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**THE MAN WHO LAUGHS**









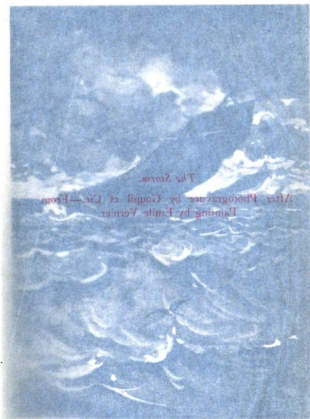


WORKS OF  
VICTOR HUGO

Volume 6  
*The Storm.*

After Photogravure by Goupil et Cie.—From  
Painting by Emile Vernier.

THE MAN WHO LAUGHS  
CLAUDE GUEUX



The Storm.  
After Photographs by Goupil et Cie—From  
Painting by Emile Vermeer

Edition De Luxe

WORKS OF  
**VICTOR HUGO**

Volume 6



THE MAN WHO LAUGHS  
CLAUDE GUEUX

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## CRITICAL NOTE

BY

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

In *The Man Who Laughs*, it was Hugo's object to "denounce" (as he would say himself) the aristocratic principle as it was exhibited in England; and this purpose, somewhat more unmitigatedly satiric than that of the two last, must answer for much that is unpleasant in the book. The repulsiveness of the scheme of the story, and the manner in which it is bound up with impossibilities and absurdities, discourage the reader at the outset, and it needs an effort to take it as seriously as it deserves. And yet when we judge it deliberately, it will be seen that, here again, the story is admirably adapted to the moral. The constructive ingenuity exhibited throughout is almost morbid. Nothing could be more happily imagined, as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the aristocratic principle, than the adventures of Gwynplaine, the itinerant mountebank, snatched suddenly out of his little way of life, and installed without preparation as one of the hereditary legislators of a great country. It is with a very bitter irony that the paper, on which all this depends, is left to float for years at the will of wind and tide. What, again, can be finer in conception than that voice from the people heard suddenly in the House of Lords, in solemn arraignment of the pleasures and privileges of its splendid occupants? The horrible laughter, stamped forever "by order of the king" upon the face of this strange spokesman of democracy, adds yet another feature of justice to the scene; in all time, travesty has been the argument of oppression; and, in all time, the oppressed might have made

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this answer: "If I am vile, is it not your system that has made me so?" This ghastly laughter gives occasion, moreover, for the one strain of tenderness running through the web of this unpleasant story: the love of the blind girl Dea for the monster. It is a most benignant providence that thus harmoniously brings together these two misfortunes; it is one of those compensations, one of those afterthoughts of a relenting destiny, that reconcile us from time to time to the evil that is in the world; the atmosphere of the book is purified by the presence of this pathetic love; it seems to be above the story somehow, and not of it, as the full moon over the night of some foul and feverish city.

There is here a quality in the narration more intimate and particular than is general with Hugo; but it must be owned, on the other hand, that the book is wordy, and even, now and then, a little wearisome. Ursus and his wolf are pleasant enough companions; but the former is nearly as much an abstract type as the latter. There is a beginning, also, of an abuse of conventional conversation, such as may be quite pardonable in the drama where needs must, but is without excuse in the romance. Lastly, I suppose one must say a word or two about the weak points of this not immaculate novel; and if so, it will be best to distinguish at once. The large family of English blunders, to which we have alluded already in speaking of *The Toilers of the Sea*, are of a sort that is really indifferent in art. If Shakespeare makes his ships cast anchor by some seaport of Bohemia, if Hugo imagines Tom-Tim-Jack to be a likely nickname for an English sailor, or if either Shakespeare, or Hugo, or Scott, for that matter, be guilty of "figments enough to confuse the march of a whole history— anachronisms enough to upset all chronology,"\* the life of their creations, the artistic truth and accuracy of their work, is not so much as compromised. But when we come upon a passage like the sinking of the "Ourque" in this romance,

\* Prefatory letter to *Peveril of the Peak*.



we can do nothing but cover our face with our hands: the conscientious reader feels a sort of disgrace in the very reading. For such artistic falsehoods, springing from what I have called already an unprincipled avidity after effect, no amount of blame can be exaggerated; and above all, when the criminal is such a man as Victor Hugo. We cannot forgive in him what we might have passed over in a third-rate sensation novelist. Little as he seems to know of the sea and nautical affairs, he must have known very well that vessels do not go down as he makes the "Ourque" go down; he must have known that such a liberty with fact was against the laws of the game, and incompatible with all appearance of sincerity in conception or workmanship.



## PREFACE

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**I**N England, everything is great, even what is not good,— even Oligarchy. The English Patriciate is the patriciate in the absolute sense of the word. No more illustrious, more terrible, or more vigorous feudality exists. Let us add that this feudality has been useful at times. It is in England that the phenomenon of Seigneurie must be studied, as in France the phenomenon of Royalty must be studied.

The true title of this book should be "Aristocracy." Another book that will follow may, perhaps, be entitled "Monarchy." These two books, if it is given to the author to finish his task, will precede and introduce another, to be called "Ninety-Three."

HAUTEVILLE HOUSE, 1869.



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# THE MAN WHO LAUGHS

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## PART I

### THE SEA AND THE NIGHT

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#### I

### TWO PRELIMINARY CHAPTERS

#### URSUS

#### I

**U**RSUS and Homo were fast friends. Ursus was a man, Homo a wolf. Their dispositions corresponded. It was the man who had christened the wolf: probably he had also chosen his own name. Having found "Ursus" fit for himself, he had found "Homo" fit for the beast. Man and wolf turned their partnership to account at fairs, at village *fêtes*, at the corners of streets where passers-by throng, and out of the desire which people seem to feel to listen to idle nonsense, and to buy quack medicine. The wolf, gentle and courteously subordinate, diverted the crowd. It is a pleasant thing to behold the tameness of animals. Our greatest delight is to see all the varieties capable of domestication parade before us. It is this feeling that brings so many people out to view a royal *cortège*.

Ursus and Homo went about from cross-road to cross-road, from the High Street of Aberystwith to the High Street of Jedburgh, from country-side to country-side, from shire to shire, from town to town. One market exhausted, they went on to another. Ursus lived in a small van upon wheels, which Homo was civilized enough to draw by day and guard by night. On bad roads, up hills, and where there were too many ruts, or there was too much mud, the man buckled the trace round his neck and pulled fraternally, side by side, with the wolf. They had thus grown old together. They encamped at hap-hazard on a common, in the glade of a wood, on the waste patch of grass where roads intersect, at the outskirts of villages, at the gates of towns, in market-places, in public walks, on the borders of parks, or before the entrances of churches. When the cart drew up on a fair ground, where the gossips ran up open-mouthed and the curious formed a circle round the pair, Ursus harangued and Homo approved. Then Homo, with a 'owl in his mouth, politely made a collection among the audience. Thus they earned their livelihood. The wolf was lettered, likewise the man. The wolf had been trained by the man, or had trained himself unassisted, to divers wolfish tricks, which swelled the receipts. "Above all things, do not degenerate into a man," his friend would say to him.

The wolf never bit: the man did, now and then. At least, that was his intention. He was a misanthrope, and to increase his misanthropy he had made himself a juggler: to live, also; for the stomach has to be consulted. Moreover, this juggler-misanthrope, whether to add to the complexity of his being or to perfect it, was a doctor. To be a doctor is nothing: Ursus was also a ventriloquist. You could hear him speak without his moving his lips. He counterfeited, so as to deceive you, any one's accent or pronunciation. He imitated voices so exactly that you believed you heard the people themselves. All alone he could simulate the murmur of a crowd; and this gave him a right to the title of Engastrimythos, which he took. He reproduced the notes of

all kinds of birds,—as of the thrush, the wren, the pipit lark, otherwise called the grey cheeper, and the ring ousel,—all travellers like himself; so that at times, when the fancy struck him, he made you aware either of a public thoroughfare filled with the uproar of men, or of a meadow loud with the voices of beasts,—at one time stormy as a multitude, at another fresh and serene as the dawn. Such gifts, although rare, exist. In the last century a man called Touzel, who imitated the mingled utterances of men and animals, and who counterfeited all the cries of wild beasts, was attached to the person of Buffon,—to serve as a menagerie.

Ursus was sagacious, contradictory, odd, and inclined to the singular expositions which we call fables. He even pretended to believe in them; and this impudence was a part of his humour. He read people's hands; opened books at random and drew conclusions; told fortunes; taught that it is dangerous to meet a black mare, and still more dangerous, as you start a journey, to hear yourself accosted by one who does not know whither you are going. He called himself a dealer in superstitions. He used to say: "There is one difference between me and the Archbishop of Canterbury: I avow what I am." Hence it was that the archbishop, justly indignant, summoned him before him one day; but Ursus cleverly disarmed his Grace by reciting a sermon he had composed upon Christmas-day, which the delighted archbishop learned by heart, and delivered from the pulpit as his own. In consideration thereof, the archbishop pardoned Ursus.

As a doctor, Ursus wrought cures by varied means. He made use of aromatics; he was versed in simples; he made the most of the immense power which lies in a heap of neglected plants, such as the hazel, the catkin, the white alder, the white briony, the mealy-tree, the traveller's joy, the buckthorn. He treated phthisis with the sun-dew; at opportune moments he would use the leaves of the spurge, which plucked at the bottom are a purgative, and plucked at the top an emetic. He cured sore throat by means of the vegetable excrescence called "Jews' ear." He knew the

rush which cures the ox, and the mint which cures the horse. He was well acquainted with the beauties and virtues of the herb mandragora, which, as every one knows, is of both sexes. He had many recipes. He cured burns with salamander wool, — of which, according to Pliny, Nero had a napkin. Ursus possessed a retort and a flask; he effected transmutations; he sold panaceas. It was said that he had once been for a short time in Bedlam; they had done him the honour to take him for a madman, but had set him free on discovering that he was only a poet. This story was probably not true; we all have to submit to some such absurd reports about ourselves.

The fact is, Ursus was a bit of a savant, a man of taste, and an old Latin poet. He was skilled in two forms of verse,— he Hippocratized and he Pindarized. He could have vied in bombast with Rapin and Vida. He could have composed Jesuit tragedies in a style no less successful than that of Father Bouhours. It followed from his familiarity with the venerable rhythms and metres of the ancients that he had peculiar figures of speech, and a whole family of classical metaphors at his command. He would say of a mother followed by her two daughters, "There is a dactyl;" of a father preceded by his two sons, "There is an anapæst;" and of a little child walking between its grandmother and grandfather, "There is an amphimacer." So much knowledge could only end in starvation. The school of Salerno says, "Eat little and often." Ursus ate little and seldom, thus obeying one half the precept and disobeying the other; but this was the fault of the public, who did not always flock to hear him, and who did not often buy.

Ursus was wont to say: "The expectoration of a sentence is a relief. The wolf is comforted by its howl, the sheep by its wool, the forest by its finch, woman by her love, and the philosopher by his epiphomena." Ursus at a pinch composed comedies, which he all but acted in recital; this helped to sell the drugs. Among other works, he composed an heroic pastoral in honour of Sir Hugh Middleton, who in 1608 brought a river to London. The river was lying peacefully

in Hertfordshire, twenty miles from London: the knight came and took possession of it. He brought a brigade of six hundred men, armed with shovels and pickaxes; set to breaking up the ground, scooping it out in one place, raising it in another,—now thirty feet high, now twenty feet deep; made wooden aqueducts high in air; and at different points constructed eight hundred bridges of stone, bricks, and timber. One fine morning the river entered London, which was short of water. Ursus transformed all these vulgar details into a fine Eclogue between the Thames and the New River, in which the former invited the latter to come to him, saying, "I am too old to please women, but I am rich enough to pay them,"—an ingenious and gallant conceit to indicate how Sir Hugh Middleton had completed the work at his own expense.

Ursus was great in soliloquy. Of a disposition at once unsociable and talkative, desiring to see no one, yet longing to converse with some one, he solved the difficulty by talking to himself. Any one who has lived a solitary life knows how deeply seated monologue is in one's nature. Speech imprisoned longs to find a vent. To harangue space is an outlet. To talk out loud when one is alone is as it were to have a dialogue with the divinity within. It was, as is well known, a habit with Socrates; he declaimed to himself. Luther did the same. Ursus took after those great men. He had the hermaphrodite faculty of being his own audience. He questioned himself, answered himself, praised himself, blamed himself. You heard him in the street soliloquizing in his van. The passers-by, who have their own way of appreciating clever people, used to say, "He is an idiot." As we have just observed, he abused himself at times; but there were times also when he did himself justice. One day, in one of these allocutions addressed to himself, he was heard to cry out: "I have studied vegetation in all its mysteries,—in the stalk, in the bud, in the sepal, in the stamen, in the carpel, in the ovule, in the spore, in the theca, and in the apothecium. I have thoroughly sifted chromatrics, osmosis,

and chymosis; that is to say, the formation of colours, of smell, and of taste." There was something fatuous, doubtless, in this certificate which Ursus gave to Ursus; but let those who have thoroughly sifted chromatrics, osmosis, and chymosis cast the first stone at him.

Fortunately, Ursus had never gone into the Low Countries; there they would certainly have weighed him, to ascertain whether he was of the normal weight, above or below which a man is a sorcerer. In Holland this weight was sagely fixed by law. Nothing was simpler or more ingenious. It was a clear test. They put you in a scale, and the evidence was conclusive. Too heavy, you were hanged; too light, you were burned. To this day the scales in which sorcerers were weighed may be seen at Oudewater; but they are now used for weighing cheeses. How religion has degenerated! Ursus would certainly have had a crow to pluck with those scales. In his travels he kept away from Holland, and he was wise. Indeed, we believe that he never roved beyond the limits of Great Britain.

However this may have been, he was very poor and morose; and having made the acquaintance of Homo in a wood, a taste for a wandering life came over him. So he took the wolf into partnership, and with him went forth on the highways, living in the open air the great life of chance. He had a great deal of industry and caution, and great skill in everything connected with healing operations, restoring the sick to health, and working wonders peculiar to himself. He was considered a clever mountebank and a good doctor. As may be imagined, he passed for a wizard as well: not much indeed,—only a little; for it was unwholesome in those days to be considered a friend of the devil. To tell the truth, Ursus, by his passion for pharmacy and his love of plants, laid himself open to suspicion, seeing that he often went to gather herbs in rough thickets where Lucifer's salads grew, and where, as had been proved by the Counsellor De l'Ancre, there is a risk of meeting in the evening mist a man who comes out of the earth, "blind in the right eye, bare-footed, without



"The little house on wheels belonged to Ursus and to the wolf."

*The Man Who Laughs. Vol. I, Page 7.*





a cloak, and with a sword by his side." But for the matter of that, Ursus, although eccentric in manner and disposition, was too good a fellow to invoke or disperse hail, to make faces appear, to kill a man with the torment of excessive dancing, to suggest dreams fair or foul and full of terror, and to cause the birth of cocks with four wings. He had no such mischievous tricks. He was incapable of certain abominations,—such for instance as speaking German, Hebrew, or Greek, without having learned them, which is a sign of unpardonable wickedness, or of a natural infirmity proceeding from a morbid humour. If Ursus spoke Latin, it was because he knew it. He would never have allowed himself to speak Syriac, which he did not know. Besides, it is asserted that Syriac is the language spoken in the midnight meetings at which uncanny people worship the devil. In medicine, he justly preferred Galen to Cardan,—Cardan, although a learned man, being but an earthworm in comparison with Galen.

To sum up, Ursus was not one of those persons who live in fear of the police. His van was long enough and wide enough to allow of his lying down in it on a box containing his not very sumptuous apparel. He owned a lantern, several wigs, and some utensils suspended from nails, among which were musical instruments. He possessed, besides, a bearskin with which he covered himself on his days of grand performance. He called this putting on full dress. He used to say, "I have two skins: this is the real one," pointing to the bearskin.

The little house on wheels belonged to himself and to the wolf. Besides his house, his retort, and his wolf, he owned a flute and a violoncello on which he played prettily. He concocted his own elixirs. His wits yielded him enough to sup on sometimes. In the top of his van was a hole, through which the pipe of a cast-iron stove passed so close to his box as to scorch the wood of it. The stove had two compartments: in one of them Ursus cooked his chemicals, and in the other his potatoes. At night the wolf slept under the van,

amicably secured by a chain. Homo's hair was black, that of Ursus grey. Ursus was fifty,— unless, indeed, he was sixty. He accepted his destiny to such an extent that, as we have just seen, he ate potatoes,—the trash on which at that time pigs and convicts were fed. He ate them sadly, but resignedly. He was not tall,— he was long. He was bent and melancholy. The bowed frame of an old man is the settlement in the architecture of life. Nature had formed him for sadness. He found it difficult to smile, and he had never been able to weep; so that he was deprived of the consolation of tears, as well as of the palliative of joy. An old man is a thinking ruin; and such a ruin was Ursus. He had the loquacity of a charlatan, the leanness of a prophet, the irascibility of a charged mine; such was Ursus. In his youth he had been a philosopher in the house of a lord.

This was a hundred and eighty years ago, when men were more like wolves than they are now. Not so very much though.

## II

Homo was no ordinary wolf. From his appetite for medlars and potatoes he might have been taken for a prairie wolf; from his dark hide, for a lycaon; and from his bark prolonged into a howl, for a Chilian dog. But no one has as yet examined the eye-ball of a Chilian dog sufficiently to determine whether he be not a fox; and Homo was a real wolf. He was five feet long, which is a fine length for a wolf, even in Lithuania; he was very strong; he looked at you askance, which was not his fault; he had a soft tongue, with which he occasionally licked Ursus; he had a narrow brush of short bristles on his backbone, and he was lean with the wholesome leanness of a forest life. Before he knew Ursus and had a carriage to draw, he thought nothing of doing his fifty miles a night. Ursus meeting him in a thicket near a stream of running water had conceived a high opinion of him from seeing the skill and sagacity with which he

fished out crawfish, and welcomed him as an honest and genuine Koupara wolf of the kind called crab-eater.

As a beast of burden, Ursus preferred Homo to a donkey. He would have felt a repugnance to having his hut drawn by an ass; he thought too highly of the ass for that. Moreover, he had observed that the ass, a four-legged thinker little understood by men, has a habit of cocking his ears uneasily when philosophers talk nonsense. In life the ass counts as a third person between our thoughts and ourselves, and acts as a restraint. As a friend, Ursus preferred Homo to a dog, considering that the love of a wolf is more rare.

Hence it was that Homo sufficed for Ursus. Homo was for Ursus more than a companion, he was an analogue. Ursus used to pat the wolf's empty ribs, and say, "I have found the second volume of myself!" Again he said, "When I am dead, any one wishing to know me need only study Homo. I shall leave him as a true copy behind me."

The English law, which is not very lenient to beasts of the forest, might have picked a quarrel with the wolf, and punished him for his assurance in going freely about the towns; but Homo took advantage of the immunity granted by a statute of Edward IV. to servants. "Every servant in attendance on his master is free to come and go." Besides, a certain relaxation of the law had resulted with regard to wolves, in consequence of its being the fashion of the ladies of the Court under the later Stuarts to have, instead of dogs, little wolves, called "adives," about the size of cats, which were brought from Asia at great cost.

Ursus had taught Homo a portion of his accomplishments,—such as to stand upright, to restrain his rage into sulkiness, to growl instead of howl, etc.; and on his part, the wolf had taught the man what *he* knew,—to do without a roof, without bread and fire,—and to prefer hunger in the woods to slavery in a palace.

This van, which served both as a dwelling and a vehicle, and which had travelled so many different roads without

ever leaving Great Britain, had four wheels, with shafts for the wolf and a cross-bar for the man. The cross-bar came into use when the roads were bad. The van was strong, although it was built of light boards like a dove-cote. In front there was a glass door with a little balcony used for orations, which had something of the character of the platform tempered by the air of a pulpit. At the back there was a panelled door. By lowering three steps, which turned on a hinge below the door, access was gained to the hut, which at night was securely fastened with bolt and lock. Rain and snow had fallen plentifully on it; it had been painted, but in what colour it was difficult to say, changes of season being to vans what changes of reign are to courtiers. In front, outside, was a board,—a kind of frontispiece,—on which the following inscription might once have been deciphered; it was in black letters on a white ground, but by degrees the characters had become confused and blurred:—

"By friction, gold loses every year a fourteen hundredth part of its bulk. This is what is called the Wear. Hence it follows that on fourteen hundred millions of gold in circulation throughout the world, one million is lost annually. This million dissolves into dust, flies away, floats about, is reduced to atoms, drugs, weighs down consciences, amalgamates with the souls of the rich whom it renders proud, and with those of the poor whom it renders brutish."

The inscription, rubbed and blotted by the rain and by the kindness of Nature, was fortunately illegible, for it is possible that the philosophical remarks concerning the circulation of gold might not have been to the taste of the sheriffs, the provost-marshals, and other big-wigs of the law. English legislation did not trifle in those days. It did not take much to make a man a felon. The magistrates were ferocious by tradition, and cruelty was a matter of routine. The judges of assize increased and multiplied. Jefferies had become a breeder of whelps.

## III

IN the interior of the van there were two other inscriptions. Above the locker, on a whitewashed plank, a hand had written in ink as follows:—

## THE ONLY THINGS NECESSARY TO KNOW.

The baron, peer of England, wears a cap with six pearls. The coronet begins with the rank of viscount. The viscount wears a coronet of which the pearls are without number. The earl, a coronet with the pearls upon points, mingled with strawberry leaves placed low between. The marquis, one with pearls and leaves on the same level. The duke, one with strawberry leaves alone,—no pearls. The royal duke, a circlet of crosses and *fleurs-de-lis*. The Prince of Wales, crown like that of the king, but unclosed.

The duke is "most high and most puissant prince," the marquis and earl "most noble and puissant lord," the viscount "noble and puissant lord," the baron "trusty lord." The duke is "his Grace;" the other Peers their "Lordships." "Most honourable" is higher than "right honourable."

Lords who are peers are lords in their own right. Lords who are not peers are lords by courtesy:—there are no real lords, excepting such as are peers.

The House of Lords is a chamber and a court, *Concilium et Curia*, legislature and court of justice. The Commons, who are the people, when ordered to the bar of the Lords, humbly present themselves bareheaded before the peers, who remain covered. The Commons send up their bills by forty members, who present the bill with three low bows. The Lords send their bills to the Commons by a mere clerk. In case of disagreement, the two Houses confer in the Painted Chamber, the Peers seated and covered, the Commons standing and bareheaded.

Peers go to Parliament in their coaches in file; the Commons do not. Some peers go to Westminster in open four-wheeled chariots. The use of these and of coaches emblazoned with coats-of-arms and coronets is allowed only to Peers, and forms a portion of their dignity.

Barons have the same rank as bishops. To be a baron peer of England, it is necessary to be in possession of a tenure from the king *per Baroniam integram*, by full barony. The full barony consists of thirteen knights' fees and one third part, each knight's fee being of the value of twenty pounds sterling, which makes in all four hundred marks. The head of a barony (*caput baroniae*) is a castle disposed by inheritance, as England herself,—that is to say, descending to daughters if there be no sons, and in that case going to the eldest daughter, *ceteris filiabus aliunde satisfactis*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As much as to say, the other daughters are provided for as best may be. (Note by Ursus on the margin of the wall.)

Barons have the degree of lord,—in Saxon, *laford*; *dominus* in high Latin; *Lordus* in low Latin. The eldest and younger sons of viscounts and barons are the first esquires in the kingdom. The eldest sons of peers take precedence of knights of the garter. The younger sons do not. The eldest son of a viscount comes after all barons, and precedes all baronets. Every daughter of a peer is a "Lady." Other English girls are plain "Mistress."

All judges rank below peers. The sergeant wears a lambskin tippet; the judge one of vair, *de minuto vario*, made up of a variety of little white furs, always excepting ermine. Ermine is reserved for peers and the king.

A lord never takes an oath, either to the crown or the law. His word suffices; he says, "Upon my honour."

By a law of Edward the Sixth, peers have the privilege of committing manslaughter. A peer who kills a man without premeditation is not prosecuted.

The persons of peers are inviolable. A peer cannot be held in duress, save in the Tower of London. A writ of *supplicavit* cannot be granted against a peer. A peer sent for by the king has the right to kill one or two deer in the royal park. A peer holds in his castle a baron's court of justice. It is unworthy of a peer to walk the street in a cloak, followed by two footmen; he should only show himself attended by a great train of gentlemen of his household. A peer can be amerced only by his peers, and never to any greater amount than five pounds, excepting in the case of a duke, who can be amerced ten. A peer may retain six aliens born, any other Englishman but four. A peer can have wine custom-free; an earl eight tuns. A peer is alone exempt from presenting himself before the sheriff of the circuit. A peer cannot be assessed towards the militia. When it pleases a peer he raises a regiment and gives it to the king; thus have done their graces the Dukes of Athol, Hamilton, and Northumberland. A peer can hold only of a peer; in a civil cause he can demand the adjournment of the case, if there be not at least one knight on the jury. A peer nominates his own chaplains; a baron appoints three chaplains, a viscount four, an earl and a marquis five, a duke six. A peer cannot be put to the rack, even for high treason. A peer cannot be branded on the hand. A peer is a clerk, though he knows not how to read; in law he knows.

A duke has a right to a canopy, or cloth of state, in all places where the king is not present; a viscount may have one in his house; a baron has a cover of assay, which may be held under his cup while he drinks. A baroness has the right to have her train borne by a man in the presence of a viscountess.

Eighty-six tables, with five hundred dishes, are served every day in the royal palace at each meal.

If a plebeian strike a lord, his hand is cut off.

A lord is very nearly a king; the king is very nearly a god.

The earth is a lordship.

The English address God as "my lord!"

Opposite this writing was written a second one, in the same fashion, which ran thus:—

SATISFACTION WHICH MUST SUFFICE THOSE WHO HAVE NOTHING.

Henry Auverquerque, Earl of Grantham, who sits in the House of Lords between the Earl of Jersey and the Earl of Greenwich, has a hundred thousand a year. To his lordship belongs the palace of Grantham Terrace, built all of marble and famous for what is called the labyrinth of passages,—a curiosity which contains the scarlet corridor in marble of Saracolin; the brown corridor in lumachel of Astracan; the white corridor in marble of Lani; the black corridor in marble of Alabanda; the grey corridor in marble of Staremma; the yellow corridor in marble of Hesse; the green corridor in marble of the Tyrol; the red corridor, half cherry-spotted marble of Bohemia, half lumachel of Cordova; the blue corridor in turquin of Genoa; the violet corridor in granite of Catalonia; the mourning-hued corridor veined black and white in slate of Murviedro; the pink corridor in cipolin of the Alps; the pearl corridor in lumachel of Nonetta; and the corridor of all colours, called "the courtiers' corridor," in motley.

Richard Lowther, Viscount Lonsdale, owns Lowther in Westmoreland, which has a magnificent approach, and a flight of entrance steps which seems to invite the ingress of kings.

Richard, Earl of Scarborough, Viscount and Baron Lumley of Lumley Castle, Viscount Lumley of Waterford in Ireland, and Lord Lieutenant and Vice-Admiral of the county of Northumberland and of Durham, both city and county, owns the double castleward of old and new Sandbeck, where you admire a superb railing, in the form of a semicircle, surrounding the basin of a matchless fountain. He has, besides, his castle of Lumley.

Robert Darcy, Earl of Holderness, has his domain of Holderness, with baronial towers, and large gardens laid out in French fashion, where he drives in his coach-and-six, preceded by two outriders, as becomes a peer of England.

Charles Beauclerc, Duke of St. Alban's, Earl of Burford, Baron Heddington, Grand Falconer of England, has an abode at Windsor, regal even in comparison with the king's.

