The Shadow of the Sword

Robert Buchanan

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Preface to the new edition.

In issuing a new edition of “The Shadow of the Sword,” my publishers have asked me to introduce it with a few lines of preface. This I do the more willingly, as it gives me an opportunity of thanking the Critics of the Newspaper Press of England for the generous way in which they have received this and my subsequent attempts in fiction.

“The Shadow of the Sword” is a polemic against War, against the institution which, above all others, is the disgrace and scourge of modern civilization. But what am I saying? I write this preface in the near neighbourhood of Shoeburyness, where our English artillerymen have been recently experimenting, at the expense of the public pocket and of the town windows, with the new 80−ton gun. I forget exactly how many pounds sterling every discharge of this cheerful invention costs the people of England, or how much they are mulcted for the experimental cannonade which takes place daily at Shoeburyness and other havens of unrest, made hideous for us by a quasi−military government. And I have before me as I write the beautiful wall−almanack for 1883, owned by the pious proprietors of a newspaper called the *Christian Herald*, and containing, together with portraits of leading divines, a picture of the hero of Egypt, Sir Garnet Wolseley. Other signs in every land convince me of the perfect condition of our boasted Christian civilization. It is cheering also to reflect that even Liberals have been impelled to adopt the programme of imperialism, and stimulate the enthusiasm of Egyptian bondholders by a glorious victory over helpless fellow−creatures in the East. The Bible, the sword, and the ambulance waggon are triumphant, and the religion of Christ prevails. Only one step further, surely, would be needed, to reach the Millennium; and that step would be taken if our rulers would only listen to the voice of Christian opinion, expressed in so many comfortable circles, and cicatrize the old wounds of refractory Ireland—with powder and shot!

But this subject, after all, is too sad a one to be sarcastic upon. I am face to face with the horrible truth that War is still a reality, and will be a reality so long as it is tolerated, under any circumstances or under any name, by the preachers of Christianity—among which preachers I include, as by far the most powerful, the members of the fourth estate. In the nineteenth century, War should be simply impossible. That it is possible is a proof of the failure of the Christian religion, so far, to enfranchise the world.

I have cast “The Shadow of the Sword” as a crumb upon the waters. It may do some good; it cannot by any possibility do any harm. The idea has been described as transcendental, like (to compare small things with great) the sublime ideas of the Founder of Christianity. It has been accepted, and praised without stint, by many, as an attack on Despotism in the person of the first Napoleon. I trust, however, that it is something more—an attack on War in the abstract, as the deadliest and most loathsome representation of the retrograde movement of modern political thought. Once more, “the time grows near the birth of Christ.” The Holy Name will be murmured from a thousand pulpits, echoed by a million hearts; but Christ still sleeps, despite His promise to arise, and sad−eyed Science is telling us that He will never arise at all. Blocking the mouth of the Sepulchre lies now, instead of the old stone, a monstrous implement—the GATLING GUN!

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

SOUTHEND, *Dec.* 21 1882

Proem.

Nineteen sad sleepless centuries
Had shed upon the dead CHRIST'S eyes
Dark blood and dew, and o'er them still
The waxen lids were sealed chill.
Drearily through the dreary years
The world had waited on in tears,
With heart clay−cold and eyelids wet,
But He had not arisen yet.
Nay, Christ was cold; and, colder still,
The lovely Shapes He came to kill
Slept by His side. Ah, sight of dread!
Dead CHRIST, and all the sweet gods dead!
He had not risen, tho' all the world
Was waiting; tho', with thin lips curl'd,
Pale ANTICHRIST upon his prison
Gazed yet denying, He had not risen;
Tho' every hope was slain save Him,
Tho' all the eyes of Heaven were dim,
Despite the promise and the pain,
He slept—and had *not* risen again.
Meantime, from France's funeral pyre,
Rose, god−like, girt around with fire,
Napoleon!
—On eyes and lips
Burnt the red hues of Love's eclipse;
Beneath his strong triumphal tread
All days the human winepress bled;
And in the silence of the nights
Pale Prophets stood upon the heights,
And, gazing thro' the blood−red gloom
Far eastward, to the dead CHRIST'S tomb,
Wail'd to the winds. Yet CHRIST still slept:
And o'er His white Tomb slowly crept
The fiery Shadow of a Sword!
Not Peace; a Sword.
And men adored
Not Christ, nor Antichrist, but CAIN;
And where the bright blood ran like rain
He stood, and looking, men went wild;—
For lo! on whomsoe'er he smiled
Came an idolatry accurst,
But chief, Cain's hunger and Cain's thirst
For bloodshed and for tears; and when
He beckon'd, countless swarms of men
Flew thick as locusts to destroy
Hope's happy harvests, sown in joy
Yea, verily*;* at each finger−wave

They swarm'd—and shared the crimson grave
Beneath his Throne.
Then, 'neath the sun
One man of France—and he, indeed,
Lowest and least of all man's seed—
Shrank back, and stirr'd not!—heard Cain's cry,
But flew not!—mark'd across the sky
The Shadow of the Sword, but still
Despair'd not!—Nay, with steadfast will,
He sought Christ's Tomb, and lying low,
With cold limbs cushion'd on the snow,
He waited!—But when Cain's eye found
His hiding−place on holy ground,
And Cain's hand gript him by the hair,
Seeking to drag him forth from there,
He clutch'd the stones with all his strength,
Struggled in silence—and at length,
In the dire horror of his need,
Shrieked out on CHRIST!
Did CHRIST rise?
READ.

Chapter 1. FULL SUNSHINE

“Rohan, Rohan! Can you not hear me call? It is time to go. Come, come! It frightens me to look down at you. Will you not come up now, Rohan?”

The voice that cries is lost in the ocean−sound that fills the blue void beneath; it fades away far under, amid a confused murmur of wings, a busy chattering of innumerable little newborn mouths; and while the speaker, drawing dizzily back, feels the ground rise up beneath her feet and the cliffs prepare to turn over like a great wheel, a human cry comes upward, clear yet faint, like a voice from the sea that washes on the weedy reefs of blood−red granite a thousand feet below.

The sun is sinking far away across the waters, sinking with a last golden gleam amid the mysterious Hesperides of the silent air, and his blinding light comes slant across the glassy calm till it strikes on the scarred and storm−rent faces of these Breton crags, illuminating and vivifying every nook and cranny of the cliffs beneath, burning on the summits and brightening their natural red to the vivid crimson of dripping blood, changing the coarse grass and yellow starwort into threads of emerald and glimmering stars, burning in a golden mist around the yellow flowers of the overhanging broom, and striking with fiercest ray on one naked rock of solid stone which juts out like a huge horn over the brink of the abyss, and around which a strong rope is noosed and firmly knotted.

Close to this horn of rock, in the full glory of the sunset light, stands a young girl, calling aloud to one who swings unseen below.

The sunlight flashes full into her face and blinds her, while the soft breath of the sea kisses the lids of her dazzled eyes.

Judged by her sun−tanned skin, she might be the daughter of some gipsy tribe. But such dark features as hers are common among the Celtic women of the Breton coast; and her large eyes are not gipsy−black, but ethereal grey—that mystic colour which can be soft as heaven with joy and love, but dark as death with jealousy and wrath; and, indeed, to one who gazes long into such eyes as these, there are revealed strange depths of passion, and self−control, and pride. The girl is tall and shapely, somewhat slight of figure, small−handed, small−footed; so that, were her cheek a little less rosy, her hands a little whiter, and her step a little less elastic, she might be a lady born.

It is just eighteen years to−day since that red blustering morning when her father, running into port with the biggest haul of fish on record that season in the little fishing village, found that the Holy Virgin, after giving him four strong sons had at last deposited in his marriage bed a maid−child, long prayed for, come at last; and the maid's face is still beautiful with the unthinking innocence of childhood. Mark the pretty, almost petulant mouth, with the delicious underlip—

“Some bee hath stung it newly!”

Woman she is, yet still a child; and surely the sun, that touches this moment nearly every maiden cheek in every village for a hundred miles along this stormy coast, shines upon no sweeter thing.

Like Queen Bertha of old she bears in her hand a distaff, but not even a queen's dress, however fair, could suit her better than the severe yet picturesque garb of the Breton peasant girl—the modest white coif, the blue gown brightly bordered with red, the pretty apron enwrought with flowers in coloured thread, the neat bodice adorned with a rosary and medal of Our Lady; and finally, the curious *sabots*, or wooden shoes.

“Rohan, Rohan!”

A clear bird−like voice, but it is lost in the murmur of the blue void below.

The girl puts down her distaff beside a pair of *sabots* and a broad felt hat which lie already on one of the blocks of stone; then, placing herself flat upon her face close to the very edge of the cliff, and clasping with one hand the rope which is suspended from the horn of rock close to her, she peers downward.

Half−way down the precipice a figure, conscious of her touch upon the rope, by which he is partially suspended, turns up to her a shining face, and smiles.

She sees for a minute the form that hovers beneath her in mid−air, surrounded by a flying cloud of ocean birds—she marks the white beach far below her, and the red stains of the weedy pools above the tide, and the

cream−white edge of the glassy moveless sea—she feels the sun shining, the rocks gleaming, for a little space;—then her head goes round, and she closes her eyes with a little cry. A clear ringing laugh floats up to her and reassures her. She plucks up heart and gazes once again.

What a depth! She turns dizzy anew as she looks into it, but presently the brain−wave passes away, and her head grows calm. She sees all now distinct and clear, but her eyes rest on one picture only!—not on the crimson reefs and granite rocks amidst which the placid ocean creeps, through fretwork of tangled dulse and huge crimson water−ferns; not on the solitary Needle of Gurlan, an enormous monolith of chalk and stone, standing several furlongs out in the sea, with the waves washing eternally round its base and a cloud of sea−fowl hovering ever about its crest; not on the lonely specks of rock, where the great black−backed gulls, dwarfed by distance to the size of white moths, sit gazing at the sunset, weary of a long day's fishing; not on the long line of green cormorants that are flapping drowsily home to roost across waters tinted purple and mother−of−pearl; not on the seals that swim in the dim green coves far beneath; not on the solitary red−sailed fishing boat that drifts along with the ebb a mile out to sea. All these she sees for a moment as in a magician's glass; all these vanish, and leave one vision remaining—the agile and intrepid figure just under her, treading the perpendicular crags like any goat, swinging almost out into mid−air as from time to time he bears his weight upon the rope, and moving lightly hither and thither, with feet and hands alike busy, the latter hunting for sea−birds' eggs.

Thick as foam−flakes around his head float the little terns; past him, swift as cannon−balls, the puffins whizz from their burrows (for the comic little sea−parrot bores the earth like a rabbit, before she lays her eggs in it like a bird), and sailing swiftly for a hundred yards, wheel, and come back, past the intruder's ears again, to their burrows once more; round and round, in a slow circle above his head, a great cormorant—of the black, not the green species—sails silently and perpetually, uttering no sound; and facing him, snowing the surface of the cliffs, sit the innumerable birds, with their millions of little eyes on his. The puffins on the green earthy spots, peering out with vari−coloured bills; the guillemots in earth and rock alike, wherever they can find a spot to rest an egg; the little dove−like tern; male and female, sitting like love−birds beak to beak, on the tiny little coignes of vantage on the solid rocks below the climber's feet. Of the numberless birds which surround him on every side, few take the trouble to stir, though those few make a perfect snow around him; but the air is full of a twittering and a trembling, and a chattering and rustling, which would drive a less experienced cragsman crazy on the spot. As he slips nimbly among them, they grumble a little in their bird fashion; that is all. Occasionally an infuriated would−be mother, robbed of her egg, makes belief to fly at his face, but quails at the first movement of his fowler's staff; and now and then an angry puffin, as his hand slips into her hole, clings to his finger like a parrot, is drawn out a ruffled wrath of feathers, and is flung shrieking away into the air.

The fowler's feet are naked—so his toes sometimes suffer from a random bite or peck, but his only answer is a merry laugh. He flits about as if completely unconscious of danger, or if conscious, as if the peril of the sport made it exhilarating tenfold.

It is exciting to see him moving about in his joyous strength amid the dizzy void, with the sunset burning on his figure, the sea sparkling beneath his feet. His head is bare; his hair, of perfect golden hue, floats to his shoulders, and is ever and anon blown into his face, but with a toss of his head he flings it behind him. The head is that of a lion; the throat, the chin, leonine; and the eyes, even when they sparkle as now, have the strange, far−away, visionary look of the king of animals. His figure, agile as it is, is herculean; for is he not a Gwenfern, and when, since the memory of a man, did a Gwenfern ever stand less than six feet in his s*abots*? Stripped of his raiment and turned to stone, he might stand for Heracles—so large of mould is he, so mighty of limb. But even in his present garb—the peasant dress of dark blue, shirt open at the throat, gaily−coloured sash, and trousers fastened at the knee with a knot of scarlet ribbon—he looks sufficiently herculean.

He plies his trade. Secured to his waist hangs a net of dark earth−coloured eggs, and it is nearly full.

The sunset deepens, its flashes grow more blinding as they strike on the reddened cliff but the fowler lifts up his eyes in the light, and sees the dark face of the maiden shining down upon him through the snow of birds.

“Rohan, Rohan!” she cries again.

He waves his fowler's staff and smiles, preparing to ascend.

“I am coming, Marcelle!” he calls.

And through the flying snow he slowly comes, till it is no longer snow around his head, but snow around his feet. Partly aided by the rope, partly by the hook of his fowler's staff, he clings with hands and feet, creeps from

ledge to ledge, crawling steadily upward. Sometimes the loose conglomerate crumbles in his hands or beneath his feet, and he swings with his whole weight upon the rope; then for a moment his colour goes, from excitement, not fear, and his breath comes quickly. No dizziness with him! his calm blue eyes look upward and downward with equal unconcern, and he knows each footstep of his way. Slowly, almost laboriously, he seems to move, yet his progress is far more rapid than it appears to the eye, and in a few minutes he has drawn himself up the overhanging summit of the crag, reached the top, gripped the horn of rock with hands and knees, and swung himself on to the greensward, close to the girl's side.

All the prospect above the cliffs opens suddenly on his sight. The cloudy east is stained with deep crimson bars, against which the grassy hills, and fresh−ploughed fields, and the squares of trees whose foliage hides the crowning farms, stand out in distinct and beautiful lines.

But all he sees for the moment is the one dark face, and the bright eyes that look lovingly into his.

“Why will you be so daring, Rohan?” she inquires in a soft Breton *patois*. “If the rope should break, if the knot should slip, if you should grow faint! Gildas and Hoël both say you are foolish. St. Gurlan's Craig is not fit for a man to climb!”

Chapter 2. ROHAN AND MARCELLE

To creep where foot of man has never crept before, to crawl on the great cliffs where even the goats and sheep are seldom seen, to know the secret places as they are known to the hawk and the raven and the black buzzard of the crags, this is the joy and glory of the man's life—this is the rapture that he shares with the winged, the swimming, and the creeping things. He swims like a fish, he crawls like a fly, and his joy would be complete if he could soar like a bird! His animal enjoyment, meantime, is perfect. Not the peregrine, wheeling in still circles round the topmost crags, moves with more natural splendour on its way.

All the peasants and fishers of Kromlaix are cragsmen too, but none possess his cool sublimity of daring. Rohan Gwenfern will walk almost erect where no other fowler, however experienced, would creep on hands and knees. In the course of his lifelong perils he has had ugly falls, which have only stimulated him to fresh exploits.

He began, when a mere child, by herding sheep and goats among these very crags, and making the lonely caverns ring with his little goatherd's horn. By degrees he familiarized himself with every feature of the storm−rent terrible coast; so that even when he grew up towards manhood, and joined his fellows in fishing expeditions far out at sea, he still retained his early passion for the crags and cliffs. While others were lounging on the beach or at the door of the *calozes*, while these were drinking in the *cabaret* and those were idling among their nets, Rohan was walking in some vast cathedral not made with hands, or penetrating like a spectre, torch in hand, into the pitch−black cavern where the seal was suckling her young, or swimming naked out to the cormorant's roost on the base of the Needle of Gurlan.

