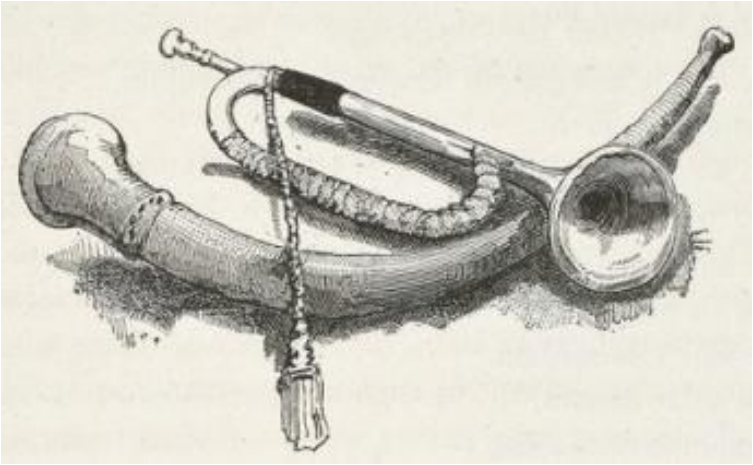
VIII.

THE SPEECH AND THE ROAR.



Meanwhile, Cimourdain who had not yet taken his position on the plateau, and who stood beside Gauvain, approached a trumpeter.

"Sound the trumpet!" he said to him.

The clarion sounded, the horn replied.

Again the clarion and the trumpet exchanged calls.

"What does that mean?" asked Gauvain of Guéchamp. "What does Cimourdain want?"

Cimourdain, with a white handkerchief in his hand, approached the tower; and as he drew near, he cried aloud,—

"You men in the tower, do you know me?"

And the voice of the Imânus made answer from the heights,—

"We do."

These two voices were now heard exchanging question and reply as follows:—

"I am the ambassador of the Republic,'

"You are the former curé of Parigné."

"I am a delegate of the Committee of Public Safety."

"You are a priest."

"I am a representative of the law."

"You are a renegade."

"I am a commissioner of the Revolution."

"You are an apostate."

"I am Cimourdain."

"You are a demon."

"Do you know me?"

"We abominate you."

"Would you like to have me in your power?"

"There are eighteen of us here who would give our heads to have yours."

"Well, then, I have come to give myself up to you."

A burst of savage laughter rang out from the top of the tower, with the derisive cry,—

"Come!"

A deep silence of expectancy reigned in the camp.

Cimourdain continued,—

"On one condition."

"What is that?"

"Listen."

"Speak."

"You hate me?"

"Yes."

"And I love you; I am your brother."

The voice from above replied,—

"Yes—our brother Cain."

Cimourdain went on, with a peculiar inflection of voice,—soft, but penetrating:—

"Insult me, if you will, but listen to my words. I come here protected by a flag of truce. Poor misguided men, you are in very truth my brothers, and I am your friend. I am the light, trying to illumine your ignorance. Light is the essence of brotherhood. Moreover, have we not all one common mother,—our native land? Then listen to me. Sooner or later, you—or at least your children or grandchildren—will know that every event of this present time is the result of the higher law, and that this revolution is the work of God himself. But while we wait for the time when, to the inner sense of every man, even unto yours, all these things will be made plain, and when all fanaticisms, including our own, will vanish before the powerful light that is to dawn, is there none to take pity on your ignorance? Behold, I come to you, and I offer you my head; more than this, I hold out my hand. I beg of you to take my life and spare your own. All power is vested in me, and what I promise I can fulfil. I make one final effort in this decisive moment. He who speaks to you is both citizen and priest. The citizen contends with you, but the priest implores you. I beseech you to hear me. Many among you have wives and children. It is in their behalf that I entreat you. Oh, my brothers—"

"Go on with your preaching!" sneered the Imânus.

Cimourdain continued:—

"My brethren, avert this fatal hour. There will be frightful slaughter here. Many of us who stand before you will not see to-morrow's sun; yes, many indeed will perish, and you,—you will all die. Have mercy on yourselves. Why shed all this blood to no avail? Why kill so many men when two would suffice?"

"Two?" asked the Imânus.

"Yes, two."

"Who are they?"

"Lantenac and myself."

Here Cimourdain raised his voice.

"We are the two men whose deaths would be most pleasing to our respective parties. This is my offer; accept it and you are saved. Give Lantenac to us and take me in his place; he will be guillotined, and with me you may do what you will."

"Priest," howled the Imânus, "if we but had you, we would roast you over a slow fire."

"So be it," said Cimourdain; and he went on:—

"You, the condemned who are in this tower, in one hour may all be safe and free. I offer you salvation. Will you accept?"

The Imânus burst out:—

"You are a fool as well as a villain. Why do you interfere with us? Who invited you to come here with your speeches? You expect us to deliver up Monseigneur, do you? What do you want to do with him?"

"I want his head, and I offer you—"

"Your skin, for we would flay you like a dog, curé; but no, your skin is not worth his head. Begone!"

"The slaughter will be terrible. Once more I beseech you to reflect."

Night had come on during the progress of this gloomy conference, which had been heard both within and without the tower. The Marquis de Lantenac listened in silence, letting the affair take its course; leaders sometimes exhibit this self-absorbed indifference, as a kind of prerogative of responsibility.

The Imânus raised his voice above that of Cimourdain, exclaiming:—

"You men who are about to attack us, we have declared our intentions. You have heard our offers; we shall make no change in them, and woe be unto you if you refuse them. But if you consent, we will give you back the three children whom we now hold, on condition that each one of us is allowed to depart in safety."

"You may all go free, save one," replied Cimourdain.

"Who is that?"

"Lantenac."

"Monseigneur! Deliver Monseigneur! Never!"

"We must have Lantenac."

"Never!"

"We can treat with you on no other condition."

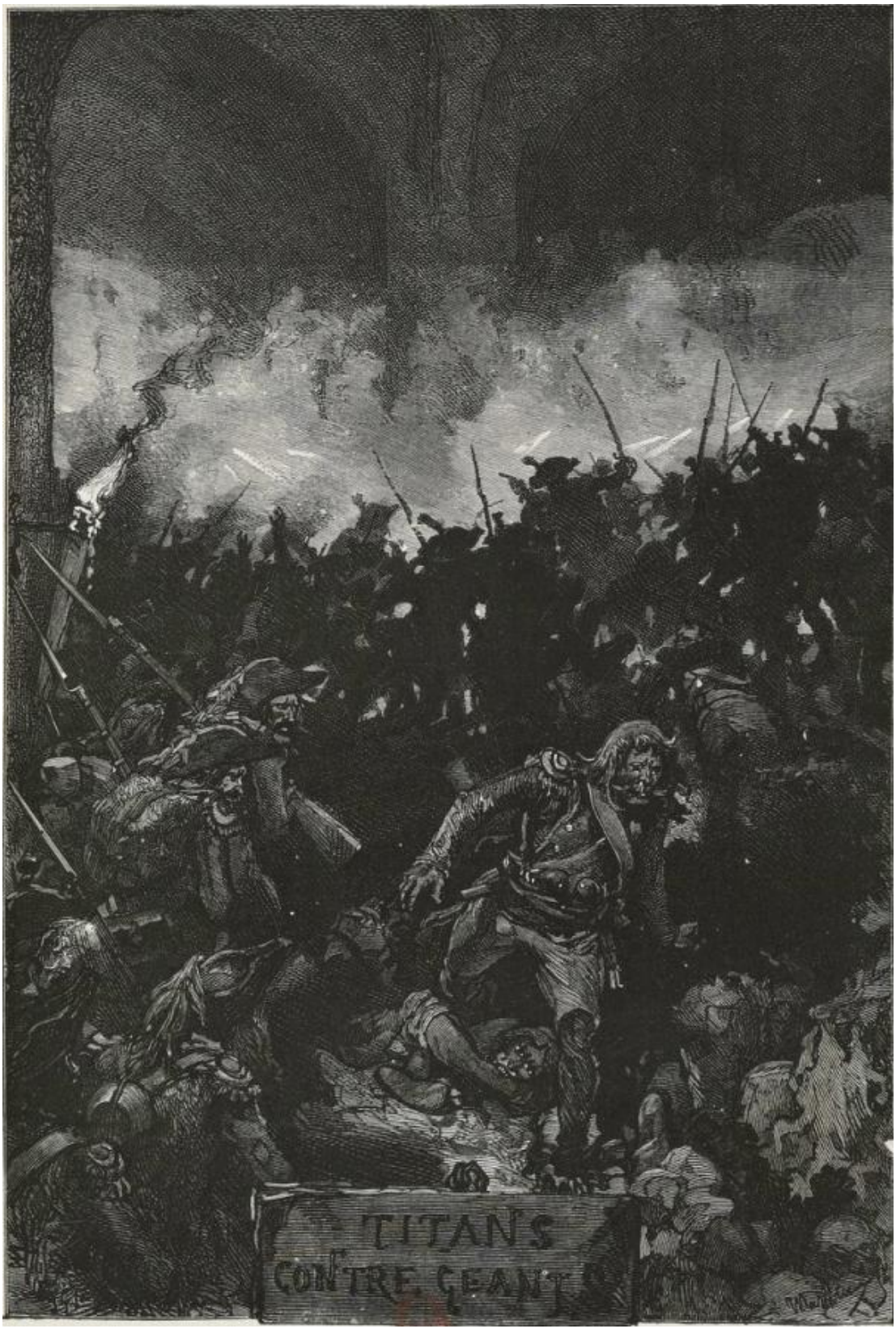
"Then you had better begin the attack."

Silence ensued.

The Imânus having given the signal on his horn, came down, the Marquis grasped his sword, the nineteen besieged silently gathered in the lower hall behind the *retirade*, and fell upon their knees; they heard the measured tread of the attacking column as it advanced towards the tower, drawing nearer and nearer in the darkness, until suddenly the sound was close upon them, at the very mouth of the breach. Then every man knelt and adjusted his musket or blunderbuss in an opening of the retirade, while one of their number, Grand-Francoeur, the former priest Turmeau, rose, and holding in his right hand a drawn sabre, and in his left a crucifix, solemnly uttered the blessing.

"In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost!"

All fired at once, and the conflict began.


TITANS
CONTRE GEANTS

IX.

TITANS AGAINST GIANTS.

It was indeed a fearful scene.

This hand-to-hand struggle surpassed all conception.

To find its parallel one must have recourse to the great duels of Æschylus, or to the butcheries of old feudal times; to those "attacks with short arms" that continued in vogue until the seventeenth century, when men penetrated into fortified places by way of concealed breaches; tragic assaults, where, says an old sergeant of the province of Alentejo, "the mines having done their work, the besiegers will now advance, carrying boards covered with sheets of tin, armed with round shields and bucklers, and

supplied with an abundance of grenades; and as they force those who hold the intrenchments and *retirades* to give way, they will take possession of them, vigorously expelling the besieged."

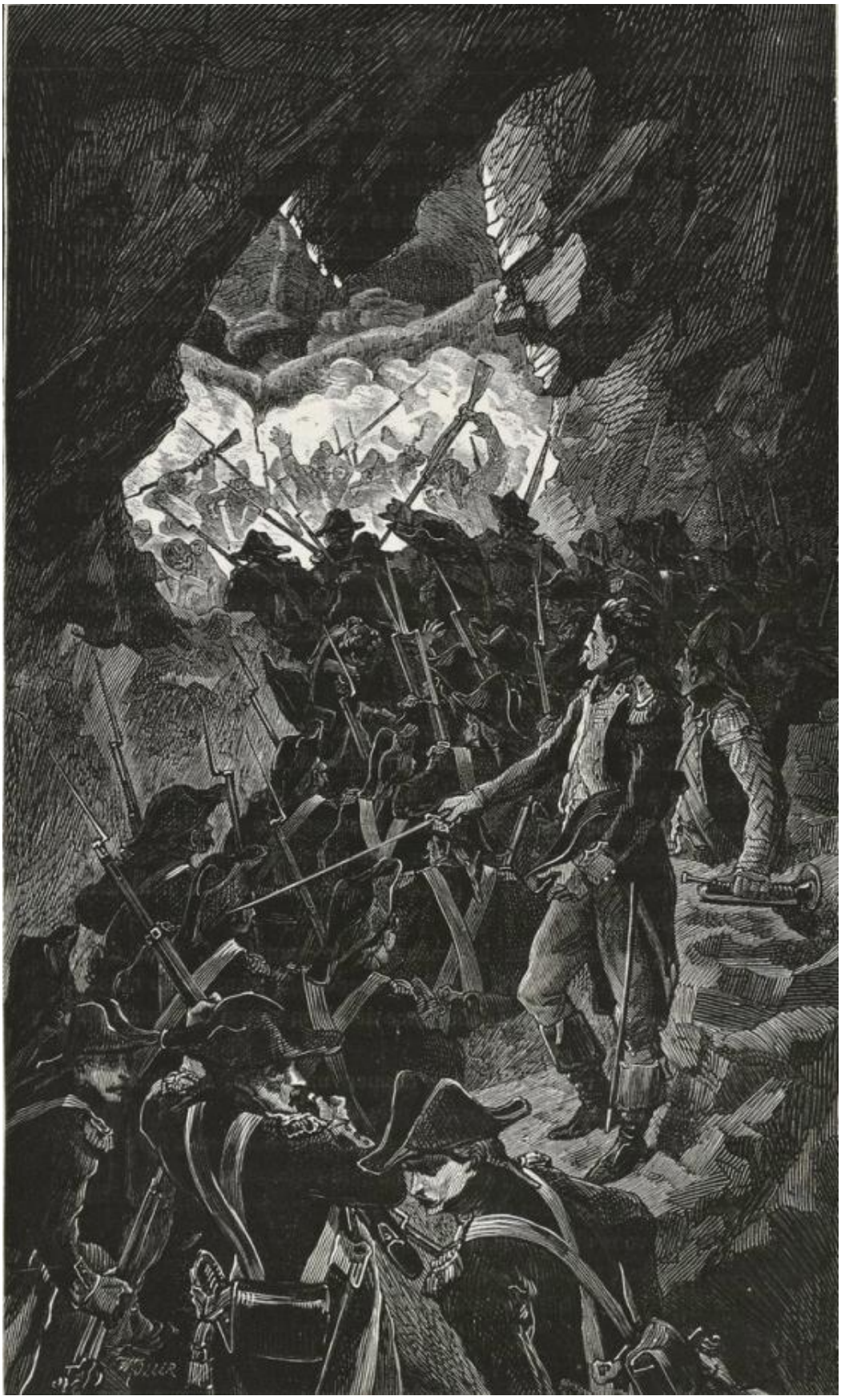
The scene of the attack was terrible; it was one of those breaches technically termed "a covered breach," and was, it must be remembered, not a wide breach opened to daylight, but a mere crack, traversing the wall from side to side. The powder had worked like an auger. The effect of the explosion had been so tremendous that the tower was cracked for more than forty feet above the chamber of the mine; but it was only a fissure, and the practicable rent that served as a breach and afforded an entrance into the lower hall, had the effect of having been pierced by the thrust of a lance rather than cleft by a blow from an axe.

It was a puncture in the side of the tower, a long, deep cut, not unlike a well, horizontal with the ground, a narrow passage twisting and turning like an intestine through a wall fifteen feet thick, a shapeless cylinder, abounding in obstacles, pitfalls, and all the débris of past explosions, where a man, blinded by the darkness and stumbling over the rubbish beneath his feet, would surely dash his head against the granite rock.

Before the assailants yawned this black portal, like a cavernous mouth, whose upper and lower jaws, closely set with jagged rocks, rivalled a shark's mouth in the number of its teeth. This cavity was the only means of entrance or exit, and while the grape-shot was raining within, on the other side—that is to say, in the lower hall of the ground-floor—rose the *retirade*.

The ferocity of the encounter can only be compared with the encounters of sappers in underground passages when a counter-mine has just cut across a mine, or with the cutlass butcheries that take place when in a naval battle a man-of-war is boarded. Fighting in the depths of a grave reaches the very climax of all that is dreadful. The fact that a ceiling is overhead seems to increase the horror of human slaughter. Just as the first of the assailants came surging in, the *retirade* was wrapped in a sheet of lightning, and it seemed like the bursting of a subterranean thunder-clap, report answering report as the besiegers returned the thunder of the ambuscade. Above the uproar rose the voice of Gauvain, shouting, "Break them in!" then Lantenac's cry, "Stand firm against the enemy!" then the cry of the Imânus, "Stand by me, men of Maine!" then the clang of sabres clashing one against the other, and terrible discharges following in swift succession, dealing death on every hand. The torch fastened to the wall but dimly lighted this scene of horror. A lurid glare enveloped all objects, amid which nothing could be clearly distinguished; and those who entered were straightway struck deaf and blind,—deafened by the uproar, blinded by the smoke. The disabled

lay here and there among the rubbish; while the combatants trampled upon the corpses, crushing the wounds and bruising the broken limbs of the injured men, who groaned aloud in their wild agony, and sometimes set their teeth in the feet of those who were torturing them. Now and then a silence more appalling than sound would settle over all. Men seized each other by the throat, and then were heard fierce pantings, followed by gnashings of teeth, death-rattles and imprecations, and directly all the din returned again. A stream of blood flowed through the breach in the tower, and spreading in the gloom, formed a dark, smoking pool outside upon the grass.



One might have said that the tower herself was bleeding like a wounded giantess.

Surprising to relate, all this tumult was hardly audible on the outside. The night was very dark, and around the besieged fortress an almost funereal sense of peace rested on forest and plain. Hell was within, a sepulchre without. This life-and-death struggle in the darkness, these volleys of musketry, this clamor and fury,—all this tumult and confusion was subdued by the massive walls and arches. There was not air enough for reverberation, and a sense of suffocation was added to the carnage. Outside the tower the noise was scarcely audible; and meanwhile the three little children still slumbered.

The fury of the combat deepened; the *retirade* held its own.

There is nothing more difficult to force than this kind of barricade, with a re-entering angle. If the besieged were at a disadvantage in numbers, their position was in their favor. The attacking column had suffered serious loss of men. Formed in a long line outside the tower, it gradually worked its way through the breach, shortening as it disappeared, like a snake twisting itself into its hole.

Gauvain, with the rashness peculiar to a youthful leader, was in the lower hall, in the thickest of the mêlée, with the bullets flying in all directions. Let us add, however, that he felt all the confidence of a man who had never been wounded.

As he turned to give an order, the flash from a volley of musketry lighted up a face close beside him.

"Cimourdain!" he-cried, "why are you here?"

"I came to be near you," replied the man, who was indeed Cimourdain.

"But you will be killed."

"What of that? Are you not in the same danger?"

"But I am needed here, and you are not."

"Since you are here, my place is by your side."

"No, my master."

"Yes, my child."

And Cimourdain remained near Gauvain.

The dead lay in heaps on the pavement of the lower hall. Although the *retirade* had not as yet been carried, the majority would sooner or later gain the day. The assailants, it is true, were not protected, while the assailed were under cover; and ten of the besiegers fell to one of the besieged; but the latter were constantly replaced.

In proportion as the besieged diminished the besiegers increased.

The nineteen besieged were collected behind the *retirade*, since that was the centre of attack; and among them were their dead and wounded; not more than fifteen of them were in fighting condition. One of the fiercest, Chante-en-hiver, had been frightfully mutilated. He was a thick-set Breton, with curling hair, and short of stature, but full of life and energy. Although his jaw was broken and one of his eyes blown out, he could still walk, and he dragged himself up the winding staircase into the room on the first story, hoping there to be able to say his prayers and die.

He leaned against the wall near the loop-hole trying to get a breath of air.

The butchery down below in front of the *retirade* had grown more and more horrible. Once when there was a pause between two volleys Cimourdain raised his voice.

"Besieged," he cried, "why continue this bloodshed? You are conquered. Surrender! Remember we are four thousand five hundred against nineteen, which is over two hundred to one. Surrender!"

"Let us put an end to that idle babble," replied the Marquis de Lantenac.

And twenty balls responded to Cimourdain's appeal.

The *retirade* did not reach as high as the vaulted ceiling, thus the besieged were enabled to fire over it; but at the same time it presented to the besiegers an opportunity for an escalade.

"An assault on the *retirade*!" cried Gauvain. "Is there a man among you who will volunteer to scale it?"

"I," replied Sergeant Radoub.

X.

RADOUB.

A sudden stupor fell upon the assailants. Radoub had been the sixth to enter the breach at the head of the attacking column, and of these six men of the Parisian

battalion four had already fallen. After uttering the exclamation "I," he was seen to draw back instead of advancing, and bending over, in a crouching attitude, he crawled between the legs of the combatants, until, reaching the opening of the breach, he rushed out. Was this flight? Was it possible for such a man to flee? What could it mean?

Having escaped from the breach, Radoub, still blinded by the smoke, rubbed his eyes, as though to dispel the horror and gloom of the night, and by the faint glimmer of the stars began to scrutinize the wall of the tower. He nodded with an air of satisfaction, as much as to say, "So I was not mistaken."

Radoub had noticed that the deep fissure caused by the explosion of the mine extended from the breach to that loop-hole on the first story whose iron grating had been shattered and partially torn off by a cannon-ball, and thus hanging, the network of broken bars left just room enough for a man to pass through,—provided he could climb up to it; and that was the question. Possibly it might be done by following the crack, supposing the man to be a cat; and Radoub was precisely like a cat. He was of the race which Pindar calls "the agile athletes." Although a man may be an old soldier, it by no means follows that he is no longer young. Radoub, who had been in the French Guards, was not yet forty years of age, and he was as active as Hercules.

Laying his musket on the ground, he removed his shoulder-belt, threw off his coat and waistcoat, keeping only his two pistols, which he stuck in the belt of his trousers, and his drawn sabre, which he held between his teeth. The butts of his pistols projected from above his belt.

Thus burdened by no unnecessary weight, and followed in the darkness by the eyes of all those of the attacking column who had not as yet entered the breach, he began the ascent, climbing the stones of the cracked wall as though they had been the steps of a staircase. It was an advantage to him that he wore no shoes; there is nothing like a naked foot for clinging, and he twisted his toes into the holes between the stones. While hoisting himself by means of his fists, he used his knees for support. It was a hard pull, not unlike climbing up the teeth of a saw. "Luckily," he thought to himself, "there is no one in the room on the first story; for if there were, I should never have been allowed to climb up in this way."

He had about forty feet to climb after this fashion, and, as he advanced, somewhat inconvenienced by the projecting butts of his pistols, the crack grew narrower and the ascent more and more difficult. The increasing depth of the precipice beneath his feet added constantly to the danger of a fall; but at last he reached the edge of the loop-hole, and on pushing aside the twisted and broken grating he found that he had ample

room to pass through. Then raising himself by a powerful effort, he braced his knees against the cornices of the ledge, caught hold of a fragment of the grating on either hand, and holding his sabre between his teeth, he drew himself up as high as his waist in front of the embrasure of the loop-hole; there, with his entire weight resting on his two fists, he hung suspended over the abyss.

