III

CONVERSATIONS INTERRUPTED

The Durande started pleasantly. The passengers, as soon as their bags and portmanteaus were installed upon and under the benches, took that customary survey of the vessel which seems indispensable under the circumstances. Two of the passengers—the tourist and the Parisian—had never seen a steam-vessel before, and from the moment the paddles began to revolve, they stood admiring the foam. Then they looked with wonderment at the smoke. Then they examined one by one, and almost piece by piece upon the upper and lower deck, all those naval appliances such as rings, grapnels, hooks and bolts, which, with their nice precision and adaptation, form a kind of colossal *bijouterie*—a sort of iron jewellery, fantastically gilded with rust by the weather. They walked round the little signal gun upon the upper deck. "Chained up like a sporting[Pg 136] dog," observed the tourist. "And covered with a waterproof coat to prevent its taking cold," added the Parisian. As they left the land further behind, they indulged in the customary observations upon the view of St. Malo. One passenger laid down the axiom that the approach to a place by sea is always deceptive; and that at a league from the shore, for example, nothing could more resemble Ostend than Dunkirk. He completed his series of remarks on Dunkirk by the observation that one of its two floating lights painted red was called *Ruytingen*, and the other *Mardyck*.

St. Malo, meanwhile, grew smaller in the distance, and finally disappeared from view.

The aspect of the sea was a vast calm. The furrow left in the water by the vessel was a long double line edged with foam, and stretching straight behind them as far as the eye could see.

A straight line drawn from St. Malo in France to Exeter in England would touch the island of Guernsey. The straight line at sea is not always the one chosen. Steam-vessels, however, have, to a certain extent, a power of following the direct course denied to sailing ships.

The wind in co-operation with the sea is a combination of forces. A ship is a combination of appliances. Forces are machines of infinite power. Machines are forces of limited power. That struggle which we call navigation is between these two organisations, the one inexhaustible, the other intelligent.

Mind, directing the mechanism, forms the counterbalance to the infinite power of the opposing forces. But the opposing forces, too, have their organisation. The elements are conscious of where they go, and what they are about. No force is merely blind. It is

the function of man to keep watch upon these natural agents, and to discover their laws.

While these laws are still in great part undiscovered, the struggle continues, and in this struggle navigation, by the help of steam, is a perpetual victory won by human skill every hour of the day, and upon every point of the sea. The admirable feature in steam navigation is, that it disciplines the very ship herself. It diminishes her obedience to the winds, and increases her docility to man.

The Durande had never worked better at sea than on that day. She made her way marvellously.

Towards eleven o'clock, a fresh breeze blowing from the nor'-nor'-west, the Durande was off the Minquiers, under little[Pg 137] steam, keeping her head to the west, on the starboard tack, and close up to the wind. The weather was still fine and clear. The trawlers, however, were making for shore.

By little and little, as if each one was anxious to get into port, the sea became clear of the boats.

It could not be said that the Durande was keeping quite her usual course. The crew gave no thought to such matters. The confidence in the captain was absolute; yet, perhaps through the fault of the helmsman, there was a slight deviation. The Durande appeared to be making rather towards Jersey than Guernsey. A little after eleven the captain rectified the vessel's course, and put her head fair for Guernsey. It was only a little time lost, but in short days time lost has its inconveniences. It was a February day, but the sun shone brightly.

Tangrouille, in his half-intoxicated state, had not a very sure arm, nor a very firm footing. The result was, that the helmsman lurched pretty often, which also retarded progress.

The wind had almost entirely fallen.

The Guernsey passenger, who had a telescope in his hand, brought it to bear from time to time upon a little cloud of grey mist, lightly moved by the wind, in the extreme western horizon. It resembled a fleecy down sprinkled with dust.

Captain Clubin wore his ordinary austere, Puritan-like expression of countenance. He appeared to redouble his attention.

All was peaceful and almost joyous on board the Durande. The passengers chatted. It is possible to judge of the state of the sea in a passage with the eyes closed, by noting

the *tremolo* of the conversation about you. The full freedom of mind among the passengers answers to the perfect tranquillity of the waters.

It is impossible, for example, that a conversation like the following could take place otherwise than on a very calm sea.

“Observe that pretty green and red fly.”

“It has lost itself out at sea, and is resting on the ship.”

“Flies do not soon get tired.”

“No doubt; they are light; the wind carries them.”

“An ounce of flies was once weighed, and afterwards counted; and it was found to comprise no less than six thousand two hundred and sixty-eight.”

The Guernsey passenger with the telescope had approached the St. Malo cattle dealers; and their talk was something in this vein:

“The Aubrac bull has a round and thick buttock, short legs,[Pg 138] and a yellowish hide. He is slow at work by reason of the shortness of his legs.”

“In that matter the Salers beats the Aubrac.”

“I have seen, sir, two beautiful bulls in my life. The first has the legs low, the breast thick, the rump full, the haunches large, a good length of neck to the udder, withers of good height, the skin easy to strip. The second had all the signs of good fattening, a thick-set back, neck and shoulders strong, coat white and brown, rump sinking.”

“That’s the Cotentin race.”

“Yes; with a slight cross with the Angus or Suffolk bull.”

“You may believe it if you please, sir, but I assure you in the south they hold shows of donkeys.”

“Shows of donkeys?”

“Of donkeys, on my honour. And the ugliest are the most admired.”

“Ha! it is the same as with the mule shows. The ugly ones are considered best.”

“Exactly. Take also the Poitevin mares; large belly, thick legs.”

“The best mule known is a sort of barrel upon four posts.”

“Beauty in beasts is a different thing from beauty in men.”

“And particularly in women.”

“That is true.”

“As for me, I like a woman to be pretty.”

“I am more particular about her being well dressed.”

“Yes; neat, clean, and well set off.”

“Looking just new. A pretty girl ought always to appear as if she had just been turned out by a jeweller.”

“To return to my bulls; I saw these two sold at the market at Thouars.”

“The market at Thouars; I know it very well. The Bonneaus of La Rochelle, and the Babas corn merchants at Marans, I don’t know whether you have heard of them attending that market.”

The tourist and the Parisian were conversing with the American of the Bibles.

“Sir,” said the tourist, “I will tell you the tonnage of the civilised world. France 716,000 tons; Germany 1,000,000; the United States, 5,000,000; England, 5,500,000; add the small vessels. Total 12,904,000 tons, carried in 145,000 vessels scattered over the waters of the globe.”

The American interrupted:[Pg 139]

“It is the United States, sir, which have 5,500,000.”

“I agree,” said the tourist. “You are an American?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I agree again.”

There was a pause. The American missionary was considering whether this was a case for the offer of a Bible.

“Is it true, sir,” asked the tourist, “that you have a passion for nicknames in America, so complete, that you confer them upon all your celebrated men, and that you call your famous Missouri banker, Thomas Benton, ‘Old Lingot’?”

“Yes; just as we call Zachary Taylor ‘Old Zach.’”

“And General Harrison, ‘Old Tip;’ am I right? and General Jackson, ‘Old Hickory?’”

“Because Jackson is hard as hickory wood; and because Harrison beat the redskins at *Tippecanoe*.”

“It is an odd fashion that of yours.”

“It is our custom. We call Van Buren ‘The Little Wizard;’ Seward, who introduced the small bank-notes, ‘Little Billy;’ and Douglas, the democrat senator from Illinois, who is four feet high and very eloquent, ‘The Little Giant.’ You may go from Texas to the State of Maine without hearing the name of Mr. Cass. They say the ‘Great Michiganer.’ Nor the name of Clay; they say ‘The miller’s boy with the scar.’ Clay is the son of a miller.”

“I should prefer to say ‘Clay’ or ‘Cass,’” said the Parisian. “It’s shorter.”

“Then you would be out of the fashion. We call Corwin, who is the Secretary of the Treasury, ‘The Waggoner-boy;’ Daniel Webster, ‘Black Dan.’ As to Winfield Scott, as his first thought after beating the English at Chippeway, was to sit down to dine, we call him ‘Quick—a basin of soup.’”

The small white mist perceived in the distance had become larger. It filled now a segment of fifteen degrees above the horizon. It was like a cloud loitering along the water for want of wind to stir it. The breeze had almost entirely died away. The sea was glassy. Although it was not yet noon, the sun was becoming pale. It lighted but seemed to give no warmth.

“I fancy,” said the tourist, “that we shall have a change of weather.”

“Probably rain,” said the Parisian.

“Or fog,” said the American.

“In Italy,” remarked the tourist, “Molfetta is the place[Pg 140] where there falls the least rain; and Tolmezzo, where there falls the most.”

At noon, according to the usage of the Channel Islands, the bell sounded for dinner. Those dined who desired. Some passengers had brought with them provisions, and were eating merrily on the after-deck. Clubin did not eat.

While this eating was going on, the conversations continued.

The Guernsey man, having probably a scent for Bibles, approached the American. The latter said to him:

“You know this sea?”

“Very well; I belong to this part.”

“And I, too,” said one of the St. Malo men.

The native of Guernsey followed with a bow and continued:

“We are fortunately well out at sea now; I should not have liked a fog when we were off the Minquiers.”

The American said to the St. Malo man:

“Islanders are more at home on the sea than the folks of the coast.”

“True; we coast people are only half dipped in salt water.”

“What are the Minquiers?” asked the American.

The St. Malo man replied:

“They are an ugly reef of rocks.”

“There are also the Grelets,” said the Guernsey man.

“Parbleu!” ejaculated the other.

“And the Chouas,” added the Guernsey man.

The inhabitant of St. Malo laughed.

“As for that,” said he, “there are the Savages also.”

“And the Monks,” observed the Guernsey man.

“And the Duck,” cried the St. Maloite.

“Sir,” remarked the inhabitant of Guernsey, “you have an answer for everything.”

The tourist interposed with a question:

“Have we to pass all that legion of rocks?”

“No; we have left it to the sou’-south-east. It is behind us.”

And the Guernsey passenger continued:

“Big and little rocks together, the Grelets have fifty-seven peaks.”

“And the Minquiers forty-eight,” said the other.

The dialogue was now confined to the St. Malo and the Guernsey passenger.

“It strikes me, Monsieur St. Malo, that there are three rocks which you have not included.”[Pg 141]

“I mentioned all.”

“From the Derée to the Maître Ile.”

“And Les Maisons?”

“Yes; seven rocks in the midst of the Minquiers.”

“I see you know the very stones.”

“If I didn’t know the stones, I should not be an inhabitant of St. Malo.”

“It is amusing to hear French people’s reasonings.”

The St. Malo man bowed in his turn, and said:

“The Savages are three rocks.”

“And the Monks two.”

“And the Duck one.”

“*The* Duck; this is only one, of course.”

“No: for *the* Suarde consists of four rocks.”

“What do you mean by the Suarde?” asked the inhabitant of Guernsey.

“We call the Suarde what you call the Chouas.”

“It is a queer passage, that between the Chouas and the Duck.”

“It is impassable except for the birds.”

“And the fish.”

“Scarcely: in bad weather they give themselves hard knocks against the walls.”

“There is sand near the Minquiers?”

“Around the Maisons.”

“There are eight rocks visible from Jersey.”

“Visible from the strand of Azette; that’s correct: but not eight; only seven.”

“At low water you can walk about the Minquiers?”

“No doubt; there would be sand above water.”

“And what of the Dirouilles?”

“The Dirouilles bear no resemblance to the Minquiers.”

“They are very dangerous.”

“They are near Granville.”

“I see that you St. Malo people, like us, enjoy sailing in these seas.”

“Yes,” replied the St. Malo man, “with the difference that we say, ‘We have the habit,’ you, ‘We are fond.’”

“You make good sailors.”

“I am myself a cattle merchant.”

“Who was that famous sailor born of St. Malo?”

“Surcouf?”

“Another?”[Pg 142]

“Duguay-Trouin.”

Here the Parisian commercial man chimed in:

“Duguay-Trouin? He was captured by the English. He was as agreeable as he was brave. A young English lady fell in love with him. It was she who procured him his liberty.”

At this moment a voice like thunder was heard crying out:

“You are drunk, man!”

IV

CAPTAIN CLUBIN DISPLAYS ALL HIS GREAT QUALITIES

Everybody turned.

It was the captain calling to the helmsman.

Sieur Clubin’s tone and manner evidenced that he was extremely angry, or that he wished to appear so.

A well-timed burst of anger sometimes removes responsibility, and sometimes shifts it on to other shoulders.

The captain, standing on the bridge between the two paddle-boxes, fixed his eyes on the helmsman. He repeated, between his teeth, “Drunkard.” The unlucky Tangrouille hung his head.

The fog had made progress. It filled by this time nearly one-half of the horizon. It seemed to advance from every quarter at the same time. There is something in a fog of the nature of a drop of oil upon the water. It enlarged insensibly. The light wind moved it onward slowly and silently. By little and little it took possession of the ocean. It was coming chiefly from the north-west, dead ahead: the ship had it before her prow, like a line of cliff moving vast and vague. It rose from the sea like a wall. There was an exact point where the wide waters entered the fog, and were lost to sight.

This line of the commencement of the fog was still above half-a-league distant. The interval was visibly growing less and less. The Durande made way; the fog made way also. It was drawing nearer to the vessel, while the vessel was drawing nearer to it.

Clubin gave the order to put on more steam, and to hold off the coast.

Thus for some time they skirted the edge of the fog; but still it advanced. The vessel, meanwhile, sailed in broad sunlight.

Time was lost in these manœuvres, which had little chance[Pg 143] of success. Nightfall comes quickly in February. The native of Guernsey was meditating upon the subject of this fog. He said to the St. Malo men:

“It will be thick!”

“An ugly sort of weather at sea,” observed one of the St. Malo men.

The other added:

“A kind of thing which spoils a good passage.”

The Guernsey passenger approached Clubin, and said:

“I’m afraid, Captain, that the fog will catch us.”

Clubin replied:

“I wished to stay at St. Malo, but I was advised to go.”

“By whom?”

“By some old sailors.”

“You were certainly right to go,” said the Guernsey man. “Who knows whether there will not be a tempest to-morrow? At this season you may wait and find it worse.”

A few moments later, the Durande entered the fog bank.

The effect was singular. Suddenly those who were on the after-deck could not see those forward. A soft grey medium divided the ship in two.

Then the entire vessel passed into the fog. The sun became like a dull red moon. Everybody suddenly shivered. The passengers put on their overcoats, and the sailors their tarpaulins. The sea, almost without a ripple, was the more menacing from its cold tranquillity. All was pale and wan. The black funnel and the heavy smoke struggled with the dewy mist which enshrouded the vessel.

Dropping to westward was now useless. The captain kept the vessel’s head again towards Guernsey, and gave orders to put on the steam.

The Guernsey passenger, hanging about the engine-room hatchway, heard the negro Imbrancam talking to his engineer comrade. The passenger listened. The negro said:

“This morning, in the sun, we were going half steam on; now, in the fog, we put on steam.”

The Guernsey man returned to Clubin.

“Captain Clubin, a look-out is useless; but have we not too much steam on?”

“What can I do, sir? We must make up for time lost through the fault of that drunkard of a helmsman.”

“True, Captain Clubin.”

And Clubin added:[Pg 144]

“I am anxious to arrive. It is foggy enough by day: it would be rather too much at night.”

The Guernsey man rejoined his St. Malo fellow-passengers, and remarked:

“We have an excellent captain.”

At intervals, great waves of mist bore down heavily upon them, and blotted out the sun; which again issued out of them pale and sickly. The little that could be seen of the heavens resembled the long strips of painted sky, dirty and smeared with oil, among the old scenery of a theatre.

The Durande passed close to a cutter which had cast anchor for safety. It was the *Shealtiel* of Guernsey. The master of the cutter remarked the high speed of the steam-vessel. It struck him also, that she was not in her exact course. She seemed to him to bear to westward too much. The apparition of this vessel under full steam in the fog surprised him.

Towards two o'clock the weather had become so thick that the captain was obliged to leave the bridge, and plant himself near the steersman. The sun had vanished, and all was fog. A sort of ashy darkness surrounded the ship. They were navigating in a pale shroud. They could see neither sky nor water.