Even in wildest winter, when for days together the cormorants sat on the ledges of the cliffs and gazed despairingly at the sea, starving, afraid to stir a feather lest the mighty winds should dash them to pieces against the stones; when the mountains of foam shook the rocks to their foundation; when the earthquakes of ocean were busy, and crag after crag loosened, crumbled, and swept like an avalanche down to the sea,—even in the maddest storms of nature's maddest season, Rohan was abroad,—not the great herring−gull being more constant a mover along the black water−mark than he.

Hence there had arisen in him, day by day and year by year, that terrible and stolid love for Water which wise critics and dwellers in towns believe to be the special and sole prerogative of the poets, particularly of Lord Byron, and which, when described as an attribute of a Breton peasant or a Connaught “boy,” they refer to the abysses of sentimentality. Does a street−girl love the street, or a ploughman love the fields, or a sailor love the ship that sails him up and down the world? Even so, but with an infinitely deeper passion, did Rohan love the sea. It is no exaggeration to say that even a few miles inland he would have been heartily miserable. And that he should love the sea as he did, not with a sentimental emotion, not with any idea of romancing or attitudinizing, but with a vital and natural love, part of the very beatings of his heart, was only just. He was its foster−child.

Weird and thrilling superstitions are still afloat on this wild coast; grotesque and awful legend; many of them full of deep faith and pathetic beauty, still pass from mouth to mouth; but among them there is one which is something more than a mere legend, something more than a fireside dream. It tells of the sore straits and perils on the lonely seas during “the great fishing,” and how, one summer night, a fisher, Raoul Gwenfern, took with him to sea his little golden−haired child. That very night, blowing the trumpets of wrath and death, Euroclydon arose. Lost, shrieking, terror−stricken, the fleet of boats drifted before the wind in the terrible mountainous sea; and at last, when all hope had fled, the crew of this one lugger knelt down together in the darkness for the last time—knelt as they had often done side by side in the little chapel on the cliff; and invoked the succour of Our Blessed Lady of Safety;—and no less than the others prayed the little child, shivering and holding his father's hand. And at last, amid all the darkness of the tempest and the roaring of the sea, there dawned a solemn shining, which for a moment stilled the palpitating waters around the vessel; and that one innocent child on board, he and none other beside, saw with his mortal eyes, amid that miraculous light, and floating upon the waters—all spangled and silver as she stands, an image, up there in the little chapel of Notre Dame de la Garde—the face and form of the Mother of God!

Be that as it may, the storm presently abated, and the fleet was saved; but when the light dawned, and the fishers on board the lugger came to their senses again they missed one man. The child cried “Father!” but no

father answered; he had been washed over in the darkness, and his footprints in the land of men were never seen more. It was then that the child, wailing for his beloved parent, told what he had seen upon the waters in that hour of prayer. Whether it was a real vision, or a child's dream, or a flash of memory illuminating the image he had often seen and thought so lovely, who can tell? But that day he ran and flung himself into his mother's arms, an orphan child; and from that day forth he had no father but the Sea.

His mother, a poor widow now, dwelt in a stone cottage just outside the village, and under the shelter of a hollow in the crag. Her son, the only child of her old age, the child of her prayers and tears, obtained by the special intercession of the Virgin and her cousin St. Elizabeth, grew fairer and fairer as he approached manhood, and ever on his face there dwelt a brightness which the mother, in her secret heart, deemed due to that celestial vision.

Now, tales of wonder travel, and in due course the legend travelled to the priest; and the priest came and saw the child, and (being a little bit of a phrenologist) examined his head and his bumps, and saw the shining of his fair face with no ordinary pleasure. It is not every day that the good God performs a miracle, and this opportunity was too fine a one to be lost. So the *curé,* a remarkable man in his way, and one of considerable learning, then and there made the widow a proposition which caused her to weep for joy, and cry that St. Elizabeth was her friend indeed. It was this—that Rohan should be trained in holy knowledge, and in due season become a priest of God. Of course the offer was joyfully accepted, and Rohan was taken from the solitary crags, where he had been herding goats to eke out the miserable pittance that his mother earned, to live in the house of the priest. For a time the change was pleasing, and Rohan was taught to read and write, and to construe a little Latin, and to know a word or two of Greek; he was, moreover, a willing child, and he would get up without a murmur on the darkest and coldest winter's morning to serve the *curé's* mass. He evinced, on the other hand, an altogether stupendous capacity for idleness and play. As he grew older his inclinations grew more irrepressible, and he would slip off in the fishing boats that were going out to sea, or run away for a long day's ramble among the crags, or spend the summer afternoon on the shore, alternately bathing naked and wading for shrimps and prawns. When most wanted he was often not to be found. One day he was carried home with his collar−bone broken, after having in vain attempted to take the nest of an indignant raven. Twice or thrice he was nearly drowned.

This might have been tolerated, though not for long; but presently it was discovered that Master Rohan had a way of asking questions which were highly puzzling to the priest. It was still Revolution time. Though the kingdom was an Empire, and though the terrible ideas of '93 had scarcely reached Kromlaix, the atmosphere was full of strange thoughts. The little acolyte began secretly to indulge in a course of secular reading; the little eyes opened, the little tongue prattled; and the good priest discovered, to his disgust, that the child was too clever.

When the time came for the boy, in the natural course of things, to be removed from the village, Rohan revolted utterly. He had made up his mind, he said, and he would never become a priest!

That was a bitter blow for the mother, and for a space her heart was hard against the boy; but the priest, to her astonishment, sided with the revolter.

“Come, mother!” he said, nodding his big head till his great hollow cheeks trembled with his earnestness. “After all, it is ill to force a lad's inclination. The life of a priest is a hard one, see you, at the best. The priesthood is well enough, but there are better ways of serving the good God.”

Rohan's heart rejoiced and the widow cried, “Better ways!—ah, no, *m'sieu le curé.*“

“But yes,” persisted his reverence. “God's will is best of all; and better even a good ropemaker than a bad priest!” It was settled at last, and the boy returned to his home. The truth is, the priest was glad to be rid of his bargain. He saw that Rohan was not the stuff that holy men are made of, and that, sooner or later, he would be inventing a heresy or adoring a woman. He did not relinquish his charge without a sigh, for that business of the miraculous vision, if consummated by a life of exemplary piety, would have been a fine feather in the Church's cap. He soon found a more fitting attendant, however, and his former annoyances and disappointments were forgotten.

Meantime, Rohan returned to his old haunts with the rapture of a prisoned bird set free. He soon persuaded his mother that it was all arranged for the best; for would he not, instead of being taken away as a priest must be, remain with her for ever, and supply his father's place, and be a comfort to her old age? There were two sorts of lives that he detested with all his heart, and in either of these lives he would be lost to home and to her. He would never become a Priest, because he liked not the life, and because (he naïvely thought to himself) he could never

marry his little cousin Marcelle! He could never become a Soldier (God and all the saints be praised for *that!),* because he was a widow's only son.

But it was the year 1813, the “soote spring season” of that year, and the great Emperor, after having successfully allayed the fear of invasion which had filled all France ever since his disastrous return from Moscow, was preparing a grand *coup* by which all his enemies were utterly to be annihilated. There were strange murmurs afloat, but nothing definite was yet known. The air was full of that awful silence which precedes thunderstorm and earthquake.

Down here at Kromlaix, however, down here in the loneliest and saddest corner of the Breton coast, the sun shone and the sea sparkled as if Moscow had never been, as if becatombs of French dead were not lying bleaching amid the Russian snows, as if martyred France had never in her secret heart shrieked out a curse upon the Avatar. The sounds of war had echoed far away, but Rohan had heeded them little. Happiness is uniformly selfish, and Rohan was happy. Life was sweet to him. It was a blessed thing to breathe, to be, to remain free; to raise his face to the sun, to mark the cliffs and caves, to watch the passing sails, or the blue smoke curling from the chimneys of the little fishing village; to listen to the plump *curé,* “fatter than his cure;” to hear the strange stories of bivouac and battle−field told by the old Bonapartist burnpowder, his uncle; to hear Alain or Jannick play wild tunes on the *biniou,* or bagpipe; to hunt the nests of gulls and seapies; to go out on calm nights with his comrades and net the shining shoals of herring: best of all, to walk with Marcelle along the sward or shore; to kneel at her side, holding her hand, before the statue of Our Lady; to look into her eyes, and, pleasanter still, to kiss her ripe young lips. What life could be better, what life, all in all, could be sweeter than this?

And Marcelle?

His mother's sister's child, and only niece of the quaint old corporal with whom she lives, with her four great brothers, each strong as Anak. Since they were children together—and he first appalled her young heart by his reckless daring—they have been accustomed to meet in all the innocence of Nature. While her great brothers care not for her society, but haunt the *cabaret* or go courting when ashore, Rohan seeks the maiden, and is more gentle than any brother, though still her kin. He loves her dark eyes and her hidden black hair, and her gentle ways, and her tender admiration of himself. She has been his playmate for years—now she is, what shall we say? his companion—soon, perhaps, to be known by a nearer name. But the marriage of such close kin is questionable in Brittany, and a special consent from the Bishop will be needed to bring it about; and besides, after all, they have never exchanged one syllable of actual love.

Doubtless they understand each other; for youth is electrical, and passion has many tones far beyond words, and it is not in Nature for a man and a maiden, both beautiful, to look upon each other without joy. To their vague delicious feeling in each other's society, however, they have never given a name. They enjoy each other as they enjoy the fresh sweet air, and the shining sun, and the happy blue vault above, and the sparkling sea below. They drink each other's breathing, and are glad. So is the Earth glad, whenever lovers so unconscious stir and tremble happily in her arms.

Mark them again, as Rohan rises from the cliff, and stands by the girl's side, and listens to her laughing rebuke. How does he answer? He takes her face between his two hands and kisses her on either cheek.

She laughs and blushes slightly; the blush would be deeper if he had kissed her on the lips.

Then he turns to the block of granite where he has left his hat and *sabots,* and slowly begins to put them on.

The sunset is fading now upon the ocean.

The vision of El Dorado, which has been burning for an hour on the far sea−line, will soon be lost for ever. The golden city with its purple spires, the strange mountains of pink−tinged snow beyond, the dark dim cloud−peak softly crowned by one bright green opening star, are dissolving slowly, and a cold breath comes now from those ruined sunset shores. The blood−red reefs, the wet sands, the flashing pools of water along the shingle and beneath the crags, are burning with dimmer and dimmer colours; the crows are winging past to some dark rookery inland; the sea−fowl are settling down with many murmurs on the nests among the cliffs; the night−owl is fluttering forth in the dark shadow of a crag; and the fishing lugger yonder is drifting on a dark and glassy sea.

Rohan looks down.

The lugger glides along on the swift ebb tide, and he can plainly see the men upon her deck, bare−headed, with hands folded in prayer and faces upraised to the very crags on which he stands; for not far beyond him, on the very summit of the cliffs, stands the little Chapel of Our Lady of Safety—the beloved beacon of the

homeward−bound, the last glimpse of home the fisher sees as he sails away to the west, and the help, night and day, of all good mariners.

All this picture Rohan has taken in at a glance, and now, grasping his fowler's hook in one hand, and coiling the rope around his arm, he moves along the summit of the cliff followed by Marcelle. A well−worn path along the scanty sward leads to the door of the little Chapel, and this path they follow.

They have not proceeded far when a large white goat, which has been busy somewhere among the cliffs, climbs up close by, and stands looking at them curiously. The inspection is evidently satisfactory, for it approaches them slowly with some signs of recognition.

“See!” cries the girl. “It is Jannedik.”

Jannedik answers by coming closer and rubbing its head against her dress. Then it turns to Rohan, and pushes its chin into his outstretched hand.

“What are you doing so far from home, Jannedik?” he asks, smiling, surprised. “You are a rover, and will some day break your neck. It is nearly bed−time, Jannedik!”

Jannedik is a lady among goats, and she belongs to the mother of Rohan. It is her pleasure to wander among the cliffs like Rohan himself; and she knows the spots of most succulent herbage and the secretest corners of the caves. There is little speculation in her great brown eyes, but she comes to the whistle like a dog, and she will let the village children ride upon her back, and she is altogether more instructed than most of her tribe, in which the cliffs abound.

As Rohan and Marcelle wander on to the little Chapel, Jannedik follows, pausing now and then to browse upon the way; but when they enter—which they do with a quiet reverence—Jannedik hesitates for a moment, stamps her foot upon the ground, and trots off homeward by herself.

She has many points of a good Christian, but the Church has no attractions for her.

The little Chapel stands open night and day. It was built by sailor hands, for sailor use, and with no small labour were the materials carried up hither from the village below. It is very tiny, and it nestles in the highest cliff like a white bird, moveless in all weathers.

It is quite empty, and as Rohan and Marcelle approach the altar, the last light of sunlight strikes through the painted pane, illumining the altar−piece within the rails—a rudely painted picture of shipwrecked sailors on a raft, raising eyes to the good Virgin, who appears among the clouds. Close to the altar stands the plaster figure of Our Lady, dressed in satin and spangles. Strewing the pedestal and hanging round her feet are wreaths of coloured beads, garlands of flowers cut in silk and satin, little rude pictures of the Virgin, medals in tin and brass, wooden rosaries, and strings of beads.

Marcelle crosses herself and falls softly upon her knees.

Rohan remains standing, hat in hand, gazing on the picture of the Virgin on the altar−piece behind the rails.

The little Chapel grows darker and darker, the rude timbers and storm−stained walls are very dim, and the last sunlight fades on Marcelle's bent head and on the powerful lineaments of Rohan.

Faith dwells here, and the touch of a passionate peace and love which are worth more.

Peace be with them and with the world to−night—peace in their hearts, love in their breasts, peace and love in the hearts and breasts of all mankind!

But ah! should to−morrow bring the Shadow of the Sword!

Chapter 3. ROHAN'S CATHEDRAL

Not far from the Chapel of Our Lady of Safety, but situated on the wild sea−shore under the crags, stands a Cathedral fairer than any wrought by man, with a roof of eternal azure, walls of purple, crimson, green, gold, and a floor of veritable “mosaic paven.” Men name its chief entrance the Gate of St. Gildas, but the lovely Cathedral itself has neither name nor worshippers.

At low water this Gate is passable dry−shod, at half−tide it may be entered by wading waist−deep, at three−quarters or full flood it can only be entered by an intrepid swimmer and diver.

Two gigantic walls of crimson granite jut out from the mighty cliff−wall and meet together far out on the edge of the sea, and where the sea touches them it has hollowed their extremity into a mighty arch, hung with dripping moss.

Entering here at low water, one sees the vast walls towering on every side, carved by wind and water into fantastic niches and many−coloured marble forms; with no painted windows, it is true, but with the blue cloudless heaven for a roof far above, where the passing sea−gull hovers, small as a butterfly, in full sunlight. A dim religious light falls downward, lighting up the solemn place, and showing shapes which superstition might fashion into statues and images of mitred abbots and cowled monks and dusky figures of the Virgin; and here and there upon the floor of weeds and shingle are strewn huge blocks like carven tombs, and in lonely midnights the seals sit on these and look at the moon like black ghosts of the dead.

Superstition has seen this place, and has transformed its true history into a legend.