Now, with a single bound, he had but to leap into the hall of the first story.

Suddenly he beheld in the gloom a horrible object; a face appeared in the embrasure, like a bleeding mask with its jaw crushed and one eye torn out, and this one-eyed mask was gazing steadily at him.

The two hands belonging to this mask were seen to reach forth from the darkness in the direction of Radoub; one of them instantly caught the pistols from his belt, and the other pulled the sabre from his teeth, and thus Radoub was disarmed.

He felt his knee slipping from the sloping cornice, the grasp of his hands on fragments of the grating barely sufficed to support him, while behind him yawned an abyss of forty feet.

That mask and those hands belonged to Chante-en-hiver.

Suffocated by the smoke that rose from below, Chante-en-hiver had made his way into the embrasure of this loop-hole, where the out-door air had revived him, the freshness of the night had checked the bleeding of his wounds, and he had begun to feel somewhat stronger, when suddenly in the opening before him appeared the form of Radoub; then, while the latter hung there, clinging with both hands to the railing, with no choice but to drop or suffer himself to be disarmed, Chante-en-hiver, with an awful calmness, snatched the two pistols from big belt and the sabre from his teeth.

Whereupon ensued a duel between the unarmed and the wounded,—a duel without a parallel.

There could be no doubt that the dying man would come off victorious; one shot would be enough to hurl Radoub into the yawning gulf below.

Luckily for Radoub, Chante-en-hiver, in consequence of holding the two pistols in one hand, was unable to fire either, and was forced to use the sabre, with which he gave Radoub a thrust in the shoulder,—a blow which wounded him and at the same time saved his life.

Although unarmed, Radoub, in full possession of his strength and heedless of his injury, which was simply a flesh-wound, suddenly swung himself forward, and

releasing his hold on the bars, leaped into the embrasure, where he found himself face to face with Chante-en-hiver, who had thrown the sabre behind him, as he knelt clutching a pistol in either hand.

As he took aim at Radoub, the muzzle of his pistol was so close as nearly to touch him; but his enfeebled arm trembled, and a minute passed before he could fire.

Radoub availed himself of this respite to burst out laughing.

"Look here, you hideous object!" he cried, "do you think you can frighten me with your jaw like beef *à la mode?* Sapristi! how they have spoiled your face for you."

Chante-en-hiver was aiming at him.

"I suppose it is rather rude to say so," continued Radoub, "but the grape-shot has made a pretty ragged piece of work of your head. Bellona spoiled your beauty, my poor fellow. Come, come, spit out your little pistol-shot, my friend."

The pistol went off, and the ball, grazing Radoub's head, tore away half his ear. Chante-en-hiver, still grasping the second pistol, raised his other arm, but Radoub gave him no time to take aim.

"It's quite enough to lose one ear," he cried. "You have wounded me twice, and now my turn has come."

Throwing himself on Chante-en-hiver, he gave his arm so powerful a blow that the pistol went off in the air; then seizing him by his wounded jaw, he twisted it until Chante-en-hiver uttered a howl of agony and fainted.

Radoub stepped over his prostrate form and left him lying in the embrasure.

"Now that I have made known to you my ultimatum, don't you dare to stir," he said. "Lie there, base reptile that you are! You may be very sure that I shall not amuse myself at present by killing you. Crawl at your leisure over the ground, under my feet You will have to die, anyhow. And then you will find out what nonsense your curé has been telling you. Away with you into the great mystery, peasant!"

And he sprang into the hall of the lower story.

"One can't see his hand before him," he grumbled.

Chante-en-hiver was convulsively writhing and moaning in his agony. Radoub looked back.

"Silence! Will you please to keep still, citizen without knowing it? I have nothing more to do with you; for I should scorn to put an end to your life. Now, leave me in peace."

And as he stood watching Chante-en-hiver, he plunged his hands restlessly into his hair.

"What am I to do? This is all very well, but here I am disarmed. I had two shots to fire, and you have wasted them, animal that you are. And besides, the smoke is so thick that it makes my eyes water;" and accidentally touching his tom ear, he cried out with pain.

"You have not gained much by getting my ear," he continued; "in fact, I would rather lose that than any other member; it's only an ornament, any way. You have scratched my shoulder, too, but that's of no consequence. You may die in peace, rustic; I forgive you."

He listened. The noise in the lower hall was frightful. The fight was raging more wildly than ever.

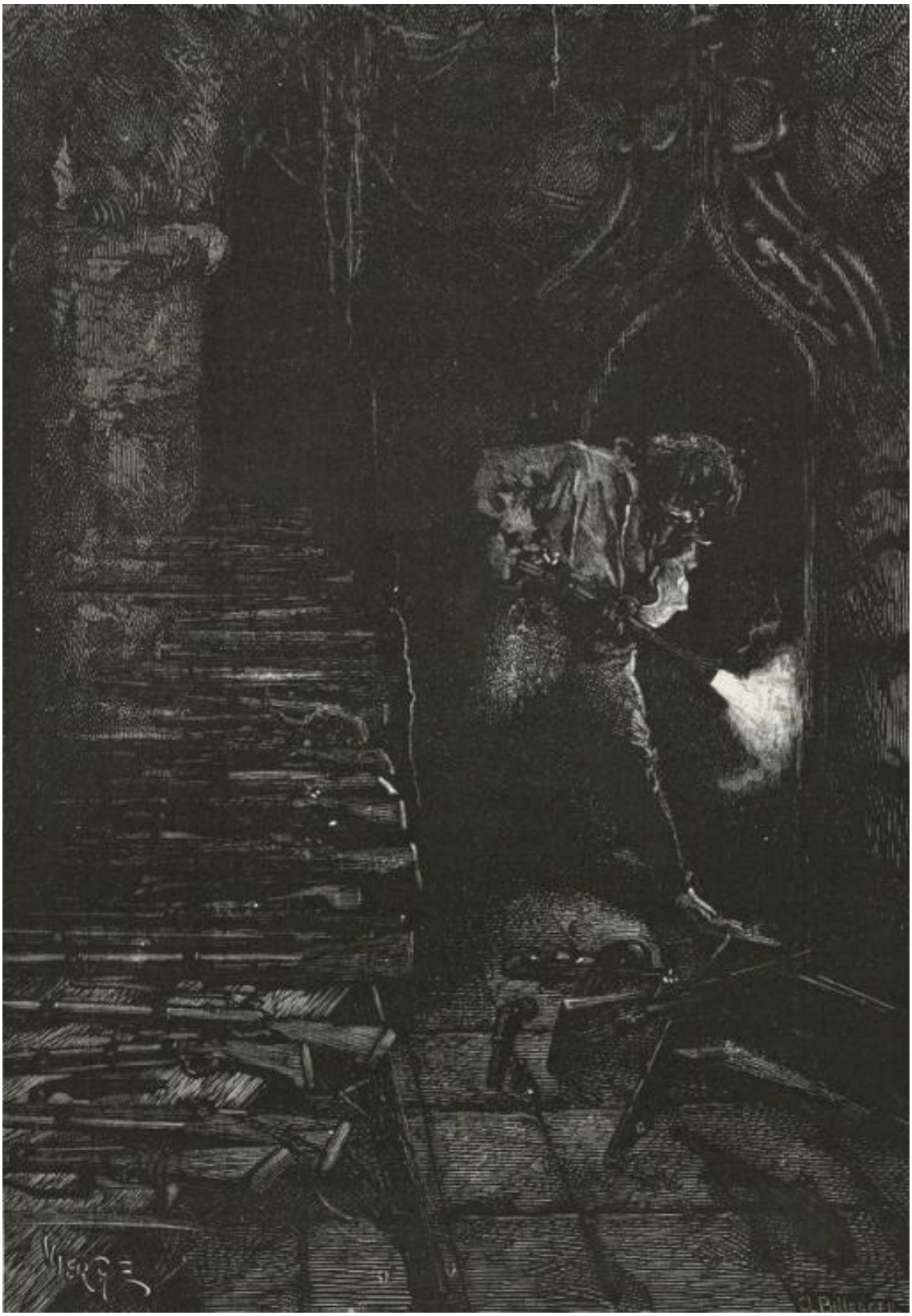
"Things are progressing downstairs. Hear them yelling 'Long live the King!' It must be acknowledged that they die nobly."

He stumbled over his sabre that lay on the floor, and as he picked it up, he said to Chante-en-hiver, who had ceased to moan, and who might very possibly be dead:—

"You see, man of the woods, my sabre is not of the slightest use for what I intended to do. However, I take it as a keepsake from you. But I needed my pistols. Devil take you, savage! What am I to do here? I am of no use at all."

As he advanced into the hall, tiding to see where he was and to get his bearings, he suddenly discovered in the shadow behind the central pillar a long table, and upon this table something faintly gleaming. He felt of the objects. They were muskets, pistols, and carbines, a whole row of fire-arms arranged in order and apparently only waiting for hands to seize them. This was the reserve prepared by the besieged for the second stage of the assault; indeed, it was a complete arsenal.

"This is a treasure indeed!" exclaimed Radoub; and half dazed with joy he flung himself upon them.



Then it was that he became formidable.

Near the table covered with fire-arms could be seen the wide-open door of the staircase leading to the upper and lower stories. Radoub dropped his sabre, seized a double-barrelled pistol in each hand, and instantly fired at random through the door leading to the spiral staircase; then he grasped a blunderbuss, firing that also, and directly afterwards a gun loaded with buckshot, whose fifteen balls made as much noise as a volley of grape-shot. After which, pausing to take breath, he shouted in thundering tones down the staircase, "Long live Paris!"

Seizing another blunderbuss bigger than the first he aimed it towards the vault of the winding staircase and paused again.

The uproar that ensued in the lower hall baffles description. Resistance is shattered by such unlooked for surprises.

Two of the balls of Radoub's triple discharge had taken effect, killing the older of the brothers Pique-en-bois and Houzard, who was M. de Quélen.

"They are upstairs," cried the Marquis.

At this exclamation; the men determined to abandon the *retirade* and no flock of birds could have surpassed the rapidity of their flight, as they rushed pell-mell towards the staircase, the Marquis urging them onward.

"Make haste!" he cried; "now we must show our courage by flight. Let us all go up to the second floor and there begin anew!"

He himself was the last man to leave the *retirade*, and to this act of bravery he owed his life.

Radoub, with his finger on the trigger, was concealed on the first landing of the staircase, watching the rout. The first men who appeared at the turn of the staircase received the discharge full in their faces and fell, and if the Marquis had been among them he would have been a dead man. Before Radoub had time to seize another weapon they had all passed, and the Marquis, moving more deliberately than the others, brought up the rear. Supposing as they did that the room on the first story was filled with the besiegers, they never paused until they reached the mirror room on the second story,—the room with the iron door and the sulphur match, where they must either capitulate or die.

Gauvain, quite as much surprised as any one of the besieged at the sound of the shots from the staircase, and having no idea of the source of this unexpected assistance, but availing himself of it without trying to understand, had leaped over the *retirade*,

followed by his men, and, sword in hand, had driven the fugitives to the first story. There he found Radoub, who, with a military salute, said to him,—

"One moment, commander. It was I who did that. I had not forgotten Dol, so I followed your example, and took the enemy between two fires."

"You are a clever scholar," replied Gauvain with a smile.

One's eyes, like those of night birds, grow accustomed to a dim light after a certain time, and Gauvain discovered that Radoub was covered with blood.

"But you are wounded, comrade!"

"Oh, that is nothing, commander. What is an ear more or less? I got a sabre-thrust, too, but I don't mind it. When one breaks a pane of glass, of course one gets a few cuts; it is only a question of a little blood."

In the room in the first story conquered by Radoub the men halted. A lantern was brought, and Cimourdain rejoined Gauvain; whereupon they both took counsel together, and well they might. The besiegers were not in the confidence of the besieged; they had no means of knowing their scarcity of ammunition nor their want of powder; the second story was their very last intrenchment, and the assailants thought it not unlikely that the staircase might be mined.

One thing was certain,—the enemy could not escape. Those who were not killed, were like men locked in a prison. Lantenac was caught in the trap.

Resting upon this assurance, they felt that it would be well to devote a short time to considering the matter of bringing the affair to a crisis. Many of their men had already been killed. They must take measures to prevent too great a loss of life in the final assault.

There would be serious danger in this last attack. At the first onset they would no doubt find themselves exposed to a heavy fire.

Hostilities had ceased. The besiegers in possession of the ground-floor and the first story waited for orders from their chief to renew the fight. While Gauvain and Cimourdain held counsel together, Radoub listened in silence to their deliberations.

At last he timidly ventured another military salute.

"Commander!"

"What is it, Radoub?"

"Have I earned a small reward?"

"Certainly. Ask what you will."

"Then I ask to be the first one to go up."

It was impossible to refuse him; besides, he would have gone without permission.

XI.

THE DESPERATE.

While these deliberations were in progress on the first floor, a barricade was going up overhead. If success inspires fury, defeat fills men with rage. The two stories were about to clash in wild frenzy. There is a sense of intoxication in the assurance of victory. The assailants below were buoyed up by hope, that most powerful incentive to human effort when it is not counteracted by despair. All the despair was above,—calm, cold, and gloomy despair. When they reached this hall of refuge, their last resource, they proceeded first of all to bar the entrance, and in order to accomplish this object they decided that the blockading of the staircase would be more effectual than barring the door. Under such circumstances an obstacle through which one can both see what is going on and fight at the same time is a better defence than a closed door.

All the light they had, came from the torch which Imânus had stuck in the holder on the wall near the sulphur match.

One of those great heavy oaken chests such as formerly served the purpose of holding clothing and linen, before the invention of chests of drawers, stood in the hall, and this trunk they dragged out, and set up on end in the doorway of the staircase.

It fitted so closely into the space that it blocked up the entrance, leaving just room enough for the passage of a single man, thus affording them an excellent chance to kill their assailants one by one. It seemed somewhat doubtful whether any of them would attempt to enter.

Meanwhile, the obstructed entrance gave them a respite, during which they counted the men.

Of the original nineteen, but seven remained, including the Imânus; and he and the Marquis were the only ones who had not been wounded.

The five wounded men, who were still active,—for in the excitement of battle no man would succumb to anything less than a mortal wound,—- were Chatenay, called Robi, Guinoiseau, Hoisnard, Branche-d'Or, Brin-d'Amour, and Grand-Francoeur. All the others were dead.

Their ammunition was exhausted, and their cartridge-boxes were empty. On counting the cartridges, they found that there were just four rounds apiece among the seven men.

Death was now their only resource. Behind them yawned the dreadful precipice. They could hardly have been nearer to the edge.

Meanwhile, the attack had just begun again,—slowly, it is true, but none the less determined. As the assailants advanced, they could hear the butt-end of their muskets strike on each stair by way of testing its security.

All means of escape were cut off. By way of the library? Six guns stood on the plateau, with matches lighted. Through the rooms overhead? To what avail? Opening on to the platform as they did, they simply offered an opportunity to hurl themselves from the summit of the tower into the depths below.

And now the seven survivors of this epic band realized the hopelessness of their position; within that solid wall, which, though protecting for the moment, would in the end betray, they were practically prisoners, although not as yet really captured.

The voice of the Marquis broke the silence.

"My friends, all is over," he said.

Then, after a pause, he added,—

"Grand-Francoeur will for the time being resume the duties of the Abbé Turmeau."

All knelt, rosary in hand. The sounds of the butt-ends of the besiegers' guns came nearer and nearer.

Grand-Francoeur, bleeding from a gunshot wound which had grazed his skull and torn away his hairy leathern cap, raised a crucifix in his right hand; the Marquis, a thorough sceptic, knelt on one knee.

"Let each one confess his sins aloud. Speak, Monseigneur."

And the Marquis replied, "I have killed my fellow-men."

"And I the same," said Hoisnard.

"And I," said Guinoiseau.

"And I," said Brin-d'Amour.

"And I," said Chatenay.

"And I," said the Imânus.

Then Grand-Francoeur repeated: "In the name of the Most Holy Trinity I absolve you. May your souls depart in peace."

"Amen!" replied all the voices.

The Marquis rose.

"Now let us die," he said.

"And kill, as well," said the Imânus.

The blows from the butt-ends of the muskets already shook the chest that stood within the door, barring the entrance.

"Turn your thoughts to God," said the priest; "earth no longer exists for you."

"Yes," rejoined the Marquis, "we are in the tomb."

All bowed their heads and smote their breasts. The priest and the Marquis alone remained standing. All eyes were fixed on the ground,—the priest and the peasants absorbed in prayer, the Marquis buried in his own thoughts. The chest, under the hammer-like strokes of the guns, sent forth its dismal reverberations.

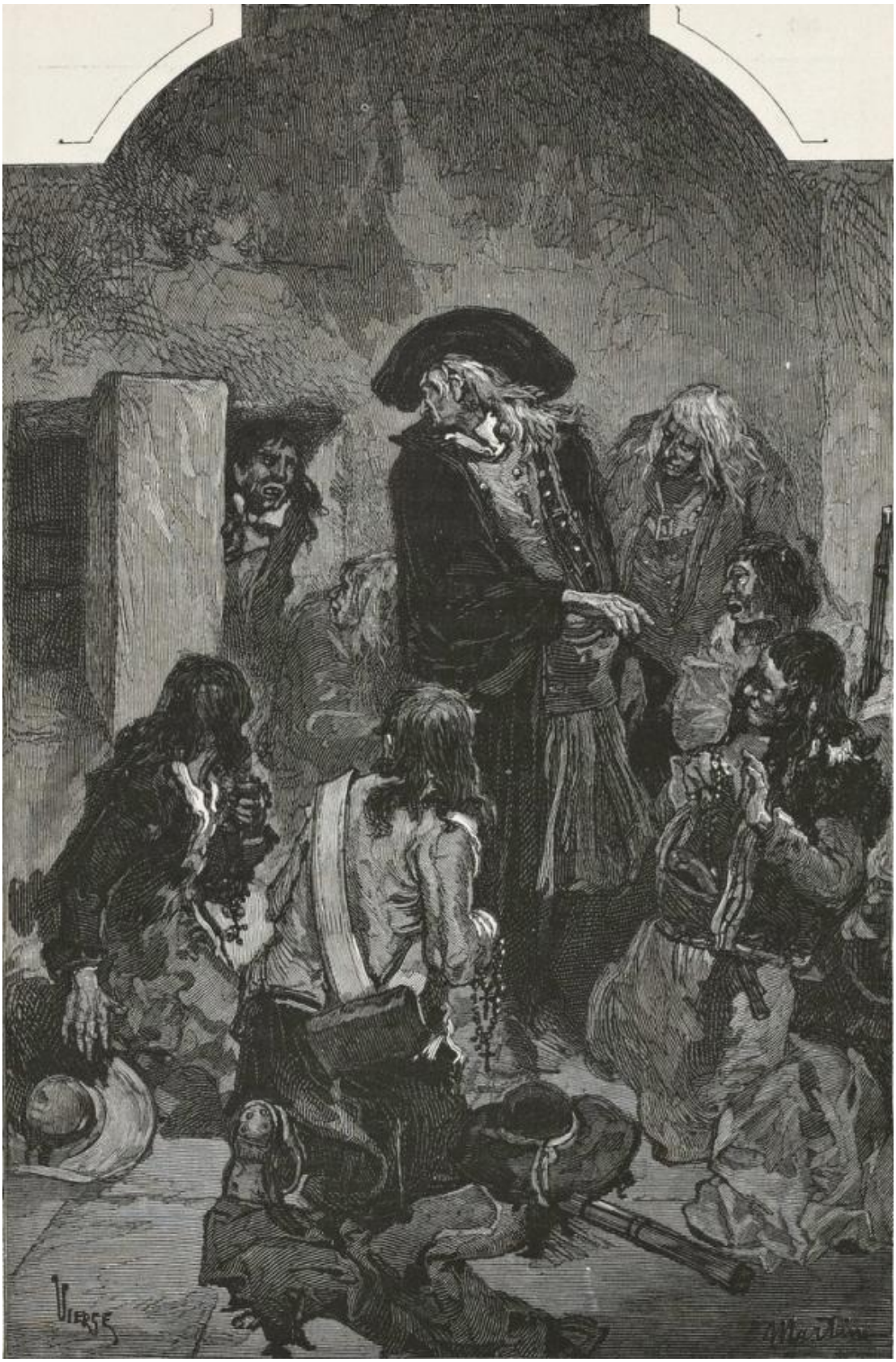
At that moment a powerful, resonant voice suddenly rang out behind them, exclaiming,—

"I told you so, Monseigneur!"

All the heads turned in amazement.

A hole had just opened in the wall.

A stone, fitting perfectly with the others, but left without cement and provided with a pivot above and below, had revolved on itself like a turnstile, and, as it turned, had opened the wall. In revolving on its axis it opened a double passage to the right and left,—narrow, it is true, yet wide enough to allow a man to pass; and through this unexpected door could be seen the first steps of a spiral staircase. A man's face appeared in the opening, and the Marquis recognized Halmalo.


VIERGE

XII.

THE DELIVERER.

"Is that you, Halmalo?"

"It is I, Monseigneur. You see I was right about the turning stones, and that there is a way of escape. I have come just in time. But you must make haste; ten minutes more, and you will be in the heart of the forest."

"God is great!" said the priest.

"Save yourself, Monseigneur!" cried the men.

"Not until I have seen every one of you in safety," said the Marquis.

"But you must lead the way, Monseigneur," said the Abbé Turmeau.

"Not so," replied the Marquis; "I shall be the last man to leave."

And in a severe tone he continued:—

"Let there be no strife in this matter of generosity. We have no time for a display of magnanimity; your only chance for life is in escape. You hear my commands: make haste now, and take advantage of this outlet,—for which I thank you, Halmalo."

"Are we, then, to separate, Monsieur le Marquis?" asked the Abbé Turmeau.

"Certainly, after we have left the tower; otherwise, there would be small chance for escape."

"Will Monseigneur appoint some place of rendez-vous?"

"Yes; a glade in the forest,—the Pierre-Gauvaine. Do you know the spot?"

"We all know it."

"All those who are able to walk will find me there to-morrow at noonday."

"Every man will be on the spot."

"And then we will begin the war over again," said the Marquis.

Meanwhile Halmalo, bringing all his strength to bear on the turning stone, found that it would not stir, and therefore the opening could not be closed.

"Let us make haste, Monseigneur," he cried; "the stone will not move. I managed to open the passage, but now I cannot close it."

In fact, the stone, from a long disuse, had stiffened, so to speak, in its groove, and it was impossible to start it again.

