elevation of this castle on the bridge by means of piles, its second story was on a level with the corresponding story of the tower; and here, for greater safety, the iron door had been placed.

This iron door led from the bridge into the library, and from the tower into a large vaulted hall with a pillar in the centre. As already stated, this hall was in the second story of the keep. Like the tower itself, it was circular in its form, and was lighted by deep embrasures overlooking the fields. The stones of its rough and naked walls, unhidden from the view, were, however, symmetrically adjusted. This hall was reached by a spiral staircase built in the wall,—quite a simple matter when walls are

fifteen feet thick. In the Middle Ages they used to capture a city by streets, a street by houses, and a house by rooms; and thus a fortress was besieged story by story. In this respect La Tourgue was very skilfully arranged, and very difficult to cope with. An uncomfortable staircase connected one story with another; the doors were sloping, and not high enough to admit a man unless he bent his head; and where at every door the besieged stood in waiting for their assailants, a bowed head was certain death.

Below the circular hall with the pillar were two similar rooms, composing the first story and the ground-floor, and above these three more. The tower was closed, so to speak, by a platform which rested on these six rooms like a stone cover, and a narrow watch-tower led up to the platform.

As they were obliged to pierce this wall in which the iron door was sealed to a depth of fifteen feet, it was thereby framed in a deep archway, which when the door was closed formed a porch six or seven feet deep, towards the bridge as well as towards the tower, and when it was open these two porches united to form the entrance arch. Set in the wall under the porch, towards the bridge, was a low gate with a Saint-Gilles bolt, leading into the corridor of the first story under the library. This was another difficulty for the besiegers. That side of the castle on the bridge looking towards the plateau ended in a perpendicular wall, and there the bridge was severed. The drawbridge set up against a low gate to connect it with the plateau, and which on account of the height of the latter could only be lowered like an inclined plane, led into the long corridor called the guard-room. The besiegers who found themselves in possession of this corridor would have been obliged to carry by main force the Saint-Gilles winding stairway that led to the second story, in order to reach the iron gate.

VI.

THE LIBRARY.

As to the library, it was an oblong room of the same length and width as the bridge, with a single door, and that the iron one. A false folding-door covered with green cloth, which only needed to be pushed, concealed within the entrance arch of the tower. The walls of the library were lined from floor to ceiling with glass bookcases in the fine taste of the seventeenth century cabinet-work, and lighted by six large windows, three on a side,—that is, one over each arch. Through these windows the interior of the room was visible from the height of the platform. Between the windows stood six marble busts on pedestals of carved oak,—Hermolaüs of Byzantium, the grammarian

Athenæus of Naucratis, Suidas, Casaubon, Clovis, King of France, and his chancellor, Anachalus,—who for that matter was no more a chancellor than Clovis was a king.

There were various books in the library. One has remained famous. It was an ancient quarto, enriched with prints, with the title "Saint Bartholomew" in large letters, together with the sub-title, "Gospel according to Saint Bartholomew, preceded by a dissertation by Pantoenus, Christian philosopher, on the question as to whether this Gospel should be considered apocryphal, and whether Saint Bartholomew is identical with Nathanal." This book, supposed to be a unique copy, was placed on a reading-desk in the middle of the library. In the last century people came to see it as a curiosity.

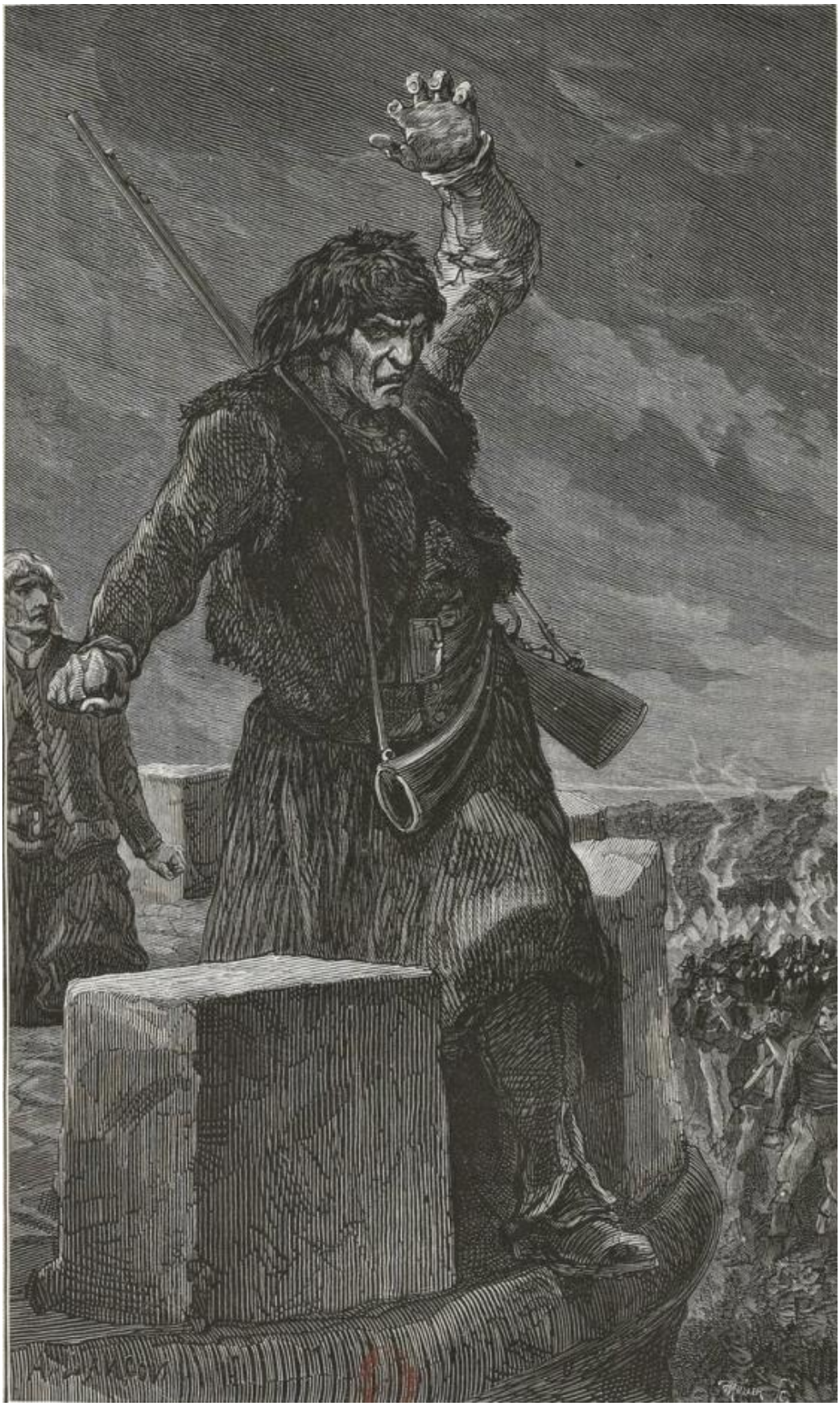
VII.

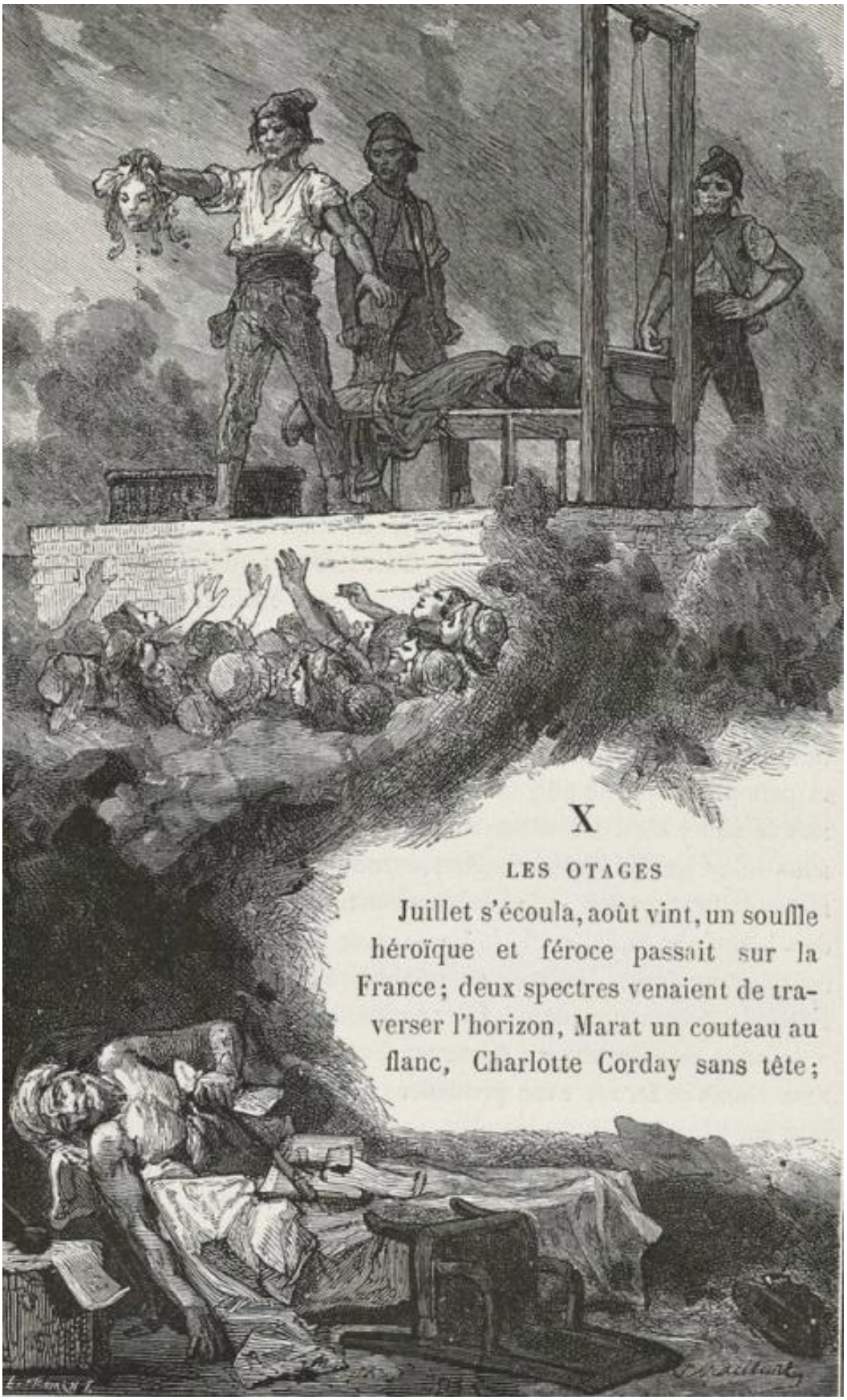
THE GRANARY.

As for the granary, which, like the library, followed the oblong form of the bridge, it was merely the space under the woodwork of the roof. It consisted of a large room filled with hay and straw, and lighted by six Mansard windows, with no other ornament than the statue of Saint Barnabas sculptured on the door, and below it the following verse:—

"Barnabus sanctus falcem jubet ire per herbam."

A lofty and massive tower, six stories in height, pierced here and there by a few embrasures, its sole means of entrance and egress an iron door opening into a bridge-castle closed by a drawbridge; behind the tower a forest, before it a heath-covered plateau, higher than the bridge, lower than the tower; below the bridge, between the tower and the plateau, a deep narrow ravine filled with underbrush, a torrent in winter, a stream in the springtime, and a rocky bed in summer,—such was the Tour-Gauvain, called La Tourgue.





X

LES OTAGES

Juillet s'écoula, août vint, un souffle héroïque et féroce passait sur la France; deux spectres venaient de traverser l'horizon, Marat un couteau au flanc, Charlotte Corday sans tête;

X.

THE HOSTAGES.

July passed away, and August came. A blast, fierce and heroic, had swept over France; two spectres had but just crossed the horizon,—Marat with a dagger in his side, and Charlotte Corday headless: events looked threatening. As to the Vendée, defeated in her grand strategic schemes, she turned her attention to others on a smaller scale, which, as we have already said, were likely to prove more dangerous. This war had now become one monstrous battle scattered about in the woods: the disasters of the grand army, Royal and Catholic, so called, had begun. A decree had been passed to send the army of Mayence into the Vendée; eight thousand Vendeans were killed at Ancenis; they were repulsed from Nantes, dislodged from Montaigu, expelled from Thouars, driven out of Noirmoutier, pitched headlong out of Cholet, Mortagne, and Saumur; they had evacuated Parthenay, abandoned Clisson, and lost ground at Châtillon; at Saint-Hilaire their flag was captured; they were defeated at Pornic, Sables, Fontenay, Doui, Château-d'Eau, and Ponts-de-Cé; they were checkmated at Luçon, retreated from Châtaigneraye, and were routed at the Roche-sur-Yon; at present, while they threatened La Rochelle on the one hand, on the other an English fleet riding in the waters of Guernsey, commanded by General Craig, and carrying several regiments of the English army, together with some of the best officers of the French navy, was only waiting for the signal of the Marquis de Lantenac to disembark,—a descent which might once more turn the tide of victory in favor of the Royalists. Pitt was but a political malefactor. As the dagger to an armament, even so is treason to political warfare. Pitt stabbed our country, and betrayed his own, since to dishonor is to betray. Through his influence and under his administration England waged Punic warfare. She spied, cheated, and deceived. Poacher and forger, she stopped at nothing, stooping to the petty details of hatred. She established a monopoly of tallow that cost five francs a pound. A letter from Prigent, Pitt's agent in the Vendée, which was seized on the person of an Englishman at Lille, contained the following lines: "I beg you to spare no money. In regard to the assassinations, we hope that prudence will be exercised; disguised priests and women are the most suitable for this work. Send sixty thousand livres to Rouen, and fifty thousand to Caen." This letter was read by Barère at the Convention on the first day of August. As a retaliation for these acts of treachery witness the cruelties of Parrein, and still later the atrocities of Carrier. The Republicans of Metz and those of the South were eager to march against the rebels. A decree was passed ordering the formation of twenty-four companies of sappers, who were to burn the fences and enclosures of the Bocage.