Here indeed in immemorial time stood a great abbey reared by hands, and surrounded by a fertile plain; but the monks of this abbey were wicked, bringing their wantons into the blessed place, and profaning the name of the good God. But the good God, full of His mercy, sent a Saint—Gildas indeed by name—to warn these wicked ones to desist from their evil ways and think of the wrath to come. It was a cold winter night when Gildas reached the gate, and his limbs were chill and he was hungry and athirst, and he knocked faintly with his frozen hand; and at first, being busy at revel, they did not hear; he knocked again and they heard, but when they saw his face, his poor raiment, and his bare feet, they bade him begone. Then did Gildas beseech them to receive and shelter him for Our Lady's sake, warning them also of their iniquities and of God's judgment; but even as he spoke, they shut the gate in his face. Then St. Gildas raised his hands to Heaven and cursed them and that abbey, and called on the great sea to arise and destroy it and them. So the sea, though it was then some miles away arose and came; and the wicked ones were destroyed, the likeness of the abbey was changed, and the great roof was washed away. Even unto this day the strange semblance remains as a token that these things were so.

We said this Cathedral had no worshippers. It had two, at least.

Within it sat, not many days after they had stood together in the little chapel, Rohan and Marcelle. It was *morte mer*, and not a ripple touched the light cathedral floor; but it was damp and gleaming with the last tide, and the weed−hung granite tombs were glittering crimson in the light.

They sat far within, on a dry rock close under the main cliff, and were looking upward. At what? At the *Altar*.

Far up above them stretched the awful precipices of stone, but close over their heads, covering the whole side of the cliff for a hundred square yards, was a thick curtain of moss, and over this moss, from secret places far above, poured little runlets of crystal water, spreading themselves on the soft moss−fringes and turning into innumerable drops of diamond dew: here scattering countless pearls over a bed of deepest emerald, there trickling into waterfalls of brightest silver filagree, and again gleaming like molten gold on soft trembling folds of the yellow lichen; and over all this dewy mass of sparkling colours there ebbed and flowed, and flitted and changed, a perpetually liquid light, flashing alternately with all the colours of the prism.

A hundred yards above, all was rent again into fantastic columns and architraves. Just over the Altar, where the dews of heaven were perpetually distilling, was a dark blot like the mouth of a Cave.

“Is it not time to go?” said Marcelle, presently. “Suppose the sea were to come and find us here, how dreadful! Hoël Grallon died like that!”

Rohan smiled—the self−sufficient smile of strength and superior wisdom.

“Hoël Grallon was a great ox, and should have stayed praying by his own door. Look you, Marcelle! There are

always two ways out of my Cathedral; when it is neap tide and not rough you can wait for the ebb up here by the Altar—it will not rise so far; and when it is stormy and blows hard you can climb up yonder to the *Trou*"—and he pointed to the dark blot above his head—"or even to the very top of the cliff."

Marcelle shrugged her shoulders.

"Climb the cliff!—why, it is a wall, and every one has not feet of a fly."

"At least it is easy as far as the *Trou.* There are great ledges for the feet, and niches for the hands."

"If one were even there, what then? It is like the mouth of Hell, and one could not enter."

Marcelle crossed herself religiously.

"It is rather like the little Chapel above, when one carries a light to look around. It is quite dry and pleasant; one might live there and be glad."

"It is, then, a cave?"

"Fit for a sea−woman to dwell in and bring up her little ones."

Rohan laughed, but Marcelle crossed herself again.

"Never name them, Rohan!—ah, the terrible place!"

"It is not terrible, Marcelle; I could sleep there in peace—it is so calm, so still. It would be like one's own bed at home but for the blue doves stirring upon the roosts, and the bats that slip in and out into the night."

"The bats—horrible! my flesh creeps!"

Marcelle, though a maid of courage, had the feminine horror of unclean and creeping things. Charlotte Corday slew the rat Marat, but she shivered at the sight of a mouse.

"And as for the crag above," said Rohan, smiling at her, "I have seen Jannedik climb it often, and I should not fear to try it myself; it is easier than St. Gurlan's Craig. Many poor sailors, when their ship was lost, have been saved like that, when the wind is off the sea; and they have felt God's hand grip them and hold them tight against the precipice that they might not fall—God's hand or the wind, Marcelle, that is all one?"

After this there was silence for a time. Marcelle kept her great eyes fixed upon the glittering curtain of moss and dew, while Rohan dropped his eyes again to a book which he held upon his knee—an old, well−thumbed, coarsely printed volume, with leaves well sewn together with waxed thread.

He read, or seemed to read; yet all the time his joy was in the light presence by his side, and he was conscious of her happy breathing, of the warm touch of her dress against his knee.

Presently he was disturbed in his enjoyment. Marcelle sprang to her feet.

"If we stay longer," she cried, "I shall have to take off my *sabots* and stockings. For my part, Rohan, I shall run."

And the girl passed rapidly towards the Gate and looked for Rohan to follow her.

Rohan, however, did not stir.

"There is time," he said, glancing through the Gate at the sea, which seemed already preparing to burst and pour in between the granite archway. "Come back, and do not be afraid. There is yet a half−hour, and as for the *sabots* and stockings, surely you remember how we used to wade together in the blue water of old. Come, Marcelle, and look!"

Marcelle complied. With one doubtful side−glance at the wall of water which seemed to rise up and glimmer close to the Gate, she stole slowly back, and seated herself by her cousin's side. His strength and beauty fascinated her, as it would have fascinated any maiden on that coast, and while she placed her soft brown hand on his knees, and looked up into his face, she felt within her the mysterious stirs of a yearning she could not understand.

"Look, then," he said, pointing out through the Gate; "does it not seem as if all the green waters of the sea were about to rush in and cover us, as they covered the great abbey long ago?"

Marcelle looked.

To one unaccustomed to the place it seemed as if egress were already impossible; for the great swell rose and fell close up against the archway, closing out all glimpses of blue air or sky. Out beyond the arch swam a great grey−headed seal looking with large wistful eyes into the Cathedral, and just then a flight of pigeons swooped through the Gate, scattered in swift flight as they passed overhead, and disappeared in the darkness of the great cave above the Altar.

"Let us go!" said Marcelle in a low voice.

She was superstitious, and the allusion to the old legend made her feel uncomfortable in that solemn place.

“Rest yet,” answered Rohan, as he rose and closed his book and touched her arm. “In half an hour, not sooner, the Gate will be like the jaws of a great monster. Do you remember the story of the great Sea−beast and the Maiden chained to a rock, and the brave Youth with wings who rescued her and turned the beast to stone?”

Marcelle smiled and coloured slightly.

“I remember,” she answered.

More than once had Rohan, who had a taste for mythology and fairy legend, told her the beautiful myth of Perseus and Andromeda; and more than once had she pictured herself chained in that very place, and a fair−haired form—very like Rohan's—floating down to her on great outspread wings from the blue roof above her head; and although in her dream she herself wore *sabots* and coarse stockings, and had her dark hair pinned in a coif while Perseus wore *sabots* too, and the long hair and loose raiment of a Breton peasant, was it any the less delicious to think of? As to slaying a monster, Rohan was quite equal to that, she knew, if occasion came; and taking his reckless daring and his wild cliff−flights into consideration, he really might have been born with wings.

Just then the incoming tide began to be broken into foam below one arch of the gateway, and the rocks with jagged teeth to tear the sea, and the whole side of the Gate, blackly silhouetted against the green water, seemed like the head and jaws of some horrible monster, such as the Greek sailor saw whenever he sailed along his narrow seas; such as the Breton fisher sees to this hour when he glides along the edges of his craggy coast.

“There is the great Sea−beast,” said Rohan, “crouching and waiting.”

“Yes! See the huge red rock—it is like a mouth.”

“If you could stop here and watch, you would say so truly. In a little it will begin to lash and tear the water till the red mouth is white with foam and black with weeds, and the water below it is spat full of foam, and the air is filled with a roar like the bellowing of a beast. I have sat here and watched till I thought the old story was come true and the monster was there; but that was in time of storm.”

“You watched it—up in the *Trou*?”

“It caught me one tide, and I had to sit shivering until sunset; and then the storm went down, but the tide was high. The water washed close to the roof of the Gate, and when the wave rose there was not room for a fly to pass—it surged right up yonder against the walls. Well, I was hungry, and knew not what to do. It was pleasant to see the water turn crystal green all along the cavern floor, and to watch it washing over the rocks and stones where we sat to−day, and to see the seals swimming round and round and trying in vain to find a spot to rest on. But all that would not fill one's stomach. I waited, and then it grew dark, but the tide was still high. It was terrible then, for the stars were clustered up yonder, and the shapes of the old monks seemed coming down from the walls, and I felt afraid to stay. So I left my hat and *sabots* at the mouth of the cave, and slipped down from ledge to ledge, and dropped down into the water—it was dark as death!”

Marcelle uttered a little terrified “Ah!” and clutched Rohan's arm.

“At first I thought the fiends were loose, for I fell amid a flock of black cormorants, and they shrieked like mad things; and one dived and seized me by the leg, but I shook him away. Then I struck out for the Gate, and as I drew near with swift strokes I saw the great waves rising momently and shutting out the light; but when the waves fell there was a glimmer, and I could just see the top of the arch. So I came close, treading on the sea, till I could almost touch the arch with my hand, and then I watched my chance and dived! Mon Dieu, it was a sharp minute! Had I swum awry, or not dived deep enough, I should have been lifted up and crushed against the jagged stones of the arch; but I held my breath and struck forward—eight, nine, ten strokes under water, when choking, I rose!”

“And then?”

“I was floating on the great wave just outside the arch, with the sea before me and the stars above my head. Then I thought all safe, but just then I saw a billow like a mountain coming in; I drew in a deep breath, and just as the wave rose above me I dived again; when I rose it had passed and was shrieking round the Gate of St. Gildas. So all I had to do then was to swim on for a hundred yards, and turn in and land upon the sands below the Ladder of St. Triffine.”

The girl looked for a moment admiringly on her herculean companion—then she smiled.

“Let us go, now,” she cried, “or the sea will come again, and this time one at least would drown.”

“I will come.”

“There, that last wave ran right down into the passage. We must wade, after all.”

“What then? The water is warm.”

So Rohan still standing rapidly pulled off his *sabots* and stockings; while Marcelle, sitting on a low rock, drew off hers—nervously, and with less sped. Then she rose, making a pretty grimace as her little white feet touched the cold shingle. Rohan took her hand, and they passed right under the portal, close up against which the tide had by this time crept.

At every step it grew deeper, and soon the maiden had to resign his hand; and gathering up her clothes above the knee, she moved nervously on.

No blush tinged her cheek at thus revealing her pretty limbs; she knew they were pretty, of course, and she felt no shame. True modesty does not consist in a prurient veiling of all that nature has made fair, and perhaps there is no more uncleanness in showing a shapely leg than in baring a well−formed arm.

On one point, however, Marcelle's modesty was supreme. According to the custom of the country, she carefully curled up and coifed her locks, which, unlike those of most Breton maidens, were long enough to reach her shoulders. Her hair was sacred from seeing. Even Rohan in all their later rambles had never beheld her without her coif.

They had reached the portal and were only knee−deep, but before them stretched for several yards a solid wall connected with the Gate, and round the end of this wall they must pass to reach the safe shingle beyond.

Marcelle stood in despair.

Before her stretched the great fields of the ocean, illimitable to all seeming—still but terrible, with here and there a red sail glimmering and following the shining harvest. On every side the tide had risen, and around the outlying wall it was quite deep.

“Ay me!” cried the girl in a pretty despair; “I told you so, Rohan.”

Rohan, standing like a solid stone in the water, merely smiled.

“Have no fear,” he replied, coming close to her. “Hold your apron!”

She obeyed, holding up her apron and petticoat together; and then, after putting in her lap his and her own *sabots* and stockings, with the book he had been reading, he lifted her like a feather in his powerful arms.

“You are heavier than you used to be,” he said, laughing; while Marcelle, gathering her apron up with one hand, clung tightly round his neck with the other. Slowly and surely, step by step, he waded with her seaward along the moss−hung wall; he seemed in no hurry, perhaps because he had such pleasure in his burthen; but at every step he went deeper, and when he reached the end of the wall the water had crept to his hips.

“If you should stumble!” cried Marcelle.

“I shall not stumble,” answered Rohan quietly.

Marcelle was not so sure, and clung to him vigorously. She was not afraid, for there was no danger; but she had the true feminine dread of a wetting. Place her in any circumstance of real peril, call up the dormant courage within her, and she would face the very sea with defiance, with pride, dying like a heroine. Meantime, she was timid, disliking even a splash.

The wall was quickly rounded, and Rohan was wading with his burthen to the shore, so that he was soon only knee−deep again. His heart was palpitating madly, his eyes and cheeks were burning, for the thrill of his delicious load filled him with strange ecstasy; and he lingered in the water, unwilling to resign the treasure he held within his arms.

“Rohan! quick! do not linger!”

It was then that he turned his face up to hers for the first time; and lo! he saw a sight which brought the bright blood to his own cheeks and made him tremble like a tree beneath his load. Porphyro, gazing on his mistress,

“Half hidden like a mermaid in seaweed,”

and watching her naked beauty gleam like marble in the moonlight, felt no fairer revelation.

Rohan, too, “felt faint.”

And why? It was only this—in the excitement and struggle of the passage Marcelle's white coif had fallen back, and her black hair, loosened from its fastenings, had rained down in one dark shower, round cheeks and neck; and cheeks and neck, when Rohan raised his eyes, were burning crimson with a delicious shame.

Have we not said that the hair of a Breton maid is virgin, and is as hallowed as an Eastern woman's face, and is only to be seen by the eyes of him she loves?

Rohan's head swam round.

As his face turned up, burning like her own, the sacred hair fell upon his eyes, and the scent of it—who knows

not the divine perfume even scentless things give out when touched by Love?—the scent of it was sweet in his nostrils, while the thrill of its touch passed into his very blood. And under his hands the live form trembled, while his eyes fed on the blushing face.

“Rohan! quick! set me down!”

He stood now on dry land, but he still held her in his arms. The sweet hair floated to his lips, and he kissed it madly, while the fire grew brighter on her face.

“I love you, Marcelle!”

Chapter 4. THE MENHIR

There is one supreme emotion in the life of Love which is never to be known again when once its holy flush has passed; there is one divine sensation when the wave of life leaps its highest and breaks softly, never to rise quite so high again in sunlight or starlight; there is one first touch of souls meeting, and that first touch is divinest, whatever else may follow. The minute, the sensation, the touch, had come to Rohan and Marcelle. Passion suddenly arose full−orbed and absolute. The veil was drawn between soul and soul, and they knew each other's tremor and desire.

Many a day had the cousins wandered alone together for hours and hours. From childhood upwards they had been companions, and their kinship was so close that few coupled their names together as lovers, even in jest. Now, when Rohan was three or four and twenty and Marcelle was eighteen, they were attached friends as ever, and no surveillance was set upon their meetings. Walking about with Rohan had been only like walking with Hoël, or Gildas, or Alain, her tall brothers.

Not that either was quite unconscious of the sweet sympathy which bound them together. Love feels before it speaks, thrills before it sees, wonders before it knows. They had been beautiful in each other's eyes for long, but neither quite knew why.

So their secret had been kept, almost from themselves.

But that disarrangement of the coif that loosening of the virgin hair, divulged all. It broke the barrier between them, it bared each to each in all the nudity of passion. They had passed in an instant from the cold clear air to the very heart of Love's fire, and there they moved, and turned to golden shapes, and lived.

Then, they passed out again, and through the flame, into the common day.

All this time he held her in his arms, and would not let her go. Her hair trembled down upon his face in delicious rain. She could not speak, now, nor struggle.

At last he spoke again.

“I love you, Marcelle!—and *you?*“

There was only a moment's pause, during which her eyes trembled on his with an excess of passionate light; then, stirring not in his arms, she closed her eyes, and in answer to him, then and for ever, let her lips drop softly down on his!

It was better than all words, sweeter than all looks; it was the very divinest of divine replies, in that language of Love which is the same all over the wide earth. Their lips trembled together in one long kiss, and all the life−blood of each heart flowed through that warm channel into the other.

Then Rohan set her down, and she stood upon her feet, dazzled, and trembling; and lo! as if that supreme kiss was not enough, he kissed her hands over and over, and caught her in his arms, and kissed her lips and cheeks again.