"Monseigneur," said Halmalo, "I hoped to close the passage, so that when the Blues came in and found no one here they would not know what to make of it, and might imagine that you had all vanished in smoke. But the stone is not to be moved, and the enemy will find the outlet and probably pursue us; so let us lose not a minute, but reach the staircase as quickly as we can."

The Imânus laid his hand on Halmalo's shoulder.

"Comrade," he said, "how long will it take to go through this passage and reach the woods in safety?"

"Are any of the men seriously wounded?" asked Halmalo.

"None," they answered.

"In that case, a quarter of an hour will be sufficient."

"So if the enemy does not get in here for a quarter of an hour—" rejoined the Imânus.

"He might pursue, but he could not overtake us."

"But they will be upon us in five minutes," said the Marquis; "that old chest cannot keep them out much longer. A few blows from their muskets will settle the affair. A quarter of an hour! Who could hold them at bay for a quarter of an hour?"

"I," said the Imânus.

"You, Gouge-le-Bruant?"

"Yes, I, Monseigneur. Listen. Out of six men five of us are wounded. I have not even a scratch."

"Nor I either," said the Marquis.

"Yes, but you are the chief, Monseigneur. I am a soldier. The chief and the soldier are two different persons."

"Our duties are not alike, it is true."

"Monseigneur, at this moment we have but one duty between us, and that is to save your life."

The Imânus turned to his companions.

"Comrades," he said, "we must hold the enemy in check and delay pursuit until the last moment. Listen. I have not lost a drop of blood; not having been wounded, I am as strong as ever, and can hold out longer than any of the others. Go now, but leave me your weapons, and I promise to make good use of them. I will undertake to keep the enemy at bay a good half-hour. How many loaded pistols are there?"

"Four."

"Put them down on the floor."

They did as he required.

"That is well. I remain here, and they will find some one to entertain them. Now, get away as fast as you can."

In moments of imminent peril gratitude finds but brief expression. Hardly had they time to press his hand.

"We shall soon meet again," said the Marquis.

"I hope not, Monseigneur,—not quite at once, for I am about to die."

One by one they made their way down the narrow staircase, the wounded in advance; and as they went, the Marquis drew a pencil from his note-book and wrote a few words on the stone that, refusing to turn, had thus left an open passage-way.

"Come, Monseigneur, you are the only one left," said Halmalo, as he went down.

The Marquis followed him, and Imânus remained alone.

XIII.

THE EXECUTIONER.

Upon the flagstones which formed the only floor of the hall the four pistols had been placed, and the Imânus, taking two of them, one in each hand, advanced stealthily towards the entrance of the staircase, obstructed and concealed by the chest.

The assailants evidently suspected a snare. They might be on the verge of one of those decisive explosions that overwhelm both conquerer and conquered in one common ruin. In proportion as the first attack had been impetuous, the last was cautious and deliberate. They could not, or perhaps did not care to batter down the chest by main

force; they had destroyed the bottom of it with the butts of their muskets and pierced its lid with their bayonets; and now through these holes they attempted to see the interior of the hall before venturing within it.

The glimmer of the lanterns, by means of which the staircase was lighted, fell through these chinks, and the Imânus, catching sight of an eye peering through one of them, instantly adjusted the barrel of his pistol to the spot and pulled the trigger. No sooner had he fired than to his great joy he heard a terrible cry. The ball passed through the head by way of the eye, and the soldier, interrupted in his gazing, fell backward down the staircase. The assailants had broken open the lower part of the lid in two places, forming something not unlike loop-holes; and the Imânus, availing himself of one of these apertures, thrust his arm in it and fired his second pistol at random among the mass of the besiegers. The ball probably rebounded, for several cries were heard, as though three or four had been killed or wounded, and a great tumult ensued as the men, losing their footing, fell back in confusion. The Imânus threw down the two pistols which he had discharged, and caught up the remaining ones; grasping one in each hand, he peered through the holes in the chest and beheld the result of his first assault.

The besiegers had retreated down the stairs and the dying lay writhing in agony upon the steps; the form of the spiral staircase prevented him from seeing beyond three or four steps.

He paused.

"So much time gained," he thought to himself.

Meanwhile, he saw a man crawling up the steps flat on his stomach, and just at that moment, a little farther down, the head of a soldier emerged from behind the central pillar of the winding stairs. The Imânus aimed at this head and fired. The soldier fell back with a cry, and as the Imânus was transferring his last pistol from his left hand into his right, he himself felt a horrible pain, and in his turn uttered a yell of agony. Some tone had thrust a sabre into his vitals, and it was the very man whom he had seen crawling along the stair, whose hand, entering the other hole in the bottom of the chest, had plunged a sabre into the body of the Imânus.

The wound was frightful. The abdomen was pierced through and through.

The Imânus did not fall. He ground his teeth as he muttered, "That is good!"

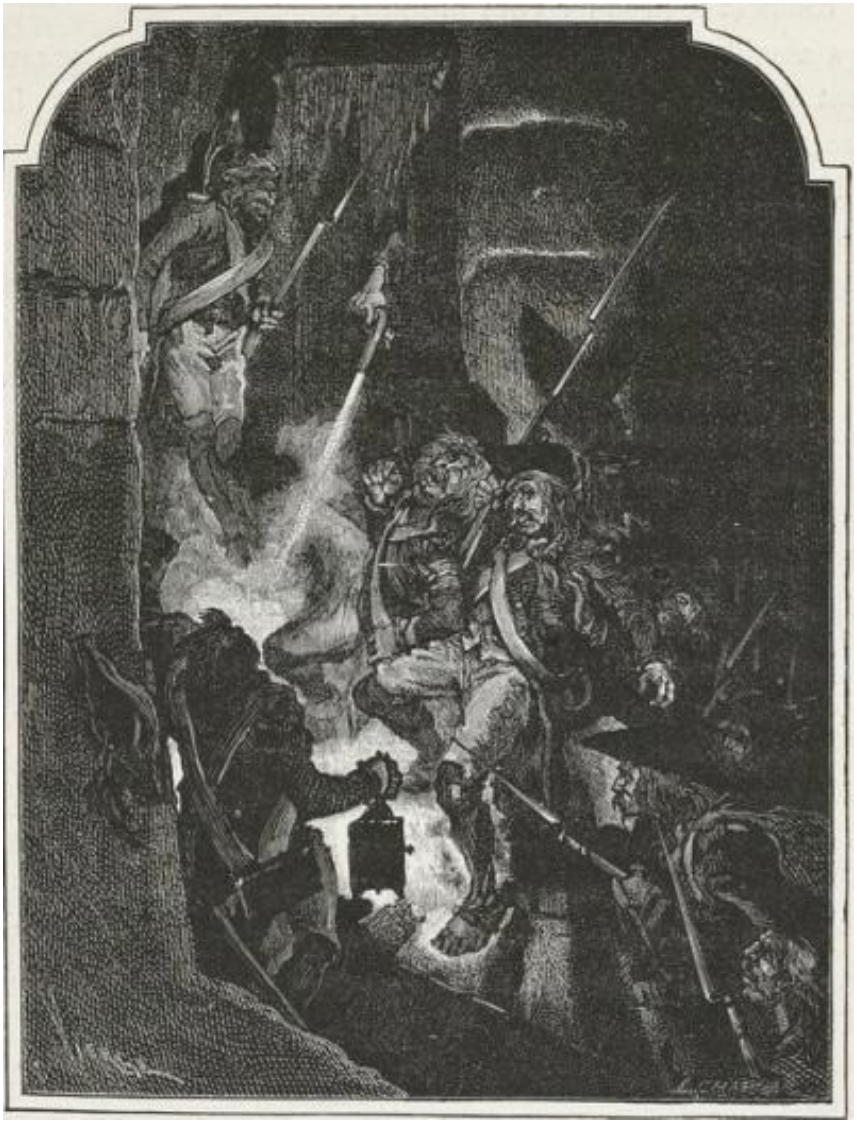
Then, tottering, and with great effort, he dragged himself back to the torch still burning near the iron door; this he seized, after putting down his pistol, and then, supporting

with his left hand the protruding intestines, with his right he lowered the torch until it touched the sulphur-match, which caught fire, and the wick blazed up in an instant.

Dropping the still burning torch upon the ground, he grasped his pistol, and although he had fallen on the flags, he lifted himself and used the scanty breath that was left him to fan the flame, which, starting, ran along until it passed under the iron door and reached the bridge-castle.

When he beheld the triumph of his villanous scheme, taking to himself more credit for this crime than for his self-sacrifice, the man who had acted the part of a hero and who now degraded himself to the level of an assassin smiled as he was about to die, and muttered:—

"They will remember me. I take vengeance on their little ones, in behalf of our own little king shut up in the Temple."



XIV.

THE IMÂNUS ALSO ESCAPES.

At that moment a loud voice was heard, and the chest, violently hurled aside, was shattered into fragments,—giving passage to a man, who, sabre in hand, rushed into the hall.

"It is I, Radoub!" he cried. "Who wants to fight me? I am bored to death with waiting, and I must run the risk. I don't care what happens; at all events, I have disembowelled one of you, and now I come to attack you all. Follow me or not, as you like; but here I am. How many are you?"

It was indeed Radoub himself, and he alone. After the slaughter that the Imânus had made on the staircase, Gauvain, suspecting some hidden mine, had withdrawn his men and was taking counsel with Cimourdain.

Amid the darkness, where the expiring torch cast but a feeble glimmer, Radoub, sabre in hand, stood on the threshold and repeated his question,—

"I am alone. How many are you?"

Receiving no reply, he advanced. Just then one of those sudden flashes, emitted from time to time by a dying fire,—a kind of throbbing light, which might be compared with a human sob,—burst from the torch and illuminated the entire hall.

Radoub caught sight of one of the little mirrors hung on the wall, and approaching it, inspected his bloody face and lacerated ear, saying as he did so,—

"What a horrible mutilation!"

Then he turned, surprised to see the hall empty, and cried,—

"No one here! not a soul!"

His eyes lighted on the revolving stone, the passage, and the staircase.

"Ah, I understand! they have taken to their heels! Come on, comrades! come on! They have all run away; they have gone, evaporated, dissolved, vanished. There was a crack in this old jug of a tower; there is the hole through which they got out, the rascals! How are we ever to get the better of Pitt and Coburg, when men play tricks like these? The Devil himself must have come to their aid. There is no one here!"

A pistol-shot was fired, and a ball, grazing his elbow, flattened itself against the wall.

"Ah! some one is here, then! To whom do I owe this delicate attention?"

"To me," replied a voice.

Radoub, peering through the shadows, at last descried the form of Imânus.

"Aha!" he cried, "I have got one of you! The others have escaped, but you will not get off."

"Is that your opinion?" replied the Imânus. Radoub made one step forward and paused.

"Hey I who are you, lying on the ground there?"

"I am a man on the ground, who laughs at those who are on the feet."

"What is that in your right hand?"

"A pistol."

"And in your left hand?"

"My intestines."

"I take you prisoner."

"I defy you to do it."

And the Imânus, stooping over the burning wick, blew feebly upon its flame, and with that breath expired.

A few moments later, Gauvain and Cimourdain, followed by the others, entered the hall. They all saw the opening, and after searching every corner and exploring the staircase which led down into the ravine, they felt very sure that the enemy had escaped. They shook the Imânus, but he was dead. Gauvain, with lantern in hand, examined the stone which had furnished the fugitives with a means of escape. He had heard of this revolving stone, but he too had always regarded it as a fable. While he was examining the stone he noticed certain words written with a pencil; and holding the lantern nearer, he read as follows:—

"Au revoir, Monsieur le Vicomte.
"LANTENAC."

Guéchamp had joined Gauvain. Pursuit was manifestly out of the question; the escape had been successful; everything was in favor of the fugitives,—the entire country, the underbrush, the ravines, the copses, and even the inhabitants themselves. No doubt they were far enough away by this time; there was no possibility of finding them, and the entire forest of Fougères was one vast hiding-place. What was to be done? They saw themselves forced to begin the whole affair over again. Gauvain and Guéchamp exchanged their regrets and conjectures.

Cimourdain listened gravely without uttering a word.

"By the way, Guéchamp, how was it about the ladder?"

"It has not come, commander."

"But we saw a wagon with an escort of gendarmes."

"It was not bringing the ladder," replied Guéchamp.

"What, then, was it bringing?"

"The guillotine," said Cimourdain.

XV.

NEVER PUT A WATCH AND KEY IN THE SAME POCKET.

The Marquis de Lantenac was not so far away as they supposed, although he was in perfect safety, and beyond their reach.

He had followed Halmalo.

The staircase by which they had descended, following the other fugitives, ended in a narrow passage quite near the ravine and the arches of the bridge. This passage led into a deep natural fissure in the ground which formed a connecting link between the ravine and the forest. In this fissure, twisting and turning as it did through impenetrable thickets and utterly hidden from the human eye, no man could ever have been captured; he had but to follow the example of a snake, and his safety was assured. The entrance to this secret passage was so overgrown with brambles, that its constructors had deemed it unnecessary to provide it with any other screen.

The Marquis had now no further need even to consider the matter of disguise. Since his arrival in Brittany he had continued to wear the peasant dress, feeling himself to be more truly a grand seigneur when thus attired. He had contented himself with taking off his sword, unfastening and throwing aside the belt.

When Halmalo and the Marquis emerged from the passage into the fissure, nothing was to be seen of the five others,—Guinoiseau, Hoisnard Branche-d'Or, Brin d'Amour, Chatenay, and the Abbé Turmeau.

"They have lost no time," said Halmalo.

"Follow their example," replied the Marquis.

"Does Monseigneur wish me to leave him?"

"Of course; I have told you so already. A man who is trying to escape must remain alone if he would insure success; one man can often pass where two would find it impossible. Were we together, we should attract attention and imperil each other."

"Does Monseigneur know the neighborhood?"

"Yes."

"And the rendez-vous is still to be the same,—at the Pierre-Gauvaine?"

"To-morrow at noon."

"I will be there. We shall all be there."

Halmalo paused.

"Ah, Monseigneur, when I remember the time we were alone together on the open sea, when I wanted to kill you, you who were my lord and master and might have told me, but did not! What a man you are!"

The sole reply of the Marquis was, "England is our only resource. In fifteen days the English must be in France."

"I have a great many things to tell Monseigneur. I have given all his messages."

"We will attend to all that to-morrow."

"Farewell till then, Monseigneur."

"By the way, are you hungry?"

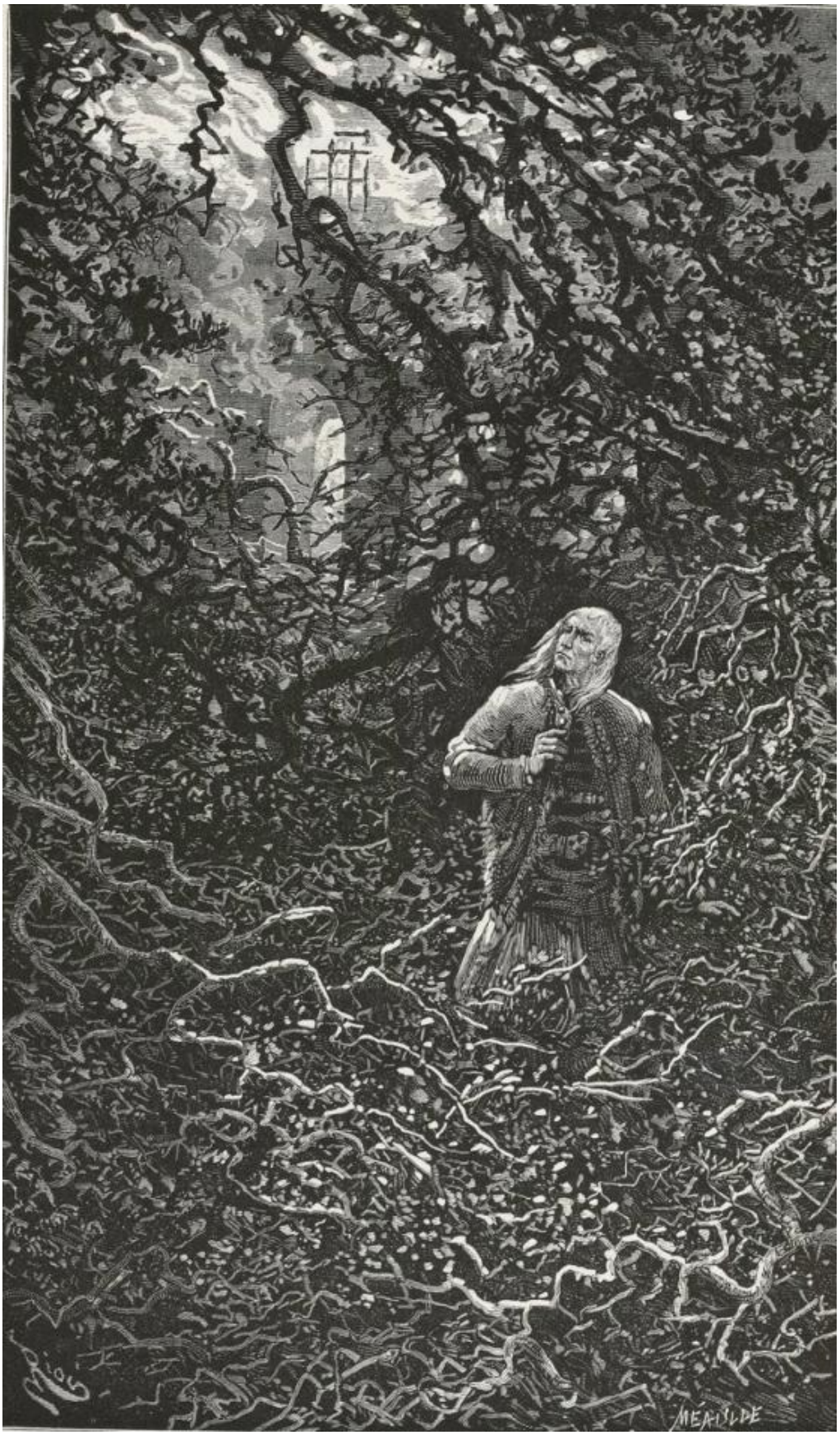
"Perhaps I am, Monseigneur. I was in such a hurry to get here, that I have forgotten whether I had anything to eat to-day or not."

The Marquis drew from his pocket a cake of chocolate, broke it in two, and giving one half to Halmalo, he began to eat the other himself.

"Monseigneur," said Halmalo, "you will find the ravine on your right, and the forest on your left."

"Very well. Leave me now. Go your own way."

Halmalo obeyed, and was at once lost in the darkness. At first there was a rustling of the underbrush soon followed by silence, and in a few moments every trace of his passage had disappeared. This land of the Bocage, bristling with forests and labyrinths, was the fugitives' best ally. Men vanished before one's very eyes. It was this facility for rapid disappearance that made our armies pause before this ever-retreating Vendée, and rendered its combatants so formidable in their flight.


MEADE

The Marquis stood motionless. Although he was a man who kept his feelings under perfect control, he was not insensible to the joy of breathing the fresh air, after having lived so long in an atmosphere of blood and carnage. To be rescued at a moment when all seemed utterly lost, to find one's self in safety after gazing into one's own grave, to be snatched from death to life, is a severe shock even for such a man as Lantenac; and although this was by no means his only experience of the kind, he could not at once subdue his agitation. For a moment he admitted to himself his own satisfaction, but straightway suppressed an emotion that was akin to joy.

Drawing out his watch he struck the hour. He wondered what time it might be, and to his great surprise discovered that it was but ten o'clock.

When one has just passed through some terrible crisis wherein life and death have hung in the balance it is always astonishing to discover that those minutes so crowded with action were no longer than any others. The warning cannon had been fired shortly before sunset, and half an hour later, just at dusk, between seven and eight o'clock, the assault on the Tourgue began; hence this tremendous combat beginning at eight and ending at ten, this epic, as one might call it, had consumed just one hundred and twenty minutes. Catastrophes often descend like a flash of lightning, and events are marvellously fore-shortened, and when one pauses to reflect, it would be surprising were it otherwise; two hours' resistance offered by so small a band against a force vastly superior to itself was extraordinary, and this struggle of nineteen against four thousand could not be called a brief one.

But it was time to go. Halmalo must by this time be far away, and the Marquis felt that prudence no longer required him to remain there. He put his watch back into his waistcoat pocket, but not into the one from which he had taken it, for he noticed that in that one it came in contact with the key of the iron door which the Imânus had brought him, and there was danger of breaking the crystal. Just as he was on the point of taking the left-hand turning towards the forest, he fancied he saw a feint ray of light.

He turned, and through the underbrush which all at once stood out against a red background, thus revealing its minutest details with absolute distinctness, he beheld a bright glare along the ravine very near the spot where he was standing. At first, he turned in that direction, then changed his mind as the folly of exposing himself to that light occurred to him; whatever it might be, it was really no affair of his in any event. Once more he started to follow Halmalo's directions, and advanced several steps towards the forest.

All at once, buried and hidden by the brambles as he was, he heard above his head a terrible cry; it seemed to come from the very edge of the plateau, above the ravine. The Marquis raised his eyes and paused.

IN DÆMONE DEVS

BOOK V.

IN DÆMONE DEUS.

I.

FOUND, BUT LOST.

When Michelle Fléchard first perceived the tower reddened by the rays of the setting sun, it was more than a league away; and this woman, nothing daunted by the distance, though scarcely able to put one foot before the other, kept bravely on her way. Women may be weak, but mothers are strong.

The sun had set: twilight came on, followed by the darkness of night; as she walked along, far away in the distance, from some invisible belfry, probably that of Parigné, she heard the clock strike eight, then nine. From time to time she paused to listen to something that sounded like heavy blows; but it might have been only the uncertain noises peculiar to the night.

She walked straight onward, crushing the furze and prickly heather beneath her bleeding feet. She was guided by a faint light issuing from the distant keep, which bathed the tower in a mysterious glow while it defined its outlines against the surrounding gloom. This light changed in measure as the sounds grew loud or faint.

The vast plateau across which Michelle Fléchard made her way was completely covered with grass and heather; neither house nor tree was to be seen. Its rise was almost imperceptible, and as far as the eye could reach, its long line was clearly defined against the dark horizon dotted with stars. She was supported, as she climbed, by the sight of the tower constantly before her eyes, and as she drew nearer, it gradually increased in size.

As we have just remarked, the muffled reports and the pallid gleams of light that issued from the tower were intermittent; dying away and then returning as they did, it seemed to the wretched mother in her distress like some agonizing enigma.

Suddenly they ceased, and with the sound, the light too died away; there was a moment of absolute silence, an appalling tranquillity, and then it was that Michelle Fléchard reached the edge of the plateau.

She saw beneath her feet a ravine, whose depths were hidden by the dim shadows of night; at a short distance, on the top of the plateau, the confused mass of wheels, slopes; and embrasures which formed the battery; and before her, indistinctly lighted by the burning matches of the guns, an enormous edifice that seemed built of shadows blacker than those that surrounded it.