There was not a breath of wind.

The can of turpentine suspended under the bridge, between the paddle-boxes, did not even oscillate.

The passengers had become silent.

The Parisian, however, hummed between his teeth the song of Béranger—"*Un jour le bon Dieu s'éveillant*."

One of the St. Malo passengers addressed him:

"You are from Paris, sir?"

"Yes, sir. *Il mit la tête à la fenêtre.*"

"What do they do in Paris?"

"*Leur planète a péri, peut-être.*—In Paris, sir, things are going on very badly."

"Then it's the same ashore as at sea."

"It is true; we have an abominable fog here."

"One which might involve us in misfortunes."

The Parisian exclaimed:

"Yes; and why all these misfortunes in the world? Misfortunes! What are they sent for, these misfortunes? What use do they serve? There was the fire at the Odéon theatre, and immediately a number of families thrown out of employment. Is that just? I don't know what is your religion, sir, but I am puzzled by all this."[Pg 145]

"So am I," said the St. Malo man.

“Everything that happens here below,” continued the Parisian, “seems to go wrong. It looks as if Providence, for some reason, no longer watched over the world.”

The St. Malo man scratched the top of his head, like one making an effort to understand. The Parisian continued:

“Our guardian angel seems to be absent. There ought to be a decree against celestial absenteeism. He is at his country-house, and takes no notice of us; so all gets in disorder. It is evident that this guardian is not in the government; he is taking holiday, leaving some vicar—some seminarist angel, some wretched creature with sparrows’-wings—to look after affairs.”

Captain Clubin, who had approached the speakers during this conversation, laid his hand upon the shoulder of the Parisian.

“Silence, sir,” he said. “Keep a watch upon your words. We are upon the sea.”

No one spoke again aloud.

After a pause of five minutes, the Guernsey man, who had heard all this, whispered in the ear of the St. Malo passenger:

“A religious man, our captain.”

It did not rain, but all felt their clothing wet. The crew took no heed of the way they were making; but there was increased sense of uneasiness. They seemed to have entered into a doleful region. The fog makes a deep silence on the sea; it calms the waves, and stifles the wind. In the midst of this silence, the creaking of the Durande communicated a strange, indefinable feeling of melancholy and disquietude.

They passed no more vessels. If afar off, in the direction of Guernsey or in that of St. Malo, any vessels were at sea outside the fog, the Durande, submerged in the dense cloud, must have been invisible to them; while her long trail of smoke attached to nothing, looked like a black comet in the pale sky.

Suddenly Clubin roared out:

“Hang-dog! you have played us an ugly trick. You will have done us some damage before we are out of this. You deserve to be put in irons. Get you gone, drunkard!”

And he seized the helm himself.

The steersman, humbled, shrunk away to take part in the duties forward.

The Guernsey man said:

“That will save us.”

The vessel was still making way rapidly.[Pg 146]

Towards three o’clock, the lower part of the fog began to clear, and they could see the sea again.

A mist can only be dispersed by the sun or the wind. By the sun is well; by the wind is not so well. At three o’clock in the afternoon, in the month of February, the sun is always weak. A return of the wind at this critical point in a voyage is not desirable. It is often the forerunner of a hurricane.

If there was any breeze, however, it was scarcely perceptible.

Clubin with his eye on the binnacle, holding the tiller and steering, muttered to himself some words like the following, which reached the ears of the passengers:

“No time to be lost; that drunken rascal has retarded us.”

His visage, meanwhile, was absolutely without expression.

The sea was less calm under the mist. A few waves were distinguishable. Little patches of light appeared on the surface of the water. These luminous patches attract the attention of the sailors. They indicate openings made by the wind in the overhanging roof of fog. The cloud rose a little, and then sunk heavier. Sometimes the density was perfect. The ship was involved in a sort of foggy iceberg. At intervals this terrible circle opened a little, like a pair of pincers; showed a glimpse of the horizon, and then closed again.

Meanwhile the Guernsey man, armed with his spyglass, was standing like a sentinel in the fore part of the vessel.

An opening appeared for a moment, and was blotted out again.

The Guernsey man returned alarmed.

“Captain Clubin!”

“What is the matter?”

“We are steering right upon the Hanways.”

“You are mistaken,” said Clubin, coldly.

The Guernsey man insisted.

“I am sure of it.”

“Impossible.”

“I have just seen the rock in the horizon.”

“Where?”

“Out yonder.”

“It is the open sea there. Impossible.”

And Clubin kept the vessel’s head to the point indicated by the passenger.

The Guernsey man seized his spyglass again.

A moment later he came running aft again.

“Captain!”[Pg 147]

“Well.”

“Tack about!”

“Why?”

“I am certain of having seen a very high rock just ahead. It is the Great Hanway.”

“You have seen nothing but a thicker bank of fog.”

“It is the Great Hanway. Tack, in the name of Heaven!”

Clubin gave the helm a turn.

V

CLUBIN REACHES THE CROWNING-POINT OF GLORY

A crash was heard. The ripping of a vessel’s side upon a sunken reef in open sea is the most dismal sound of which man can dream. The Durande’s course was stopped short.

Several passengers were knocked down with the shock and rolled upon the deck.

The Guernsey man raised his hands to heaven:

“We are on the Hanways. I predicted it.”

A long cry went up from the ship.

“We are lost.”

The voice of Clubin, dry and short, was heard above all.

“No one is lost! Silence!”

The black form of Imbrancam, naked down to the waist, issued from the hatchway of the engine-room.

The negro said with self-possession:

“The water is gaining, Captain. The fires will soon be out.”

The moment was terrible.

The shock was like that of a suicide. If the disaster had been wilfully sought, it could not have been more terrible. The Durande had rushed upon her fate as if she had attacked the rock itself. A point had pierced her sides like a wedge. More than six feet square of planking had gone; the stem was broken, the prow smashed, and the gaping hull drank in the sea with a horrible gulping noise. It was an entrance for wreck and ruin. The rebound was so violent that it had shattered the rudder pendants; the rudder itself hung unhinged and flapping. The rock had driven in her keel. Round about the vessel nothing was visible except a thick, compact fog, now become sombre. Night was gathering fast.[Pg 148]

The Durande plunged forward. It was like the effort of a horse pierced through the entrails by the horns of a bull. All was over with her.

Tangrouille was sobered. Nobody is drunk in the moment of a shipwreck. He came down to the quarter-deck, went up again, and said:

“Captain, the water is gaining rapidly in the hold. In ten minutes it will be up to the scupper-holes.”

The passengers ran about bewildered, wringing their hands, leaning over the bulwarks, looking down in the engine-room, and making every other sort of useless movement in their terror. The tourist had fainted.

Clubin made a sign with his hand, and they were silent. He questioned Imbrancam:

“How long will the engines work yet?”

“Five or six minutes, sir.”

Then he interrogated the Guernsey passenger:

“I was at the helm. You saw the rock. On which bank of the Hanways are we?”

“On the Mauve. Just now, in the opening in the fog, I saw it clearly.”

“If we’re on the Mauve,” remarked Clubin, “we have the Great Hanway on the port side, and the Little Hanway on the starboard bow; we are a mile from the shore.”

The crew and passengers listened, fixing their eyes anxiously and attentively on the captain.

Lightening the ship would have been of no avail, and indeed would have been hardly possible. In order to throw the cargo overboard, they would have had to open the ports and increase the chance of the water entering. To cast anchor would have been equally useless: they were stuck fast. Besides, with such a bottom for the anchor to drag, the chain would probably have fouled. The engines not being injured, and being workable while the fires were not extinguished, that is to say, for a few minutes longer, they could have made an effort, by help of steam and her paddles, to turn her astern off the rocks; but if they had succeeded, they must have settled down immediately. The rock, indeed, in some degree stopped the breach and prevented the entrance of the water. It was at least an obstacle; while the hole once freed, it would have been impossible to stop the leak or to work the pumps. To snatch a poniard from a wound in the heart is instant death to the victim. To free the vessel from the rock would have been simply to founder.[Pg 149]

The cattle, on whom the water was gaining in the hold, were lowing piteously.

Clubin issued orders:

“Launch the long boat.”

Imbrancam and Tangrouille rushed to execute the order. The boat was eased from her fastenings. The rest of the crew looked on stupefied.

“All hands to assist,” cried Clubin.

This time all obeyed.

Clubin, self-possessed, continued to issue his orders in that old sea dialect, which French sailors of the present day would scarcely understand.

“Haul in a rope—Get a cable if the capstan does not work—Stop heaving—Keep the blocks clear—Lower away there—- Bring her down stern and bows—Now then, all together, lads—Take care she don’t lower stern first—There’s too much strain on there—Hold the laniard of the stock tackle—Stand by there!”

The long boat was launched.

At that instant the Durande's paddles stopped, and the smoke ceased—the fires were drowned.

The passengers slipped down the ladder, and dropped hurriedly into the long boat. Imbrancam lifted the fainting tourist, carried him into the boat, and then boarded the vessel again.

The crew made a rush after the passengers—the cabin boy was knocked down, and the others were trampling upon him.

Imbrancam barred their passage.

"Not a man before the lad," he said.

He kept off the sailors with his two black arms, picked up the boy, and handed him down to the Guernsey man, who was standing upright in the boat.

The boy saved, Imbrancam made way for the others, and said:

"Pass on!"

Meanwhile Clubin had entered his cabin, and had made up a parcel containing the ship's papers and instruments. He took the compass from the binnacle, handed the papers and instruments to Imbrancam, and the compass to Tangrouille, and said to them:

"Get aboard the boat."

They obeyed. The crew had taken their places before them.

"Now," cried Clubin, "push off."[Pg 150]

A cry arose from the long boat.

"What about yourself, Captain?"

"I will remain here."

Shipwrecked people have little time to deliberate, and not much for indulging in tender feeling. Those who were in the long boat and in comparative safety, however, felt an emotion which was not altogether selfish. All the voices shouted together:

"Come with us, Captain."

"No: I remain here."

The Guernsey man, who had some experience of the sea, replied:

“Listen to me, Captain. You are wrecked on the Hanways. Swimming, you would have only a mile to cross to Pleinmont. In a boat you can only land at Rocquaine, which is two miles. There are breakers, and there is the fog. Our boat will not get to Rocquaine in less than two hours. It will be a dark night. The sea is rising—the wind getting fresh. A squall is at hand. We are now ready to return and bring you off; but if bad weather comes on, that will be out of our power. You are lost if you stay there. Come with us.”

The Parisian chimed in:

“The long boat is full—too full, it is true, and one more will certainly be one too many; but we are thirteen—a bad number for the boat, and it is better to overload her with a man than to take an ominous number. Come, Captain.”

Tangrouille added:

“It was all my fault—not yours, Captain. It isn’t fair for you to be left behind.”

“I have decided to remain here,” said Clubin. “The vessel must inevitably go to pieces in the tempest to-night. I won’t leave her. When the ship is lost, the captain is already dead. People shall not say I didn’t do my duty to the end. Tangrouille, I forgive you.”

Then, folding his arms, he cried:

“Obey orders! Let go the rope, and push off.”

The long-boat swayed to and fro. Imbrancam had seized the tiller. All the hands which were not rowing were raised towards the captain—every mouth cried, “Cheers for Captain Clubin.”

“An admirable fellow!” said the American.

“Sir,” replied the Guernsey man, “he is one of the worthiest seamen afloat.”[Pg 151]

Tangrouille shed tears.

“If I had had the courage,” he said, “I would have stayed with him.”

The long-boat pushed away, and was lost in the fog.

Nothing more was visible.

The beat of the oars grew fainter, and died away.

Clubin remained alone.

VI

THE INTERIOR OF AN ABYSS SUDDENLY REVEALED

When Clubin found himself upon this rock, in the midst of the fog and the wide waters, far from all sound of human life, left for dead, alone with the tide rising around him, and night settling down rapidly, he experienced a feeling of profound satisfaction.

He had succeeded.

His dream was realised. The acceptance which he had drawn upon destiny at so long a date had fallen due at last.

With him, to be abandoned there was, in fact, to be saved.

He was on the Hanways, one mile from the shore; he had about him seventy-five thousand francs. Never was shipwreck more scientifically accomplished. Nothing had failed. It is true, everything had been foreseen. From his early years Clubin had had an idea to stake his reputation for honesty at life's gaming-table; to pass as a man of high honour, and to make that reputation his fulcrum for other things; to bide his time, to watch his opportunity; not to grope about blindly, but to seize boldly; to venture on one great stroke, only one; and to end by sweeping off the stakes, leaving fools behind him to gape and wonder. What stupid rogues fail in twenty times, he meant to accomplish at the first blow; and while they terminated a career on the gallows, he intended to finish with a fortune. The meeting with Rantaine had been a new light to him. He had immediately laid his plan—to compel Rantaine to disgorge; to frustrate his threatened revelations by disappearing; to make the world believe him dead, the best of all modes of concealment; and for this purpose to wreck the Durande. The shipwreck was necessary to his designs. Lastly, he had the satisfaction of vanishing, leaving behind him a great renown, the crowning point of his existence. As he stood[Pg 152] meditating on these things amid the wreck, Clubin might have been taken for some demon in a pleasant mood.

He had lived a lifetime for the sake of this one minute.

His whole exterior was expressive of the two words, "At last." A devilish tranquillity reigned in that sallow countenance.

His dull eye, the depth of which generally seemed to be impenetrable, became clear and terrible. The inward fire of his dark spirit was reflected there.

Man's inner nature, like that external world about him, has its electric phenomena. An idea is like a meteor; at the moment of its coming, the confused meditations which

preceded it open a way, and a spark flashes forth. Bearing within oneself a power of evil, feeling an inward prey, brings to some minds a pleasure which is like a sparkle of light. The triumph of an evil purpose brightens up their visages. The success of certain cunning combinations, the attainment of certain cherished objects, the gratification of certain ferocious instincts, will manifest themselves in sinister but luminous appearances in their eyes. It is like a threatening dawn, a gleam of joy drawn out of the heart of a storm. These flashes are generated in the conscience in its states of cloud and darkness.

Some such signs were then exhibiting themselves in the pupils of those eyes. They were like nothing else that can be seen shining either above or here below.

All Clubin's pent-up wickedness found full vent now.

He gazed into the vast surrounding darkness, and indulged in a low, irrepressible laugh, full of sinister significance.

He was rich at last! rich at last!

The unknown future of his life was at length unfolding; the problem was solved.

Clubin had plenty of time before him. The sea was rising, and consequently sustained the Durande, and even raised her at last a little. The vessel kept firmly in its place among the rocks; there was no danger of her foundering. Besides, he determined to give the long-boat time to get clear off—to go to the bottom, perhaps. Clubin hoped it might.

Erect upon the deck of the shipwrecked vessel, he folded his arms, apparently enjoying that forlorn situation in the dark night.

Hypocrisy had weighed upon this man for thirty years. He had been evil itself, yoked with probity for a mate. He detested virtue with the feeling of one who has been trapped into a hate[Pg 153]ful match. He had always had a wicked premeditation; from the time when he attained manhood he had worn the cold and rigid armour of appearances. Underneath this was the demon of self. He had lived like a bandit in the disguise of an honest citizen. He had been the soft-spoken pirate; the bond-slave of honesty. He had been confined in garments of innocence, as in oppressive mummy cloths; had worn those angel wings which the devils find so wearisome in their fallen state. He had been overloaded with public esteem. It is arduous passing for a shining light. To preserve a perpetual equilibrium amid these difficulties, to think evil, to speak goodness—here had been indeed a labour. Such a life of contradictions had been Clubin's fate. It had been his lot—not the less onerous because he had chosen it

himself—to preserve a good exterior, to be always presentable, to foam in secret, to smile while grinding his teeth. Virtue presented itself to his mind as something stifling. He had felt, sometimes, as if he could have gnawed those finger-ends which he was compelled to keep before his mouth.