By this time, however, she had recovered herself; so she gently released herself from his embrace.

“Cease, Rohan!” she said softly. “They will see us from the cliffs.”

Released by Rohan, she picked up her stockings and *sabots*, which had fallen on the dry sand, together with those of Rohan, and the book; all the contents of her lap. Then she sat down with her back to Rohan, and drew on her stockings, and could he have marked her face just then, he would have seen it illumined with a strange complacent joy. Then she softly up−bound her hair within its coif. When she rose and turned to him she was quite pale and cool—and the sweet hair was hid.

In these consummate episodes a woman subdues herself to joy sooner than a man. Rohan had put on his stockings and *sabots*, but he was still trembling from head to foot.

“Marcelle! you love me? ah, but you give me good news—it is almost too good to bear!”

He took both her hands in his, and drew her forward to him, but this time he kissed her brow.

“Did you not know?” she said softly.

“I cannot tell; yes, I think so; but now it seems so new. I was afraid because I was your cousin you might not love me like *that*. I have known you all these years, and yet it now seems most strange.”

“It is strange also to me.”

As she spoke she had drawn one hand away, and was walking on up the beach.

“But you love me, Marcelle?” he cried again.

“I have loved you always.”

“But not as to−day?”

“No, not as to−day;” and she blushed again.

“And you will never change?”

“It is the men that change, not we women.”

“But you will not?”

“I will not.”

“And you will marry me, Marcelle?”

“That is as the good God wills.”

“So!”

“And the good God's bishop.”

“We shall have his blessing too.”

“And my brothers also, and my Uncle the Corporal.”

“Theirs also.”

After that there was a brief silence. To be candid, Rohan was not quite sure of his uncle, who was a man of strange ideas, differing greatly from his own. The Corporal might see objections, and if he saw them he would try, being a man of strong measures, to enforce them. Still, the thought of him was only a passing cloud, and Rohan's face soon brightened.

It was a clear bright day, and every nook and cranny of the great cliffs was distinct in the sunlight. The sea was like glass, and covered as far as the eye could see with a dim heat, like breath on a mirror. Far up above their heads two ravens were soaring in beautiful circles, and beyond these dark specks the skies were all harebell−blue and white feathery clouds.

They soon sought and found a giddy staircase which, entering the very heart of the cliff, wound and wound until it reached the summit; it was partly natural, partly hewn by human hands: here and there it was dangerous, for the loose stone steps had fallen away and left only a slippery slide.

This was the Ladder of St. Triffine.

It was a hard pull to the summit, and for a great part of the way Rohan's arm was round Marcelle's waist. Again and again they stopped for breath, and saw through airy loop−holes in the rock the sea breaking far below them with a cream−white edge on the ribbed sands, and the great boulders glistening in the sun, and the white gulls hovering on the water's brim. At last they reached the grassy plateau above the cliffs, and there they sat and rested,—for Marcelle was very tired.

They could have lingered so for ever, since they were so happy.

It was enough to breathe, to be near each other, to hold each other's hands. The veriest commonplace became divine on their lips, just as the scenes around, common to them, became divine in their eyes. Love is easily satisfied. A look, a tone, a perfume will content it for hours. As for speech, it needs none, since it knows the language of all the flowers and stars, and the secret tones of all the birds.

When the lovers did talk, walking homeward along the greensward, their talk was practical enough.

“I shall not tell my uncle yet,” said Marcelle, “nor any of my brothers, not even Gildas. It wants thinking over, and then I will tell them all. But there is no hurry.”

“None,” said Rohan. “Perhaps they may guess?”

“How should they if we are wise? We are cousins, and we shall meet no oftener than before.”

“That is true.”

“And when one meets, one need not show one's heart to all the world.”

“That is true also. And my mother shall not know.”

“Why should she? She will know all in good time. We are doing no wrong, and a secret may be kept from one's people without sin.”

“Surely!”

“All the village would talk if they knew, and your mother perhaps most of all. A girl does not like her name carried about like that, unless it is a certain thing.”

“Marcelle! is it not certain?”

“Perhaps—yes, I think so—but nevertheless who can tell?”

“But you love me, Marcelle!”

“Ah yes, I love you, Rohan!”

“Then nothing but the good God can keep us asunder, and He is just!”

So speaking, they had wandered along the green plateau until they came in sight of a Shape of stone, which, like some gigantic living form, dominated the surrounding prospect for many miles. It was a Menhir, so colossal that one speculated in vain over the means that had been adopted to raise it on its jagged end.

It surveyed the sea−coast like some dark lighthouse, but no ray ever issued from its awful heart. On its summit was an iron cross, rendered white as snow by the sea−birds; and down its sides, also, the same white snow dripped and hardened, making it hoary and awful as some bearded Druidic god of the primeval forest.

The cross was modern—a sign of capture set there by the new faith. But the Menhir remained unchanged, and gazed at the sea like some calm eternal thing.

It had stood there for ages—how many no man might count; but few doubted that it was first erected in the dim legendary times when dark forests of oak and pine covered this treeless upland; when the sea, if indeed there were any sea, and not in its stead a rocky arm reaching far away into the kindred woods of Cornwall—when the sea was so remote that no sound of its breathing shuddered through the brazen forest−gloom; and when the dark forms of the Druidic procession flitted in its shadow and consecrated its stone with human blood. All had changed on sea and land; countless races of men had winged past like crows into the red sunsets of dead Time, and had turned no more; mountains of sand had crumbled, whirlwinds of leaves had scattered; mighty forests had fallen, and had rotted, root and branch; and the sea, inexorable and untiring, had crawled and crawled over and under, changing, defacing, destroying,—washing away the monuments of ages as easily as it obliterates a child's footprints in the sand, But the Menhir remained, waiting for that far−away hour when the sea would creep still closer, and drink it up, as Eternity drinks a drop of dew. Against all the elements, against wind, rain, snow, yea, even earthquake, it had stood firm. Only the sea might master it—it, and the cross on its brow.

As the lovers approached, a black hawk, which was seated on the iron cross, flapped its wings and swooped away down over the crags into the abyss beneath.

“I have heard Master Arfoll say,” observed Rohan as they approached the Menhir, “that the great stone here looks like some giant of old turned into stone for shedding human blood. For my part, it reminds me of the wife of Lot”

“Who was she?” asked Marcelle. “The name is not of our parish.”

It must be confessed that Marcelle was utterly ignorant even of the literature of her own religion. Like most peasants of her class, she took her knowledge from the lips of the priest, and from the pictures of the Holy Virgin, the child Jesus, and the saints. In many Catholic districts the least known of all books is the Bible.

Rohan did not smile; his own knowledge of the Book was quite desultory.

“She was flying away from a city of wicked people, and God told her not to look back; but women are curious, above all, and she broke God's bidding, and for that He turned her into a stone like this, only it was made of salt. That is the story, Marcelle!”

“She was a wicked woman, but the punishment was hard.”

“I think sometimes myself that this must once have been alive. Look, Marcelle! Is it not like a monster with a white beard?”

Marcelle crossed herself rapidly.

“The good God forbid,” she said.

“Have you not heard my mother tell of the great stones on the plain, and how they are petrified ghosts of men; and how, on the night of Noël, they turn into life again, and bathe in the river and quench their thirst?”

“Ah, but that is foolish!”

Rohan smiled.

“Is it foolish, too, that the stone faces on the church walls are the devils that tried to burst in when the place was built and the first mass was said, but that the saints of God stopped them and turned them into the faces you see? I have heard *m'sieur le curé* say as much.”

“It may be true,” observed Marcelle simply, “but these are things we cannot understand.”

"You believe? Master Arfoll says *that* is foolish also."

Marcelle was silent for a minute, then she remarked quietly—

"Master Arfoll is a strange man. Some say he does not believe in God."

"Do not listen to them. He is good."

"I myself have heard him say wicked things—Uncle said they were blasphemous. It was shameful! He wished the emperor might lose, that he might be killed!"

The girl's face flashed with keen anger, her voice trembled with its indignation.

"Did he say that?" asked Rohan in a low voice.

"He did—I heard him—ah, God, the great good Emperor, that any one alive should speak of him like that! If my uncle had heard him there would have been blood. It was dreadful! It made my heart go cold."

Rohan did not answer directly. He knew that he was on delicate ground. When he did speak, he kept his eyes fixed nervously upon the grass.

"Marcelle, there are many others that think like Master Arfoll"

Marcelle looked round quickly into the speaker's face. It was quite pale now.

"Think what, Rohan?"

"That the Emperor has gone too far, that it would be better for France if he were dead."

"Ah!"

"More than that; better that he had never been born."

The girl's face grew full of mingled anger and anguish. It terrible to hear blasphemy against the creed we believe in all our heart and soul; most terrible, when that creed all the madness of idolatry. She trembled, and her hands were clenched convulsively.

"And *you* too believe this?" she cried, in a low shuddering whisper, almost shrinking away from his side.

He saw his danger, and prevaricated. "You are too quick, Marcelle—I did not say that Master Arfoll was right."

"He is a devil!" cried the girl, with a fierceness which showed the soldier−stock of which she came. "It is cowards and devils like him that have sometimes nearly broken the Old Emperor's heart. They love neither France nor the Emperor; they are hateful; God will punish them in the next world for their unbelief."

"Perhaps they are punished already in this," returned Rohan, with a touch of sarcasm which passed quite unheeded by the indignant girl.

"The great good Emperor," she continued, unconscious of his interruption, "who loves all his people like his children, who is not proud, who has shaken my uncle by the hand and called him 'comrade,' who would die for France, who has made her name glorious over all the world, who is adored by all save his wicked enemies—God punish them soon! He is next to God and the Virgin and God's Son; he is a saint; he is sublime. I pray for him first every night before I sleep—for him first, and then for my uncle afterwards. If I were a man, I would fight for him. My uncle gave him his poor leg—I would give him my heart, my soul!"

It came from her in a torrent, in a *patois* that anger rendered broader, yet that was still most musical. Her face shone with a religious ecstasy; she clasped her hands as if in prayer.

Rohan remained silent.

Suddenly she turned to him, with more anger than love in her beautiful eyes, and cried—

"Speak then, Rohan! Are *you* against him? Do you hate him in your heart?"

Rohan trembled, and cursed the moment when he had introduced the unlucky subject.

"God forbid!" he answered. "I hate no man. But why?"

Her cheeks went white as death as she replied—

"Because then *I* should hate *you,* as I hate all the enemies of God. I hate all the enemies of the great Emperor"

Chapter 5. MASTER ARFOLL

They had approached close to the Menhir, and were standing in its very shadow, while Marcelle spoke the last words. As she concluded, Rohan quietly put one hand on her arm, and pointed with the other.

Not far from the pillar, and close to the edge of the crag, stood a figure which, looming darkly against the white sheet of sky, seemed of superhuman height—resembling for the moment one of those wild petrified spirits of whom Rohan had spoken, in the act of turning to life. Lean and skeletonian, with stooping shoulders, and snow−white hair falling down his back, thin shrunken limbs, arms drooping by his side, he stood moveless, like a very shape of stone..

His dress consisted of the broad hat and loose jacket and pantaloons of the Breton peasant. His stockings were black; instead of *sabots* he wore old−fashioned leather shoes fastened with thongs of hide, but long usage had nearly worn these shoes away. His extreme poverty was perceptible at a glance. His clothes, where they were not hopelessly ragged, were full of careful patches and darns, and even his stockings showed signs of constant mending.

“See!” said Rohan in a whisper. “It is Master Arfoll himself.”

The girl drew back, still full of the indignation that had overmastered her, but Rohan took her arm and pulled her softly forward, with whispered words of love. She yielded, but her face still wore a fixed expression of superstitious dislike.

The sound of. footsteps startled the man, and he turned slowly round.

If his form had appeared spectral at the first view, his face seemed more spectral still. It was long and wrinkled, with a powerful high−arched nose, and thin firm−set lips, quite bloodless, like the cheeks. The eyes were black and large, full of a weird, wistful expression and wild fitful light. An awful face, as of one risen from the dead.

But when the large eyes fell on Rohan he smiled, and the smile was one of beatitude. His face shone. You would have said then, a beautiful face, as of one who had looked upon angels.

Only for a moment; then the smile faded, and the old worn pallor returned.

“Rohan!” he cried, in a clear musical voice. “And my pretty Marcelle!”

Rohan raised his hat as to a superior, while Marcelle, still preserving her resolved expression, blushed guiltily, and made no sign.

There was that in this man which awed her as it awed all others. She might dislike him when he was absent, but in his presence she was conscious of a charm. Poor though he was in the world's goods, and unpopular as were many of his opinions, Master Arfoll possessed that dæmoniac and magnetic power which Goethe perceived in Bonaparte, and avowed to be, whether fashioned for good or evil, the especial characteristic of mighty men.

More will be spoken of Master Arfoll anon when the strange events on which this story is based come to be further rehearsed. Meantime it is necessary to explain that he was an itinerant schoolmaster, teaching from farm to farm, from field to field. From his lips Rohan had drunk much secret knowledge, seated in the open meadows in the summer−time, or in some quiet cave by the white fringe of the sea, or on some mossy stone on the summit of the high crags. He was a dreamer, and he had taught the boy to dream.

Men said that his face was pale because of the awful things he had seen when the seals of the Apocalypse were opened in Paris. He never entered a church, yet he prayed in the open air; he preferred perfect freedom of religious belief, yet he taught little children to read the Bible; he was the friend of many a *curé* and many a soldier, but ceremonies and battles were alike his abomination. In brief, he was an outcast; his bed was the earth, his roof heaven; but the holiness of Nature was upon him, and he crept from place to place like a spirit, sanctifying and sanctified.

It was some months since he had been in that neighbourhood, and his appearance there at that moment was a surprise.

“You are a great stranger, Master Arfoll,” said Rohan, after they had taken each other by the hand.

“I have been far away this time, as far as Brest,” was the reply. “Ah, but my journey has been desolate: I have seen in every village Rachel, weeping for her children. There have been great changes, my son; and there are

more changes coming. Yet I return, as you see, and find the great Stone unchanged. Nothing abides but death: that only is eternal."

As he spoke, he pointed to the Menhir.

"Is there bad news, then, Master Arfoll?" inquired Rohan, eagerly.

"How should there be good? Ah, but you are children, and do not understand. Tell me, why should this cold loveless thing abide"—again he pointed to the Menhir—"when men and cities, and woods and hills and rivers, and the very gods on their thrones, and the great kings on theirs, perish away and leave no sign that they have been? Thousands and thousands of years ago there was blood on that stone; men were sacrificed there, Rohan; it is the same tale to−day—men are martyred still."

He spoke in low sad tones, as if communing with himself.

They perceived now that he held in his hand a book—the old Bible in the Breton tongue, from which he was wont to teach—and that his finger was inserted between the leaves as if he had just been reading.

He now walked slowly on, with Rohan and Marcelle close to his side, until he reached the edge of the glassy plateau and lo! lying just under the very edge of the sea was Kromlaix, with every house and boat mapped out clearly in the shining sun.

The light fell on glistening gables, on walls washed blue and white, on roofs of wrecked timber or stone tiles, or of thatch weighted with lumps of granite to resist the violence of the wind. The houses crouched on the very edge of the sea. Scattered among them were wild huts made of old fishing boats, upturned and roofed with straw; and though some of them were used for storing nets, sails, oars, and other boating implements and tackle, some served for byres, and many, occupied by the poorer families, sent up their curl of blue smoke through an iron funnel. Below the houses and huts, floating on the edge of the water—for it was high tide now—was the fishing fleet: a long line of boats, like cormorants with their black necks pointed seaward.

A village crouching on the very fringe of the wild ocean. The sea was around and beneath as well as before it; for it oozed below it into unseen shingly caves, and crawling inland underground for miles, finally bubbled into the green brackish pools that form the dreary tarns of Ker Léon. A lonely village, many miles from any other; a village cradled in tempest, daily rocked by death, and ever gazing with sad eyes seaward, hungry for the passing sail.