This building consisted of a bridge, whose arches rested in the ravine, together with a kind of castle erected on the bridge, both castle and bridge supported by a round and lofty mass of masonry; this was the tower which had been that mother's distant goal. One could see the lights moving to and fro behind the loop-holes of the tower, and it was evident, from the noise issuing therefrom, that it was crowded with men, whose shadows were projected even as high as platform.

Michelle Fléchard could distinguish the vedettes of the camp near the battery, but the darkness and the underbrush concealed her from their view.

She had reached the edge of the plateau, and was so close to the bridge that it seemed as if she could almost touch it with her hand. The deep ravine alone separated her from it. She could distinguish even in the darkness the three stories of the bridge-castle.

She knew not how long she had been standing there, having lost all consciousness of time, absorbed in a silent contemplation of that yawning chasm and the gloomy building. What was it that was going on within. Was this the Tourgue? She felt that restless sense of expectation peculiar to travellers who have either just arrived or are on the eve of departure. As she stood listening and gazing around, she tried to think why she was there. Suddenly all objects vanished before her eyes.

A veil of smoke had suddenly obscured the object she was watching. A sharp pain forced her to close her eyes; but she had no sooner done so, than a light flashed upon them so intensely brilliant that her eyelids seemed transparent, and when she opened them again, the night had changed into day, but the light of that day, dreadful to look upon, was born of fire. What she saw was the outburst of a conflagration.

The smoke had changed from black to scarlet, from which at times a mighty flame leaped forth, with those fierce contortions peculiar to the lightning and the serpent. It darted forth like a tongue from some monstrous jaw; but it was really a window filled with fire, whose iron bars were already red hot,—a casement in the lower story of the bridge-castle, and the only part of the entire building that could now be seen. Even the plateau was shrouded in the smoke, and the edge of the ravine alone could be distinguished against the crimson flames.

Michelle Fléchard looked on in amazement. Smoke is a cloud; dreams come from the clouds; hardly realizing what she saw, she knew not what to do. Should she stay, or try to make her escape? She almost felt herself transported beyond the actual world.

There came a gust of wind, that rent the curtain of smoke and revealed through this gap the tragic Bastile, in all its grandeur, with its keep, its bridge, and its castle, dazzling and terrible, magnificently gilded by the light of the flames which were reflected upon it from summit to base. Michelle Fléchard could see everything by the awful glare of the flames.

Only the lower story of the bridge-castle was as yet burning.

Above it could be seen the two other stories, still intact, though resting as it were upon a bed of flames. From the edge of the plateau where she stood, through the smoke and fire, Michelle Fléchard caught an occasional glimpse of the interior. All the windows were open. Through those of the second story, which were very large, she could see cases along the walls, which seemed to her to be filled with books; and in front of one of the windows, lying on the floor in the shadow, she noticed a little group whose outline had no definite form; it lay in a heap, like a nest or brood of young birds, and from time to time she thought she saw it stir.

She watched it.

What could this little group of shadows be?

Sometimes she fancied it was composed of living forms. She was feverish and exhausted, for she had not eaten a mouthful since morning, had walked incessantly, and she felt as if she were the victim of some sort of hallucination which she instinctively mistrusted. But her eyes were now riveted upon this dark group of objects, whatsoever they might be; doubtless it was something inanimate lying there upon the floor in the hall directly over the conflagration.

Suddenly, as though inspired by a will of its own, the fire flung forth a jet of flame upon the dead ivy that mantled the very wall on which Michelle Fléchard stood gazing. It was as if it had just discovered this network of withered branches; a spark greedily seized upon it, and the fire began to rise from twig to twig with the frightful rapidity of a powder-train. In the twinkling of an eye the flame reached the second story, and from thence a light was thrown into the one below. A vivid glare brought into instantaneous relief three little sleeping children.

It was a charming group, their little legs and arms intertwined, their eyelids closed, their faces sweetly smiling.

The mother knew her children.

She uttered a terrible cry.

That cry of inexpressible anguish is given only to mothers. No sound can be more savage and yet pathetic. Uttered by a woman, it is like the cry of a she-wolf; and when one hears it from a wolf it might well come from a woman.

This cry of Michelle Fléchard was a howl. Hecuba howled, Homer tells us.

And this was the cry just heard by the Marquis de Lantenac.

We saw him pause to listen.

He was between the outlet of the passage through which Halmalo had guided him in his escape, and the ravine. Through the tangled wildwood about him he saw the burning bridge, and the Tourgue reddened by the reflection; he pushed aside the branches, and discovered on the opposite side, above his head, on the edge of the plateau, in front of the burning castle, and in the full light of the conflagration, the haggard and woful face of a woman bending over the ravine.

This face was no longer the face of Michelle Fléchard; it was a Medusa. There is something formidable in intense agony. This peasant woman had changed into one of the Eumenides. The unknown rustic, low, ignorant, stupid, had suddenly taken on the epic proportions of despair. Great sorrows expand the soul to gigantic proportions. This mother was the embodiment of maternity. A summary of humanity rises to the superhuman; she stood towering above the edge of the ravine, within sight of the conflagration, in presence of that crime like a power from beyond the grave. Moaning like a wild beast, she stood in the attitude of a goddess, with a countenance like a flaming mask, hurling forth imprecations. Nothing could have been more imperious than the lightning that flashed from those eyes drowned in tears; her look was like a thunderbolt hurled against the conflagration.

The Marquis listened. These reproaches fell upon his head; he heard her inarticulate, heart-rending cries, more like sobs than words:—

"My children, oh, my Lord! They are my children! Help! Fire! Fire! Fire! You must be brigands! Is there no one here? But my children will be burned to death! Such doings! Georgette! My children! Gros-Alain! René-Jean! What can this mean? Who put my children there? They are sleeping. I am mad! Oh, this is impossible! Help!"

Meanwhile, a great commotion was going on in the Tourgue and on the plateau. The whole camp had rushed to the fire, which had just broken out. The besiegers, after encountering the grape-shot, had now to struggle against the fire. Gauvain, Cimourdain, and Guéchamp were giving orders. What could be done? A few buckets of water might possibly be drawn from the slender stream in the ravine. The edge of the plateau was covered with terrified faces, gazing at the sight with ever-increasing distress; and it was an awful scene.

There they stood looking on, but none could lend a helping hand.

By way of the ivy the flames had risen to the upper story, and finding there a granary filled with straw had rushed upon it; and that entire granary was now on fire, the flames merrily dancing. A dreadful sight is the glee of a fire! It was like the breath of fiends fanning a funereal pile. One could fancy that the terrible Imânus was in person

there, metamorphosed into a whirlwind of sparks, living in this cruel life of flame, and that his horrible soul had been transformed into a conflagration. The flames had not yet reached the library story; its lofty ceiling and massive walls had retarded the fatal moment that was now drawing near. The flames, like tongues of fire, darted upward from the story below; while the flames from above touched the stones, as if carressing them with the dread kiss of death. Beneath it lay a cave of lava, above an arch of fiery coals. Were the floor to cave in, all would be precipitated into a bed of red-hot ashes; were the ceiling to give way, they would be buried beneath the glowing coals. René-Jean, Gros-Alain, and Georgette had not yet waked; they were sleeping the sound and innocent sleep of childhood; and through the sheets of flame and smoke which now hid, now revealed the windows, they could be seen in this fiery grotto against a background of meteoric light, calm, graceful, and motionless, like three heavenly cherubs confidingly slumbering in hell. A tiger might have wept to see such blossoms in that furnace,—their cradles in the grave.

Meanwhile the mother wrung her hands:—

"Fire! Fire! I am crying fire! Are they all deaf, that no one comes? They arc burning up my children! Come, you men over yonder! To think of the days and days I have walked, and to find them like this! Fire! Help! They are angels, nothing short of angels! What have those innocents done? They shot me, and now they are burning them! Who does such things as these? Help! Save my children! Don't you hear me? If I were a dog, you would have pity on me! My children! They are asleep! Ah, Georgette, I see her dear little body! René-Jean! Gros-Alain! Those are their names. You can see well enough that I am their mother. Such abominable doings go on in these days! I have walked for days and nights. Why, I talked about them this very morning to a woman. Help! Help! Fire! They must be monsters! This is horrible! The oldest one is not five years old and the baby not two. I can see their little naked legs. They are asleep. Holy Virgin! Heaven gives them to me and Hell snatches them back again. Just think how far I have walked! The children that I fed with my milk,—I who felt so wretched because I couldn't find them! Have pity on me! I want my children; I must have them! And to think of them there in the fire! See my poor bleeding feet. Help! It cannot be that there are men on earth who would let those poor little creatures die like that! Help! Murder! Who ever saw the like? Ah, the brigands! What is that dreadful house? They stole them from me to murder them. Merciful Jesus! I want my children. Oh, I don't know what to do! They must not die! Help! Help! Help! Oh, I shall curse Heaven if they die like that!"

Simultaneously with the mother's entreaty other voices rang out on the plateau and the ravine.

"A ladder!"

"There is none."

"Water!"

"None to be had!"

"Up in the tower there, in the second story, there is a door."

"It is iron."

"Break it in!"

"Impossible."

Here the mother redoubled her desperate appeals.

"Fire! Help! Make haste, or kill me at once! My children! My children! Oh, that terrible fire! Throw me into the fire, but save their lives!"

In the intervals between her cries could be heard the constant crackling of the flames.

The Marquis felt in his pocket and his hand met the key to the iron door. Then stooping below the arch, through which he had just escaped, he re-entered the passage from which he had so lately emerged.

II.

FROM THE DOOR OF STONE TO THAT OF IRON.

A whole army driven half wild by its enforced inaction in the presence of danger; four thousand men unable to save three children,—such was the situation.

In point of fact, they had no ladder; the one sent from Javené had not arrived; the flames spread as from a yawning crater; it was simply absurd to attempt to extinguish them with the water from the half-dried brook in the ravine; one might as well empty a glass of water into a volcano.

Cimourdain, Guéchamp, and Radoub had gone down into the ravine. Gauvain had returned to the hall on the second story of the Tourgue, where the turning stone, the secret passage, and the iron door of the library were to be found; it was there that the sulphur match had been lighted by the Imânus, and there the fire had originated.

Gauvain had brought with him twenty sappers. Their last resource was to force open the iron door. Its fastenings were terribly strong.

They went at it with their axes, dealing violent blows. The axes broke. One of the sappers exclaimed,—

"Steel shivers like glass against that iron."

In fact, the door was composed of double sheets of wrought-iron bolted together, each sheet three inches thick.

Then they took iron bars and tried to pry the door open from below. The iron bars broke.

"One would think they were matches," said the sapper.

"Nothing less than a cannon-ball could open that door," muttered Gauvain, gloomily. "We should have to mount a field-piece up here."

"But even then—" replied the sapper.

For a moment they stood in despair, and their arms fell helpless by their sides. With a sense of defeat, these men stood in speechless dismay, gazing upon that door so awful in its immobility. They caught a glimpse of the red reflection from beneath it. Behind them, the fire was spreading.

The frightful body of the Imânus was there, dread victor that he was.

But a few minutes more, and the entire building might fall into ruins.

What could they do? The last ray of hope was gone.

Gauvain, whose eyes were riveted on the revolving stone and the opening through which the escape had been made, cried in the bitterness of his exasperation,—

"And yet the Marquis de Lantenac escaped through that door!"

"And returns," said a voice.

Against the stone setting of the secret passage appeared a white head.

It was the Marquis.

It was many a year since Gauvain had seen him so close at hand. He drew back.

Every man present stood as if petrified.

The Marquis held a large key in his hand; with one haughty glance he compelled the sappers who stood in his path to make way for him, walked at once to the iron door, stooped beneath the arch, and put the key into the lock.

It creaked in the lock, the door opened, they saw the fiery gulf; the Marquis entered it.

With head erect and steady step he strode forward. And those who looked on shuddered as their eyes followed his receding form.

He had barely taken a few steps in the burning hall, before the inlaid floor, undermined by the fire and shaken by his tread, gave way behind him, setting a chasm between him and the door. The Marquis pursued his way, never once turning his head, and vanished in the smoke.

Nothing more was seen.

Had he succeeded in making his way; or had another fiery chasm opened under his feet; or had he but ended his own life? No one could tell. A wall of smoke and flames rose before them. Whether dead or alive, the Marquis was on the other side.

III.

WHERE THE SLEEPING CHILDREN WAKE.

Meanwhile, the little ones had at last opened their eyes.

The fire, although it had not yet reached the library, cast a red reflection on the ceiling. It was not the kind of dawn the children knew. They were gazing at it,—Georgette utterly absorbed.

The conflagration showed forth all its glories; the black hydra and the scarlet dragon appeared amid the smoke-wreaths in all their sombre and vermilion hues. Great sparks shot out into the distance, lighting up the gloom like contending comets pursuing one another. Fire is a prodigal; its furnaces abound in jewels which they

scatter to the winds; and it is to some purpose that charcoal is identical with the diamond. From the fissures opened in the wall of the third story, the embers were showering down into the ravine like cascades of jewels; the heaps of straw and oats burning in the granary began to pour in a stream through the windows like avalanches of gold-dust,—the oats changing to amethysts, and the straw to carbuncles.

"Pretty!" cried Georgette.

All three were now sitting up.

"Ah!" cried the mother, "they are awake!"

When René-Jean rose, then Gros-Alain rose also, and Georgette followed.

René-Jean stretched himself, and going towards the window, exclaimed, "I am hot!"

"Me hot!" repeated Georgette.

The mother called them.

"Children! René! Alain! Georgette!"

The children looked round. They were trying to find out what it all meant. Where men feel terrified, children are simply curious; he who is open to surprise is not easily alarmed; ignorance is closely allied to intrepidity. Children have so little claim upon hell, that were they to behold it, it would but excite their admiration.

The mother kept repeating,—

"René! Alain! Georgette!"

René-Jean turned; that voice roused him from his reverie. Children have short memories, but their recollections are swift; the entire past is for them but as yesterday. When René-Jean saw his mother, it seemed to him the most natural thing that could happen, surrounded as he was by strange things; and with a dim consciousness of needing support, he called, "Mamma!"

"Mamma!" said Gros-Alain.

"M'ma!" repeated Georgette.

And she stretched out her little arms.

The mother shrieked, "My children!"

The three children came to the window-ledge; fortunately, the conflagration was not on this side.

"I am too warm," said René-Jean; then added, "it burns"! and he looked for his mother.

"Why don't you come, mamma?" he said.

"Tum, m'ma," repeated Georgette.

The mother, with her hair streaming, torn and bleeding as she was, let herself roll from bush to bush, down into the ravine. There stood Cimourdain and Guéchamp, as powerless in their position as Gauvain was in his. The soldiers, in despair at their helplessness, were swarming around them. The heat would have seemed unbearable, had any one noticed it. They were discussing the escarpment of the bridge, the height of the arches and of the different stories, the inaccessible windows, and the necessity for speedy action. Three stories to climb, with no means of access. Radoub, wounded by a sabre-thrust in the shoulder, his ear lacerated, dripping with sweat and blood, had appeared upon the scene. He saw Michelle Fléchard.

"What have we here,—the woman who was shot come to life again?"

"My children!" cried the mother.

"You are right!" replied Radoub; "this is no time to inquire about ghosts." And he started to scale the bridge,—a useless attempt. He dug his nails into the stone, clung thus for a few seconds, but the smooth layers of stone offered neither cleft nor projection; they were as accurately fitted one upon the other as if the wall had just been built, and Radoub fell back. The fire was still increasing, terrible to behold. They could see the three fair heads framed in the window lighted by the glowing flames. Then Radoub shook his fist towards Heaven as though he beheld some one, and exclaimed,—

"Has Almighty God no mercy?"

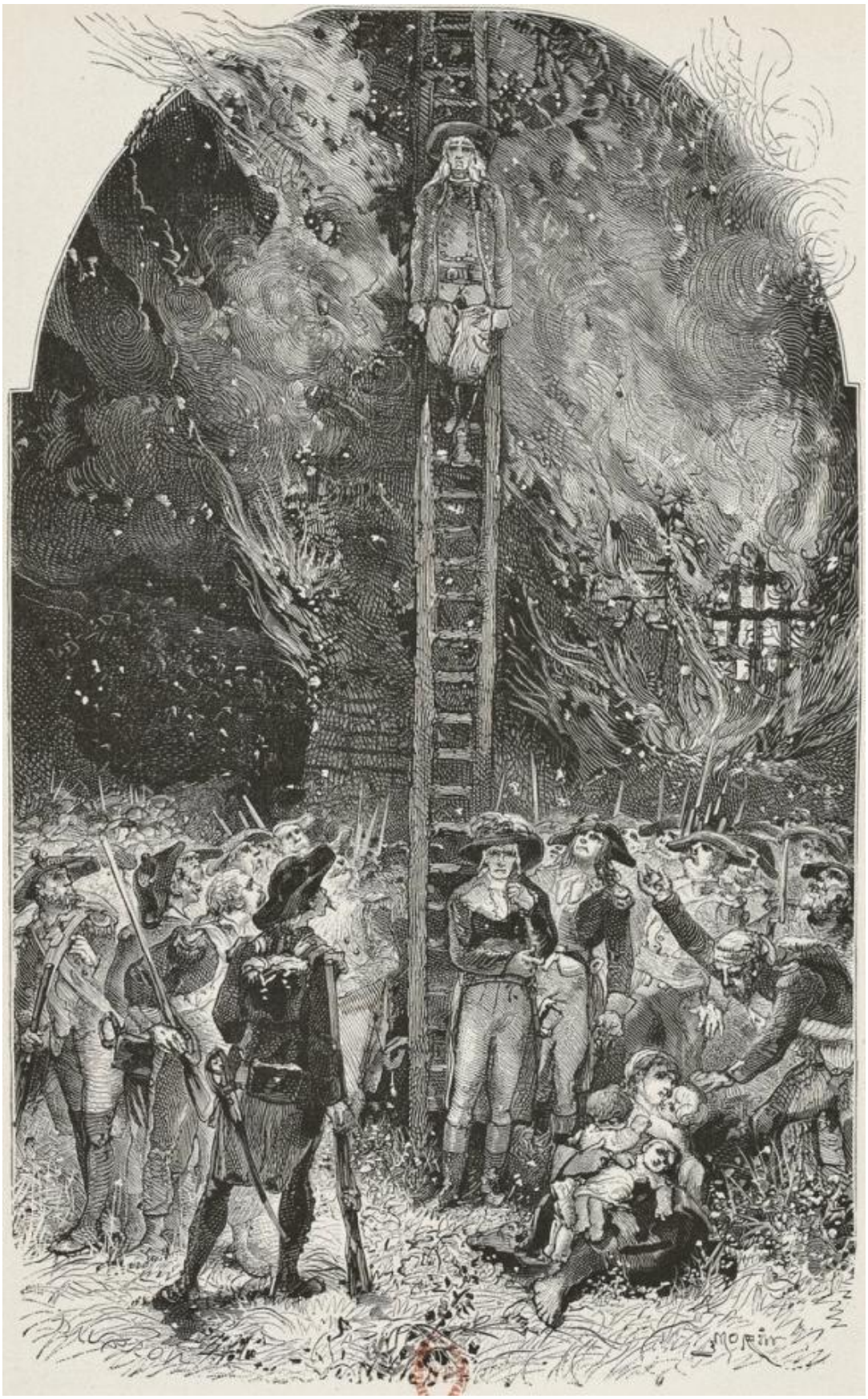
The mother, kneeling, clasped her arms around one of the piers of the bridge, crying, "Mercy!"

The hollow sound of crashing timbers mingled with the crackling of the flames. The glass doors of the bookcases in the library cracked and fell with a crash. There could be no doubt that the woodwork was giving way. Human strength was of no avail. One moment, and the entire building would be swallowed up in the abyss. They were only waiting for the final catastrophe. The little voices could be heard repeating, "Mamma, mamma!" They were in paroxysms of terror.

Suddenly against the crimson background of the flames a tall figure came into view standing in the window next to the one where the children stood.

All heads were raised, all eyes were riveted upon the spot. A man up there, in the hall of the library,—a man in that furnace! His face looked black against the flames, but his hair was white. They recognized the Marquis de Lantenac.

He vanished, but only to appear again.



This appalling old man stood in the window, managing an enormous ladder. It was the escape-ladder, which had been lying along the library wall, and which he had dragged to the window. He seized one end of it, and with the masterly agility of an athlete he let it slip out of the window over the outer ledge down into the depths of the ravine. Radoub, standing below, wild with excitement, received the ladder in his outstretched arms, and clasping it to his breast, cried,—

"Long live the Republic!"

"Long live the King!" replied the Marquis.

"You may cry what you please," muttered Radoub, "and talk all the nonsense you like; you are a very angel of mercy."

The ladder was firmly planted, and communication thereby established between the burning hall and the ground. Twenty men, led by Radoub, rushed forward, and in the twinkling of an eye grouped themselves on the ladder from top to bottom, leaning back against the rungs, like masons carrying stones up and down, thus forming a human ladder over the wooden one. Radoub, standing on the uppermost rung, facing towards the fire, was just on a level with the window.

The little army, dispersed across the heath and along the slopes, overcome by contending emotions, hastened towards the plateau down into the ravine and up to the platform of the tower. Again they lost sight of the Marquis, but he reappeared, carrying a child in his arms.

The applause was tremendous.

He had caught up the first child that came within his reach, and it chanced to be Gros-Alain, who cried out,—

"I am frightened!"

The Marquis handed him to Radoub, who passed him on to a soldier standing just behind him, a little farther down, who in his turn delivered him to the next one; and while Gros-Alain, screaming with terror, was thus transferred from hand to hand until he reached the bottom of the ladder, the Marquis, disappearing for a moment, returned to the window with René-Jean, who, struggling and crying, slapped Radoub just as the Marquis handed him to the sergeant.

Again the Marquis went back into the burning room. Georgette was the only one left. She smiled, and this man of granite felt the tears spring to his eyes. "What is your name?" he asked.

"'Orgette," she said.

He took her still smiling in his arms, and as he gave her to Radoub his conscience, austerely pure, albeit darkened, succumbed to the overpowering charm of innocence, and the old man kissed the child.

"It is the little midget!" exclaimed the soldiers; and so Georgette in her turn, amid the cries of admiration, was also passed from hand to hand till she reached the ground. The soldiers clapped their hands and stamped their feet. The old grenadiers sobbed aloud as she smiled upon them.

The mother stood at the foot of the ladder, panting, frantic, intoxicated by this sudden transition from hell to paradise. Excess of joy tears the heart in a fashion of its own. She held out her arms, first receiving Gros-Alain, then René-Jean, then Georgette. She covered them with frenzied kisses; then bursting into a laugh she fell swooning to the ground.

Then rose a loud cry,—

"All are saved!"