To live a life which is a perpetual falsehood is to suffer unknown tortures. To be premeditating indefinitely a diabolical act, to have to assume austerity; to brood over secret infamy seasoned with outward good fame; to have continually to put the world off the scent; to present a perpetual illusion, and never to be one's self—is a burdensome task. To be constrained to dip the brush in that dark stuff within, to produce with it a portrait of candour; to fawn, to restrain and suppress one's self, to be ever on the *qui vive*; watching without ceasing to mask latent crimes with a face of healthy innocence: to transform deformity into beauty; to fashion wickedness into the shape of perfection; to tickle, as it were, with the point of a dagger, to put sugar with poison, to keep a bridle on every gesture and keep a watch over every tone, not even to have a countenance of one's own—what can be harder, what can be more torturing. The odiousness of hypocrisy is obscurely felt by the hypocrite himself. Drinking perpetually of his own imposture is nauseating. The sweetness of tone which cunning gives to scoundrelism is repugnant to the scoundrel compelled to have it ever in the mouth; and there are moments of disgust when villainy seems on the point of vomiting its secret. To have to swallow that bitter saliva is horrible. Add to this picture his profound pride. There are strange moments in the history of such a life, when hypocrisy worships itself. There[Pg 154] is always an inordinate egotism in roguery. The worm has the same mode of gliding along as the serpent, and the same manner of raising its head. The treacherous villain is the despot curbed and restrained, and only able to attain his ends by resigning himself to play a secondary part. He is summed-up littleness capable of enormities. The perfect hypocrite is a Titan dwarfed.

Clubin had a genuine faith that he had been ill-used. Why had not he the right to have been born rich? It was from no fault of his that it was otherwise. Deprived as he had been of the higher enjoyments of life, why had he been forced to labour—in other words, to cheat, to betray, to destroy? Why had he been condemned to this torture of flattering, cringing, fawning; to be always labouring for men's respect and friendship, and to wear night and day a face which was not his own? To be compelled to dissimulate was in itself to submit to a hardship. Men hate those to whom they have to lie. But now the disguise was at an end. Clubin had taken his revenge.

On whom? On all! On everything!

Lethierry had never done him any but good services; so much the greater his spleen. He was revenged upon Lethierry.

He was revenged upon all those in whose presence he had felt constraint. It was his turn to be free now. Whoever had thought well of him was his enemy. He had felt himself their captive long enough.

Now he had broken through his prison walls. His escape was accomplished. That which would be regarded as his death, would be, in fact, the beginning of his life. He was about to begin the world again. The true Clubin had stripped off the false. In one hour the spell was broken. He had kicked Rantaine into space; overwhelmed Lethierry in ruin; human justice in night, and opinion in error. He had cast off all humanity; blotted out the whole world.

The name of God, that word of three letters, occupied his mind but little.

He had passed for a religious man. What was he now?

There are secret recesses in hypocrisy; or rather the hypocrite is himself a secret recess.

When Clubin found himself quite alone, that cavern in which his soul had so long lain hidden, was opened. He enjoyed a moment of delicious liberty. He revelled for that moment in the open air. He gave vent to himself in one long breath.

The depth of evil within him revealed itself in his visage. He expanded, as it were, with diabolical joy. The features of[Pg 155] Rantaine by the side of his at that moment would have shown like the innocent expression of a new-born child.

What a deliverance was this plucking off of the old mask. His conscience rejoiced in the sight of its own monstrous nakedness, as it stepped forth to take its hideous bath of wickedness. The long restraint of men's respect seemed to have given him a peculiar relish for infamy. He experienced a certain lascivious enjoyment of wickedness. In those frightful moral abysses so rarely sounded, such natures find atrocious delights—they are the obscenities of rascality. The long-endured insipidity of the false reputation for virtue gave him a sort of appetite for shame. In this state of mind men disdain their fellows so much that they even long for the contempt which marks the ending of their unmerited homage. They feel a satisfaction in the freedom of degradation, and cast an eye of envy at baseness, sitting at its ease, clothed in ignominy and shame. Eyes that are forced to droop modestly are familiar with these stealthy glances at sin. From Messalina to Marie-Alacoque the distance is not great. Remember the histories of La Cadière and the nun of Louviers. Clubin, too, had worn

the veil. Effrontery had always been the object of his secret admiration. He envied the painted courtesan, and the face of bronze of the professional ruffian. He felt a pride in surpassing her in artifices, and a disgust for the trick of passing for a saint. He had been the Tantalus of cynicism. And now, upon this rock, in the midst of this solitude, he could be frank and open. A bold plunge into wickedness—what a voluptuous sense of relief it brought with it. All the delights known to the fallen angels are summed up in this; and Clubin felt them in that moment. The long arrears of dissimulations were paid at last. Hypocrisy is an investment; the devil reimburses it. Clubin gave himself up to the intoxication of the idea, having no longer any eye upon him but that of Heaven. He whispered within himself, "I am a scoundrel," and felt profoundly satisfied.

Never had human conscience experienced such a full tide of emotions.

He was glad to be entirely alone, and yet would not have been sorry to have had some one there. He would have been pleased to have had a witness of his fiendish joy; gratified to have had opportunity of saying to society, "Thou fool."

The solitude, indeed, assured his triumph; but it made it less.

He was not himself to be spectator of his glory. Even to be[Pg 156] in the pillory has its satisfaction, for everybody can see your infamy.

To compel the crowd to stand and gape is, in fact, an exercise of power. A malefactor standing upon a platform in the market-place, with the collar of iron around his neck, is master of all the glances which he constrains the multitude to turn towards him. There is a pedestal on yonder scaffolding. To be there—the centre of universal observation—is not this, too, a triumph? To direct the pupil of the public eye, is this not another form of supremacy? For those who worship an ideal wickedness, opprobrium is glory. It is a height from whence they can look down; a superiority at least of some kind; a pre-eminence in which they can display themselves royally. A gallows standing high in the gaze of all the world is not without some analogy with a throne. To be exposed is, at least, to be seen and studied.

Herein we have evidently the key to the wicked reigns of history. Nero burning Rome, Louis Quatorze treacherously seizing the Palatinate, the Prince Regent killing Napoleon slowly, Nicholas strangling Poland before the eyes of the civilised world, may have felt something akin to Clubin's joy. Universal execration derives a grandeur even from its vastness.

To be unmasked is a humiliation; but to unmask one's self is a triumph. There is an intoxication in the position, an insolent satisfaction in its contempt for appearances, a flaunting insolence in the nakedness with which it affronts the decencies of life.

These ideas in a hypocrite appear to be inconsistent, but in reality are not. All infamy is logical. Honey is gall. A character like that of Escobar has some affinity with that of the Marquis de Sade. In proof, we have Léotade. A hypocrite, being a personification of vice complete, includes in himself the two poles of perversity. Priest-like on one side, he resembles the courtesan on the other. The sex of his diabolical nature is double. It engenders and transforms itself. Would you see it in its pleasing shape? Look at it. Would you see it horrible? Turn it round.

All this multitude of ideas was floating confusedly in Clubin's mind. He analysed them little, but he felt them much.

A whirlwind of flakes of fire borne up from the pit of hell into the dark night, might fitly represent the wild succession of ideas in his soul.

Clubin remained thus some time pensive and motionless. He[Pg 157] looked down upon his cast-off virtues as a serpent on its old skin.

Everybody had had faith in that virtue; even he himself a little.

He laughed again.

Society would imagine him dead, while he was rich. They would believe him drowned, while he was saved. What a capital trick to have played off on the stupidity of the world.

Rantaine, too, was included in that universal stupidity. Clubin thought of Rantaine with an unmeasured disdain: the disdain of the marten for the tiger. The trick had failed with Rantaine; it had succeeded with him.—Rantaine had slunk away abashed; Clubin disappeared in triumph. He had substituted himself for Rantaine—stepped between him and his mistress, and carried off her favours.

As to the future, he had no well-settled plan. In the iron tobacco-box in his girdle he had the three bank-notes. The knowledge of that fact was enough. He would change his name. There are plenty of countries where sixty thousand francs are equal to six hundred thousand. It would be no bad solution to go to one of those corners of the world, and live there honestly on the money disgorged by that scoundrel Rantaine. To speculate, to embark in commerce, to increase his capital, to become really a millionaire, that, too, would be no bad termination to his career.

For example. The great trade in coffee from Costa Rica was just beginning to be developed. There were heaps of gold to be made. He would see.

It was of little consequence. He had plenty of time to think of it. The hardest part of the enterprise was accomplished. Stripping Rantaine, and disappearing with the wreck of the Durande, were the grand achievements. All the rest was for him simple. No obstacle henceforth was likely to stop him. He had nothing more to fear. He could reach the shore with certainty by swimming. He would land at Pleinmont in the darkness; ascend the cliffs; go straight to the old haunted house; enter it easily by the help of the knotted cord, concealed beforehand in a crevice of the rocks; would find in the house his travelling-bag containing provisions and dry clothing. There he could await his opportunity. He had information. A week would not pass without the Spanish smugglers, Blasquito probably, touching at Pleinmont. For a few guineas he would obtain a passage, not to Torbay—as he had said to Blasco, to confound conjecture, and put him off the scent—but to Bilbao[Pg 158] or Passages. Thence he could get to Vera Cruz or New Orleans. But the moment had come for taking to the water. The long boat was far enough by this time. An hour's swimming was nothing for Clubin. The distance of a mile only separated him from the land, as he was on the Hanways.

At this point in Clubin's meditations, a clear opening appeared in the fog bank, the formidable Douvres rocks stood before him.

VII

AN UNEXPECTED DENOUEMENT

Clubin, haggard, stared straight ahead.

It was indeed those terrible and solitary rocks.

It was impossible to mistake their misshapen outlines. The two twin Douvres reared their forms aloft, hideously revealing the passage between them, like a snare, a cut-throat in ambush in the ocean.

They were quite close to him. The fog, like an artful accomplice, had hidden them until now.

Clubin had mistaken his course in the dense mist. Notwithstanding all his pains, he had experienced the fate of two other great navigators, Gonzalez who discovered Cape Blanco, and Fernandez, who discovered Cape Verd. The fog had bewildered him. It had seemed to him, in the confidence of his seamanship, to favour admirably the

execution of his project; but it had its perils. In veering to westward he had lost his reckoning. The Guernsey man, who fancied that he recognised the Hanways, had decided his fate, and determined him to give the final turn to the tiller. Clubin had never doubted that he had steered the vessel on the Hanways.

The Durande, stove in by one of the sunken rocks of the group, was only separated from the two Douvres by a few cables' lengths.

At two hundred fathoms further was a massive block of granite. Upon the steep sides of this rock were some hollows and small projections, which might help a man to climb. The square corners of those rude walls at right angles indicated the existence of a plateau on the summit.

It was the height known by the name of "The Man."

"The Man Rock" rose even higher still than the Douvres. Its platform commanded a view over their two inaccessible[Pg 159] peaks. This platform, crumbling at its edges, had every kind of irregularity of shape. No place more desolate or more dangerous could be imagined. The hardly perceptible waves of the open sea lapped gently against the square sides of that dark enormous mass; a sort of rest-place for the vast spectres of the sea and darkness.

All around was calm. Scarcely a breath of air or a ripple. The mind guessed darkly the hidden life and vastness of the depths beneath that quiet surface.

Clubin had often seen the Douvres from afar.

He satisfied himself that he was indeed there.

He could not doubt it.

A sudden and hideous change of affairs. The Douvres instead of the Hanways. Instead of one mile, five leagues of sea! The Douvres to the solitary shipwrecked sailor is the visible and palpable presence of death, the extinction of all hope of reaching land.

Clubin shuddered. He had placed himself voluntarily in the jaws of destruction. No other refuge was left to him than "The Man Rock." It was probable that a tempest would arise in the night, and that the long-boat, overloaded as she was, would sink. No news of the shipwreck then would come to land. It would not even be known that Clubin had been left upon the Douvres. No prospect was now before him but death from cold and hunger. His seventy-five thousand francs would not purchase him a mouthful of bread. All the scaffolding he had built up had brought him only to this snare. He alone was the laborious architect of this crowning catastrophe. No

resource—no possible escape; his triumph transformed into a fatal precipice. Instead of deliverance, a prison; instead of the long prosperous future, agony. In the glance of an eye, in the moment which the lightning occupies in passing, all his construction had fallen into ruins. The paradise dreamed of by this demon had changed to its true form of a sepulchre.

Meanwhile there had sprung up a movement in the air. The wind was rising. The fog, shaken, driven in, and rent asunder, moved towards the horizon in vast shapeless masses. As quickly as it had disappeared before, the sea became once more visible.

The cattle, more and more invaded by the waters, continued to bellow in the hold.

Night was approaching, probably bringing with it a storm.

The Durande, filling slowly with the rising tide, swung from[Pg 160] right to left, then from left to right, and began to turn upon the rock as upon a pivot.

The moment could be foreseen when a wave must move her from her fixed position, and probably roll her over on her beam-ends.

It was not even so dark as at the instant of her striking the rocks. Though the day was more advanced, it was possible to see more clearly. The fog had carried away with it some part of the darkness. The west was without a cloud. Twilight brings a pale sky. Its vast reflection glimmered on the sea.

The Durande's bows were lower than her stern. Her stern was, in fact, almost out of the water. Clubin mounted on the taffrail, and fixed his eyes on the horizon.

It is the nature of hypocrisy to be sanguine. The hypocrite is one who waits his opportunity. Hypocrisy is nothing, in fact, but a horrible hopefulness; the very foundation of its revolting falsehood is composed of that virtue transformed into a vice.

Strange contradiction. There is a certain trustfulness in hypocrisy. The hypocrite confides in some power, unrevealed even to himself, which permits the course of evil.

Clubin looked far and wide over the ocean.

The position was desperate, but that evil spirit did not yet despair.

He knew that after the fog, vessels that had been lying-to or riding at anchor would resume their course; and he thought that perhaps one would pass within the horizon.

And, as he had anticipated, a sail appeared.

She was coming from the east and steering towards the west.

As it approached the cut of the vessel became visible. It had but one mast, and was schooner-rigged. Her bowsprit was almost horizontal. It was a cutter.

Before a half-hour she must pass not very far from the Douvres.

Clubin said within himself, “I am saved!”

In a moment like this, a man thinks at first of nothing but his life.

The cutter was probably a strange craft. Might it not be one of the smuggling vessels on its way to Pleinmont? It might even be Blasquito himself. In that case, not only life, but fortune, would be saved; and the accident of the Douvres, by hastening the conclusion, by dispensing with the necessity for concealment in the haunted house, and by bringing the[Pg 161] adventure to a dénouement at sea, would be turned into a happy incident.

All his original confidence of success returned fanatically to his sombre mind.

It is remarkable how easily knaves are persuaded that they deserve to succeed.

There was but one course to take.

The Durande, entangled among the rocks, necessarily mingled her outline with them, and confounded herself with their irregular shapes, among which she formed only one more mass of lines. Thus become indistinct and lost, she would not suffice, in the little light which remained, to attract the attention of the crew of the vessel which was approaching.

But a human form standing up, black against the pale twilight of the sky, upon “the Man Rock,” and making signs of distress, would doubtless be perceived, and the cutter would then send a boat to take the shipwrecked man aboard.

“The Man” was only two hundred fathoms off. To reach it by swimming was simple, to climb it easy.

There was not a minute to lose.

The bows of the Durande being low between the rocks, it was from the height of the poop where Clubin stood that he had to jump into the sea. He began by taking a sounding, and discovered that there was great depth just under the stern of the wrecked vessel. The microscopic shells of foraminifera which the adhesive matter on the lead-line brought up were intact, indicating the presence of very hollow caves

under the rocks, in which the water was tranquil, however great the agitation of the surface.

He undressed, leaving his clothing on the deck. He knew that he would be able to get clothing when aboard the cutter.

He retained nothing but his leather belt.

As soon as he was stripped he placed his hand upon this belt, buckled it more securely, felt for the iron tobacco-box, took a rapid survey in the direction which he would have to follow among the breakers and the waves to gain “the Man Rock;” then precipitating himself head first, he plunged into the sea.