For miles and miles on either side stretches the great ocean wall, washed and worn into grandest forms of archway, dome, and spire, beaten against, storm shaken, undermined; gnawed, torn, rent, stricken by whirlwind and earthquake, yet still standing, with its menhirs and dolmens, firm and strong; a mighty line of weed−hung scaurs, precipices, and crags, of monoliths and dark aërial caves, towering above the ever−restless sea:—so high, that to him who walks above on the grassy edges of the crags the seagull hovering midway is a speck, and the dark seaweed−gatherers on the sands beneath are dwarfed by distance small as crawling mice. For many a league stretches the great wall, and the wayfarer threading its dizzy paths hears underneath his feet the rush and roar of water, and the flapping wings of winds, and the screams of birds from foam−splashed gulfs. But here, suddenly, the wall, rent apart as if by earthquake, leaves one mighty gap; and in the gap (which widening inward turns into a grassy vale fed by a dark river) the village crouches, winter and summer, changeless through the generations, with its eyes ever fixed on the changeless sea.

A village ever doomed and ever saved. For the river, when it reaches the tarns of Ker Léon, plunges into the earth, and mingles with the increeping ocean, and so crawls onward unseen; and the houses are verily rocked upon the waves which moan sullenly beneath them, and the fountains are brackish wherever they burst, and the village trembles and cries like a living thing when the vials of heaven are opened and the great sea threatens with some mighty tide.

That day, however, while Master Arfoll gazed down, all was brightness and peace. In and about the boats children played, while the men lounged in twos and threes, or lay smoking on the sands, or lazily sat in the sunlight mending their nets. The smoke went up straight to heaven, and heaven was calm. All was quite still, but you could hear the village just breathing, like a creature at rest.

Higher up the valley and partly on a rising slope stood, surrounded by its graveyard, the little red granite church, with its stone−tiled roof and ruddy tower crusted with dark green mosses and a hoary rime of salt blown from the sea. The sunlight struck along the gorge, so that even from the height they could see the rude group of the CALVARY close by, the stone head of the Christ drooping in death, the little wells of holy water sparkling on

the tombstones, and along the wall of the charnel−house the dark dots where the skulls of the dead, each in its little pigeon−box, were nailed up as a ghastly *memento mori*.

“Could the Stone yonder speak,” said Master Arfoll, looking down, “what a tale it could tell! I will tell you something it could remember. The time when all around us stretched mighty forests, and when a deep river ran down yonder gorge, and when a great City stood on the river's banks full of people who worshipped strange gods.”

“I have heard *m'sieu le curé* speak of that,” said Rohan. “It is very strange; and they say that if you listen on the eve of Noël you can hear the bells ringing, and the dead people flocking in the streets, far under the ground. Old Mother Brieux, who died last Noël, heard it all, she said, before she died.”

Master Arfoll smiled sadly.

“That is an old wife's tale: a superstition—the dead sleep.”

Marcelle felt herself bound to put in a word for her traditions.

“You do not believe,” she said. “Ah, Master Arfoll, you believe little; but Mother Brieux was a good woman, and she would not lie.”

“All that is superstition, and superstition is an evil thing,” returned Master Arfoll quietly. “In religion, in politics, in all the affairs of life, my child, superstition is a curse. It makes men fear the gentle dead, and phantoms, and darkness; and it makes them bear wicked rulers and cruel deeds, because they see in them an evil *fate*. It is superstition which holds bad kings on their thrones, and covers the earth with blood, and breaks the hearts of all who love their kind. Superstition, look you, may turn an evil man into a god, and make all men worship him and die for him as if he were divine.”

“That is true,” said Rohan, with a rather anxious glance at Marcelle. Then, as if wishing to change the subject, “It is certain, is it not, that the great City once stood there?”

“We know that by many signs, “ answered the schoolmaster; “one need not dig very deep to come upon its traces. Oh yes, the City was there, with its houses of marble and temples of gold, and its greet baths and theatres, and its statues of the gods; and a fair sight it must have been glittering in the sunlight as Kromlaix glitters now. Then the river was a river indeed, and white villas stood upon its banks, and there were flowers on every path and fruit on every tree. Well even *then* our Stone stood here, and saw it all. For the City was built like many another of our own with human blood, and its citizens were part of the butchers of the earth, and a sword was at each man's side, and blood was on each man's hand. God was against them, and their stone gods could not save them. They were a race of wolves, these old Romans! they were the children of Cain! So what did God do at last?—He wiped them away like weeds from the face of the earth!”

The speaker's face was terrible; he seemed delivering prophecy, not describing an event.

“He lifted his finger, and the sea came up and devoured that City, and covered it over with rock and sand. Every man, woman, and child were buried in one grave, and there they sleep.”

“Till the Last Judgment!” said Marcelle solemnly.

“They are judged already,” answered Master Arfoll

“Their doom was spoken, and they sleep; it is only 'superstition' that would awake them in their graves.”

Marcelle seemed about to speak, but the large word “superstition" overpowered her. She had only a dim notion of its meaning, but it sounded conclusive. It was Master Arfoll's pet word, and it must be confessed that he used it in a confusing way to express all sorts of ideas and conditions.

Rohan said little or nothing. In truth, he was slightly astonished at the exceedingly solemn tone of Master Arfoll's discourse; for he knew well the wanderer's gentler and merrier side, and he had seldom seen him look so sad and talk so cheerlessly as to−day. It was clear to his mind that something unusual had happened; it was clear also, from certain significant looks, that Master Arfoll did not care to express himself fully in the presence of Marcelle.

Meantime they had begun descending the slope that led to the village. Marcelle fell a few steps behind, but Rohan kept by the itinerant's side, quietly solicitous to discover the cause of his unusual melancholy.

As they went Master Arfoll's eye fell upon Rohan's book, which he still carried in his hand.

“What is that you read?” he asked.

Rohan delivered up the book. It was a rudely printed translation of Tacitus into French, with the original Latin on the opposite page. It bore a date of the Revolution, and had been printed in some dark den when Paris was

trembling with the storm.

Master Arfoll looked at the volume, then returned it to its owner. He himself had taught Rohan to see, however dimly, the spirit of such books as that; but to−day he was bitter.

“Of what do you read there?” he exclaimed. “Of what but blood, and battles, and the groans of people under the weight of thrones? Ah, God, it is too terrible! Even here, in what men call God's own book”—and he held up the old Bible—“it is the same red story, the same mad cry of martyred men. Yes, God's book is bloody, like God's earth.”

Marcelle shuddered. Such language was veriest blasphemy.

“Master Arfoll—” she began.

His large wild eyes seemed fixed as in a trance; he did not heed her.

“For ever and ever, now as it was in the beginning, this wild beast's hunger to kill and kill, this madman's thirst for war and glory. Who knows but the great Stone yonder holds the spirit of some mighty murderer of old times, some Cain the Emperor, turned to rock, but with consciousness still left to see what glory is, to watch while kingdoms wither and kings waste and dead people are shed down like leaves? Well, that is superstition; but had I my will, I would serve each tyrant like that. I would petrify him—I would set him as a sign! He should see, he should see! And then there would be no more war, for there would be no more Cains to make it and to drive the people mad!”

Marcelle only half understood him, but some of his words jarred upon her heart. She did not address Master Arfoll, but with angry flashing eyes she turned to Rohan.

“It is only cowards that are afraid to fight. Uncle Ewen was a brave soldier and shed his blood for France: witness the beautiful medal of the great Emperor! The country is a great country, and it is the wars against the wicked that have made it great. It is the bad people that rise against the Emperor because he is good and so grand; *that* makes war, and the Emperor is not to blame.”

Master Arfoll heard every word, and smiled sadly to himself. He knew the maiden's worship for the Emperor; how she had been brought up to think of him next to God: so without attacking her Idol, he said softly, with that benign smile which owed its chief charm to an inexpressible sadness—“That is what Uncle Ewen says? Well, Uncle Ewen is a brave man. But do you, my little Marcelle, want to know what war is? Look then!”

He pointed inland, and the girl followed the direction of his hand.

Far away, towering solitary among the winding hedgerows of the vale, was another deserted Calvary,—so broken and so mutilated that only an eye familiar with it could have told what it was. One arm and a portion of the body was still intact, but the head and the other limbs had disappeared, and what remained was stained almost to blackness by rain and foul verdure. Beneath, wild underwood and great weeds climbed,—darnel and nettle made their home there, and there in its season the foxglove flowered. Yet, broken and ruined as the figure was, it dominated the inland prospect, and lent to the wild landscape around it a wilder desolation.

“*That* is war!” said Master Arfoll solemnly. “Our roads are strewn with the stone heads of angels and the marble limbs of shapes like that. The gospel of love is lost; the figure of love is effaced. The world is a battlefield, France is a charnel−house, and—well, you were right, my child!—the Emperor is a god!”

Marcelle made no reply; her heart was full of indignation, but she felt herself no match for her opponent. “That is treason,” she thought to herself; “if the Emperor heard him talk like that he would be killed.” Then she looked again sidelong into the worn wild face and the great sorrowful eyes, and her anger passed away in pity. “What they say is right,” she thought, “it is not his fault—he has grown foolish with much sorrow; his lonely life has made him almost mad. Poor Master Arfoll!”

By this time they had reached the outskirts of the village. Their way was a footpath winding hither and thither until it passed close under the walls of the old church. Here Marcelle, with a quiet squeeze of Rohan's hand and a quick glance at Master Arfoll, slipped away and disappeared.

The itinerant walked on without noticing her absence; his heart was too full, his brain too busy, and he held his eyes fixed upon the ground.

Rohan disturbed him abruptly from his reverie.

“Master Arfoll—tell me—speak—Marcelle is no longer here—what has happened? Something dreadful, I fear!”

Master Arfoll looked up wearily.

“Be not impatient to hear bad news—it will come soon enough, my son. There is a thunderstorm brewing, that is all.”

“A thunderstorm?”

“That: and earthquake, and desolation. The snows of Russia are not tomb enough; we shall have the waters of the Rhine as well,” he added, solemnly. “We are on the eve of a new conscription.”

Rohan trembled, for he knew what that meant.

“And this time there are to be no exemptions except *pères de familles!* Prepare yourself, Rohan! This time even only sons will take their chance!”

Rohan's heart sank within him, his blood ran cold. A new and nameless horror took possession of him. Looking up, he saw in the distance the broken Calvary, like a sign of misery and desolation.

He was about to speak, when the church gate swung open, and forth from the churchyard stepped *monsieur le curé*, with his breviary tucked under his arm, and a short pipe, black as ebony with tobacco stains, held between his lips.

Chapter 6. “RACHEL, MOURNING FOR HER CHILDREN”

He walked with a waddle, his shoulders thrown back, his chest thrust forward, and his portly stomach shaking at every step. His legs were short and bandy, his arms long and powerful, his body long and loose and well covered with fat. There was nothing of the soft sybarite, however, about Father Rolland. He could run, leap, and wrestle with any man in Kromlaix.

His face was coloured almost to a mahogany hue by constant exposure to sun and wind, and above his dark brown cheeks glittered two eyes as black as coals, as comic as the eyes of any *ignis fatuus.* His mouth, from which he ever and anon drew his pipe to emit a cloud of smoke, was firm yet merry.

As he came out of the churchyard, he might have been taken for some comical bird unused to walking; for he waddled like any crow, and the skirts of his threadbare black cassock were drawn up clumsily, and his little legs in their worn black stockings appeared peeping out behind. Marcelle's uncle the Corporal, who exercised the old soldier's prerogative of inventing nick−names, and who had a keen eye for detecting odd resemblances, was in the habit of calling the birds who flocked to his window in wintertime “the little *curés* of God,” and the robins in particular “the little *curés au rabat rouge.”*

And truth to say, Father Rolland possessed in a large degree two strong characteristics of the robin redbreast—extreme patience and contentedness under difficulties, and an immense amount of good−natured pugnacity.

His life was hard, and had been a perilous one. He rose with the lark, although (to be quite honest) he not unfrequently went to bed with it! He lived in a dismal hut, where an Englishman would scarcely keep his cow; he was liable to be called out at any hour and in any weather to exercise his holy vocation; his food was miserable; and, to crown all his miseries, the “drink” of the country was vile!

Now, Father Rolland was a convivial man, a *gourmet* in good liquors—a man, indeed, who needed good liquor to loosen his tongue and complete his good−humour. He was by nature and instinct and habit a *gossip.* If the earth had been deserted, and himself left all alone with the Enemy of mankind, he would have gossiped and drunk with “Master Robert” for company. And in good sooth, he bore no malice in his heart to any creature—not even “Master Robert” or Bonaparte.

He had not been long *curé* in Kromlaix; his predecessor, whom Rohan Gwenfern had worried so tremendously, having only been removed some few years. But he was a native of the district, and knew every menhir, every village roof; and every fireside for miles along the coast. He still spoke his native Brezonec to perfection, and in using the politer French he was guilty, especially when excited, of a strong *patois*—pronouncing (for example) *poëme* as if it meant an apple *(pomme), couteau, ktay,* and *chevaux, jvak.* In recording his conversation in an English translation it would be quite impossible to follow this peculiarity, but the reader must imagine a thick shower of gutturals, very peculiar and very difficult for any but Bretons to comprehend.

Father Rolland had passed with a sound skin through all the storms of the Revolution and the Civil War. He was a man of no “ideas,” and he performed his priestly functions—such as marrying and giving in marriage, shriving the sick and dying—automatically enough, with a certain eye to his monetary dues. The great Figures of Contemporary History passed like contending Titans above his head; he saw them from afar, and discussed them with unconcern. He was not the stuff of which martyrs are made. His sole business was with his flock, to whom he ever commended patience, good gossip, and contented drinking.

To sum up, his intellectual grasp was small, but his scholastic attainments were fair. He was a good Latinist, an excellent grammarian, and he counted among his stock of quotations some half−dozen lines of Homer, among others the famous

Deine de klagge genet argureoio bioio

and the still more famous and commonplace

Be d'akeon para thina polyphloisboi thalasses

both of which he hurled at the heads of new acquaintances in a thick *patois* with all the charm of novelty.

Conceive, then, a jovial peasant taken from the soil and supplied with a little learning, and you have Father

Rolland.

As he sallied from the church gate he held out both his brown hands to Master Arfoll, and nodded kindly to Rohan.

He had a greeting for everybody, had Father Rolland—Legitimist, Bonapartist, or Republican; and Master Arfoll's love of the “rights of man” did not daunt *him.* The only recusant and hopeless offender was the parishioner who had not paid his dues, or who attempted in any way to diminish the Priest's perquisites! Yet Father Rolland was not mean. He demanded his rights on principle, and then when they were paid, whether in the shape of money or grain, he rattled them in his pocket or stored them in his yard, and incontinently chuckled over them. And then, perhaps the very next day, he turned them into bread or wine or brandy, and shared them among the sick and hungry at his door.

“Welcome, Master Arfoll!” cried the *curé,* “You are a stranger to Kromlaix; 'tis months since we had a glass or a pipe together. Where have you been? What have you been doing? Welcome again!”

As he spoke his brown face beamed with pleasure.

Master Arfoll returned the greeting gently. They walked on a few paces side by side.

Presently the priest, linking his arm familiarly through that of Master Arfoll, while Rohan strode beside them like the giant that he was, began to demand his news.

The itinerant shook his head sadly.

“News, father,” he exclaimed. “Ah, there is none—only, of course, the old bad news. Red blood on the battle−field, and black crape in all the lands around. I do not think that it can last long—the patience of the world is exhausted.”

“Humph!” muttered the *curé,* with his fat little finger in the bowl of his pipe. “The world seems topsy−turvy, honest brother—it is standing on its head.”