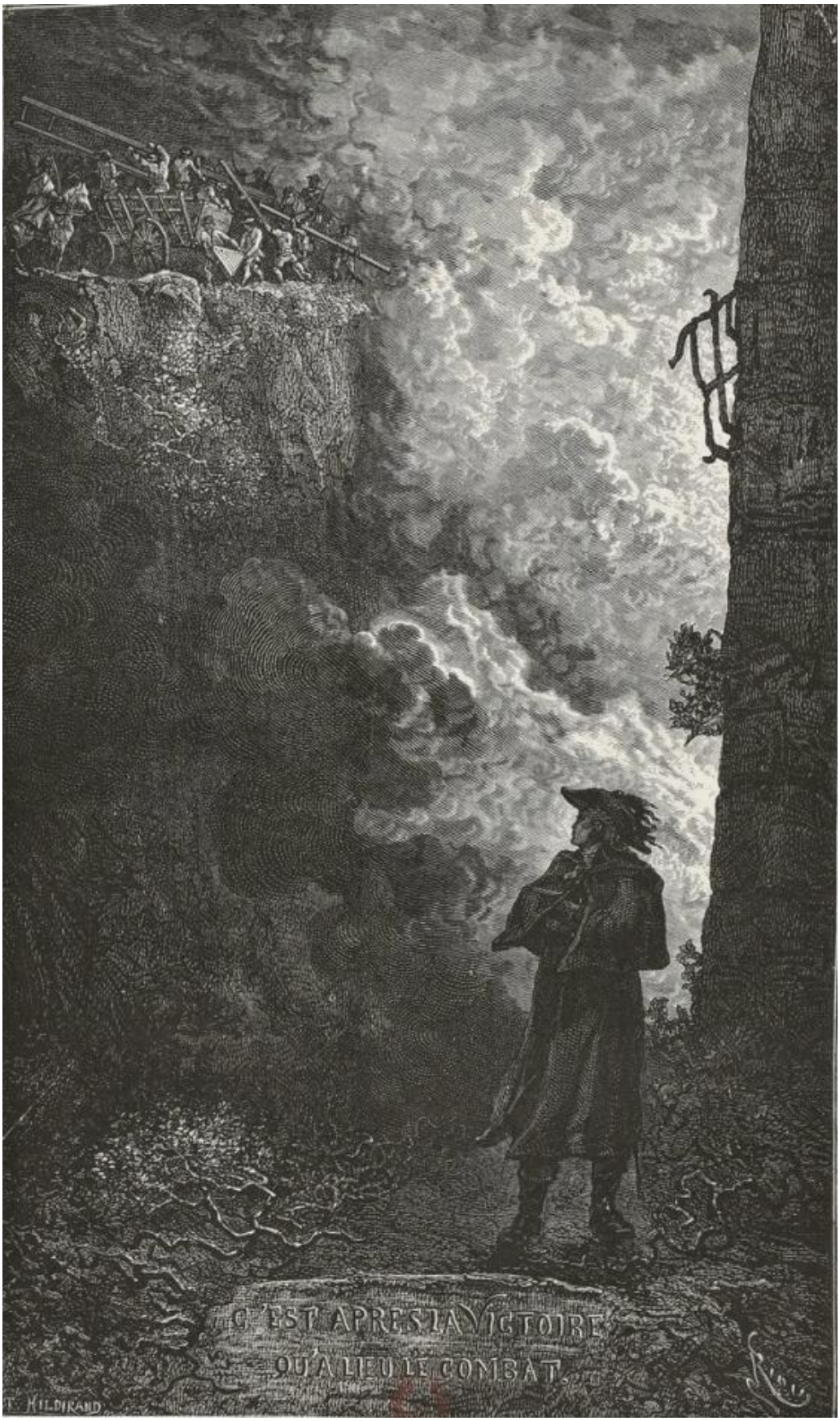
And so indeed they were, except the old man.

But no one thought of him, not even he himself perhaps. For several instants he stood dreamily near the window-ledge, as though he would give the fiery abyss time to make up its mind; then deliberately, slowly, and proudly he stepped over the window-sill, and without turning, holding himself upright and perfectly erect, with his back towards the rungs, the conflagration behind and the precipice before and beneath him, with all the majesty of a supernatural being he proceeded to descend the ladder in silence. Those who were on the ladder rushed down; a thrill ran through the witnesses, and they drew back in holy horror before this man who was approaching them like a vision. But stately and grave he continued his descent into the darkness before him, drawing nearer and nearer as they recoiled before his approach. His marble pallor revealed not a wrinkle; his ghost-like eyes, cold as steel, neither glittered nor flashed. As he drew near these men, whose startled eyes were fixed upon him in the darkness, he seemed to grow at every step; the ladder shook and echoed beneath his ominous tread; he might have been compared to the statue of the commander returning to his tomb.

When he reached the bottom and had stepped from the last rung of the ladder to the ground, a hand seized him by the collar. He turned.

"I arrest you," said Cimourdain.

"I approve," replied Lantenac.


C'EST APRES LA VICTOIRE
QU'A LIEU LE COMBAT.
T. HILDIBRAND

BOOK VI.

AFTER VICTORY, STRUGGLE BEGINS.

I.

LANTENAC TAKEN.

The Marquis had indeed descended into his tomb.

They led him away.

The oubliette dungeon on the ground-floor of the Tourgue was forthwith reopened under Cimourdain's severe superintendence; a lamp was placed there, a jug of water, and a loaf of soldier's bread; a bundle of straw was flung in; and in less than a quarter of an hour from the instant when the priest's hand had seized upon him, the dungeon door closed upon Lantenac.

This done, Cimourdain joined Gauvain; at that moment the clock from the distant church of Parigné struck eleven: Cimourdain said to Gauvain:—

"I am about to summon a court-martial. You will not join it; you are a Gauvain as well as Lantenac. You are too nearly related to be a judge; and I do not approve of Égalité sitting in judgment upon Capet. The court-martial will consist of three judges,—one officer, Captain Guéchamp, one non-commissioned officer, Sergeant Radoub, and myself, who will preside. You need have no further concern in the matter. We shall be governed by the decree of the Convention; all we have to do is simply to prove the identity of the ci-devant Marquis de Lantenac. To-morrow the court-martial, the day after to-morrow the guillotine. The Vendée is dead."

Gauvain made no reply; and Cimourdain, preoccupied with the important business that lay before him, departed. He now had to appoint the hour and select the place. Like Lequinio at Granville, Talien at Bordeaux, Châlier at Lyons, and Saint-Just at Strasbourg, he had made a practice of superintending executions in person. It was regarded as an excellent example, this supervision on the part of the judge of the executioner's work,—a custom borrowed by the Terror of '93 from the parliaments of France and the Spanish Inquisition.

Gauvain himself was preoccupied.

A cold wind blew from the forest. He left Guéchamp to give the necessary orders, went into his tent, which was in the meadow on the outskirts of the wood at the foot of the Tourgue, and taking his hooded cloak wrapped himself in it. This cloak was trimmed with that simple galoon which in accordance with the republican fashion, averse to decoration, designated the commander-in-chief. He began to pace up and down this bloody field where the assault was begun. There he was alone. The fire, though scarcely heeded, had not yet ceased to bum. Radoub was with the mother and children, almost as motherly as she herself; the bridge-castle was nearly consumed, the sappers completing the work of the flames; they dug ditches, buried the dead, cared for the wounded, demolished the *retirade,* and removed the dead bodies from the rooms and the staircases; the men were at work purifying the scene of carnage, sweeping away the mass of horrible filth, and setting matters in order after the battle with military rapidity. Gauvain took no note of all this activity.

Absorbed in his own thoughts, he hardly glanced at the sentries guarding the breach, doubled by the order of Cimourdain.

He could distinguish this breach amid the darkness, about two hundred paces from that part of the field in which he had found refuge. He saw that black opening. There the attack began three hours ago; this was the breach through which Gauvain had made his way into the tower; there was the ground-floor, with the *retirade;* the Marquis's dungeon-door opened on to that floor. The sentries posted near the breach guarded the dungeon.

While thus he gazed absently upon it, these words returned confusedly to his ears, like the tolling of a funeral knell: "The court-martial to-morrow; the guillotine the day after to-morrow."

The fire, which had been isolated, and upon which the sappers had dashed all the water that they could obtain, still resisted their efforts to extinguish it, and continued to shoot forth occasional jets of flame. Now and then was heard the cracking of the ceilings and the crashing of the stories as they fell one upon another; then showers of sparks flew about as from a whirling torch, revealing like a flash of lightning the extreme limit of the horizon; and the shadow cast by the Tourgue would grow to colossal size, extending to the very edge of the forest.

Gauvain walked slowly back and forth in this shadow in front of the breach. Now and then he clasped both his hands behind his head, covered by his military hood. He was thinking.

II.

GAUVAIN MEDITATING.

His reverie was fathomless.

An unheard of change had taken place.

The Marquis de Lantenac had been transfigured, and Gauvain had seen it with his own eyes.

He would never have believed it possible that such a state of things could have come to pass from any complication of events whatsoever. Even in a dream he could not have imagined such a condition of affairs.

The Unforeseen, that inexplicable force that makes a man the plaything of its capricious will, had seized Gauvain and held him fast.

Before his eyes he beheld the realization of the impossible,—visible, palpable, inevitable, inexorable.

And what did he think of it? This was no time for evasion; he must make up his mind. A question had been presented to him; he must meet it fairly.

Who had asked this question?

It had come to him in the course of events, but not through events alone.

For when events, which are ever changing, ask us a question, immutable justice summons us to answer.

Behind the cloud that casts the shadow is the star that sheds the light.

We can no more escape the light than the shadow.

Gauvain was undergoing an interrogatory.

He had been arraigned before a judge.

An awe-inspiring presence.

His own conscience.

His entire being was vacillating within him; his firmest resolutions, his most solemn promises, his most irrevocable determinations, were all shaken to their foundations. The soul has its earthquakes.

The more he reflected upon what he had just witnessed, the more confused he grew.

Gauvain, Republican as he was, believed himself to be and was just; but a superior law had been revealed.

Human law takes a higher stand than the law of revolutions. This affair now in progress could not be evaded; it was a serious matter, and Gauvain formed a part of it; he was involved in it, and could not extricate himself; and however much Cimourdain might say, "This matter no longer concerns you," he felt all the sensations of a tree torn up by its roots.

Every man has a basis; a shock to this basis produces a serious disturbance; and this was what Gauvain now felt. He pressed his head between his hands, as if to express from it the truth. It was no easy task to gain a clear idea of a situation like his: nothing could be more uncomfortable; he saw before him a formidable array of ciphers to be added up. To add up the columns of human destiny! The bare thought made him dizzy. And yet he was endeavoring to do this; he was trying to explain matters to himself, to collect his ideas, to subdue the resistance that he felt within him, and to review the facts. He revolved them again and again in his mind.

Is there one among us who has not been called upon to consider some important subject in all its bearings, or has not asked himself at a serious crisis which road to follow,—whether to advance or to retreat?

Gauvain had been witness to a miracle.

While the earthly combat was still in progress, a celestial one had begun.

A contest between good and evil.

A merciless heart had just been conquered.

In the man before him, with all the evil inherent to his nature, violence, error, blindness, an unwholesome obstinacy, selfishness, and pride, Gauvain had witnessed a miracle. A victory won by humanity over the man.

The human victorious over the inhuman.

And by what means? How was it achieved? How had it overthrown a colossus of anger and hatred? What weapons had it used? What machinery of warfare? Simply the cradle.

To Gauvain it was positively bewildering. To the very midst of civil war, at the climax of hostility and vengeance, in the darkest and fiercest moment of the tumult, when crime lent all its fires, and hatred all its blackness, at the very crisis of the struggle when anything may serve for a missile, when the mêlée is so direful that man is lost to every sense of justice, honesty, and truth, suddenly from the Unknown, that mysterious monitor of the human soul, overpowering all the lights and shadows of humanity, came one broad flash of the everlasting light.

Above that fatal duel between falsehood and comparative truth, the face of absolute truth had suddenly risen from the depths.

The strength of the weak had suddenly intervened.

The triumph of three poor little beings, but lately born into the world, unconscious of wrong, orphans, forsaken, and alone, lisping and smiling, with all the Gorgons of civil war, retaliation, the terrible logic of reprisals, murder, carnage, fratricide, wrath, and malice, had just been witnessed, together with the failure and defeat of an infamous conflagration kindled with criminal intent; cruelty had been frustrated and baffled; ancient feudal ferocity, inexorable disdain, the professed experience of the necessities of war, reasons of State, all the arrogant resolves of savage old age vanished before the innocent blue eyes of infant life; and what could be more simple?

The infant whose little life has just begun, has done no evil; it is the embodiment of justice, truth, and innocence; the highest angels of heaven dwell in little children.

And truly it was an edifying sight; these frenzied combatants in a merciless war had, in the face of all their evil deeds, their crimes, fanaticism, and murder, vengeance fanning the funeral piles, death advancing torch in hand, suddenly seen Innocence rise in its omnipotence above this countless legion of crimes.

And Innocence had won the day.

One might well say, No; civil war has no existence; there are no such evils as barbarism, hatred, or crime; there is no darkness; the divine dawn of infancy has but to rise, and all these spectres will straightway vanish.

Never in any struggle had the presence of Satan and of Almighty God been more plainly visible.

A conscience had furnished the arena for this combat. It was the conscience of Lantenac.

And again it was renewed, more desperate, and possibly more decisively than ever, in another conscience,—in the conscience of Gauvain.

What a battle-field is the mind of man!

Our thoughts, like gods, monsters, or giants, hold us in their power.

Sometimes those terrible wrestlers trample our very soul beneath their feet.

Gauvain was thinking.

The Marquis de Lantenac, hemmed in, blockaded, condemned, outlawed, confined like a wild beast in a circus, held like a nail in a vice, immured in his own home that had changed into a prison, encompassed on every side by a wall of iron and fire, had eluded his enemies and stolen away. He had effected a miraculous escape. He had achieved a masterpiece,—the most difficult of all accomplishments in a war like this,—flight. He had regained possession of the forest to intrench himself therein, of the district where he would renew the combat, and of the impenetrable shadows among which he might vanish from sight. Once more he had become formidable, ever on the wing, a knight-errant whose presence boded evil; the captain of invisible forces, the leader of men who dwell beneath the ground, the master of the woods. Gauvain was victorious, but Lantenac was free. Henceforth Lantenac was safe, his career unfettered, asylums without number from which to choose. He was intangible,

unapproachable, inaccessible. This lion, caught in a snare, had forced his way out, and now behold he had come back to it.

The Marquis de Lantenac had voluntarily, impelled only by his free will, left the shades of the forest, where safety and freedom awaited him, to return to the most frightful danger; first, Gauvain had seen it himself, rushing with fearless spirit into the flames that threatened to engulf him, and again descending that ladder that was to deliver him into the hands of his enemies,—the same ladder that offered escape to others, but to him absolute ruin.

And why had he done this?

To save three children.

And what were they now about to do with this man?

Guillotine him.

And so, this man, for the sake of three children,—his own? No; of his kin perhaps? Not at all; belonging to his own rank in life? By no means; for three little beggars, chance children, foundlings, unknown to him, ragged and barefooted, this nobleman, this prince, this old man, who had made his escape, who was both a free man and a victor, for escape is a triumph in itself,—had risked everything, compromised his own safety, imperilled the cause, and while restoring the children, he offered up his own head, this head hitherto terrible, but now august.

And what were they about to do with it?

To accept it.

The Marquis de Lantenac had had the opportunity to choose between the life of others and his own; and when this splendid option lay before him, he chose his death.

And it was to be granted him.

They would put him to death.

What a reward for heroism!—To return a generous action by a deed of barbarity!

To cast this reproach upon the Revolution!

Thus to humiliate the Republic!

While he, a man still in the bondage of prejudices and slavery, suddenly assumed another form and re-entered the lists of humanity, they, the champions of deliverance

and freedom, would still remain plunged in civil war, with its routine of blood and fratricide!

And they who fought on the side of error respected the supreme law of divine forgiveness, of abnegation, of redemption, and of sacrifice, while for the soldiers of truth it had apparently ceased to exist!

What! Was there to be no rivalry in magnanimity? Were they, who were now in the ascendant, to resign themselves to defeat, to acknowledge their weakness, to take advantage of their victory, to commit murder, and to allow men to say that while the defenders of monarchy save little children, Republicans kill old men!

This grand soldier, this powerful octogenarian, this disarmed warrior, betrayed rather than captured, seized in the very act of doing a good deed, bound by his own consent, with the moisture of a superb devotion still upon his brow, would be seen mounting the steps of the scaffold as if borne upward in an apotheosis; and they would offer to the knife that head round which the three souls of the little angels he had saved would hover in supplication! And standing face to face with a death so infamous for the executioners, a smile would be seen on the face of that man, while a blush of shame would overspread that of the Republic!

And that was to take place in the presence of Gauvain, the chief!

And he, possessing the power to prevent this,—was he to hold his peace? Was he to content himself with that haughty dismissal, "You have no further concern in this matter," and not to realize that in a case like this, abdication of authority was equivalent to complicity? And could he not see that in a deed so outrageous, the coward who allows the act is worse than the man who commits it? But had he not promised that this death should take place? Had not he, Gauvain the merciful, declared that Lantenac was to be excluded from mercy, and that he would deliver him to Cimourdain?

This head was a debt which he owed, and he paid it That was all.

But was this indeed the same head?

Hitherto Gauvain had seen in Lantenac nothing but a barbarous warrior, enslaved by the fanaticisms of royalty and feudality, the murderer of prisoners, an assassin let loose by war, a man of blood,—and of that man he felt no fear; this proscriber of others he would himself proscribe; this relentless man would find him relentless also. Nothing could be more simple; the road was already mapped out and terribly plain to follow; all had been anticipated; he who had killed others was now to suffer the same

fate; they were in the direct path of the horrible. Suddenly this straight line changed; an unlooked for turn revealed a new horizon, a transformation had been effected. Lantenac had appeared on the scene in an unexpected character. A hero had come forth from the monster; yea, one greater than a hero,—a man. Something higher than a mind,—a heart. He stood before Gauvain no longer a murderer, but a saviour. Gauvain was overwhelmed by a flood of celestial light. Lantenac had felled him to the ground by a thunderbolt of virtue.

And had not this transfigured Lantenac in his turn the power to transfigure Gauvain? What! Was this flood of light to meet with no responsive flash? Was the man of the past to lead the van of progress, and the man of the future to fall back to the rear? Was the man of barbarism and superstition suddenly to spread his wings and soar upward, all the while gazing down at the man with the lofty ideal, groping below him in the mire amid the murky shadows of the night? Gauvain would lie prostrate in the savage old rut, while Lantenac soared higher and higher in his new career!

And another thing must be considered,—the family!

This blood that he was about to shed,—for to allow its shedding amounted to the same as shedding it himself,—was not this his own blood? His grandfather was dead, it is true, but his great-uncle still lived in the person of the Marquis de Lantenac. Would not he, who already rested in the grave, rise to bar the entrance against his brother? Would he not lay his command upon his grandson henceforth to pay the same veneration to that crown of white hair as to his own halo? Would not the indignant glance of a departed spirit rise between Gauvain and Lantenac?

Was it then the object of Revolution to destroy the natural affections, to sever all family ties, and to stifle every sense of humanity? Far from it. The dawn of '89 came to affirm those higher truths, and not to deny them. The destruction of bastilles signified the deliverance of humanity; the overthrow of feudalism was the signal for the building up of the family. Since authority takes rise from and is centred in its author, there can be no real authority save in fatherhood; thus we see the legitimacy of the queen-bee who gives birth to her subjects and combines the mother with the queen; and also the absurdity of the king-man, who not being the father, has no right to be the master; hence the suppression of the king, and the rise of the Republic. And what is the meaning of all this? It is family, humanity, revolution. Revolution is the accession of the people, and in reality The People is Man.

It had now become important to ascertain whether, since Lantenac had returned to humanity, Gauvain would return to the family.

The question was whether the uncle and the nephew would meet again in the higher light, or whether the decline of the nephew would correspond to the progress of the uncle.

In this pathetic struggle between Gauvain and his conscience the question thus presented itself, and the answer seemed instinctive,—Lantenac must be saved.

Yes—but France?

Here the puzzling problem suddenly assumed a different aspect.

What! France, at the last extremity, betrayed, exposed to attack on all sides, dismantled! Her moat was gone; Germany could cross the Rhine: her walls were overthrown; Italy might leap over the Alps, and Spain over the Pyrenees. All that was left to her was the ocean, whose infinite abyss was on her side. She could lean against it, and, giantess as she was, supported by the expanse of the sea, fight the whole world,—an invincible position one might well call it. But no: she was on the point of losing this position. The ocean was no longer her own: England lay in this sea, though she knew not how to cross it. Well, there stood a man ready to throw a bridge across, to lend her a helping hand,—a man who was about to say to Pitt, to Cornwallis, to Dundas, to the pirates, "Come!" a man who would cry out, "England, come over and seize upon France!" and this man was the Marquis de Lantenac, whom they now held in their grasp.

After three months of an eager, passionate chase they had finally seized him. The hand of Revolution had swooped down upon the accursed one, the clenched fist of '93 grasped the Royalist murderer by the collar; and by one of those mysterious dispensations of Providence which enter into human affairs, it was in his own family dungeon that the parricide now awaited his punishment,—the feudal lord lay in the feudal oubliette; the stones of his own castle had risen and closed upon him. Thus he who would have betrayed his country was himself betrayed by his own castle. God had visibly ordained all this; the hour of doom had struck, and Revolution had turned the key upon the public enemy. He could no longer fight, neither could he struggle nor work further harm. Of that Vendée, where there was no lack of arms, his alone was the brain: his death would be the signal for the close of the war,—tragic climax ardently desired. After all the massacre and carnage he had caused, the murderer was in their power, and doomed in his turn to die.

And was there a man who could wish to save him?

Cimourdain in the person of '93 held Lantenac, or, as one might call him, the spirit of monarchy; and could a man be found to snatch that prey from these brazen talons?

Lantenac, around whose name was bound that sheaf of scourges which men call the past, the Marquis de Lantenac, was in the tomb; the heavy door of eternity had closed upon him, and would one appear from without to draw back the bolt? This social malefactor was dead, and with him had perished revolt, the fratricidal struggle, the brutal war; and conceive of a man who would bring him back to life!

Oh, how that death's-head would laugh!

The spectre would exclaim, "Good! I am still alive, you fools."

With what zeal he would begin his hideous work all over again! With what implacable rejoicing would he plunge again into the abyss of hatred and war! Not a day would pass before houses would be in flames, prisoners massacred, the wounded slain, women shot.

And, after all, was it not possible that Gauvain exaggerated the deed that so fascinated his imagination?