As he dived from a height, he plunged heavily.

He sank deep in the water, touched the bottom, skirted for a moment the submarine rocks, then struck out to regain the surface.

At that moment he felt himself seized by one foot.[Pg 162]

BOOK VII

THE DANGER OF OPENING A BOOK AT RANDOM

I

THE PEARL AT THE FOOT OF THE PRECIPICE

A few moments after his short colloquy with Sieur Landoys, Gilliatt was at St. Sampson.

He was troubled, even anxious. What could it be that had happened.

There was a murmur in St. Sampson like that of a startled hive. Everybody was at his door. The women were talking loud. There were people who seemed relating some occurrence and who were gesticulating. A group had gathered around them. The words could be heard, “What a misfortune!” Some faces wore a smile.

Gilliatt interrogated no one. It was not in his nature to ask questions. He was, moreover, too much moved to speak to strangers. He had no confidence in rumours. He preferred to go direct to the Bravées.

His anxiety was so great that he was not even deterred from entering the house.

The door of the great lower room opening upon the Quay, moreover, stood quite open. There was a swarm of men and women on the threshold. Everybody was going in, and Gilliatt went with the rest.

Entering he found Sieur Landoys standing near the doorposts.

“You have heard, no doubt, of this event?”

“No.”

“I did not like to call it out to you on the road. It makes me like a bird of evil omen.”

“What has happened?”

“The Durande is lost.”

There was a crowd in the great room.

The various groups spoke low, like people in a sick chamber.

The assemblage, which consisted of neighbours, the first[Pg 163] comers, curious to learn the news, huddled together near the door with a sort of timidity, leaving clear the bottom of the room, where appeared Déruchette sitting and in tears. Mess Lethierry stood beside her.

His back was against the wall at the end of the room. His sailor’s cap came down over his eyebrows. A lock of grey hair hung upon his cheek. He said nothing. His arms were motionless; he seemed scarcely to breathe. He had the look of something lifeless placed against the wall.

It was easy to see in his aspect a man whose life had been crushed within him. The Durande being gone, Lethierry had no longer any object in his existence. He had had a being on the sea; that being had suddenly foundered. What could he do now? Rise every morning: go to sleep every night. Never more to await the coming of the Durande; to see her get under way, or steer again into the port. What was a remainder of existence without object? To drink, to eat, and then?—He had crowned the labours of his life by a masterpiece: won by his devotion a new step in civilisation. The step was lost; the masterpiece destroyed. To live a few vacant years longer! where would be the good? Henceforth nothing was left for him to do. At his age men do not begin life anew. Besides, he was ruined. Poor old man!

Déruchette, sitting near him on a chair and weeping, held one of Mess Lethierry’s hands in hers. Her hands were joined: his hand was clenched fast. It was the sign of

the shade of difference in their two sorrows. In joined hands there is still some token of hope, in the clenched fist none.

Mess Lethierry gave up his arm to her, and let her do with it what she pleased. He was passive. Struck down by a thunderbolt, he had scarcely a spark of life left within him.

There is a degree of overwhelmment which abstracts the mind entirely from its fellowship with man. The forms which come and go within your room become confused and indistinct. They pass by, even touch you, but never really come near you. You are far away; inaccessible to them, as they to you. The intensities of joy and despair differ in this. In despair, we take cognisance of the world only as something dim and afar off: we are insensible to the things before our eyes; we lose the feeling of our own existence. It is in vain, at such times, that we are flesh and blood; our consciousness of life is none the more real: we are become, even to ourselves, nothing but a dream.[Pg 164]

Mess Lethierry's gaze indicated that he had reached this state of absorption.

The various groups were whispering together. They exchanged information as far as they had gathered it. This was the substance of their news.

The Durande had been wrecked the day before in the fog on the Douvres, about an hour before sunset. With the exception of the captain, who refused to leave his vessel, the crew and passengers had all escaped in the long-boat. A squall from the south-west springing up as the fog had cleared, had almost wrecked them a second time, and had carried them out to sea beyond Guernsey. In the night they had had the good fortune to meet with the *Cashmere*, which had taken them aboard and landed them at St. Peter's Port. The disaster was entirely the fault of the steersman Tangrouille, who was in prison. Clubin had behaved nobly.

The pilots, who had mustered in great force, pronounced the words "The Douvres" with a peculiar emphasis. "A dreary half-way house that," said one.

A compass and a bundle of registers and memorandum-books lay on the table; they were doubtless the compass of the Durande and the ship's papers, handed by Clubin to Imbrancam and Tangrouille at the moment of the departure of the long-boat. They were the evidences of the magnificent self-abnegation of that man who had busied himself with saving these documents even in the presence of death itself—a little incident full of moral grandeur; an instance of sublime self-forgetfulness never to be forgotten.

They were unanimous in their admiration of Clubin; unanimous also in believing him to be saved after all. The *Shealtiel* cutter had arrived some hours after the *Cashmere*. It was this vessel which had brought the last items of intelligence. She had passed four-and-twenty hours in the same waters as the Durande. She had lain-to in the fog, and tacked about during the squall. The captain of the *Shealtiel* was present among the company.

This captain had just finished his narrative to Lethierry as Gilliatt entered. The narrative was a true one. Towards the morning, the storm having abated, and the wind becoming manageable, the captain of the *Shealtiel* had heard the lowing of oxen in the open sea. This rural sound in the midst of the waves had naturally startled him. He steered in that direction, and perceived the Durande among the Douvres. The sea[Pg 165] had sufficiently subsided for him to approach. He hailed the wreck; the bellowing of the cattle was the sole reply. The captain of the *Shealtiel* was confident that there was no one aboard the Durande. The wreck still held together well, and notwithstanding the violence of the squall, Clubin could have passed the night there. He was not the man to leave go his hold very easily. He was not there, however; and therefore he must have been rescued. It was certain that several sloops and luggers, from Granville and St. Malo, must, after laying-to in the fog on the previous evening, have passed pretty near the rocks. It was evident that one of these had taken Clubin aboard. It was to be remembered that the long-boat of the Durande was full when it left the unlucky vessel; that it was certain to encounter great risks; that another man aboard would have overloaded her, and perhaps caused her to founder; and that these circumstances had no doubt weighed with Clubin in coming to his determination to remain on the wreck. His duty, however, once fulfilled, and a vessel at hand, Clubin assuredly would not have scrupled to avail himself of its aid. A hero is not necessarily an idiot. The idea of a suicide was absurd in connection with a man of Clubin's irreproachable character. The culprit, too, was Tangrouille, not Clubin. All this was conclusive. The captain of the *Shealtiel* was evidently right, and everybody expected to see Clubin reappear very shortly. There was a project abroad to carry him through the town in triumph.

Two things appeared certain from the narrative of the captain: Clubin was saved, the Durande lost.

As regarded the Durande, there was nothing for it but to accept the fact; the catastrophe was irremediable. The captain of the *Shealtiel* had witnessed the last moments of the wreck. The sharp rock on which the vessel had been, as it were, nailed, had held her fast during the night, and resisted the shock of the tempest as if reluctant to part with its prey; but in the morning, at the moment when the captain of

the *Shealtiel* had convinced himself that there was no one aboard to be saved, and was about to wear off again, one of those seas which are like the last angry blows of a tempest had struck her. The wave lifted her violently from her place, and with the swiftness and directness of an arrow from a bow had thrown her against the two Douvres rocks. “An infernal crash was heard,” said the captain. The vessel, lifted by the wave to a certain height, had plunged between the two rocks up to her midship frame. She[Pg 166] had stuck fast again; but more firmly than on the submarine rocks. She must have remained there suspended, and exposed to every wind and sea.

The Durande, according to the statements of the crew of the *Shealtiel*, was already three parts broken up. She would evidently have foundered during the night, if the rocks had not kept her up. The captain of the *Shealtiel* had watched her a long time with his spyglass. He gave, with naval precision, the details of her disaster. The starboard quarter beaten in, the masts maimed, the sails blown from the bolt-ropes, the shrouds torn away, the cabin sky-lights smashed by the falling of one of the booms, the dome of the cuddy-house beaten in, the chocks of the long-boat struck away, the round-house overturned, the hinges of the rudder broken, the trusses wrenched away, the quarter-cloths demolished, the bits gone, the cross-beam destroyed, the shear-rails knocked off, the stern-post broken. As to the parts of the cargo made fast before the foremast, all destroyed, made a clean sweep of, gone to ten thousand shivers, with top ropes, iron pulleys, and chains. The Durande had broken her back; the sea now must break her up piecemeal. In a few days there would be nothing of her remaining.

It appeared that the engine was scarcely injured by all these ravages—a remarkable fact, and one which proved its excellence. The captain of the *Shealtiel* thought he could affirm that the crank had received no serious injury. The vessel’s masts had given way, but the funnel had resisted everything. Only the iron guards of the captain’s gangway were twisted; the paddle boxes had suffered, the frames were bruised, but the paddles had not a float missing. The machinery was intact. Such was the conviction of the captain of the *Shealtiel*. Imbrancam, the engineer, who was among the crowd, had the same conviction. The negro, more intelligent than many of his white companions, was proud of his engines. He lifted up his arms, opening the ten fingers of his black hands, and said to Lethierry, as he sat there silent, “Master, the machinery is alive still!”

The safety of Clubin seeming certain, and the hull of the Durande being already sacrificed, the engines became the topic of conversation among the crowd. They took an interest in it as in a living thing. They felt a delight in praising its good qualities. “That’s what I call a well-built machine,” said a French sailor. “Something like a good

one," cried a Guernsey fisherman. "She must have some good stuff in her," said the[Pg 167] captain of the *Shealtiel*, "to come out of that affair with only a few scratches."

By degrees the machinery of the Durande became the absorbing object of their thoughts. Opinions were warm for and against. It had its enemies and its friends. More than one who possessed a good old sailing cutter, and who hoped to get a share of the business of the Durande, was not sorry to find that the Douvres rock had disposed of the new invention. The whispering became louder. The discussion grew noisy, though the hubbub was evidently a little restrained; and now and then there was a simultaneous lowering of voices out of respect to Lethierry's death-like silence.

The result of the colloquy, so obstinately maintained on all sides, was as follows:—

The engines were the vital part of the vessel. To rescue the Durande was impossible; but the machinery might still be saved. These engines were unique. To construct others similar, the money was wanting; but to find the artificer would have been still more difficult. It was remembered that the constructor of the machinery was dead. It had cost forty thousand francs. No one would risk again such a sum upon such a chance: particularly as it was now discovered that steamboats could be lost like other vessels. The accident of the Durande destroyed the prestige of all her previous success. Still, it was deplorable to think that at that very moment this valuable mechanism was still entire and in good condition, and that in five or six days it would probably go to pieces, like the vessel herself. As long as this existed, it might almost be said that there was no shipwreck. The loss of the engines was alone irreparable. To save the machinery would be almost to repair the disaster.

Save the machinery! It was easy to talk of it; but who would undertake to do it? Was it possible, even? To scheme and to execute are two different things; as different as to dream and to do. Now if ever a dream had appeared wild and impracticable, it was that of saving the engines then embedded between the Douvres. The idea of sending a ship and a crew to work upon those rocks was absurd. It could not be thought of. It was the season of heavy seas. In the first gale the chains of the anchors would be worn away and snapped upon the submarine peaks, and the vessel must be shattered on the rocks. That would be to send a second shipwreck to the relief of the first. On the miserable narrow height where the legend of the[Pg 168] place described the shipwrecked sailor as having perished of hunger, there was scarcely room for one person. To save the engines, therefore, it would be necessary for a man to go to the Douvres, to be alone in that sea, alone in that desert, alone at five leagues from the coast, alone in that region of terrors, alone for entire weeks, alone in the presence of dangers foreseen and unforeseen—without supplies in the face of hunger and

nakedness, without succour in the time of distress, without token of human life around him save the bleached bones of the miserable being who had perished there in his misery, without companionship save that of death. And besides, how was it possible to extricate the machinery? It would require not only a sailor, but an engineer; and for what trials must he not prepare. The man who would attempt such a task must be more than a hero. He must be a madman: for in certain enterprises, in which superhuman power appears necessary, there is a sort of madness which is more potent than courage. And after all, would it not be a folly to immolate oneself for a mass of rusted iron. No: it was certain that nobody would undertake to go to the Douvres on such an errand. The engine must be abandoned like the rest. The engineer for such a task would assuredly not be forthcoming. Where, indeed, should they look for such a man?

All this, or similar observations, formed the substance of the confused conversations of the crowd.

The captain of the *Shealtiel*, who had been a pilot, summed up the views of all by exclaiming aloud:—

“No; it is all over. The man does not exist who could go there and rescue the machinery of the Durande.”

“If I don’t go,” said Imbrancam, “it is because nobody could do it.”

The captain of the *Shealtiel* shook his left hand in the air with that sudden movement which expresses a conviction that a thing is impossible.

“If he existed—” continued the captain.

Déruchette turned her head impulsively, and interrupted.

“I would marry him,” she said, innocently.

There was a pause.

A man made his way out of the crowd, and standing before her, pale and anxious, said:

“You would marry him, Miss Déruchette?”

It was Gilliatt.

All eyes were turned towards him. Mess Lethierry had just[Pg 169] before stood upright, and gazed about him. His eyes glittered with a strange light.

He took off his sailor's cap, and threw it on the ground: then looked solemnly before him, and without seeing any of the persons present, said:

"Déruchette should be his. I pledge myself to it in God's name."

II

MUCH ASTONISHMENT ON THE WESTERN COAST

The full moon rose at ten o'clock on the following night; but however fine the night, however favourable the wind and sea, no fisherman thought of going out that evening either from Hogue la Perre, or Bourdeaux harbour, or Houmet Benet, or Platon, or Port Grat, or Vazon Bay, or Perrelle Bay, or Pezeries, or the Tielles or Saints' Bay, or Little Bo, or any other port or little harbour in Guernsey; and the reason was very simple. A cock had been heard to crow at noonday.

When the cock is heard to crow at an extraordinary hour, fishing is suspended.

At dusk on that evening, however, a fisherman returning to Omptolle, met with a remarkable adventure. On the height above Houmet Paradis, beyond the Two Brayes and the Two Grunes, stands to the left the beacon of the Plattes Tougères, representing a tub reversed; and to the right, the beacon of St. Sampson, representing the face of a man. Between these two, the fisherman thought that he perceived for the first time a third beacon. What could be the meaning of this beacon? When had it been erected on that point? What shoal did it indicate? The beacon responded immediately to these interrogations. It moved, it was a mast. The astonishment of the fisherman did not diminish. A beacon would have been remarkable; a mast was still more so: it could not be a fishing-boat. When everybody else was returning, some boat was going out. Who could it be? and what was he about?

Ten minutes later the vessel, moving slowly, came within a short distance of the Omptolle fisherman. He did not recognise it. He heard the sound of rowing: there were evidently only two oars. There was probably, then, only one man aboard. The wind was northerly. The man, therefore, was evidently paddling along in order to take the wind off Point Fontenelle.[Pg 170] There he would probably take to his sails. He intended then to double the Ancresse and Mount Crevel. What could that mean?

The vessel passed, the fisherman returned home. On that same night, at different hours, and at different points, various persons scattered and isolated on the western coast of Guernsey, observed certain facts.

As the Omptolle fisherman was mooring his bark, a carter of seaweed about half-a-mile off, whipping his horses along the lonely road from the Clôtures near the Druid stones, and in the neighbourhood of the Martello Towers 6 and 7, saw far off at sea, in a part little frequented, because it requires much knowledge of the waters, and in the direction of North Rock and the Jablonneuse, a sail being hoisted. He paid little attention to the circumstance, not being a seaman, but a carter of seaweed.

Half-an-hour had perhaps elapsed since the carter had perceived this vessel, when a plasterer returning from his work in the town, and passing round Pelée Pool, found himself suddenly opposite a vessel sailing boldly among the rocks of the Quenon, the Rousse de Mer, and the Gripe de Rousse. The night was dark, but the sky was light over the sea, an effect common enough; and he could distinguish a great distance in every direction. There was no sail visible except this vessel.