Here was a crisis without parallel. War was suspended in one direction only to break out in another. "No mercy! No prisoners!" was the war-cry of both parties. Dark and terrible shadows fall across the pages of history in these times.

In this very month of August the Tourgue was besieged.

One evening, just as the stars were rising in the calm twilight peculiar to dog-day weather, when not a leaf stirred in the woods, nor a blade of grass quivered on the plain, the sound of a horn was heard through the silence of the approaching night. It came from the summit of the tower.

This peal was answered by the ring of a clarion from below. On the top of the tower stood an armed man, and in the shadow below lay a camp.

In the obscurity around the Tour-Gauvain one could dimly distinguish the moving to and fro of dark figures. This was the bivouac. A few fires had been kindled beneath the forest-trees and among the heather of the plateau, their shining points of light pricking through the darkness here and there, as if earth as well as sky would deck itself out with stars, though it were but with the lurid stars of war. Towards the plateau the bivouac stretched as far as the plain, and in the direction of the forest it extended into the thicket. The Tourgue was invested.

The extent of the besiegers' bivouac indicated a numerous force.

The camp pressed hard upon the fortress, reaching to the rock in the direction of the tower, and as far as the ravine on the side of the bridge.

Another peal from the horn was heard, followed by a second blast from the clarion.

The horn asked the question, and the clarion made reply.

The horn was the voice of the tower asking the camp, "May we speak with you?" To which the clarion, speaking for the camp, answered, "Yes."

At that time the Convention did not regard the Vendeans in the light of belligerents, and it being forbidden by a decree to exchange flags of truce with "the brigands," they supplemented as best they could the usual means of communication which international law authorizes in ordinary warfare, but interdicts in civil conflicts. Consequently in time of need a certain understanding existed between the peasant horn and the military clarion. The first call simply broached the subject; the second asked the question, "Will you listen?" If the clarion made no reply to the second question, it meant refusal. If, on the other hand, the clarion replied, it was consent, and signified a truce for a few minutes.

When the clarion answered this second call, the man who stood on the top of the tower spoke, and these were his words:—

"Be it known to all ye who hear me, I am Gouge-le-Bruant, surnamed Brise-Bleu because I have killed many of your people, and also surnamed the Imânus because I mean to kill many more; in the attack at Granville, while my finger rested on the barrel of my gun, it was chopped off by a sabre-stroke; at Laval you guillotined my father, my mother, and my eighteen-year-old sister Jacqueline. And now you know me.

"I speak to you in the name of my master, Monseigneur le Marquis Gauvain de Lantenac, Vicomte de Fontenay, Breton Prince, and owner of the Seven Forests.

"It is well for you to learn that before shutting himself up in this tower, where you hold him blockaded, Monsieur le Marquis distributed the command among six chiefs, his lieutenants. To Delière he assigned the country between the woods of Brest and Erneé; to Treton, that which lies between the Roë and Laval; to Jacquet, called Taillefer, the border of the Haut-Maine; to Gaulier, called Grand-Pierre, Château-Gontier; to Lecomte, Craon; to Monsieur Dubois-Guy, Fougères; and to Monsieur de Rochambeau, all Mayenne; so that the capture of this fortress by no means ends the war for you, and even were Monsieur le Marquis to die, the Vendée of God and the king will still live.

"I say this for your information. Monseigneur is here beside me; I am but his mouthpiece. Silence, besiegers!

"It will be well for you to consider my words.

"Remember that the war you are waging against us is unjust; we are men living in our own land and fighting honestly. Submissive to the will of God, we are as simple and upright as the grass beneath the dew. It is the Republic who has attacked us: she comes to trouble us in our fields; she has burned our houses and our harvests and destroyed our farms, and our women and children have been forced to run barefoot in the woods while the hedge-sparrow was still singing.

"You who are down there listening to me,—you have pursued us through the forest and surrounded us in this tower; you have killed or scattered our allies; you have cannon, and you have added to your division the garrisons and the posts of Mortain, Barenton, Teilleul, Landivy, Evran, Tinténiac, and Vitré,—which gives you four thousand five hundred men with which to attack us.

"We, who are nineteen for the defence, are supplied with provisions and munitions.

"You have succeeded in undermining and blowing up a part of our rock and wall, thus making a breach at the foot of the tower, through which you can enter, although it is not open, while the tower stands strong and upright, forming an arch above it.

"Now you are preparing for the assault.

"And we—first of all, Monseigneur le Marquis, who is a Breton prince and the secular prior of the Abbey of Sainte-Marie de Lantenac, where a daily Mass was instituted by Queen Jeanne, and the other defenders of this tower, who are: Monsieur l'Abbé Turmeau, whose military name is Grand-Francoeur; my comrades, Guinoiseau, captain of the Camp-Vert; Chante-en-Hiver, captain of the camp of Avoine; Musette, captain of the camp Fourmis; and myself, a peasant, born in the town of Daon, through which runs the brook Moriandre,—we have one thing to tell you.

"Listen, now, ye men at the foot of this tower!

"We hold three prisoners,—the same children who were adopted by one of your battalions, and they are yours. We offer to give them back to you on one condition,—that we be allowed to go free.

"If you refuse,—listen to this. There are but two points of attack,—either the breach or the bridge, according as you advance from the fortress or the plateau. There are three stories in the building on the bridge; in the lower one I, the Imânus, who speak to you, have placed six casks of tar and one hundred bundles of dry heather; there is straw in the upper, and there are books and papers in the middle story; the iron door communicating with the tower is closed, and monseigneur carries the key on his person; I have made a hole under the door, through which is passed a sulphur slow-match; one end of it is in a cask of tar, and the other within reach of my hand, inside the tower; I can set it on fire whenever I choose. If you refuse to let us go free, the children will be placed on the second floor of the bridge, between the story where the sulphur-match ends in the barrel and the one which is filled with straw, and the iron door will be closed on them. If you attack us by way of the bridge, you will be the ones to set the building on fire; if by the breach, it will be left to us; and if you attack us from both sides at once, we shall both be kindling the fire at the same instant; at all events, the three children will perish.

"It rests with you, now, either to accept or refuse.

"If you accept, we depart; if you refuse, the children die.

"I have finished,"

And the man who had been speaking from the top of the tower was silent.

"We refuse!" cried a voice from below, in tones abrupt and severe. Another voice, quite as firm, although less harsh, added,—

"We give you twenty-four hours to surrender at discretion."

A silence ensued, and then the same voice continued,—

"If to-morrow at this hour you have not surrendered, we begin the assault."

"And give no quarter," resumed the first speaker; and then a voice from the top of the tower made reply to the savage one. Between two battlements a tall figure, in which, by the light of the stars, one might have recognized the awe-inspiring form of the Marquis de Lantenac, leaned forward; his glance, piercing the shadows, seemed searching for some one.

"Ah, it is thou, priest!" he cried.

"Yes, it is I, traitor!" replied the harsh voice from below.

XI.

TERRIBLE AS THE ANTIQUE.

This implacable voice was in truth the voice of Cimourdain; the younger and less imperative one was that of Gauvain.

The Marquis de Lantenac had not been mistaken in his recognition of the Abbé Cimourdain.

In this district, ensanguined by civil war, Cimourdain, as we have said, had in a few weeks become famous. No man had won a more baleful notoriety. Men would say: "Marat in Paris, Châlier at Lyons, Cimourdain in the Vendée." All the veneration which the Abbé Cimourdain had formerly enjoyed was now turned to his dishonor. This is what a priest who unfrocks himself may fairly expect.

Cimourdain excited a feeling of horror. The austere are unfortunate, inasmuch as their own acts seem to condemn them. Could their consciences be revealed, men might perhaps absolve them. A Lycurgus misunderstood may seem like a Tiberius. However, the fact remains that these two men—the Marquis de Lantenac and the Abbé Cimourdain—were equally matched in regard to the hatred they inspired. The maledictions hurled at Cimourdain by the Royalists were counterbalanced by the execrations which the Republicans heaped upon Lantenac. Each of those men seemed a monster in the eyes of the opposite camp. In fact, by a singular coincidence

it chanced that while Prieur de la Marne at Granville had set a price on the head of Lantenac, Charette at Noirmoutier had likewise set one on that of Cimourdain.

We may observe that these two men—the Marquis and the priest—represented in a certain degree one and the same man. The bronze mask of civil war has a double profile, one of which looks towards the past, the other towards the future. Lantenac wore the former, Cimourdain the latter; only the bitter sneer of Lantenac was shrouded in darkness, whereas on Cimourdain's fatal brow might be discerned a glimmer of the dawn.

Meanwhile the besieged Tourgue was enjoying a respite.

Thanks to the intervention of Gauvain, they had agreed upon a sort of truce for twenty-four hours.

The Imânus had indeed been well informed. In consequence of Cimourdain's requisitions Gauvain was now in command of four thousand five hundred men, national guards as well as troops of the line, with which he surrounded Lantenac in the Tourgue, and could, moreover, bring to bear against the fortress a masked battery of six cannon, planted on the edge of the forest towards the tower, together with an open battery of six on the plateau towards the bridge. He had succeeded in springing the mine, and a breach had been made at the foot of the tower.

Thus on the expiration of the twenty-four hours' truce, the struggle would begin again under the following conditions:—

On the plateau and in the forest were four thousand five hundred men against nineteen in the tower.

History may find the names of the nineteen besieged in the placards posted against outlaws. We may possibly come across them.

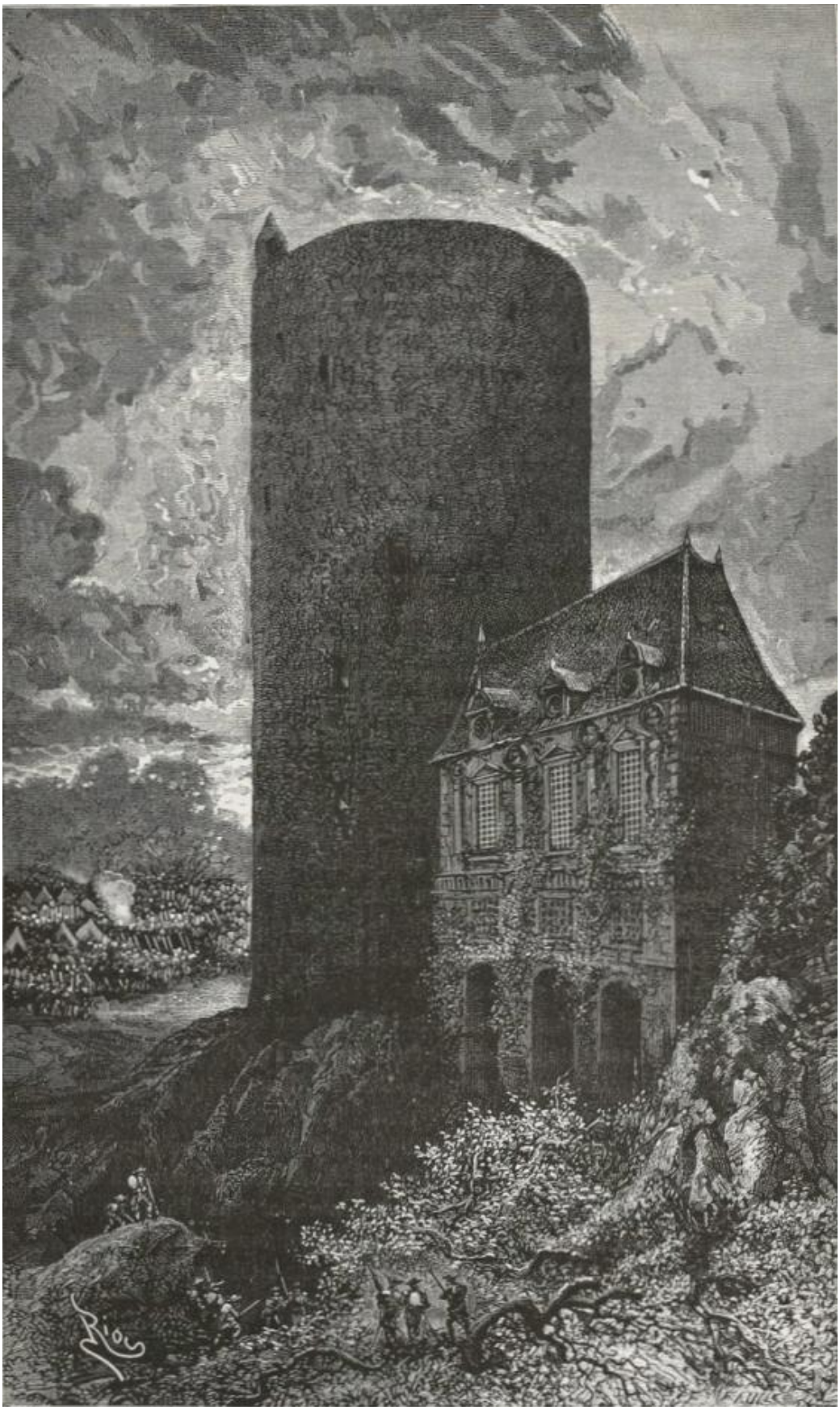
It would have pleased Cimourdain had Gauvain consented to accept the rank of adjutant-general, in order to command these four thousand five hundred men, which was practically an army. But the latter refused, saying: "We will consider that matter after Lantenac is taken; I have won no promotion as yet."