Charles Bodville Robartes, Baron Robartes of Truro, Viscount Bodmin and Earl of Radnor, owns Wimpole in Cambridgeshire, which is really three palaces in one, having three façades, one bowed and two triangular. The approach is by an avenue of trees four deep.

The most noble and most puissant Lord Philip, Baron Herbert of Cardiff, Earl of Montgomery and of Pembroke, Ross of Kendall, Parr, Fitzhugh, Marmion, St. Quentin, and Herbert of Shurland, Warden of the Stannaries in the counties of Cornwall and Devon, hereditary visitor of Jesus College, possesses the wonderful gardens at Wilton, where there are two sheaf-like fountains, finer than those of his most Christian Majesty King Louis XIV. at Versailles.

Charles Seymour, Duke of Somerset, owns Somerset House on the Thames, which is equal to the Villa Pamphili at Rome. On the chim-

ney-piece are seen two porcelain vases of the dynasty of Yuen, which are worth half a million in French money.

In Yorkshire, Arthur, Lord Ingram, Viscount Irwin, has Temple Newsam, which is entered under a triumphal arch, and which has large wide roofs resembling Moorish terraces.

Robert, Lord Ferrers of Chartly, Bouchier and Louvaine, has Staunton Harold in Leicestershire, of which the park is geometrically planned in the shape of a temple with a façade, and in front of the piece of water is the great church with the square belfry, which belongs to his lordship.

In the county of Northampton, Charles Spencer, Earl of Sunderland, member of His Majesty's Privy Council, possesses Althorp, at the entrance of which is a railing with four columns surmounted by groups in marble.

Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester, has, in Surrey, New Park, rendered magnificent by its sculptured pinnacles, its circular lawn belted by trees, and its woodland, at the extremity of which is a little mountain, artistically rounded, and surmounted by a large oak, which can be seen from afar.

Philip Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, possesses Brethby Hall in Derbyshire, with a splendid clock tower, falconries, warrens, and very fine sheets of water, long, square, and oval, one of which is shaped like a mirror, and has two jets, which throw the water to a great height.

Charles Cornwallis, Baron Cornwallis of Eye, owns Broome Hall, a palace of the fourteenth century.

The most noble Algernon Capel, Viscount Malden, Earl of Essex, has Cashobury in Hertfordshire, a country-seat which is in the shape of a capital H, and which rejoices sportsmen with its abundance of game.

Charles, Lord Ossulston, owns Darnley in Middlesex, approached by Italian gardens.

James Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, has, seven leagues from London, Hatfield House, with its four lordly pavilions, its belfry in the centre, and its grand courtyard of black and white slabs, like that of St. Germain. This palace, which has a frontage two hundred and seventy-two feet in length, was built in the reign of James I. by the Lord High Treasurer of England, the great-grandfather of the present earl. To be seen there is the bed of one of the Countesses of Salisbury; it is of inestimable value and made entirely of Brazilian wood, which is a panacea against the bites of serpents, and which is called *milhombres*, that is to say "a thousand men." On this bed is inscribed, *Honi soit qui mal y pense*.

Edward Rich, Earl of Warwick and Holland, is owner of Warwick Castle, where whole oaks are burnt in the fire-places.

In the parish of Sevenoaks, Charles Sackville, Baron Buckhurst, Baron Cranfield, Earl of Dorset and Middlesex, is owner of Knowle, which is as large as a town and is composed of three palaces standing parallel one behind the other, like ranks of infantry. There are six gables in steps on the principal frontage, and a gate under a keep with four towers.



Thomas Thynne, Baron Thynne of Warminster, and Viscount Weymouth, possesses Longleat, in which there are as many chimneys, cupolas, pinnacles, pavilions, and turrets, as at Chambord, in France, which belongs to the king.

Henry Howard, Earl of Suffolk, owns, twelve leagues from London, the palace of Audley End in Essex, which in grandeur and dignity scarcely yields the palm to the Escorial of the King of Spain.

In Bedfordshire, Wrest House and Park, which is a whole district, enclosed by ditches, walls, woodlands, rivers, and hills, belongs to Henry, Marquis of Kent.

Hampton Court, in Herefordshire, with its strong embattled keep, and its gardens bounded by a piece of water which divides them from the forest, belongs to Thomas, Lord Coningsby.

Grimsthorp, in Lincolnshire,—with its long façade broken by turrets; its park, its fish-ponds, its pheasantries, its sheep-folds, its lawns; its grounds planted with rows of trees; its groves, its walks, its shrubberies; its flower-beds and borders, formed in square and lozenge-shape, and resembling great carpets; its race-courses, and the majestic sweep for carriages to turn in at the entrance of the house,—belongs to Robert, Earl Lindsey, hereditary lord of the forest of Waltham.

Up Park, in Sussex, a square house, with two symmetrical befried pavilions on each side of the great courtyard, belongs to the Right Honourable Forde, Baron Grey of Werke, Viscount Glendale and Earl of Tankerville.

Newnham Paddox, in Warwickshire, which has two quadrangular fish-ponds and a gabled archway with a large window of four panes, belongs to the Earl of Denbigh, who is also Count von Rheinfelden in Germany.

Wytham Abbey, in Berkshire, with its French garden in which there are four curiously trimmed arbors, and its great embattled towers supported by two bastions, belongs to Montague, Earl of Abingdon, who also owns Rycote, of which he is Baron, and the principal door of which bears the device *Virtus ariete fortior*.

William Cavendish, Duke of Devonshire, has six dwelling-places, of which Chatsworth (two-storied, and of the finest order of Grecian architecture) is one.

The Viscount of Kinalmeaky, who is Earl of Cork, in Ireland, is owner of Burlington House, Piccadilly, with its extensive gardens, reaching to the fields outside London; he is also owner of Chiswick, where there are nine magnificent *corps de logis*; he also owns Londesborough, which is a new house by the side of an old palace.

The Duke of Beaufort owns Chelsea, which contains two Gothic buildings, and a Florentine one; he has also Badminton, in Gloucestershire, a residence from which a number of avenues branch out like rays from a star. The most noble and puissant prince Henry, Duke of Beaufort, is also Marquis and Earl of Worcester, Earl of Glamorgan, Viscount Grosmont, and Baron Herbert of Chepstow, Ragland, and Gower, Baron Beaufort of Caldecott Castle, and Baron de Bottetourt.

John Holles, Duke of Newcastle, and Marquis of Clare, owns Bolscever, with its majestic square keeps; his also, is Haughton, in Notting-

hamshire, where a round pyramid, made to imitate the Tower of Babel, stands in the centre of a basin of water.

William, Earl of Craven, Viscount Uffington, and Baron Craven of Hamstead Marshall, owns Combe Abbey in Warwickshire, where is to be seen the finest water-jet in England; and in Berkshire two baronies, Hamstead Marshall, on the façade of which are five Gothic lanterns sunk in the wall, and Ashdown Park, which is a country-seat situate at the point of intersection of cross-roads in the forest.

Linnaeus, Lord Clancharlie, Baron Clancharlie and Hunkerville, Marquis of Corleone in Sicily, derives his title from the Castle of Clancharlie, built in 912 by Edward the Elder, as a defence against the Danes. Besides Hunkerville House, in London, which is a palace, he has Corleone Lodge at Windsor, which is another, and eight castles, one at Burton-on-Trent, with a royalty on the carriage of plaster of Paris; then Grumdaith, Humble, Moricambe, Trewardraith, Hell-Kesters (where there is a miraculous well), Phillimore, with its turf bogs, Reculver, near the ancient city of Vagniac, Vinecaunton, on the Moel-culle Mountain; besides nineteen boroughs and villages with reeves, and the whole of Penneth chase, all of which brings his lordship 40,000*l.* a year.

The one hundred and seventy-two peers enjoying their dignities under James II. possess among them altogether a revenue of 1,372,000*l.* sterling a year, which is the eleventh part of the revenue of England.

In the margin, opposite the last name (that of Linnaeus, Lord Clancharlie), there was a note in the handwriting of Ursus:—

“Rebel; in exile; houses, lands, and chattels sequestered. It is well.”

#### IV

URSUS admired Homo. One admires one's counterpart. That is a universal law.

To be always raging inwardly and grumbling outwardly was the normal condition of Ursus. He was the malcontent of creation. By nature he was a man ever in opposition. He took the world unkindly; he gave his approval to no one and to nothing. The bee did not atone for its sting by its honey-making; a full-blown rose did not absolve the sun for yellow fever and black vomit. It is probable that in secret Ursus criticised Providence a good deal. “Evidently,” he would say, “the devil works by a spring, and the mistake

that God made is having let go the trigger." He approved of none but princes, and he had his own peculiar way of expressing his approbation. One day, when James II. made a gift to the Virgin in a Catholic chapel in Ireland of a massive gold lamp, Ursus, passing that way with Homo, who was more indifferent to such things, burst into loud exclamations of admiration before the crowd, and exclaimed: "It is certain that the blessed Virgin needs a lamp much more than those barefooted children there need shoes."

Such proofs of his loyalty and such evidences of his respect for established powers probably contributed in no small degree to make the magistrates tolerate his vagabond life and his disreputable alliance with a wolf. Sometimes of an evening, through friendly weakness, he allowed Homo to stretch his limbs and wander about. The wolf was incapable of an abuse of confidence, and behaved in society, that is to say among men, with all the meekness of a poodle. All the same, if bad-tempered officials had to be dealt with, difficulties might arise; so Ursus kept the honest wolf chained up as much as possible.

From a political point of view his writing about gold, not very intelligible in itself, and now become undecipherable, was but a smear, and gave no handle to the enemy. Even after the time of James II., and under the "respectable" reign of William and Mary, his caravan might have been seen peacefully going its rounds of the little English country towns. He travelled freely from one end of Great Britain to the other, selling his philtres, and phials, and performing, with the assistance of his wolf, his quack mummeries; and he passed with ease through the meshes of the nets which the police of that period had spread all over England in order to catch wandering gangs, and especially to stop the progress of the Comprachicos.

This was right enough. Ursus belonged to no gang. Ursus lived with Ursus, a *tête-à-tête*, into which the wolf gently thrust his nose. If Ursus could have had his way, he would have been a Caribbee; that being impossible, he

preferred to be alone. The solitary man is a modified savage, accepted by civilization. He who wanders most is most alone; hence his continual change of place. To remain anywhere long, suffocated him with the sense of being tamed. He spent his life in moving on. The sight of towns increased his taste for brambles, thickets, thorns, and caves. His home was the forest. He did not feel much out of his element in the murmur of crowded streets, which is so like the rustling of trees. The crowd to some extent satisfies our taste for the desert. What he disliked most in his van was its having a door and windows, and thus resembling a house. He would have realized his ideal had he been able to put a cave on four wheels and travel in a den.

Ursus did not smile, as we have already said, but he used to laugh,—sometimes, indeed frequently, a bitter laugh. There is consent in a smile, while a laugh is often a refusal. His chief business was to hate the human race. He was implacable in this hatred. Having satisfied himself that human life is a dreadful thing; having observed the superposition of evils,—kings on the people, war on kings, the plague on war, famine on the plague, folly on everything; having proved a certain degree of chastisement in the mere fact of existence; having recognized that death is a deliverance,—when they brought him a sick man he cured him; and he had cordials and beverages to prolong the lives of the old. He put lame cripples on their legs again, and hurled this sarcasm at them: "There, you are on your paws once more; may you walk long in this vale of tears!" When he saw a poor man dying of hunger, he gave him all the pence he had about him, growling out: "Live on, you wretch! eat! last a long time! It is not I who would shorten your penal servitude." After which, he would rub his hands and say, "I do men all the harm I can."

Through the little window at the back, passers-by could read on the ceiling of the van these words, written within in big letters, but visible from without,—"**URSUS, PHILOSOPHER.**"

## II

## THE COMPRACHICOS

## I

WHO ever hears the word "Comprachicos" now, and who knows its meaning?

The Comprachicos, or Comprapequeños, were a hideous and nondescript association of wanderers, famous in the seventeenth century, forgotten in the eighteenth, unheard of in the nineteenth. The Comprachicos are like the "succession powder," an ancient social characteristic detail. They are part of old human ugliness. To the great eye of history, which sees everything collectively, the Comprachicos are closely connected with the colossal evil of slavery. Joseph sold by his brethren is one chapter in their history. The Comprachicos have left their traces in the penal laws of Spain and England. You find here and there in the dark confusion of English laws the impress of this horrible truth, like the foot-print of a savage in a forest.

Comprachicos, the same as Comprapequeños, is a compound Spanish word signifying "Child-buyers." The Comprachicos traded in children. They bought and sold them. They did not steal them; the kidnapping of children is another branch of industry. And what did they make of these children? Monsters. Why monsters? To laugh at. The populace must needs laugh; and kings too. The mountebank is wanted in the streets; the jester at the Louvre. The first is called a Clown; the other, a Fool. The efforts of man to provide himself with amusement are at times worthy of the attention of the philosopher.

What are we sketching in these few preliminary pages? A chapter in the most terrible of books,—a book which might be entitled, "The Farming of the Unhappy by the Happy."

## II

A CHILD destined to be a plaything for men,— such a thing has existed; such a thing exists even now. In simple and savage times such a thing constituted a special trade. The seventeenth century, called the great century, was of those times. It was a century very Byzantine in tone. It combined corrupt simplicity with delicate ferocity,— a curious variety of civilization; a tiger with a simper. Madame de Sévigné minces on the subject of the fagot and the wheel. That century traded a good deal in children. Flattering historians have concealed the sore, but have divulged the remedy,— Vincent de Paul.

In order that a human toy should prove a success, he must be taken in hand early. The dwarf must be fashioned when young. We play with childhood. But a well-formed child is not very amusing; a hunchback is better fun.

Hence grew an art. There were trainers who took a man and made him an abortion; they took a face and made a muzzle; they stunted growth; they distorted the features. The artificial production of teratological cases had its rules. It was quite a science; what one can imagine as the antithesis of orthopedy. Where God had put a look, their art put a squint; where God had made harmony, they made discord; where God had made a perfect picture, they made a caricature; and in the eyes of connoisseurs it was the caricature that was perfect. They debased animals as well; they invented piebald horses. Turenne rode a piebald horse. In our own days do we not dye dogs blue and green? Nature is our canvas. Man has always wished to add something to God's work. Man retouches creation, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. The Court buffoon was nothing but an attempt to lead man back to the monkey. It was a move in the wrong direction; a masterpiece in retrogression. At the same time they tried to make a man of the monkey. Barbara, Duchess of Cleveland and Countess of Southampton, had a marmoset for a page. Frances Sutton, Baroness Dud-

ley, eighth peeress in the bench of barons, had tea served by a baboon clad in gold brocade, which her ladyship called *My Black*. Catherine Sedley, Countess of Dorchester, used to go and take her seat in parliament in a coach with armorial bearings, behind which stood, with muzzles high up in the air, three Cape monkeys in grand livery. A Duchess of Medina-Celi, at whose toilet Cardinal Pole assisted, had her stockings put on by an ourang-outang. These monkeys thus raised in the social scale were a counter-poise to men brutalized and bestialized. This promiscuousness of man and beast, desired by the great, was especially prominent in the case of the dwarf and the dog. The dwarf never quitted the dog, which was always bigger than himself; the dog was the pair of the dwarf,—it was as if they were coupled with a collar. This juxtaposition is authenticated by a mass of historic records; and notably by the portrait of Jeffrey Hudson, dwarf of Henrietta of France, daughter of Henri IV., and wife of Charles I.

To degrade man tends to deform him. The degradation of his condition was completed by disfigurement. Certain vivisectors of that period succeeded marvellously well in effacing from the human face the divine effigy. Doctor Conquest, member of the Amen-street College, and judicial visitor of the chemists' shops of London, wrote a book in Latin on this pseudo-surgery, the processes of which he describes. If we are to believe Justus of Carrickfergus, the inventor of this branch of surgery was a monk named Avonmore,—an Irish word signifying Great River.

The dwarf of the Elector Palatine, Perkeo, whose effigy (or ghost) springs from a magical box in the cave of Heidelberg, was a remarkable specimen of this science, which was very varied in its applications. It fashioned beings the law of whose existence was hideously simple; it permitted them to suffer, and commanded them to amuse.

## III

THE manufacture of monstrosities was practiced on a large scale, and comprised various branches. The Sultan wanted them; so did the Pope,—the one to guard his women, the the other to say his prayers. These were of a peculiar kind, incapable of reproduction. Scarcely human beings, they were useful to voluptuousness and to religion. The seraglio and the Sistine Chapel utilized the same species of monsters; fierce in the former case, mild in the latter.

They knew how to produce things in those days which are not produced now; they had talents which we lack, and it is not without reason that some good folk cry out that the decline has come. We no longer know how to sculpture living human flesh; this is consequent on the loss of the art of torture. Men were once virtuosos in that respect, but are so no longer; the art has become so simplified that it will soon disappear altogether. In cutting off the limbs of living men, in opening their bellies and dragging out their entrails, phenomena were grasped on the moment and discoveries made. We are obliged to renounce these experiments now, and are thus deprived of the progress which surgery made by the aid of the executioner.

The vivisection of former days was not limited to the manufacture of phenomena for the market-place, of buffoons for the palace, and eunuchs for sultans and popes. It abounded in varieties. One of its triumphs was the manufacture of cocks for the King of England.

It was the custom, in the palace of the kings of England, to have a sort of watchman who crowed like a cock. This watcher, awake while all others slept, ranged the palace, and raised from hour to hour the cry of the farmyard, repeating it as often as was necessary, and thus supplying the place of a clock. This man had in childhood undergone an operation of the pharynx, which was part of the art described by Dr. Conquest. Under Charles II. the salvation caused by the operation having disgusted the Duchess of Portsmouth, the



appointment was indeed preserved, so that the splendour of the crown should not be impaired; but they got an unmutated man to represent the cock. A retired officer was generally selected for this honourable employment. Under James II. the functionary was named William Sampson, Cock, and received for his crow 9*l.* 2*s.* 6*d.* annually.<sup>1</sup> The memoirs of Catherine II. inform us that at St. Petersburg, scarcely a hundred years since, whenever the czar or czarina was displeased with a Russian prince, he was forced to squat down in the great ante-chamber of the palace, and to remain in that posture a certain number of days, mewing like a cat or clucking like a sitting hen, and pecking his food from the floor. These fashions have passed away; but not so much, perhaps, as one might imagine. Nowadays, courtiers slightly modify their intonation in clucking to please their masters. More than one picks up from the ground — we will not say from the mud — what he eats.

It is very fortunate that kings cannot err. Hence their contradictions never perplex us. In approving always, one is sure to be always right,— which is pleasant. Louis XIV. would not have liked to see at Versailles either an officer acting the cock, or a prince acting the turkey. That which enhanced the royal and imperial dignity in England and Russia would have seemed to Louis the Great incompatible with the crown of St. Louis. We know how intense was his displeasure when Madame Henriette forgot herself so far as to see a hen in a dream,— which was, indeed, a grave breach of good manners in a lady of the Court. When one is of the Court, one should not dream of the courtyard. Bossuet, it may be remembered, was nearly as much scandalized as Louis XIV.

<sup>1</sup> See Chamberlayne's "Present State of England," part i. chap. xiii., p. 179. 1688.

## IV

THE traffic in children in the seventeenth century, as we have already explained, was connected with a trade. The Comprachicos engaged in the traffic and carried on the trade. They bought children, worked a little on the raw material, and re-sold them afterwards.

The vendors were of all kinds,— from the wretched father, getting rid of his family, to the master, utilizing his stud of slaves. The sale of men was a simple matter. In our own time we have had fighting to maintain this right. Remember that it is less than a century ago that the Elector of Hesse sold his subjects to the King of England, who required men to be killed in America. Kings went to the Elector of Hesse as we go to the butcher to buy meat. The Elector had food for powder in stock, and hung up his subjects in his shop: "Come, buy! they are for sale!" In England, under Jeffries, after the tragical episode of Monmouth, there were many lords and gentlemen beheaded and quartered. Those who were executed left wives and daughters, widows and orphans, whom James II. gave to the queen, his wife; the queen sold these ladies to William Penn. Very likely the king had so much per cent on the transaction. The extraordinary thing is, not that James II. should have sold the women, but that William Penn should have bought them. Penn's purchase is excused, or explained, by the fact that having a wilderness to sow with men, he needed women as farming implements. Her Gracious Majesty made a handsome sum out of these ladies. The young sold dear. We can imagine, with the uneasy feeling which a complicated scandal arouses, that probably some old duchesses were thrown in cheap.

The Comprachicos were also called the Cheylas,— a Hindoo word, which conveys the idea of harrying a nest. For a long time the Comprachicos made only a pretence of concealing themselves. There is sometimes a favouring shadow thrown over iniquitous trades, in which they thrive.

In our own day we have seen an association of this kind in Spain, under the direction of the ruffian Ramon Selles, continue from 1834 to 1866, and keep three provinces in terror for thirty years,—Valencia, Alicante, and Murcia. Under the Stuarts, the Comprachicos were by no means in bad odour at Court. On occasions they were used for reasons of State. For James II. they were almost an *instrumental regni*. It was a time when families, which were refractory or in the way, were dismembered; when a descent was cut short; when heirs were suddenly suppressed. At times one branch was defrauded for the profit of another. The Comprachicos had a genius for disfigurement which recommended them to State policy. To disfigure is better than to kill. There was, indeed, the Iron Mask, but that was a dangerous measure. Europe could not be peopled with iron masks, while deformed mountebanks ran about the streets without creating any surprise. Besides, the iron mask is removable; not so the mask of flesh. You are masked forever by your own flesh: what can be more ingenious?

The Comprachicos worked on man as the Chinese work on trees. They had their secrets, as we have said; they had tricks which are now lost arts. A sort of fantastic stunted thing left their hands; it was ridiculous and wonderful. They could touch up a little being with such skill that its father would not have recognized it. Sometimes they left the spine straight and remade the face. Children destined for tumblers had their joints dislocated in a masterly manner; you would have said they had been boned. Thus gymnasts were made. The Comprachicos not only deprived a child of his natural lineaments, not only took away his face from the child, but they also took away his memory. At least they took away all they could of it; the child had no consciousness of the mutilation to which he had been subjected. The frightful operation left its traces on his countenance, but not on his mind. The most he could recall was that one day he had been seized by men; that next he had fallen asleep;

and then that he had been cured. Cured of what, he did not know. Of burnings with sulphur and incisions with the iron he remembered nothing. The Comprachicos deadened the little patient by means of a stupefying powder which was thought to be magical, and which suppressed all pain. This powder has been known from time immemorial in China, and is still employed there. The Chinese have been in advance of us in all our inventions,—printing, artillery, aërostation, chloroform. The difference is that the discovery which at once takes life in Europe and becomes a prodigy and a wonder, in China remains a chrysalis and is preserved in a death-like state. China is a museum of embryos.

As we are in China, let us linger a moment to note another peculiarity. In China, from time immemorial, they have displayed a marvellous refinement in industry and art. It is the art of moulding a living man. They take a child two or three years old, put him in a more or less grotesque porcelain vase, which is made without top or bottom to allow egress for the feet and head. During the day the vase is set upright, and at night is laid down to allow the child to sleep. Thus the child thickens without growing taller, filling up with his compressed flesh and distorted bones the depressions in the vase. This development in a bottle continues many years. After a certain time it becomes irreparable. When they consider that this is accomplished, and the monster made, they break the vase. The child comes out,—and, behold, there is a man in the shape of a mug!

This is convenient; by ordering your dwarf betimes you are able to have him of any shape you wish.

## V

JAMES II. tolerated the Comprachicos for the very good reason that he found them useful; at least it happened that he did so more than once.

We do not always disdain to use what we despise. This low trade, an excellent substitute sometimes for the higher one

which is called State policy, was censured but not persecuted. There was no surveillance, but a certain amount of attention. Sometimes the king went so far as to avow his complicity; such is the audacity of monarchical terrorism. The disfigured one was marked with a *fleur-de-lis*; they took from him the mark of God, and put on him the mark of the king. Jacob Astley, knight and baronet, lord of Melton Constable, in the county of Norfolk, had in his family a child who had been sold, upon whose forehead the dealer had branded a *fleur-de-lis* with a hot iron. In certain cases in which it was considered desirable to record for some reason the royal origin of the new position made for the child, they used such means. England has always done us the honour to utilize the *fleur-de-lis* for her personal use.

The Comprachicos, allowing for the shade of difference which distinguishes a trade from a fanaticism, were analogous to the Stranglers of India. They lived in gangs, and to facilitate their operations affected somewhat of the Merry-Andrew. They encamped here and there, but were grave and religious, bearing no affinity to other nomads, and were incapable of theft. The people for a long time wrongly confounded them with the Moors of Spain and the Moors of China. The Moors of Spain were counterfeitters; the Moors of China were thieves. There was nothing of the sort about the Comprachicos; they were honest folk. Whatever you may think of them, they were sometimes sincerely scrupulous. They pushed open a door, entered, bargained for a child, paid, and departed. All was done with propriety.

They were of all nationalities. English, French, Castilians, Germans, Italians fraternized under the name of Comprachicos. A unity of idea, a unity of superstition, and the pursuit of the same calling made such fusions. In this roving fraternity those of the Mediterranean seaboard represented the East, those of the Atlantic seaboard the West. Many Basques held converse with many Irishmen. The Basque and the Irishman understand each other, they speak the old Punic jargon; add to this the intimate relations of

Catholic Ireland with Catholic Spain,—relations such that they resulted in bringing to the gallows in London one who was almost King of Ireland, the Celtic Lord de Brany.

The Comprachicos were rather a fellowship than a tribe; rather a residuum than a fellowship. They were all the riff-raff of the universe, having a crime for their trade. They were a sort of harlequin people, all composed of rags. To gain a recruit was to sew on another tatter. To appear and disappear, to wander about, was the Comprachicos' law of existence. What is barely tolerated cannot take root. Even in kingdoms where their business supplied the Courts, and occasionally served as an auxiliary to the royal power, they were often ill-treated. Kings made use of their art and then sent the artists to the galleys. These inconsistencies belong to the ebb and flow of royal caprice,—“For such is our good will and pleasure.”

A rolling stone and a roving trade gather no moss. The Comprachicos were poor. They might have said what the lean and ragged witch said, when she saw them setting fire to the stake: “*Le jeu n'en vaut pas la chandelle.*” It is possible, nay probable (their chiefs remaining unknown), that the wholesale contractors in the trade were rich. After the lapse of two centuries it would be difficult to throw any light on this point.

They were, as we have said, a fellowship. They had their laws, their oaths, their formulæ,—almost their cabala. Any one nowadays wishing to know all about the Comprachicos, need only go into Biscaya or Galicia; there were many Basques among them, and it is in those mountains that one hears their history. To this day the Comprachicos are spoken of at Oyarzun, at Urbistondo, at Leso, at Astigarraga. “*Aguardate niño, que voy a llamar al Comprachicos*” (Take care, child, or I'll call the Comprachicos) is the cry with which mothers frighten their children in that country.

The Comprachicos, like the Zigeuner and the Gipsies, had appointed places for periodical meetings. Their leaders conferred together from time to time. In the seventeenth cen-

tury they had four principal points of rendezvous,—one, the pass of Pancorbo in Spain; one, the glade called the Wicked Woman, near Diekirsch, in Germany, where there are two strange bas-reliefs, representing a woman with a head and a man without one; one in France, the hill where the colossal statue of Massue-la-Promesse stood in the old sacred wood of Borvo Tomona, near Bourbonne les Bains; and one in England, behind the garden wall of William Challoner, Squire of Gisborough in Cleveland, Yorkshire.

## VI

THE laws against vagabonds have always been very rigorous in England. In her Gothic legislation England seemed to be inspired with this principle, *Homo errans fera errante peior*. One of the special statutes classifies the man without a home as "more dangerous than the asp, dragon, lynx, or basilisk" (*atrocior aspide, dracone, lynce, et basilico*). For a long time England troubled herself as much concerning the Gipsies, of whom she wished to be rid, as about the wolves of which she had been cleared. In that the Englishman differed from the Irishman, who prayed to the saints for the health of the wolf, and called him "my god-father."