Three children were in danger of death: Lantenac had saved them.

But who had imperilled their lives?

Was it not Lantenac?

Who had put their cradles in the fire?

Was it not the Imânus?

Who was the Imânus?

The lieutenant of the Marquis.

It is the chief who bears the responsibility.

Hence Lantenac was both the incendiary and the assassin.

Why then was his deed so admirable?

He had simply desisted from evil,—nothing more.

Having conceived the crime, he had recoiled before its presence; he was horrified at himself. The mother's shriek had stirred within him the dregs of human pity,—the deposit of universal life which exists in every soul, even in the most cruel. At this cry he had retraced his steps; from the darkness towards which he was plunging he had turned back towards the light. Having committed the crime, he made haste to retrieve it. He had not continued a monster to the very end; herein lay all his merit.

And in return for so small a thing was all to be restored to him,—his liberty, the fields and plains, the open air, daylight, the forest, which he would use for brigandage; his own freedom, that he might use it to plunge others into slavery; his own life, which he would devote to the death of his fellow-men?

As for trying to come to an understanding with him, as for attempting to treat with this arrogant soul, offering to save his life under conditions, to ask him whether he would agree, provided his life were spared, to abstain henceforth from hostility and revolt,—what a mistake would such an offer be, what an advantage it would give him, with what scorn would he greet the proposal, how he would scourge the question by the answer! Hear him exclaim: "Keep such indignities for yourselves! For my part, give me death!"

Nothing could be done with such a man; he must either be set free or put to death. His was a rugged, inaccessible nature; ready for flight, ready for sacrifice,—it mattered not which. His strange soul displayed the characteristics of the eagle as well as of the precipice.

To kill him? Dreadful to contemplate! To set him free? What a responsibility!

Suppose Lantenac were saved, it would simply be a return to the beginning of the Vendée, like a struggle with a hydra, whose head is not yet severed. In the twinkling of an eye, like the flash of a meteor, all the flames which expired when this man vanished, would be rekindled. Lantenac would never rest until he had effected his detestable plan,—to establish Monarchy like the lid of a tomb over the Republic, and to give England control over France! He who would save Lantenac must sacrifice France; Lantenac's life would be death to a multitude of innocent creatures,—men, women, and children,—who would again become the prey of civil war; it meant the landing of the English, the Revolution retarded, the cities sacked, the inhabitants distracted, Brittany tom and bleeding; in short, it would be like tossing back his prey to the tiger's claws. And Gauvain, amid all this uncertain glimmering of cross-lights,—Gauvain, in-his reverie, caught a vague glimpse of the problem as it gradually took form in his mind: the setting at liberty of a tiger.

And then the question resumed its former aspect; the stone of Sisyphus, which is nothing less than the conflict of man with his own conscience, recoiled upon him. Was Lantenac then a tiger?

Once he may have been; but was he a tiger still? Gauvain grew dizzy with conflicting thoughts,—thoughts which coiled themselves around one another after the fashion of a snake. Could one, after mature consideration, really deny the devotion of Lantenac,

his stoical self-abnegation, his sublime disinterestedness? What! after he had shown his humanity in the very jaws of civil war? What! when in the conflict between inferior truths he had shown forth the truth that stands above all others? What! when he had proved that the deep tenderness of human nature, the protection that strength owes to weakness, the duty which binds every man who is saved to lend a helping hand to his perishing brother, the fatherhood which every old man owes to every little child, are above all principalities and revolutions, above all earthly questions whatsoever,—when he had proved the truth of all these grand things, and proved it by the gift of his own head? What! general as he was, to have renounced strategy, battle, and revenge? What! he, being a Royalist, had taken the scales, and placing in one end the King of France, the monarchy fifteen centuries old, the restoration of ancient laws and the re-establishment of an old society, and in the other, three little unknown peasants, and had found the king, the throne, the sceptre, and the fifteen centuries of monarchy out-weighed by those innocent creatures?

Could it be possible that all this was to count for nothing? Was he who had done this to remain a tiger and be treated like a wild beast? No, no, no! He was no monster, the man whose divine action had just illumined the abyss of civil war! The sword-bearer had been transformed into a messenger of light. The infernal Satan had become once more the heavenly Lucifer. Lantenac had expiated all his cruel deeds by one act of sacrifice; his moral salvation had been attained by way of his material ruin; he had returned to a state of innocence; he had signed his own pardon. Does Hot the right of self-forgiveness exist? Henceforth he was an object for veneration.

Lantenac had just proved himself a remarkable man. It was now Gauvain's turn to make fitting response.

The struggle between the passions of good and evil was fast converting the world into chaos; Lantenac, dominating this same chaos, had set humanity free, and now it was left for Gauvain to assert the rights of the family.

What was he about to do?

Was he to betray God's trust?

No. And he muttered to himself: Lantenac must be saved.

Well, then, go your way; connive with the English, desert your country, ally yourself with her enemy! Save Lantenac and betray France!

Here he shuddered.

Dreamer that thou art, this is no solution! and Gauvain fancied he saw in the shadow the baleful smile of the sphinx.

This combination of circumstances was like a platform whereon conflicting truths had taken their stand, ready for the encounter, and where the three loftiest principles of mankind—humanity, family, and country—stood face to face.

Each of these voices spoke in turn, and each one spoke the truth. How was a man to choose? Each one by turns seemed to have discovered the point of union between justice and wisdom, and said, "Act thus." Must he obey this voice? Yes. No. Reason suggested one thing, sentiment another; and their counsels were diametrically opposed. Logic is nothing more than reason; sentiment is often the voice of the conscience: the one comes from man, the other from above.

Hence the perceptions of sentiment are less clear, but wield a stronger influence.

But what a power dwells in stern reason!

Gauvain hesitated.

Torturing perplexities!

Two abysses opened before Gauvain,—to destroy the Marquis, or to save him? Into one or the other he must needs plunge. Towards which of these two did duty call him?

III

THE COMMANDER'S HOOD.

The question had indeed resolved itself in a matter of duty.

Duty arose stem-visaged and immutable before the spirit of Cimourdain, and terrible before that of Gauvain.

Simple to the one; complex, many-sided, devious, to the other.

The hour of midnight sounded; then one o'clock.

Without realizing where he was going, Gauvain had unconsciously approached the entrance of the breach.

The light of the expiring fire cast now but a dim reflection. The plateau on the other side of the tower caught the light and became visible for an instant only, to vanish as the clouds of smoke obscured the flames. This light, with its unexpected flashes and

sudden darkening shadows, exaggerated the surrounding objects and gave to the sentinels of the camp the effect of phantoms. Gauvain, lost in thought, unconsciously watched the alternations of smoke and flame. There seemed to him a strange analogy between these changes of light and shade and the varied phases of truth in his own mind.

Suddenly, between two clouds of smoke, a flame burst forth from the bed of dying coals, threw a brilliant light on the summit of the plateau, and revealed the red outlines of a wagon. Gauvain gazed upon it. It was surrounded by horsemen wearing the hats of gendarmes. He concluded that this must be the same one that he had seen through Guéchamp's spy-glass against the horizon a few hours before, just as the sun was setting. There were men on the wagon who appeared to be unloading it. The object which they were removing seemed heavy, and at times the clanking of iron could be heard; it would have been difficult to say what it was. It seemed to be wood-work; two of the men lowered from the wagon and placed on the ground a case, which, judging from its shape, might contain some triangular object. The flame died out, and everything was dark again; Gauvain, wrapped in thought, gazed steadily before him upon that object now hidden by the darkness.

Lanterns were lighted, and men could be seen moving to and fro on the plateau; but the outlines were indistinct, and moreover, Gauvain, standing as he did, and on the opposite side of the ravine, could only discern those objects which were close to the edge.

He could hear the voices, but not the words. Now and then he caught the echo of hammering upon the wood. He could also hear a grinding, metallic sound, like the sharpening of a scythe.

It struck two.

Slowly, and like one who would from choice take two steps forward and three back, Gauvain advanced towards the breach. On his approach, the sentinel, recognizing in the dusk the commander's cloak and braided hood, presented arms. Gauvain entered the hall on the lower floor, which had been transformed into a guard-room. A lantern hung from the ceiling, and cast just light enough so that one could cross the hall without treading on the men, most of whom lay upon the straw, sound asleep.

There they lay, on the spot where but a few hours since they had been fighting. The grape-shot, from the careless sweeping, still lay scattered about beneath them, and was not very comfortable to sleep on; but weary as they were, they could sleep in spite of it This hall had been the terrible spot: here the assault had been made; yonder

men had roared, howled, gnashed their teeth, given blow for blow, struck down the enemy, and in their turn expired; many of their men had fallen dead upon this floor where they were now slumbering; the same straw on which they slept had been drenched with the blood of their comrades. Now all was ended; all the blood was stanched and the sabres dried, the dead were dead, peacefully slumbering. Such is war; and it may be no longer than to-morrow before every man among them will sleep the same sleep. On Gauvain's entrance some of the sleepers rose, among them the officer in command. Pointing to the door of the dungeon, Gauvain said to him,—

"Open it."

The bolts were drawn, and the door opened.

Gauvain entered the dungeon.

The door closed behind him.

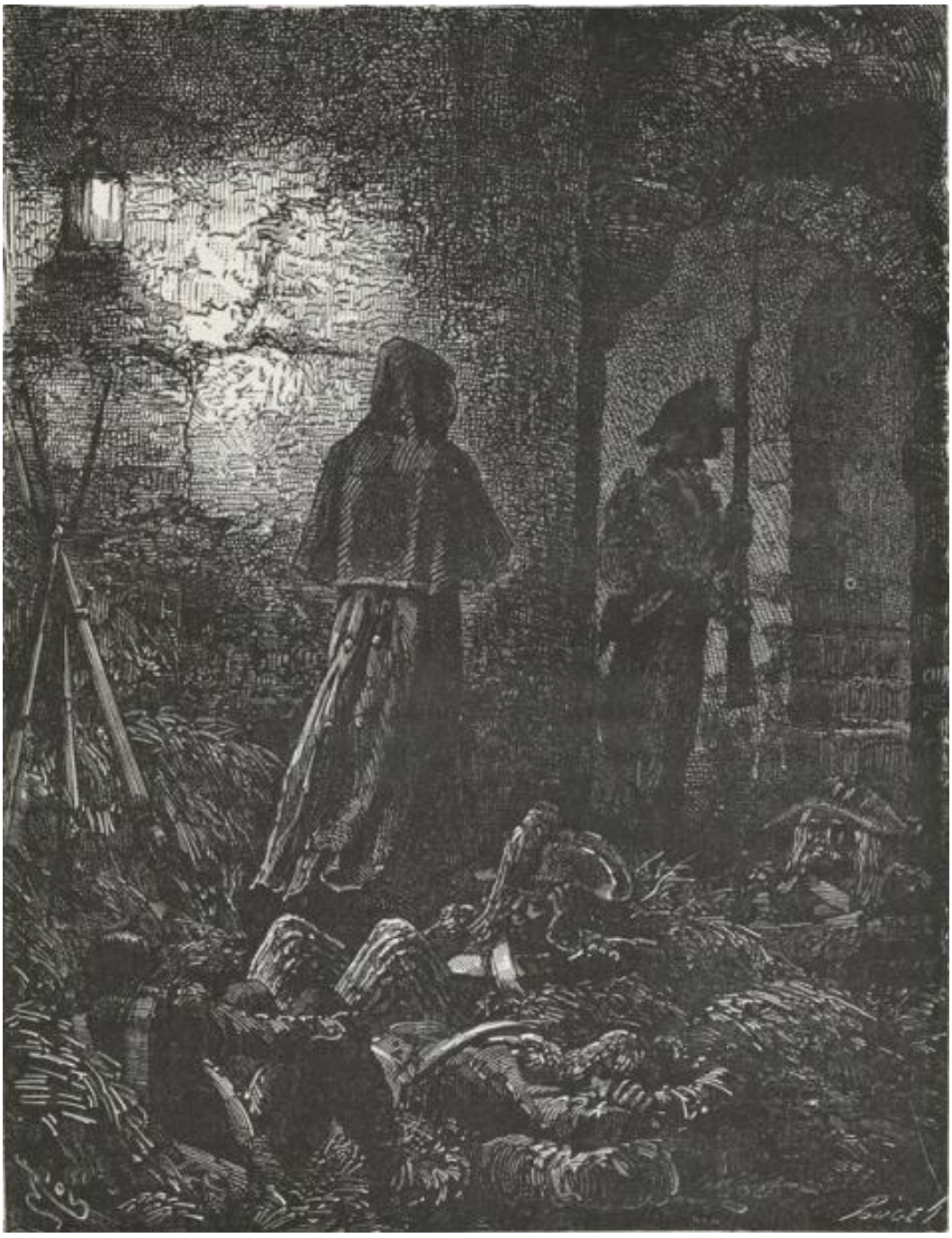

FEODALITE
ET REVOLUTION

BOOK VII.

FEUDALITY AND REVOLUTION.

I.

THE ANCESTOR.



A lamp stood on the flags of the dungeon, beside the square air-hole of the oubliette.

There was also to be seen a jug of water, a loaf of army bread, and a truss of straw. As the dungeon was cut out of solid rock, any prisoner who conceived the idea of setting the straw on fire would have had his labor for his pains,—no risk of a conflagration for the prison, and certain suffocation for the prisoner.

When the door turned on its hinges, the Marquis was walking up and down in his prison, with that mechanical pacing to and fro peculiar to caged wild animals.

At the sound of the opening and closing door, he looked up, and the light from the lamp that stood on the floor between Gauvain and himself struck full upon the faces of both men.

They looked at each other with such an expression that each stood there as if transfixed.

The Marquis burst out laughing and exclaimed:

"Good-evening, sir. Many years have passed since I have had the pleasure of meeting you. You honor me by your visit. I thank you. Nothing could please me more than a little conversation, for I was beginning, to be bored. Your friends are wasting their time,—proofs of identity, court-martials, all those ceremonies are tedious. Were it my affair I should proceed more rapidly. I am at home here. Will you be good enough to come in. Well, what do you think of the present state of affairs? It is original, is it not? Once upon a time there was a king and queen in France; the king was the king; France herself was the queen. They have cut off the king's head and married the queen to Robespierre; and to this pair a daughter has been born,—they call her Guillotine, and it seems that I am to make her acquaintance to-morrow morning. I shall be as pleased to meet her as I am to meet you. Is that perchance the object of your visit? Have you been promoted? Shall you officiate as headsman? But if this be simply a visit of friendship, I feel grateful. You may perhaps have forgotten, Viscount, what a nobleman is? Allow me to present you to one. Behold me; it has become a rare specimen; it believes in God, in tradition, and in the family; it believes in its ancestors, in the example of its father, in fidelity, in loyalty, in its duty towards its princes, in reverence for ancient laws, in virtue and in justice; and it would order you to be shot with much pleasure. Will you do me the favor to take a seat? I must ask you to sit upon the floor, since there is no arm-chair in this salon; but he who dwells in the mire may well sit upon the ground. I do not say this to offend you, for that which is mire in our esteem, represents the nation in your eyes. You will not, of course, require me to shout for Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity? This is an old room in my house, where in former times the lords used to imprison their peasants; nowadays, it is the peasants who imprison the lords. And these follies men call revolution! It seems that my head is to be cut off in thirty-six hours. I have no objection to offer; still, had they been well-bred they would have sent me my snuff-box, which is upstairs in the mirror-chamber, where you used to play when you were a child, and where I have dandled you on my knee. Sir, let me tell you one thing: your name is Gauvain, and strange as it may seem, you have

noble blood in your veins,—yes, *pardieu*! the very same blood that flows in mine; and this blood which has made a man of honor of me, has made of you a scoundrel. Such are the idiosyncrasies of the human race! You will tell me that it is not your fault. Nor is it mine. *Parbleu*! one may be a rascal unconsciously. It depends upon the air one breathes. In times like ours, no man is responsible for what he does; revolution is the scapegoat for all mankind, for your great criminals are supreme innocents. What blockheads! To begin with yourself. Allow me to admire you. Yes, I admire a youth like yourself, who, well-born, with an excellent position in State affairs, possessing noble blood fit to be shed in a noble cause, Viscount of this Tower-Gauvain, Prince of Brittany, a duke in his own right, belonging to the hereditary peerage of France,—which is about all that a sensible man can desire here below,—a youth who, being such as he is, amuses himself by playing a part like yours, until his enemies believe him a scoundrel, and his friends regard him as an idiot! By the way, give my regards to the Abbé Cimourdain."

Perfectly at his ease, the Marquis spoke slowly and calmly, without emphasis, in his society voice, his eyes clear and tranquil, and with both hands in his waistcoat pockets. He paused, took a long breath, and then continued:—

"I do not conceal from you that I have done all in my power to kill you. As I stand before you, I have three times in person aimed a cannon at you. A discourteous proceeding, I confess, but it would be relying upon a false maxim did we allow ourselves to fancy that in time of war the enemy proposes to make himself agreeable. For we are in a state of war, nephew. Everything is put to fire and sword, and they have killed the king besides. A fine century!"

He paused again, then continued:—

"And when one thinks that none of these things would have happened if they had hung Voltaire and sent Rousseau to the galleys! Ah, those men of intellect! What a scourge they were! For what crime did you reproach the Monarchy? The Abbé Pucelle was sent to his Abbey of Corbigny, it is true, allowing him the choice of conveyance and as much time as he required in the journey; and as for your Monsieur Titon, who was—begging your pardon—a wretched libertine, who visited abandoned women before going to the miracles of Deacon Pâris, he was transferred from Vincennes to the fortress of Ham in Picardy, which is, I admit, rather a disagreeable place. Those are your grievances; I remember them, for I too inveighed against them in my day. I have been as stupid as you."

The Marquis fumbled in his pocket as though he expected to find his snuff-box; then he continued:

"But not so wicked. We talked for the sake of talking. There was, moreover, the mutiny of demands and petitions; and then those gentlemen the philosophers appeared upon the scene, whose works they burned,—they would have done better had they burned the authors: Court intrigues were mixed up in the affair. Then came all the dunces, Turgot, Quesnay, Malesherbes, the physiocratists, and so forth, and the wrangling began. All this was the work of scribblers and rhymsters. The Encyclopædia! Diderot! D'Alembert! Ah! the malicious scamps! Fancy a well-born man like the King of Prussia joining hands with them! I would have made short work with all those paper-scribblers. Ah! we know how to administer justice; you can see here, on this wall, the mark of the quartering-wheels. There was no jesting in the matter. No, no; let us abolish scribblers! So long as there are Arouets there will be Marats. So long as there are men who scribble, there will be wretches who murder; while there is ink, there will be black stains; so long as men's claws can hold a goose-quill, frivolous nonsense will engender atrocious follies. Books are the authors of crime. The word 'chimera' has a double signification,—it means a dream and it means a monster. What a price one pays for all this idle nonsense! What is it you keep repeating to us about your rights,—the rights of man, the rights of the people! Has it any sense whatever? Could anything be more stupid, utterly imaginary, and devoid of meaning! When I state the fact that Havoise, the sister of Conan II., brought the Comté of Bretagne to Hoël, Count of Nantes and of Cornwall, from whom the estate descended to Alain Fergant, the uncle of that Bertha who married Alain le Noir, lord of Roche-sur-Yon, and bore unto him Conan le Petit, grandfather of Guy or Gauvain de Thouars our ancestor,—I make a plain statement, and claim my rights. But the knaves, the rascals, the scoundrels of your party, what rights do they claim? Deicide and regicide. Is it not frightful? Ah! the ragamuffins! I am sorry for you, sir; still, you come of that proud Breton blood; you and I have a Gauvain de Thouars for our grandfather, and furthermore we have an ancestor in that famous Duke de Montbazon, a peer of France and decorated with the Grand Collar, who attacked the Faubourg de Tours and was wounded at the battle of Arques, and who died Grand-veneur of France in his house of Couzières in Touraine at the age of eighty-six. I could tell you of the Duke of Laudunois, son of the Lady de la Garnache, of Claude de Lorraine, of the Duke de Chevreuse, of Henri do Lenoncourt, and of Françoise de Laval-Boisdauphin. But to what purpose? Monsieur has the honor of being an idiot, and he delights to lower himself to the level of my groom. Learn this: I was already an old man when you were still a nursing infant. I watched you, and I would watch you still. As you grew up you succeeded in degrading yourself. Since we ceased to meet, each of us has followed his inclinations; mine have led me in the direction of honesty, while your course has been the very reverse. Ah! I know not how all this will end; but your friends are consummate villains. Oh, yes, I acknowledge it is

all very fine, the progress is marvellous; they have done away in the army with the punishment of the pint of water, inflicted for three days in succession, on drunken soldiers; they have the maximum, the Convention, Bishop Gobel, Monsieur Chaumette, and Monsieur Hébert; there has been a wholesale extermination of the past, from the Bastille to the calendar. The saints are replaced by vegetables. Very well, citizens; be our masters if you will, reign over us, take your ease, act your good pleasure, stand upon no ceremony. All that will not prevent religion from being religion, nor alter the fact that royalty has occupied fifteen hundred years of our history, and that the old French nobility, even though beheaded, stands higher than you. And as to your sophistries concerning the historical right of royal races, what care we for that matter? Chilpéric was really nothing but a monk by the name of Daniel; it was Rainfroi who invented Chilpéric to annoy Charles Martel,—we know that as well as you. That is not the question. The question is this: that there shall be a great kingdom, old France, a well-regulated country, where men consider first the sacred person of the monarchs, absolute rulers of the State, then the princes, then the officers of the crown, naval and military, as well as the controllers of finance. Then there are the officers of justice of the different grades, followed by those of the salt-tax and the general receipts, and finally the police of the kingdom in its three orders. All this was fine and well-regulated; you have destroyed it. You have destroyed the provinces, without even understanding—so great was your ignorance,—what the provinces were. The genius of France was made up from that of the entire continent, and each of its provinces represents a special virtue of Europe; the frankness of Germany is to be found in Picardy, the generosity of Sweden in Champagne, the industry of Holland in Burgundy, the activity of Poland in Languedoc, the grave dignity of Spain in Gascony, the wisdom of Italy in Provence, the subtlety of Greece in Normandy, the fidelity of Switzerland in Dauphiny. You knew nothing of all this; you have broken, shattered, crushed, demolished, behaving like stupid beasts of the field. So you wish to have no more nobles? Very well, you shall have none. Prepare your mourning. Your paladins and heroes have departed. Bid farewell to all the ancient glories. Find me a D'Assas at the present time, if you can! You are all trembling for your skins. You will have no more Chevaliers de Fontenoy who saluted the enemy before killing him; you will have no more combatants in silk stockings like those at the siege of Lérida; you will have no more of those days of military glory when plumes flashed by like meteors; your days are numbered; the outrage of invasion will descend upon you. If Alain II. were to return, he would no longer find a Clovis to confront him; if Abdérame were to come back, he would encounter no such foe as Charles Martel; neither would the Saxons find a Pépin waiting for them. You will have no Agnadel, Rocroy, Lens, Staffarde, Nerwinde, Steinkerque, La Marsaille, Raucoux, Lawfeld, Mahon; you will

never have another Marignan with Francis I.; nor a Bouvines with Philip-Augustus, who took Renaud, Count of Boulogne, prisoner with one hand, while with the other he held Ferrand, Count of Flanders. You will have Agincourt, but you will not have the great standard-bearer, the Sieur de Bacqueville, wrapping himself in his banner to die. Go on, go on, accomplish your work! Be the new men. Dwarf yourselves!"