These important commands, held by officers of subordinate rank, were, moreover, in accordance with Republican customs. Bonaparte, later on, while as yet only a colonel of artillery, was at the same time commander-in-chief of the army of Italy.

It was a strange fate for the Tour-Gauvain to be attacked by one Gauvain, while defended by another member of the same family. Hence a certain reluctance in the

attack, but none in the defence; for M. de Lantenac was a man who spared nothing. Accustomed as he had been to live at Versailles, he had no feeling of regard for the Tourgue, which he scarcely knew. He had sought refuge there, simply because he had no other resource; but he would have destroyed it without a scruple. Gauvain felt more respect for it.

The bridge was the weak point of the fortress, but in the library above it were the family records. Now, if the assault began there, the burning of the bridge would be inevitable, and it seemed to Gauvain that to burn the records would be like attacking his ancestors. The Tourgue was the ancestral manor of the Gauvain family; from this tower started all their fiefs of Brittany, as those of France from the tower of the Louvre. It was the centre round which clustered the family associations of the Gauvains. He himself was born there; and now, led by the tortuous chances of fate, the grown man had come to attack the venerable walls that had protected his childhood.



Was it an impious act to lay this dwelling in ashes? Perhaps his own cradle was stored away in some corner of the granary over the library. Certain trains of thought assume the nature of emotions. Before the old family mansion Gauvain felt himself deeply moved, and it was in consequence of this feeling that he had spared the bridge. Contenting himself with making it impossible for the enemy to sally forth or attempt an escape at this point of egress, he held the bridge in check by a battery, and chose the opposite side for the attack. Hence the mining and sapping at the foot of the tower.

Cimourdain had allowed him to take his own course, meanwhile reproaching himself; for these Gothic antiquities were odious to his severe soul, and he was no more indulgent towards buildings than towards human beings. Sparing a castle was the first step in the direction of mercy; and he knew that mercy was Gauvain's weak point. Cimourdain, as we are aware, kept watch over him, and arrested his progress down this slope, so fatal in his eyes. And yet even he—and he acknowledged it to himself with a sort of indignation—had been unable to see the Tourgue again without a secret emotion: he was affected by the sight of that schoolroom containing the first books in which he had taught Gauvain to read. He had been the curé of the neighboring village Parigné; had occupied an upper room in the castle on the bridge; it was in the library that he held little Gauvain between his knees, and taught him the alphabet; within these four old walls he had seen his beloved pupil, the child of his soul, growing up to manhood, and watched the development of his mind. Was he about to burn and destroy this library, this castle, these walls, wherein he had so often blessed the child? He had spared them, but it had not been done without compunction.

He had allowed Gauvain to begin the siege from the opposite point. The tower might have been called the savage side of the Tourgue, and the library its civilized side. Cimourdain had allowed Gauvain to make the breach only in the former.

This ancient castle in the midst of the Revolution had, after all, only resumed its feudal customs, in being at the same time attacked and defended by a Gauvain. The history of the Middle Ages is but a record of wars between kinsmen. Étéocles and Polynices are Gothic as well as Grecian; and Hamlet but repeats in Elsinore what Orestes did in Argos.

XII.

THE RESCUE PLANNED.

The entire night was spent by both parties in preparations. As soon as the gloomy parley to which we lately listened was over, Gauvain's first act was to summon his lieutenant.

Guéchamp, with whom we must become acquainted, was a man of the secondary order, honest, brave, commonplace, a better soldier than commander, strictly intelligent up to the point when it becomes a duty not to understand, never moved to tenderness, proof against corruption in whatsoever shape it might present itself,—whether in the form of bribery, that taints the conscience, or in that of pity, that corrupts justice. As the eyes of a horse are shaded by his blinders, so were his heart and soul protected by the two screens of discipline and the order of command, and he walked straight ahead in the space they allowed him to see. His course was direct, but his path was narrow.

A man to be depended on, withal,—stern in command, exact in obedience.

Gauvain spoke in rapid tones,—

"We need a ladder, Guéchamp."

"We have none, commander."

"One must be found."

"For scaling?"

"No; for rescue."

After a moments reflection, Guéchamp replied,—

"I understand. But to serve your purpose a very long one is needed."

"The length of three stories."

"Yes, commander, that's about the height."

"It ought to be longer than that, for we must be sure of success."

"Certainly."

"How is it that you have no ladder?"

"Commander, you did not think it best to besiege the Tourgue from the plateau; you were satisfied to blockade it on that side; you planned the attack by way of the tower, and not from the bridge. So we gave our attention to the mine, and thought no more about the scaling. That is why we have no ladder."

"Have one made at once."

"A ladder of the length of three stories cannot be made at once."

"Then fasten several short ones together."

"But we must first get our ladders."

"Find them."

"There are none to be found. All through the country the peasants destroy ladders, just as they break up the carts and cut the bridges."

"True, they intend to paralyze the Republic."

"They mean that we shall neither transport baggage, cross a river, nor scale a wall."

"But I must have a ladder, in spite of all that."

"I was thinking, commander, that at Javené, near Fougères, there is a large carpenter's shop. We might get one there."

"There is not a moment to lose."

"When do you want the ladder?"

"By this time to-morrow, at the latest."

"I will send a messenger at full speed to Javené to carry the order for a requisition. A post of cavalry stationed there will furnish an escort. The ladder may be here to-morrow before sunset."

"Very well; that will answer," said Gauvain; "only be quick about it. Go!"

Ten minutes later, Guéchamp returned, and said to Gauvain,—

"The messenger has started for Javené."

Gauvain ascended the plateau, and for a long time stood gazing intently on the bridge-castle across the ravine. The gable of the castle, with no other opening than the low entrance closed by the raised drawbridge, faced the escarpment of the ravine. In order to reach the plateau at the foot of the bridge one roust climb down the face of the ravine, which might be accomplished by clinging to the bushes. But once in the moat, the assailants would be exposed to a shower of missiles from the three stories. Gauvain became convinced that at this stage of the siege the proper way to attack was through the breach of the tower.

He took every precaution to render flight impossible; he perfected the strict blockade of the Tourgue. Drawing the meshes of his battalions more and more closely, so that nothing could pass between them, Gauvain and Cimourdain divided the investment of the fortress between them,—the former reserving for himself the forest side, and leaving the plateau to Cimourdain. It was agreed that while Gauvain, aided by

Guéchamp, should conduct the assault through the mine, Cimourdain, with all the matches of the upper battery lighted, should watch the bridge and the ravine.

XIII.

WHAT THE MARQUIS IS DOING.

While all these preparations for the attack were going on outside, they were also making ready for resistance inside the tower.

A tower may be entered by a mine as a cask is bored by an auger; hence a tower is sometimes called a *douve*,[4] and it was the fate of the Tourgue to have its walls pierced by a bung-hole.

The powerful boring of two or three hundred-weight of powder had driven a hole through the mighty wall from one side to the other. Beginning at the foot of the tower, it had made a breach in the thickest part of the wall, in a sort of shapeless arch in the lower story of the fortress, and in order to make this hole more practicable for assault from without, the besiegers had enlarged it by cannon-shot.

The ground-floor where this breach had penetrated was a large, empty hall of a circular form, with a pillar in the centre, supporting the keystone of the vaulted ceiling. The hall, which was the largest in the keep, was no less than forty feet in diameter. Each story of the tower had a similar room, only on a smaller scale, with guards to the embrasures of the loop-holes. The hall on the ground-floor had neither embrasures, ventilators, nor dormer windows. There was about as much air and light in it as in a tomb.

The door of the oubliettes, the greater part of which was iron, was in the lower hall. Another door opened on a staircase leading to the upper rooms. All the staircases were built in the wall itself.

It was to the lower hall that the besieged had gained access by the breach they had made; but even after gaining possession of it, the tower would still remain to be taken.

One could scarcely breathe in this lower hall, and formerly no one could remain in it twenty-four hours without suffocating; but now, thanks to the breach, one could exist there.

For this reason the besieged had not closed the breach. Besides, what purpose would it have served? The guns would have reopened it.

They had fastened an iron torch-holder into the wall, wherein they set a torch, and that lighted the lower floor.

But how were they to defend themselves?

To stop up the hole would have been easy enough, but useless. A *retirade* would be more effective. A *retirade* is an intrenchment with a retreating angle,—a kind of barricade composed of rafters, by means of which the fire may be concentrated on the assailants, and which while leaving the breach open from without closes it from within. There was no lack of materials, and they proceeded to construct a barricade of this description with clefts for the passage of gun-barrels. The corner of the *retirade* was supported by the middle pillar, the two wings touching the walls on either side. Having completed this they placed *fugades* in safe places.

The Marquis directed everything. Inspirer, commander, guide, and master,—a terrible spirit!

Lantenac was one of those soldiers of the eighteenth century who save cities at the age of eighty. He resembled the Count d'Alberg, who, when almost a centenarian, drove the King of Poland from Riga.

"Courage, friends!" he said; "in 1713, at the beginning of this century, Charles XII., shut up in a house at Bender, with three hundred Swedes, held his own against twenty thousand Turks."

They barricaded the two lower stories, fortified the chambers, converted the alcoves into battlements, supported the doors with beams driven in by a mallet, thus forming buttresses; but the spiral staircase connecting the different stories they were obliged to leave free, since if they blockaded it against the besieger, their own passage would be obstructed. Thus a fortification always has its weak point.

The Marquis, indefatigable, vigorous as a young man, set example for the others by putting his own hands to the work, raising beams and carrying stones; he gave his orders, helped, fraternized, and laughed with this savage band, yet always remaining their lord and master, haughty even while familiar, elegant although fierce.

He allowed no one to contradict him. Once he said: "If half of you were to revolt, I would have you shot by the other half, and still defend the place with the rest."

This is the sort of thing for which men worship a commander.

XIV.

WHAT THE IMÂNUS IS DOING.

While the Marquis occupied himself with the breach and tower, the Imânus attended to the bridge. At the beginning of the siege the escape-ladder suspended crosswise below the windows of the second story had been removed by order of the Marquis and placed by the Imânus in the library. Probably this was the very ladder whose place Gauvain wished to supply. The windows of the entresol on the first story, called the guard-room, were defended by a triple bracing of iron bars set in the stones, so that one could neither come nor go that way.

The library windows, which were high, had no bars.

The Imânus was accompanied by three men as resolute and daring as himself. These men were Hoisnard, called Branche-d'Or, and the two brothers Pique-en-Bois. Taking with him a dark-lantern, he opened the iron door, and made a careful inspection of the three stories of the bridge-castle. Hoisnard Branche-d'Or, whose brother had been killed by the Republicans, was as implacable as the Imânus. The latter investigated the upper story, filled with hay and straw, as well as the lower one, into which he had several *pots-à-feu* brought, which he placed near the tar-barrels; he ordered bundles of dry heather to be so arranged that they would touch the tar-casks, after which he made sure that the sulphur-match, one end of which was on the bridge and the other in the tower, was in good working order. Over the floor, under the casks and the bundles, he poured a pool of tar into which he dipped the end of the sulphur-match; then he ordered his men to bring into the library, between the ground-floor and the attic, with tar beneath and straw overhead, three cradles containing René-Jean, Gros-Alain, and Georgette, who were all sound asleep. The cradles were brought in very gently, that the children might not be roused.

They were simple little village cribs, something like an osier basket, which when placed on the floor were low enough for a child to climb in and out without help. Beside each cradle the Imânus ordered them to place a porringer of soup, together with a wooden spoon. The escape-ladder, taken off its hooks, was laid on the floor against the wall, and the three cradles were placed end to end along the opposite wall, facing the ladder; then, thinking that a current of air might be useful, he flung wide open the six windows of the library. It was a warm and clear summer night.

He sent the brothers Pique-en-Bois to open the windows in the stories above and below. On the eastern façade of the building he had observed a large ivy, old and withered, about the color of tinder, which entirely covered one side of the bridge, framing the windows of the three stories, and thought that this ivy would do no harm. After bestowing a last glance on everything, the Imânus and his men left the châtelet

and returned into the keep. Double locking the heavy iron door, he examined attentively this immense and awe-inspiring lock, nodded approvingly at the sulphur-match, passed through the hole he had drilled, which was henceforth the only channel of communication between the tower and the bridge. This match, starting from the round room, passed beneath the iron door and entered under the arch, coiled snake-like over the spiral stairs, crept across the floor of the corridor below, and ended in the pool of tar under the dry heath. The Imânus had calculated that it would take a quarter of an hour from the time this sulphur-match was lighted from the interior of the tower, to set on fire the pool of tar under the library. Having completed and reviewed all these preparations, he carried the key of the iron door to the Marquis de Lantenac, who put it in his pocket.