A little lower, a gatherer of crayfish, preparing his fish wells on the beach which separates Port Soif from the Port Enfer, was puzzled to make out the movements of a vessel between the Boue Corneille and the Moubrette. The man must have been a good pilot, and in great haste to reach some destination to risk his boat there.

Just as eight o'clock was striking at the Catel, the tavern-keeper at Cobo Bay observed with astonishment a sail out beyond the Boue du Jardin and the Grunettes, and very near the Susanne and the Western Grunes.

Not far from Cobo Bay, upon the solitary point of the Houmet of Vason Bay, two lovers were lingering, hesitating before they parted for the night. The young woman addressed the young man with the words, "I am not going because I don't care to stay with you: I've a great deal to do." Their farewell kiss was interrupted by a good sized sailing boat which passed very near them, making for the direction of the Messellettes.

Monsieur le Peyre des Norgiots, an inhabitant of Cotillon Pipet, was engaged about nine o'clock in the evening in examining a hole made by some trespassers in the hedge of his property[Pg 171] called La Jennerotte, and his "*friquet* planted with trees." Even while ascertaining the amount of the damage, he could not help observing a fishing-boat audaciously making its way round the Crocq Point at that hour of night.

On the morrow of a tempest, when there is always some agitation upon the sea, that route was extremely unsafe. It was rash to choose it, at least, unless the steersman knew all the channels by heart.

At half-past nine o'clock, at L'Equerrier, a trawler carrying home his net stopped for a time to observe between Colombelle and the Soufleresse something which looked

like a boat. The boat was in a dangerous position. Sudden gusts of wind of a very dangerous kind are very common in that spot. The *Soufleresse*, or Blower, derives its name from the sudden gusts of wind which it seems to direct upon the vessels, which by rare chance find their way thither.

At the moment when the moon was rising, the tide being high and the sea being quiet, in the little strait of Li-Hou, the solitary keeper of the island of Li-Hou was considerably startled. A long black object slowly passed between the moon and him. This dark form, high and narrow, resembled a winding-sheet spread out and moving. It glided along the line of the top of the wall formed by the ridges of rock. The keeper of Li-Hou fancied that he had beheld the Black Lady.

The White Lady inhabits the Tau de Pez d'Amont; the Grey Lady, the Tau de Pez d'Aval; the Red Lady, the Silleuse, to the north of the Marquis Bank; and the Black Lady, the Grand Etacré, to the west of Li-Houmet. At night, when the moon shines, these ladies stalk abroad, and sometimes meet.

That dark form might undoubtedly be a sail. The long groups of rocks on which she appeared to be walking, might in fact be concealing the hull of a bark navigating behind them, and allowing only her sail to be seen. But the keeper asked himself, what bark would dare, at that hour, to venture herself between Li-Hou and the Pécheresses, and the Anguillières and Lérée Point? And what object could she have? It seemed to him much more probable that it was the Black Lady.

As the moon was passing the clock-tower of St. Peter in the Wood, the serjeant at Castle Rocquaine, while in the act of raising the drawbridge of the castle, distinguished at the end of the bay beyond the Haute Canée, but nearer than the Sambule, a sailing-vessel which seemed to be steadily dropping down from north to south.[Pg 172]

On the southern coast of Guernsey behind Pleinmont, in the curve of a bay composed entirely of precipices and rocky walls rising peak-shaped from the sea, there is a singular landing-place, to which a French gentleman, a resident of the island since 1855, has given the name of "The Port on the Fourth Floor," a name now generally adopted. This port, or landing-place, which was then called the Moie, is a rocky plateau half-formed by nature, half by art, raised about forty feet above the level of the waves, and communicating with the water by two large beams laid parallel in the form of an inclined plane. The fishing-vessels are hoisted up there by chains and pulleys from the sea, and are let down again in the same way along these beams, which are like two rails. For the fishermen there is a ladder. The port was, at the time of our story,

much frequented by the smugglers. Being difficult of access, it was well suited to their purposes.

Towards eleven o'clock, some smugglers—perhaps the same upon whose aid Clubin had counted—stood with their bales of goods on the summit of this platform of the Moie. A smuggler is necessarily a man on the look out, it is part of his business to watch. They were astonished to perceive a sail suddenly make its appearance beyond the dusky outline of Cape Pleinmont. It was moonlight. The smugglers observed the sail narrowly, suspecting that it might be some coast-guard cutter about to lie in ambush behind the Great Hanway. But the sail left the Hanways behind, passed to the north-west of the Boue Blondel, and was lost in the pale mists of the horizon out at sea.

"Where the devil can that boat be sailing?" asked the smuggler.

That same evening, a little after sunset, some one had been heard knocking at the door of the old house of the Bû de la Rue. It was a boy wearing brown clothes and yellow stockings, a fact that indicated that he was a little parish clerk. An old fisherwoman prowling about the shore with a lantern in her hand, had called to the boy, and this dialogue ensued between the fisherwoman and the little clerk, before the entrance to the Bû de la Rue:—

"What d'ye want, lad?"

"The man of this place."

"He's not there."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"Will he be there to-morrow?"[Pg 173]

"I don't know."

"Is he gone away?"

"I don't know."

"I've come, good woman, from the new rector of the parish, the Reverend Ebenezer Caudray, who desires to pay him a visit."

"I don't know where he is."

“The rector sent me to ask if the man who lives at the Bû de la Rue would be at home to-morrow morning.”

“I don’t know.”

III

A QUOTATION FROM THE BIBLE

During the twenty-four hours which followed, Mess Lethierry slept not, ate nothing, drank nothing. He kissed Déruchette on the forehead, asked after Clubin, of whom there was as yet no news, signed a declaration certifying that he had no intention of preferring a charge against anyone, and set Tangrouille at liberty.

All the morning of the next day he remained half supporting himself on the table of the office of the Durande, neither standing nor sitting: answering kindly when anyone spoke to him. Curiosity being satisfied, the Bravées had become a solitude. There is a good deal of curiosity generally mingled with the haste of condolences. The door had closed again, and left the old man again alone with Déruchette. The strange light that had shone in Lethierry’s eyes was extinguished. The mournful look which filled them after the first news of the disaster had returned.

Déruchette, anxious for his sake, had, on the advice of Grace and Douce, laid silently beside him a pair of stockings, which he had been knitting, sailor fashion, when the bad news had arrived.

He smiled bitterly, and said:

“They must think me foolish.”

After a quarter of an hour’s silence, he added:

“These things are well when you are happy.”

Déruchette carried away the stockings, and took advantage of the opportunity to remove also the compass and the ship’s papers which Lethierry had been brooding over too long.

In the afternoon, a little before tea-time, the door opened and[Pg 174] two strangers entered, attired in black. One was old, the other young.

The young one has, perhaps, already been observed in the course of this story.

The two men had each a grave air; but their gravity appeared different. The old man possessed what might be called state gravity; the gravity of the young man was in his nature. Habit engenders the one; thought the other.

They were, as their costume indicated, two clergymen, each belonging to the Established Church.

The first fact in the appearance of the younger man which might have first struck the observer was, that his gravity, though conspicuous in the expression of his features, and evidently springing from the mind, was not indicated by his person. Gravity is not inconsistent with passion, which it exalts by purifying it; but the idea of gravity could with difficulty be associated with an exterior remarkable above all for personal beauty. Being in holy orders, he must have been at least four-and-twenty, but he seemed scarcely more than eighteen. He possessed those gifts at once in harmony with, and in opposition to, each other. A soul which seemed created for exalted passion, and a body created for love. He was fair, rosy-fresh, slim, and elegant in his severe attire, and he had the cheeks of a young girl, and delicate hands. His movements were natural and lively, though subdued. Everything about him was pleasing, elegant, almost voluptuous. The beauty of his expression served to correct this excess of personal attraction. His open smile, which showed his teeth, regular and white as those of a child, had something in it pensive, even devotional. He had the gracefulness of a page, mingled with the dignity of a bishop.

His fair hair, so fair and golden as to be almost effeminate, clustered over his white forehead, which was high and well-formed. A slight double line between the eyebrows awakened associations with studious thought.

Those who saw him felt themselves in the presence of one of those natures, benevolent, innocent, and pure, whose progress is in inverse sense with that of vulgar minds; natures whom illusion renders wise, and whom experience makes enthusiasts.

His older companion was no other than Doctor Jaquemin Hérode. Doctor Jaquemin Hérode belonged to the High Church; a party whose system is a sort of popery without a pope. The Church of England was at that epoch labouring[Pg 175] with the tendencies which have since become strengthened and condensed in the form of Puseyism. Doctor Jaquemin Hérode belonged to that shade of Anglicanism which is almost a variety of the Church of Rome. He was haughty, precise, stiff, and commanding. His inner sight scarcely penetrated outwardly. He possessed the letter in the place of the spirit. His manner was arrogant; his presence imposing. He had less the appearance of a “Reverend” than of a *Monsignore*. His frock-coat was cut

somewhat in the fashion of a cassock. His true centre would have been Rome. He was a born Prelate of the Antechamber. He seemed to have been created expressly to fill a part in the Papal Court, to walk behind the Pontifical litter, with all the Court of Rome in *abitto paonazzo*. The accident of his English birth and his theological education, directed more towards the Old than the New Testament, had deprived him of that destiny. All his splendours were comprised in his preferments as Rector of St. Peter's Port, Dean of the Island of Guernsey, and Surrogate of the Bishop of Winchester. These were, undoubtedly, not without their glories. These glories did not prevent M. Jaquemin Hérode being, on the whole, a worthy man.

As a theologian he was esteemed by those who were able to judge of such matters; he was almost an authority in the Court of Arches—that Sorbonne of England.

He had the true air of erudition; a learned contraction of the eyes; bristling nostrils; teeth which showed themselves at all times; a thin upper lip and a thick lower one. He was the possessor of several learned degrees, a valuable prebend, titled friends, the confidence of the bishop, and a Bible, which he carried always in his pocket.

Mess Lethierry was so completely absorbed that the entrance of the two priests produced no effect upon him, save a slight movement of the eyebrows.

M. Jaquemin Hérode advanced, bowed, alluded in a few sober and dignified words to his recent promotion, and mentioned that he came according to custom to introduce among the inhabitants, and to Mess Lethierry in particular, his successor in the parish, the new Rector of St. Sampson, the Rev. Ebenezer Caudray, henceforth the pastor of Mess Lethierry.

Déruchette rose.

The young clergyman, who was the Rev. Ebenezer, saluted her.

Mess Lethierry regarded Monsieur Ebenezer Caudray, and muttered, "A bad sailor."[Pg 176]

Grace placed chairs. The two visitors seated themselves near the table.

Doctor Hérode commenced a discourse. It had reached his ears that a serious misfortune had befallen his host. The Durande had been lost. He came as Lethierry's pastor to offer condolence and advice. This shipwreck was unfortunate, and yet not without compensations. Let us examine our own hearts. Are we not puffed up with prosperity? The waters of felicity are dangerous. Troubles must be submitted to cheerfully. The ways of Providence are mysterious. Mess Lethierry was ruined, perhaps. But riches were a danger. You may have false friends; poverty will disperse

them, and leave you alone. The Durande was reported to have brought a revenue of one thousand pounds sterling per annum. It was more than enough for the wise. Let us fly from temptations; put not our faith in gold; bow the head to losses and neglect. Isolation is full of good fruits. It was in solitude that Ajah discovered the warm springs while leading the asses of his father Zibeon. Let us not rebel against the inscrutable decrees of Providence. The holy man Job, after his misery, had put faith in riches. Who can say that the loss of the Durande may not have its advantages even of a temporal kind. He, for instance, Doctor Jaquemin Hérode had invested some money in an excellent enterprise, now in progress at Sheffield. If Mess Lethierry, with the wealth which might still remain to him, should choose to embark in the same affair, he might transfer his capital to that town. It was an extensive manufactory of arms for the supply of the Czar, now engaged in repressing insurrection in Poland. There was a good prospect of obtaining three hundred per cent. profit.

The word Czar appeared to awaken Lethierry. He interrupted Dr. Hérode.

“I want nothing to do with the Czar.”

The Reverend Jaquemin Hérode replied:

“Mess Lethierry, princes are recognised by God. It is written, ‘Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s.’ The Czar is Cæsar.”

Lethierry partly relapsed into his dream and muttered:

“Cæsar? who is Cæsar? I don’t know.”

The Rev. Jaquemin Hérode continued his exhortations. He did not press the question of Sheffield.

To contemn a Cæsar was republicanism. He could understand a man being a republican. In that case he could turn his thoughts towards a republic. Mess Lethierry might repair his[Pg 177] fortune in the United States, even better than in England. If he desired to invest what remained to him at great profit, he had only to take shares in the great company for developing the resources of Texas, which employed more than twenty thousand negroes.

“I want nothing to do with slavery,” said Lethierry.

“Slavery,” replied the Reverend Hérode, “is an institution recognised by Scripture. It is written, ‘If a man smite his slave, he shall not be punished, for he is his money.’”

Grace and Douce at the door of the room listened in a sort of ecstacy to the words of the Reverend Doctor.

The doctor continued. He was, all things considered, as we have said, a worthy man; and whatever his differences, personal or connected with caste, with Mess Lethierry, he had come very sincerely to offer him that spiritual and even temporal aid which he, Doctor Jaquemin Hérode, dispensed.

If Mess Lethierry's fortune had been diminished to that point that he was unable to take a beneficial part in any speculation, Russian or American, why should he not obtain some government appointment suited to him? There were many very respectable places open to him, and the reverend gentleman was ready to recommend him. The office of Deputy-Vicomte was just vacant. Mess Lethierry was popular and respected, and the Reverend Jaquemin Hérode, Dean of Guernsey and Surrogate of the Bishop, would make an effort to obtain for Mess Lethierry this post. The Deputy-Vicomte is an important officer. He is present as the representative of His Majesty at the holding of the Sessions, at the debates of the *Cohue*, and at executions of justice.

Lethierry fixed his eye upon Doctor Hérode.

"I don't like hanging," he said.

Doctor Hérode, who, up to this point, had pronounced his words with the same intonation, had now a fit of severity; his tone became slightly changed.

"Mess Lethierry, the pain of death is of divine ordination. God has placed the sword in the hands of governors. It is written, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.'"

The Reverend Ebenezer imperceptibly drew his chair nearer to the Reverend Doctor and said, so as to be heard only by him:

"What this man says, is dictated to him."

"By whom? By what?" demanded the Reverend Jaquemin Hérode, in the same tone.

The young man replied in a whisper, "By his conscience."[Pg 178]

The Reverend Jaquemin Hérode felt in his pocket, drew out a thick little bound volume with clasps, and said aloud:

"Conscience is here."

The book was a Bible.

Then Doctor Hérode's tone became softer. "His wish was to render a service to Mess Lethierry, whom he respected much. As his pastor, it was his right and duty to offer counsel. Mess Lethierry, however, was free."

Mess Lethierry, plunged once more in his overwhelming absorption, no longer listened. Déruchette, seated near him, and thoughtful, also did not raise her eyes, and by her silent presence somewhat increased the embarrassment of a conversation not very animated. A witness who says nothing is a species of indefinable weight. Doctor Hérode, however, did not appear to feel it.

Lethierry no longer replying, Doctor Hérode expatiated freely. Counsel is from man; inspiration is from God. In the counsels of the priests there is inspiration. It is good to accept, dangerous to refuse them. Sochoh was seized by eleven devils for disdaining the exhortations of Nathaniel. Tiburianus was struck with a leprosy for having driven from his house the Apostle Andrew. Barjesus, a magician though he was, was punished with blindness for having mocked at the words of St. Paul. Elxai and his sisters, Martha and Martena, are in eternal torments for despising the warnings of Valentianus, who proved to them clearly that their Jesus Christ, thirty-eight leagues in height, was a demon. Aholibamah, who is also called Judith, obeyed the Councils, Reuben and Peniel listened to the counsels from on high, as their names indeed indicate. Reuben signifies son of the vision; and Peniel, "the face of God."