Nevertheless, in the same way that English law (as we have just seen) tolerated the wolf, which was tamed, domesticated, and become in some sort a dog, so it tolerated the regular vagabond, become in some sort a subject. It did not trouble itself about either the mountebank or the travelling barber, the quack doctor, the peddler, or the open-air scholar, as long as they had a trade to live by. Further than this, and with these exceptions, the kind of freedom which exists in the wanderer terrified the law. A tramp was a possible public enemy. That modern thing, the loafer, was then unknown; that ancient thing, the vagrant, was alone understood. A suspicious appearance, that indescribable something which all understand and none can define, was sufficient reason why society should seize a man by the collar and de-

mand, "Where do you live? How do you get your living?" And if he could not answer, harsh penalties awaited him. Iron and fire were in the code: the law practiced the cauterization of vagrancy. Hence, throughout English territory a veritable *loi des suspects* was applicable to vagrants (who, it must be owned, readily became malefactors), and particularly to Gipsies, whose expulsion has erroneously been compared to the expulsion of the Jews and the Moors from Spain, and the Protestants from France. As for us, we do not confound a *battue* with a persecution.

The Comprachicos, we insist, had nothing in common with the Gipsies. The Gipsies were a nation; the Comprachicos were a compound of all nations,—the lees of a horrible vessel full of filthy waters. The Comprachicos had not, like the Gipsies, a vernacular of their own; their jargon was a promiscuous collection of idioms; all languages were mixed together in their language; they spoke a medley. Like the Gipsies, they had come to be a people winding through the peoples; but their common tie was association, not race. At all epochs in history one finds in the vast liquid mass which constitutes humanity some of these streams of venomous men exuding poison around them. The Gipsies were a tribe; the Comprachicos, a freemasonry,—a masonry having not a noble aim, but a hideous handicraft. Finally, their religions differed: the Gipsies were Pagans; the Comprachicos were Christians, and more than that, good Christians, as became an association which, although a mixture of all nations, owed its birth to Spain, a devout land. They were more than Christians, they were Catholics; they were more than Catholics, they were Romanists; and they were so devoted in their faith, and so pure, that they refused to associate with the Hungarian nomads of the comitat of Pesth, commanded and led by an old man, having for sceptre a wand with a silver ball, surmounted by the double-headed Austrian eagle. It is true that these Hungarians were schismatics, to the extent of celebrating the Assumption on the 29th of August, which is an abomination.



In England, so long as the Stuarts reigned, the confederation of the Comprachicos was (for motives of which we have already given a glimpse) to a certain extent protected. James II., a devout man, who persecuted the Jews and trampled out the Gipsies, was a good prince to the Comprachicos. We have seen why. The Comprachicos were buyers of the human wares in which he was a dealer. They excelled in disappearances. Disappearances are occasionally necessary for the good of the State. An inconvenient heir of tender age whom they took in hand lost his original shape. This facilitated confiscation; the transfer of titles to favourites was simplified. The Comprachicos were, moreover, very discreet, and very taciturn. They bound themselves to silence and kept their word, which is very necessary in affairs of State. There is scarcely an instance of their having betrayed the secrets of the king. This was, it is true, greatly to their interest; for if the king had lost confidence in them, they would have been in great danger. They were thus of use in a political point of view. Moreover, these artists furnished singers for the Holy Father. The Comprachicos were useful for the "Miserere" of Allegri. They were particularly devoted to the Virgin Mary. All this pleased the Stuarts. James II. could not be hostile to men who carried their devotion to the Virgin to the extent of manufacturing eunuchs. In 1688 there was a change of dynasty in England: Orange supplanted Stuart; William III. replaced James II.

James II. went away to die in exile; miracles were performed on his tomb, and his relics cured the Bishop of Autun of fistula,—a worthy recompense for the Christian virtues of the prince.

William having neither the same ideas nor the same practices as James, was severe to the Comprachicos. He did his best to crush out the vermin. A statute of the early part of William and Mary's reign hit the association of child-buyers hard. It was as the blow of a club to the Comprachicos, who were from that time pulverized. By the terms of this statute, those of the fellowship taken and duly convicted

were to be branded with a red-hot iron, imprinting "R" on the shoulder signifying rogue; on the left hand "T," signifying thief; and on the right hand "M," signifying man-slayer. The chiefs, "supposed to be rich, although beggars in appearance," were to be punished in the *collistrigium*, that is, the pillory,—and branded on the forehead with a "P," besides having their goods confiscated and the trees in their woods rooted up. Those who did not inform against the Comprachicos were to be punished by confiscation and imprisonment for life, as for the crime of misprision. As for the women found among these men, they were to be punished by the cucking-stool. This is a sort of see-saw, the name of which is derived from the French word *coquine*, and the German *stuhl*. English law being endowed with remarkable longevity, this punishment for quarrelsome women still exists in English legislation. The cucking-stool is suspended over a river or a pond; the woman is seated upon it. The chair is then allowed to drop into the water, and then pulled out. This dipping of the woman is repeated three times, "to cool her anger," says the commentator, Chamberlayne.

## BOOK I

### NIGHT NOT SO BLACK AS MAN

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#### CHAPTER I

##### PORTLAND BILL

**A** STRONG north wind blew continuously over the mainland of Europe, and yet more roughly over England, during the entire month of December, 1689, and also the month of January, 1690. Hence the terrible cold weather which caused that winter to be noted as "memorable to the poor" on the margin of the old Bible in the Presbyterian chapel of the Non-jurors in London. Thanks to the lasting qualities of the old monarchical parchment employed in official registers, long lists of poor persons, found dead of famine and cold, are still legible in many local repositories,—particularly in the archives of the Liberty of the Clink, in the borough of Southwark, of Pie Powder Court (which signifies Dusty Feet Court), and in those of Whitechapel Court, held in the village of Stepney by the bailiff of the Lord of the Manor. The Thames was frozen over,—a thing which does not happen once in a century, as ice forms on it with difficulty owing to the action of the sea. Coaches rolled over the frozen river, and a fair was held upon it with booths, bear-baiting and bull-baiting. An ox was roasted whole on the ice. This thick ice lasted two months. The year 1690 exceeded in severity even the famous winters at the beginning of the seventeenth century so minutely observed by Dr. Gid-

eon Delane,— the same who was, in his quality of apothecary to King James, honoured by the city of London with a bust and a pedestal.

One evening, towards the close of one of the most bitter days of the month of January, 1690, something unusual was going on in one of the numerous inhospitable coves of the Bay of Portland, which caused the sea-gulls and wild geese to scream and circle round its mouth, not daring to re-enter. In this cove, the most dangerous of all which line the bay during the continuance of certain winds, and consequently the most lonely (well suited, by reason of its very danger, for ships in hiding), a little vessel, almost touching the cliff, so deep was the water, was moored to a point of rock. We are wrong in saying, "The night falls;" we should say "The night rises," for it is from the earth that darkness comes. It was already night at the bottom of the cliff; it was still day at the top. Any one approaching the vessel's moorings would have recognized a Biscayan hooker. The sun, concealed all day by the mist, had just set. That deep and sombre melancholy which might be called longing for the absent sun already pervaded the scene. As there was no breeze from the sea, the water of the creek was calm. This was, especially in winter, a lucky exception. Almost all the Portland creeks have sand-bars; and in heavy weather the sea becomes very rough, and, to pass in safety, much skill and practice are necessary. These little ports (ports more in appearance than fact) are of small advantage. They are hazardous to enter, dangerous to leave. This evening, for a wonder, there was no danger.

The Biscay hooker is of an ancient model, now fallen into disuse. This kind of craft, which has done service even in the navy, was stoutly built in its hull,— a boat in size, a ship in strength. It figured in the Armada. Sometimes the war-hooker attained to a high tonnage; thus the "Great Griffin," bearing a captain's flag, and commanded by Lopez de Medina, measured six hundred and fifty good tons, and carried forty guns. But the merchant and contraband hookers were

very feeble specimens. Sea-folks held them at their true value, and considered the model a very sorry one. The rigging of the hooker was made of hemp, sometimes with wire inside, which was probably intended as a means, however unscientific, of obtaining indications, in the case of magnetic tension. The lightness of this rigging did not exclude the use of heavy tackle, the *cabrias* of the Spanish galleon, and the *cameli* of the Roman triremes. The helm was very long, which gives the advantage of a long arm of leverage, but the disadvantage of a small arc of effort. Two wheels in two pulleys at the end of the tiller corrected this defect, and compensated to some extent for the loss of strength. The compass was well housed in a perfectly square case, and well balanced by its two copper frames placed horizontally, one inside the other, on little bolts, as in Cardan's lamps. There were both science and cunning in the construction of the hooker, but untutored science and barbarous cunning. The hooker was primitive, like the praam and the canoe; was akin to the praam in stability and to the canoe in swiftness; and, like all vessels born of the instinct of the pirate and fisherman, it had remarkable sea-going qualities, and was equally well suited to land-locked and to open waters. Its system of sails, complicated in stays and very peculiar, allowed of its navigating the close bays of Asturias (which are little more than enclosed basins, as Pasages for instance) as well as the open sea. It could sail round a lake, and sail round the world,—a strange craft, as good for a pond as for a storm. The hooker is among vessels what the wagtail is among birds,—one of the smallest and yet one of the boldest. The wagtail perching on a reed scarcely bends it, and flying away crosses the ocean.

The hooker of the poorest Biscayan was gilded and painted. Tattooing was also one of the accomplishments of these people, who are still to some extent savage in their tastes. The superb colouring of their mountains, varied by dazzling snows and emerald meadows, teaches them the wonderful charm that ornamentation exerts. They are poverty-stricken and

yet magnificent; they put coats-of-arms on their cottages; they have huge asses, which they bedizen with bells, and huge oxen, on which they put gay head-dresses of feathers. Their coaches, the wheels of which you can hear creaking two leagues off, are illuminated, carved, and decked with ribbons. A cobbler has a bas-relief on his door; it is only St. Crispin and an old shoe, but it is in stone. They trim their leathern jackets with lace. They do not mend their rags, but they embroider them. The Basques are like the Greeks, children of the sun; while the Valencian wraps himself, bare and sad, in his mantle of russet wool, with a hole to pass his head through, the natives of Galicia and Biscay delight in fine linen shirts bleached in the dew. Their thresholds and their windows teem with fair and fresh faces, laughing under garlands of maize; a joyous and proud serenity shines out in their ingenious arts, in their trades, in their customs, in the dress of their maidens, in their songs. The mountain, that colossal ruin, is all aglow in Biscay: the sun's rays penetrate every nook and crevice. The wild *jaisquivel* is full of idylls. Biscay is Pyrenean grace as Savoy represents Alpine grace. With dangerous bays, with storms, with clouds, with flying spray, with the raging of the waves and winds, with terror, with uproar, are mingled boat-women crowned with roses. He who has seen the Basque country once longs to see it again. It is a favoured land,—two harvests a year; villages resonant and gay; a stately poverty; all Sunday the sound of guitars, dancing, castanets, love-making; houses clean and bright; storks in the belfries.

But let us return to Portland, that rugged mountain in the sea.

The peninsula of Portland, viewed geometrically, presents the appearance of a bird's head, of which the bill is turned towards the ocean, the back of the head towards Weymouth; the isthmus is its neck. Portland exists now only for trade. The value of the Portland stone was discovered by quarrymen and plasterers about the middle of the seventeenth century. Ever since that period what is called Roman cement has been

made of the Portland stone,—a useful industry, enriching the district but disfiguring the bay. Two hundred years ago these coasts were being eaten away as a cliff; to-day, as a quarry. The pick bites meanly, the wave grandly; hence a diminution of beauty. To the magnificent ravages of the ocean have succeeded the measured strokes of men. These measured strokes have annihilated the creek where the Biscay hooker was moored. To find any vestige of the little anchorage, now destroyed, the eastern side of the peninsula should be searched, towards the point beyond Folly Pier and Dirdle Pier, beyond Wakeham even, between the place called Church Hope and the place called Southwell.

The creek, walled in on all sides by cliffs much taller than its width, was becoming more and more veiled in shadow. The misty gloom, usual at twilight, became thicker; it was like the growth of darkness at the bottom of a well. The opening of the creek seaward, a narrow passage, traced on the almost night-black interior a pallid rift where the waves were moving. You must have been quite close to perceive the hooker moored to the rocks, and, as it were, hidden by the great mantle of shadow. A plank extending to a low and level projection of the cliff, the only point on which a landing could be made, placed the vessel in communication with the land. Dark figures were passing and repassing one another on this tottering gangway, and in the shadow beyond several persons could be dimly discerned standing on the deck.

It was less cold in the creek than out at sea, thanks to the screen of rock rising to the north of the basin, which did not, however, prevent the people from shivering. They were hurrying. The effect of the twilight defined the forms as though they had been punched out with a tool. Certain indentations in their clothes were visible, and showed that they belonged to the class called in England, "The ragged." The windings of the pathway could be vaguely distinguished on the side of the cliff. This pathway, full of curves and angles, almost perpendicular, and better adapted for goats than men, terminated at the platform where the plank was

placed. The pathways of cliffs ordinarily imply a not very inviting declivity; they plunge downward rather than slope. This one — probably some ramification of a road on the plain above — was disagreeable to look at, so steep was it. From below you saw it attain by a series of zig-zags the summit of the cliff where it passed out on to the high plateau through a cut in the rock; and the passengers for whom the vessel was waiting must have come by this path.

No step, no noise, no breath was heard except the stir of embarkation which was being made in the creek. At the other side of the roads, at the entrance of Ringstead Bay, you could just distinguish a fleet of shark-fishing boats, which were evidently out of their reckoning. These polar boats had been driven from Danish into English waters by the whims of the sea. Northerly winds play these tricks on fishermen. They had just taken refuge in the anchorage of Portland,— a sign of bad weather expected and danger out at sea. They were now engaged in casting anchor. The principal boat was placed in front after the old custom in Norwegian flotillas, all her rigging standing out black, above the sea; while in front might be seen the iron rack, loaded with all kinds of hooks and harpoons destined for the Greenland shark, the dog-fish, and the spinous shark, as well as the nets to pick up the sun-fish. Except a few other craft, all driven into the same corner, the eye beheld nothing on the vast horizon. Not a house, not a ship. The coast in those days was not inhabited, and the roads, at that season, were not safe.

In spite of the ominous indications of the weather, the persons who were going to sail away in the Biscayan *urca*, hastened on the hour of departure. They formed a busy and confused group. To distinguish one from another was difficult; to tell whether they were old or young was impossible. The dim evening light intermixed and blurred them; the mask of shadow was over their faces. There were eight of them, and there were apparently one or two women among them whom it was hard to distinguish under the rags and tatters in which the group was attired,— clothes which were



no longer either man's or women's. Rags have no sex. A smaller shadow, fitting to and fro among the large ones, indicated either a dwarf or a child. It was a child.

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## CHAPTER II

### LEFT ALONE

A CLOSE observer might have noticed that all wore long cloaks, torn and patched, but covering them, and if need be concealing them up to the very eyes,—useful alike against the north wind and curiosity. They moved with ease under these cloaks. The greater number wore a handkerchief tied round the head,—a sort of rudiment which marks the commencement of the turban in Spain. This head-dress was nothing unusual in England. At that time the South was in fashion in the North; perhaps this was connected with the fact that the North was beating the South. It conquered and admired. After the defeat of the Armada, Castilian was considered in the halls of Elizabeth as the court language. To speak English in the palace of the Queen of England was deemed almost an impropriety. To adopt partially the manners of those upon whom we impose our laws is very common. It was thus that Castilian fashions penetrated into England; while as an offset, English interests crept into Spain.

One of the men in the group embarking appeared to be a chief. He had sandals on his feet, and was bedizened with gold-lace tatters and a tinsel waistcoat, shining under his cloak like the belly of a fish. Another pulled down over his face a huge piece of felt, cut like a sombrero; this felt had no hole for a pipe, thus indicating the wearer to be a man of letters.

On the principle that a man's vest is a child's cloak, the child was clad in a sailor's jacket, which reached to his knees.

By his height you would have supposed him to be a boy of ten or eleven; his feet were bare.

The crew of the hooker was composed of a captain and two sailors. The hooker had apparently come from Spain, and and was about to return thither. She was beyond a doubt engaged in a stealthy service from one coast to the other. The persons embarking in her whispered among themselves. The whisperings interchanged by these creatures was a composite sound,—now a word of Spanish, then of German, then of French, then of Gaelic, at times of Basque. It was either a patois or a slang. They appeared to be of all nationalities, and yet to belong to the same band. The motley group appeared to be a company of comrades, perhaps a gang of accomplices. The crew probably belonged to the same brotherhood.

If there had been a little more light, and if one could have seen more distinctly, one might have perceived under the rags of these people rosaries and scapulars half-hidden. One of the women in the group had a rosary almost equal in the size of its beads to that of a dervish, and easy to recognize for an Irish one made at Llanymthefry, which is also called Llanandriffy. One might also have seen, had it not been so dark, a gilded figure of Our Lady and Child on the bow of the hooker. It was probably that of the Basque Notre Dame,—a sort of Panagia of the old Cantabri. Under this image, which occupied the position of a figurehead, was a lantern, which at this moment was not lighted,—an excess of caution which implied an extreme desire of concealment. This lantern was evidently for two purposes: when lighted, it burned before the Virgin, and at the same time illumined the sea,—a beacon doing duty as a taper. Under the bowsprit the cut-water, long, curved, and sharp, projected in front like the horn of a crescent. At the top of the cut-water, and at the feet of the Virgin, a kneeling angel, with folded wings, leaned her back against the stem, and gazed out through a spy-glass at the horizon. The angel was gilded like Our Lady. In the cut-water were holes and openings to let the waves pass

through, which afforded an opportunity for more gilding and arabesques. Under the figure of the Virgin was written, in gilt capitals, the word "Matutina,"—the name of the vessel, invisible just now on account of the darkness.

Amid the confusion of departure there were thrown down in disorder, at the foot of the cliff, the goods which the voyagers were to take with them, and which, by means of the plank serving as a bridge across, were being passed rapidly from the shore to the boat. Bags of biscuit, a cask of fish, a case of portable soup, three barrels (one of fresh water, one of malt, one of tar), four or five bottles of ale, an old port-manteau buckled up by straps, trunks, boxes, a ball of tow for torches and signals,—such was the lading. These ragged people had valises, which seemed to indicate a roving life. Wandering rascals are obliged to own something; at times they would prefer to fly away like the birds, but they cannot do so without abandoning the means of earning a livelihood. They necessarily possess boxes of tools and instruments of labour, whatever their trade may be. Those of whom we speak were taking their baggage with them. No time was lost; there was one continued passing to and fro from the shore to the vessel, and from the vessel to the shore. Each one did his share of the work; one carried a bag, another a chest. Those of the promiscuous company who were possibly or probably women, worked like the rest. They overloaded the child.

It was doubtful if the child's father or mother were in the group, for no sign of interest was vouchsafed him. They made him work; but that was all. He appeared not a child in a family, but a slave in a tribe. He waited on every one, and no one even spoke to him. Still he laboured diligently, and like all the other members of this strange party he seemed to have but one thought,—to embark as quickly as possible. Did he know why? Probably not; he hurried mechanically because he saw the others hurry.

The stowing of the cargo in the hold was soon finished, and the moment to put off arrived. The last case had been car-

ried over the gangway, and nothing was left on shore but the men. The two persons in the group who seemed to be women were already on board; six persons, the child among them, were still on the low platform of the cliff. Preparations for immediate departure were apparent on the vessel; the captain seized the helm, a sailor took up an axe to cut the hawser: to cut is an evidence of haste; when there is time it is unknotted.

"Andamos," said, in a low voice, he who appeared to be chief of the six, and who had the spangles on his tattered clothes. The child rushed towards the plank in order to be the first aboard. As he placed his foot on it, two of the men hurried by, at the risk of throwing him into the water, got in before him, and passed on; the fourth drove him back with his fist, and followed the third; the fifth, who was the chief, bounded into rather than sprang aboard the vessel, and as he jumped in kicked the plank, which fell into the sea; a stroke of the hatchet cut the moorings, the helm was put up, the vessel left the shore, and the child remained on land.

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### CHAPTER III

#### ALONE

THE child remained motionless on the rock, with his eyes fixed; no calling out, no appeal. Though this was unexpected by him, he uttered not a word. The same silence reigned in the vessel. No cry from the child to the men; no farewell from the men to the child. There was on both sides a mute acceptance of the widening distance between them. It was like a separation of ghosts on the banks of the Styx. The child, as if nailed to the rock, up which the tide was beginning to creep, watched the departing bark. It seemed as if he realized his position. What did he realize? Darkness.

A moment more, and the vessel had reached the mouth of

the creek, and entered it. Against the clear sky the mast-head was visible, rising above the split blocks between which the strait wound as between two walls. Then it was seen no more; all was over; the bark had reached the sea.

The child watched its disappearance; he was astonished but thoughtful. His stupefaction was increased by a sense of the grim reality of existence. It seemed as if there were experience in this youthful being. Did he, perchance, already exercise judgment? Experience coming too early constructs, sometimes, in the depths of a child's mind some dangerous balance, in which the poor little soul weighs God. Feeling himself innocent, he submitted. There was no complaint; the irreproachable does not reproach. His rough expulsion drew from him no sign; he suffered a sort of internal stiffening. The child did not bow under this sudden blow of fate, which seemed to put an end to his existence ere it had well begun; he received the thunderstroke standing. It would have been evident to any one who could have seen his astonishment un-mixed with dejection, that, in the group which abandoned him, there was no one who loved him, and no one whom he loved.

Brooding, the child forgot the cold. Suddenly the wave wetted his feet,—the tide was flowing; a gust passed through his hair,—the north wind was rising. He shivered. There came over him, from head to foot, the shudder of awakening. He glanced about him. He was alone. Up to this time there had never existed for him any other men than those who were now in the hooker,—those men who had just stolen away. Strange to say, those men, the only ones he knew, were really strangers to him. He could not have told who they were. His childhood had been passed among them, without his having the consciousness of being one of them. He was in juxtaposition to them, nothing more. He had just been forgotten by them. He had no money about him, no shoes on his feet, scarcely a garment on his body, not even a piece of bread in his pocket. It was winter; it was night. It would be necessary to walk several miles before a human habitation could be reached. He

did not know where he was. He knew nothing, unless it was that those who had come with him to the brink of the sea had gone away without him. He felt himself put outside the pale of life. He felt that man had failed him. He was ten years old.

The child was in a desert, between heights from which he saw the night descending, and depths where he heard the waves murmuring. He stretched out his little thin arms and yawned. Then, suddenly, with the agility of a squirrel, or perhaps of an acrobat, he turned his back on the creek, and set to work to climb the cliff. He escalated the path, left it, then returned to it, quick and venturesome. He was hurrying inland, as though he had a destination marked out; nevertheless he was going nowhere. He hastened on without an object,— a fugitive before Fate. To climb is the function of a man; to crawl is that of an animal; he did both.

As the cliffs of Portland face southward, there was scarcely any snow on the path; the intensity of cold had, however, frozen that snow into dust very troublesome to the walker. The child freed himself of it. His jacket, which was much too big for him, complicated matters, and got in his way. Now and then on an overhanging crag or in a declivity he came upon a little ice, which caused him to slip. Then, after hanging some moments over a precipice, he would catch hold of a dry branch or projecting stone. Once he came on a vein of slate, which suddenly gave way under him, letting him down with it. Crumbling slate is treacherous. For some seconds the child slid like a tile on a roof; he rolled to the extreme edge of the chasm; a tuft of grass which he clutched at the right moment saved him. He was as mute on the verge of the abyss as he had been in the company of the men; he gathered himself up and re-ascended silently. The slope was steep; so he had to zig-zag in ascending. The precipice seemed to grow in the darkness, and the summit to recede farther and farther in proportion as the child ascended; but at last he reached the top. He had scarcely set foot on the summit when he began to shiver. The wind cut his face like a whip-lash, for the

bitter northwester was blowing. He tightened his rough sailor's jacket about his chest. It was a good coat, called in ship-language a "sou'-wester," because made of a sort of stuff that allows little of the south-westerly rain to penetrate.

The child, having gained the table-land, stopped, planted his feet firmly on the frozen ground and looked about him. Behind him was the sea; in front the land; above, the sky,—but a sky without stars; an opaque mist hid the zenith. On reaching the summit of the rocky wall he found himself facing the interior, and he gazed at it attentively. It stretched before him far as the eye could reach, flat, frozen, and covered with snow. A few tufts of heather shivered in the wind. No roads were visible,—no dwelling, not even a shepherd's cot. Here and there, pale, spiral vortices might be seen, which were whirls of fine snow, snatched from the ground by the wind and blown away. Successive undulations of ground suddenly became misty and disappeared from view. The great dull plains were lost in the white fog. A deep silence reigned, far-reaching as infinity, hushed as the tomb.

The child turned again towards the sea. The sea, like the land, was white,—the one with snow, the other with foam. There is nothing so melancholy as the light produced by this double whiteness. The sea was like steel, the cliff like ebony. From the height where the child was, the bay of Portland appeared almost like a geographical map in a semicircle of hills. There was something dreamlike in that nocturnal landscape,—a wan disk belted by a dark crescent; the moon sometimes has a similar appearance. From cape to cape, along the whole coast, not a single spark indicated a hearth with a fire; not a lighted window, not an inhabited house, was to be seen. On earth as in heaven there was no light,—not a lamp below, not a star above. Here and there came sudden elevations in the broad expanse of water, as the wind disturbed and wrinkled the vast sheet. The hooker was still visible in the bay, looking like a black triangle gliding over the water. The "Matutina" was making rapid headway; she seemed to grow smaller every minute. Nothing can com-

pare in rapidity with the flight of a vessel disappearing in the distance. Suddenly she lighted the lantern at her prow. Probably the darkness closing in around her made those on board uneasy, and the pilot thought it necessary to throw light on the waves. This luminous point, a spark seen from afar, clung like a spectral light to the tall black form.

There was a storm in the air; the child took no notice of it, but a sailor would have trembled. It was one of those moments when it seems as if the elements were changing into persons, and that one was about to witness the mysterious transformation of the wind into the windgod. The sea becomes Ocean; its power reveals itself as Will: hence the terror. The soul of man fears to be thus confronted with the soul of Nature. Chaos was about to appear. The wind rolled back the fog, and making a stage of the clouds behind set the scene for that fearful drama of wave and winter, which is called a snow-storm. Vessels putting back hove in sight. For some minutes past the roads had no longer been deserted; every moment anxious barks hastening towards an anchorage appeared from behind the capes; some were doubling Portland Bill, the others St. Alban's Head. From afar ships were running in. It was a race for life. Southwards the darkness had thickened, and clouds full of menace bordered the sea. The weight of the tempest hanging overhead made a dreary lull on the waves. It certainly was no time to set sail.

Yet the hooker had sailed. She was steering due south. She was already out of the gulf, and in the open sea. Suddenly there came a gust of wind. The "Matutina," which was still clearly in sight, put on all sail, as if resolved to profit by the hurricane. It was the nor'-wester, a wind sullen and angry. Its weight was felt instantly. The hooker, caught broadside on, staggered, but recovering held her course to sea. This indicated a flight rather than a voyage, less fear of sea than of land, and greater dread of pursuit from man than from the wind. The hooker, passing through every degree of diminution, sank into the horizon. The little star



which she carried paled into shadow, then disappeared,— this time for good and all.

At least the child seemed to understand it so, for he ceased to look at the sea. His gaze reverted to the plains, the moor, the hills, where it might be possible to find some living creature. Towards this unknown region he now directed his steps.