Every movement of the besiegers must be watched; so with his cowherd horn in his belt he stood sentinel in the watch-tower of the platform on the summit of the tower. While keeping his eye on both the forest and the plateau, he had beside him in the embrasure of the watch-tower a powder-horn, and a canvas bag filled with good-sized balls and old newspapers, which he tore up to make cartridges. When the sun rose, it revealed in the forest eight battalions, with sabres at their sides, cartridge-boxes on their backs, and fixed bayonets, ready for the assault; on the plateau a battery with caissons, cartridges, and boxes of grape-shot; within the fortress nineteen men loading their muskets, pistols, and blunderbusses, and three children asleep in their cradles.

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[1]A corruption of the word "patriot."—Tr.

[2]Rustics.

[3]Equal to the occasion.

[4]Stave, cask.


LA MASSACRE DES S.T BARTHELEMY

BOOK III.

I.

THE MASSACRE OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW.

I.

The children awoke.

The little girl was the first to open her eyes.

The waking of children is like the opening of flowers; and like the flowers, these pure little souls seem to exhale fragrance.

Georgette, the youngest of the three, who last May was but a nursing infant, and now only twenty months old, lifted her little head, sat up in her cradle, looked at her toes, and began her baby-talk.

A ray of light fell upon the crib; it would have been difficult to say which was the rosier,—Georgette's foot, or the dawn.

The other two children still slept,—boys always sleep more soundly than girls,—while Georgette, contented and peaceful, began to prattle.

René-Jean's hair was brown, Gros-Alain's auburn, and Georgette's blond,—all shades peculiar to their ages, which would change as the children grew older. René-Jean looked like an infant Hercules as he lay there on his stomach fast asleep, with his two fists in his eyes. Gros-Alain had thrust his legs outside his little bed.

All three were in rags. The clothes given them by the battalion of the Bonnet-Rouge were in tatters; they had not even a shirt between them. The two boys were almost naked, and Georgette was bundled up in a rag which had formerly been a petticoat, but which now served the purpose of a jacket. Who had taken care of these little ones? It would be impossible to tell. Certainly not a mother. Those savage peasants who had carried them along as they fought their way from forest to forest, gave them their share of the soup, and nothing more. The little ones lived as best they could; they had masters in plenty, but no father. Yet childhood is enveloped by an atmosphere of enchantment that lends a charm to its very rags; and these three tiny beings were delightful.

Georgette chattered away.

The child prattles as the bird sings; but it is always the same hymn,—indistinct, inarticulate, and yet full of deep meaning; only the child, unlike the bird, has the dark fate of humanity before it. None can listen to the joyous song of a child without a sense of sadness. The lisping of a human soul from the lips of childhood may well be called the most sublime of earthly songs. This confused murmuring of thought, which is as yet mere instinct, contains an unconscious appeal to eternal justice. Perhaps it is a protest uttered on the threshold of life,—an unconscious protest, distressing to hear; ignorance, smiling on the infinite, seems to make all creation responsible for the fate allotted to a weak and defenceless being. Should misfortune befall, it would seem like an abuse of confidence.

The prattle of a child is more and less than speech; it is a song without notes, a language without syllables, a murmur that begins in heaven but is not to end on earth. As it began before birth, so it will go on after death. As the lispings are the continuance

of what the child said when he was an angel, they are likewise a foreshadowing of what he will say in eternity. The cradle has its Yesterday, as the grave has its Morrow; and the double mystery of both mingles with this unintelligible babble. There is no such proof of God, of eternity, of responsibility, and of the duality of destiny, as is this awe-inspiring shadow which we see resting upon a bright young soul.

Still, there was nothing melancholy about Georgette's chatter, for her sweet face was wreathed in smiles. Her mouth, her eyes, the dimples in her cheeks, all smiled in concert; and by this smile she seemed to show her delight in the morning. The human soul believes in sunshine. The sky was blue, the weather warm and beautiful; and this frail creature, neither knowing nor comprehending the meaning of life,—living in a dream, as it were,—felt safe amid the loveliness of Nature, with its friendly trees and its pure verdure, the serene and peaceful landscape, with the noises of birds, springs, insects, and leaves, and above all, the intense purity of the sunshine.

René-Jean, the oldest of the children, a boy over four years old, was the next one to wake. He stood up, jumped out of his cradle like a little man, discovered his porringer, as the most natural thing that could happen, seated himself on the floor, and began to eat his soup.

Georgette's prattle had not roused Gros-Alain, but at the sound of the spoon in the porringer he started and opened his eyes. Gros-Alain was the three-year-old boy. He too saw his bowl, and as it was within reach of his arm, he seized it, and without getting out of bed, with his dish on his knees and his spoon in his fist, he straightway followed the example of René-Jean.

Georgette did not hear them; the modulations of her voice seemed to keep time with the cradling of a dream. Her large eyes, gazing upward, were divine; however gloomy may be the vault over a child's head, heaven is always reflected in its eyes.

When René-Jean had finished, he scraped the bottom of the porringer with the spoon, sighed, and remarked with dignity,—

"I have eaten my soup."

This roused Georgette from her dreaming.

"Thoup," said she.

And seeing that René-Jean had finished his, and that Gros-Alain was still eating, she took the bowl of soup which stood beside her, and began to eat, carding the spoon quite as often to her ear as she did to her mouth.

From time to time she renounced civilization and ate with her fingers.

When Gros-Alain had scraped the bottom of his porringer he jumped out of bed and trotted after his brother.

II.

Suddenly from below rang the blast of a clarion, stern and loud, coming from the direction of the forest, to which a trumpet from the summit of the tower made reply.

This time the clarion called, and the trumpet answered. And again came the summons from the clarion, followed by the reply of the trumpet.

Then from the edge of the forest rose a voice, distant but clear, shouting distinctly,—

"Brigands, a summons! If by sunset you have not surrendered at discretion, we shall begin the assault."

A voice that sounded like the roar of a wild beast answered from the top of the tower,—

"Attack."

The voice from below replied,—

"A cannon will be fired as a last warning half an hour before the assault."

And the voice from above repeated,—

"Attack."

The children did not hear these voices, but the clarion and the horn echoed louder and more distinctly, and at the first sound Georgette craned her neck and ceased eating; she had dropped her spoon into the porringer, and at the second blast from the clarion she lifted the tiny forefinger of her right hand, and alternately raising and letting it fall, she marked the time of the trumpet, that was prolonged by the second call of the horn; when the horn and the clarion were silent, with her finger still uplifted, she paused dreamily, and then murmured to herself, "Muthic."

She probably meant "music,"

The two older ones, René-Jean and Gros-Alain, had paid no attention to the horn and the clarion; they were absorbed by another object. Gros-Alain, who had spied a woodlouse in the act of crawling across the library floor, exclaimed,—

"A creature!"

René-Jean ran up to him.

"It pricks," continued Gros-Alain.

"Don't hurt it," said René-Jean.

And both the children set themselves to watch the traveller.

Meanwhile Georgette, having finished her soup, was looking about for her brothers, who, crouching in the embrasure of a window, hung gravely over the woodlouse, their heads so close together that their hair intermingled; holding their breath, they gazed in astonishment at the creature, which, far from appreciating so much admiration, had stopped crawling, and no longer attempted to move.

Georgette, seeing that her brothers were watching something, desired to know what it might be. It was no easy matter to reach them, but she undertook it nevertheless. The journey fairly bristled with difficulties; all sorts of things were scattered over the floor,—stools turned upside down, bundles of papers, packing-cases which had been opened and left empty, trunks, all sorts of rubbish,—around which she had to make her way: a very archipelago of reefs; but Georgette took the risk. Her first achievement was to crawl out of the crib; then she plunged among the reefs. Winding her way through the straits, and pushing aside a footstool, she crawled between two boxes and over a bundle of papers, climbing up on one side, rolling down on the other, innocently exposing her poor little naked body, and finally reached what a sailor would call the open sea,—that is to say, quite an expanse of floor unencumbered by rubbish and free from perils. Here she made a rush, and with the agility of a cat she crept across the room on all fours as far as the window, where she encountered a formidable obstacle in the shape of the long ladder, which lying against the wall ended at this window, reaching a little beyond the corner of the embrasure, thus forming a sort of promontory between Georgette and her brothers. She paused, and seemed to consider the subject; and when she had solved the problem to her satisfaction, she resolutely clasped her rosy fingers about one of the rungs, which, as the ladder rested on its side, were not horizontal but vertical, and tried to pull herself up on to her feet; and when, after two unsuccessful attempts, she at last succeeded, she walked the entire length of the ladder, catching one rung after the other. On reaching the end her support failed, she stumbled and fell; but, nothing daunted, she caught at the end of one of its enormous poles with her tiny hands, pulled herself up, doubled the promontory, looked at René-Jean and Gros-Alain, and burst out laughing.

III.

Just then René-Jean, satisfied with the result of his investigations of the woodlouse, raised his head and affirmed,—

"It is a female."

Georgette's laughter made René-Jean laugh, and Gros-Alain laughed because his brother did.

Georgette having effected her object and joined her brothers, they sat round upon the floor as in a sort of diminutive chamber, but their friend the woodlouse had vanished.

It had taken advantage of Georgette's laughter and hidden itself away in a crack.

Other events followed the visit of the woodlouse.

First some swallows flew by.

Their nests were probably under the eaves. They flew quite close to the window, somewhat startled at the sight of the children, describing great circles in the air, and uttering their sweet spring note. This made the three children look up, and the woodlouse was forgotten.

Georgette pointed her finger at the swallows, crying,—

"Biddies!"

René-Jean reprimanded her,—

I "You mustn't say 'biddies,' missy; you must say 'birds.'"

"'Bir's,'" said Georgette.

And, all three watched the swallows.

Then a bee flew in.

Nothing reminds one of the human soul more than the bee, which goes from flower to flower as a soul from star to star, gathering honey as the soul absorbs the light.

This one came buzzing in with an air of great stir, as if it said: "Here I am; I have just seen the roses, and now I have come to see the children. What is going on here, I should like to know?"

A bee is a housekeeper, scolding as it hums.

As long as the bee stayed, the children never once moved their eyes from it.

It explored the entire library, rummaging in every corner, flying about quite as if it were at home in its hive; winged and melodious, it darted from case to case, peering through the glass at the titles of the books, just as if it had a brain, and having paid its visit, it flew away.

"It has gone home," said René-Jean.

"It is an animal," remarked Gros-Alain.

"No," replied René-Jean, "it is a fly."

"A f'y,'" said Georgette.

Then Gros-Alain, who had just found a string on the floor with a knot in the end, took the other end between his thumb and his forefinger, and having made a sort of windmill of the string, he was deeply absorbed in watching its whirling.

Georgette on her part, having returned to her former character of quadruped, and started again on her capricious journeys across the floor, had discovered a venerable arm-chair, with moth-eaten upholstery, from which the horse-hair was falling out in several places. She had stopped before this arm-chair, and was carefully enlarging the holes and pulling out the horse-hair.

Suddenly she raised her finger to attract her brothers' attention and make them listen.

They turned their heads.

A vague far-away sound could be heard outside: probably the attacking camp executing some strategic manoeuvre in the forest; there was a neighing of horses, a beating of drums, a rolling to and fro of caissons, a clanking of chains, and military calls and responses echoed on every side,—a confusion of wild sounds, whose combination resulted in a sort of harmony; the children listened in delight.

"It is the good God who does that," said Gros-Alain.

IV.

The noise ceased.

René-Jean had fallen into a dream.

How are ideas formed and scattered in those little minds? What is the mysterious action of those memories, so faint and evanescent? In this dreamy little head there was a confused vision of the good God, of prayer, of clasped hands, of a certain tender smile that had once rested on him, and which now he missed, and René-Jean whispered half-aloud, "Mamma!"

"Mamma," said Gros-Alain.

"Mma," repeated Georgette.

Thereupon René-Jean began to jump, and Gros-Alain lost no time in following his example, imitating all the movements and gestures of his brother; not so Georgette. Three years may copy four, but twenty months preserves its independence.

Georgette remained seated, uttering a word now and then; she had as yet achieved no success in sentences.

She was a thinker, and only uttered monosyllabic apothegms. After a few moments, however, she succumbed to the influence of example, and began her attempts to imitate her brothers, and these three pairs of naked little feet began to dance, run, and totter about in the dust that covered the old oaken floor, under the serious eyes of the marble busts, towards which Georgette from to time threw an uneasy glance, whispering,—

"The Momommes!"

In the language of Georgette a "momomme" was anything that looked like a man without really being one. Living beings are strangely confused with ghosts in the minds of children.

As Georgette tottered along after her brothers she was always on the verge of descending to all fours.

Suddenly René-Jean, who had gone near the window, raised his head, but dropped it the next moment, and ran to hide in a corner formed by the embrasure of the window. He had caught sight of some one looking at him. It was one of the Blues, a soldier from the encampment on the plateau, who, taking advantage of the armistice and perhaps somewhat infringing thereon, had ventured to the edge of the escarpment from whence he had gained a view of the interior of the library. Seeing René-Jean hide, Gros-Alain hid also; he cuddled down close by his brother's side, and Georgette hid herself behind them, and there they stayed silent and motionless, Georgette laying her finger on her lips. After a few moments René-Jean ventured to put out his head, but finding the soldier still there, he quickly drew it back, and the three children hardly

dared to breathe. This lasted for quite a long time, but finally Georgette grew tired of it; she plucked up the courage to look out, and behold the soldier had gone, and once more they began to run and play.