Here the Marquis paused a moment; then he continued:—

"But leave to us our greatness. Kill the kings, kill nobles and priests, if you will; sow broadcast over the land destruction, ruin, and death; trample all things under foot; set your heel upon the ancient laws, overthrow the throne, stamp upon the altar of your God, and dance over the ruins. All rests with you, cowards and traitors as you are, incapable of self-devotion and sacrifice. I have said all that I have to say. Now have me guillotined, Monsieur le Vicomte. I have the honor to be your most humble servant."

Then he added,—

"It is but the truth. What difference can it make to me? I am dead."

"You are free," said Gauvain.

And he advanced towards the Marquis, unfastened his commander's-cloak, and throwing it over the shoulders of the latter, he drew the hood down over his eyes. Both men were of the same height.

"What is this that you are doing?" said the Marquis.

Gauvain raised his voice and called out,—

"Lieutenant, open to me!"

The door was opened.

Gauvain cried,—

"You will be careful to close the door behind me."

And he pushed the astonished Marquis across the threshold.

It must be remembered that the low hall which had been turned into a guard-room was lighted by a horn lantern, whose dim rays served only to deepen the shadows; it threw an uncertain glimmer on the surrounding objects, and in this indistinct light those of the soldiers who were not sleeping saw a tall man walk past them towards the entrance, wrapped in the cloak and braided hood of the commander-in-chief. The soldiers saluted him as he passed out.

The Marquis slowly crossed the guard-room and the breach,—not without hitting his head more than once,—and went out. The sentinel, supposing that it was Gauvain whom he saw, presented arms.

Once outside, within two hundred steps of the forest, feeling the turf beneath his feet, and space, the protecting night, liberty, and life before him, he paused and stood for a moment motionless, like a man who has allowed himself to be influenced, has been overcome by surprise, and who, having taken advantage of an open door, asks himself whether he has acted nobly or ignobly, and hesitates before going on,—giving ear, as it were, to an afterthought. After some moments of deep reverie, he raised his right hand, and snapping his thumb and finger, cried,—

"Faith!"

And he went on.

The door of the prison had closed again, and this time it was upon Gauvain.

II.

THE COURT-MARTIAL.

Nearly all the court-martials of this period were arbitrary tribunals. In the Legislative Assembly, Dumas had drawn up a rough plan of military legislation, afterwards improved by Talbot in the Council of the Five Hundred, but the final code of councils of war was not drawn up until the time of the Empire. From that time also, be it mentioned by way of parenthesis, dates the law imposed on military tribunals in regard to the taking of votes, that of beginning with the lower grade. This law was not in existence during the Revolution.

In 1793, the president of a military tribunal might almost be said to personify the tribunal itself; he elected the members, arranged the order of the ranks and regulated the method of voting; he was master as well as judge.

Cimourdain had selected the identical room on the ground-floor where the *retirade* had been, and where the guard was now posted, for the judgment-hall of the court-martial. He was anxious to shorten everything,—the road from the prison to the tribunal, and the passage from the tribunal to the scaffold.

In accordance with his orders, the court opened its session at noon with no more display of ceremonial than three straw chairs, a pine table, two lighted candies, and a stool placed in front of the table.

The chairs were for the judges and the stool was for the prisoner. At each end of the table stood another stool, one for the commissioner-auditor, who was a quartermaster, and the other for the clerk, who was a corporal.

On the table there was a stick of red sealing-wax, a copper seal of the Republic, two inkstands, bundles of white paper, and two printed placards, spread wide open,—one containing the sentence of outlawry, the other, the decree of the Convention.

The middle chair was pushed back against a group of tricolored flags; in those times of rude simplicity, decorations were quickly arranged, and but little time was needed to change a guard-hall into a court of justice. The middle chair, intended for the president, faced the prison door.

The audience was composed of soldiers.

Two gendarmes stood on guard beside the stool.

Cimourdain was seated in the middle chair, with Captain Guéchamp, the first judge, on his right, and Sergeant Radoub, the second, on his left.

He wore a hat with tricolored plumes, a sabre by his side, and two pistols on his belt. His scar, of a vivid red, increased the ferocity of his appearance.

Radoub had at last consented to allow his wounds to be dressed. He wore a handkerchief tied round his head, on which a blood-stain was gradually extending.

At noon, before the Court opened, a messenger stood beside the table of the tribunal, while his horse impatiently pawed the ground outside. Cimourdain was writing; and this was what he wrote:—

"*Citizen members of the Com. of Public Safety:*"

"Lantenac is taken. He will be executed to-morrow."

After dating and signing the despatch he folded and sealed it, and then handed it to the messenger, who took his leave.

Whereupon Cimourdain said in a loud voice,—

"Open the dungeon."

Two gendarmes drew back the bolts, opened the dungeon, and went in.

Cimourdain raised his head, crossed his arms, glanced at the door, and exclaimed:—

"Bring forth the prisoner!"

Beneath the archway of the open door appeared a man between the two gendarmes.

It was Gauvain.

Cimourdain started.

"Gauvain!" he cried

Then continued:—

"I demand the prisoner."

"It is I," said Gauvain.

"Thou?"

"I."

"And Lantenac?"

"He is free."

"Free?"

"Yes."

"Escaped?"

"Escaped."

Cimourdain trembled as he murmured:—

"True, it is his own castle, he is familiar with all its outlets; the crypt perhaps communicates with one of them. I ought to have thought of this; he probably found means of escape; he would need no help."

"He has been helped," said Gauvain.

"To escape?"

"To escape."

"Who helped him?"

"I."

"Thou?"

"I."

"Thou art dreaming."

"I went into the dungeon, I was alone with the prisoner, I took off my cloak and wrapped it about him, I drew the hood over his face; he went out in my stead, while I remained in his. Here I am."

"Thou hast not done this?"

"I have."

"It is impossible."

"It is true."

"Bring me Lantenac."

"He is no longer here. The soldiers, seeing the commander's-cloak, took him for me and allowed him to pass. It was still dark."

"Thou art mad."

"I tell you what happened."

A silence ensued. Cimourdain stammered:—

"Then thou deservest—"

"Death," said Gauvain.

Cimourdain was as pale as a corpse, and as motionless as a man who has been struck by lightning. He seemed to have lost the power of breathing. A great drop of sweat formed upon his forehead.

He controlled his voice, forcing himself to speak firmly as he said:—

"Gendarmes, seat the accused."

Gauvain took his seat on the stool.

Cimourdain continued:—

"Gendarmes, draw your sabres."

This was the usual formula when the accused was under sentence of death.

The gendarmes bared their sabres.

Cimourdain's voice regained its ordinary tone.

"Accused," he said, "rise."

He no longer used the familiar "thee" and "thou."

III.

THE VOTES.

Gauvain rose.

"What is your name?" asked Cimourdain.

"Gauvain," was the reply.

Cimourdain went on with the interrogatory:—

"Who are you?"

"I am commander-in-chief of the expeditionary column of the Côtes-du-Nord."

"Are you a kinsman or connection of the man who has escaped?"

"I am his great-nephew."

"Are you acquainted with the decree of the Convention?"

"I see the placard on your table."

"What have you to say in regard to this decree?"

"That I have countersigned it, and have ordered its execution; that it was I who had that placard written, to which my name is affixed."

"Choose your defender."

"I will defend myself."

"You may speak."

Cimourdain had become impassible. Only his impassibility was more like the calmness of a rock than that of a man.

For a moment Gauvain remained silent and thoughtful.

Cimourdain continued:—

"What have you to say in your defence?"

Gauvain slowly raised his head, and without looking at any one, replied:—

"This: one thing has prevented me from seeing another. A good deed, viewed too near at hand, hid from my sight hundreds of criminal actions; on the one side, an aged

man, on the other, children,—all this interfered between me and my duty. I forgot the burning villages, the ravaged fields, the massacred prisoners, the wounded cruelly put to death, the women shot; I forgot France betrayed to England: I have set at liberty the country's murderer. I am guilty. When I speak thus I seem to speak against myself, but it is not so; I am speaking in my own behalf. When he who is guilty acknowledges his fault, he saves the only thing worth saving—honor."

"Is this all you have to say in your defence?" returned Cimourdain.

"I will add, that being the commander I should have set an example, and that you in turn as judges must offer one."

"What example do you require of us?"

"My death."

"You think it just?"

"And necessary."

"Take your seat."

The quartermaster, who was commissioner-auditor, rose and read, first the decree pronouncing the sentence of outlawry against the ci-devant Marquis de Lantenac; second, that of the Convention sentencing to death any one whomsoever who should aid or abet the escape of a rebel prisoner. He ended with the few lines printed at the bottom of the placard, forbidding men to "aid or abet" the rebel aforesaid, "under penalty of death," and signed: "Commander-in-chief of the expeditionary column, GAUVAIN." The reading ended, the auditor-commissioner again took his scat.

Cimourdain, crossing his arms, said:—

"Attention, accused, and let the public listen, look on, and keep silence. The law lies before you. It will be put to vote. The sentence will be determined by the vote of the majority. Each judge will in turn pronounce his decision aloud, in the presence of the accused; for justice has nothing to conceal."

Cimourdain continued,—

"Let the first judge cast his vote. Speak, Captain Guéchamp."

Captain Guéchamp seemed unconscious of the presence either of Gauvain or Cimourdain. His eyes, riveted upon the placard of the decree, as if he were absorbed in the contemplation of an abyss, were hidden by his downcast lids. He said:—

"The law is clearly defined. The judge is more and less than a man,—less than a man, inasmuch as he has no heart; more than a man, in that he wields the sword. In the year 414 of the building of the city of Rome, Manlius put his son to death because he gained a victory without waiting for orders. That infraction of discipline required an expiation. Here, the law has been violated; and the law stands higher than discipline. A man has been overcome by the emotion of pity, and the country is once more endangered. Pity may rise to the level of a crime. Commander Gauvain has connived at the escape of the rebel Lantenac. Gauvain is guilty. I vote for death."

"Write it down, clerk," said Cimourdain.

The clerk wrote, "Captain Guéchamp: death."

Gauvain said in a firm voice,—

"Guéchamp, you have voted well; I thank you."

Cimourdain continued,—

"It is the turn of the second judge. Speak, Sergeant Radoub."

Radoub rose, and turning towards Gauvain, he made the military salute, exclaiming,—

"If that is the way things are going, then guillotine me; for upon my most sacred word of honor, I would like to have done, first, what the old man did, and then what my commander did. When I beheld that man of eighty rushing into the flames to save the three midgets, I said to myself, 'Good man, you are a brave fellow!' And since I hear that it was my commander who saved this old man from your beastly guillotine, by all that is holy, I say, 'Commander, you ought to be the general; and you are a true man; and by thunder, I would give you the Cross of Saint-Louis if there were any crosses or saints or Louises left!' Are we going to make idiots of ourselves, for pity's sake? I should say so, if this is to be the result of winning the battles of Jemmapes, Valmy, Fleurus, and Wattignies. What! here is Commander Gauvain, who for these four months past has been driving those donkeys of Royalists to the sound of the drum, who saves the Republic by his sword, and who did something at Dol that needed brains to accomplish it; and when you have a man like that, you try to get rid of him, and instead of making him your general you propose to cut his throat! I say that it is enough to make one throw one's self head-foremost from the Pont-Neuf! and if you, citizen Gauvain, were only a corporal instead of being my commander, I would tell you that you talked a heap of nonsense just now. The old man did well when he saved the children, you did well to save the old man; and if men are to be guillotined for their good actions, then we might as well go to the deuce; and I am sure I don't know what it

all means. There is nothing to depend upon. This must be a sort of dream, isn't it? I pinch myself to see if I am really awake. I don't understand. So the old man ought to have let the midgets burn alive, and my commander did wrong to save the old man's head? See here! guillotine me; I wish you would! Suppose the midgets had died; then the battalion of the Bonnet-Rouge would have been dishonored. Is that what they wanted? If that is the case, then let us destroy one another. I know as much about politics as you do, for I belonged to the Club of the Section of the Pikes. Sapristi! we are getting to be no better than the brutes! In a word, this is the way I look at it. I don't like such an upsetting state of affairs. Why the devil do we risk our lives? So that our chief may be put to death. None of that, Lisette! I want my chief; I must have my chief. I love him better to-day than I did yesterday. You make me laugh when you say that he is to be guillotined. We'll have nothing of the sort. I have listened. You may say what you please; but let me tell you in the first place, it is impossible."

And Radoub took his seat. His wound had reopened. A thin stream of blood oozed from under the bandage, from the place where his ear had been, and ran along his neck.

Cimourdain turned towards Radoub.

"You vote that the accused be acquitted?"

"I vote to have him made general," replied Radoub.

"I ask you whether you vote for his acquittal."

"I vote that he be made the head of the Republic."

"Sergeant Radoub, do you, or do you not, vote for Captain Gauvain's acquittal? Yes, or no?"

"I vote that you behead me in his place."

"Acquittal," said Cimourdain. "Write it down, clerk."

Then the clerk announced,—

"One vote for death, one for acquittal: a tie."

It was Cimourdain's turn to vote.

He rose, took off his hat, and placed it on the table. He was no longer pale or livid; his face was the color of clay.

Had every man present been lying in his shroud, the silence could not have been more profound.

In solemn, measured tones Cimourdain said,—

"Gauvain, the accused, your case has been heard. The court-martial, in the name of the Republic, by a majority of two against one—"

He broke off; he seemed to pause. Was he still doubtful whether to vote for death or for life? The audience was breathless. Cimourdain went on,—

"—condemns you to the penalty of death."

His face revealed the torture of an awful triumph. When Jacob in the darkness forced a blessing from the angel whom he had overthrown, he must have worn the same terrible smile.

It passed like a flash, however, and Cimourdain again became marble. He took his seat, replaced his hat on his head, and added,—

"Gauvain, you will be executed to-morrow at sunrise."

Gauvain rose, bowed, and said,—

"I thank the court."

"Remove the prisoner," said Cimourdain; and at a sign from him the door of the dungeon was reopened, Gauvain entered, and it closed behind him. Two gendarmes with drawn sabres were stationed on each side of the door.

Radoub, who had just fallen senseless, was carried away.

IV.

AFTER CIMOURDAIN THE JUDGE, CIMOURDAIN THE MASTER.

A camp is a wasps nest, especially in time of revolution. The civic sting which exists in the soldier darts forth at a moments notice, and after driving out the enemy, will often turn without ceremony upon its own chief. The brave army which had taken the Tourgue was alive with conflicting rumors. When first the escape of Lantenac was discovered, it was all against Gauvain; but when the latter was seen coming out of the dungeon where they had supposed Lantenac to be imprisoned, it was like the transmission of an electric spark, and in less than a minute the whole army knew of it. A murmur broke forth from the little band; at first it ran: "They are getting ready to try Gauvain. But it is all a farce. He is a fool who trusts these ci-devants and calotins! We have just seen a Viscount save a Marquis, and presently we shall see a priest acquit a noble!"

When the condemnation of Gauvain became known, there was a second murmur: "That is an outrage! Our chief, our brave chief, our young commander, a hero! He is a Viscount, to be sure, but so much more to his credit that he is also a Republican! What, he, the liberator of Pontorson, of Villedieu, of Pont-au-Beau: the conqueror of Dol and of the Tourgue! the man who has made us invincible! the sword of the Republic in the Vendée,—he who for five months holds his own against the Chouans, and corrects all the blunders of Léchelle and others! And Cimourdain dares to condemn him! Wherefore? Because he saved an old man who had rescued three children! Does it become a priest to put a soldier to death?"

Thus murmured the victorious and dissatisfied camp. On every side a dull sense of anger prevailed against Cimourdain. Four thousand men against one might be supposed to constitute a power; but it does not. These four thousand men were nothing more than a crowd; Cimourdain was a will. They all knew that his frown was easily provoked, and this knowledge sufficed to hold the army in awe. In those times it needed but the shadow of the Committee of Public Safety behind a man to make him formidable, and to convert an imprecation into a whisper, and that whisper into silence. Before, as well as after their murmuring, Cimourdain was absolute master of

the fate of all, as well as of that of Gauvain. They knew that it would be vain to entreat him; that he would listen only to his conscience,—that superhuman voice audible to himself alone. Everything depended upon him. What he had done simply in his capacity of military judge, he could undo as civil delegate. He alone could pardon; there were no limits to his authority; it needed but a sign from him to set Gauvain at liberty; life and death were in his hands; the guillotine was at his command. In this tragic moment he held supreme authority.

There was no resource but to wait.

The night came.

V.

THE DUNGEON.

Once more the hall of justice was changed into a guard-room; and as on the previous evening, the sentinels were doubled, two of whom guarded the door of the closed dungeon.

Toward midnight, a man, bearing a lantern in his hand, crossed the guard-room, where he made himself known, and ordered the dungeon to be opened. It was Cimourdain. He entered, leaving the door half open behind him. The dungeon was dark and silent. Taking one step forward in the gloom, he placed the lantern on the ground and stood still. The even breathing of a sleeping man could be heard through the darkness. Cimourdain stood dreamily listening to this peaceful sound.

On the truss of straw at the farther end of the dungeon lay Gauvain sound asleep. It was his breathing that he heard.

Cimourdain moved as noiselessly as possible, and when he had drawn near, he fixed his eyes upon Gauvain; no mother gazing upon her sleeping infant could have worn a look more unutterably tender. The expression was probably beyond his control; he pressed his clenched hands against his eyes as children sometimes do, and for a moment stood perfectly still. Then he knelt, gently lifted Gauvain's hand, and carried it to his lips.

Gauvain stirred. He opened his eyes, with the vague surprise of sudden waking. The feeble glimmer of a lantern dimly lighted the dungeon. He recognized Cimourdain.

"Ah, is that you, master?" he said.

Then he added,—

"I dreamed that Death was kissing my hand."

A sudden influx of thoughts will now and then startle a man, and so it was with Cimourdain; at times this wave rolls in so tumultuously that it threatens to submerge the soul. But Cimourdain's deep soul gave forth no sign; he could but utter the word "Gauvain!"

And the two men stood gazing at each other—Cimourdain's eyes alight with flames that scorched his tears, Gauvain with his sweetest smile.

Gauvain raised himself on one elbow, and said:—

"That scar I see on your face is the sabre-cut you received in my stead. It was but yesterday you stood beside me in the mêlée, and all for my sake. If Providence had not placed you by my cradle, where should I be to-day? In ignorance. If I have any sense of duty, it is to you that I owe it. I was born in fetters,—I mean the bonds of prejudice,—which you have loosened; you promoted my free development, and from the mummy you have created a child. You have implanted a conscience in a being who bade fair to prove an abortion. Without you my growth would have been cramped; it is through your influence that I live. I was but a lord, you have made of me a citizen; I was only a citizen, you have made of me a mind; you have fitted me to lead the life of a man upon the earth, and have shown my soul the way to heaven. It is you who placed in my hands the key of truth that unlocks the domain wherein we find the realities of human life, and the key of light to the realms above. I thank you, my master! To you I owe my life."

Cimourdain, seating himself on the straw beside Gauvain, said,—

"I have come to sup with you."

Gauvain broke the black bread and offered it to him. After Cimourdain had taken a piece, Gauvain handed him the jug of water.

"Drink first yourself," said Cimourdain.

Gauvain drank, and then passed the jug to Cimourdain, who drank after him.

Gauvain had taken but a swallow.

Cimourdain took deep draughts.

During this supper Gauvain ate, and Cimourdain drank,—a proof of the calmness of the one, and of the burning fever of the other.

A certain awful tranquillity pervaded this dungeon. The two men conversed.

"Gauvain was saying,—

"Grand events are taking form. No one can comprehend the mysterious workings of revolution at the present time. Behind the visible achievement rests the invisible, the one concealing the other. The visible work seems cruel; the invisible is sublime. At this moment I can see it all very clearly. It is strange and beautiful. We have been forced to use the materials of the Past. Hence this wonderful '93. Beneath a scaffolding of barbarism we are building the temple of civilization.

"Yes," replied Cimourdain, "these temporary expedients pave the way for the final adjustment, wherein justice and duty stand side by side, where taxation will be proportionate and progressive, and military service compulsory; where there is to be absolute equality in rank; and where, above all things else, the straight line of the Law is to be maintained,—the republic of the absolute."

"I prefer the republic of the ideal," said Gauvain.

He broke off, then continued:—

"But, oh, my master, where in the picture you have just drawn in words do you place devotion, sacrifice, abnegation, the sweet intermingling of kindliness and love? An accurate adjustment of proportions is a good thing, but harmony is still better. The lyre stands higher than the scales. Your republic deals with the material interest of man; mine transports him to the skies: it is like the difference between a theorem and an eagle."

"You are lost in the clouds."

"And you in your calculations."