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## CHAPTER IV

### QUESTIONS

**W**HAT kind of a band was it that had left the child behind in its flight. Were those fugitives Comprachicos?

We have already noted the measures taken by William III., and passed by Parliament against the malefactors, male and female, called Comprachicos, otherwise Comprapequeños, otherwise Cheylas. There are laws which scatter people to the four corners of the earth. The law enacted against the Comprachicos determined, not only the Comprachicos, but vagabonds of all sorts on a general flight. It was the devil take the hindmost. A large number of Comprachicos returned to Spain, many of them, as we have said, being Basques. The law for the protection of children had at first this strange result,— it caused many children to be abandoned. The immediate effect of the penal statute was to produce a crowd of children, found, or rather lost. The reason is evident. Every wandering gang containing a child was liable to suspicion. The mere fact of the child's presence was in itself a denunciation. "They are probably Comprachicos." This was the very first idea of the sheriff, of the bailiff, and of the constable. Hence arrest and inquiry. People simply unfortunate, reduced to wander and to beg, were seized with a terror of being taken for Comprachicos, although they were

nothing of the kind; for the weak have grave fears of possible errors in justice. Besides these vagabonds are very easily scared.

The charge against the Comprachicos was that they traded in other people's children. But the promiscuousness caused by poverty and indigence is such that at times it might have been difficult for a father and mother to prove a child their own. How came you by this child? How were they to prove that they had received it from God? The child became a danger: they got rid of it; to fly unencumbered was easier. The parents resolved to leave it,—now in a wood, now on a beach, now down a well. Many children were found drowned in cisterns.

Let us add that in imitation of England all Europe henceforth hunted down the Comprachicos. The impulse of pursuit was given. There is nothing like belling the cat. From that time on the desire to capture Comprachicos caused much rivalry between the police of the different countries, and the alguazil was no less watchful than the constable.

One could still see, twenty-three years ago, on a stone of the gate of Otero, an untranslatable inscription,—the words of the code outraging propriety. In it, however, the difference which existed between the buyers and kidnapers of children is very strongly marked. Here is part of the inscription in somewhat rough Castilian: "Aqui quedan las orejas de los Comprachicos, y las bolsas de los robaniños, mientras que se van ellos al trabajo de mar." The confiscation of ears, etc., did not prevent their owners from going to the galleys. Hence ensued a general rout among all vagabonds. They started frightened; they arrived trembling. On every shore in Europe their furtive advent was closely watched. It was impossible for such a band to embark with a child, since to disembark with one was so dangerous. To lose the child was a much easier matter.

And this child, of whom we first caught a glimpse in the shadow of the Portland cliffs, by whom had he been abandoned? To all appearance by Comprachicos.

## CHAPTER V

## THE TREE OF HUMAN INVENTION

IT was about seven o'clock in the evening. The wind was diminishing,—a sign, however, of a violent recurrence later on. The child was on the table-land at the extreme south end of Portland.

Portland is a peninsula; but the child did not know what a peninsula was, and had never even heard the name of Portland. He knew only one thing; that was that one could walk until one drops. An idea is a guide; but he had no idea. They had brought him there, and left him there. *They* and *there*. These two enigmas represented his doom. *They* were humankind; *there* was the universe. For him in all creation there was absolutely no basis to rest upon but the little piece of hard, frozen ground where he set his naked feet. In the great twilight world, open on all sides, what was there for him? Nothing. Around him was the vastness of human desertion.

The child crossed the first plateau diagonally, then a second, then a third. At the end of each plateau the child came to a break in the ground. The slope was sometimes steep, but always short; the high, bare plains of Portland resemble great flagstones overlapping one another. The south side seems to enter under the protruding slab, the north side laps over the next one; this made ascents, which the child stepped over nimbly. From time to time he stopped, and seemed to hold counsel with himself. The night was becoming very dark; his radius of sight was contracting. He could now see only a few steps before him. Suddenly he stopped and listened for an instant; then with an almost imperceptible nod of satisfaction he turned quickly and directed his steps towards an eminence of moderate height, which he dimly perceived on his right, at the end of the plain nearest

the cliff. There was on the eminence a shape which in the mist looked like a tree. The child had just heard a noise in this direction, which was neither the noise of wind nor of the sea; nor was it the cry of an animal. He thought that some one was there, and a few strides brought him to the foot of the hillock.

Some one was there. That which had been indistinct on the top of the eminence was now plainly visible. It looked something like a great arm thrust straight out of the ground; at the upper extremity of the arm a sort of forefinger, supported from beneath by the thumb, pointed out horizontally; the arm, the thumb, and the forefinger formed a triangle against the sky. At the point of juncture of this peculiar finger and this peculiar thumb there was a line, from which hung something black and shapeless. The line moving in the wind sounded like a chain.

This was the noise the child had heard. Seen closely, the line proved to be that which the sound indicated,—a chain; a single chain cable. By that mysterious law which throughout Nature causes appearances to exaggerate realities, the place, the hour, the mist, the mournful sea, the angry clouds on the distant horizon, added to the affect of this figure, and made it seem enormous. The mass appended to the chain presented the appearance of a huge scabbard. There was a round knot at the top, about which the end of the chain was fastened. The scabbard was riven asunder at the lower end, and long shreds hung between the rents. A faint breeze stirred the chain, and that which was appended to it swayed gently to and fro.

It was altogether an object to inspire indescribable dread. Horror, which disproportions everything, increased its dimensions, without changing its shape. It was a condensation of darkness into a definite form. Twilight and moon-rise, stars setting behind the cliff, the clouds and winds, seemed to have entered into the composition of this visible nonentity. The sort of log hanging in the wind partook of the impersonality diffused over sea and sky, and the darkness completed

this phase of the thing which had once been man. It was that no longer.

To be naught but a remainder!—such a thing it is beyond the power of language to express. To exist no more, yet to persist in existing; to be in the dread abyss, yet out of it; to reappear after death as if indissoluble,—all this makes it inexpressible. There is a certain amount of impossibility mixed with such a reality. This being,—was it a being? This black witness was a remainder, and an awful remainder. A remainder of what? Of Nature first, and then of society; zero, and yet total. The wild inclemency of the weather held it at its will; the deep oblivion of solitude environed it. It was given up to unknown chances; it was without defence against the darkness, which did with it what it willed. It was forever the patient; it submitted; the hurricane (that ghastly conflict of winds) was upon it. The spectre was given over to pillage. It underwent the horrible outrage of rotting in the open air; it was an outlaw of the tomb. There was no peace for it even in annihilation; in the summer it fell away into dust, in the winter into mud. Death should be veiled, the grave should have its reserve. Here was neither veil nor reserve, but cynically avowed putrefaction. It is effrontery in death to display its work; it offends all the calmness of shadow when it does its task outside its laboratory, the grave.

This dead thing had been stripped. To strip one already stripped,—relentless act! His marrow was no longer in his bones; his entrails were no longer in his body; his voice was no longer in his throat. A corpse is a pocket which death turns inside out, and empties. If he ever was an I, where was that I? There still, perchance; and this was fearful to think of. Something wandering about, something in chains,—can one imagine a more mournful lineament in the darkness?

Realities exist here below which serve as issues to the unknown, which seem to facilitate the egress of speculation, and at which hypothesis snatches. Conjecture has its *compelle*

*intrare*. In passing by certain places and before certain objects one cannot help stopping,—a prey to dreams into the realms of which the mind enters. In the invisible there are dark portals ajar. No one could have met this dead man without meditating. In the vastness of dispersion he was wearing silently away. He had had blood which had been drunk, skin which had been eaten, flesh which had been stolen. Nothing had passed him by without taking somewhat from him. December had borrowed cold of him; midnight, horror; the iron, rust; the plague, miasma; the flowers, perfume. His slow disintegration was a toll paid to all,—a toll of the corpse to the storm, to the rain, to the dew, to the reptiles, to the birds. All the dark hands of night had rifled the dead. He was, indeed, an inexpressibly strange tenant,—a tenant of the darkness. He was on a plain and on a hill, and *he was not*; he was palpable, yet vanished; he was a shadow accruing to the night. After the disappearance of day into the vast of silent obscurity, he became in lugubrious accord with all around him; by his mere presence he increased the gloom of the tempest and the calm of the stars. The unutterable which is in the desert was condensed in him; waif of an unknown fate, he commingled with all the wild secrets of the night. There was in his mystery a vague reverberation of all enigmas; about him life seemed sinking to its lowest depths; certainty and confidence appeared to diminish in his environs. The shiver of the brushwood and the grass, a desolate melancholy, an anxiety in which a conscience seemed to lurk, appropriated with tragic force the whole landscape to that black figure suspended by the chain. The presence of a spectre in the horizon is an aggravation of solitude.

This spectre was a Sign. Having unappeasable winds around him, he was implacable. Perpetual shuddering made him terrible. Fearful to say, he seemed to be a centre in space, with something immense leaning on him,—perhaps that equity, half seen and set at defiance, which transcends human justice. There was in his unburied continuance the vengeance of men and his own vengeance. He was a testi-

mony in the twilight and the waste; he was in himself a disquieting substance, since we tremble before the substance which is the ruined habitation of the soul. For dead matter to trouble us, it must once have been tenanted by spirit. He denounced the law of earth to the law of heaven. Placed there by man, he there awaited God. Above him floated, blended with all the vague distortions of the cloud and the wave, boundless dreams of shadow.

Who could tell what sinister mysteries lurked behind this phantom? The illimitable circumscribed by naught — nor tree, nor roof, nor passer-by — was around the dead man. When the unchangeable broods over us, when heaven, the abyss, the life, grave, and eternity appear patent, then it is we feel that all is inaccessible, all is forbidden, all is sealed. When infinity opens to us, terrible indeed is the closing of the gate behind.

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## CHAPTER VI

### STRUGGLE BETWEEN DEATH AND NIGHT

**T**HE child stood before this thing with staring eyes, dumb and wondering. To a man it would have been a gibbet; to the child it was an apparition. Where a man would have seen a corpse, the child saw a spectre. Besides, he did not understand.

The attractions of mysterious horrors are manifold. There was one on the summit of that hill. The child took one step, then another; he ascended, wishing all the while to descend; and he approached, wishing all the while to retreat. When he got close under the gibbet, he looked up and examined the spectre. It was tarred, and here and there it shone. The child could distinguish the face. That too was coated with pitch; and this mask, which appeared viscous and sticky, varied its aspect even in the night shadows. The child saw

the mouth, which was a hole; the nose, which was a hole; the eyes, which were holes.

The body was wrapped, and apparently corded up, in coarse canvas, soaked in naphtha. The canvas was mouldy and torn. A knee protruded through it; a rent disclosed the ribs. The face was the colour of earth; slugs, wandering over it, had traced across it vague ribbons of silver. The skull, cracked and fractured, gaped like a huge rotten apple. The teeth were still human, for they retained a laugh; the remains of a cry seemed to linger in the open mouth. There were a few hairs of beard on the cheek. The inclined head had an air of attention. Some repairs had recently been made; the face had been tarred afresh, as well as the ribs and the knee which protruded from the canvas. The feet hung out below. Just underneath, in the grass, were two shoes, which snow and rain had rendered shapeless. These shoes had fallen from the dead man's feet. The barefooted child looked at the shoes.

The wind, which had become more and more restless, was now and then interrupted by those pauses which foretell the approach of a storm. For the last few minutes it had altogether ceased to blow. The corpse no longer stirred; the chain was as motionless as a plumbline. Like all new-comers into life, and taking into account the peculiar influences of his fate, the child no doubt felt within him that awakening of ideas characteristic of early years, which endeavours to open the brain and which resembles the pecking of the young bird in the egg. But all that there was in his little consciousness just then was resolved into stupor. Excess of sensation has the effect of too much oil, and ends by putting out thought. A man would have put himself questions; the child put himself none; he only looked. The tar gave the face a wet appearance; drops of pitch, congealed in what had once been the eyes, produced the effect of tears. However, thanks to the pitch, the ravages of death, if not annulled, had been greatly retarded. That which hung before the child was a thing of which great care was taken. The man was evidently



precious; and though they had not cared to keep him alive, they had cared to preserve him dead. The gibbet was old and worm-eaten, although strong, and had been in use many years.

It was the custom in England to tar smugglers. They were hanged on the seaboard, coated over with pitch and left swinging. Examples must be made in public, and tarred examples last longest. The tar was a fine thing; by renewing it they were spared the necessity of making too many fresh examples. In those days they placed gibbets from point to point along the coast, as nowadays they do beacons. The hanged man did duty as a lantern. After his fashion, he guided his comrades, the smugglers, who from far out at sea perceived the gibbets. There is one, first warning; another, second warning. It did not however stop smuggling; but public order is made up of such things. The fashion lasted in England up to the beginning of the present century. In 1822 three men could still be seen hanging in front of Dover Castle. But, for that matter, the preserving process was employed not with smugglers alone. England treated robbers, incendiaries, and murderers in the same way. Jack Painter, who set fire to the government storehouses at Portsmouth, was hanged and tarred in 1776. L'Abbé Coyer, who calls him *Jean le Peintre*, saw him in 1777; Jack Painter was still hanging above the ruin he had made, and was re-tarred from time to time. His corpse lasted (I had almost said lived) nearly fourteen years. It was still doing good service in 1788; in 1790, however, they were obliged to replace it by another. The Egyptians used to value the mummy of the king; a plebeian mummy can also be of service, it seems.

The wind, having great power on the hill, had cleared it of all snow. Herbage was now reappearing on it, interspersed here and there with a few thistles; the hill was covered with that close, short grass which grows by the sea, and makes the tops of cliffs resemble green cloth. Under the gibbet, on the very spot over which hung the feet of the executed criminal, was a long thick tuft, uncommon on such poor soil. Corpses,

crumbling there for centuries past, accounted for the beauty of the grass. Earth feeds on man.

A dreary fascination held the child spell-bound. He only dropped his head a moment when a nettle, which felt like an insect, stung his leg; then he looked up again,— looked up at the face which was looking down on him. It appeared to regard him the more steadfastly because it had no eyes. It was a comprehensive glance, having an indescribable fixedness, in which there was both light and darkness, and which emanated from the skull and teeth as well as from the empty arches of the brow. The whole head of a dead man seems to have vision, and this is awful; no eyeball, yet we feel that we are being looked at.

Little by little the child himself was becoming petrified. He no longer moved. A deadly torpor was stealing over him. He did not even perceive that he was losing consciousness, though he was becoming benumbed and lifeless. Winter was silently delivering him over to night. There is something of the traitor in winter. The child was all but a statue. The coldness of stone was penetrating his bones; darkness, that insidious reptile, was creeping over him. The drowsiness resulting from snow steals over one like a dim tide. The child was being slowly invaded by a stagnation resembling that of the corpse. He was on the point of falling under the gibbet. He no longer knew whether he was standing upright or not.

The end always impending, no transition between to be and not to be, the return to the crucible, the slip possible every minute,— such is life! Another instant, and the child and the dead would be victims of the same obliteration.

The spectre seemed to understand this, and not to wish it. Suddenly it moved; one would have said it was warning the child. The wind was beginning to blow again. Nothing stranger than this dead man in motion could be conceived of. The corpse at the end of the chain, swayed by the invisible gust, assumed an oblique position; rose on the left, then fell back; reascended on the right, and then fell and rose with slow and mournful precision. A weird game of see-saw; it seemed

as though one saw in the darkness the pendulum of the clock of Eternity.

This continued some time. The child felt himself waking up at the sight; for even through his increasing numbness he experienced a keen sensation of fear. The chain with every oscillation made a creaking sound, with hideous regularity. It seemed to take breath, and then to resume. This creaking was like the cry of a grasshopper. An approaching squall is heralded by sudden gusts of wind; all at once the breeze increased into a gale. The corpse quickened its dismal oscillations; it no longer swung, it tossed. The chain, which had been creaking, now shrieked; it seemed as if its shriek was heard. If it was a call, it was obeyed. From the depths of the horizon came a rushing sound: it was the sound of wings.

An incident now occurred, one of the weird incidents peculiar to graveyards and solitudes. It was the arrival of a flock of ravens. Black flying specks pricked the clouds, pierced the mist, increased in size, came nearer, all hastening towards the hill and uttering shrill cries. It was like the approach of a Legion. The winged vermin of darkness alighted on the gibbet; the child drew back in terror. The birds crowded on the gibbet; not one was on the corpse. They were talking among themselves; the croaking was frightful. The howl, the whistle, and the roar are signs of life; the croak is a pleased announcement of putrefaction; in it you can fancy you hear the grave speak. The child was even more overcome with terror than with cold.

Then the ravens were silent. Finally one of them flew down upon the skeleton. This was the signal; they all precipitated themselves upon it. There was a cloud of wings, then their ranks closed up, and the skeleton disappeared under a swarm of black objects struggling in the darkness. Just then the corpse moved. Was it the corpse, or was it the wind? It made a frightful bound. The hurricane, which was increasing, came to its aid. The skeleton fell into convulsions. The squall, already blowing fiercely, seized hold of it, and

dashed it about in all directions. It became horrible; it began to struggle,—an awful puppet, with a gallows' chain for a string. It seemed as if some one had seized the string, and was playing with the mummy; it leaped about as if it would fain dislocate itself. The birds frightened, flew off; it was as if an explosion had scattered the unclean creatures. Then they returned and a fresh struggle began.

The dead man seemed endowed with hideous vitality. The winds lifted him as though they meant to carry him away. He seemed to be struggling and to be making efforts to escape, but his iron collar held him fast. The birds adapted themselves to all his movements, retreating, then striking again,—scared but desperate. The corpse, moved by every gust of the wind, had shocks, starts, fits of rage: it went, it came, it rose, it fell, driving back the scattered swarm. The fierce, assailing flock would not let go their hold, and grew stubborn; the spectre, as if maddened by their attacks, redoubled its blind chastisement of space. At times the corpse was covered by talons and wings; then it was free. There were disappearances of the horde; then sudden furious returns. The birds seemed frenzied. Thrusting of claws, thrusting of beaks, croakings, rendings of shreds which were no longer flesh, creakings of the gibbet, shudderings of the skeleton, rattlings of the chain, the voices of the storm and tumult,—what conflict more fearful? A hobgoblin warring with devils, a combat with a spectre!

At times, the storm redoubling its violence, the hanged man revolved as if upon a pivot, turning every way at once, as if trying to run after the birds. The wind was on his side, the chain against him. It was as if dark-skinned deities were mixing themselves up in the fray. The hurricane took part in the battle. As the dead man turned himself about, the flock of birds wound round him spirally. It was a whirl in a whirlwind. A great roar was heard from below,—it was the sea.

As the child was gazing at this nightmare, he suddenly trembled in every limb; a shiver traversed his frame; he stag-

gered, tottered, nearly fell; recovered himself, pressed both hands to his forehead, as if he felt his forehead a support. Then, with hair streaming in the wind, he descended the hill with long strides, his eyes closed, himself almost a phantom, leaving that horror of the night behind him.

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## CHAPTER VII

## THE NORTH POINT OF PORTLAND

**T**HE child ran until he was breathless, at random, desperate, over the plain into the snow, into space. His flight warmed him. He needed it. Without the run and the fright he would have died. When his breath failed him, he stopped, but he dared not look back. He fancied that the birds would pursue him, that the dead man had undone his chain and was perhaps hurrying after him, that possibly the very gibbet itself was descending the hill, running after the dead man; he feared that he should see these things if he turned his head. When he had somewhat recovered his breath, he resumed his flight.

To account for facts does not belong to childhood. This child had received impressions which were magnified by terror, but he did not link them together in his mind, nor form any conclusion on them. He was going on, no matter how or where; he ran in agony and difficulty as one in a dream. During the three hours or so since he had been deserted, his onward progress, still vague, had changed in character. At first it was a search; now it was a flight. He was no longer conscious of hunger or cold; he felt only fear. One instinct had given place to another. To escape was now his one desire,—to escape. From what? From everything. On all sides life seemed to enclose him like a horrible wall. If he could have fled from everything, he would have done so. But

children know nothing of that breaking from prison which is called suicide. He was running; he ran on for an indefinite time. But fear dies with lack of breath.

All at once, as if seized by a sudden accession of energy and intelligence, he stopped. One would have said he was ashamed of running away. He drew himself up, stamped his foot, and with head erect looked around him. There was no hill, no gibbet, no flying crows visible now. The fog had resumed possession of the horizon. The child continued his way; but now he no longer ran, but walked. To say that this meeting with a corpse had made a man of him was not far from the truth. The gibbet which had so terrified him still seemed to him an apparition; but terror overcome is strength gained, and he felt himself stronger. Had he been of an age to probe self, he would have discovered a thousand other germs of meditation; but the reflection of children is shapeless, and the most they feel is the bitter aftertaste of that which, obscure to them, the man later on calls indignation. Let us add that a child has the faculty of promptly accepting the conclusions of a sensation; the distant boundaries which amplify painful subjects escape him. A child is protected by the very limit of his understanding from emotions which are too complex. He sees the fact, and little else. The difficulty of being satisfied with half-formed ideas does not exist so far as he is concerned. It is not until later that experience comes, with its brief, to conduct the lawsuit of life. *Then* he confronts groups of facts which have crossed his path; the understanding, cultivated and enlarged, draws comparisons; the memories of youth reappear like the traces of a palimpsest after erasure; these memories form the bases of logic, and that which was a vision in the child's brain becomes a syllogism in the man's. Experience is varied, however, and leads to good or evil according to natural disposition.

The child had run quite a quarter of a league, and walked another quarter, when suddenly he felt the cravings of hunger. A thought which altogether eclipsed the hideous apparition on the hill occurred to him,—that he must eat. *Happily*

there are in man brute instincts which serve to lead him back to reality. But what to eat, where to eat, how to eat? He felt in his pockets mechanically, well knowing that they were empty. Then he quickened his pace, without knowing whither he was going. He was hastening towards a possible shelter. This faith in a shelter is one of the convictions rooted by God in man; to believe in a shelter is to believe in God.

On that snow-clad plain, however, there was nothing resembling a roof. Yet the child went on, and the waste continued bare as far as eye could reach. There had never been a human habitation on the table-land. It was at the foot of the cliff, in holes in the rocks, that the aboriginal inhabitants had dwelt long ago,—men who had slings for weapons, dried cow-dung for fuel, for a god the idol Heil standing in a glade at Dorchester, and for a trade the fishing of that grey coral which the Gauls called *plin*, and the Greeks *Isidis plocamos*. The child made his way along as best he could. Destiny is made up of cross-roads; an option of path is sometimes dangerous. This little creature had an early choice of doubtful chances. He continued to advance, but although the muscles of his thighs seemed to be of steel, he began to tire. There were no tracks in the plain, or if there were any the snow had obliterated them. Instinctively he directed his course eastwards. Sharp stones had wounded his heels; had it been daylight, blood-stains might have been seen in the foot-prints he left in the snow. He recognized no landmarks; for he was crossing the plain from south to north, and it is probable that the band with which he had come, to avoid meeting any one, had crossed it from east to west. They had probably sailed in some fisherman's or smuggler's boat from a point on the coast of Uggescombe (such as St. Catherine's Cape), or Swancry, to Portland, to find the hooker which awaited them; and they must have landed in one of the creeks of Weston, and re-embarked in one of the creeks of Easton. That route intersected the one the child was now following; but it was impossible for him to recognize the road.

On the plain of Portland there are here and there occasional

strips of elevated land, ending abruptly at the shore, where they plunge straight down into the sea. The wandering child had now reached one of these culminating points and stopped on it, hoping that a broader view might furnish some helpful indications. He tried to see around him. Before him, in place of an horizon, was a vast livid opacity. He looked at this attentively, and under the intentness of his gaze objects became less indistinct. At the base of a distant eminence to the eastward (a moving and wan sort of precipice, which resembled a cliff of the night) crept and floated some dim black specks, some mere shreds of vapour. The pale opacity was fog, the black shreds were smoke. Where there is smoke there must be men. The child turned his steps in that direction. He saw some distance off a descent, and at the foot of the descent, among shapeless conformations of rock, blurred by the mist, what seemed to be either a sandbank or a tongue of land, probably connecting the plains in the horizon with the table-land he had just crossed. It was evident he must pass that way. He had, in fact, arrived at the Isthmus of Portland, a diluvian alluvium which is called Cheshil.

The child began now to descend the side of the plateau. The descent was difficult and rough. It was (with less ruggedness, however) the reverse of the ascent he had made on leaving the creek. Every ascent is balanced by a decline; after having clambered up, he now crawled down. He leaped from one rock to another at the risk of a sprain, and at the risk of falling into the vague depths below. To save himself when he slipped on the rock or on the ice, he caught hold of tufts of weeds and furze, thick with thorns, the points of which ran into his fingers. Sometimes he came to an easier declivity, where he took breath as he descended; then came to a precipice again, where each step was fraught with peril. In descending precipices every movement is a problem. One must be skilful under penalty of death. These problems the child solved with an instinct which would have won him the admiration of apes and mountebanks. The descent was steep and long. Nevertheless he was nearing the Isthmus, of which



from time to time he caught a glimpse. Now and then, as he bounded or dropped from rock to rock, he pricked up his ears, his head erect the while like a listening deer. He was hearkening to a diffused and faint uproar, far away to the left, like the deep note of a clarion. It was the roar of the winds, preceding that fearful northern blast, which is heard rushing from the pole, like an invasion of trumpets. At the same time the child felt on his brow, on his eyes, and on his cheeks something which was like the palms of cold hands being placed on his face. These were large frozen flakes, sown at first softly in space, then eddying wildly and heralding a snow-storm. The child was soon covered with them. The snow-storm, which for the last hour had been raging on the sea, had now reached the land, and was slowly invading the plains.

BOOK II  
THE HOOKER AT SEA

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CHAPTER I

SUPERHUMAN LAWS

THE snow-storm is one of the greatest mysteries of the ocean. It is the most obscure of things meteorological; obscure in every sense of the word. It is a mixture of fog and storm; and even in our own day we cannot well account for the phenomenon. Hence many disasters.

We try to explain all things by the action of wind and wave; yet in the air there is a force which is not the wind, and in the waters a force which is not the wave. That force, both in the air and in the water, is effluvium. Air and water are two nearly identical liquid masses, entering into the composition of each other by condensation and dilatation, so that to breathe is to drink. Effluvium alone is fluid. The wind and the wave are only impulses; effluvium is a current. The wind is visible in clouds, the wave is visible in foam; effluvium is invisible. From time to time, however, it says, "I am here." Its "I am here" is a clap of thunder.

The snow-storm offers a problem analogous to the dry fog. If the solution of the *callina* of the Spaniards, and the *quobar* of the Ethiopians be possible, assuredly that solution will be achieved by attentive observation of magnetic effluvium.

But for effluvium a host of circumstances would remain unexplained. Strictly speaking, the changes in the velocity of

the wind, varying from three feet per second to two hundred and twenty feet, would explain the variations of the waves rising from three inches in a calm sea to thirty-six feet in a raging one. Strictly speaking the horizontal direction of the winds, even in a squall, enables us to understand how it is that a wave thirty feet high can be fifteen hundred feet long. But why are the waves of the Pacific four times higher near America than near Asia; that is to say, higher in the East than in the West? Why is the contrary true of the Atlantic? Why, at the Equator, are they highest in the middle of the sea? Wherefore these deviations in the swell of the ocean? This is something which magnetic effluvium, combined with terrestrial rotation and sidereal attraction, can alone explain.

Is not this mysterious complication needed to explain an oscillation of the wind veering, for instance, by the west from southeast to northeast, then suddenly returning in the same great curve from northeast to southeast, so as to make in thirty-six hours a prodigious circuit of five hundred and sixty degrees? Such was the preface to the snow-storm of March, 17, 1867.