Mess Lethierry struck the table with his fist.

"Parbleu!" he cried; "it was my fault."

"What do you mean?" asked M. Jaquemin Hérode.

"I say that it is my fault."

"Your fault? Why?"

"Because I allowed the Durande to return on Fridays."

M. Jaquemin Hérode whispered in Caudray's ear:

"This man is superstitious."

He resumed, raising his voice, and in a didactic tone:

"Mess Lethierry, it is puerile to believe in Fridays. You ought not to put faith in fables. Friday is a day just like any other. It is very often a propitious day. Melendez founded the city of Saint Augustin on a Friday; it was on a Friday that[Pg 179] Henry the Seventh gave his commission to John Cabot; the Pilgrims of the *Mayflower* landed at Province Town on a Friday. Washington was born on Friday, the 22nd of February 1732; Christopher Columbus discovered America on Friday, the 12th of October 1492."

Having delivered himself of these remarks, he rose.

Caudray, whom he had brought with him, rose also.

Grace and Douce, perceiving that the two clergymen were about to take their leave, opened the folding-doors.

Mess Lethierry saw nothing; heard nothing.

M. Jaquemin Hérode said, apart to M. Caudray:

“He does not even salute us. This is not sorrow; it is vacancy. He must have lost his reason.”

He took his little Bible, however, from the table, and held it between his hands outstretched, as one holds a bird in fear that it may fly away. This attitude awakened among the persons present a certain amount of attention. Grace and Douce leaned forward eagerly.

His voice assumed all the solemnity of which it was capable.

“Mess Lethierry,” he began, “let us not part without reading a page of the Holy Book. It is from books that wise men derive consolation in the troubles of life. The profane have their oracles; but believers have their ready resource in the Bible. The first book which comes to hand, opened by chance may afford counsel; but the Bible, opened at any page, yields a revelation. It is, above all, a boon to the afflicted. Yes, Holy Scripture is an unfailing balm for their wounds. In the presence of affliction, it is good to consult its sacred pages—to open even without choosing the place, and to read with faith the passage which we find. What man does not choose is chosen by God. He knoweth best what suiteth us. His finger pointeth invisibly to that which we read. Whatever be the page, it will infallibly enlighten. Let us seek, then, no other light; but hold fast to His. It is the word from on high. In the text which is evoked with confidence and reverence, often do we find a mysterious significance in our present troubles. Let us hearken, then, and obey. Mess Lethierry, you are in affliction, but I hold here the book of consolation. You are sick at heart, but I have here the book of spiritual health.”

The Reverend Jaquemin Hérode touched the spring of the clasp, and let his finger slip between the leaves. Then he placed his hand a moment upon the open volume, collected his thoughts, and, raising his eyes impressively, began to read in a loud voice.[Pg 180]

The passage which he had lighted on was as follows:

“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide, and he lifted up his eyes and saw and beheld the camels were coming.

“And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she lighted off the camel.

“For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?

“And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.”

Caudray and Déruchette glanced at each other.[Pg 181]

PART II.—MALICIOUS GILLIATT

BOOK I

THE ROCK

I

THE PLACE WHICH IS DIFFICULT TO REACH, AND DIFFICULT TO LEAVE

The bark which had been observed at so many points on the coast of Guernsey on the previous evening was, as the reader has guessed, the old Dutch barge or sloop. Gilliatt had chosen the channel along the coast among the rocks. It was the most dangerous way, but it was the most direct. To take the shortest route was his only thought. Shipwrecks will not wait; the sea is a pressing creditor; an hour’s delay may be irreparable. His anxiety was to go quickly to the rescue of the machinery in danger.

One of his objects in leaving Guernsey was to avoid arousing attention. He set out like one escaping from justice, and seemed anxious to hide from human eyes. He shunned the eastern coast, as if he did not care to pass in sight of St. Sampson and St. Peter’s Port, and glided silently along the opposite coast, which is comparatively uninhabited. Among the breakers, it was necessary to ply the oars; but Gilliatt managed them on scientific principles; taking the water quietly, and dropping it with exact regularity, he was able to move in the darkness with as little noise and as rapidly as possible. So stealthy were his movements, that he might have seemed to be bent upon some evil errand.

In truth, though embarking desperately in an enterprise which might well be called impossible, and risking his life with nearly every chance against him, he feared nothing but the possibility of some rival in the work which he had set before him.

As the day began to break, those unknown eyes which look down upon the world from boundless space might have beheld,[Pg 182] at one of the most dangerous and solitary spots at sea, two objects, the distance between which was gradually decreasing, as the one was approaching the other. One, which was almost imperceptible in the wide movement of the waters, was a sailing boat. In this was a man. It was the sloop. The other, black, motionless, colossal, rose above the waves, a singular form. Two tall pillars issuing from the sea bore aloft a sort of cross-beam which was like a bridge between them. This bridge, so singular in shape that it was impossible to imagine what it was from a distance, touched each of the two pillars. It resembled a vast portal. Of what use could such an erection be in that open plain, the sea, which stretched around it far and wide? It might have been imagined to be a Titanic Cromlech, planted there in mid-ocean by an imperious whim, and built up by hands accustomed to proportion their labours to the great deep. Its wild outline stood well-defined against the clear sky.

The morning light was growing stronger in the east; the whiteness in the horizon deepened the shadow on the sea. In the opposite sky the moon was sinking.

The two perpendicular forms were the Douvres. The huge mass held fast between them, like an architrave between two pillars, was the wreck of the Durande.

The rock, thus holding fast and exhibiting its prey, was terrible to behold. Inanimate things look sometimes as if endowed with a dark and hostile spirit towards man. There was a menace in the attitude of the rocks. They seemed to be biding their time.

Nothing could be more suggestive of haughtiness and arrogance than their whole appearance: the conquered vessel; the triumphant abyss. The two rocks, still streaming with the tempest of the day before, were like two wrestlers sweating from a recent struggle. The wind had sunk; the sea rippled gently; here and there the presence of breakers might be detected in the graceful streaks of foam upon the surface of the waters. A sound came from the sea like the murmuring of bees. All around was level except the Douvres, rising straight, like two black columns. Up to a certain height they were completely bearded with seaweed; above this their steep haunches glittered at points like polished armour. They seemed ready to commence the strife again. The beholder felt that they were rooted deep in mountains whose summits were beneath the sea. Their aspect was full of a sort of tragic power.

Ordinarily the sea conceals her crimes. She delights in[Pg 183] privacy. Her unfathomable deeps keep silence. She wraps herself in a mystery which rarely consents to give up its secrets. We know her savage nature, but who can tell the extent of her dark deeds? She is at once open and secret; she hides away carefully,

and cares not to divulge her actions; wrecks a vessel, and, covering it with the waves, engulfs it deep, as if conscious of her guilt. Among her crimes is hypocrisy. She slays and steals, conceals her booty, puts on an air of unconsciousness, and smiles.

Here, however, was nothing of the kind. The Douvres, lifting above the level of the waters the shattered hull of the Durande, had an air of triumph. The imagination might have pictured them as two monstrous arms, reaching upwards from the gulf, and exhibiting to the tempest the lifeless body of the ship. Their aspect was like that of an assassin boasting of his evil deeds.

The solemnity of the hour contributed something to the impression of the scene. There is a mysterious grandeur in the dawn, as of the border-land between the region of consciousness and the world of our dreams. There is something spectral in that confused transition time. The immense form of the two Douvres, like a capital letter H, the Durande forming its cross stroke, appeared against the horizon in all their twilight majesty.

Gilliatt was attired in his seaman's clothing: a Guernsey shirt, woollen stockings, thick shoes, a homespun jacket, trousers of thick stuff, with pockets, and a cap upon his head of red worsted, of a kind then much in use among sailors, and known in the last century as a *galérienne*.

He recognised the rocks, and steered towards them.

The situation of the Durande was exactly the contrary of that of a vessel gone to the bottom: it was a vessel suspended in the air.

No problem more strange was ever presented to a salvor.

It was broad daylight when Gilliatt arrived in the waters about the rock.

As we have said, there was but little sea. The slight agitation of the water was due almost entirely to its confinement among the rocks. Every passage, small or large, is subject to this chopping movement. The inside of a channel is always more or less white with foam. Gilliatt did not approach the Douvres without caution.

He cast the sounding lead several times.[Pg 184]

He had a cargo to disembark.

Accustomed to long absences, he had at home a number of necessaries always ready. He had brought a sack of biscuit, another of rye-meal, a basket of salt fish and smoked beef, a large can of fresh water; a Norwegian chest painted with flowers, containing several coarse woollen shirts, his tarpaulin and his waterproof overalls,

and a sheepskin which he was accustomed to throw at night over his clothes. On leaving the Bû de la Rue he had put all these things hastily into the barge, with the addition of a large loaf. In his hurry he had brought no other tools but his huge forge-hammer, his chopper and hatchet, and a knotted rope. Furnished with a grappling-iron and with a ladder of that sort, the steepest rocks become accessible, and a good sailor will find it possible to scale the rudest escarpment. In the island of Sark the visitor may see what the fishermen of the Havre Gosselin can accomplish with a knotted cord.

His nets and lines and all his fishing apparatus were in the barge. He had placed them there mechanically and by habit; for he intended, if his enterprise continued, to sojourn for some time in an archipelago of rocks and breakers, where fishing nets and tackle are of little use.

At the moment when Gilliatt was skirting the great rock the sea was retiring; a circumstance favourable to his purpose. The departing tide laid bare, at the foot of the smaller Douvre, one or two table-rocks, horizontal, or only slightly inclined, and bearing a fanciful resemblance to boards supported by crows. These table-rocks, sometimes narrow, sometimes broad, standing at unequal distances along the side of the great perpendicular column, were continued in the form of a thin cornice up to a spot just beneath the Durande, the hull of which stood swelling out between the two rocks. The wreck was held fast there as in a vice.

This series of platforms was convenient for approaching and surveying the position. It was convenient also for disembarking the contents of the barge provisionally; but it was necessary to hasten, for it was only above water for a few hours. With the rising tide the table-rocks would be again beneath the foam.

It was before these table-rocks, some level, some slanting, that Gilliatt pushed in and brought the barge to a stand. A thick mass of wet and slippery sea-wrack covered them, rendered more slippery here and there by their inclined surfaces.[Pg 185]

Gilliatt pulled off his shoes and sprang bare-footed on to the slimy weeds, and made fast the barge to a point of rock.

Then he advanced as far as he could along the granite cornice, reached the rock immediately beneath the wreck, looked up, and examined it.

The Durande had been caught suspended, and, as it were, fitted in between the two rocks, at about twenty feet above the water. It must have been a heavy sea which had cast her there.

Such effects from furious seas have nothing surprising for those who are familiar with the ocean. To cite one example only:—On the 25th January 1840, in the Gulf of Stora, a tempest struck with its expiring force a brig, and casting it almost intact completely over the broken wreck of the corvette *La Marne*, fixed it immovable, bowsprit first, in a gap between the cliffs.

The Douvres, however, held only a part of the Durande.

The vessel snatched from the waves had been, as it were, uprooted from the waters by the hurricane. A whirlwind had wrenched it against the counteracting force of the rolling waves, and the vessel thus caught in contrary directions by the two claws of the tempest had snapped like a lath. The after-part with the engine and the paddles, lifted out of the foam and driven by all the fury of the cyclone into the defile of the Douvres, had plunged in up to her midship beam, and remained there. The blow had been well directed. To drive it in this fashion between the two rocks, the storm had struck it as with an enormous hammer. The forecastle carried away and rolled down by the sea, had gone to fragments among the breakers.

The hold, broken in, had scattered out the bodies of the drowned cattle upon the sea.

A large portion of the forward side and bulwarks still hung to the riders by the larboard paddle-box, and by some shattered braces easy to strike off with the blow of a hatchet.

Here and there, among beams, planks, rags of canvas, pieces of chains, and other remains of wreck were seen lying about among the rugged fragments of shattered rock.

Gilliatt surveyed the Durande attentively. The keel formed a roofing over his head.

A serene sky stretched far and wide over the waters, scarcely wrinkled with a passing breath. The sun rose gloriously in the midst of the vast azure circle.

From time to time a drop of water was detached from the wreck and fell into the sea.[Pg 186]

II

A CATALOGUE OF DISASTERS

The Douvres differed in shape as well as in height.

Upon the Little Douvre, which was curved and pointed, long veins of reddish-coloured rock, of a comparatively soft kind, could be seen branching out and dividing the interior of the granite. At the edges of these red dykes were fractures, favourable to climbing. One of these fractures, situated a little above the wreck, had been so laboriously worn and scooped out by the splashing of the waves, that it had become a sort of niche, in which it would have been quite possible to place a statue. The granite of the Little Douvre was rounded at the surface, and, to the feel at least, soft like touchstone; but this feeling detracted nothing from its durability. The Little Douvre terminated in a point like a horn. The Great Douvre, polished, smooth, glossy, perpendicular, and looking as if cut out by the builder's square, was in one piece, and seemed made of black ivory. Not a hole, not a break in its smooth surface. The escarpment looked inhospitable. A convict could not have used it for escape, nor a bird for a place for its nest. On the summit there was a horizontal surface as upon "The Man Rock;" but the summit of the Great Douvre was inaccessible.

It was possible to scale the Little Douvre, but not to remain on the summit; it would have been possible to rest on the summit of the Great Douvre, but impossible to scale it.

Gilliatt, having rapidly surveyed the situation of affairs, returned to the barge, landed its contents upon the largest of the horizontal cornice rocks, made of the whole compact mass a sort of bale, which he rolled up in tarpaulin, fitted a sling rope to it with a hoisting block, pushed the package into a corner of the rocks where the waves could not reach it, and then clutching the Little Douvre with his hands, and holding on with his naked feet, he clambered from projection to projection, and from niche to niche, until he found himself level with the wrecked vessel high up in the air.

Having reached the height of the paddles, he sprang upon the poop.

The interior of the wreck presented a mournful aspect.

Traces of a great struggle were everywhere visible. There were plainly to be seen the frightful ravages of the sea and wind.[Pg 187] The action of the tempest resembles the violence of a band of pirates. Nothing is more like the victim of a criminal outrage than a wrecked ship violated and stripped by those terrible accomplices, the storm-cloud, the thunder, the rain, the squall, the waves, and the breakers.

Standing upon the dismantled deck, it was natural to dream of the presence of something like a furious stamping of the spirits of the storm. Everywhere around were the marks of their rage. The strange contortions of certain portions of the ironwork

bore testimony to the terrific force of the winds. The between-decks were like the cell of a lunatic, in which everything has been broken.

No wild beast can compare with the sea for mangling its prey. The waves are full of talons. The north wind bites, the billows devour, the waves are like hungry jaws. The ocean strikes like a lion with its heavy paw, seizing and dismembering at the same moment.

The ruin conspicuous in the Durande presented the peculiarity of being detailed and minute. It was a sort of horrible stripping and plucking. Much of it seemed done with design. The beholder was tempted to exclaim, "What wanton mischief!" The ripping of the planking was edged here and there artistically. This peculiarity is common with the ravages of the cyclone. To chip and tear away is the caprice of the great devastator. Its ways are like those of the professional torturer. The disasters which it causes wear a look of ingenious punishments. One might fancy it actuated by the worst passions of man. It refines in cruelty like a savage. While it is exterminating it dissects bone by bone. It torments its victim, avenges itself, and takes delight in its work. It even appears to descend to petty acts of malice.

Cyclones are rare in our latitudes, and are, for that reason, the more dangerous, being generally unexpected. A rock in the path of a heavy wind may become the pivot of a storm. It is probable that the squall had thus rotated upon the point of the Douvres, and had turned suddenly into a waterspout on meeting the shock of the rocks, a fact which explained the casting of the vessel so high among them. When the cyclone blows, a vessel is of no more weight in the wind than a stone in a sling.