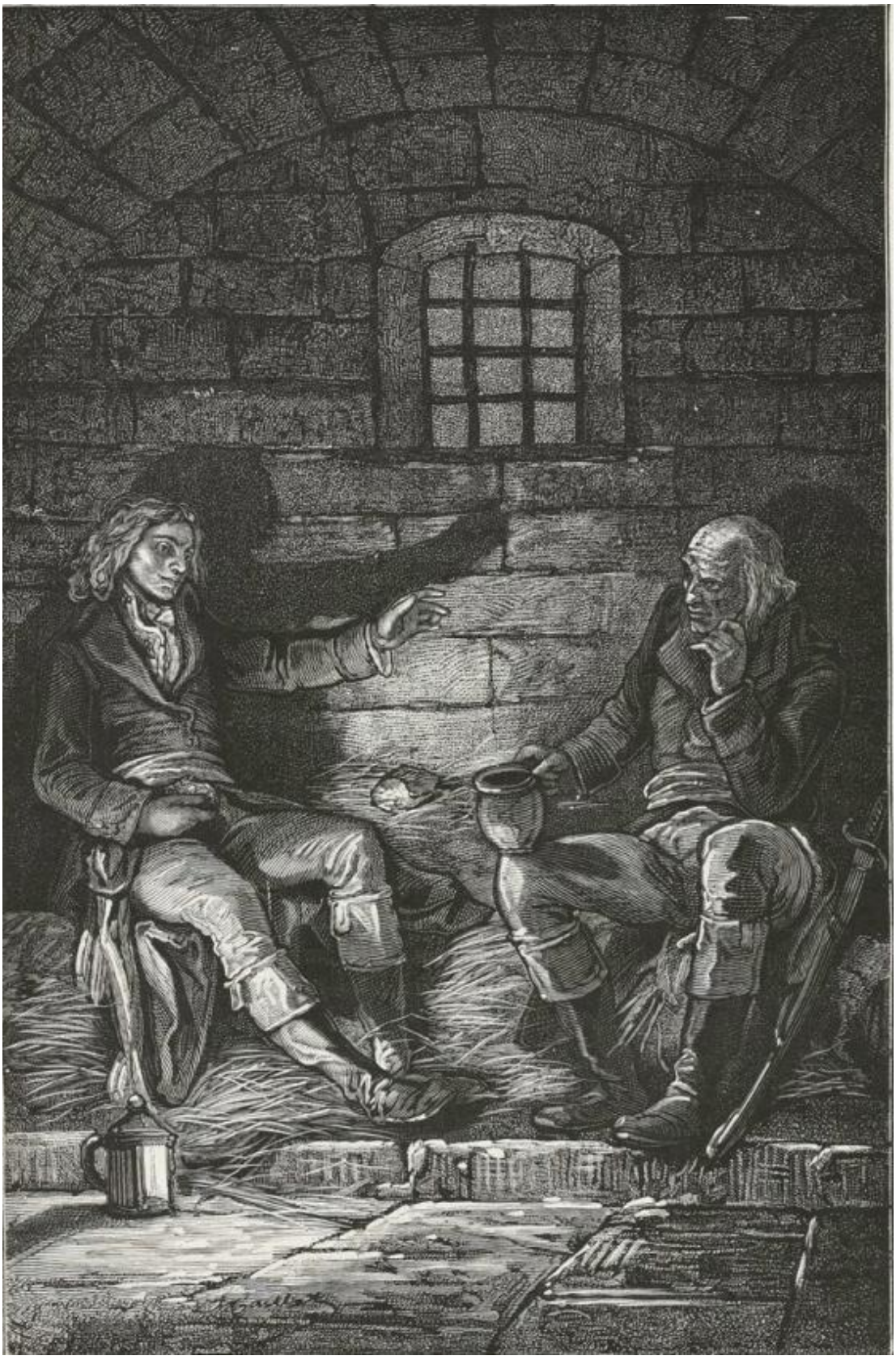
"There is an element of dreaminess in harmony."

"So there is in algebra."

"I would have man fashioned according to Euclid."

"And I like him better as described by Homer."

The stern smile of Cimourdain rested on Gauvain as though to stay the flight of his soul.



"Poetry. Beware of poets!"

"Yes; that is a familiar warning: beware zephyrs, beware of sunbeams, beware of perfumes, beware of flowers, beware of the stars."

"That sort of thing can never supply us with food."

"How can you tell? There is mental nourishment: a man finds food in thought."

"Let us indulge in no abstractions! The republic is like two and two in mathematics: two and two make four. When I have given to each man his due—"

"Then your duty is to give him what does not revert to him as a right."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean those mutual concessions which each man owes his neighbor, and which go to make up the sum of social life."

"There is nothing beyond the just limits of the law."

"Ah, but there is—everything!"

"I see nothing but justice."

"I look higher."

"What stands higher than justice?"

"Equity."

Now and then both paused, as though a sudden light had flashed across their minds.

Cimourdain continued,—

"Explain your assertion. I challenge you to do it."

"Very well, then. You demand compulsory military service. Against whom? Against mankind. I object to military service; I would have peace. You desire to help the wretched; what I wish is the abolition of their misery. You demand proportionate taxation; I would have no taxes whatsoever. I would have the public expenses reduced to the lowest level, and paid for by the social surplus."

"What do you mean by that?"

"This: In the first place, it is for you to suppress sycophancy,—that of the priest, the soldier, and the judge. Then, use your wealth to the best advantage; distribute over

your furrows all that fertilizing matter which is now thrown into your sewers. Three quarters of the soil lies fallow; plough it up; redeem the waste pastures; divide the communal lands; let each man have a farm, and each farm a man. You will increase a hundredfold the social product. At the present time, France affords her peasants meat but four times a year; well cultivated, she could feed three millions of men, all Europe. Utilize nature, that gigantic auxiliary; enlist every breeze, every waterfall, every magnetic current, in your service. This globe has a subterranean network of veins, through which flows a marvellous circulation of water, oil, and fire; pierce this vein of the globe, and let the water feed your fountains, the oil your lamps, and the fire your hearths. Consider the action of the waves,—the ebb and flow of the tides. What is the ocean? A prodigious force wasted. How stupid is the earth, to make no use of the ocean!"

"There you go, in full career with your dreams!"

"You mean with my realities."

Gauvain continued,—

"And woman,—how do you dispose of her?"

Cimourdain replied,—

"Leave her as she is,—the servant of man."

"Yes, under one condition."

"What is that?"

"That man shall be the servant of woman."

"What are you thinking of?" exclaimed Cimourdain. "Man a servant? Never! Man is the master. I admit but one kingdom,—that of the fire-side. Man is king in his own home."

"Yes, on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That woman shall be its queen."

"You mean that you demand for both man and woman—"

"Equality."

"'Equality'! Can you dream of such a thing? The two beings are so entirely unlike!"

"I said equality, not identity."

There was another pause, a sort of truce as it were, between these two minds exchanging their lightning flashes. Cimourdain broke it.

"And the child? To whose care would you intrust that?"

"First to the father who begets, then to the mother who gives him birth, later to the master who educates, and to the city that makes a man of him, then to the country which is his supreme mother, and lastly to humanity which is his great ancestress."

"You have not mentioned God."

"Each step—father, mother, master, city, country, humanity—is but a rung in the ladder that leads to God."

Cimourdain was silent, while Gauvain continued:

"When one climbs to the top of the ladder one has reached God. God is revealed, and one has but to enter into heaven."

Cimourdain made the gesture of one who calls another back: "Gauvain, return to earth. We want to realize the possible."

"Do not begin then by making it impossible."

"The possible may always be realized."

"Not always. Rough usage destroys Utopia. Nothing is more defenceless than the egg."

"Still, Utopia must be seized and forced to wear the yoke of reality; she must be circumscribed by a system of actual facts. The abstract must be resolved into the concrete: what it loses in beauty it gains in usefulness; although contracted, it is improved. Justice must enter into law; and when justice has become law, it is absolute. That is what I call the possible."

"The possible includes more than that."

"Ah, there you go again, soaring away into the land of dreams!"

"The possible is a mysterious bird, always hovering above the head of man."

"We must catch it."

"And take it alive too."

Gauvain continued:—

"My idea is this: Ever onward. If God had intended that man should go backwards He would have given him an eye in the back of his head. Let us look always towards the dawn, the blossom-time, the hour of birth. Those things which are falling to decay encourage the new springing life. In the splitting of the old tree may be heard a summons to the new one. Each century will do its work,—civic, to-day; humane, to-morrow: to-day, the question of justice; to-morrow, that of compensation. Wages and Justice are in point of fact synonymous terms. Man's life is not to be spent without a suitable compensation. When He bestows life, God contracts thereby a debt: justice is the inherent compensation; remuneration is the acquirement thereof."

Gauvain spoke with the calm serenity of a prophet; Cimourdain listened. The parts were changed, and now it seemed as if it were the pupil who had become the master.

Cimourdain murmured,—

"You go at a rapid rate."

"Perhaps because I have no time to lose," replied Gauvain with a smile.

He continued:—

"Ah, master, here is the difference between our two utopias. You would have military service obligatory; I demand the same for education. You dream of man the soldier; I, of man the citizen. You wish him to strike terror; I would have him thoughtful. You establish a republic of swords, while I desire to found—"

He broke off.

"I should like to establish a republic of minds."

Cimourdain looked down on the flag-stones of the dungeon.

"And in the mean time what would you have?" he asked.

"The existing condition of things."

"Then you absolve the present moment."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because it is a tempest. A tempest always knows what it is about. For every oak that is struck by lightning, how many forests are purified! Civilization has a plague; a strong wind is sent to expel it from the land. It may not choose its methods wisely, perhaps,

but can it do otherwise? Its task is no light one. Viewing the horror of the miasma, I can understand the fury of the wind."

Gauvain went on:—

"But what matters the storm to me, if I have a compass; and what power can events gain over me, if I have my conscience?"

And he added in that undertone which produces so solemn an effect:—

"There is One to whose will we must always yield."

"Who is that?" asked Cimourdain.

Gauvain pointed upwards. Cimourdain looked in the direction of the uplifted finger, and it seemed to him that he could see the starry sky through the dungeon vault.

Once more they relapsed into silence.

Cimourdain continued:—

"A supernatural state of society; I tell you it is no longer possible,—it is a mere dream."

"It is a goal; otherwise, of what use is society? Better remain in a state of nature; be like the savages. Otaheite is a paradise, only in that paradise no one thinks. Better an intelligent hell than a stupid heaven. But, no,—we will have no hell whatever. Let us be a human society. Super-natural? Yes. But if you are to add nothing to Nature, why leave her? In that case you may as well content yourself with work like the ant, and with honey like the bee. Rest content among the laboring classes, instead of rising to the ranks of superior intelligence. If you add anything to Nature, you must of necessity rise above her: to add is to augment; to augment is to increase. Society is the exaltation of Nature. I would have what bee-hives and ant-hills lack,—monuments, arts, poetry, heroes, men of genius. To bear eternal burdens is no fit law for man. No, no, no! let us have no more pariahs, no more slaves, no more convicts, no more lost souls! I would have every attribute of man a symbol of civilization and an example of progress; I would present liberty to the intellect, equality to the heart, fraternity to the soul. Away with the yoke! Man is not made for dragging chains, but that he may spread his wings. Let us have no more of the reptile. Let the larva turn into a butterfly; let the grub change into a living flower and fly away. I wish—"

He broke off. His eyes shone, his lips moved, he said no more.

The door had remained open. Sounds from without penetrated into the dungeon. The distant echo of a trumpet reached their ears,—probably the réveille; then, when the

guard was relieved, they heard the butt-ends of the sentinels' muskets striking the ground; again, apparently quite near the tower, so far as the darkness allowed one to judge, a noise like the moving of planks and beams, accompanied by muffled and intermittent sounds resembling the blows of a hammer. Cimourdain turned pale as he listened. Gauvain heard nothing. Deeper and deeper grew his reverie. Hardly did he seem to breathe, so absorbed was he in the visions of his brain. Now and then he moved, like one slightly startled. A gathering brightness shone in his eyes, like the light of dawn.

Some time passed thus.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked Cimourdain.

"Of the future," replied Gauvain.

And he fell back again into his meditation. Unobserved by the latter, Cimourdain rose from the bed of straw whereon they had both been sitting. His eyes rested yearningly upon the young dreamer, while he slowly moved backward towards the door. He went out. The dungeon was again closed.

VI.

STILL THE SUN RISES

It was not long before day began to dawn on the horizon; and together with the day there sprang to light upon the plateau of the Tourgue, above the forest of Fougères, a strange, stationary, and wonderful object, unfamiliar to the birds of heaven.

It had been placed there during the night,—set up rather than built. From a distance, against the horizon, it presented a profile composed of straight and rigid lines, resembling a Hebrew letter, or one of those Egyptian hieroglyphics which formed part of the alphabet of the ancient enigma.

The first thought that entered the mind at the sight of this object was its uselessness. There it stood, among the blossoming heather. Then came the question, could it be used; and for what purpose? Then came a shudder. It was a sort of trestle-work, supported by four posts. At one end were two long upright beams, united at the top by a cross-beam, from which hung a triangle that looked black against the pale blue of the morning sky. At the other end of this trestle stood a ladder. Between these two beams, beneath the triangle, could be distinguished a sort of panel composed of two movable sections, which, fitting into one another, offered to the eye a round hole about the size of a man's neck. The upper section of the panel ran in a groove, by means of which it could be raised or lowered. For the moment the two semicircles that formed the collar were drawn apart. At the foot of the two pillars supporting the triangle was seen a plank that moved on hinges like a see-saw. Beside the plank stood a long basket, and in front, between the two posts at the end of the staging, a square one. This object was painted red, and made entirely of wood, except the triangle, which was of iron. One might know that it was built by men, so ugly, sordid, and contemptible did it look; and yet so formidable was it that it might well have been transported hither by genii.

This shapeless structure was the guillotine.

In front of it, a few paces off, in the ravine, was another monster, La Tourgue,—a stone monster, companion-piece to the monster of wood. And let us add, that after wood and stone have been manipulated by man they lose something of their original substance, taking on a certain similitude to man himself. A building is a dogma; a machine is an idea.

The Tourgue was that fatal product of the past called in Paris the Bastille, in England the Tower of London, in Germany the Fortress of Spielberg, in Spain the Escurial, in Moscow the Kremlin, and in Rome the Castle of Saint-Angelo.

The Tourgue was the condensation of fifteen hundred years,—the period of the Middle Ages, with its vassalage, its servitude, and its feudality. The guillotine showed forth but one year,—'93; but these twelve months were a fitting counterpoise for those fifteen centuries.

The Tourgue was the personification of monarchy; the guillotine, of revolution.

A tragic encounter.

On the one hand, the debt; on the other, the requirement thereof. All the hopeless entanglement of the Gothic period—the serf, the lord, the slave, the master, the plebeian, the nobility, a complex code with all the ramifications of practice, the coalition of judge and priest, the infinite variety of shackles, fiscal duties, the salt-tax, the mortmain, the poll-tax, the exception, the prerogatives, the prejudices, the fanaticisms, the royal privilege of bankruptcy, the sceptre, the throne, the arbitrary will, the divine right—opposed to that simple thing, a knife.

On one side, a knot; on the other, the axe.

For many a year the Tourgue had stood alone in this desert, and from its battlements had rained the boiling oil, the burning pitch, and the melted lead; there it stood, with its dungeons paved with human bones, its torture-chamber alive with memories of its tragic past. For fifteen centuries of savage tranquillity its gloomy front had towered above the shades of the forest; it had been the only power in the land,—the one thing respected and feared; its reign had been supreme, without a rival in its wild barbarity, when it suddenly saw rising before it, with an aspect of hostility, a thing,—nay, more than a thing; a creature as hideous as itself,—the guillotine.

Stone seems at times endowed with the sense of sight. A statue observes, a tower watches, the front of a building contemplates. The Tourgue seemed to be examining the guillotine.

It was as if questioning itself,—

"What can this object be?"

One might fancy it to have sprung from the soil.

And so, indeed, it had.

Like a poisonous tree it had sprouted from a fatal soil. From that soil so plentifully watered by human sweat, by tears, and by blood, from the soil wherein men had dug countless graves, tombs, caves, and ambushes, from the same soil wherein had rotted the innumerable victims of every kind of tyranny, from that soil covering so great a multitude of crimes, buried like frightful germs in the depths below, had sprung forth, on the appointed day, this stranger, this avenging goddess, this fierce sword-bearing instrument; and '93 cried out to the Old World,—

"Behold me!"

The guillotine had a right to say to the dungeon: "I am thy daughter."

And yet at the same time the keep—for these fatal objects live a certain obscure life—recognized its own death-warrant.

At the sight of this formidable apparition the Tourgue seemed bewildered. One might have called it terror. The immense mass of granite was both majestic and infamous; that plank with its triangle was still more dreadful. Deposed omnipotence felt a horror of the rising power. It was criminal history studying judicial history. The violence of former days was comparing itself with the violence of the present time; the ancient fortress, both the prison and the dwelling of the lords, where the tortured victims had shrieked aloud, this structure devoted to war and murder, now useless and defenceless, violated, dismantled, discrowned, a pile of stones no better than a heap of cinders, hideous to look upon, magnificent in death, dizzy with the vertigo of those terrible centuries, stood watching the passage of the awful living hour. Yesterday shuddered in the presence of To-day. The old ferocity beheld and did homage to the new terror, and that which was mere Nothingness unclosed its spectral eyes before the Terror, and the phantom gazed upon the ghost. Nature is pitiless; she never withholds her flowers, her melodies, her perfumes, her sunbeams, from human abominations. She overwhelms man by the contrast between divine beauty and social ugliness; she spares him nothing, neither the wing of butterfly, nor song of bird; on the verge of murder, in the act of vengeance or barbarity, she brings him face to face with those holy things; nowhere can he escape the eternal reproach of universal benevolence and the implacable serenity of the sky. Human law in all its hideous deformity must stand forth naked in the presence of the eternal radiance. Man breaks and crushes, lays waste, destroys; but the summer, the lily, and the star remain ever the same.

Never had the fair sky of early dawn seemed lovelier than on that morning. A soft breeze stirred the heather, the mist floated lightly among the branches, the forest of Fougères, suffused with the breath of running brooks, smoked in the dawn like a

gigantic censer filled with incense; the blue sky, the snowy clouds, the clear transparency of the streams, the verdure, with its harmonious scale of color, from the aqua-marine to the emerald, the social groups of trees, the grassy glades, the far-reaching plains,—all revealed that purity which is Nature's eternal precept unto man. In the midst of all this appeared the awful depravity of man; there stood the fortress and the scaffold, war and punishment, the two representatives of this sanguinary epoch and moment, the screech-owl of the gloomy night of the Past and the bat of the twilight of the Future. In the presence of a world all flowery and fragrant, tender and charming, the glorious sky bathed both the Tourgue and the guillotine with the light of dawn, as though it said to man: "Behold my work, and yours."

The sun wields a formidable weapon in its light.

This spectacle had its spectators.

The four thousand men of the expeditionary army were drawn up on the plateau in battle array. They surrounded the guillotine on three sides, forming themselves around it after a geometrical fashion in the shape of the letter E; the battery placed against the centre of the longest line made the notch of the E. The red machine was, if we may so express it, shut in by these three battle fronts, a wall of soldiers, extending in a sort of coil and spreading as far as the edge of the escarpment of the plateau; the fourth side, left open, was the ravine itself, which looked upon the Tourgue.

This formed an oblong square, in the centre of which stood the scaffold. The shadow cast upon the grass by the guillotine lessened as the sun rose. The gunners with lighted matches stood by their pieces. A faint blue smoke curled upward from the ravine,—the last breath of the dying fire on the bridge.

This smoke obscured without veiling the Tourgue, whose lofty platform overlooked the entire horizon. Only the width of the ravine separated the platform from the guillotine, and voices could easily have been heard between them.

The table of the tribunal and the chair shaded by the tricolored flags had been conveyed to this platform. The sun rising behind the Tourgue brought into relief the black mass of the fortress, and upon its summit, seated on the chair of the tribunal, beneath the group of flags, the figure of a man, motionless, his arms crossed upon his breast.

This man was Cimourdain. He wore, as on the previous evening, his civil delegate's uniform, a hat with the tricolored cockade upon his head, a sabre by his side, and pistols in his belt.

He was silent. The entire assembly was silent likewise. The soldiers, their eyes downcast, stood at order-arms. They touched elbows, but no one spoke. They were thinking vaguely about this war,—the numerous battles, the hedge fusillades so valiantly faced, of the hosts of furious peasants scattered by their prowess, the citadels conquered, the engagements won, the victories; and now it seemed as though all this glory were turned to their shame. A gloomy expectation oppressed every breast. They could see the executioner walking up and down the platform of the guillotine. The growing light of day deepened until it filled the sky with its majestic presence.

Suddenly was heard that muffled sound peculiar to crape-covered drums; nearer and nearer came their funereal roll; the ranks opened, and the procession, entering the square, moved towards the scaffold.

First came the black' drums, then a company of grenadiers with lowered muskets, then a platoon of gendarmes with drawn sabres, then the prisoner, Gauvain.

Gauvain walked without constraint. Neither hands nor feet were bound. He was in undress uniform, and wore his sword.

Behind him marched another platoon of gendarmes.

The same pensive joy that had lighted his face when he said to Cimourdain, "I am thinking of the future," still rested upon it. Nothing could be more sublime and touching than this continued smile.

When he reached the fatal spot, his first glance was turned to the summit of the tower. He disdained the guillotine. He knew that Cimourdain would feel it his duty to be present at the execution; his eyes sought him on the platform and found him there.

Cimourdain was ghastly pale and cold. Even those who stood nearest heard no sound of his breathing.

When he caught sight of Gauvain not a quiver passed over his face; and yet he knew that every step brought him nearer to the scaffold.

As he advanced, Gauvain looked at Cimourdain, and Cimourdain looked at him. It seemed as though Cimourdain found support in that glance.

Gauvain reached the foot of the scaffold. He ascended it, followed by% the officer in command of the grenadiers. He unbelted his sword and handed it to this officer; then he loosened his cravat and gave it to the headsman. He was like a vision. Never had he looked more beautiful: his brown locks floated in the wind (at that time they did not

cut the hair of those about to be executed); his fair throat reminded one of a woman's; his heroic and commanding expression gave the idea of an arch-angel. He stood upon the scaffold, lost in reverie. There, too, was a height. Gauvain stood upon it stately and calm. The sun streamed about him, crowning him, as it were, with a halo. Still, the prisoner must be bound. Rope in hand, the executioner advanced.

At that moment, when the soldiers saw their young leader so near the knife, they could no longer restrain themselves; the hearts of those warriors burst forth. Then was heard a startling sound,—the sobs of an entire army. A clamor arose: "Mercy! mercy!" Some fell on their knees, others threw down their muskets, stretching their arms towards the platform where Cimourdain stood. One grenadier, pointing to the guillotine, cried, "Here I am; will you not take me as a substitute?" All repeated frantically, "Mercy! mercy!" The very lions would have been moved or terrified; for the tears of soldiers are terrible.

The headsman paused, uncertain what to do.

Then a voice, quick and low, and yet in its ominous severity distinctly heard by all, cried from the top of the tower,—

"Execute the law!"

They recognized the inexorable tone. Cimourdain had spoken. The army shuddered.

The executioner hesitated no longer. He moved forward, holding out the cord.

"Wait," said Gauvain.

And turning towards Cimourdain, he waved his free right hand in token of farewell; then he allowed himself to be bound.

When he was tied he said to the executioner,—

"Pardon,—one moment more. Long live the Republic!" he cried.

He was laid upon the plank. The infamous collar clasped that charming and noble head. The executioner gently lifted his hair, then pressed the spring; the triangle detached itself, gliding first slowly, then rapidly: a frightful blow was heard.

At the same instant another report sounded; the stroke of the axe was answered by a pistol-shot. Cimourdain had just seized one of the pistols that he wore in his belt; and as Gauvain's head rolled into the basket, Cimourdain sent a bullet through his own heart. A stream of blood gushed from his mouth, and he fell dead.

Thus these twin souls, united in the tragic death, rose together,—the shadow of the one blending with the radiance of the other.

THE END.