The storm-waves of Australia reach a height of eighty feet; this fact is connected with close proximity of the Pole. Storms in those latitudes result less from disorder of the winds than from submarine electrical disturbances. In the year 1866 the transatlantic cable was disturbed at regular intervals in its workings for two hours in the twenty-four,—from noon to two o'clock,—by a sort of intermittent fever. Certain compositions and decompositions of forces produce certain phenomena which force themselves on the calculations of the seamen under penalty of shipwreck. The day that navigation, now a routine, shall become a branch of mathematics; the day we shall, for instance, seek to know why it is that hot winds sometimes come from the north, and cold winds from the south; the day when we shall understand that diminutions of temperature are proportionate to oceanic depths; the day when we shall realize that the globe is a vast load-stone polarized in immensity, with two axes (an axis of rotation,

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and an axis of effluvium, intersecting each other at the centre of the earth), and that the magnetic poles turn the geographical poles; when those who risk life will choose to risk it scientifically; when the captain shall be a meteorologist, and the pilot a chemist,—then will many catastrophes be avoided. The sea is as magnetic as it is aquatic; a host of unknown forces float in its liquid waves. To behold in the sea only a mass of water is not to behold it at all. The sea is an ebb and flow of fluid, complicated by magnetic and capillary attractions even more than by hurricanes. Molecular adhesion manifested among other phenomena by capillary attraction, although microscopic, takes in the ocean its place in the grandeur of immensity; and the wave of effluvium sometimes aids, sometimes counteracts, the wave of the air and the wave of the waters. He who is ignorant of electric law is ignorant of hydraulic law; for the one intermixes with the other. It is true there is no study more difficult nor more obscure; it verges on empiricism, just as astronomy verges on astrology; and yet without this study there is no such thing as real navigation. Having said this much, we will pass on.

One of the most dangerous components of the sea is the snow-storm. The snow-storm is above all things magnetic; the pole produces it as it produces the aurora borealis. Storms are the nervous attacks and delirious frenzies of the sea. The sea has its ailments. Tempests may be compared to maladies. Some are fatal, others are not; some may be escaped, others cannot. A snow-storm is considered extremely dangerous on the sea. Jarabija, one of the pilots of Magellan, termed it "a cloud issuing from the devil's sore side."<sup>1</sup> Surcouf said: "Il y a du trousse-galant dans cette tempête-la." The old Spanish navigators called this kind of squall, *la nevada* when it came with snow; *la helada*, when it came with hail. According to them, bats fell from the sky with the snow. Snow-storms are characteristic of polar latitudes; nev-

<sup>1</sup> Una nube salida del malo lado del diablo.

ertheless, at times they glide, one might almost say tumble, into our climates.

The "Matutina," as we have seen, plunged resolutely into the perils of the night,—perils greatly increased by the impending storm. She braved them with a sort of tragic audacity, for it must be remembered that she had received due warning.

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## CHAPTER II

### OUR FIRST ROUGH SKETCHES FILLED IN

WHILE the hooker was in the gulf of Portland, there was very little sea; the ocean, though gloomy, was almost still, and the sky was yet clear. The wind was very little felt on the vessel, for the hooker hugged the cliff as closely as possible, it serving as a screen to her.

There were ten on board the little Biscayan felucca, three men in the crew, and seven passengers, two of whom were women. In the light of the open sea (which changes twilight into day) all the figures on board were clearly visible. Besides, they were not hiding now; they were all at ease; each one resumed his natural manner, spoke in his own voice, showed his face: departure was to them a deliverance.

The motley nature of the group was apparent. The women were of an uncertain age. A wandering life produces premature old age, and indigence is made up of wrinkles. One of the women was a Basque of the Dry-ports; the other, with the large rosary, was an Irish woman. They wore that air of indifference common to the wretched. They had squatted down close to each other when they got on board, on chests at the foot of the mast. They talked to each other. Irish and Basque are, as we have said, kindred languages. The Basque woman's hair was scented with onions and basil.

The skipper of the hooker was a Basque of Guipuzcoa. One sailor was a Basque from the northern slope of the Pyrenees; the other was from the southern slope,—that is to say, they were of the same race, although the first was French and the latter Spanish. The Basques acknowledge no official country. "My mother is called the mountain."<sup>1</sup> as Zalareus, the muleteer, used to say. Of the five men on the hooker, one was a Frenchman of Languedoc, one a Frenchman of Provence, one a Genoese; one, the old man who wore a sombrero without a hole for a pipe, appeared to be a German. The fifth, the chief, was a Basque of the Landes from Biscarrosse. It was he who had with a kick of his heel cast the plank into the sea just as the child was going aboard the hooker. This man, robust, agile, quick in movement, covered, as may be remembered with trimmings, slashings, and glistening tinsel, could not keep still, but sat down, rose up, and continually walked to and fro from one end of the vessel to the other, as if debating uneasily on what had been done and what was going to happen.

This chief of the band, the captain, and the two sailors, all four Basques, spoke sometimes Basque, sometimes Spanish, sometimes French,—these three languages being common on both slopes of the Pyrenees. But generally speaking, all except the women talked something like French, which was the foundation of their slang. The French language, about this period, began to be chosen by the peoples as the happy medium between the excess of consonants in the north and the excess of vowels in the south. In Europe, French was the language of commerce, and also of felony. It will be remembered that Gibby, a London thief, understood Cartouche.

The hooker, a fine sailor, was making rapid progress; still, ten persons, besides their baggage, were a heavy cargo for a vessel of such light draught.

The fact of the vessel's aiding the escape of a band did not necessarily imply that the crew were accomplices. It was

<sup>1</sup> Mi madre se llama Montaña.

sufficient that the captain of the vessel was a Vascongado, and that the chief of the band was another. Among that race mutual assistance is a duty which admits of no exception. A Basque, as we have said, is neither Spanish nor French; he is a Basque, and always and everywhere he must succour a Basque. Such is Pyrenean fraternity.

While the hooker was in the gulf, the sky, although threatening, did not frown enough to cause the fugitives any uneasiness. They were flying swiftly along, they were escaping, and they were noisily gay. One laughed, another sang; the laugh was dry but free, the song was low but careless. The Languedocian cried, "Caoucagno!"<sup>1</sup> He was a long-shore-man, a native of the waterside village of Gruissan, on the southern side of the Clappe,— a bargeman rather than a mariner, but accustomed to navigate the inlets of Bages, and to draw the drag-net full of fish over the salt sands of St. Lucie. He was of the race that wears a red cap, makes complicated signs of the cross after the Spanish fashion, drinks wine out of goat-skins, eats scraped ham, kneels down to blaspheme, and adjures his patron saint with threats: "Great saint! grant me what I ask, or I'll throw a stone at thy head, — *ou té feg un pic!*" He might at need prove a useful addition to the crew.

The Provençal in the caboose was punching a turf fire under an iron pot, and making broth. The broth was a kind of *puchero*, in which fish took the place of meat, and into which the Provençal threw peas, little bits of bacon cut in squares, and pods of red pimento,— concessions made by the eaters of *bouillabaisse* to the eaters of *olla podrida*. One of the bags of provisions lay beside him unpacked. Over his head he had lighted an iron lantern, glazed with talc, which swung on a hook from the ceiling; near it from another hook swung the weather-cock halcyon.<sup>2</sup> While he made the broth, the Pro-

<sup>1</sup>*Cocagne* expresses the highest pitch of satisfaction in Narbonne.

<sup>2</sup>There was a popular belief in those days that a dead halcyon hung by the beak always turned its breast to the quarter whence the wind was blowing.

vençal put the neck of a gourd into his mouth, and now and then swallowed a draught of aguardiente. It was one of those gourds covered with wicker, broad and flat, with handles, which used to be hung at the side by a strap, and which were then called hip-gourds. Between each gulp he mumbled one of those country songs about nothing in particular. One needs, to make such a song, no more than to see (even in imagination) a hollow road, a hedge; in a meadow, through a gap in the bushes, the shadow of a horse and cart, elongated in the sunset, and from time to time, above the hedge, the end of a fork loaded with hay appearing and disappearing.

According to the state of one's mind, a departure is either a relief or the reverse. All seemed lighter in spirits except the old man of the party. This old man, who looked more German than anything else, although he had one of those unfathomable faces in which nationality is lost, was bald; and he was so grave that his baldness might have been a tonsure. Every time he passed the Virgin on the prow he raised his felt hat, so that you could see the swollen and senile veins of his skull. A sort of full gown, torn and threadbare, of brown Dorchester serge, half hid his closely fitting coat, tight, compact, and hooked up to the neck like a cassock. His hands seemed inclined to cross each other, as if habituated to an attitude of prayer. He had what might be called a wan countenance; for the countenance is above all things a reflection, and it is an error to believe that an idea is colourless. That countenance was evidently the reflection of a strange mental state, the result of a composition of contradictions,—some tending to drift away in good, others in evil; and to an observer it was the revelation of one who was less and more than human, capable of falling below the scale of the tiger or of rising above that of man. Such chaotic souls exist. There was something inscrutable in this old man's face. In his impassibility, which was perhaps only on the surface, there was portrayed a twofold petrification,—the petrification of heart proper to the hangman,



and the petrification of mind proper to the mandarin. One might have said (for the monstrous has its mode of being complete) that all things were possible to him, even emotion. In every savant there is something of the corpse, and this man was a savant. One saw science imprinted in the gestures of his body and in the folds of his dress. His was a fossil face, the serious cast of which was counteracted by that wrinkled mobility of the polyglot which verges on grimace. But he was a severe man withal,— nothing of the hypocrite, nothing of the cynic; a tragic dreamer also. He was one of those men whom crime leaves pensive. He had the brow of an incendiary tempered by the eyes of an archbishop; his sparse grey locks had turned to white over his temples. The Christian was evident in him, complicated with the fatalism of the Turk. Chalkstones deformed his fingers, which were skeleton-like in their thinness. The stiffness of his tall frame was grotesque. He had his sea-legs on; he walked slowly about the deck, not looking at any one, with an air at once stern and sinister. His eyeballs were filled with the fixed stare of a soul groping in darkness and afflicted with violent compunctions of conscience. From time to time the chief of the band, abrupt and alert, and making sudden turns about the vessel, came to the old man and whispered in his ear. He answered with a nod. It might have been the lightning consulting the night.

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### CHAPTER III

#### TROUBLED MEN ON THE TROUBLED SEA

**T**WO men on board the craft were absorbed in thought,— the old man, and the captain of the hooker, who must not be mistaken for the chief of the band. The captain was occupied by the sea; the old man by the sky. The former did not lift his eyes from the waters; the latter kept close

watch of the firmament. The captain's anxiety was the state of the sea; the old man seemed to distrust the heavens. He scanned the stars through every break in the clouds.

It was the hour when day still lingers, but when a few stars begin to pierce the twilight. The horizon was singular, the mist upon it varied. A haze predominated on land, clouds at sea. The captain, noting the rising billows, had everything made taught before he got outside Portland Bay. He would not delay so doing until he should pass the headland. He examined the rigging closely, and satisfied himself that the lower shrouds were well set up, and that they supported firmly the futtock-shrouds,—precautions of a man who means to carry a press of sail at all hazards. The hooker was not trimmed, being two foot by the head; this was her weak point. The captain passed every minute from the binnacle to the standard compass, taking the bearings of objects on shore. The "Matutina" had at first a wind which was not unfavourable, though she could not lie within five points of her course. The captain took the helm as often as possible, trusting no one but himself to prevent her from dropping to leeward, the effect of the rudder being influenced by the steerage-way.

The difference between the true and apparent course being considerable, the hooker seemed to lie closer to the wind than she really did. The breeze was not a-beam, nor was the hooker close-hauled; but one cannot ascertain the true course made, except when the wind is abaft. When one perceives long streaks of clouds meeting in a point on the horizon, one may be sure that the wind is in that quarter. But this evening the wind was variable; the needle fluctuated. The captain distrusted the erratic movements of the vessel. He steered carefully but resolutely, luffed her up, watched her coming-to, prevented her from yawing and from running into the wind's eye; noted the leeway, the little jerks of the helm; was observant of every roll and pitch of the vessel, of the difference in her speed, and of the variable gusts of wind. For fear of accidents, he was constantly on the lookout for

squalls from off the land he was hugging; and above all he was cautious to keep her sails full,—the indications of the compass being uncertain from the small size of the instrument. The captain's eyes, frequently lowered, remarked every change in the waves. Once, however, he raised them towards the sky, and tried to make out the three stars of Orion's belt. These stars are called the three magi, and an old proverb of the ancient Spanish pilots declares that, "He who sees the three magi is not far from the Saviour."

This glance of the captain tallied with an aside growled out, at the other end of the vessel, by the old man: "We don't even see the pointers, nor the star Antares, red as he is. Not one of them is visible."

No fears troubled the other fugitives. Still, when the first hilarity they felt at their escape had passed away, they could not help remembering that they were at sea in the month of January, and that the wind was freezing cold. It was impossible to establish themselves in the cabin; it was much too narrow and too encumbered with bales and baggage. The baggage belonged to the passengers, the bales to the crew; for the hooker was no pleasure-boat, and was engaged in smuggling. The passengers were obliged to remain on deck, a state of things to which these wanderers easily resigned themselves. Open-air habits make it easy for vagabonds to settle themselves for the night. The open air (*la belle étoile*) is their friend, and the cold helps them to sleep,—sometimes to die. But to-night, as we have seen, there was no *belle étoile*.

The Languedocian and the Genoese, while waiting for supper, rolled themselves up near the women, at the foot of the mast, in some tarpaulins which the sailors had thrown them. The old man remained at the bow motionless, and apparently insensible to the cold. The captain of the hooker, from the helm where he was standing, uttered a sort of guttural call somewhat like the cry of the American bird called the Exclaimer. At his call the chief of the band drew near, and the captain addressed him thus:—

"Ethecho Jaüna." These two words, which mean "tiller of the mountain," form with these old Cantabri a solemn preface to any subject which should command attention. Then, the captain having pointed the old man out to the chief, the dialogue continued in Spanish; though it was not a very correct dialect, being that of the mountains. Here are the questions and answers:

"Ethecho jaüna, que es este hombre?"

"Un hombre."

"Que lenguas habla?"

"Todas."

"Que cosas sabe?"

"Todas."

"Qual país?"

"Ningun, y todos."

"Qual dios?"

"Dios."

"Como le llamas?"

"El tonto."

"Como dices que le llamas?"

"El sabio."

"En vuestre tropa que esta?"

"Esta lo que esta."

"El gefe?"

"No."

"Pues que esta?"

"La alma."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Tiller of the mountain, who is that man?"

"A man."

"What tongue does he speak?"

"All."

"What things does he know?"

"All."

"What is his country?"

"None and all."

"Who is his God?"

"God."

"What do you call him?"

"The madman."

"What do you say you call him?"

The chief and the captain parted, each to continue his own meditation, and a little while afterwards the "Matutina" left the gulf.

Now came the great rolling of the open sea. The ocean in the spaces between the foam was slimy in appearance. The waves seen through the twilight in indistinct outline somewhat resembled splashes of gall. Here and there a level space between the waves showed cracks and stars, like a pane of glass broken by stones; and in the centre of these stars, as in a revolving orifice, trembled a phosphorescent gleam, like that feline reflection of vanished light which shines in the eyeballs of owls.

Proudly, like a strong, bold swimmer, the "Matutina" crossed the dangerous Shambles shoal. This bank, a hidden obstruction at the entrance of Portland roads, is not a barrier but an amphitheatre, its benches cut out by the circling of the waves. An arena, round and symmetrical, as high as a Jungfrau, only submerged; an oceanic coliseum, seen by the diver in the vision-like transparency which engulfs him,—such is the Shambles shoal. There hydras fight, leviathans meet. There, says the legend, at the bottom of the gigantic shaft, are the wrecks of ships, seized and sunk by the huge Kraken, also known as the devil-fish. These spectral realities, unknown to man, are indicated at the surface only by a slight ripple.

In this nineteenth century the Shambles bank is in ruins; the breakwater recently constructed has overthrown and mutilated, by the force of its surf, that high submarine structure, just as the jetty built at the Croisic in 1760 changed, by a quarter of an hour, the courses of the tides. And yet the tide is eternal. But eternity is more subservient to man than man imagines.

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"The wise man."  
"In your hand, what is he?"  
"He is what he is."  
"The chief?"  
"No."  
"Then what is he?"  
"The soul."

## CHAPTER IV

## A CLOUD DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS ENTERS ON THE SCENE

THE old man whom the chief of the band had called first the Madman, then the Sage, now never left the fore-castle. Since they crossed the Shambles shoal, his attention had been divided between the heavens and the waters. He looked down, he looked upwards, and above all watched the northeast. The captain gave the helm to a sailor, stepped over the aft hatchway, crossed the gangway, and went on to the fore-castle. He approached the old man, but not from the front; he passed a little behind him, with elbows resting on his hips, with outstretched hands, his head on one side, with open eyes and arched eyebrows, and a smile in the corners of his mouth,—an attitude of curiosity hesitating between mockery and respect. The old man, either because it was his habit to talk to himself, or because hearing some one behind him incited him to speech, began to soliloquize while he looked into space:—

“The Meridian from which the right ascension is calculated is marked in this century by four stars,—the Polar, Cassiopeia’s Chair, Andromeda’s Head, and the star Algenib, which is in Pegasus. But not one of them is visible.”

These words followed one another mechanically, and were scarcely articulated, as if he did not care to pronounce them. They floated out of his mouth and dispersed. Soliloquy is the smoke exhaled by the inmost fires of the soul.

The captain broke in: “Señor!”

The old man, perhaps rather deaf as well as very thoughtful, went on: “Too few stars, and too much wind. The breeze continually changes its direction and blows inshore; thence it rises perpendicularly. This results from the land being warmer than the water. Its atmosphere is lighter. The cold, dense wind of the sea rushes in to replace it.

From this cause, in the upper regions the wind blows towards the land from every quarter. It would be advisable to make long tacks between the real and apparent parallel. When the latitude by observation differs from the latitude by dead reckoning, by not more than three minutes in thirty miles or by four minutes in sixty miles, you are in the true course."

The captain bowed, but the old man saw him not. The latter, who wore what resembled an Oxford or Göttingen university gown, did not relax his haughty and rigid attitude. He observed the waves as a critic of waves and of men. He studied the billows, but almost as if he was about to demand his turn to speak amidst their turmoil, and teach them something. There was in him both pedagogue and soothsayer. He seemed an oracle of the deep. He continued his soliloquy, which was perhaps intended to be heard:—

"We might try, if we had a wheel instead of a helm. With a speed of twelve miles an hour, a force of twenty pounds exerted on the wheel produces three hundred thousand pounds' effect on the course. And more, too; for in some cases, with a double block and runner, they can get two more revolutions."

The captain bowed a second time, and said, "Señor!"

The old man's eyes rested on him; he had turned his head without moving his body. "Call me Doctor."

"Master Doctor, I am the captain."

"Just so," said the doctor. The doctor, as henceforward we shall call him, appeared willing to converse: "Captain, have you an English sextant?"

"No."

"Without an English sextant you cannot take an altitude at all."

"The Basques," replied the captain, "took altitudes before there were any English."

"Be careful you are not taken aback."

"I keep her away when necessary."

"Have you tried how many knots she is running?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Just now."

"How?"

"By the log."

"Did you take the trouble to look at the triangle?"

"Yes."

"Did the sand run through the glass in exactly thirty seconds?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure that the sand has not worn the hole between the globes?"

"Yes."

"Have you proved the sand-glass by the oscillations of a bullet?"

"Suspended by a rope-yarn drawn out from the top of a coil of soaked hemp? Undoubtedly."

"Have you waxed the yarn lest it should stretch?"

"Yes."

"Have you tested the log?"

"I tested the sand-glass by the bullet, and checked the log by a round shot."

"Of what size was the shot?"

"One foot in diameter."

"Heavy enough!"

"It is an old round shot of our war-hooker, 'La Casse de Par-Grand.'"

"Which was in the Armada?"

"Yes."

"And which carried six hundred soldiers, fifty sailors, and twenty-five guns?"

"Shipwreck knows it."

"How did you compute the resistance of the water to the shot?"

"By means of a German scale."

"Have you taken into account the resistance of the rope supporting the shot to the waves?"

"Yes."



"What was the result?"

"The resistance of the water was one hundred and seventy pounds."

"That's to say, she is running four French leagues an hour."

"And three Dutch leagues."

"But that is the difference merely of the vessel's way and the rate at which the sea is running?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Whither are you steering?"

"For a creek I know, between Loyola and St. Sebastian."

"Make the latitude of the harbor's mouth as soon as possible."

"Yes, as near as I can."

"Beware of gusts and currents. The first cause the second."

"Yes: the traitors!"

"No abuse! The sea understands. Insult nothing; be satisfied with watching."

"I have watched, and I am still watching. Just now the tide is running against the wind; by-and-by, when it turns, we shall be all right."

"Have you a chart?"

"No; not for this channel."

"Then you sail by rule of thumb?"

"Not at all. I have a compass."

"The compass is one eye, the chart the other."

"A man with one eye can see."

"How do you compute the difference between the true and apparent course?"

"I've got my standard compass, and I make a guess."

"To guess is all very well. To know for a certainty is better."

"Christopher<sup>1</sup> guessed."

"When there is a fog and the needle revolves treacherously,

<sup>1</sup> Columbus.

you can never tell on which side you should look out for squalls; and the end of it is that you know neither the real nor apparent day's work. An ass with his chart is better off than a wizard with his oracle."

"There is no fog yet, and I see no cause for alarm."

"Ships are like flies in the spider's web of the sea."

"Just now both winds and waves are tolerably favourable."

"Black specks quivering on the billows,—such are men on the ocean."

"I dare say there will be nothing wrong to-night."

"You may get into a mess that you will find it hard to get out of."

"Yes; but all goes well at present."

The doctor's eyes were fixed on the northeast. The captain continued:—

"Let us once reach the Gulf of Gascony, and I can answer for our safety. Ah, I am at home there! I know it well, my Gulf of Gascony! It is a little basin, often very boisterous; but there I know every sounding and the nature of the bottom,—mud opposite San Cipriano, shells opposite Cizarque, sand off Cape Peñas, little pebbles off Boncaut de Mimizan; and I know the colour of every pebble."

The captain broke off; the doctor was no longer listening. He was gazing at the northeast. Over that icy face passed an extraordinary expression. All the agony of terror possible to a mask of stone was depicted there. From his mouth escaped the word, "Ha!"

His eyes were dilated with horror as he perceived a speck on the horizon. Then he added, under his breath, "It is well. As for me, I do not object."

The captain looked at him.

The doctor went on talking to himself, or to some one in the deep: "Yes, I say." Then he was silent, and fixed his eyes with renewed attention on that which he was watching, and said: "It is coming from afar off, but it will come none the less surely."

The arc of the horizon which engrossed the visual orbs and thoughts of the doctor, being opposite to the west, was illuminated by the transcendent reflection of twilight, as if it were day. This arc, limited in extent, and surrounded by streaks of greyish vapour, was uniformly blue, but of a leaden rather than cerulean blue. The doctor pointed to this atmospheric arc, and said:

"Captain, do you see?"

"What?"

"That."

"What?"

"Out there."

"A blue spot? Yes."

"What is it?"

"An opening in the heavens."

"For those who go to heaven; for those who go elsewhere it is another affair,"—and the doctor emphasized these enigmatical words with an appalling expression which was unseen in the darkness.

A silence ensued. The captain, remembering the two names given by the chief to this man, asked himself the question: "Is he a madman, or is he a sage?"

The stiff and bony finger of the doctor continued to point, like a sign-post, to the dark spot in the sky.

The captain looked at this spot. "In truth," he growled out, "it is not sky, but clouds."

"A blue cloud is worse than a black cloud," said the doctor; "and it's a snow-cloud," he added.

"La nube de la nieve," said the captain, as if trying to understand the word better by translating it.

"Do you know what a snow-cloud is?" asked the doctor.

"No."

"You'll know by-and-by."

The captain again turned his attention to the horizon. Continuing to observe the cloud, he muttered between his teeth:—

"One month of squalls, another of wet; January with its

gales, February with its rains,—that's all the winter we Asturians get. Our rain even is warm. We've no snow but on the mountains. Ay, ay, look out for the avalanche. The avalanche is no respecter of persons; the avalanche is a brute."

"And the water-spout is a monster," said the doctor, adding, after a pause, "here it comes."

He continued: "Several winds are getting together,—a strong wind from the west, and a gentle wind from the east."

"That last is a deceitful one," said the captain.

The blue cloud was growing larger. "If the snow," said the doctor, "is appalling when it slips down the mountain, think what it is when it falls from the Pole!" His eye was glassy. The cloud seemed to spread over his face and almost simultaneously over the horizon. He continued, in musing tones: "Every minute the fatal hour draws nearer. The will of Heaven is about to be manifested."

The captain again asked himself this question, "Is he a madman?"

"Captain," began the doctor, without taking his eyes off the cloud, "have you often crossed the Channel?"

"This is the first time."

"How is that?"

"Master Doctor, my usual cruise is to Ireland. I sail from Fontarabia to Black Harbour, or to the Achill Islands. I go sometimes to Braich-y-Pwll, a point on the Welsh coast. But I always steer outside the Scilly Islands. I do not know this sea at all."

"That's unfortunate. Woe to him who is inexperienced on the ocean! One ought to be familiar with the Channel: the Channel is the Sphinx. Look out for shoals."

"We are in twenty-five fathoms of water here."

"We ought to get into fifty-five fathoms to the west, and avoid even twenty fathoms to the east."

"We'll sound as we get on."

"The Channel is not an ordinary sea. The water rises fifty feet with the spring tides, and twenty-five with neap

tides. Here we are in slack water. I thought you looked scared."

"We'll sound to-night."

"To sound you must heave-to. and that you cannot do."

"Why not?"

"On account of the wind."

"We'll try."

"The squall is close upon us."

"We'll sound, Master Doctor."

"You could not even bring-to."

"Trust in God."

"Take care what you say. Do not utter that dread name lightly."

"I will sound, I tell you."

"Be sensible; you will have a gale of wind presently."

"I say that I will try for soundings."

"The resistance of the water will prevent the lead from sinking, and the line will break. Ah, so this is your first experience in these waters?"

"My first."

"Very well; in that case listen, Captain."

The tone of the word "listen" was so commanding that the captain made an obeisance: "Master Doctor, I am all attention."

"Port your helm, and haul up on the starboard tack."

"What do you mean?"

"Direct your course westward."

"*Caramba!*"

"Direct your course westward."

"Impossible!"

"As you will. What I tell you is for the sake of the others. As for myself, I am indifferent."

"But, Master Doctor, steer west?"

"Yes, Captain."

"The wind will be dead against us."

"Yes, Captain."

"She'll pitch like the devil."

- "Moderate your language. Yes, Captain."  
"The vessel would be in irons."  
"Yes, Captain."  
"That means very likely the mast will go."  
"Possibly."  
"And yet you wish me to steer westward?"  
"Yes."  
"I cannot."  
"In that case settle your reckoning with the sea."  
"The wind ought to change."  
"It will not change to-night."  
"Why not?"  
"Because it is a wind twelve hundred leagues in length."  
"Make headway against such a wind? Impossible!"  
"Steer westward, I tell you."  
"I'll try; but in spite of everything she will fall off."  
"That's the danger."  
"The wind is driving us towards the east."  
"Don't go to the east."  
"Why not?"  
"Captain, do you know what is sure death for us?"  
"No."  
"Death is *the east*."  
"I'll steer west."

This time the doctor, having turned right round, looked the captain full in the face, and with his eyes resting on him, as though to implant the idea in his head, pronounced slowly, syllable by syllable, these words: "If to-night out at sea we hear the sound of a bell, the ship is lost."

The captain pondered in amaze: "What do you mean?"