Gros-Alain, although an imitator and admirer of René-Jean, possessed a talent peculiarly his own, that of making discoveries; and his brother and sister now beheld him prancing in wild delight, dragging along a little four-wheeled cart, which he had unexpectedly discovered.

This doll-carriage had been lying there for years, forgotten in the dust, side by side with works of genius and the busts of sages. Perhaps Gauvain may have played with it when he was a child.

Gros-Alain had converted his bit of string into a whip, which he cracked with great exultation. Thus it is with discoverers. If one cannot discover America, one can at least find a small cart. It amounts to much the same thing.

But he must share his treasure; René-Jean was eager to harness himself to the wagon, and Georgette tried to get in and sit down.

René-Jean was the horse, Gros-Alain the coachman.

But the coachman did not know his business, and the horse felt obliged to give him a few lessons.

"Say, 'Get up!'" cried René-Jean.

"'Get up!'" repeated Gros-Alain.

The carriage upset, and Georgette fell out, whereupon she proceeded to make it known that angels can shriek,—and after that she had half a mind to cry.

"You are too big, missy," said René-Jean.

"I big," stammered Georgette; and her vanity seemed to console her for her fall.

The cornice under the windows was very wide, and the dust of the fields from the heath-covered plateau had collected there. After the rains had changed this dust into soil, among the seeds wafted thither by the wind was a bramble, which, making the most of this shallow soil, had taken root therein; it was of the hardy variety known as the fox-blackberry, and now in August it was covered with berries, and one of its branches, pushing its way through the window, hung down almost to the floor.

Gros-Alain to the discovery of the string and the cart added that of the blackberry-vine. He went up to it, picked off a berry, and ate it.

"I am hungry," said René-Jean. And Georgette, galloping on her hands and knees, lost no time in making her appearance on the scene.

The three together soon stripped the branch and devoured all the fruit; staining their faces and hands with the purple juices and laughing aloud in their glee, these three little seraphs were speedily turned into three little fauns, who would have horrified Dante and charmed Virgil.

Occasionally the thorns pricked their fingers. Every pleasure has its price.

Pointing to the bush, and holding out her finger, on which stood a tiny drop of blood, Georgette said to René-Jean,—

"Prick."

Gros-Alain, who had also pricked himself, looked suspiciously at the bush, and cried out,—

"It is a beast."

"No, it's a stick," replied René-Jean.

"Sticks are wicked, then," remarked Gros-Alain.

Again Georgette would have liked to cry, but she decided to laugh.


Emile Bayard

V.

Meanwhile René-Jean, jealous perhaps of the discoveries of his younger brother Gros-Alain, had conceived a grand project. For some time past, while he had been gathering the berries and pricking his fingers, his eyes had turned frequently towards the reading-desk, which, raised on a pivot, stood alone like a monument in the middle of the library. On this desk was displayed the famous volume of Saint Bartholomew.

It was really a magnificent and remarkable quarto. It had been published at Cologne by Bloeuw, or Coesius, as he was called in Latin, the famous publisher of the Bible of 1682. It was printed, not on Dutch paper, but on that fine Arabian paper, so much admired by Édrisi, manufactured from silk and cotton, which always retains its whiteness; the binding was of gilded leather, and the clasps of silver; the fly-leaves were of that parchment which the Parisian parchment-sellers swore to buy at the hall Saint-Mathurin "and nowhere else." This volume was full of wood-cuts, engravings on copper, and geographical maps of many countries; it contained a preface consisting of a protest from the printers, paper-manufacturers, and book-sellers against the edict of 1635, which imposed a tax on "leather, beer, cloven-footed animals, sea-fish, and paper," and on the back of the frontispiece was a dedication to the Gryphs, who rank in Lyons with the Elzévirs in Amsterdam. And all this had combined to produce a famous copy almost as rare as the "Apostol" of Moscow.

It was a beautiful book, and for that reason René-Jean gazed at it—too long, perhaps. The volume lay open just at the large engraving which represented Saint Bartholomew carrying his skin on his arm. This print could be seen from below, and when the berries were eaten, René-Jean gazed steadily at it with all his longing and greedy eyes; and Georgette, whose eyes had taken the same direction, spied the engraving, and exclaimed,—

"Picsure."

This word seemed to decide René-Jean. Then to the unbounded surprise of Gros-Alain a most remarkable proceeding took place.

In one corner of the library stood a large oaken chair. René-Jean went up to this chair, seized it, and dragged it across the room all alone by himself to the desk, then pushing it close up to the latter, he climbed upon it and put both his fists on the book.

Having reached the height of his ambition, he felt that it behooved him to be generous; so taking the "picsure" by the upper corner he carefully tore it in two,—the tear

crossing the saint diagonally, which was a pity; but that was no fault of René-Jean. The entire left side, one eye, and a fragment of the halo of this old apocryphal evangelist were left in the book; he offered Georgette the other half of the saint and the whole of his skin. Georgette, as she received it, remarked,—

"Momomme."

"Me too!" cried Gros-Alain.

The tearing out of the first page is like the first shedding of blood in battle; it decides the carnage.

René-Jean turned over the page; next to the saint came the commentator, Pantoenus; he bestowed Pantoenus upon Gros-Alain.

Meanwhile, Georgette had torn her large piece into two smaller ones, and then the two into four; thus it might have been recorded in history that Saint-Bartholomew, after being flayed in Armenia, was quartered in Brittany.

VI.

The execution finished, Georgette held out her hand to René-Jean for more.

After the saint and his commentator came the frowning portraits of the glossarists. First came Gavantus; René-Jean tore him out and placed him in Georgettes hand.

A similar fate befell all the commentators of Saint-Bartholomew.

The act of giving imparts a sense of superiority. René-Jean kept nothing for himself. He knew that Gros-Alain and Georgette were watching him, and that was enough for him; he was satisfied with the admiration of his audience. René-Jean, inexhaustible in his magnificent generosity, offered Fabricius and Pignatelli to Gros-Alain, and Father Stilting to Georgette; Alphonse Tostat to Gros-Alain, *Cornelius a Lapide* to Georgette; Gros-Alain had Henry Hammond, and Georgette Father Roberti, together with an old view of the city of Douai, where the latter was born in 1619; Gros-Alain received the protest of the paper-manufacturers, while Georgette obtained the dedication to the Gryphs. And then came the maps, which René-Jean also distributed. He gave Ethiopia to Gros-Alain, and Lycaonia to Georgette; after which he threw the book on the floor.

This was an awful moment. With mingled feelings of ecstasy and awe, Gros-Alain and Georgette saw René-Jean frown, stiffen his limbs, clench his fists, and push the massive quarto off the desk. It is really quite tragical to see a stably old book treated

with such disrespect. The heavy volume, pushed from its resting-place, hung a moment on the edge of the desk, hesitating, as if it were trying to keep its balance; then it fell, crumpled and torn, with disjointed clasps and loosened from its binding, all flattened out upon the floor. Luckily, it did not fall on the children.

They were startled, but not crushed. The results of conquest have sometimes proved more fatal.

Like all glories, it was accompanied by a loud noise and a cloud of dust.

Having upset the book, René-Jean now came down from the chair.

For a moment, silence and dismay prevailed; for victory has its terrors. The three children clung to one another's hands and gazed from a distance upon the ruins of this monstrous volume.

After a brief pause, However, Gros-Alain went up to it with an air of determination and gave it a kick.

This was quite enough; the appetite for destruction is never sated. René-Jean gave it a kick too, and Georgette gave it another, which landed her on the floor, but in a sitting position, of which she at once took advantage to throw herself on Saint Bartholomew. All respect was now at an end. René-Jean and Gros-Alain pounced upon it, jubilant, wild with excitement, triumphant, and pitiless, tearing the prints, slashing the leaves, tearing out the markers, scratching the binding, detaching the gilded leather, pulling the nails from the silver corners, breaking the parchment, defacing the noble text,—working with hands, feet, nails, and teeth; rosy, laughing, and fierce, they fell upon the defenceless evangelist like three angels of prey.

They annihilated Armenia, Judea, and Benevento, where the relics of the saint are to be found; Nathanael, who is supposed by some authorities to be the same as Bartholomew; Pope Gelasius, who declared the Gospel of Nathanael-Bartholomew apocryphal; and every portrait and map. Indeed, they were so utterly engrossed in their pitiless destruction of the old book, that a mouse ran by unobserved.

It might well be called extermination.

To cut to pieces history, legend, science, miracles true or false, ecclesiastical Latin, superstition, fanaticism, and mysteries,—thus to tear a whole religion to tatters,—might be considered a work of time for three giants. And even for three children it was no small matter; they labored for hours, but at last they conquered, and nothing remained of Saint-Bartholomew.

When they came to the end, when the last page was detached and the last print thrown on the floor, when all that was left in the skeleton binding were fragments of text and tattered portraits, René-Jean rose to his feet, looked at the floor all strewn with scattered leaves, and clapped his hands in triumph.

Gros-Alain immediately did the same.

Georgette rose, picked up a leaf from the floor, leaned against the window-sill, that was just on a level with her chin, and began to tear the big page into tiny bits and throw them out of the window.

When René-Jean and Gros-Alain saw what she was doing, they were at once eager to follow her example; and picking up the pages, they tore them over and over again, page by page, and threw the fragments outside the window as she had done. Thus almost the whole of that ancient book, torn by those destructive little fingers, went flying to the winds. Georgette dreamily watched the fluttering groups of tiny white papers blown about by every wind, and cried,—

"Butterflies."

And here ended the massacre, its last traces vanishing in thin air.

VII.

Thus for the second time was Saint Bartholomew put to death,—he who had already suffered martyrdom in the year of our Lord 49.

Meanwhile the evening was drawing on, and as the heat increased a certain drowsiness pervaded the atmosphere. Georgette's eyes were growing heavy; René-Jean went to his crib, pulled out the sack of straw that served him for a mattress, dragged it to the window, and stretching himself out upon it, said, "Let us go to bed."

Gros-Alain leaned his head against René-Jean, Georgette laid hers on Gros-Alain, and thus the three culprits fell sound asleep.

Warm breezes stole in at the open windows; the scent of wild-flowers borne upon the wind from the ravines and hills mingled with the breath of evening; Nature lay calm and sympathetic; radiance, peace, and love pervaded the world; the sunlight touched each object with a soft caress; and one felt in every pore of his being the harmony that springs from the profound tenderness of inanimate things. Infinity holds within itself the essence of motherhood; creation is a miracle in full bloom, whose magnitude is perfected by its benevolence. One seemed to be conscious of an invisible presence

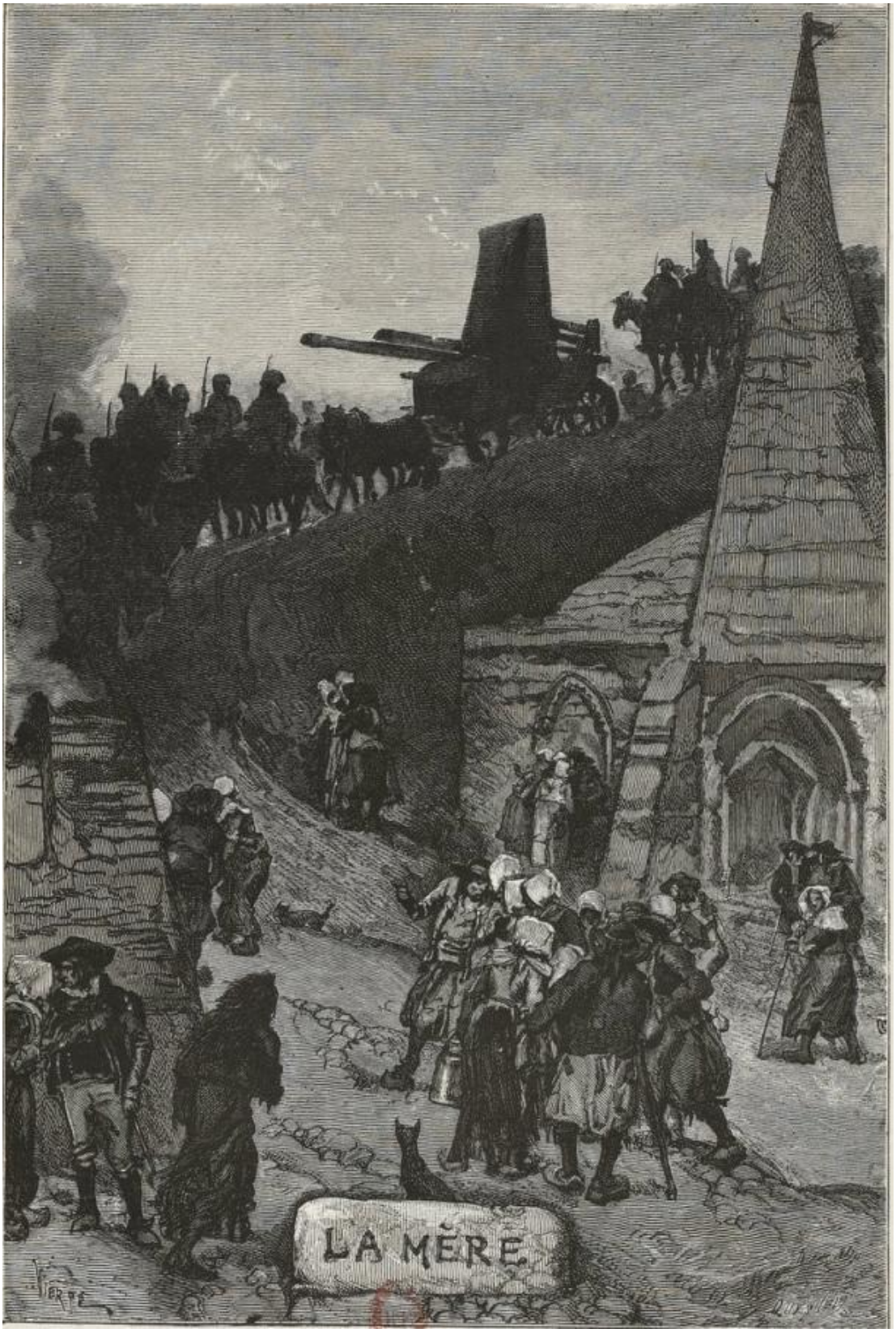
exercising its mysterious influence in the dread conflict between created beings, protecting the helpless against the powerful; beauty meanwhile on every side, its splendor only to be equalled by its tenderness. The landscape, calm and peaceful, displayed the enchanting hazy effects of light and shade over the fields and river; the smoke rose upwards to the clouds, like reveries melting into dreams; flocks of birds circled above the Tourgue; the swallows peeped in at the windows, as much as to say, "We have come to see if the children are sleeping comfortably." And pure and lovable they looked as they lay motionless, prettily grouped, like little half-naked Cupids, their united ages amounting to less than nine years. Vague smiles hovered round their lips, reflecting dreams of Paradise. Perchance Almighty God was whispering in their ears, since they were of those whom all human tongues unite to call the weak and the blessed. Theirs was the innocence that commands veneration. All was silent, as if the breath that stirred those tender bosoms were the business of the universe, and all creation paused to listen; not a leaf rustled, not a blade of grass quivered. It seemed as if the wide starry universe held its breath lest these three lowly but angelic slumberers should be disturbed; and nothing could be more sublime than the impressive reverence of Nature in the presence of this insignificance.