The damage received by the Durande was like the wound of a man cut in twain. It was a divided trunk from which issued a mass of *débris* like the entrails of a body. Various kinds of cordage hung floating and trembling, chains swung chattering;[Pg 188] the fibres and nerves of the vessel were there naked and exposed. What was not smashed was disjointed.

Fragments of the sheeting resembled currycombs bristling with nails; everything bore the appearance of ruin; a handspike had become nothing but a piece of iron; a sounding-lead, nothing but a lump of metal; a dead-eye had become a mere piece of wood; a halliard, an end of rope; a strand of cord, a tangled skein; a bolt-rope, a thread in the hem of a sail. All around was the lamentable work of demolition. Nothing remained that was not unhooked, unnailed, cracked, wasted, warped, pierced with holes, destroyed: nothing hung together in the dreadful mass, but all was torn, dislocated, broken. There was that air of drift which characterises the scene of all struggles—from the melées of men, which are called battles, to the melées of the

elements, to which we give the name of chaos. Everything was sinking and dropping away; a rolling mass of planks, panelling, ironwork, cables, and beams had been arrested just at the great fracture of the hull, whence the least additional shock must have precipitated them into the sea. What remained of her powerful frame, once so triumphant, was cracked here and there, showing through large apertures the dismal gloom within.

The foam from below spat its flakes contemptuously upon this broken and forlorn outcast of the sea.

III

SOUND; BUT NOT SAFE

Gilliatt did not expect to find only a portion of the ship existing. Nothing in the description, in other respects so precise, of the captain of the *Shealtiel* had led him to anticipate this division of the vessel in the centre. It was probable that the "diabolical crash" heard by the captain of the *Shealtiel* marked the moment when this destruction had taken place under the blows of a tremendous sea. The captain had, doubtless, worn ship just before this last heavy squall; and what he had taken for a great sea was probably a waterspout. Later, when he drew nearer to observe the wreck, he had only been able to see the stern of the vessel—the remainder, that is to say, the large opening where the fore-part had given way, having been concealed from him among the masses of rock.[Pg 189]

With that exception, the information given by the captain of the *Shealtiel* was strictly correct. The hull was useless, but the engine remained intact.

Such chances are common in the history of shipwreck. The logic of disaster at sea is beyond the grasp of human science.

The masts having snapped short, had fallen over the side; the chimney was not even bent. The great iron plating which supported the machinery had kept it together, and in one piece. The planks of the paddle-boxes were disjointed, like the leaves of wooden sunblinds; but through their apertures the paddles themselves could be seen in good condition. A few of their floats only were missing.

Besides the machinery, the great stern capstan had resisted the destruction. Its chain was there, and, thanks to its firm fixture in a frame of joists, might still be of service, unless the strain of the voyal should break away the planking. The flooring of the deck bent at almost every point, and was tottering throughout.

On the other hand, the trunk of the hull, fixed between the Douvres, held together, as we have already said, and it appeared strong.

There was something like derision in this preservation of the machinery; something which added to the irony of the misfortune. The sombre malice of the unseen powers of mischief displays itself sometimes in such bitter mockeries. The machinery was saved, but its preservation did not make it any the less lost. The ocean seemed to have kept it only to demolish it at leisure. It was like the playing of the cat with her prey.

Its fate was to suffer there and to be dismembered day by day. It was to be the plaything of the savage amusements of the sea. It was slowly to dwindle, and, as it were, to melt away. For what could be done? That this vast block of mechanism and gear, at once massive and delicate, condemned to fixity by its weight, delivered up in that solitude to the destructive elements, exposed in the gripe of the rock to the action of the wind and wave, could, under the frown of that implacable spot, escape from slow destruction, seemed a madness even to imagine.

The Durande was the captive of the Douvres.

How could she be extricated from that position?

How could she be delivered from her bondage?

The escape of a man is difficult; but what a problem was this—the escape of a vast and cumbrous machine.[Pg 190]

IV

A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

Gilliatt was pressed on all sides by demands upon his labours. The most pressing, however, was to find a safe mooring for the barge; then a shelter for himself.

The Durande having settled down more on the larboard than on the starboard side, the right paddle-box was higher than the left.

Gilliatt ascended the paddle-box on the right. From that position, although the gut of rocks stretching in abrupt angles behind the Douvres had several elbows, he was able to study the ground-plan of the group.

This survey was the preliminary step of his operations.

The Douvres, as we have already described them, were like two high gable-ends, forming the narrow entrance to a straggling alley of small cliffs with perpendicular faces. It is not rare to find in primitive submarine formations these singular kinds of passages, which seem cut out with a hatchet.

This defile was extremely tortuous, and was never without water even in the low tides. A current, much agitated, traversed it at all times from end to end. The sharpness of its turnings was favourable or unfavourable, according to the nature of the prevailing wind; sometimes it broke the swell and caused it to fall; sometimes it exasperated it. This latter effect was the most frequent. An obstacle arouses the anger of the sea, and pushes it to excesses. The foam is the exaggeration of the waves.

The stormy winds in these narrow and tortuous passages between the rocks are subjected to a similar compression, and acquire the same malignant character. The tempest frets in its sudden imprisonment. Its bulk is still immense, but sharpened and contracted; and it strikes with the massiveness of a huge club and the keenness of an arrow. It pierces even while it strikes down. It is a hurricane contracted, like the draught through the crevice of a door.

The two chains of rocks, leaving between them this kind of street in the sea, formed stages at a lower level than the Douvres, gradually decreasing, until they sunk together at a certain distance beneath the waves.

There was another such gullet of less height than the gullet[Pg 191] of the Douvres, but narrower still, and which formed the eastern entrance of the defile. It was evident that the double prolongation of the ridge of rocks continued the kind of street under the water as far as “The Man Rock,” which stood like a square citadel at the extremity of the group.

At low water, indeed, which was the time at which Gilliatt was observing them, the two rows of sunken rock showed their tips, some high and dry, and all visible and preserving their parallel without interruption.

“The Man” formed the boundary, and buttressed on the eastern side the entire mass of the group, which was protected on the opposite side by the two Douvres.

The whole, from a bird’s-eye view, appeared like a winding chaplet of rocks, having the Douvres at one extremity and “The Man” at the other.

The Douvres, taken together, were merely two gigantic shafts of granite protruding vertically and almost touching each other, and forming the crest of one of the mountainous ranges lying beneath the ocean. Those immense ridges are not only

found rising out of the unfathomable deep. The surf and the squall had broken them up and divided them like the teeth of a saw. Only the tip of the ridge was visible; this was the group of rocks. The remainder, which the waves concealed, must have been enormous. The passage in which the storm had planted the Durande was the way between these two colossal shafts.

This passage, zigzag in form as the forked lightning, was of about the same width in all parts. The ocean had so fashioned it. Its eternal commotion produces sometimes those singular regularities. There is a sort of geometry in the action of the sea.

From one extremity to the other of the defile, the two parallel granite walls confronted each other at a distance which the midship frame of the Durande measured exactly. Between the two Douvres, the widening of the Little Douvre, curved and turned back as it was, had formed a space for the paddles. In any other part they must have been shattered to fragments.

The high double façade of rock within the passage was hideous to the sight. When, in the exploration of the desert of water which we call the ocean, we come upon the unknown world of the sea, all is uncouth and shapeless. So much as Gilliatt could see of the defile from the height of the wreck, was appalling. In the rocky gorges of the ocean we may often trace a strange permanent impersonation of shipwreck. The[Pg 192] defile of the Douvres was one of these gorges, and its effect was exciting to the imagination. The oxydes of the rock showed on the escarpment here and there in red places, like marks of clotted blood; it resembled the splashes on the walls of an abattoir. Associations of the charnel-house haunted the place. The rough marine stones, diversely tinted—here by the decomposition of metallic amalgams mingling with the rock, there by the mould of dampness, manifested in places by purple scales, hideous green blotches, and ruddy splashes, awakened ideas of murder and extermination. It was like the unwashed walls of a chamber which had been the scene of an assassination; or it might have been imagined that men had been crushed to death there, leaving traces of their fate. The peaked rocks produced an indescribable impression of accumulated agonies. Certain spots appeared to be still dripping with the carnage; here the wall was wet, and it looked impossible to touch it without leaving the fingers bloody. The blight of massacre seemed everywhere. At the base of the double parallel escarpment, scattered along the water's edge, or just below the waves, or in the worn hollows of the rocks, were monstrous rounded masses of shingle, some scarlet, others black or purple, which bore a strange resemblance to internal organs of the body; they might have been taken for human lungs, or heart, or liver, scattered and putrefying in that dismal place. Giants might have been

disembowelled there. From top to bottom of the granite ran long red lines, which might have been compared to oozings from a funeral bier.

Such aspects are frequent in sea caverns.

V

A WORD UPON THE SECRET CO-OPERATIONS OF THE ELEMENTS

Those who, by the disastrous chances of sea-voyages, happen to be condemned to a temporary habitation upon a rock in mid-ocean, find that the form of their inhospitable refuge is by no means a matter of indifference. There is the pyramidal-shaped rock, a single peak rising from the water; there is the circle rock somewhat resembling a round of great stones; and there is the corridor-rock. The latter is the most alarming of all. It is not only the ceaseless agony of the waves between[Pg 193] its walls, or the tumult of the imprisoned sea; there are also certain obscure meteorological characteristics which appear to appertain to this parallelism of two marine rocks. The two straight sides seem a veritable electric battery.

The first result of the peculiar position of these corridor-rocks is an action upon the air and the water. The corridor-rock acts upon the waves and the wind mechanically by its form; galvanically, by the different magnetic action rendered possible by its vertical height, its masses in juxtaposition and contrary to each other.

This form of rock attracts to itself all the forces scattered in the winds, and exercises over the tempest a singular power of concentration.

Hence there is in the neighbourhood of these breakers a certain accentuation of storms.

It must be borne in mind that the wind is composite. The wind is believed to be simple; but it is by no means simple. Its power is not merely dynamic, it is chemical also; but this is not all, it is magnetic. Its effects are often inexplicable. The wind is as much electrical as aerial. Certain winds coincide with the *aurores boreales*. The wind blowing from the bank of the Aiguilles rolls the waves one hundred feet high; a fact observed with astonishment by Dumont-d'Urville. The corvette, he says, "knew not what to obey."

In the south seas the waters will sometimes become inflated like an outbreak of immense tumours; and at such times the ocean becomes so terrible that the savages fly to escape the sight of it. The blasts in the north seas are different. They are mingled

with sharp points of ice; and their gusts, unfit to breathe, will blow the sledges of the Esquimaux backwards in the snow. Other winds burn. The simoon of Africa is the typhoon of China and the samiel of India. Simoon, typhoon, and samiel, are believed to be the names of demons. They descend from the heights of the mountains. A storm vitrified the volcano of Toluca. This hot wind, a whirlwind of inky colour, rushing upon red clouds, is alluded to in the Vedas: "Behold the black god, who comes to steal the red cows." In all these facts we trace the presence of the electric mystery.

The wind indeed is full of it; so are the waves. The sea, too, is composite in its nature. Under its waves of water which we see, it has its waves of force which are invisible. Its constituents are innumerable. Of all the elements the ocean is the most indivisible and the most profound.[Pg 194]

Endeavour to conceive this chaos so enormous that it dwarfs all other things to one level. It is the universal recipient, reservoir of germs of life, and mould of transformations. It amasses and then disperses, it accumulates and then sows, it devours and then creates. It receives all the waste and refuse waters of the earth, and converts them into treasure. It is solid in the iceberg, liquid in the wave, fluid in the estuary. Regarded as matter, it is a mass; regarded as a force, it is an abstraction. It equalises and unites all phenomena. It may be called the infinite in combination. By force and disturbance, it arrives at transparency. It dissolves all differences, and absorbs them into its own unity. Its elements are so numerous that it becomes identity. One of its drops is complete, and represents the whole. From the abundance of its tempests, it attains equilibrium. Plato beheld the mazy dances of the spheres. Strange fact, though not the less real, the ocean, in the vast terrestrial journey round the sun, becomes, with its flux and reflux, the balance of the globe.

In a phenomenon of the sea, all other phenomena are resumed. The sea is blown out of a waterspout as from a syphon; the storm observes the principle of the pump; the lightning issues from the sea as from the air. Aboard ships dull shocks are sometimes felt, and an odour of sulphur issues from the receptacles of chain cables. The ocean boils. "The devil has put the sea in his cauldron," said De Ruyter. In certain tempests, which characterise the equinoxes and the return to equilibrium of the prolific power of nature, vessels breasting the foam seem to give out a kind of fire, phosphoric lights chase each other along the rigging, so close sometimes to the sailors at their work that the latter stretch forth their hands and try to catch, as they fly, these birds of flame. After the great earthquake of Lisbon, a blast of hot air, as from a furnace, drove before it towards the city a wave sixty feet high. The oscillation of the ocean is closely related to the convulsions of the earth.

These immeasurable forces produce sometimes extraordinary inundations. At the end of the year 1864, one of the Maldive Islands, at a hundred leagues from the Malabar coast, actually foundered in the sea. It sunk to the bottom like a shipwrecked vessel. The fishermen who sailed from it in the morning, found nothing when they returned at night; scarcely could they distinguish their villages under the sea. On this occasion boats were the spectators of the wrecks of houses.

In Europe, where nature seems restrained by the presence of[Pg 195] civilisation, such events are rare and are thought impossible. Nevertheless, Jersey and Guernsey originally formed part of Gaul, and at the moment while we are writing these lines, an equinoctial gale has demolished a great portion of the cliff of the Firth of Forth in Scotland.

Nowhere do these terrific forces appear more formidably conjoined than in the surprising strait known as the Lyse-Fiord. The Lyse-Fiord is the most terrible of all the gut rocks of the ocean. Their terrors are there complete. It is in the northern sea, near the inhospitable Gulf of Stavanger, and in the 59th degree of latitude. The water is black and heavy, and subject to intermitting storms. In this sea, and in the midst of this solitude, rises a great sombre street—a street for no human footsteps. None ever pass through there; no ship ever ventures in. It is a corridor ten leagues in length, between two rocky walls of three thousand feet in height. Such is the passage which presents an entrance to the sea. The defile has its elbows and angles like all these streets of the sea—never straight, having been formed by the irregular action of the water. In the Lyse-Fiord, the sea is almost always tranquil; the sky above is serene; the place terrible. Where is the wind? Not on high. Where is the thunder? Not in the heavens. The wind is under the sea; the lightnings within the rock. Now and then there is a convulsion of the water. At certain moments, when there is perhaps not a cloud in the sky, nearly half way up the perpendicular rock, at a thousand or fifteen hundred feet above the water, and rather on the southern than on the northern side, the rock suddenly thunders, lightnings dart forth, and then retire like those toys which lengthen out and spring back again in the hands of children. They contract and enlarge; strike the opposite cliff, re-enter the rock, issue forth again, recommence their play, multiply their heads and tips of flame, grow bristling with points, strike wherever they can, recommence again, and then are extinguished with a sinister abruptness. Flocks of birds fly wide in terror. Nothing is more mysterious than that artillery issuing out of the invisible. One cliff attacks the other, raining lightning blows from side to side. Their war concerns not man. It signals the ancient enmity of two rocks in the impassable gulf.

In the Lyse-Fiord, the wind whirls like the water in an estuary; the rock performs the function of the clouds; and the thunder breaks forth like volcanic fire. This strange defile is a voltaic pile; the plates of which are the double line of cliffs.[Pg 196]

VI

A STABLE FOR THE HORSE

Gilliatt was sufficiently familiar with marine rocks to grapple in earnest with the Douvres. Before all, as we have just said, it was necessary to find a safe shelter for the barge.

The double row of reefs, which stretched in a sinuous form behind the Douvres, connected itself here and there with other rocks, and suggested the existence of blind passages and hollows opening out into the straggling way, and joining again to the principal defile like branches to a trunk.

The lower part of these rocks was covered with kelp, the upper part with lichens. The uniform level of the seaweed marked the line of the water at the height of the tide, and the limit of the sea in calm weather. The points which the water had not touched presented those silver and golden hues communicated to marine granite by the white and yellow lichen.