The doctor did not answer. His countenance so expressive a moment before was now reserved. His eyes became vacuous; he did not seem to hear the captain's wondering question. He was now engrossed by his own thoughts. His lips let fall, as if mechanically, in a low murmuring tone, these words: "The time has come for sullied souls to purify themselves."

The captain elevated his chin scornfully. "He is more

madman than sage," he growled, as he moved off. Nevertheless he steered westward.

But both the wind and the sea were increasing.

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## CHAPTER V

### HARDQUANONNE

**T**HE appearance of the clouds was becoming ominous. In the west as in the east the sky was now nearly covered with dark, angry clouds, which were rapidly advancing in the teeth of the wind. These contradictions are part of the wind's vagaries. The sea, which had been clothed in scales a moment before, now wore a skin,— for such is the nature of this aquatic monster. It was no longer a crocodile, it was a boa-constrictor. Its lead-colored skin looked immensely thick, and was crossed by heavy wrinkles. Here and there, on its surface, bubbles of froth, like pustules, gathered and then burst. The foam was like leprosy. It was at this moment that the hooker, still seen from afar by the child, lighted her signal.

A quarter of an hour elapsed. The captain looked around for the doctor; he was no longer on deck. Directly the captain left him, the doctor bent his somewhat ungainly form and entered the cabin, where he sat down near the stove, on a block. He took a shagreen ink-bottle and a cordwain pocket-book from his pocket; extracted from the pocket-book a parchment folded four times, old, stained, and yellow; opened the sheet, took a pen out of his ink-case, laid the pocket-book, flat on his knee and the parchment on the pocket-book, and by the rays of the lantern, which was lighting the cook, set to writing on the back of the parchment. Though the rolling of the waves inconvenienced him, he wrote on thus for some time.

As he wrote, the doctor noticed the gourd of aguardiente, which the Provençal tasted every time he added a grain of pimento to the puchero, as if he were consulting with reference to the seasoning. The doctor noticed the gourd, not because it was a flask of brandy, but because of a name which was plaited in the wicker-work, with red rushes on a white background. There was light enough in the cabin to permit of his reading the name. The doctor paused and spelled it in a low voice: "Hardquanonne." Then he addressed the cook:—

"I never observed this gourd before; did it belong to Hardquanonne?"

"Yes," the cook answered,— "to our poor comrade, Hardquanonne."

"To Hardquanonne, the Fleming of Flanders?"

"Yes."

"The same who is in prison?"

"Yes."

"In the dungeon at Chatham?"

"Yes, it is his gourd," replied the cook. "He is a friend of mine, and I keep it in remembrance of him. When shall we see him again? It is the bottle he used to wear slung over his hip."

The doctor took up his pen again, and continued laboriously tracing somewhat straggling lines on the parchment. He was evidently anxious that his hand-writing should be very legible. At last, notwithstanding the tremulousness of the vessel and the tremulousness of age, he finished what he wanted to write.

It was time; for suddenly a sea struck the craft, a mighty rush of waters besieged the hooker, and they felt her break into that fearful dance in which ships lead off with the tempest.

The doctor rose and approached the stove, meeting the ship's motion with his knees dexterously bent, dried as best he could at the stove where the pot was boiling the lines he had written, refolded the parchment in the pocket-book,



and replaced the pocket-book and the ink-horn in his pocket.

The stove was not the least ingenious piece of interior economy in the hooker. It was judiciously isolated, yet the pot oscillated wildly. The Provençal watched it closely.

"Fish broth," said he.

"For the fishes," replied the doctor, as he went on deck again.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THEY THINK THAT HELP IS AT HAND

**T**HROUGH his growing pre-occupation, the doctor dreamily reviewed the situation; and any one near him might have heard these words drop from his lips: "Too much rolling, and not enough pitching." Then he again relapsed into thought, as a miner into his shaft. His meditation in nowise interfered with his watch of the sea. The contemplation of the sea is in itself a reverie.

The travail of the eternally tortured waters was commencing. A wail of lamentation arose from the whole main. Confused and ominous preparations were going on in space. The doctor noted each detail, though there was no sign of scrutiny in his face. One does not scrutinize hell. A vast commotion, as yet half latent, but visible through the turmoils in space, increased and irritated the winds, the vapours and the waves more and more. Nothing is so logical and yet nothing appears so erratic as the ocean. Self-dispersion is the essence of its sovereignty, and one of the elements of its redundancy. The sea is ever for or against. It knots, that it may unravel itself; one of its waves attacks, the other relieves. There is nothing so truly wonderful as the waves. Who can paint the alternating hollows and elevations, the heaving bosoms, the majestic outlines? Who can describe the thickets of foam, the blendings of mountains and dreams?

The indescribable is everywhere there, in the rending, in the frowning, in the anxiety, in the perpetual contradiction, in the chiaroscuro, in the pendants of the clouds, in the ever-changing curves, in the disaggregation without rupture, in the mighty uproar caused by all that overhanging tumult!

The wind had just veered around to the north, and its violence was so favourable and useful in driving them away from England that the captain of the "Matutina" had made up his mind to set all sail. The hooker dashed through the foam at a gallop, bounding from wave to wave in a gay frenzy. The fugitives were delighted, and laughed; they clapped their hands; applauded the surf, the sea, the wind, the sails, the swift progress, the flight, all unmindful of the future. The doctor seemed not to see them, and dreamed on.

Every vestige of day had faded away. This was the moment when the child, watching from the distant cliff, lost sight of the hooker. Up to that time his gaze had been riveted upon the vessel. Did that look exert any influence over the vessel's fate? When the hooker was lost to sight in the distance, and when the child could no longer see aught of it, he went north and the ship went south. Both were plunged in darkness.

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## CHAPTER VII

### SUPERHUMAN HORRORS

IT was with wild rejoicing and delight that those on board the hooker saw the hostile land recede and lessen behind them. By degrees the dark ring of ocean rose higher, dwarfing in the twilight Portland, Purbeck, Tineham, Kimmeridge, the Matravers, the long lines of dim cliffs, and the coast dotted with lighthouses. England disappeared. The fugitives had now nothing around them but the sea.

All at once the darkness became frightful. There was no

longer space; the sky became as black as ink, and closed in round the vessel. The snow began to fall slowly, only a few flakes at first. They might have been ghosts. Nothing else was visible. A snare lurked in every possibility.

It is in this cavernous darkness that in our climate the Polar water-spout makes its appearance. A great muddy cloud, resembling the belly of a hydra, hung over the ocean, its livid base adhering to the waves in some places. Some of these adherences resembled pouches with holes, pumping up the sea, disgoring vapour, and refilling themselves with water. Here and there these suctions raised cones of foam on the sea.

The boreal storm hurled itself on the hooker; the hooker rushed to meet it. The squall and the vessel met as though to insult each other. In the first mad shock not a sail was reefed, not a jib lowered; the mast creaked and bent back as if in fear. Cyclones in our northern hemisphere circle from left to right, in the same direction as the hands of a watch, with a velocity which is sometimes as much as sixty miles an hour. Although she was entirely at the mercy of the storm, the hooker behaved as if she were out in moderate weather, without any further precaution than keeping her head to the billows, with the wind broad on the bow so as to avoid being caught broadside on. This prudential measure would have availed her nothing in case of the wind's shifting and taking her aback.

A deep rumbling sound was audible in the distance. The roar of ocean,— what can be compared to it? It is the great brutish howl of the universe. What we call matter,— that unsearchable organism, that amalgamation of incommensurable energies, in which can occasionally be detected an almost imperceptible degree of intention which makes us shudder; that blind, benighted cosmos; that enigmatical Pan,— has a cry, a strange cry, prolonged, obstinate, and continuous, which is between speech and thunder. That cry is the hurricane. Other and different voices, songs, melodies, clamours, tones, proceed from nests, from broods, from pairings, from nup-

tials, from homes. This trumpet-blast comes out of the Naught, which is All. Other voices express the soul of the universe; this expresses its brute power. It is the howl of the formless; it is the inarticulate uttered by the indefinite; it is a thing full of pathos and of terror. Those clamours resound above and beyond man. They rise, fall, undulate; form waves of sound; constitute all sorts of wild surprises for the mind; now burst close to the ear with the importunity of a peal of trumpets, now assail us with the rumbling hoarseness of distance,—giddy uproar which resembles a language, and which in fact is a language. It is the effort which the world makes to speak; it is the lisping of the wonderful. In this wail is manifested vaguely all that the vast, dark palpitation endures, suffers, accepts, rejects. For the most part it talks nonsense; it is like an attack of chronic sickness. We fancy that we are witnessing the descent of supreme evil into the infinite. At moments we seem to discern a reclamation of the elements, some vain effort of chaos to re-assert itself over creation. At times it is a despairing moan; the void bewails and justifies itself. It is the pleading of the world's cause: we can fancy that the universe is engaged in a lawsuit; we listen, we try to grasp the reasons given, the redoubtable for and against. Such a moaning among the shadows has the tenacity of a syllogism. Here is a vast field for thought; here is the *raison d'être* of mythologies and polytheisms. To the terror of these wild murmurs are added superhuman outlines melting away as they appear,—Eumenides which are almost distinct, throats of furies shaped in the clouds, Plutonian chimeras almost defined. No horrors can equal those sobs, those laughs, those tricks of tumult, those inscrutable questions and answers, those appeals to unknown aid. Man is utterly bewildered in the presence of that awful incantation; he bows under the enigma of those Draconian intonations. What latent meaning have they; what do they signify; what do they threaten; what do they implore? It would seem as though all bonds were loosened. Vociferations from precipice to precipice, from air to water,

from wind to wave, from rain to rock, from zenith to nadir, from stars to foam; the abyss unmuzzled,—such is this tumult complicated by some mysterious contest with evil consciences.

The loquacity of night is not less lugubrious than its silence. One feels in it the wrath of the unknown. Night is a presence. The presence of what? For that matter we must distinguish between night and the shadowy. In the night there is the absolute; in the shadowy, the multiple. The night is one, the shadowy is made up of many. In this infinite and indefinite shadowy lives something or some one; but that which lives there forms part of our death. After our earthly career, when the shadowy will be clear to us, the life which is beyond will seize us; meanwhile it appears to touch and try us. Obscurity is a pressure. Night is, as it were, a hand placed on our soul; at certain hideous and solemn hours we feel that which is beyond the wall of the tomb encroaching on us.

Never does this proximity of the unknown seem more imminent than in storms at sea. The horrible combines with the fantastic. The possible interrupter of human actions, the old Cloud-compeller, has it in his power to mould, in whatsoever shape he chooses, the changing elements, the wild incoherence, and aimless force. That mystery the tempest is ever accepting and executing some unknown change of real or apparent will. Poets in all ages have called the waves capricious; but there is no such thing as caprice. The disconcerting enigmas in Nature which we call caprice, and in human life chance, are the results of unseen and incomprehensible laws.

## CHAPTER VIII

## NIX ET NOX

**T**HE chief characteristic of the snow-storm is its blackness. Nature's habitual aspect during a storm, the earth or sea black and the sky pale, is reversed: the sky is black, the ocean white; foam below, darkness above,—an horizon walled in with smoke; a zenith roofed with crape. The tempest resembles a cathedral hung with mourning; but there is no light in that cathedral,—no phantom lights on the crests of the waves, no spark, no phosphorescence, naught but a dense shadow. The polar cyclone differs from the tropical cyclone, inasmuch as the one sets fire to every light, and the other extinguishes them all. The world is suddenly converted into a vaulted cave. Out of the night falls a dust of pale spots, which hesitate between sky and sea. These spots, which are flakes of snow, slip, wander, and float. It is like the tears of a winding-sheet putting themselves into life-like motion. A mad wind mingles with this dissemination. Blackness crumbling into whiteness, the furious into the obscure, all the tumult of which the sepulchre is capable, a whirlwind under a catafalque,—such is the snow-storm. Underneath trembles the ocean, forming and reforming over portentous depths. In the polar wind, which is electrical, the flakes turn suddenly into hailstones, and the air becomes filled with projectiles; the water crackles, shot with grape. There are no thunder-claps; the lightning of boreal storms is silent. What is sometimes said of the cat, "It swears," may be applied to this lightning. It is a menace proceeding from a mouth half open, and strangely inexorable. The snow-storm is a storm blind and dumb; when it has passed, the ships also are often blind and the sailors dumb.

To escape from such danger is difficult. It would be wrong, however, to consider shipwreck inevitable. The Dan-

ish fishermen of Disco and the Balesin; the seekers of black whales; Hearn, steering towards Behring Strait to discover the mouth of Coppermine River; Hudson, Mackenzie, Vancouver, Ross, Dumont d'Urville,—all underwent almost at the pole itself the wildest hurricanes, and escaped out of them.

It was into this description of tempest that the hooker had entered, triumphant and under full sail. Frenzy against frenzy. When Montgomery, escaping from Rouen, drove his galley, with all the force of its oars, against the chain barring the Seine at La Bouille, he showed similar effrontery. The "Matutina" sailed on fast; she keeled over so much under her sails that at times she was at an angle of fifteen degrees with the sea; but her well-rounded keel adhered to the water as if glued to it. The keel resisted the grasp of the hurricane; the lantern at the prow still cast its light ahead. The clouds settled down more and more upon the sea around the hooker. Not a gull, not a sea-mew, was to be seen,—nothing but snow. The expanse of waves was becoming contracted and terrible; only three or four gigantic billows were visible. Now and then a tremendous flash of copper-coloured lightning broke out from behind the heavy masses of clouds on the horizon and in the zenith. This sudden burst of vermilion-flame showed the immense size and blackness of the clouds; while the brief illumination of ocean to which the first layer of clouds and the distant boundaries of celestial chaos seemed to adhere plainly revealed the horrors of their immediate surroundings. Against this fiery background, the snow flakes looked so black that they reminded one of dark butterflies darting about in a furnace; then, everything was once more veiled in gloom. The first explosion over, the squall, still in mad pursuit of the hooker, began a savage, continuous roar. Nothing could be more appalling than this sort of monologue of the tempest. The gloomy recitative seems intended to serve as a momentary rest for the contending forces,—a sort of truce maintained in the mighty deep.

The hooker held wildly on her course. Her two mainsails

especially were doing wonderful work. The sky and sea were like ink compared with the jets of foam running higher than the mast. Every instant masses of water swept the deck like a deluge, and at each roll of the vessel the hawse-holes — now to starboard, now to larboard — became so many open mouths vomiting black foam into the sea. The women had taken refuge in the cabin, but the men remained on deck; the blinding snow eddied round, the surge mingling with it.

At that moment the chief of the band, standing abaft and holding with one hand to the shrouds, and with the other taking off the kerchief he wore round his head and waving it in the light of the lantern, gay and arrogant, with pride in his face, and his hair in wild disorder, cried out,—

“We are free!”

“Free, free, free!” echoed the fugitives, and the band, seizing hold of the rigging, rose up on deck.

“Hurrah!” shouted the chief.

And the band shouted in the storm, “Hurrah!”

Just as this clamour was dying away in the tempest a loud, solemn voice rose from the other end of the vessel, saying, “Silence!”

All turned their heads. The darkness was thick, and the doctor was leaning against the mast, so that he seemed part of it, and they could not see him.

The voice spoke again: “Listen!”

All were silent. They distinctly heard through the darkness the tolling of a bell.

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE CHARGE CONFIDED TO A RAGING SEA

**T**HE captain, at the helm, burst out laughing: “A bell, that’s good! We are on the larboard tack. What does the bell prove? Why, that we have land to starboard.”



The firm and measured voice of the doctor replied: "You have not land to starboard."

"But we have!" shouted the captain.

"No!"

"But that bell tolls from the land."

"That bell," said the doctor, "tolls from the sea."

A shudder passed over these daring men; the haggard faces of the two women appeared above the companionway like two hobgoblins conjured up; the doctor took a step forward, separating his tall form from the mast. From the gloomy depths of night again resounded the dreary tolling of the bell.

The doctor resumed: "Half-way between Portland and the Channel Islands there is in the midst of the sea a buoy, placed there as a warning. The buoy is moored by chains to a rock, and floats on the top of the water. To the buoy is affixed an iron trestle, and across the trestle is hung a bell. In bad weather heavy seas toss the buoy, and the bell rings. That is the bell you hear."

The doctor, after pausing to allow an unusually violent gust of wind to subside, continued: "To hear that bell in a storm, when a nor'-wester is blowing, is to be lost. Wherefore? For this reason: you hear the bell because the wind brings the sound to you. The wind is blowing from the north-west, and the rocks of Alderney lie to the east of us. You hear the bell only because you are between the buoy and the breakers. It is upon those rocks that the wind is driving you. You are on the wrong side of the buoy. If you were on the right side, you would be out at sea on a safe course, and you would not hear the bell; the wind would not convey the sound to you,— you might pass close to the buoy without knowing it. We are out of our course. That bell is shipwreck sounding the tocsin. Listen!"

As the doctor spoke, the bell, soothed by a lull of the storm, rang out slowly, stroke by stroke; and its dismal voice seemed to testify to the truth of the old man's words. It was perhaps their death-knell. All listened breathlessly,— now to the voice, now to the bell.

## CHAPTER X

## THE COLOSSAL SAVAGE, THE STORM

IN the mean time the captain had caught up his speaking-trumpet: "*Cargate todo, hombres!* Let go the sheets, man the down-hauls, lower ties and brails! Let us steer to the west, let us regain the high sea! Head for the buoy, steer for the bell; there's an offing down there. We've yet a chance."

"Try," said the doctor.

Let us remark here, by the way, that this buoy, a kind of bell-tower on the deep, was removed in 1802. There are yet alive very aged mariners who remember hearing it. It forewarned, but rather too late.

The orders of the captain were obeyed. The Languedocian made a third sailor. All bore a hand. Not satisfied with brailing up, they furled the sails; secured the clew-lines, bunt-lines, and leech-lines; clapped preventor-shrouds on the block-straps, which thus might serve as back-stays. They braced the mast; they battened down the ports and bull's eyes, which is a method of walling up a ship. These evolutions, though executed in a lubberly fashion were nevertheless thoroughly effective. The hooker was stripped to bare poles. But in proportion as the vessel, stowing every stitch of canvas, became more helpless, the havoc of both and waves increased. The billows ran mountains high.

The hurricane, like an executioner hastening to his victim, began to dismember the craft. There came, in the twinkling of an eye, a dreadful crash; the top-sails were blown from the bolt-ropes, the chess-trees were hewn asunder, the deck was swept clear, the shrouds were carried away, the mast went by the board; all the lumber of the wreck was flying in shivers. The main shrouds also succumbed, although they were turned in and strongly stoppered. The magnetic currents common

to snow-storms hastened the destruction of the rigging; it broke as much from the effects of these as from the violence of the wind. Most of the chain gear, fouled in the blocks, ceased to work. The bows and stern quivered under the terrific shocks. One wave washed overboard the compass and its binnacle; a second carried away the boat, which like a box slung under a carriage had been, in accordance with the quaint Asturian custom, lashed to the bowsprit; a third breaker wrenched off the sprit-sail yard; a fourth swept away the figure-head and signal-light. The rudder only was left. To replace the ship's bow-lantern they set fire to, and suspended at the stem, a large block of wood covered with oakum and tar. The broken mast, all bristling with splinters, ropes, blocks, and yards, cumbered the deck; in falling, it had stove in a plank of the starboard gunwale. The captain, still firm at the helm, shouted: "While we can steer, we have a chance! The lower planks hold good. Axes, axes! Overboard with the mast! Clear the decks!"

Both crew and passengers worked with the excitement of despair. A few strokes of the hatchets, and it was done. They pushed the mast over the side; the deck was cleared.

"Now," continued the captain, "take a rope's end and lash me to the helm."

They bound him to the tiller. While they were fastening him he laughed, and shouted,—

"Bellow, old hurdy-gurdy! bellow! I've seen your equal off Cape Machichaco!"

And when secured, he clutched the helm with that strange hilarity which danger awakens, crying out,—

"All goes well, my lads! Long live our Lady of Buglose! Let us steer west."

An enormous wave came down abeam, and dashed against the vessel's side. There is always in storms a tiger-like wave, a billow fierce and decisive, which after attaining a certain height creeps horizontally over the surface of the waters for a time, then rises, roars, rages, and falling on the distressed vessel tears it limb from limb. A cloud of foam covered the

entire deck of the "Matutina." A loud noise was heard above the confusion of darkness and waters. When the spray cleared off, and the stern again rose to view, the captain and the helm had disappeared. Both had been swept away. The helm and the man they had but just secured to it had passed with the wave into the hissing turmoil of the hurricane.

The chief of the band, gazing intently into the darkness, shouted: "Te burlas de nosotros?"

To this defiant exclamation there followed another cry: "Let go the anchor! Save the captain!"

They rushed to the capstan and let go the anchor. Hookers carry but one. In this case the anchor reached the bottom, but only to be lost; the bottom was of the hardest rock. The billows were raging with resistless force. The cable snapped like a thread; the anchor lay at the bottom of the sea. At the cutwater there remained only the cable end protruding from the hawse-hole. From this moment the hooker became a wreck. The "Matutina" was irrevocably disabled. The vessel, just before in full sail and almost formidable in her speed, was now helpless; all her evolutions were uncertain and executed at random; she yielded passively and like a log to the capricious fury of the waves.

The howling of the wind became more and more frightful. The bell on the sea rang despairingly, as if tolled by a weird hand. The "Matutina" drifted like a cork at the mercy of the waves. She sailed no longer,—she merely floated; every moment she seemed about to turn over on her back, like a dead fish. The good condition and perfectly water-tight state of the hull alone saved her from this disaster. Below the water-line not a plank had started; there was not a cranny, chink, nor crack; and she had not a single drop of water in the hold. This was lucky, as the pump, being out of order, was useless. The hooker pitched and rolled frightfully in the seething billows. The vessel had throes as of sickness, and seemed to be trying to belch forth the unhappy crew. Helpless they clung to the rigging, to the transoms, to the shank painters,

to the gaskets, to the broken planks (the protruding nails of which tore their hands), to the warped riggers, and to all the rugged projections on the stumps of the masts. From time to time they listened: the tolling of the bell came over the waters fainter and fainter,—one might have supposed that too was in distress. Finally the sound died away altogether.

Where were they,—at what distance from the buoy? The sound of the bell had frightened them; its silence terrified them. The northwester drove them forward in perhaps a fatal course. They felt themselves wafted on by maddened and ever-recurring gusts of wind. The wreck sped forward in the darkness. There is nothing more fearful than being hurried forward blindfold. They felt the abyss before them, over them, under them. It was no longer a run, it was a rush. Suddenly, through the appalling density of the snow-storm, there loomed a red light.

“A lighthouse!” cried the crew.

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## CHAPTER XI

### THE CASSETS

**I**T was the Caskets Light.

A lighthouse of the nineteenth century is a high cylinder of masonry, surmounted by scientifically constructed machinery for throwing light. The Casket lighthouse in particular is a white tower supporting three light-rooms. These three chambers revolve on clock-wheels, with such precision that the man on watch who sees them from sea can invariably take ten steps during their irradiation, and twenty-five during their eclipse. Everything is based on the focal plan and on the rotation of the octagon drum, which is formed of eight wide simple lenses in range, having above and below it two series

of dioptric rings; it is protected from the violence of the winds and waves by glass a millimetre thick, yet sometimes broken by the sea-eagles, which dash themselves like great moths against these gigantic lanterns. The building which encloses and sustains this mechanism, and in which it is set, is also mathematically constructed. Everything about it is plain, exact, bare, precise, correct. A lighthouse is a mathematical figure.

In the seventeenth century a lighthouse was a sort of ornament to the sea-shore. The architecture of a lighthouse tower was magnificent and extravagant. It was covered with balconies, balusters, lodges, alcoves, weather-cocks,— nothing but masks, statues, foliage, volutes, reliefs, figures large and small, medallions with inscriptions. “*Pax in bello,*” said the Eddystone lighthouse. (We may as well observe, by the way, that this declaration of peace did not always disarm the ocean. Winstanley repeated it on a lighthouse which he constructed at his own expense, on a wild spot near Plymouth. The tower being finished, he shut himself up in it to have it tried by the tempest. The storm came, and carried off the lighthouse and Winstanley in it.) Such excessive adornment afforded too great a hold to the hurricane; as generals too brilliantly equipped in battle draw the enemy’s fire. Besides whimsical designs in stone, they were loaded with whimsical designs in iron, copper, and wood. On the sides of the lighthouse there jutted out, clinging to the walls among the arabesques, engines of every description, useful and useless,— windlasses, tackles, pullies, counterpoises, ladders, cranes, grappels. On the pinnacle around the light, delicately wrought iron-work held great iron chandeliers, in which were placed pieces of rope steeped in resin,— wicks which burned doggedly, and which no wind extinguished; and from top to bottom the tower was covered by a complication of sea standards, danderoles, banners, flags, and pennons, which rose from stage to stage, from story to story,— a medley of all hues, all shapes, all heraldic devices, all signals, all confusion, up to the light-chamber, making in the storm a **gay**

riot of colour about the blaze. This insolent light on the brink of the abyss seemed to breathe defiance, and inspired shipwrecked men with a spirit of daring.

But the Caskets Light was not one of this kind. It was at that period a primitive sort of lighthouse. Henry I. built it after the loss of the "White Ship." It was an unpretending tower perched upon a rock and surmounted with a brazier enclosed by an iron railing,—a head of hair flaming in the wind. The only improvement made in this lighthouse since the twelfth century was a pair of forge-bellows worked by a pendulum and a stone weight, which had been added to the light-chamber in 1610.

The fate of the sea-birds that chanced to fly against these old lighthouses was more tragic than those of our days. The birds dashed against them, attracted by the light, and fell into the brazier, where they could be seen struggling like black spirits in a hell; at times they would fall back again between the railings upon the rock, smoking, lame, blind, like half-burnt flies out of a lamp.

To a full-rigged ship in good trim, answering readily to the pilot's handling, the Caskets Light is useful; it cries, "Look out!" It warns her of the shoal. To a disabled ship it is simply terrible. The hull, paralyzed and inert, with no defence against the fury of the storm or the mad heaving of the waves,—a fish without fins, a bird without wings,—can but go where the wind wills. The lighthouse reveals the end, points out the spot where it is doomed to disappear, and casts a ghastly light upon the place of burial. In short, it is but a funeral torch to illumine the yawning chasm, to warn against the inevitable. What more tragic mockery!

## CHAPTER XII

## FACE TO FACE WITH THE ROCK

THE wretched people on board the "Matutina" soon understood the derisive character of this warning. The sight of the lighthouse raised their spirits at first, then overwhelmed them with despair. Nothing could be done, nothing attempted. What has been said of kings, we may say of the waves,—we are their people, we are their prey. All their raving must be borne.

The nor'-wester was driving the hooker on the Caskets. They were nearing them; escape was impossible. They were drifting rapidly towards the reef; they felt that they were getting into shallow waters; the lead, if they could have thrown it to any purpose, would not have shown more than three or four fathoms. They heard the dull sound of the waves being sucked within the submarine caves of the steep rock. They made out, near the lighthouse, a deep cut between two granite walls,—the narrow passage leading into the ugly, wild-looking little harbour, supposed to be full of the skeletons of men and carcasses of ships. It looked like the mouth of a cave, rather than the entrance of a port. They could hear the crackling of the flames high up within the iron grating. A ghastly purple illuminated the storm; the collision of the rain and hail disturbed the mist. The black cloud and the red flame fought, serpent against serpent; live ashes, reft by the wind, flew from the fire, and the sudden assaults of the sparks seemed to drive the snow-flakes before them. The ledge, blurred at first in outline, now stood out in bold relief,—a medley of rocks with peaks, crests, and vertebræ. As they neared it, the appearance of the reef became more and more forbidding. One of the women, the Irishwoman, told her beads wildly.