The declining sun had nearly reached the horizon, when suddenly, amid this profound peace, lightning flashed from the forest, followed by a savage report. A cannon had just been fired. The echoes seized this sound, and magnified it to a dreadful din, and so frightful was the prolonged reverberation from hill to hill that it roused Georgette.

She raised her head a little, lifted her finger, listened, then said,—

"Boom!"

The noise ceased, and silence returned again. Georgette put her head back on Gros-Alain, and fell asleep again.


LA MÈRE

BOOK IV.

THE MOTHER.

I.

DEATH PASSES.

That evening the mother, whom we have seen wandering onward with no settled plan, had walked all day long. This was, to be sure, a matter of every-day occurrence. She kept on her way without pause or rest; for the sleep of exhaustion in some chance corner could no more be called rest than could the stray crumbs that she picked up here and there like the birds be considered nourishment. She ate and slept just enough to keep her alive.

She had spent the previous night in a forsaken barn,—a wreck such as civil wars leave behind them. In a deserted field she had found four walls, an open door, a little straw, and the remains of a roof, and on this straw beneath the roof she threw herself down,

feeling the rats glide under as she lay there, and watching the stars rise through the roof. She slept several hours; then waking in the middle of the night, she resumed her journey, so as to get over as much ground as possible before the excessive heat of the day came on. For the summer pedestrian midnight is more favorable than noon.

She followed as best she could the brief directions given her by the Vautortes peasant, and kept as far as possible toward the west. Had there been any one near, he might have heard her incessantly muttering half aloud, "La Tourgue." She seemed to know no other word, save the names of her children.

And as she walked she dreamed. She thought of the adventures that had befallen her, of all she had suffered and endured, of the encounters, the indignities, the conditions imposed, the bargains offered and accepted, now for a shelter, now for a bit of bread, or simply to be directed on her way. A wretched woman is more unfortunate than a wretched man, inasmuch as she is the instrument of pleasure. Terrible indeed was this wandering journey! But all this would count for nothing if she could but find her children.

On that day her first adventure was in a village through which her route lay; the dawn was barely breaking, and the dusk of night still shrouded all the surrounding objects; but in the principal village street a few doors were half open, and curious faces peeped out of the windows. The inhabitants seemed restless like a startled hive of bees,—a disturbance due to the noise of wheels and the clanking of iron, which had reached their ears.

On the square in front of the church, a frightened group was staring at some object that was descending the hill towards the village. It was a four-wheeled wagon drawn by five horses, whose harness was composed of chains, and upon which could be seen something that looked like a pile of long joists, in the middle of which lay an object whose vague outlines were hidden by a large canvas resembling a pall. Ten horsemen rode in front of the wagon, and ten behind. They wore three-cornered hats, and above their shoulders rose what seemed like the points of naked sabres. The whole procession advanced slowly, its dark outlines sharply defined against the horizon; everything looked black,—the wagon, the harness, and the riders. On entering the village they approached the square with the pale glimmer of the dawn behind them.

It had grown somewhat lighter while the wagon was descending the hill, and now the escort was plainly to be seen,—a procession of ghosts to ail intents, for no man uttered a word.

The horsemen were gendarmes; they really were carrying drawn sabres, and the canvas that covered the wagon was black.

The wretched wandering mother, entering the village from the opposite direction, just as the wagon and the gendarmes reached the square, approached the crowd of peasants and heard voices whispering the following questions and answers,—

"What is that?"

"It's the guillotine."

"Where does it come from?"

"From Fougères."

"Where is it going?"

"I don't know. They say it is going to some castle near Parigné."

"Parigné!"

"Let it go wherever it will, so that it does not stop here."

There was something ghostlike in the combination of this great wagon with its shrouded burden, the gendarmes, the clanking chains of the team, and the silent men, in the early dawn.

The group crossed the square and passed out from the village, which lay in a hollow between two hills. In a quarter of an hour the peasants who had stood there like men petrified saw the funereal procession reappear on the summit of the western hill. The great wheels jolted in the ruts, the chains of the harness rattled as they were shaken by the early morning wind, the sabres shone; the sun was rising, and at a bend of the road all vanished from the sight.

It was at this very moment that Georgette woke up in the library beside her still sleeping brothers, and wished her rosy feet good-morning.

II.

DEATH SPEAKS.

The mother had watched this dark object as it passed by, but she neither understood nor tried to understand it, absorbed as she was in the vision that pictured her children lost in the darkness.

She too left the village soon after the procession which had just passed, and followed the same road at some distance behind the second squad of gendarmes. Suddenly the word "guillotine" came back to her, and she repeated it to herself; now, this untaught peasant woman, Michelle Fléchard, had no idea of its meaning, but her instinct warned her; she shuddered involuntarily, and it seemed dreadful to her to be walking behind it,—so she turned to the left, quitting the highway, and entered a wood, which was the Forest of Fougères.

After roaming about for some time she spied a belfry and the roofs of houses,—evidently a village on the edge of the forest; and she went towards it, for she was hungry.

It was one of those hamlets where the Republicans had established a military outpost.

She went as far as the square in front of the mayoralty-house.

Here, too, there was agitation and anxiety. A crowd had gathered in front of the flight of steps leading to the hall, and here, standing on one of these steps was a man accompanied by soldiers, who held in his hand a large unfolded placard. A drummer stood on his right, and on his left a bill-sticker, with his brush and paste-pot. Upon the balcony, over the door, stood the mayor, wearing a tricolored scarf over his peasant's dress.

The man with the placard was a public crier.

He wore a shoulder-belt from which hung a small wallet, in token that he was going from village to village proclaiming certain news throughout the district.

Just as Michelle Fléchard arrived, he had unfolded the placard and was beginning to read in a loud voice,—

"THE FRENCH REPUBLIC ONE AND INDIVISIBLE."

The drum beat. There was a stir in the crowd. A few took off their caps, others jammed their hats more firmly on their heads; in those times one could almost recognize a man's political views, throughout that district, by the fashion of his head-gear; hats were worn by Royalists, caps by Republicans. The confused murmur of voices ceased, and all listened as the crier proceeded to read:—

"By virtue of the orders given to as, and of the authority vested in us by the Committee of Public Safety,—"

Again the drum beat, and again the crier continued:—

"—and in execution of the decree of the National Convention, that outlaws all rebels taken with arms in their hands, and declares that capital punishment shall be inflicted on any man who harbors them or aids and abets in their escape,—"

One peasant whispered to his neighbor,—

"What does capital punishment mean?"

"I don't know," the neighbor replied.

The crier waved the placard:—

"—in accordance with Article 17 of the law of the 30th of April, that gives to the delegates and sub-delegates full authority over the rebels,—"

Here he made a pause, then resumed:—

"—the individuals designated under the following names and surnames are declared outlawed:—"

The audience listened with a close attention.

The voice of the crier sounded like thunder:—

"—Lantenac, brigand,—"

"That's Monseigneur," muttered a peasant.

And the whisper ran through the crowd, "It's Monseigneur."

And the crier pursued,—

"—Lantenac, ci-devant Marquis, brigand; the Imânus, brigand;—"

Two peasants looked askance at each other.

"That's Gouge-le-Bruant."

"Yes; that's Brise-Bleu."

The crier went on reading the list:—

"Grand-Francoeur, brigand;—"

A murmur-ran through the crowd.

"He's a priest."

"Yes,—the Abbé Turmeau."

"I know; he is a curé somewhere near the forest of La Chapelle."

"And a brigand," added a man in a cap.

The crier went on:—

"—Boisnouveau, brigand; the two brothers Pique-en-bois, brigands; Houzard, brigand;—"

"That's Monsieur de Quélen," said a peasant.

"—Panier, brigand;—"

"That's Monsieur Sepher."

"—Place-Nette, brigand;—"

"That's Monsieur Jamois."

Paying no heed to these remarks, the crier continued:—

"—Guinoiseau, brigand; Chatenay, called Robi, brigand;—"

One peasant whispered, "Guinoiseau is the same person we call Le Blond; Chatenay comes from Saint-Ouen."

"—Hoisnard, brigand;—" continued the crier.

"He is from Ruillé," some one in the crowd was heard to say.

"Yes, that's Branche-d'Or."

"His brother was killed at the attack of Pontorson."

"Yes, Hoisnard-Malonnière."

"A fine-looking fellow of nineteen."

"Attention!" called out the crier; "here is the end of the list:—

"—Belle-Vigne, brigand; La Musette, brigand; Sabre-tout, brigand; Brin-d'Amour, brigand;—"

Here a lad jogged the elbow of a young girl; she smiled.

The crier continued,—

"—Chante-en-hiver, brigand; Le Chat, brigand—"

"That's Moulard," said a peasant.

"—Tabouze, brigand.—"

"That's Gauffre," said another.

"There are two of the Gauffres," added some woman.

"Good fellows, both of them," muttered a lad.

The crier waved the placard, the drum beat to command silence, and then he resumed the reading:

"—And the above-named, wheresoever they may be taken, as soon as their identity is proved, will be put to death upon the spot;—"

There was a movement in the crowd.

The crier pursued,—

"—and any man who protects them, or aids them to escape, will be brought before a court-martial and forthwith put to death. Signed—"

The silence grew intense.

"—Signed: Delegate of the Committee of Public Safety,

"CIMOURDAIN."

"A priest," said a peasant.

"The former curé of Parigné," remarked another.

"Turmeau and Cimourdain," added a townsman,—"a White priest and a Blue one."

"And both of them black," remarked another townsman.

The mayor, who stood on the balcony, lifted his hat as he cried,—

"Long live the Republic!"

A roll of the drum made it known that the crier had not yet finished. He waved his hand.

"Listen," he said, "to the last four lines of the Government proclamation. They are signed by the chief of the exploring column of the Côtes-du-Nord, Commander Gauvain."

"Listen," cried voices in the crowd.

The crier read,—

"Under penalty of death,—"

All were silent.

"—it is forbidden, in pursuance with the above, to lend aid or succor to the nineteen rebels herein named, who are at present shut up and besieged in the Tourgue."

"What's that?" cried a voice.

It was a woman's voice,—the voice of the mother.

III.

MUTTERINGS AMONG THE PEASANTS.

Michelle Fléchard had mingled with the crowd. She had not listened, but some things one may hear without listening. She had heard the word "Tourgue," and raised her head.

"What's that? Did he say La Tourgue?"

People looked at her. The ragged woman seemed like one dazed.

Voices were heard to murmur, "She looks like a brigand."

A peasant woman, carrying a basket of buckwheat cakes, went up to her and whispered,—

"Keep still."

Michelle Fléchard stared stupidly; again she had lost all power of comprehension. That name, "La Tourgue" passed like a flash of lightning, and night closed once more. Had she no right to ask for information? What made the people look at her so strangely?

Meanwhile the drum had beaten for the last time, the bill-poster pasted up the notice, the mayor went back into the house, the crier started for some other village, and the crowd dispensed.

One group was still standing in front of the notice. Michelle Fléchard drew near.

They were commenting on the names of the outlaws.

Both peasants and townsmen were there; that is to say, both Whites and Blues.

"After all, they have not caught everybody," said a peasant. "Nineteen is just nineteen, and no more. They have not got Riou, nor Benjamin Moulins, nor Goupil from the parish of Andouillé."

"Nor Lorieul, of Monjean," remarked another.

And thus they went on:—

"Nor Brice-Denys."

"Nor François Dudouet."

"Yes, they have the one from Laval."

"Nor Huet, from Launey-Villiers."

"Nor Grégis."

"Nor Pilon."

"Nor Filleul."

"Nor Ménicent."