A crust of conoidical shells covered the rock at certain points, the dry rot of the granite.

At other points in the retreating angles, where fine sand had accumulated, ribbed on its surface rather by the wind than by the waves, appeared tufts of blue thistles.

In the indentations, sheltered from the winds, could be traced the little perforations made by the sea-urchin. This shelly mass of prickles, which moves about a living ball, by rolling on its spines, and the armour of which is composed of ten thousand pieces, artistically adjusted and welded together—the sea-urchin, which is popularly called, for some unknown reason, “Aristotle’s lantern,” wears away the granite with his five teeth, and lodges himself in the hole. It is in such holes that the samphire gatherers find them. They cut them in halves and eat them raw, like an oyster. Some steep their bread in the soft flesh. Hence its other name, “Sea-egg.”

The tips of the further reefs, left out of the water by the receding tide, extended close under the escarpment of “The Man” to a sort of creek, enclosed nearly on all sides by rocky walls. Here was evidently a possible harbourage. It had the form of a horse-

shoe, and opened only on one side to the east wind, which is the least violent of all winds in that sea labyrinth. The water was shut in there, and almost motionless. The shelter seemed comparatively safe. Gilliatt, moreover, had not much choice.[Pg 197]

If he wished to take advantage of the low water, it was important to make haste.

The weather continued to be fine and calm. The insolent sea was for a while in a gentle mood.

Gilliatt descended, put on his shoes again, unmoored the cable, re-embarked, and pushed out into the water. He used the oars, coasting the side of the rock.

Having reached "The Man Rock," he examined the entrance to the little creek.

A fixed, wavy line in the motionless sea, a sort of wrinkle, imperceptible to any eye but that of a sailor, marked the channel.

Gilliatt studied for a moment its lineament, almost indistinct under the water; then he held off a little in order to veer at ease, and steer well into channel; and suddenly with a stroke of the oars he entered the little bay.

He sounded.

The anchorage appeared to be excellent.

The sloop would be protected there against almost any of the contingencies of the season.

The most formidable reefs have quiet nooks of this sort. The ports which are thus found among the breakers are like the hospitality of the fierce Bedouin—friendly and sure.

Gilliatt placed the sloop as near as he could to "The Man," but still far enough to escape grazing the rock; and he cast his two anchors.

That done, he crossed his arms, and reflected on his position.

The sloop was sheltered. Here was one problem solved. But another remained. Where could he now shelter himself?

He had the choice of two places: the sloop itself, with its corner of cabin, which was scarcely habitable, and the summit of "The Man Rock," which was not difficult to scale.

From one or other of these refuges it was possible at low water, by jumping from rock to rock, to gain the passage between the Douvres where the Durande was fixed, almost without wetting the feet.

But low water lasts but a short while, and all the rest of the time he would be cut off either from his shelter or from the wreck by more than two hundred fathoms. Swimming among breakers is difficult at all times; if there is the least commotion in the sea it is impossible.

He was driven to give up the idea of shelter in the sloop or on “The Man.”

No resting-place was possible among the neighbouring rocks.[Pg 198]

The summits of the lower ones disappeared twice a day beneath the rising tide.

The summits of the higher ones were constantly swept by the flakes of foam, and promised nothing but an inhospitable drenching.

No choice remained but the wreck itself.

Was it possible to seek refuge there?

Gilliatt hoped it might be.

VII

A CHAMBER FOR THE VOYAGER

Half-an-hour afterwards, Gilliatt having returned to the wreck, climbed to the deck, went below, and descended into the hold, completing the summary survey of his first visit.

By the help of the capstan he had raised to the deck of the Durande the package which he had made of the lading of the sloop. The capstan had worked well. Bars for turning it were not wanting. Gilliatt had only to take his choice among the heap of wreck.

He found among the fragments a chisel, dropped, no doubt, from the carpenter’s box, and which he added to his little stock of tools.

Besides this—for in poverty of appliances so complete everything counts for a little—he had his jack-knife in his pocket.

Gilliatt worked the whole day long on the wreck, clearing away, propping, arranging.

At nightfall he observed the following facts:

The entire wreck shook in the wind. The carcass trembled at every step he took. There was nothing stable or strong except the portion of the hull jammed between the rocks which contained the engine. There the beams were powerfully supported by the granite walls.

Fixing his home in the Durande would be imprudent. It would increase the weight; but far from adding to her burden, it was important to lighten it. To burden the wreck in any way was indeed the very contrary of what he wanted.

The mass of ruin required, in fact, the most careful management. It was like a sick man at the approach of dissolution. The wind would do sufficient to help it to its end.

It was, moreover, unfortunate enough to be compelled to[Pg 199] work there. The amount of disturbance which the wreck would have to withstand would necessarily distress it, perhaps beyond its strength.

Besides, if any accident should happen in the night while Gilliatt was sleeping, he must necessarily perish with the vessel. No assistance was possible; all would be over. In order to help the shattered vessel, it was absolutely necessary to remain outside it.

How to be outside and yet near it, this was the problem.

The difficulty became more complicated as he considered it.

Where could he find a shelter under such conditions?

Gilliatt reflected.

There remained nothing but the two Douvres. They seemed hopeless enough.

From below, it was possible to distinguish upon the upper plateau of the Great Douvre a sort of protuberance.

High rocks with flattened summits, like the Great Douvre and “The Man,” are a sort of decapitated peaks. They abound among the mountains and in the ocean. Certain rocks, particularly those which are met with in the open sea, bear marks like half-felled trees. They have the appearance of having received blows from a hatchet. They have been subjected, in fact, to the blows of the gale, that indefatigable pioneer of the sea.

There are other still more profound causes of marine convulsions. Hence the innumerable bruises upon these primeval masses of granite. Some of these sea giants have their heads struck off.

Sometimes these heads, from some inexplicable cause, do not fall, but remain shattered on the summit of the mutilated trunk. This singularity is by no means rare. The Devil's Rock, at Guernsey, and the Table, in the Valley of Anweiler, illustrate some of the most surprising features of this strange geological enigma.

Some such phenomena had probably fashioned the summit of the Great Douvre.

If the protuberance which could be observed on the plateau were not a natural irregularity in the stone, it must necessarily be some remaining fragment of the shattered summit.

Perhaps the fragment might contain some excavation—some hole into which a man could creep for cover. Gilliatt asked for no more.

But how could he reach the plateau? How could he scale that perpendicular wall, hard and polished as a pebble, half[Pg 200] covered with the growth of glutinous confervæ, and having the slippery look of a soapy surface?

The ridge of the plateau was at least thirty feet above the deck of the Durande.

Gilliatt took out of his box of tools the knotted cord, hooked it to his belt by the grapnel, and set to work to scale the Little Douvre. The ascent became more difficult as he climbed. He had forgotten to take off his shoes, a fact which increased the difficulty. With great labour and straining, however, he reached the point. Safely arrived there, he raised himself and stood erect. There was scarcely room for his two feet. To make it his lodging would be difficult. A Stylite might have contented himself there; Gilliatt, more luxurious in his requirements, wanted something more commodious.

The Little Douvre, leaning towards the great one, looked from a distance as if it was saluting it, and the space between the Douvres, which was some score of feet below, was only eight or ten at the highest points.

From the spot to which he had climbed, Gilliatt saw more distinctly the rocky excrescence which partly covered the plateau of the Great Douvre.

This plateau rose three fathoms at least above his head.

A precipice separated him from it. The curved escarpment of the Little Douvre sloped away out of sight beneath him.

He detached the knotted rope from his belt, took a rapid glance at the dimensions of the rock, and slung the grapnel up to the plateau.

The grapnel scratched the rock, and slipped. The knotted rope with the hooks at its end fell down beneath his feet, swinging against the side of the little Douvre.

He renewed the attempt; slung the rope further, aiming at the granite protuberance, in which he could perceive crevices and scratches.

The cast was, this time, so neat and skilful, that the hooks caught.

He pulled from below. A portion of the rock broke away, and the knotted rope with its heavy iron came down once more, striking the escarpment beneath his feet.

He slung the grapnel a third time.

It did not fall.

He put a strain upon the rope; it resisted. The grapnel was firmly anchored.[Pg 201]

The hooks had caught in some fracture of the plateau which he could not see.

It was necessary to trust his life to that unknown support.

He did not hesitate.

The matter was urgent. He was compelled to take the shortest route.

Moreover, to descend again to the deck of the Durande, in order to devise some other step, was impossible. A slip was probable, and a fall almost certain. It was easier to climb than to descend.

Gilliatt's movements were decisive, as are those of all good sailors. He never wasted force. He always proportioned his efforts to the work in hand. Hence the prodigies of strength which he executed with ordinary muscles. His biceps were no more powerful than that of ordinary men; but his heart was firmer. He added, in fact, to strength which is physical, energy which belongs to the moral faculties.

The feat to be accomplished was appalling.

It was to cross the space between the two Douvres, hanging only by this slender line.

Oftentimes in the path of duty and devotedness, the figure of death rises before men to present these terrible questions:

Wilt thou do this? asks the shadow.

Gilliatt tested the cord again; the grappling-iron held firm.

Wrapping his left hand in his handkerchief, he grasped the knotted cord with his right hand, which he covered with his left; then stretching out one foot, and striking out sharply with the other against the rock, in order that the impetus might prevent the rope twisting, he precipitated himself from the height of the Little Douvre on to the escarpment of the great one.

The shock was severe.

There was a rebound.

His clenched fists struck the rocks in their turn; the handkerchief had loosened, and they were scratched; they had indeed narrowly escaped being crushed.

Gilliatt remained hanging there a moment dizzy.

He was sufficiently master of himself not to let go his hold of the cord.

A few moments passed in jerks and oscillations before he could catch the cord with his feet; but he succeeded at last.

Recovering himself, and holding the cord at last between his naked feet as with two hands, he gazed into the depth below.

He had no anxiety about the length of the cord, which had[Pg 202] many a time served him for great heights. The cord, in fact, trailed upon the deck of the Durande.

Assured of being able to descend again, he began to climb hand over hand, and still clinging with his feet.

In a few moments he had gained the summit.

Never before had any creature without wings found a footing there. The plateau was covered in parts with the dung of birds. It was an irregular trapezium, a mass struck off from the colossal granitic prism of the Great Douvre. This block was hollowed in the centre like a basin—a work of the rain.

Gilliatt, in fact, had guessed correctly.

At the southern angle of the block, he found a mass of superimposed rocks, probably fragments of the fallen summit. These rocks, looking like a heap of giant paving-stones, would have left room for a wild beast, if one could have found its way there, to secrete himself between them. They supported themselves confusedly one against the other, leaving interstices like a heap of ruins. They formed neither grottoes nor

caves, but the pile was full of holes like a sponge. One of these holes was large enough to admit a man.

This recess had a flooring of moss and a few tufts of grass. Gilliatt could fit himself in it as in a kind of sheath. The recess at its entrance was about two feet high. It contracted towards the bottom. Stone coffins sometimes have this form. The mass of rocks behind lying towards the south-west, the recess was sheltered from the showers, but was open to the cold north wind.

Gilliatt was satisfied with the place.

The two chief problems were solved; the sloop had a harbour, and he had found a shelter.

The chief merit of his cave was its accessibility from the wreck.

The grappling-iron of the knotted cord having fallen between two blocks, had become firmly hooked, but Gilliatt rendered it more difficult to give way by rolling a huge stone upon it.

He was now free to operate at leisure upon the Durande.

Henceforth he was at home.

The Great Douvre was his dwelling; the Durande was his workshop.

Nothing was more simple for him than going to and fro, ascending and descending.

He dropped down easily by the knotted cord on to the deck.[Pg 203]

The day's work was a good one, the enterprise had begun well; he was satisfied, and began to feel hungry.

He untied his basket of provisions, opened his knife, cut a slice of smoked beef, took a bite out of his brown loaf, drank a draught from his can of fresh water, and supped admirably.

To do well and eat well are two satisfactions. A full stomach resembles an easy conscience.

This supper was ended, and there was still before him a little more daylight. He took advantage of it to begin the lightening of the wreck—an urgent necessity.

He had passed part of the day in gathering up the fragments. He put on one side, in the strong compartment which contained the machine, all that might become of use to him, such as wood, iron, cordage, and canvas. What was useless he cast into the sea.

The cargo of the sloop hoisted on to the deck by the capstan, compact as he had made it, was an encumbrance. Gilliatt surveyed the species of niche, at a height within his reach, in the side of the Little Douvre. These natural closets, not shut in, it is true, are often seen in the rocks. It struck him that it was possible to trust some stores to this depôt, and he accordingly placed in the back of the recess his two boxes containing his tools and his clothing, and his two bags holding the rye-meal and the biscuit. In the front—a little too near the edge perhaps, but he had no other place—he rested his basket of provisions.

He had taken care to remove from the box of clothing his sheepskin, his loose coat with a hood, and his waterproof overalls.

To lessen the hold of the wind upon the knotted cord, he made the lower extremity fast to one of the riders of the Durande.

The Durande being much driven in, this rider was bent a good deal, and it held the end of the cord as firmly as a tight hand.

There was still the difficulty of the upper end of the cord. To control the lower part was well, but at the summit of the escarpment at the spot where the knotted cord met the ridge of the plateau, there was reason to fear that it would be fretted and worn away by the sharp angle of the rock.

Gilliatt searched in the heap of rubbish in reserve, and took from it some rags of sail-cloth, and from a bunch of old cables he pulled out some strands of rope-yarn with which he filled his pockets.

A sailor would have guessed that he intended to bind with[Pg 204] these pieces of sail-cloth and ends of yarn the part of the knotted rope upon the edge of the rock, so as to preserve it from all friction—an operation which is called “keckling.”

Having provided himself with these things, he drew on his overalls over his legs, put on his waterproof coat over his jacket, drew its hood over his red cap, hung the sheepskin round his neck by the two legs, and clothed in this complete panoply, he grasped the cord, now firmly fixed to the side of the Great Douvre, and mounted to the assault of that sombre citadel in the sea.

In spite of his scratched hands, Gilliatt easily regained the summit.

The last pale tints of sunset were fading in the sky. It was night upon the sea below. A little light still lingered upon the height of the Douvre.

Gilliatt took advantage of this remains of daylight to bind the knotted rope. He wound it round again and again at the part which passed over the edge of the rock, with a bandage of several thicknesses of canvas strongly tied at every turn. The whole resembled in some degree the padding which actresses place upon their knees, to prepare them for the agonies and supplications of the fifth act.

This binding completely accomplished, Gilliatt rose from his stooping position.

For some moments, while he had been busied in his task, he had had a confused sense of a singular fluttering in the air.

It resembled, in the silence of the evening, the noise which an immense bat might make with the beating of its wings.

Gilliatt raised his eyes.

A great black circle was revolving over his head in the pale twilight sky.

Such circles are seen in pictures round the heads of saints. These, however, are golden on a dark ground, while the circle around Gilliatt was dark upon a pale ground. The effect was strange. It spread round the Great Douvre like the aureole of night.

The circle drew nearer, then retired; grew narrower, and then spread wide again.

It was an immense flight of gulls, seamews, and cormorants; a vast multitude of affrighted sea birds.

The Great Douvre was probably their lodging, and they were coming to rest for the night. Gilliatt had taken a chamber in[Pg 205] their home. It was evident that their unexpected fellow-lodger disturbed them.

A man there was an object they had never beheld before.

Their wild flutter continued for some time.

They seemed to be waiting for the stranger to leave the place.

Gilliatt followed them dreamily with his eyes.

The flying multitude seemed at last to give up their design. The circle suddenly took a spiral form, and the cloud of sea birds came down upon “The Man Rock” at the extremity of the group, where they seemed to be conferring and deliberating.

Gilliatt, after settling down in his alcove of granite, and covering a stone for a pillow for his head, could hear the birds for a long time chattering one after the other, or croaking, as if in turns.

Then they were silent, and all were sleeping—the birds upon their rock, Gilliatt upon his.