The chief was now acting as captain; for the Basques are



equally at home on the mountain and the sea; they are bold on the precipice, and inventive in catastrophes. They were nearing the cliff. They were about to strike. Suddenly they came so close to the great rock north of the Caskets that it shut out the lighthouse from their view. They saw nothing but the rock and a red glare behind it. The huge rock looming in the mist was like a gigantic black woman with a hood of fire. This ill-famed rock is called the Biblet. It faces the north side of the reef, which on the south is faced by another ridge, L'Etacq-aux-giulmets. The chief looked at the Biblet and shouted,—

“A man with a will to take a rope to the rock! Who can swim?”

No answer. No one on board knew how to swim, not even the sailors,—an ignorance not uncommon among seafaring people. A beam nearly freed from its lashings was swinging loose. The chief seized it with both hands, crying,—

“Help me!”

They unlashed the beam. They had now at their disposal the very thing they wanted. Abandoning the defensive they assumed the offensive. It was a long beam of solid oak, sound and strong, useful either as a support or as a weapon, as a lever for a burden or a battering ram against a tower.

“Ready!” shouted the chief.

All six getting foothold on the stump of the mast, threw their weight on the spar projecting over the side, and aimed straight as a lance towards a projection of the cliff. It was a dangerous manœuvre. To strike at a mountain is audacious indeed; the six men might have been thrown into the water by the shock. There is variety in struggles with storms. After the hurricane, the shoal; after the wind, the rock: first the intangible, then the immovable, to be encountered. Several minutes passed, such minutes as whiten men's hair. The rock and the vessel were about to come in collision; the rock awaited the blow like a culprit. A relentless wave rushed in; it ended the respite. It caught the

vessel underneath, raised it, and swayed it for an instant as the sling swings its projectile.

"Steady!" cried the chief, "it is only a rock, and we are men!"

The beam was couched; the six men were one with it; its sharp bolts tore their arm-pits, but they did not feel them. The wave dashed the hooker against the rock. Then came the shock. It came under the cloud of foam which always hides such catastrophes. When the spray fell back into the sea, when the waves rolled back from the rock, the six men were rolling about the deck, but the "Matutina" was floating alongside the rock, clear of it. The beam had stood fast and turned the vessel aside. The sea was running so fast that in a few seconds the hooker had left the caskets behind.

Such things sometimes occur. It was a straight stroke of the bowsprit that saved Wood of Largo at the mouth of the Tay. In the wild neighbourhood of Cape Winterton, and under the command of Captain Hamilton, it was the appliance of such a lever against the dangerous rock Branodunum that saved the "Royal Mary" from shipwreck, although she was but a Scotch-built frigate. The force of the waves can be so abruptly decomposed that changes in direction can be easily effected, or at least are possible even in the most violent collisions. The whole secret of avoiding shipwreck, is to try and pass from the secant to the tangent. Such was the service the beam rendered to the hooker; it had done the work of an oar, had taken the place of a rudder. But the manœuvre once performed could not be repeated. The beam was overboard; the shock of the collision had wrenched it out of the men's hands, and it was lost in the waves. To loosen another beam would have been to dismember the hull.

The hurricane swept the "Matutina" on. The light paled in the distance, faded, and disappeared. There was something mournful in its extinction. Layers of mist gradually sank down upon the now uncertain light; its rays died in the waste of waters; the flame floated, struggled, sank, and lost its form. It might have been a drowning creature. The

brazier dwindled to the snuff of a candle; then naught remained save a faint uncertain glimmer. It was like the quenching of light in the pit of night.

The bell which had threatened was dumb; the lighthouse which had threatened had melted away. And yet it was more awful now that they had ceased to threaten. One was a voice, the other a torch. There was something human about them. They were gone, and naught remained but the mighty deep.

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### CHAPTER XIII

#### FACE TO FACE WITH NIGHT

**A** GAIN was the hooker running with the shadow into immeasurable darkness. The "Matutina," escaped from the Caskets, sank and rose from billow to billow, a respite, but in chaos. Spun around by the wind, tossed by all the thousand motions of the wave, she reflected every mad oscillation of the sea. She scarcely pitched at all,—a terrible symptom in a ship in distress. Wrecks merely roll; pitching is a sign of strife. The helm alone can turn a vessel to the wind.

Mists, whirlwinds, gales, motion in all directions, no shelter, gulf succeeding gulf, no horizon visible, intense blackness for background,—through all these the hooker drifted. To have got free of the Caskets, to have escaped the rock, was a victory for the shipwrecked men; but it was a victory which left them in a sort of stupor. They had raised no cheer; at sea such an impudence is not repeated twice. To throw down a challenge where they could not cast the lead, would have been too serious a jest. The shipwreck averted was an impossibility achieved; they were petrified by it. By degrees, however, they began to hope again. Such are the mirages of the soul! There is no distress so complete but that even in the most critical moments the inexplicable sunrise of hope is

seen in its depths. These poor wretches were ready to declare to themselves that they were saved. The words were almost on their lips.

But suddenly something terrible appeared before them in the darkness. On the port bow arose a tall, perpendicular, opaque mass, a square tower as it were. They gazed at it, open-mouthed. The storm was driving them straight towards it. They knew not what it was. It was the Ortach rock emerging from the depths of ocean.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### ORTACH

**D**ANGER was imminent again. After the Caskets comes Ortach. The storm is no artist; brutal and all-powerful, it never varies its appliances. The darkness is inexhaustible; its snares and perfidies never come to an end. As for man, he soon comes to the end of his resources. Man exhausts his strength, the abyss never. The shipwrecked men turned towards the chief, their hope. He could only shrug his shoulders. Dismal contempt of helplessness.

The Ortach, a single huge rock, rises in a straight line eighty feet above the angry beating of the waves. Waves and ships break against it. An immovable cube, it plunges its rectilinear planes into the numberless serpentine curves of the sea. At night it looks like an enormous block resting on the folds of a huge black sheet. In time of storm it awaits the stroke of the axe,—that is, the thunderbolt. But there is never a thunderbolt during a snow-storm. True, the ship has a bandage over her eyes; she is like one prepared for the scaffold. As for the lightning-bolt which puts one quickly out of one's misery, that is not to be hoped for.

The "Matutina," little better now than a log upon the wa-

ters, drifted towards this rock, as she had drifted towards the other. The poor wretches on board, who had for a moment believed themselves saved, relapsed into misery. The destruction they thought they had left behind them confronted them again. The reef reappeared from the bottom of the sea. Nothing had been gained.

The Caskets are a goffering iron with a thousand subdivisions; the Ortach is a solid wall. To be wrecked on the Caskets is to be cut into ribbons; to strike on the Ortach is to be crushed into powder. Nevertheless there was one chance. On a straight frontage like that of the Ortach, neither the wave nor the cannon-ball can ricochet. The operation is simple,—first the flux, then the reflux; a wave advances, a billow returns. In such cases the question of life and death is balanced thus: if the wave carries the vessel on the rock, she breaks on it and is lost; if the billow retires before the ship has touched, she is carried back,—she is saved.

It was a moment of intense anxiety. Those on board saw through the gloom the great decisive wave bearing down on them. How far was it going to drag them? If the wave broke upon the ship, they would be carried on the rock and dashed to pieces. If it passed under the ship— The wave *did* pass under. They breathed again.

But what of the recoil? What would the surf do with them? The surf carried them back. A few minutes later the "Matutina" was out of the breakers. The Ortach faded from their view, as the Caskets had done. It was their second victory. For the second time the hooker had verged on destruction, and had drawn back in time.

## CHAPTER XV

## PORTENTOSUM MARE

**M**EANWHILE a thickening mist had descended on the drifting wretches. They were ignorant of their whereabouts, they could scarcely see a cable's length around. Despite a furious storm of hail which forced them to bow their heads, the women had obstinately refused to go below again. No one, however hopeless, but wishes, if shipwreck be inevitable, to meet it in the open air. When so near death, a ceiling above one's head seems like the first outline of a coffin.

They were now in a short and chopping sea. A turgid sea indicates its constraint. Even in a fog the entrance to a strait may be known by the boiling appearance of the waves. And it was so in this case, for they were unconsciously skirting the coast of Alderney. Between the Caskets and Ortach on the west and Alderney on the east, the sea is cramped and hemmed in. In this uncomfortable position the sea suffers like anything else; and when it suffers, it is irritable. Consequently, that channel is a thing to fear. The "Matutina" was in that channel now.

Imagine under the sea a tortoise shell as big as Hyde Park or the Champs Elysées, of which every striature is a shoal, and every embossment a reef. Such is the western approach of Alderney. The sea covers and conceals this shipwrecking apparatus. On this conglomeration of submarine breakers the cloven waves leap and foam; in calm weather a chopping sea, in storms a chaos reigns. The shipwrecked men observed this new complication without endeavouring to explain it to themselves. Suddenly they understood it. A pale vista broadened in the zenith; a wan tinge overspread the sea; the livid light revealed on the port side a long shoal stretching eastward, towards which the power of the rushing wind was driving the vessel. What was that shoal? They

shuddered. They would have shuddered even more had a voice answered them, "Alderney!"

No other isle is so well defended against man's approach as Alderney. Below and above water it is protected by a savage guard, of which Ortach is the outpost. To the west are Burhou, Sauteriaux, Anfroque, Niangle, Fond du Croc, Les Jumelles, La Grosse, La Clanque, Les Eguillons, Le Vrac, La Fosse-Malière; to the east Sauquet, Hommeau Floreau, La Brinebetais, La Queslingue, Croquelihou, La Fourche, Le Saut, Noire Pute, Coupie, Orbue. These are hydra-headed monsters of the protecting reef. One of these reefs is called Le But,—the Goal,—as if to imply that every voyage ends there. This obstruction, simplified by night and sea, looked to the shipwrecked men like a single dark belt of rocks, a sort of blot on the horizon.

Shipwreck is the height of helplessness. To be near land, and unable to reach it; to float, yet not to be able to do so in any desired direction; to rest the foot on what seems firm and is fragile; to be full of life, and yet o'ershadowed by death; to be a prisoner in space; to be walled in between sky and ocean; to have the infinite overhead like a dungeon; to be encompassed by the treacherous winds and waves; to be seized, bound, paralyzed,—such a load of misfortune stupefies and crushes us. We imagine that in it we catch a glimpse of the sneer of the opponent who is beyond our reach. That which holds you fast is that which releases the birds and sets the fishes free. It seems nothing, and is everything. We are dependent on the air which is ruffled by our mouths; we are dependent on the water which we catch in the hollow of our hands. Draw a glassful from the storm, and it is but a cup of bitterness; a mouthful is nausea, a waveful is extermination. The grain of sand in the desert, the foam-flake on the sea, are fearful symptoms. Omnipotence takes no care to hide its atom; it changes weakness into strength; and it is with the infinitely little that the infinitely great crushes you. It is with its drops that the ocean overwhelms you. You feel you are a plaything. A plaything: ghastly epithet!

The "Matutina" was a little above Alderney, which was not an unfavourable position; but she was drifting towards its northern point, which was fatal. As a bent bow discharges its arrow, the nor'-wester was shooting the vessel towards the northern cape. Off that point, a little beyond the harbour of Corbelets, is that which the seaman of the Norman archipelago call a "singe,"—that is, a current. The "singe" is a furious kind of current. A wreath of funnels in the shallows produces a wreath of whirlpools on the surface. You escape one only to fall into another. A ship caught hold of by the "singe" whirls round and round until some sharp rock cleaves her hull; then the shattered vessel stops, her stern rises from the waves, the bow completes the revolution in the abyss, the stern sinks in, and the entire wreck is sucked down. The circle of foam broadens, and nothing is seen on the surface of the waves but a few bubbles here and there.

The three most dangerous currents in the whole channel are — one close to the well-known Girdler Sands; one at Jersey between the Pignonnet and the Point of Noirmont; and that of Alderney.

Had a local pilot been on board the "Matutina," he could have warned them of their fresh peril. In place of a pilot, they had their instinct. In situations of extreme danger men are endowed with second sight. Without knowing exactly what awaited them, they approached the spot with horror. How could they double that cape? They had no means of doing it. Just as they had seen, first the Caskets, then Ortach, loom up before them, they now saw the point of Alderney, all of steep rock. It was like a number of giants rising up one after another to offer them battle. Charybdis and Scylla make but two; the Caskets, Ortach, and Alderney make three. The phenomenon of the horizon, invaded by the rocks, was again repeated with the grand monotony of the deep. The battles of the ocean have the same sublime tautology as the combats of Homer. Each wave, as they neared it, added twenty cubits to the apparent cape, already greatly



magnified by the mist; the fast decreasing distance seemed to render destruction more and more inevitable. They were on the edge of the seething current already! The first ripple that seized them would drag them in; another wave surmounted, and all would be over!

Suddenly the hooker was driven back, as if by a blow from a Titan's fist. The wave reared up under the vessel and fell back, throwing the waif back in its mane of foam. The "Matutina," thus impelled, drifted away from Alderney. She was again on the open sea. Whence had come the succour? From the wind. The breath of the storm had changed its direction. The wave had made them its toy; now it was the wind's turn. They had saved themselves from the Caskets. Off Ortach it was the wave which had been their friend; now it was the wind. The wind had suddenly veered from north to south. A sou'-wester had succeeded the nor'-wester. The current is the wind in the waters; the wind is the current in the air. These two forces had just counteracted each other, and it had been the wind's will to snatch its prey from the current.

The whims of ocean are incomprehensible; they are, perhaps, an embodiment of the perpetual. When one is at their mercy one can neither hope nor despair. They do and then undo. The ocean amuses itself. Every shade of wild, untamed ferocity is phased in the vast and cunning sea, which Jean Bart used to call "that big brute." To its claws and their gashings succeed soft intervals of velvet paws. Sometimes the storm hurries on a wreck, at others it works out the problem with care; it might almost be said that it lingers over it. The sea can afford to take its time, as its victims learn to their cost.

We must own that occasionally these lulls in the torture announce deliverance. Such cases are rare. However this may be, men in extreme peril are quick to believe in rescue. the slightest cessation in the storm's threats is sufficient,—they tell themselves that they are out of danger. After believing themselves as good as buried, they announce their

resurrection. It appears that their luck has turned; they declare themselves satisfied; they are saved; they cry quits with God.

The sou'-wester set in with a whirlwind. Shipwrecked men have never any but rough helpers. The "Matutina" was dragged rapidly out to sea by the remains of her rigging, like a dead woman trailed by the hair. It was like the freedom granted by Tiberius, at the price of violation. The wind treated with brutality those whom it saved; it rendered service with fury; it gave help without pity. The wreck was breaking up under the severity of its deliverers. Hailstones, big and hard enough to charge a blunderbuss, smote the vessel; at every rise and fall of the waves these hailstones rolled about the deck like marbles. The hooker, whose deck was almost even with the water was being beaten out of shape by the heavy sea and its clouds of spray. On board it each man was for himself. They clung on as best they could. As each sea swept over them, it was with a sense of surprise that they saw that all were still there. Several had their faces torn by splinters. Happily despair makes stout hands. In terror a child's hand has the grasp of a giant; agony makes a vice of a woman's fingers; a girl in her fright can almost bury her rose-coloured fingers in a piece of iron. With hooked fingers they hung on somehow, as the waves dashed over them; but each wave increased their fear of being swept away.

But their fears were suddenly relieved.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### THE PROBLEM SUDDENLY WORKS IN SILENCE

**T**HE hurricane ended as abruptly as it began. In a minute or two there was no longer sou'-wester or nor'-wester in the air. The fierce clarions of space were mute. The whole of the water-spout had poured from the sky with-

out any sign of diminution, as if it had slid perpendicularly into a gulf beneath. Snow-flakes took the place of hail-stones; the snow began to fall slowly. There was no more swell; the sea quieted down.

Such sudden cessations are peculiar to snow-storms. The electric influence exhausted, everything becomes still,—even the sea, which in ordinary storms often remains agitated for a long time. In snow-storms it is not so. There is then no prolonged disturbance in the deep. Like a weary worker it becomes drowsy directly,—thus almost giving the lie to the laws of statics, but not astonishing old seamen, who know that the sea is full of unforeseen surprises. The same phenomenon takes place, although very rarely, in ordinary storms. Thus, in our own time, on the occasion of the memorable hurricane of July 27, 1867, at Jersey the wind, after fourteen hours' fury, suddenly relapsed into a dead calm.

In a few minutes the hooker was floating on sleeping waters. At the same time (for the last phase of these storms resembles the first) the crew could distinguish nothing; all that had been made visible in the convulsions of the meteoric cloud was again dark. Pale outlines were fused in vague mist, and the gloom of infinite space closed around the vessel. Walls of inky blackness surrounded the "Matutina," and with the grim deliberation of an encroaching iceberg were slowly but surely closing in around her. In the zenith nothing was visible; a lid of fog seemed to be closing down upon the vessel. It was as if the hooker were at the bottom of an unfathomable abyss. The sea was like a puddle of molten lead. No movement was perceptible in the waters,—ominous immobility! The ocean is never less tame than when it is still as a pool. All was silence, stillness, darkness. Perchance the silence of inanimate objects is taciturnity. The deck was horizontal, with an insensible slope to the sides. A few broken planks were sliding about. The block on which they had lighted the tow steeped in tar, in place of the signal-light which had been washed away, no longer swung at the prow, and no longer let fall burning drops into the sea. What little

breeze remained in the clouds was noiseless. Then snow fell thickly, softly, and almost perpendicularly. No sound of breakers could be heard. The quiet of midnight was over all.

This profound peace succeeding such terrific tempests and frenzied efforts was, for these poor creatures so long tossed about, an unspeakable comfort; it was as though the punishment of the rack had ceased. It seemed an assurance that they would be saved. They regained confidence. All that had been fury was now tranquillity. It appeared to them a pledge of peace. Their wretched hearts swelled with hope. They were able to let go the end of rope or beam to which they had clung, to rise, straighten themselves up, and stand erect, and move about. They felt inexpressibly relieved. There are in the depths of darkness such phases of paradise, preparations for other things. It was evident that they were delivered from the storm, from the foam, from the wind, from the uproar. Henceforth all the chances were in their favour. In three or four hours it would be sunrise. They would be seen by some passing ship; they would be rescued. The worst was over, they were re-entering life. The important feat was to have been able to keep afloat until the cessation of the tempest. They said to themselves, "It is all over now."

Suddenly they found that all was indeed over. One of the sailors, the northern Basque, Galdeazun by name, going down into the hold to look for a rope, came hurriedly up again and exclaimed,—

"The hold is full!"

"Of what?" asked the chief.

"Of water," answered the sailor.

"What does that mean?" cried the chief.

"It means," replied Galdeazun, "that in half an hour we shall be at the bottom of the sea."

## CHAPTER XVII

## THE LAST RESOURCE

**T**HERE was a hole in the keel. A leak had been sprung. When it happened no one could tell. Was it when they touched the Caskets? Was it off Ortach? Was it when they were whirled about on the shoal west of Alderney? It was most probable that they had struck against some hidden rock, the shock of which they had not felt in the midst of the convulsive fury of the wind which was tossing them about. When one has tetanus who would feel a pin-prick?

The other sailor, the southern Basque, whose name was Ave Maria, also went down into the hold, and returning to the deck said: "There are six feet of water in the hold;" and added, "In less than forty minutes we shall sink."

Where was the leak? They could not find it. It was hidden by the water which was filling the hold. The vessel had a hole in her hull somewhere below the water-line, quite forward in the keel. Impossible to find it, impossible to check it. They had a wound which they could not stanch. The water, however, was not rising very fast.

The chief called out: "We must work the pump!"

Galdeazun replied: "We have no pump left."

"Then," said the chief, "we must make for land."

"Where is the land?"

"I don't know."

"Nor I."

"But it must be somewhere."

"True enough."

"Let some one steer for it."

"We have no pilot."

"Take the tiller yourself."

"We have lost the tiller."

"Let's rig one out of the first beam we can lay hands on. Nails — a hammer — quick — some tools."

"The carpenter's box went overboard; we have no tools."

"We'll steer all the same; no matter where."

"The rudder is lost."

"Where is the boat? We'll get in that and row."

"The boat is gone too."

"We'll row the wreck."

"We have lost all our oars."

"We'll have to depend upon our sails then."

"We have lost our sails, and the mast as well."

"We'll rig one up with a pole and a tarpaulin. Let's get out of this, and trust to the wind."

"There is no wind."

The wind, indeed, had deserted them, the storm had fled, and its departure, which they had believed to mean safety, meant in fact destruction. Had the sou'-wester continued, it might have driven them wildly on some shore, might have beaten the leak in speed, might perhaps have carried them to some propitious sandbank, and cast them on it before the booker foundered. The fury of the storm, bearing them onward, might have enabled them to reach land; but no wind now meant no hope. They were going to die because the hurricane was over. The end was near!

Wind, hail, the hurricane, the whirlwind,— these are wild combatants that may be overcome; the storm can be taken in the weak point of its armour; there are resources against the violence which is often off its guard, and often hits wide of the mark. But nothing can be done against a calm; there is nothing tangible which you can lay hold upon. The winds are like Cossacks: stand your ground and they will disperse. Calms remind one of the executioner's pincers.

The water crept up higher and higher in the hold; and as it rose, the vessel sank,— slowly but surely. Those on board the wreck of the "Matutina" felt that most hopeless of catastrophes,— an inert catastrophe undermining them. The grim certainty of their fate petrified them. No

stir in the air, no movement on the sea. The motionless is the inexorable. Absorption was sucking them down silently. Through the depths of the silent waters — without anger, without passion, not willing, not knowing, not caring — the fatal centre of the globe was drawing them downwards. It was no longer the wide-open mouth of the sea, the fierce jaws of the wind and the wave, that threatened them; it was as if the wretched beings had under them the black gulf of the infinite. They felt themselves slowly sinking into oblivion. The distance between the deck and the water was lessening,— that was all. They could calculate her disappearance to the moment. It was the exact reverse of submersion by the rising tide. The water was not rising towards them, they were sinking into it. They were digging their own grave. Their own weight was their sexton. Their fate was sealed, not by the laws of man, but by the laws of Nature.

The snow continued to fall, and as the wreck was now perfectly motionless, it was covered as with a winding-sheet. The hold was becoming fuller and deeper. There was no way of getting at the leak. They had struck a light and fixed three or four torches in holes as best they could. Galdeazun brought some old leathern buckets, and they tried to bale the hold out, standing in a row to pass the buckets from hand to hand; but the buckets were past use; the leather of some was unstitched, there were holes in the bottoms of others, and the buckets emptied themselves on the way. The difference in quantity between the water which was making its way in and that which they returned to the sea was ludicrous; for a hogshead that entered, a glassful was baled out; so they did not improve their condition. It was like a miser trying to spend a million, half-penny by half-penny.

The chief said, "Let us lighten the wreck."

During the storm they had lashed together the few chests which were on deck. These remained tied to the stump of the mast. They undid the lashings, and rolled the chests overboard through a breach in the gunwale. One of these

trunks belonged to the Basque woman, who could not repress a groan as she saw it going, exclaiming,—

“Oh, my new cloak lined with scarlet! Oh, my poor open-work stockings! Oh, my silver earrings to wear at Mass on May-day!”

The deck cleared, the cabin had next to be seen to. It was greatly encumbered, as the reader may remember, by the luggage belonging to the passengers, and by the bales belonging to the sailors. They took the luggage, and threw it over the gunwale. They carried up the bales, and cast them into the sea. The lantern, the barrels, the sacks of provisions, the bales, and the water-butts, even the pot of soup,—all went over into the waves. They unscrewed the nuts of the iron stove, in which the fire had long since gone out, hoisted it on deck, dragged it to the side of the vessel, and threw it overboard. They cast overboard everything they could pull out of the deck,—chains, shrouds, and torn rigging.

From time to time the chief took a torch, and throwing its light on the figures painted on the prow looked to see how much the wreck had settled down.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE HIGHEST RESOURCE

**T**HE wreck being lightened was sinking more slowly, but none the less surely. The hopelessness of their situation was without mitigation; they had exhausted their last resource.

“Is there anything else we can throw overboard?” asked one.

The doctor, whom everyone had forgotten, rose from the companion-way and answered: “Yes.”

“What?” asked the chief.





"Let us throw our crimes into the sea."

*The Man Who Laughs. Vol. I, Page 119.*



"Our crime," replied the doctor.

They shuddered, and all cried out: "Amen."

The doctor standing up, pale as death, raised his hand to heaven, saying: "Kneel down."

They all prepared to kneel.

The doctor went on. "Let us throw our crimes into the sea, they weigh us down; it is they that are sinking the ship. Let us cease to think of safety; let us think only of salvation. Our last crime,—the crime which we committed, or rather completed, just now,—O wretched beings who are listening to me, it is that which is overwhelming us! For those who leave intended murder behind them, it is the height of audacity to tempt the mighty deep. He who sins against a child, sins against God. True, we were obliged to put to sea, but it was certain perdition. The storm, warned by the shadow of our crime, came upon us. It is well. Regret nothing, however. There, not far off in the darkness, are the sands of Vauville and Cape La Hogue on the coast of France. There was but one possible shelter for us,—that was Spain. France was no less dangerous to us than England. Our deliverance from the sea would have led only to the gibbet. We had no alternative but to be hanged or drowned. God has chosen for us; let us give him thanks. He has vouchsafed us the grave which cleanses. Brethren, the hand of God is in it. Remember that we just now did our best to send that child on high, and that at this very moment, as I speak, there is, perhaps, in the world above a soul accusing us before a Judge whose eye is upon us. Let us make the best use of this last respite; let us make an effort, if time be granted us, to repair, as far as possible, the evil we have done. If the child survives us, let us do what we can to aid him; if he is dead, let us seek his forgiveness. Let us cast our sins from us. Let us ease our consciences of this load. Let us pray that our souls be not cast out from the presence of Almighty God, for that is the worst of shipwrecks. Bodies go to the fishes, souls to the Evil One. Have pity on yourselves. Kneel down, I tell you. Repentance is the only bark which never

sinks. You have lost your compass; you have gone sadly astray; but you can still pray."

The wolves had become lambs: such transformations often occur at the hour of death. Even tigers lick the crucifix. When the dark portals of the grave yawn, to believe is difficult, not to believe is impossible. However unsatisfactory the different religious creeds of mankind may be, no matter how little they correspond with his conception of the life hereafter, the boldest soul quails when the moment of final dissolution comes. There *must* be something that begins when this life ends. This thought impresses itself upon the mind of the dying.

Death is the end of each man's term of probation. In that fatal hour he realizes the burden of responsibility that rests upon every human soul. That which has been decides what is to be. The past returns, and enters into the future. The known becomes as terrifying as the unknown; it is the confusion of the two which so terrifies the dying man.

These poor wretches had abandoned all hope so far as this life was concerned, so they turned their thoughts to the other. Their only remaining chance was in its dark shadow, and they understood this fact perfectly. "Speak, speak!" they cried out to the doctor; "there is no one else to tell us. We will obey thee. What must we do! Speak!"

The doctor answered: "The question is how to pass over the unknown precipice and reach the shores of the unknown world beyond the tomb. Being the wisest among you, my danger is greater than yours. You do well to leave the choice of the bridge to him whose burden is the heaviest. For knowledge only increases one's responsibility. How much time have we left?"

Galdeazun looked at the water-mark, and answered: "A little more than a quarter of an hour."

"Good," said the doctor.

The low roof of the companion-way on which he was leaning served as a sort of table. The doctor took from his pocket his inkhorn and pen, and drew from his pocket-book

a piece of parchment, the same on which he had written, a few hours before, some twenty cramped and crooked lines. "A light," he said.

The snow, falling like the spray of a cataract, had extinguished the torches one after another; there was but one left. Ave Maria took it out of the place where it had been stuck, and holding it in his hand, came and stood by the doctor's side.

The doctor replaced his pocket-book in his pocket, set the pen and inkhorn on the top of the companion-way, unfolded the parchment, and said: "Listen."