It seemed odd to the little *curé* more odd than terrible. He had seen so much of terror and death that he had no particular horror for them, or for War. In his heart he loved, as in duty bound, the White better than the Blue, but he would never have instigated any man to die for the White. The respectable sort of thing, he believed, was to die, after “anointing,” in one's bed at home. He nevertheless believed battles, large and small, to be the expression of an irrepressible element in human nature, and he was not politician enough to blame any one in particular for encouraging bloodshed.

Master Arfoll continued, in a low voice—“I will tell you something, a small thing, but a sign of the end. I was stopping in a village far away east, and I entered the house of a woman who had lost both her sons in the last campaign, and but a week before buried her husband.”

“God rest his soul!” interrupted the *curé,* making the sign of the cross.

“She was sitting on a form, staring into the fire, and her eyes seemed fixed and mad. I touched her on the shoulder, and she did not stir; I spoke, and she did not hear. By slow degrees I roused her from her trance. She rose mechanically, my father, and opened her press and set before me food and drink. Then she sat down again before the fire, and I saw that her hair was white, though she was not old. When I had eaten and drunken—for I was very hungry—I spoke to her again, and this time she listened, and I told her I was a schoolmaster and was seeking for pupils. 'What can you teach, master?' she asked suddenly turning her eyes on mine. I answered softly, telling her I could teach her children to write and read. She laughed, father—ah, it was a terrible laugh. 'Go then and seek them,' she cried, pointing to the door, 'and when you have found them in their graves among the snow, come back and teach *me* to curse the hand that killed them and buried them there. Teach *me* to curse the Emperor, teach me a curse that will drag him down! Teach me how to kill him, and curse him down into hell−fire! O my poor boys, my poor boys!—André! Jacques!' She shrieked, and cast herself down on her knees, and bit her hair between her teeth and spat it out. My heart was sick. I could not help her, and I crept away.”

The *curé* nodded his head thrice musingly. He was well used to such grief; and it moved him little. Nevertheless, in the true spirit of a good gossip, he condoled.

“It is terrible—it is terrible indeed, Master Arfoll!”

“That is but one house out of thousands upon thousands. The curses go up to God. Shall they not be heard?”

“Softly, Master Arfoll,” murmured the *curé,* with an anxious glance around, “some one may hear you.”

“I care not,” cried the schoolmaster. “The Emperor may be a great tactician, a great engineer, a great soldier, but he is not a great man, for he has no heart. Mark me, my father, this is the beginning of the end. It is your

Christ against the Emperor, and Christ will win."

The little *curé* made no reply; such language was terribly serious, and the times were dangerous. He compromised.

"After all, if the Emperor could but give us peace!"

"Could? And could he *not?*" asked the itinerant suddenly.

"All the world is against our France," answered the *curé.*

"All humanity is against our Emperor," retorted Master Arfoll.

"But the Emperor fights for France, Master Arfoll. Without him, the English, and the Russians, and the Germans would eat us up alive." He added, seeing Master Arfoll's half amazed, half indignant look, "Well, I am no politician!"

"You have eyes and you can see, my father. It is well to stay at Kromlaix by the sea, far away from the march of men, but were you to wander out on the broad highway, you would know. It is all a living sacrifice to feed the horrible vanity of one Man. How should *he* give us peace? His *trade* is war. He declares now that it is England that will not allow him to make peace; he declares that it is for peace he fights. he lies, *he lies!"*

"Strong language, Master Arfoll!"

"When last he rode through the streets of Paris, the common people clamoured to him for peace, peace at any cost. They might as well have prayed to the great Stone up yonder; he passed on silent like a marble man, and did not hear them. Ah, God! the people are weary, father! they would rest!"

"That is true," exclaimed Rohan in a decided tone. The *curé* glanced at Rohan.

"Master Arfoll has taught you to think with him in many things, and Master Arfoll is a good man, whether he is right or wrong. But beware, my son, of hot speeches here in Kromlaix. What Master Arfoll could say boldly, might cost you your liberty, and perhaps your life."

He did not explain, what was a fact, that Master Arfoll was by a large majority of people considered simply insane, and in no way responsible for the strange things he said and did. Even Bonapartist officials heard his diatribes with a smile, and touched their foreheads significantly when he had finished. This is not the only instance on record of the one sane man in a district being mistaken for a Fool.

"I will remember," answered Rohan, half shrugging his great shoulders.

"The people are right, Father Rolland!" resumed the schoolmaster. "The wealth and pride of France is being blown away in cannon smoke. The loss of mere money would be little, had we only strong hands to work for more. But where are those same strong hands? The conscription has lopped them off with its bloody knife, and left us only the useless stumps."

"Not quite all," answered the priest, smiling; "for example, Rohan here has a pair of strong fists, and there are many bold lads left beside."

Master Arfoll glanced strangely at Rohan, and then said in a voice more tremulous than before—"The conscription is famished still—the monster cries for more human flesh. Out there"—and he pointed with his lean hand inland, as at some scene afar off—"out there the land is a desert, ay, darker than the desert of La Bruyère,—for the men who should till it are lying under the growing grain of strange countries, or in the deep sea, or beneath the snow. I tell you, father, France is desolate; she has nursed a serpent in her bosom: it has stung her children one by one, and it is now stinging her. Oh, how deaf you must be out here at Kromlaix by the sea, not to hear her crying—not to hear the new Rachel, wailing and weeping for her children!"

Master Arfoll had mounted his hobby, and there is no saying how far he would have ridden in his denunciation of Avatarism; but suddenly *monsieur le curé* put his plump hand on his arm and whispered—"Hush!"

Master Arfoll paused suddenly, not too soon, for as be ceased a clear sharp voice quickly demanded—"Who is this new RACHEL, Master Arfoll?"

Chapter 7. CORPORAL DERVAL DEFENDS HIS COLOURS

The speaker sat on a form in the open sunshine, at his own door, in the main street of the village. He wore horn spectacles, tied to his ears by pieces of string, and he held in his hand a paper which he had just been reading.

His face was as red as a berry; his hair, which was cropped close, reminded one of a stubble white with hoar−frost.

His dress, half rustic half military, consisted of a loose open corporal's jacket from which the epaulets and adornments had long been worn away, loose trousers reaching to the knee, and beneath the knee, one light red stocking and an old slipper, for he had only one natural leg, the place of the other being supplied by a sturdy implement of wood.

“Good morning, Uncle Ewen!” said the *curé,* anxious to divert attention from Master Arfoll's last remarks, while Rohan gave good−morrow too, and shook his uncle's hand.

For it was none other than Corporal Derval who sat there, the hero of many battles, the liege worshipper of Bonaparte, and uncle to both Rohan and Marcelle.

The Corporal, who well knew and detested Master Arfoll's sentiments, was not to be baffled; so after greeting the schoolmaster and shaking his hand, he repeated his question—

“But what about this new Rachel, Master Arfoll?” he said, taking off his spectacles.

The wondering scholar thus challenged pointblank, showed the courage of his opinions, and replied—“I spoke of these latter days of France, Corporal Derval; another conscription, it appears, is talked of; and it seems to me the best blood of the country is drained away already. I compared our poor country to Rachel, who grieved for the children who had gone from her, and would not be comforted. That was all.”

The veteran did not reply, but rose suddenly to his feet.

“That was all!” he repeated, in a voice like low thunder. As he spoke the forefinger and thumb of his left hand were plunged violently into his waistcoat pocket, while his right hand made a pass in the air and was plunged back into one of his coat tails; then forefinger and thumb, grasping a mighty pinch of snuff; were applied vigorously to his swelling nostrils, while he threw out his chest and stamped on the ground with his leg of wood!

In a moment one detected, despite the wooden leg, a curious and comical resemblance. Viewed cursorily sideways, in his quaint old imperial coat with its worn facings, in his black hat cocked *à 1' Empereur,* with his chest thrust forward and his legs wide apart, the wooden one shut out by the leg of flesh, he looked like a very bad and battered copy of the great Emperor; like a Napoleon with a Wellington nose, and six feet high; like (let us say) Mr. Gomersal at Astley's got up for the part, and really very much resembling the real thing, but for his nose, his height, and a certain shakiness in his legs.

Seen very closely, his face was deeply bronzed and wrinkled and scarred, his eyes of a piercing blackness, his chin and neck closely shaven, with prominent muscles standing out like whipcord, his nose vermilion−tipped and dew−dropped, his nostrils dilating and looking very black—the result of a habit of prodigal snuff−taking, which he shared with his great namesake “the Little Corporal”.

It must not be supposed that he was ignorant of his resemblance to his Emperor and Master. He had been told of it, and he believed and gloried in it; it was the pride and delight of his existence. He assumed the imperial pose habitually—legs well apart, chest thrown out, hands clasped behind his back, head musingly dejected, all in the well−known fashion. And when Marcelle or some good gossip would whisper admiringly, “See! would you not say it was the Emperor himself?” or “God save us, it might be the Little Corporal's ghost!” his heart expanded exultingly, and his nose took a deeper red, and he strode on his own threshold like a colossus overstriding the world; and he saw his neighbours and his foes beneath his feet, like so many kings and princes; and he sniffed the air of battle from afar, and, snuffing vigorously, laid the plan of some *cabaret* campaign; and he went over his old glories like his Master, and sighed as he reflected that he could not hasten to further victories on his wooden leg!

Not that he was irreverent. He knew how far off he was from his Idol; he knew that the resemblance was that of a pigmy to a giant. His brother's wife was a religious woman, and the arid wind of French atheism had spared their hearth; so that he believed in God if not in the Saints, for to him there seemed but one saint in the calendar—St. Napoleon!

With all his good qualities, Corporal Derval was rather an unpopular man in Kromlaix. The village lay far away from ordinary political contagion, and though it had once, like the rest of Brittany, caught a particle of the Legitimist fever that time was well−nigh forgotten; but the chief prayer of the honest folk was to let Napoleon fight it out, and leave them alone. Of course this could not be; so they heartily cursed the conscription, and, in their hearts, Bonaparte. There being too many Bonapartist enthusiasts in the place to make open grumbling safe, the inhabitants held their tongues, sighed secretly for the days of the old *régime,* and avoided in particular any passage of words with the old Corporal

"That was all!" repeated the soldier a second time "Humph!—and you, Master Arfoll, believe *that*!"

"I am sure of it, my Corporal."

The Corporal's face grew red as the tip of his nose, his black eyes flashed terribly, he snapped his snuff−box fiercely, then opening it again, took from it a huge pinch, and drew it up into his dilated nostrils with a snort of angry scorn.

The action gave him time to master the first rush of savage wrath, and he answered civilly, though his voice trembled with excitement—"Your reasons, Master Arfoll?—come, your reasons?"

The schoolmaster smiled sadly.

"You may behold them with your eyes, my Corporal," he said. "Women sow and reap our fields—women and old men over fifty—the flower of our youth is gathered up with the bloody sheaves of war, and in a little time France will fall, for there will scarce be one hand to lift a sword."

Master Arfoll spoke of course hyperbolically; but as if directly to falsify his assertion, there suddenly came forth, from the Corporal's own door, four gigantic youths, in all the bloom of health and strength, whom Rohan greeted with a smile and a nod. These were the Corporal's four nephews—Hoël, Gildas, Alain, and Jannick.

The Corporal stood aghast, like one who hears blasphemy against his God; an oath unmentionable to ears polite was hissing between his teeth, half heard, but incomprehensible.

It was time for the little *curé* to interfere.

He plucked the old soldier by the sleeve, and whispered—"Calm yourself, Corporal! Remember it is only Master Arfoll!"

The words were as oil on water, and the Corporal's features relaxed somewhat. Slowly his stern frown grew into a grim contemptuous smile as he surveyed his antagonist. His look was supreme, Napoleonic. He surveyed the itinerant as Bonaparte would have surveyed one of those liliputians of the period—a King.

Nevertheless heresy had been uttered, and for the benefit of those who had overheard the abomination, it must be confuted.

The Corporal assumed a military attitude.

"Attention!" he cried; as if addressing a file of raw recruits.

All started. The youths, who had been leaning sheepishly in various attitudes against the wall, stood up erect.

"Attention!—Hoël!"

"Here!" answered the youth of that name.

"Gildas!"

"Here!"

"Alain!"

"Here!"

"Jannick!"

"Here!"

All stood in a row, like soldiers regarding their superior.

"Listen, all of you, for it concerns you all. Attention, while I answer Master Arfoll."

He turned to the schoolmaster. All his wrath had departed, and his voice was quite clear and calm.

"Master Arfoll, I will not say you blaspheme, for you have had sorrows enough to turn any man's brain, however wise; and you are a scholar, and you travel from village to village, and from farm to farm, all over the country. Like that a man learns much, but you have something yet to learn. *1* have read my history as well as you. France has *not* fallen, she is *not* like that Rachel of whom you speak! She is great! she is sublime! like the mother of the Maccabees!"

The comparison was a happy one. It was at once patriotic and religious. The little *curé* kindled, and looked at

Master Arfoll as if to say, “There! answer that if you can, good friend!” The youths smiled at each other. They did not understand the allusion, but it was delivered like a musket−ball and seemed decisive. Rohan smiled too, but shrugged his shoulders with secret contempt.

The Corporal looked for a rejoinder, but none came.

Master Arfoll stood silent, a little pale, but with a pitying light on his sad and beautiful face that spoke far more than words; and his eyes rested on the Corporal with that sad affection good men feel for antagonists hopelessly deluded.

The veteran threw out his chest still more, displaying more prominently the medal of the Legion of Honour: and again, this time with a proud victorious smile, gave the word of command.

“Attention! Hoël, Gildas, Alain, and Jannick!”

The youths became rigid; but Jannick, who was the youthful humourist of the family, winked at Rohan, as much as to say, “Uncle is going ahead!”

“These are my boys; they were my poor brother's, and they are mine; you see them; they are mine, for my brother gave them into my keeping, and I have been a father to them, and to their sister Marcelle. I call them my sons, they are all I have in the world; I love them, I. They were little children when I took them, and who has fed them since that hour? I! Yes, but whose hand has given me the bread I gave to them? The Emperor, the great Emperor! God guard him, and give him victory over his enemies!”

As he spoke, his voice now trembling with emotion, he raised his hat reverently and stood bareheaded, the bright light burning on his bronzed face and snow−white hair. Such faith was as touching as it was contagious. Even a *chouan* might have been tempted to cry like those four youths with their voices of thunder: “*Vive 1' Empereur!”*

The veteran replaced his hat upon his head, and held up his hand for silence.

“The 'Little Corporal' forgets none of his children—no, not one! He has remembered these fatherless ones, he has fed them, and he has enabled them to become what you see! They have been taught to pray for him nightly, and their prayers have mingled with the prayers of millions, and these prayers have brought victory to him over the wide earth.”

Master Arfoll, though gentle as a lamb, was human. An opportunity occurred of answering the Corporal's former furious fire, and he found it irresistible. While the veteran paused for breath, the Schoolmaster said, in a low voice, not raising his eyes from the ground—

“And what of their three brothers, Corporal Derval?”

The blow struck home, and for a moment the blood was driven from the soldier's cheek. Far away in foreign climes slept, with no stone to mark their graves, three other brothers of the same house, who had fallen at different times—two among the awful snows of Moscow.

The veteran trembled, and his eyes glanced for a moment uneasily into the house, where he knew sat his brother's widow, the mother of those dead and these living. Then he answered sternly—“Their souls are with God, and their bodies are at rest, and they died gloriously as brave men should die. Is it better to fall like that, or to breathe the last breath in a coward's bed? to die like a soldier, or to pass away like an old woman or a child? They did their duty, Master Arfoll—may we all do ours as well!”

“Amen!” said the little *curé.*

“And now,” continued the Bonapartist, “if the 'little Corporal' away yonder should hold up his snuff−box”—he suited the action to the word—“and cry 'Corporal Ewen Derval, I have need of more of your boys,' they would smile—Hoël, Gildas, Alain, and Jannick—they would smile all four!—and I, the old grenadier of Cismone, Arcola and Austerlitz, I, do you see, with my rheumatism and my wooden leg, would march to join him—rat−a−tat, rat−a−tat—quick march!—at the head of my Maccabees!”