"Nor Guéharrée."

"Nor the three brothers Logerais."

"Nor Monsieur Lechandellier de Pierreville."

"Idiots!" exclaimed a stern-looking, white-haired man. "They have them all, if they have Lantenac."

"They have not got him yet," muttered one of the young fellows.

"Lantenac once captured, the soul is gone. The death of Lantenac means death to the Vendée," said the old man.

"Who is this Lantenac?" asked a townsman.

"He is a ci-devant," replied another.

And another added,—

"He is one of those who shoot women."

Michelle Fléchard heard this, and said,—

"That's true."

When people turned to look at her she added,—

"Because he shot me."

It was an odd thing to say; as if a living woman were to call herself dead. People looked at her suspiciously.

And truly she was a startling object, trembling at every sound, wild-looking, shivering, with an animal-like fear; so terrified was she that she frightened other people. There is a certain weakness in the despair of a woman that is dreadful to witness. It is like looking upon a being against whom destiny has done its worst. But peasants are not analytical; they see nothing below the surface. One of them muttered, "She might be a spy."

"Keep still and go away," whispered the kind-hearted woman who had spoken to her before.

"I am doing no harm," replied Michelle Fléchard; "I am only looking for my children."

The kind woman winked at those who were starring at Michelle Fléchard, and touching her forehead with her finger, said,—

"She is a simpleton."

Then drawing her aside, she gave her a buckwheat cake.

Without even stopping to thank her, Michelle Fléchard began to devour the cake like one ravenous for food.

"You see, she eats just like an animal: she must be a simpleton;" and one by one the crowd gradually dispersed.

After she had eaten, Michelle Fléchard said to the peasant woman,—

"Well, I have finished my cake; now, where is the Tourgue?"

"There she is at it again!" cried the peasant woman.

"I must go the Tourgue. Show me the road to La Tourgue."

"Never!" cried the peasant woman. "You would like to be killed, I suppose; but whether you would or not, I don't know the way myself. You must surely be insane. Listen to me, my poor woman. You look tired; will you come to my house and rest?"

"I never test," replied the mother.

"And her feet are all torn," muttered the peasant woman.

"Didn't you hear me telling you that my children were stolen from me, one little girl and two little boys? I came from the *carnichot* in the forest. You can ask Tellmarch le Caimand about me, and also the man I met in the field down yonder. The Caimand cared me. It seems I had something broken. All those things really happened. Besides, there is Sergeant Radoub; you may ask him; he will tell you, for it was he who met us in the forest. Three,—I tell you there were three children, and the oldest one's name was René-Jean: I can prove it to you; and Gros-Alain and Georgette were the two others. My husband is dead; they killed him. He was a farmer at Siscoignard. You look like a kind woman. Show me the way. I am not mad, I am a mother. I have lost my children, and am looking for them. I do not know exactly where I came from. I slept last night on the straw in a barn. I am going to the Tourgue. I am not a thief. You can't help seeing that I am telling you the truth. You ought to help me to find my children. I don't belong to this neighborhood. I have been shot, but I do not know where it happened."

The peasant woman shook her head, saying,—

"Listen, traveller; in times of revolution you must not say things that cannot be understood, for you might be arrested."

"But the Tourgue," cried the mother; "madam, for the love of the Infant Jesus and of the Blessed Virgin in Paradise I pray you, I beg of you, I beseech you, madam, tell me how I can find the road to the Tourgue!"

Then the peasant woman grew angry.

"I don't know! And if I did, I would not tell you! It is a bad place. People don't go there."

"But I am going there," said the mother.

And once more she started on her way.

The woman, as she watched her depart, muttered to herself:—

"She must have something to eat, whatever she does;" and running after Michelle Fléchard, she put a dark-looking cake in her hand, saying,—

"There is something for your supper."

Michelle Fléchard took the buckwheat-cake, but she neither turned nor made reply as she pursued her way.

She went forth from the village, and just as she reached the last houses she met three little ragged and barefooted children trotting along. She went up to them and said,—

"Here are two boys and a girl;" and when she saw them looking at her bread, she gave it to them.

The children took the bread, but they were evidently frightened.

She entered the forest.

IV.

A MISTAKE.

Meanwhile, on this very day, before dawn, amid the dim shadows of the forest, the following scene took place on the bit of road that leads from Javené to Lécousse.

All the roads of the Bocage are shut in between high banks, and those enclosing the one that runs from Javené to Parigné by way of Lécousse are even higher than usual; indeed the road, winding as it does, might well be called a ravine. It leads from Vitré, and has had the honor of jolting Madame de Sévigné's carriage. Shut in as it is by hedges on the right and on the left, no better spot for an ambush could well be found.

That morning, one hour before Michelle Fléchard, starting from a different part of the forest, had reached the first village, where she beheld the funereal apparition of the wagon escorted by the gendarmes, a crowd of unseen men, concealed by the branches, crouched in the thickets through which the road from Javené runs after it crosses the bridge over the Couesnon. They were, peasants dressed in coats of skin, such as were worn by the kings of Brittany in the sixteenth century and by the peasants in the eighteenth. Some were armed with muskets, others with axes. Those who had axes had just built in a glade a kind of funeral pile of dry fagots and logs, which was only waiting to be set on fire. Those who had muskets were posted on both sides of the road, in the attitude of expectancy. Could one have seen through the leaves, he might have discovered on every side fingers resting on triggers and guns aimed through the openings made by the interlacing of the branches. These men were lying in wait. All the muskets converged towards the road, which had begun to whiten in the rising dawn.

Amid this twilight low voices were carrying on a dialogue:—

"Are you sure of this?"

"Well, that's what they say."

"She is about to go by?"

"They say she is in this neighborhood."

"She must not leave it."

"She must be burned."

"We three villages have come out for that very purpose."

"And how about the escort?"

"It is to be killed."

"But will she come by this road?"

"So they say."

"Then she is coming from Vitré."

"And why shouldn't she?"

"Because they said she was coming from Fougères."

"Whether she comes from Fougères or from Vitré, she certainly comes from the devil."

"That is true."

"And she must go back to him."

"I agree to that."

"Then she is going to Parigné?"

"So it seems."

"She will not get there."

"No."

"No, no, no!"

"Attention!"

It was the part of prudence to be silent now, since it was growing quite light.

Suddenly these men lurking in ambush held their breath, as they heard the sound of wheels and horses' feet. Peering through the branches, they caught an indistinct glimpse of a long wagon, a mounted escort, and something on the top of the wagon, all of which was coming towards them along the hollow road.

"There she is," cried the one who appeared to be the leader.

"Yes, and the escort too," said one of the men who lay in wait.

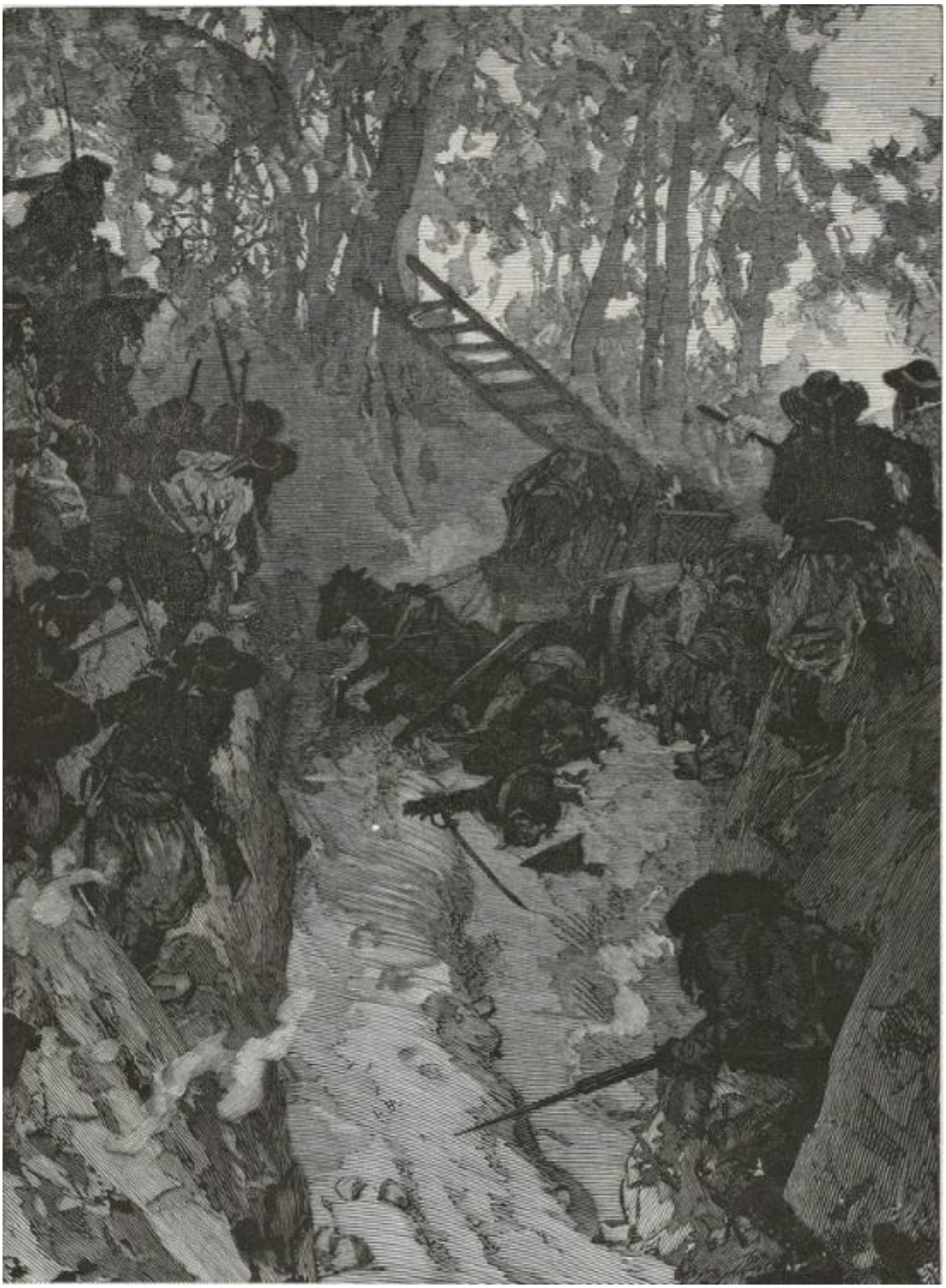
"How many are there?"

"Twelve."

"It was said that there were to be twenty."

"Twelve or twenty, let us kill them all."

"Wait till they are within our reach."



A little later and the wagon with its escort appeared at a turn of the road.

"Long live the King!" cried the peasant leader; and as he spoke, a hundred muskets were fired at the same instant. When the smoke scattered, the escort was scattered likewise. Seven horsemen had fallen, and the other five had made their escape. The peasants rushed to the wagon. "Hallo! this is not the guillotine," cried the leader; "it's a ladder."

In fact, there was nothing whatever in the wagon but a long ladder.

The two wounded horses had fallen, and the driver had been killed by accident.

"There is something suspicious about a ladder with an escort, all the same," said the leader. "It was going in the direction of Parigné. No doubt it was intended for scaling the Tourgue."

"Let us burn the ladder," cried the peasants.

As to the funereal wagon for which they were watching, it had taken another road, and was already two miles farther away, in the village where Michelle Fléchard had seen it pass at sunrise.

V.

VOX IN DESERTO.

After leaving the three children to whom she had given her bread, Michelle Fléchard started at random through the woods.

Since no one would show her the way, she must find it without help. From time to time she paused, and sat down to rest; then up and away again. She was overcome by that intense weariness which one feels first in the muscles, then in the bones,—like the fatigue of a slave. And a slave indeed she was,—the slave of her lost children. They must be found; each passing moment might be fatal to them. A duty like this debars one from the right to breathe freely; yet she was very weary. When one has reached this stage of fatigue it becomes a question whether another step can be taken. Could she do it? She had been walking since morning without finding either a village or a house. When she first started she had followed the right path, but soon wandered into the wrong one, and at last quite lost her way among the thick branches, where one tree looked just like another. Was she drawing near her goal? Were her sufferings almost over? She was following the way of the Cross, and felt all the languor and exhaustion of the final station. Was she doomed to fall dead on the road? At one time it seemed to her impossible to take another step: the sun was low, the forest dark, the

paths no longer visible in the grass, and God only knew what was to become of her. She began to call, but there was no reply.

Looking around, she perceived an opening among the branches, and no sooner had she started in that direction than she found herself out of the wood.

Before her lay a valley no wider than a trench, across whose stony bottom flowed a slender stream of clear water. Then she realized that she was excessively thirsty, and approaching it knelt to drink; and while thus kneeling she thought she would say her prayers.

When she rose she tried to get her bearings, and crossed the brook.

As far as the eye could reach on the farther side of the little valley stretched a limitless plain overgrown with a stubbly underbrush, which rose from the brook like an inclined plane, occupying the entire horizon. If the forest were a solitude, this plateau might be called a desert. In the forest there was a chance that one might encounter a human being behind any bush; but across the plateau not an object could be descried within reach of human vision. A few birds were flying across the heather, as if making an effort to escape.

Then, in the presence of this utter desolation, feeling her knees give way beneath her, the poor bewildered mother cried out amid the solitude, like one suddenly gone mad,—

"Is there no one here?"

She paused for an answer, and the answer came.