Then in the midst of the sea, on the sinking deck (a sort of quaking flooring of the tomb), the doctor began a solemn reading, to which all the shadows seemed to listen. The doomed men bowed their heads around him. The flickering light of the torch intensified their pallor. What the doctor read was written in English. Now and then, when one of those woe-begone looks seemed to ask an explanation, the doctor would stop, and repeat, either in French, Spanish, Basque, or Italian, the passage he had just read. Stifled sobs and hollow beatings of the breast were heard. The wreck was sinking more and more.

The reading over, the doctor placed the parchment flat on the companion-way, seized his pen, and on a clear margin which he had carefully left at the bottom of what he had written, he signed himself: "Gerhadus Geestemunde: Doctor."

Then turning towards the others, he said: "Come and sign."

The Basque woman approached, took the pen, and signed herself, "Asuncion." She handed the pen to the Irish woman, who not knowing how to write, made a cross. The doctor, by the side of this cross, wrote, "Barbara Fermoy, of Tyrriif Island, in the Hebrides." Then he handed the pen to the chief of the band. The chief signed, "Gaizdorra: Captal." The Genoese signed himself under the chief's name, "Giangirate." The Languedocian signed, "Jacques

Quartourze: *alias* the Narbonnais." The Provençal signed, "Luc-Pierre Capgaroupe, of the Galleys of Mahon."

Under these signatures the doctor added a note: "Of the crew of three men, the captain having been washed overboard by a sea, but two remain, and they have signed."

The two sailors affixed their names underneath the note. The northern Basque signed himself, "Galdeazun." The southern Basque signed, "Ave Maria: Thief."

Then the doctor said: "Capgaroupe."

"Here," said the Provençal.

"Have you Hardquanonne's flask?"

"Yes."

"Give it me."

Capgaroupe drank off the last mouthful of brandy, and handed the flask to the doctor.

The water was rising in the hold; the wreck was sinking deeper into the sea. The sloping edges of the ship were covered by a thin wave, which was rising. All were crowded on the centre of the deck.

The doctor dried the ink on the signatures by the flame of the torch, and folding the parchment into a narrower compass than the diameter of the neck, put it into the flask, and called for the cork.

"I don't know where it is," said Capgaroupe.

"Here is a piece of rope," said Jacques Quartourze.

The doctor corked the flask with a bit of rope, and asked for some tar. Galdeazun went forward, extinguished the signal-light, took the vessel which had held it from the stern, and brought it, half full of burning pitch, to the doctor. The flask containing the parchment which they had all signed was carefully corked and tarred over.

"It is done," said the doctor.

And from every mouth, faltered in every language, came as if from the tomb such dismal utterances as

"Ainsi soit-il!"

"Meâ culpâ!"

"Asi sea!"

"Aro raï!"

"Amen!"

It was as though the gloomy voices of Babel were resounding through the shadows as Heaven uttered its awful refusal to hear them.

The doctor turned away from his companions in crime and distress, and took a few steps towards the gunwale. Reaching the side, he looked into space, and said, in a deep voice: "Bist du bei mir?" Perchance he was addressing some phantom.

The wreck was sinking. All the others stood as in a dream. Prayer mastered them by main force. They not only knelt, they cowered. There was something involuntary in their contrition; they wavered as a sail flaps with the breeze fails.

And the haggard group took by degrees, with clasping of hands and prostration of foreheads, various attitudes expressive of profound humiliation. Some strange reflection of the deep seemed to soften their villainous features.

The doctor returned towards them. Whatever his past may have been, the old man was truly great in the presence of the catastrophe. He was not a man to be taken unawares. Brooding over him was the calm of a silent horror; on his countenance was the majesty of God's will comprehended. This old and thoughtful outlaw unconsciously assumed the air of a pontiff.

"Listen to me," he said solemnly. He contemplated the waste of water for a moment, and added: "We are about to die!"

Then he took the torch from the hands of Ave Maria, and waved it. A spark broke from it and flew into the night. Then the doctor cast the torch into the sea. It was extinguished: every glimmer of light had disappeared. Nothing remained but the dense, unfathomable gloom. It was like the very grave itself.

In the darkness, the doctor was heard saying: "Let us pray."

All knelt down. It was no longer on the snow, but in the water that they knelt. They had but a few minutes more to live. The doctor alone remained standing. The flakes of snow falling on him had sprinkled him as if with white tears, and made him plainly visible against the background of darkness. He made the sign of the cross and raised his voice, while beneath his feet he felt that almost imperceptible oscillation which precedes the moment in which a wreck is about to founder. He said:—

"Pater noster qui es in cœlis."

"Notre Père qui êtes aux cieux," the Provençal repeated in French.

"Ar nathair ata ar neamh," repeated the Irish woman in Gaelic, understood by the Basque woman.

"Sanctificetur nomen tuum," continued the doctor.

"Que votre nom soit sanctifié," said the Provençal.

"Naomhthar hainm," said the Irish woman.

"Adveniat regnum tuum," continued the doctor.

"Que votre règne arrive," said the Provençal.

"Tigeadh do rioghachd," said the Irish woman.

As they knelt, the water had risen to their shoulders.

"Fiat voluntas tua," the doctor went on.

"Que votre volonté soit faite," stammered the Provençal.

"Deuntar do thoil ar an Hhalàmb," cried the Irish woman and Basque woman.

"Sicut in cœlo, sicut in terra," said the doctor.

No voice answered him. He looked down. Every head was under water. They had allowed themselves to be drowned on their knees.

The doctor took in his right hand the flask which he had placed on the companion-way and raised it high above his head. The wreck was going down. As he sank, the doctor murmured the rest of the prayer. For an instant his shoulders were above water; then his head; then nothing remained but his arm holding up the flask, as if he were showing it to the Infinite.

Then his arm disappeared; there was no more of a ripple



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on the sea than there would have been on a cask of oil. The snow continued to fall.

One thing floated, and was carried by the waves into the darkness. It was the tarred flask, kept afloat by its osier cover.

## BOOK III

### THE CHILD IN THE SHADOW

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#### CHAPTER I

##### CHESIL

**T**HE storm was no less severe on land than on sea. The same wild strife among the elements had taken place around the abandoned child. The weak and innocent become their sport in the exhibitions of frantic rage in which they sometimes indulge. Shadows see not, and inanimate things have not the clemency they are supposed to possess.

On the land there was but little wind; yet there was an inexplicable dumbness in the cold. There was no hail; but the thickness of the falling snow was fearful. Hail-stones strike, harass, bruise, stun, crush; snow-flakes do worse. Soft and inexorable, the snow-flake does its work in silence. Touch it, and it melts. It is pure, even as the hypocrite is candid. It is by tiny particles slowly heaped one upon another that the snow-flake becomes an avalanche and the knave a criminal.

The child continued to advance in the mist: mist, like snow, is full of treachery. Though ill-fitted to cope with all these perils, he had succeeded in reaching the bottom of the descent, and had gained Chesil. Without knowing it he was on an isthmus, with water on either side; so that he could not lose his way in the fog, in the snow, or in the darkness, without falling into the deep waters of the gulf on the right

hand, or into the raging billows of the sea on the left. He was travelling on, in blissful ignorance, between these two abysses.

The Isthmus of Portland was at that time extremely sharp and rugged. No sign of its former configuration remains to-day. Since the idea of manufacturing Portland stone into cement was first conceived, the cliffs have been subjected to operations which have completely changed their original appearance. Calcareous lias, slate, and trap are still to be found there, rising from layers of conglomerate like teeth out of a gum. But the pickaxe has broken up and leveled those bristling, rugged peaks which were once the homes of the eagles. The summits no longer exist where the labbes and the skua gulls used to flock, soaring, like the envious, to sully high places. In vain you seek the tall monolith called Godolphin,—an old British word signifying “white eagle.” In summer you may still gather on these cliffs (pierced and perforated like a sponge) rosemary, pennyroyal, wild hyssop, and sea-fennel, which when infused makes a good cordial, and that herb full of knots, which grows in the sand and from which they make matting; but you no longer find grey amber or black tin, or that triple species of slate,—one sort green, one blue, and the third the colour of sage-leaves. The foxes, the badgers, the otters, and the martins have taken themselves off; on the cliffs of Portland, as well as at the extremity of Cornwall, where there were at one time chamois, none remain. The people still fish in some inlets for plaice and pilchards; but the shy salmon no longer ascend the Wey, between Michaelmas and Christmas, to spawn. Nor can one see there, as during the reign of Elizabeth, those nameless birds as large as hawks, who cut an apple in two, but ate only the pips. You never meet those crows with yellow beaks, called in English Cornish choughs (*pyrrocorax* in Latin), who mischievously drop burning twigs on thatched roofs; nor that magic bird the fulmar, a wanderer from the Scottish archipelago, dropping from his bill an oil which the islanders used to burn in their lamps. Nor do you ever find

in the evening, in the splash of the ebbing tide, that ancient, legendary neitsc, with the feet of a hog and the bleat of a calf. The tide no longer throws up the whiskered seal, with its curled ears and sharp jaws, dragging itself along on its nailless paws. On the Portland cliffs, so changed nowadays as to be scarcely recognizable the absence of forests precluded nightingales; and now the falcon, the swan, and the wild goose have fled. The sheep of Portland, nowadays, are fat and have fine wool; the few scattered ewes which nibbled the salt grass there two centuries ago were small and tough, and coarse of fleece, as became Celtic flocks brought there by garlic-eating shepherds who lived to a hundred, and who at the distance of half a mile could pierce a cuirass with their yard-long arrows. Uncultivated land makes coarse wool.

The Chesil of to-day resembles in no particular the Chesil of the past, so much has it been disturbed by man and by those furious winds which disintegrate the very stones. The Isthmus of Portland two hundred years ago was a huge mound of sand, with a vertebrated spine of rock. At present this tongue of land bears a railway, terminating in a pretty cluster of houses, called Chesilton, and there is a Portland station. Railway carriages roll where seals used to crawl.

The child's danger had now assumed a different form. What he had had to fear in the descent of the cliff was falling to the bottom of the precipice; in the isthmus his fear was of falling into the holes. After contending with the precipice, he had now to contend with pitfalls. Everything on the sea-shore is a trap; the rock is slippery, the strand is full of quicksands. Resting-places are but snares. It is walking on ice which may suddenly crack and yawn with a fissure, through which you will disappear. The ocean has false stages below, like a well-arranged theatre.

The long backbone of granite, from which both sides of the isthmus slope, is difficult of access. It is hard to find there what, in scene-shifters' language, are termed "practicables." Man need expect no hospitality from the ocean,—from the

rock no more than from the wave; the sea is kind to the bird and the fish alone. Isthmuses are especially bare and rugged; the wave, which wears and undermines them on either side, reduces them to the simplest form. Everywhere there were sharp ridges, cuttings, frightful fragments of torn stone yawning with many points like the jaws of a shark, breakneck places of wet moss, rapid slopes of rock ending in the sea. Whosoever undertakes to cross an isthmus encounters at every step huge blocks of stone as large as houses, in the shape of shin-bones, shoulder-blades, and thigh-bones,—the hideous anatomy of dismembered rocks. It is not without reason that these *striz* of the sea-shore are called ribs. The wayfarer must escape as he best can out of the confusion of these ruins. It is like journeying over the bones of an enormous skeleton.

Imagine a child put to this Herculean task! Broad daylight might have aided him; but it was night. A guide was necessary but he was alone. All the vigour of manhood would not have been too much; but he had only the feeble strength of a child. In default of a guide, a footpath might have aided him; but there was none. By instinct he avoided the sharp ridge of rock, and kept as near the strand as possible. It was there that he met with the pitfalls. They were multiplied before him under three forms,— the pitfall of water, the pitfall of snow, and the pitfall of sand. This last is the most dangerous of all, because the most deceptive. To know the peril we face is alarming; to be ignorant of it is terrible. The child was fighting against unknown dangers; he was groping his way through something which might perhaps prove to be his grave. But he did not hesitate. He went round the rocks, avoided the crevices, guessed at the pitfalls, and followed the twistings and turnings caused by such obstacles; yet he went on. Though unable to advance in a straight line, he walked with a firm tread. He patiently retraced his steps if necessary; he managed to tear himself in time from the horrid bird-lime of the quicksands; he shook the snow off him; more than once he entered the water

up to the knees, and directly he left it his wet knees were frozen by the intense cold of the night; he walked rapidly in his stiffened garments, yet he took care to keep his sailor's coat dry and warm on his chest. He was still tormented by hunger.

The chances of the abyss are illimitable. Everything is possible in it, even salvation; an issue may be found, though it be invisible. How the child, wrapped in a smothering winding-sheet of snow, lost on a narrow elevation between two jaws of an abyss, managed to cross the isthmus is something he could not himself have explained. He slipped, climbed, rolled, searched, walked, persevered,—that is all; that, indeed, is the secret of all triumphs. At the end of less than half an hour he felt that the ground was rising. He had reached the other shore. Leaving Chesil, he had gained *terra firma*. The bridge which now unites Sandford Castle with Smallmouth Sands did not then exist. It is probable that in his gropings he had re-ascended as far as Wyke Regis, where there was then a tongue of sand, a natural road crossing East Fleet.

The isthmus lay behind the child now; but he found himself still face to face with the tempest, with the cold, and with the night. Before him stretched the plain, shrouded in impenetrable gloom. He examined the ground seeking a footpath. Suddenly he bent down: he had discovered in the snow something that looked like a track. It was indeed a track,—the imprint of a foot. The print was clearly cut in the whiteness of the snow, which rendered it distinctly visible. He examined it. It was a naked foot; too small for that of a man, too large for that of a child. It was probably the foot of a woman. Beyond that mark was another, then another and another. The footprints followed one another at the distance of a step, and stuck across the plain to the right. They were still fresh, and but slightly covered with snow. A woman had just passed that way. This woman was walking in the direction where the child had seen the smoke. With his eyes fixed on the footprints, he set to work to follow them.

## CHAPTER II

## THE EFFECT OF SNOW

**T**HE child followed in this track for some time but unfortunately the footprints became more and more indistinct, for the snow was falling thick and fast. It was at the very same time that the hooker was encountering the furious snow-storm at sea. The child, in distress like the vessel, but in a different fashion, had, in the inextricable confusion of shadows that rose up before him, no guide but the footsteps in the snow, and he held to it as the thread of the labyrinth.

Suddenly, whether the snow had filled them up entirely, or for some other reason, the footsteps ceased. All became even, level, smooth, without a stain, without an irregularity. There was now nothing but a white mantle drawn over the earth, and a black one over the sky. It seemed as if the pedestrian must have flown away. The child, in despair, bent down and searched; but in vain. As he arose he fancied that he heard some indistinct sound, but he could not be sure of it. It resembled a voice, a breath, a shadow; it was more human than animal, more sepulchral than living. It was not a sound, but rather the shadow of a sound. He looked, but saw nothing. Solitude, wide and naked, stretched before him. He listened: that which he had thought he heard had faded away. Perhaps it had been only fancy. He still listened: all was silent. He went on his way again, walking on at random, with nothing thenceforth to guide him.

As the child moved away the noise began again. This time he could doubt no longer. It was a groan, almost a sob. He turned and peered eagerly into the darkness, but saw nothing. The sound arose once more. It was the most penetrating piercing, yet feeble voice imaginable, for it certainly was

a voice. It arose from a soul. There was a strange palpitation in the murmur; nevertheless, it seemed uttered almost unconsciously. It was an appeal from some one in suffering, and yet from some one who was scarcely conscious of that suffering or the appeal for relief. The cry — perhaps a first breath, perhaps a last sigh — was equally removed from the rattle which ends life and the wail with which it commences. It breathed a gloomy supplication from the depths of night. The child gazed intently everywhere,— far, near, on high, below. There was no one in sight. He listened. The voice arose again; he heard it distinctly. The sound somewhat resembled the bleating of a lamb. Then he was frightened, and thought for an instant of flight. The sound arose again; this was the fourth time. It was strangely miserable and plaintive; one felt that after that last effort, which was more mechanical than voluntary, the cry would probably be extinguished. It was an expiring exclamation, instinctively appealing to the amount of aid lying dormant in space. It was an agonized appeal to a possible Providence.

The child advanced in the direction from which the sound seemed to proceed. Still he saw nothing. He advanced again, watchfully. The wail continued; inarticulate and confused as it was, it had become clear, almost vibrating. The child was near the voice; but where was it? While he was hesitating between an impulse which urged him to fly and an instinct which commanded him to remain, he perceived in the snow at his feet, a few steps before him, a sort of undulation of the dimensions of a human body, a little eminence, low, long, and narrow, like the mound over a grave,— a sepulchre in a white church-yard. At the same time the voice cried out again. It was from beneath the undulation that it proceeded. The child crouched down beside the undulation, and with both his hands began to clear it away. Beneath the snow which he removed the lines of a human form soon became visible, and suddenly in the hollow he had made a pale face appeared.





"The child swiftly cleared away the snow, revealing a wretched little body—thin, icy-cold, but still alive."

*The Man Who Laughs. Vol. I, Page 133.*



The cry had not proceeded from this face, for the eyes were shut, and the mouth, though open, was full of snow. The form remained motionless; it stirred not under the benumbed hands of the child. He shuddered when he touched it. It was a woman's form. Her dishevelled hair was mingled with the snow; she was dead.

Again the child set to work to brush away the snow. The neck of the dead woman appeared; then her shoulders, clothed in rags. Suddenly he felt something move feebly under his touch. It was something small that was buried, and that stirred. The child swiftly cleared away the snow, revealing a wretched little body — thin, and icy cold, but still alive — lying naked on the dead woman's naked breast. It was a little girl.

It had been swaddled up, but in rags so scanty that in its struggles it had freed itself from its tatters. Its attenuated limbs, which yet contained a little warmth, and its feeble breath, had somewhat melted the snow. A nurse would have said that the baby was five or six months old; but perhaps it might be a year old, for growth, in poverty suffers deplorable drawbacks, which sometimes even produce rachitis. When the baby's face was exposed to the air it gave a cry, the continuation of its moan of distress. For the mother not to have heard that sob proved her irrevocably dead. The child took the infant in his arms.

The stiffened body of the mother was a fearful sight. A spectral light seemed to proceed from her face. Her parted, breathless lips seemed to be forming in the mysterious language of shadows her answer to the questions put to the dead by the Invisible. The ghastly reflection of the icy plains was on her countenance. There was a youthful forehead under the brown hair, an almost indignant knitting of the eye-brows, pinched nostrils, closed eye-lids, the lashes glued together by the rime, and from the corners of the eyes to the corners of the mouth extended a channel of frozen tears. The snow lighted up the corpse. Winter and death are not unlike; the corpse is a human circle. The

nakedness of the dead woman's breasts was pathetic. They had fulfilled their purpose. On them was a sublime blight of the life infused into one being by another from whom life had fled, and maternal majesty was there instead of virginal purity. At the point of one of the nipples was a white pearl. It was a drop of frozen milk.

Let us explain at once. On the plain over which the deserted boy was passing a beggar woman, nursing her infant and searching for a refuge, had lost her way a few hours before. Numb with cold she had fallen on the snow, and was unable to rise again. The falling snow covered her. As long as she was able she had clasped her little girl to her bosom; and thus she died.

The infant had tried to suck the marble breast of the mother. Blind trust, inspired by Nature; for it seems that it is possible for a woman to suckle her child even after her last sigh. But the lips of the infant had been unable to find the breast where the drop of milk had frozen, while under the snow the child, more accustomed to the cradle than the tomb, had wailed despairingly. The deserted child had heard the cry of the dying child. He disinterred it. He took it in his arms.

When the infant found herself in his arms she ceased crying. The faces of the two children touched each other, and the purple lips of the infant sought the cheek of the boy, as it had been a breast. The little girl had nearly reached the moment when the congealed blood stops the action of the heart. Her mother had touched her with the chill of death, for a corpse communicates death; its numbness is infectious. The infant's feet, hands, arms, knees, seemed paralyzed by cold. The boy felt the terrible chill. He had on him one garment dry and warm,—his pilot jacket. He placed the infant on the breast of the corpse, took off his jacket, wrapped the infant in it, which he took up again in his arms; and then, almost naked, under the blast of the north wind which covered him with eddies of snow-flakes, carrying the infant, he continued his journey. The little one having succeeded in again

finding the boy's cheek, again applied her lips to it; and, soothed by the warmth, she fell asleep. First kiss of those two souls in the darkness!

The mother lay there on her back upon the snow, her face turned up to the night; but perhaps at the moment when the boy stripped himself to clothe the little girl, the mother saw him from the depths of infinity.

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### CHAPTER III

#### A BURDEN MAKES A ROUGH ROAD ROUGHER

IT was a little more than four hours since the hooker sailed from the creek of Portland, leaving the boy on the shore. During the long hours since he had been deserted, and had been journeying onwards, he had met but three persons of that human society into which he was, perchance, about to enter,— a man (the man on the hill), a woman (the woman in the snow), and the little girl whom he was carrying in his arms. He was exhausted by fatigue and hunger, yet advanced more resolutely than ever, though with less strength and an added burden. He was now almost naked. The few rags which remained upon him, hardened by the frost, were sharp as glass, and cut his skin. He was colder, but the infant was warmer. That which he lost was not thrown away, but was gained by her. He found that the poor infant enjoyed the comfort, which to her was a renewal of life. He continued to advance. From time to time, still holding his burden securely, he bent down, and taking a handful of snow rubbed his feet with it, to prevent their being frost-bitten. At other times, his throat feeling as if it were on fire, he put a little snow in his mouth and sucked it; this for a moment assuaged his thirst, but later changed it into fever,— a relief which proved only an aggravation.

The storm had become appalling in its violence. Deluges of snow are possible; this was one. The tempest scourged the shore at the same time that it up-tore the depths of ocean. This was, perhaps, the very moment when the distracted hooker was going to pieces in its battle with the breakers.

The boy travelled on in this cutting north wind, still towards the east, over wide surfaces of snow. He knew not how the hours passed. For a long time he had ceased to see the smoke. Such indications are soon effaced in the night; besides, it was long past the hour when fires are put out. He had, perhaps, made a mistake, and it was possible that neither town nor village existed in the direction in which he was travelling. Doubting, he yet persevered. Two or three times the little infant cried, at which times he adopted in his gait a rocking movement, and the girl was soothed and silenced; she ended by falling into a sound sleep. Shivering himself, he felt to see if she were warm, and frequently tightened the folds of the jacket round her neck, so that the frost could not get in through any opening, and so that no melted snow should drop between the garment and the child. The plain was unequal; in the declivities into which it sloped, the snow, drifted by the wind, was so deep that it almost engulfed him, and he had to struggle through it, half buried. He walked on, however, working away the snow with his knees. Having passed the ravine, he reached the high lands swept by the winds, where the snow was thin. There he found the surface a sheet of ice. The little girl's lukewarm breath, playing on his face, warmed it for a moment, then froze in his hair, stiffening it into icicles.

The boy now felt the approach of another danger. He did not dare to sit down and rest; for he knew that if he did so he would never rise again. He was overcome by fatigue, and even the weight of the snow would, as in the case of the dead woman, have held him to the ground, while the ice would have glued him alive to the earth. He had tripped on the sides of precipices, and had recovered himself; he had stumbled into holes, and got out again,—but now the slightest

fall would be death; a false step would prove fatal. He *must not slip*; yet everything was slippery; everywhere there was rime and frozen snow. The little creature whom he carried made his progress fearfully difficult; she was not only a burden which his weariness and exhaustion made excessive, but was also an encumbrance in that she occupied both his arms,— and to him who walks over ice, arms serve as a natural and necessary balancing-pole. The boy was obliged to do without this balance-pole. He did do without it and advanced, bending under his burden, not knowing what would become of him. The infant that he carried was the drop causing the cup of distress to overflow; yet he advanced, reeling at every step, and accomplishing, without spectators, miracles of equilibrium.

Without spectators? We repeat that unseen eyes perhaps watched him on this perilous path,— the eyes of the mother and the eyes of God!

The boy staggered, slipped, recovered himself, tightened his hold on the infant, and drawing the jacket closer about her covered her head with it, and staggered on again. He was, to all appearance, on the plains where Bincleaves Farm was afterwards established, between what are now called Spring Gardens and the Parsonage House. Homesteads and cottages now stand upon what was then a barren waste. Sometimes less than a century changes a steppe into a city.

Suddenly, a lull having occurred in the icy blast which was blinding him, the boy perceived, at a short distance in front of him, a cluster of roofs and of chimneys, the reverse of a silhouette,— a city painted in white on a black horizon, something like what we call nowadays a negative proof. Roofs! dwellings! shelter! He had arrived somewhere at last; he felt the ineffable encouragement of hope. The watch of a ship which has wandered from her course feels some such emotion when he cries, "Land ho!" He quickened his pace. He would soon be among living creatures; there was no longer anything to fear. There glowed within him a sudden warmth,— security; his terrible ordeal was nearly over;

thenceforward there would be neither night nor winter nor tempest. It seemed to him that he had left all such misery behind him. The infant was no longer a burden; he almost ran. His eyes were fixed on the roofs: there was life there; he never took his eyes off them. A dead man might gaze thus on what was visible through the half-open cover of his sepulchre. There were the chimneys of which he had seen the smoke; no smoke arose from them now.

It was not long before the boy reached the houses. He came to the outskirts of a town,—an open street. At that period the barring of streets at night had been nearly abandoned. The street began by two houses. In those two houses neither candle nor lamp was visible; nor in the whole street, nor in the whole town, as far as eye could reach. The house to the right was a roof rather than a house; nothing could be more squalid. The walls were of mud, the roof was of straw, and there was more thatch than wall. An immense nettle, springing from the bottom of the wall, reached up to the roof. The hovel had but one door, which was like that of a dog-kennel, and a window which was but a hole. Both were shut up; but at the side an inhabited pig-sty told that the house also was inhabited. The house on the left was large, high, and built entirely of stone, with a slated roof. That too was closed; it was the rich man's home, opposite that of the pauper.

The boy did not hesitate; he approached the great mansion. The double door of massive oak, studded with large nails, was of the kind that leads one to expect that behind it there is an armory of bolts and locks. An iron knocker was attached to it. He raised the knocker with some difficulty, for his benumbed hands were stumps rather than hands, and knocked once. No answer. He knocked again,—twice this time; no movement was heard in the house. He knocked a third time; still there was no sound. He saw that they were all asleep, or did not mean to get up. Then he turned to the hovel. He picked up a small stone out of the snow, and knocked with it against the low door; there was no answer. He raised him-



self on tiptoe, and knocked with his stone against the pane,—too softly to break the glass, but loud enough to be heard; no voice was heard, no step moved, no candle was lighted. He saw that there, as well, they did not care to awake. The house of stone and the thatched hovel were equally deaf to the appeal of the wretched.

The boy decided to push on farther, and make his way down the street in front of him,—a street so dark that it seemed more like a gulf between two cliffs than the entrance to a town.

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## CHAPTER IV

### ANOTHER KIND OF DESERT

**I**T was Weymouth which the boy had just entered. Weymouth then was not the respectable and fine Weymouth of to-day.

Ancient Weymouth could not boast, like the present one, of an irreproachable rectangular quay, with an inn and a statue in honour of George III.,—and this owing to the fact that George III. had not then been born. For the same reason, they had not yet fashioned on the side of the green hill to the east, by cutting away the turf and leaving the chalky soil exposed to the view, the "White Horse," an acre long, bearing the king upon his back,—still another work of art in honour of George III. These honours, however, were deserved. George III., having lost in his old age the mind he had never possessed in his youth, was not responsible for the calamities of his reign. He was little better than an idiot. So why not erect statues to him?

Weymouth, a hundred and eighty years ago, was about as symmetrical as a game of spillikins in confusion. In legends it is said that Astaroth travelled about the world, carrying on her back a wallet which contained everything, even good