Strictly speaking, the enthusiasm of the Maccabees seemed greatly reduced by the sepulchral turn the conversation had taken. Hoël, Gildas, and Alain did not this time cry “*Vive 1' Empereur,”* and the irreverent Jannick put his tongue in his cheek.

Another voice, however, now chimed in enthusiastically—

“And *I* would march with you, Uncle Ewen!”

It was Marcelle.

Standing on the threshold of the cottage, with her eye flashing and her cheek burning, she looked a Maccabee

indeed.

Uncle Ewen turned quickly, and surveyed her with pride.

“Thou shouldst have been a man−child too!” he exclaimed, snuffing vigorously to conceal the emotion that filled his throat and dimmed his eyes; “but there, go too!” he added, with a grim laugh, “thou shalt be the *vivandière* of the Maccabees and watch the bivouac fire. But, *mon Dieu*, I forget, *chouan* that I am. I am keeping your reverence in the street—will you not walk in, Father Rolland?”

So saying, he stalked, clip−clop, to the door, and stood there bowing with a politeness uncommon among his class, but characteristic of the Breton peasant. The little *curé* followed, with a friendly nod to Master Arfoll, and the two disappeared into the cottage.

Master Arfoll stood with Rohan in the middle of the road; then, after hesitating a moment, he said hurriedly, holding out his hand—“Meet me to−night at thy mother's—I must go now!” Without awaiting any reply, Master Arfoll retreated rapidly down the narrow street leading to the sea, leaving Rohan to the society of his cousins—the gigantic Maccabees.

Chapter 8. THE CORPORAL'S FIRESIDE

All that day Marcelle was full of the stirring of a new sweet trouble; she moved to and fro like one in a dream, to a music unheard by any ears save hers; her colour went and came, her hand trembled as she cut the black bread and made the *galettes;* she was low−spoken and loving with her brothers, and she had strange impulses to kiss her mother and the Corporal. Her mother looked at her very curiously, for, having loved herself; she half suspected what it all meant.

Silent love is sweet, but love first spoken is sweeter, for it brings with it calm assurance and love's first kiss. Up to that day Rohan had never spoken what was moving in the hearts of both; up to that hour he had never done more than kiss her on both cheeks, in the ordinary Breton fashion.

Now their lips had met, their silent plight was sealed. The meeting with Master Arfoll had somewhat depressed her, but the cloud soon passed away. She did not in her heart doubt for a moment that Rohan was a good Christian in both senses, believing first in God and secondly in the great Emperor.

Marcelle's religious education had been twofold.

Her mother, a simple peasant woman, still retained in her heart all that passion for Church formulas, old superstitions, and sacerdotal legends, which the Revolution had endeavoured, most unsuccessfully, to root out of France by force. She was a faithful attendant at every ceremony in the little chapel, she fell on her knees and prayed whenever she passed a Calvary, and she believed simply in all the miracles of all the saints. She had escaped the worship of her class for Kings, for the *curés* and *vicaires* of Kromlaix had never been enthusiastic Legitimists; but she detested the Revolution.

She had been a fruitful woman. Her husband, the Corporal's elder brother, was a fisherman, who had perished in the great gale of 1796, and the Corporal, then a private soldier coming home on leave from Italy, had found her a widow with a large circle of helpless children—from the eldest, André, now fast asleep in Russian snow, down to the youngest born, Marcelle; not to speak of Jannick, who was then stirring unborn beneath her widowed heart.

Then and there, with his brother's children clinging round neck and knees, and his brother's widow weeping on his shoulder, Ewen Derval had sworn a great oath that he would never marry, but be a father to the fatherless, a brother to his brother's wife. And he had kept his word.

Fighting through many a long campaign, serving his Master with the strength of idolatry, he had carefully avoided all temptation to waste his hard−earned rewards; he had sometimes, indeed, been deemed a mean and a hard man in consequence; but the little family had never wanted, and the brave man nourished them, as it were, with his very blood.

At last, at Austerlitz, he fell and lost a leg; his service was ended, and from that hour forth he was no use to his Master. His discharge pay was not illiberal, and he could still do his duty to his “children,” as he ever called them, though he could no longer follow the great Shadow that was sweeping across the world.

Worn, weather beaten, wooden−legged, covered with medals, a heart full of gratitude and his pocket full of presents for the children, he returned to Kromlaix by the sea; and there, a hero, an oracle, and quite a family man despite his bachelorhood, he had resided peacefully ever after.

Good Corporal Ewen had preserved, throughout all the dissipations and disbeliefs of a military life, a purity of character and a simple piety of soul which were not ordinary characteristics of Napoleon's veterans. He had a respect for women quite removed from the rude freedoms of an old campaigner; and, as we have said, he believed in God. He was certainly not what people call a good Catholic, for he seldom or never went to confession, and he heard mass only once a year, at midnight, on Christmas Eve; but he would doff his old hat whenever the *angelus* sounded in the distance, and mingle the great Emperor's name with that of the good God.

So no sceptical jests from his mouth, no such coarse infidelities as distinguished the period, interfered with the quiet holy teaching with which the Widow Derval reared her children, who were taught to love and revere Christ and the Saints, and to honour *monsieur le curé,* and to go through life reverently, as became the offspring of a godly woman.

But in the long winter nights, when the wind swept in from the sea, and the snow lay deep without, the children would cluster round the old veteran, while the widow spun in the corner, and would listen open−mouthed

to his stories of the great Man who of all living men was next to God.

Strange to say, these stories sank deepest into the heart of the little girl, Marcelle. She was more passionate and reverent than her brothers. Taught from her infancy to believe that the Emperor was divine, she gave him her heart's worship, with a faith that never could be shaken, with a love that could never die. She had heard of him as early as she had heard of God; God and he were in her imagination hopelessly interblended; and with every prayer she uttered, and every dream she dreamed, the Emperor became holier and holier, in a fair religious light.

On this one day of all her days, on this day of love to be marked for ever with a white stone, Marcelle almost forgot her Idol in the rapture of the new joy. Ever and anon, as she flitted about the cottage, she felt herself uplifted in Rohan's arms, and heard the murmuring of the summer sea, and felt her virgin hair unloosening and raining on the passionate upturned face.

Fair indeed she seemed in her quaint Breton dress, moving to and fro in the fading sunset gleam. Her brightly coloured petticoat and snowy bodice shone against the dark walls in the dim, Rembrandtesque light of that quaint "interior."

In its general aspects the room resembled that of its neighbours. It was the living room, *salle−à−manger,* and kitchen all in one. There were the customary forms, and the polished table with its soup−wells hollowed out of the wood; the spoon−rack and bread−basket suspended by a pulley from the great polished black cross−beams, which were well stored with an odd mixture of eatables and wearables, candles and stockings, oil−cans, skins of lard, strings of onions, Sunday boots with great thongs of leather, some goatskin jackets, and a fitch of bacon. In a corner near the chimney stood one *lit clos*—or what the Scotch call "press−bed"—reaching to the ceiling like a large clothespress, with sliding panels black as ebony and quaintly carved; and in the opposite part of the room was another and smaller bed of the same description. A great black pot stood on the embers of the turf fire, and blazing pieces of turf were also piled over its lid.

All was clean, fresh, and bright, with no coarser scent than that of fresh linen from the *lits clos,* or a whiff from the old veteran's pipe—a quaint old German pipe of china, which lay, well blackened with use, upon a shelf in the ingle.

A staircase, ancient, quaintly carved, and black as ebony, led to the upper portion of the little cottage, the earthen floor of which was baked hard as bricks by the heat of an ever−burning fire.

They had just finished their supper of *galettes* and milk. The corporal had hobbled off to discuss campaigning with a neighbour; the twins Hoël and Gildas, were leaning back on their forms against the wall; Alain was smoking at the door, and Jannick was crouching by the fire; while the mother still sat by the table—brooding in housewife's fashion, with her large eyes fixed on the glow.

The mother watched Marcelle quietly; the youths rebuked her for her silence and her blunders, and Jannick, the humourist, her junior by two years, made her the subject of divers practical jokes.

"What is the matter with Marcelle?" asked Hoël presently. "She has not spoken a word for hours, and she stares this way and that, like mad Jeanne who lives by the Fol−Fouet."

Marcelle blushed, but said nothing.

"Perhaps," jokingly suggested Gildas, the other twin, "she has seen the *kourigaun."*

"God and the saints forbid!" cried the widow, crossing herself rapidly. For the Breton *kourigaun,* like the Scotch banshee, is a spirit presaging evil and perhaps death to whomsoever it haunts in the desolate Breton ways.

"Nonsense!" cried Marcelle.

"The child is pale" said her mother anxiously. "She eats too little and she works too hard. She does not lounge about like you others, idle as grand seigneurs when you are not at the fishing. This is a full house, and two pair of women's hands have hard work to keep it in good order."

There was a moment's silence, and Marcelle looked gratefully at her mother, to whom that one glance betrayed her secret. The mother dropped her eyes and looked at the fire; the daughter began hurriedly to clear away the remnants from the table.

"That is all very well," said Jannick, stretching out his long shapeless limbs and grinning with his dark, beardless baby face; "that is all very well, but Marcelle does not do her housework at the Gate of St Gildas."

Marcelle started and almost dropped the dish she was carrying; pale now instead of red, she gazed with no amiable expression at the speaker, who only replied by an irreverent wink and a grimace.

"What does the boy mean?" inquired the widow.

“He is a wicked imp, and should be beaten,” said Marcelle in a low voice.

The gigantic hobbledehoy burst into a horse−laugh.

“Fetch thy heart's delight and let him try,” he cried. “Mother, ask her once more—doth she wash her linen at the Gate of St. Gildas? and if she answers nay, ask why she lingered there so long to−day.”

The mother looked inquiringly at Marcelle, who was still quietly busy.

“Wast thou there to−day, my child?”

There was no hesitation in the reply.

“Yes, my mother.”

Marcelle's large truthful eyes gazed steadfastly now at her mother.

“It is a long way to walk. What took thee so far, my child?”

“I went down the Ladder of St. Triffine on to the shore to look for dulse, and the tide was low, and I wanted to see the great Gate and the *Trou à Gildas;* and, mother, the tide came in quick and nearly caught me, and I had sore work to come round through the great Gate back to the strand.”

The widow shook her head.

“Thou art too fond of wandering into dangerous places; thou wilt be lost one of these days, like thy father. A maid's work is in the house, and not out yonder or on the sea. I have lived in Kromlaix, maid and wife, for nigh fifty years, and I have never seen the Gate yet save once, from thy father's boat, when he took me out with him in the wicked days to hear the blessed mass at sea.”

By this time the housewife had risen and settled down again by her wheel, where she began to spin busily. She was one of those thrifty energetic women to whom idleness is death, and who fill the houses they inhabit with a busy hum of work, sometimes quite beelike in its misdirected waste of energy.

“I will tell you,” said Jannick, rising and stretching his limbs, “of something we saw this day when coming home from the fishing. We were drifting with the flood close by the great Gate, as near as a boat may sail, when Mikel Grallon, who has eyes like a hawk, cried out, 'Look,' and we looked, all, in at the Gate. We were too far to make out faces, but what we saw was this: a man like a fisherman wading up to his waist, and carrying a maiden in his long arms. The tide was high, and he carried her round from the Gate, and sat her down upon the shore. Turn thy face this way, Marcelle! Then the man kissed the maid, and the maid the man, and after that we slipped round the point and saw no more.”

The twins laughed, and all looked at Marcelle. She was quite calm now, and shrugged her pretty shoulders with a charming air of indifference. Jannick, irritated by her composure, turned to his mother.

“Mother! ask her if she went to the Gate of St. Gildas *alone!”*

Before the question could be put Marcelle herself answered, looking defiantly at the imp who was torturing her.

“Nay, both going and coming I had company, as you have told. Listen, mother! Jannick is a goose, and sees wonders where older people would see nothing strange. I found a comrade on the beach, and he guided me through the Gate, and after that, when the tide rose, he carried me through the Gate again, and then—what the stupid Jannick says is true—I kissed him on both cheeks for thanks! It was only Cousin Rohan, and but for his help, mother, I might have been drowned this day.”

There was another general laugh, this time at Jannick's expense. Marcelle's rambles with Rohan were well known, and Rohan's connection with the family was so close that they elicited little

Only the mother looked grave.

“That is not true,” cried Jannick, angry at having the laugh against him. “When I came up the street yonder, Rohan was with the priest and Master Arfoll, and when I entered the house thou hadst not come home. Besides, he who carried thee—for thee it was, I swear—was not taller than I, and he embraced thee too close and too often to be Rohan Gwenfern or any of thy kin.”

The widow broke in sharply—

“Whoever it was—and the Holy Virgin forbid that Marcelle or any child of mine should speak a lie—whoever it was, Rohan or another, Marcelle should not have wandered there. It is no place for maids, nor for any but mad creatures who bear their lives in their hands, like Rohan Gwenfern. Besides, all the country knows the spot was cursed by the blessed St. Gildas, and turned into a place of ill. All men know that wicked spirits walk there by night, and the souls of monks who denied the holy Cross: altogether, 'tis an evil spot, and even Rohan himself

does wrong to venture there."

Here for a space the conversation ceased; but that night, when all the house was still, Marcelle fell secretly on her mother's breast and told her all. She had intended to be silent, but she could not bear the loving questioning eyes that followed her with fond maternal solicitude and anxiety, all about the house.

The mother was not altogether unprepared for the reception of the truth. It certainly gave her little pleasure; for Rohan Gwenfern was not the husband she would have chosen for her only daughter. He was too eccentric and too reckless, too careless an attendant at mass and too diligent a pupil of that terrible Master Arfoll, to suit her old−fashioned taste; and often indeed, in her secret heart, she pitied her half−sister for having such a son. His physical beauty and his affectionate disposition were both known to her, and she loved him well; but she viewed his vagaries with alarm, and feared at they might lead him to no good.

It would be absurd to affirm that Marcelle's confession took her altogether by surprise. She had for some time feared and suspected that Rohan, on his part, regarded her daughter with more than cousinly affection, and numberless secret presents from his hands—such as brooches, embroidered belts, silk neckerchiefs, and other simple fineries purchased at the *pardons*—had only confirmed her suspicions. As happens in most such cases, she had temporized, never quite believing that there was any danger of a love affair; and lo! here lay Cupid full−grown before her eyes, sleeping under the snowy kerchief that covered her daughter's breast.

A mother and daughter on truly affectionate terms soon understand each other, and these two at once came to an arrangement. It was promised, on the mother's side, that no notice should be taken at present of what had occurred; that all the family, and the Corporal in particular, should remain in complete ignorance of Rohan's sentiments; that Rohan should be received in the house on the old footing, as in a measure one of the family; and, finally, that not one word should be breathed as yet to Rohan's mother. It was conceded, on Marcelle's side, that no final answer amounting to secret betrothal was to be given to Rohan; that Marcelle should not again wander in his company so far from home, or in any way do more to awaken suspicion or cause scandal; that she should lead Rohan to understand that the confession made in a moment of passion was in no way binding, and that all would depend on the good or bad opinion of the widow and the Corporal.

Naturally enough, the widow was a little shocked. Conventional propriety had been so far violated that two young people had taken the initiative, instead of leaving themselves to be disposed of by their elders in the usual fashion. Properly speaking, and according to strict etiquette, Rohan should have sent a deputy to the Corporal, explaining his wishes formally and stating his prospects; it would then have been the Corporal's task to consult the widow, and if the widow was willing, simply to explain, with no particular attention to the girl's wishes in the matter, that Rohan Gwenfern was to be her future husband!