A deep and muffled voice burst forth from the distant horizon, caught and repeated by echo upon echo. It was like a thunderbolt; but it might have been the firing of a cannon, or a voice answering the mother's question, and replying, "Yes."

Then silence reigned once more.

The mother rose with renewed energy. She felt reassured by a sense of companionship. Having quenched her thirst and said her prayers, her strength returned, and she began to climb the plateau in the direction from whence the voice of distant thunder had reached her ears. Suddenly she caught sight of a lofty tower looming up against the far-away horizon. It stood alone amid this wild landscape, and a ray of the setting sun cast a crimson glow across it. It was more than a league away. Beyond it stretched the forest of Fougères, its vast expanse of verdure half hidden by the mist.

Could it have been this tower that made the noise?—for it seemed to her to stand on the very spot whence came the thundering sound that had rung in her ears like a call.

Michelle Fléchard had now reached the summit of the plateau, and the plain alone lay before her.

VI.

THE SITUATION.

The moment had finally come when Cimourdain held Lantenac in his grasp. The inexorable had conquered the pitiless. The old rebel Royalist was caught in his own lair, with no possible chance of escape; and Cimourdain had determined to behead the Marquis in the home of his ancestors, on his own estate, upon his very hearthstone, so to speak, that the feudal mansion might look upon the downfall of its feudal lord, and thus present an example not soon to be forgotten.

For this reason he sent to Fougères for the guillotine, which we saw on its way.

To kill Lantenac was to kill the Vendée; the death of the Vendée meant safety for France. Cimourdain was a man utterly calm in the performance of duty, however ferocious it might be, and not for a moment did he hesitate.

In regard to the ruin of the Marquis he felt quite at ease; but he had another cause for anxiety. The struggle would no doubt be a fearful one; Gauvain would direct the assault, and perhaps take part in it. This young chief had all the fire of a soldier; he was the very man to throw himself headlong into this hand-to-hand encounter. And what if he were killed,—Gauvain, his child, the only being on earth whom he loved! Gauvain had been fortunate thus far; but fortune sometimes grows weary. Cimourdain trembled. Strange enough was his destiny, thus placed between these two Gauvains, longing for the death of the one, and praying for the life of the other.

The cannon that had started Georgette in her cradle and summoned the mother from the depths of the woods, did more than that. Whether by accident or intentionally on the part of the man who pointed the gun, the ball, though intended only as a warning, struck, broke, and partly wrenched away the iron bars that defended and closed the great loop-hole on the first floor of the tower, and the besieged had had no time to repair this damage.

The truth was that, in spite of their loud boasting, their ammunition was nearly exhausted; and their situation, let it be remembered, was more critical than the besiegers suspected. Their dream had been to blow up the Tourgue when the enemy was once fairly within the walls; but their store of powder was running low,—not more than thirty rounds left for each man. They had plenty of muskets, blunderbusses, and pistols, but few cartridges. All the guns were loaded, that they might keep up a steady fire. But how long could this last? To keep up the firing and economize their resources at one and the same time would be a somewhat difficult combination. Fortunately (a gloomy kind of fortune) it would be for the most part a hand-to-hand encounter, in which the cold steel of sabre and dagger would take the place of firearms. They would have a chance to hack the enemy in pieces, and therein lay their chief hope.

The interior of the tower seemed impregnable. In the low hall where the breach had been made the entrance was defended by that barricade so skilfully constructed by Lantenac, called that *retirade*. Behind it stood a long table covered with loaded weapons, blunderbusses, carbines, muskets, sabres, hatchets, and daggers. Having been unable to make use of the oubliette prison communicating with the lower hall, for the purpose of blowing up the tower, the Marquis had ordered the door of this dungeon to be closed. Above the hall was the round chamber of the first story, which could only be reached by a very narrow spiral staircase. This room, provided like the lower hall with a table covered with weapons ready for use, was lighted by the wide embrasure whose grating had just been crushed by a cannon-ball. Below this room

the spiral staircase led to the round chamber on the second story, from which the iron door opened into the bridge-castle. This room on the second floor was called indiscriminately "the room with the iron door," or "the mirror room", on account of the numerous little mirrors hung from rusty old nails against the naked stone walls,—an odd medley of elegance and barbarism. As there were no means by which the upper rooms could be successfully defended, this mirror-room was what Manesson-Mallet, the authority on fortifications, calls "the last post where the besieged may capitulate." The object was, as we have already stated, to prevent the besiegers from reaching it.

This round chamber on the second floor was lighted by embrasures, but a torch was burning there also. This torch, stuck in an iron torch-holder, like the one in the lower hall, had been lighted by the Imânus and placed quite near the end of the sulphur-match. Appalling solicitude.

At the end of the hall, on a long board raised on trestles, food had been placed as in a Homeric cavern; great dishes of rice, a porridge of some kind of dark grain, hashed veal, a boiled pudding made of flour and fruit, and jugs of cider. Whoever wished to eat and drink could do so.

The cannon had set them all on the alert, and now they had but half an hour of repose before them.

From the top of the tower the Imânus kept watch of the enemy's approach. Lantenac had given orders that the besiegers should be allowed to advance unmolested.

"They are four thousand five hundred," he said; "it would be useless to kill them outside. Wait till they are within the walls, where we shall be equal to them." And he added, laughing, "Equality, Fraternity."

It had been agreed that when the enemy began to advance, the Imânus should give warning on his horn.

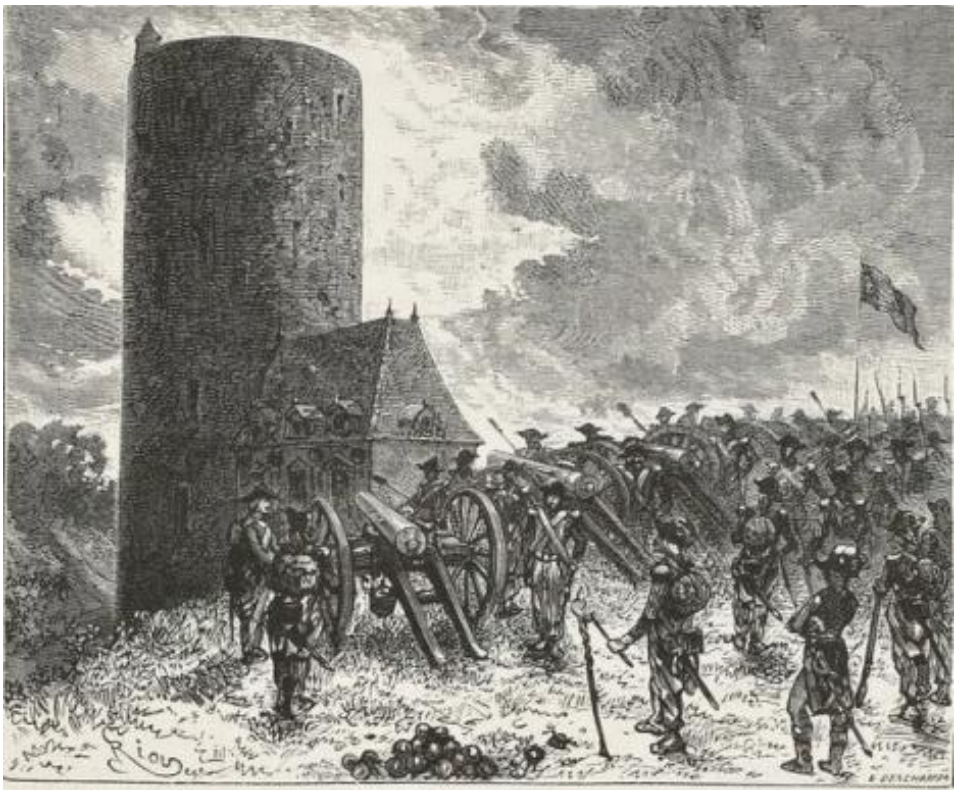
Posted behind the *retirade* and on the steps of the staircase, they waited in silence, with a musket in one hand and a rosary in the other.

The situation might be summed up as follows:—

On one side of the besiegers a breach to scale, a barricade to carry, three rooms in succession, one above the other, to be taken by main force, two spiral staircases to be climbed, step by step, under a shower of bullets; the besieged meanwhile standing face to face with death.

VII.

PRELIMINARIES.



Gauvain on his side was preparing for the attack. He had given his last instructions to Cimourdain, who, it will be remembered, was to guard the plateau, taking no part in the action, as well as to Guéchamp, who with the main body of the army was to be stationed in the forest camp. It was agreed that neither the lower battery of the wood nor the higher one of the plateau was to fire, unless a sortie or an attempt to escape were made. Gauvain reserved for himself the command of the storming column, and this it was that troubled Cimourdain.

The sun had just set.

A tower in the open country is like a ship in mid-ocean, and must be attacked in the same way. It is more like boarding than assaulting. Cannon is of no avail, for of what use would it be to cannonade walls fifteen feet thick? A port-hole through which men struggle to force a way, while others defend the entrance with axes, knives, pistols, fists, and teeth,—this was the kind of combat that might be expected, and Gauvain knew that by no other means could the Tourgue be taken. Nothing can be more deadly than an attack where the combatants can look into one another's eyes. He was familiar with the formidable interior of the tower, having lived there as a child.

He stood wrapped in deep thought.

A few paces from him, his lieutenant, Guéchamp, with a spy-glass in his hand, was scanning the horizon in the direction of Parigné. Suddenly he cried,—

"Ah! At last!"

This exclamation roused Gauvain from his reverie.

"What is it, Guéchamp?"

"The ladder is coming, commander."

"The escape-ladder?"

"Yes."

"Is it possible that it has not arrived till now?"

"No, commander; and I felt anxious about it. The courier whom I sent to Javené returned."

"I am aware of that."

"He reported that he had found in a carpenter-shop at Javené a ladder of the required dimensions, that he had taken possession of it, and having had it put on a wagon, demanded an escort of twelve horsemen; that he had waited to see them set out for Parigné,—the wagon, the escort, and the ladder,—and had then started for home at full speed."

"And reported the same to us, adding that the team was a good one and had started about two o'clock in the morning, and would therefore be here before sunset. Yes, I know all that. What else?"

"Well, commander, the sun has just set and the wagon that is to bring the ladder has not yet arrived."

"Is it possible? But we must begin the attack. The hour has come. If we are late, the besieged will think that we have retreated."

"We can attack, commander."

"But we must have the escape-ladder."

"Certainly."

"But we have not got it"

"Yes, we have."

"How is that?"

"That's what made me say, 'Ah! at last!' As the wagon had not arrived, I took my spy-glass and have been watching the road from Parigné to the Tourgue, and now I am content; for the wagon and the escort are yonder descending the hill. You can see them."

Gauvain took the spy-glass and looked.

"Yes, there it is. It is hardly light enough to see it all distinctly, but I can distinguish the escort; it is certainly that. Only it seems to me larger than you said, Guéchamp?"

"Yes, it does."

"They are about a quarter of a league distant."

"The escape-ladder will be here in a quarter of an hour, commander."

"Then we can attack."

It was indeed a wagon approaching, but not the one they supposed it to be.

As he turned, Gauvain saw behind him Sergeant Radoub standing with downcast eyes, in the attitude of military salute.

"What is it, Sergeant Radoub?"

"Citizen commander, we, the men of the battalion of the Bonnet-Rouge, have a favor to ask of you."

"What is it?"

"To be killed."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gauvain.

"Will you grant us this favor?"

"Well, that depends," said Gauvain.

"It is just this, commander. Since the affair at Dol, you have been too careful of us. There are twelve of us still."

"Well?"

"It humiliates us."

"You are the reserved force."

"We would rather be in the vanguard."

"I need you to insure success at the close of the engagement. That is why I keep you back."

"There is too much of this keeping back."

"It is all the same. You are in the column. You march."

"In the rear. Paris has a right to march at the head."

"I will consider the matter, Sergeant Radoub."

"Consider it to-day, commander. The occasion is at hand. Hard knocks will be given on both sides; it will be lively work. He who lays a finger on the Tourgue will get himself burned; we request the favor of being in the thick of it."

The sergeant paused, twisted his moustache, and continued in a changed voice:—

"And then you know, commander, our little ones are in this tower. Our children are there,—the children of the battalion, our three children. That abominable wretch Brise-Bleu, called the Imânus, that Gouge-le-Bruand, Bouge-le-Gruand, Fouge-le-Truand, that thundering devil of a man, threatens our children,—our children, our puppets, commander! No harm must come to them, whatever convulsion shakes the Tourgue. Do you understand that, commander? We will not endure it. Just now I took advantage of the truce, and climbing up the plateau, I looked at them through the window. Yes, they are certainly there,—you can see them from the edge of the ravine; I saw them, and frightened the darlings. Commander, if a single hair falls from the heads of those little cherubs,—I swear it by the thousand names of all that is sacred,—I, Sergeant Radoub, will demand an account of God Almighty! And this is what the battalion says: we want the babies to be saved, or else we all want to be killed. We have a right to ask it. Yes, that every man of us be killed! And now I salute you, and present my respects."

Gauvain held out his hand to Radoub as he exclaimed:—

"You are brave fellows! You will join the attacking column. I shall divide you into two parties; six of you I shall place in the vanguard to insure the advance, and six in the rear-guard to prevent a retreat."

"And am I still to command the twelve?"

"Of course."

"Thank you, commander. In that case, I join the vanguard."

Radoub made the military salute, and returned to the ranks. Gauvain drew out his watch, whispered a few words to Guéchamp, and the attacking column began to form.