To have refused an excellent match, arranged for her by her superiors, even if the match was with one whose face she had never seen, would have darkly tarnished the fame of any Kromlaix maiden, and her prospects of marrying would thenceforth have been almost as uncertain as those of a girl who had actually committed a breach of chastity.

The lovers in the present instance being cousins, who had from childhood upward been accustomed to each other's society, there was little or no fear of scandal or misunderstanding. Marcelle had only to be careful, and Rohan discreet!

At the same time the widow prayed in her secret heart that Marcelle might in time be cured of her fancy for Rohan Gwenfern.

Chapter 9. ST. NAPOLEON

Had the Widow Derval beheld her daughter's face as she stood undressing in the upper chamber that night, she would have felt that her prayers were almost useless.

The little chamber contained two small beds in the wall, each white as snow, as is the linen of the poorest Breton cottage. In one of these the widow, fatigued with a long day's work, slept soundly and peacefully, while Marcelle, preparing for rest, lingered over her toilette with a rapture which she had never known before.

The floor was black and bare, the walls were black too, and round the beds themselves were hooks, whereon hung sundry articles of female attire. The chief furniture in the room was a table and a form; on the table stood, burning low, an old−fashioned oil lamp. In a press in the corner stood a great oaken chest, whence came the smell of clean linen, perfumed with little bags of dried rose−leaves; and not far from the chest, fixed in a frame against the wall, was a rude mirror of common glass.

Marcelle had divested herself of her outer skirt, her *sabots* and stockings, her bodice, and her white coif; and now, in undress as pure as samite, she stood loosening her beautiful long hair, and caressing it with her two pretty hands. As the dark tresses rained over her shoulders, she gazed at her image in the glass, and blushed to see it looking back at her with eyes so sparkling and cheeks so bright. Then winding one long tress around her forefinger, and contemplating herself serenely, she went over again in her mind the scene of the morning. She felt the strong embracing arms, she heard the softly murmuring sea, she was conscious again of loving kisses on the lips. Then, thoroughly pleased with herself, she smiled; and the image answered her from the darkness of the wall. She bent closer, as if to view herself the better. The image stooped and brightened. Then, carried away by an impulse she could not resist, she put her red lips against the glass, close against the lips of the image, in one long, soft, caressing, loving kiss. A kiss for herself, with whom she was thoroughly well pleased!

She unloosened her hair, and touched it lovingly. It was such a treasure as few Breton maids possessed; not a lock of it had ever been sold to the travelling barber, and she preserved it in her coif as a precious though secret possession. Not “Gold−hair,” whom our poet of passion had so sweetly sung, loved her bright growth better. Marcelle, too, would have prayed to have it with her in her grave.

What is more divine on this low earth than Beauty lingering over herself, not in vanity, not in folly or pride, but with that still joy in its own deliciousness which a sweet flower might be supposed to feel, with that calm rapture of its own light which lives in the being of a star? From the soft caressing fingers, to the pink and prettily formed feet, Marcelle was fair, a softly rounded form of perfect womanhood—perfection from the dark arched neck to the white and dimpled knee. And she knew it, this Breton peasant girl, as Helena and Aphrodite knew it; not, as it were, with her mind, not, as it were, quite consciously, but as simply felt in her breathing, stirring in her heart, whispering in her ear: just as though a flower might enjoy its own perfume, while softly shedding it on the summer air.

At last she upbraided her hair, and stood hesitating for a moment; then, gently as a fountain falls, she sank on her knee before the chair, and bowing her face between her hands, began to pray.

Right over her head painted on cardboard, and hung against the wall, was a figure of Our Lady, with the Infant in her lap holding a lily and brightly smiling. Though the figures were covered with gold and silver tinsel, and the very stalk of the lily was stuck on in gold leaf:, the faces were comely enough, and the whole suggestion atoned for the vulgar execution.

And Marcelle prayed. “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

She thanked the Lord for His favours; she begged Him to make her sins known unto her, whether against God, or against her neighbour, or against herself. Then she repeated the general Confession.

Then, uplifting her eyes to the picture, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin.

Presently, in a low clear voice, she prayed for those who loved her and whom she loved. For the soul of her dead father, for the old Corporal and her beloved mother, for her brothers Hoël, Gildas, Alain, and Jannick. Lastly, in a lower voice still, she breathed the name of Rohan Gwenfern, and trembled as she prayed. “Bless my love for Rohan, O blessed Lady, and grant me now thy grace, that I may never offend against thee more.”

There was a pause. Her prayer seemed finished; she was silent for a moment. Then uncovering her eyes, she

looked up, not at the picture of Our Lady and her Son, but at another picture, less large and highly coloured, which hung on the same wall.

It was that of a Man in soldier's costume, standing on an eminence and pointing down with still forefinger at a red light below him, which seemed to come from some burning town. His face was white as marble; and at his feet crouched, like dogs waiting to be unleashed, their heads close against the ground, several grizzly grenadiers, moustached and bearded, with bloodshot eyes each with his bayonet set,

The picture was rude but terrible, vulgar but sublime. It was the lurid representation of a fact which a more artistic treatment might have ruined.

Not with a less gentle love, not with a less deep reverence, did Marcelle regard this picture than the other. Her eyes lingered over it tenderly, her lips moved as if they would have kissed it; then her face softly fell into her hands, as before some higher Presence.

She prays again; and as she prays, mark how above the bed wherein she is to lie are hung suspended a gun and bayonet, and above these, on a high shelf, lie, clean and carefully brushed and folded, an old knapsack, haversack, cartouche−box, shako, and great coat. These too are sacred; for the old Corporal has worn and borne them in many a war. He does not, like some veterans, parade them ostentatiously over his fireplace; he keeps them here apart, in the sanctity of this virgin bed.

“And lastly, O merciful God, for the sake of Jesus thy Son and Our Holy Mother and all the Saints, preserve the good Emperor, and give him victory over his enemies, and cast down the wicked who seek to destroy him and his people, and fill his lap with blessings, for the sake of the blessings he has given us. Amen, Amen!”

And so the last and perchance not the worst of Saints, St. Napoleon, stands impassive, pointing downward, while the maiden rises from her knees, her eyes dim with the intensity and earnestness of her prayer.

Soon she has unclothed her limbs and blown out the lamp, and crept into bed; and very soon after she is sound asleep; while the old bayonet, which has drunk many a human creature's blood, keeps its place above her head, and the figures of the Virgin and of St. Napoleon, side by side, remain near her through the watches of the night.

Chapter 10. AT THE FOUNTAIN

“Speak low, for it is the Kannerez−noz who sing; stoop, hide, lest the Kannerez−noz may see; for they wash their bloody linen white as snow, and their eyes look hither, and they sing together no earthly song. Holy Virgin, keep us! Son of God, protect us! Amen! Amen!”

Thus, in the wild words of an old Celtic *sône*, murmurs the wayfarer as he moves by night along the silent ways, and peers here and there with timid eyes, and sees spectral shadows assail his path, till his heart leaps at the sight of the light in his cottage window afar. Well may he fear the dreadful Washerwomen of the Night, for these are no fairy fancies bred in the bright imaginations of a sunny place, but spectres, lonely and horrible, of darkness and death. Doomed is he who thus beholds them in the loneliness of the night, since it is *his* shroud they are washing with skeleton fingers, and it is *his* face−cloth they stretch to dry on the starlit sward beside the brook, and it is *his* dirge they are singing as they stoop above the glimmering stream in the shadowy wood or by the lonely shore.

Night after night the Kannerez−noz are busy; their work is never done, for the long line of the Dead ceases never. Sometimes in the haunted forest, oftener under the shadowy crags, they wash and wring. And the fisherman from his craft by night sees them as often as does the waggoner crossing the great moors with his loads of salt. Down here at Kromlaix—even here, where most men would die of old age were it not for the accursed conscription—they ply their trade. Drifting along under the shadow of the Menhir, floating close to the Gate of St. Gildas, and dozing at the helm, many a Kromlaix man has seen the crags part open, revealing a spectral village, with a silver kirk in the midst from whence the *angelus* rings, a graveyard bright with silver tombs, a Calvary where the figures were not stone but white skeletons, and far away houses thatched with silver with crimson window−panes and shadows moving within; and then, half wakening and shivering, he has beheld the strand below, the spectral village all bestrewn with linen white as snow, and has seen—ah, God, with his living eyes has seen!—the Kannerez crouching close beside the sea, and has heard their terrible voices singing the dirge of dread. What avail to cross himself now, and call on Jesu and the Blessed Lady and all the Saints? for sure it is that that man's shroud is woven, and all that remains uncertain is whether he will die on firm land or out there in the great sea.

At the front of Mother Gwenfern's cottage door, situated apart in the shadow of the crag, stood Rohan and Master Arfoll, looking downward towards the strand and calmly contemplating the very scene on which superstition has based its horrible dream of the Washerwomen of the Night. For it was a calm night, of little wind; the moon every minute was darkened by slowly drifting cloud, and few stars were visible; and down on the sand, murmuring and sometimes singing, were shadowy figures stooping over hidden pools, and all around them were gleams of whiteness, as of linen spread upon the shingle. Here and there a lantern glimmered from the ground, or moved hither and thither in unseen hands. Behind these murmuring groups with flitting lights lay Kromlaix, the moonlight shimmering on its roofs, the red lights gleaming in its windows—as strange as any spectral village seen in a half−dream.

It was dead low water, the fountains were upbursting from the hidden river far below, and the women and maidens of Kromlaix were collected there, washing their linen or dipping their pitchers for water, while they gossiped over the news. Here, night or day, whenever it was low water, they gathered, old and young; and, naturally enough, the Fountain was the leading centre of all the scandal and gossip of the place.

That fancy of the Kannerez had occurred to Master Arfoll, as he quietly contemplated the far−off busy scene.

“It is so, mark you, that 'superstition' constructs its tales,” he said. “Could you not fancy now that the Kannerez−noz were before you, washing their white shrouds in the pure pools? The Kannerez! not pretty maids like your Cousin Marcelle, with their white feet tripping on the warm sand!”

“Nevertheless, Master Arfoll,” returned Rohan, laughing, “there are many there who would pass for the Kannerez even by broad day. Old Mother Barbaik, for example.”

Master Arfoll did not laugh, but kept his sad eyes fixed, as he said—

“Poor women! poor old mothers, with their weary limbs and broken hearts, and hearts that will soon be broken more! Ah, Rohan, it is a pleasant thing to be young and strong and pretty like Marcelle, but it is a sore thing to

grow old and despised like Mother Barbaik of whom you speak. Hath she not a son?”

“Yes.”

“An only son?”

“Yes; Jannick—you will know him, Master Arfoll, by sight—he walks lame, and hath a great hunch on one shoulder, and two of his right−hand fingers have never grown!”

“God has been very good to him!” said Master Arfoll quietly.

“Good, Master Arfoll!”

“To him—and to his poor old mother. Better, Rohan, in these days to be born halt and lame, or deaf and blind, than to grow up into man's strength. Happy Jannick! He will never go to war! Mother Barbaik can keep her child!”

There was a long pause. Both men watched the Fountain and the sea, but with different emotions. The itinerant's heart was full of the terrible calm of pity and unselfishness. Rohan's was stirred by a stormy passion.

At last Rohan spoke. He seemed like one concluding a long train of reflection rather than opening a subject.

“After all, my name will be on the list!”

“No doubt.”

“And my number may be drawn?”

“Perhaps;—but God forbid!”

Rohan turned his face full on his companion's, and laughed fiercely, quickly; a laugh with no joy in it, only desperation.

“God forbid?—I am sick of hearing God's name mentioned so!”

“Never be sick of hearing God's name,” said Master Arfoll gently.

“God forbid? What does God forbid? Cruelty, butchery, battle, hunger, disease! None of these! He sits calm, if He is at all, giving his world over to devils. Ah, Master Arfoll, you know! You have seen! And yet—you have faith!”

Rohan laughed again almost contemptuously. As he stood thus, towering by the frail figure of Master Arfoll, he seemed (with his fair hair and leonine locks) like some mighty giant of the north.

“I have faith,” answered Master Arfoll, and his face shone beautiful in the moonlight; “I have faith, and I think I shall have it till I die. You have seen little of the world; I have seen much. You have suffered nothing; I have lost all; and yet I say to you now, my son, as I would say to you in your despair: God forbid—that I should doubt my God!”

“And yet, mark you, He suffers these things.”

“It is so,” answered Master Arfoll simply. “While men remain ignorant, these things will be; when men grow wise, these things will cease. Man, not God, is the scourge of man. God made the world beautiful, and God is joy; the wicked are unhappy, see you, and they do not know God.”

“Who knows Him, then?—Those only who weep?”

“Those who help Him, Rohan.”

“How?”

“By fulfilling His law of love; by loving all things, hoping all things, enduring all things. But stay, my Rohan, perhaps my God is not yours. Mine is not the god of *monsieur le curé*, nor the god of Uncle Ewen, neither the god of priests nor the lord god of battles. He is the Voice within my own heart, answering all the voices that cry around me, 'There is no hope! despair, despair!'“

Rohan inclined his head, not irreverently, for he had been an apt pupil and he adored his master; but the spirit of wrath was still strong within him, and his eyes burnt angrily. The blood of the Gwenferns was fire. In this man native passion and pride had been subdued by accidental culture into something eminently noble; but the elements were there, and it only needed some insufferable outrage or indignity to turn him again into the original savage Adam. “Let me speak again of the conscription, Master Arfoll,” he said in a voice trembling with agitation. “It is coming again, and the Emperor may say to any man, 'Follow me!' Tell me then—is *this* the will of God?”

“It is not!”

“And a man would be justified in answering the Emperor, 'No, I will not follow, for thy leadership is accurst'?”

“There is no escape—he who is called must go!”

“But first answer—would that man be justified?”

"Before God he would."

Rohan Gwenfern threw his hands up into the air.

"Then, remember, if ever that call should come to me, if ever the bloody hand should be laid upon my shoulder and the bloody finger point me forward—remember, *then*, what I swear now—I will resist to the last drop of my blood, to the last fibre of my flesh; though all the world should be against me, even what I loves best, I will be firm; though the Emperor himself should summon me, I will defy him. They may kill me, but they cannot make *me* kill. Master Arfoll, if the time comes, remember *that!"*

The words poured forth in a torrent. Could the speaker's face have been seen, it would have appeared quite bloodless—the lips compressed, the eyes set, the whole countenance in one white heat of passionate resolve. Almost involuntarily, as he concluded, Gwenfern crossed himself—a custom which he seldom followed, but which he now adopted in the vehemence of his feeling, as if calling God to witness his oath.

Master Arfoll sighed. The words seemed wild and raving, and he had heard such frantic protestations made before, but the end had ever been the same—despairing submission to inevitable destiny.

A few moments afterwards the men shook hands, and Master Arfoll made his way up the cliff side.

"God forbid, indeed," he thought, "that the lot should ever fall on *him!* He is a lamb now, for he has known only green fields and the breath of peace; but I see the wild spirit within him—the first blood of battle would change him into a wild beast!"

While this dialogue was proceeding the scene at the Fountain was growing brisker. Seen closer, it lost much of its weird mystery, and became a lively human picture.

About midway between high and low water−marks glimmered numerous pools, fresh dug by the hands of the women; for wherever holes were scooped the fresh water bubbled up; and around the pools, kneeling on boards and old thwarts of boats, and sometimes even on the shingle with their bare unprotected knees, were busy groups of white−capped women and girls, washing, beating their linen with their wooden bats, laughing and chattering as merrily as a sisterhood of rooks which the moon keeps awake in the tree−tops.

The sands were still luminous with the ebbed tide, and strewn with tangled weeds and gleaming jelly−fish. The air was warm, but piquant with the odours of ocean, and every breath of it wafted inland the night−moths and large gnats that people sandy places.

At intervals there came from the dim sea the cry of some belated and solitary gull; and once a great white owl, while prowling purblind among the clefts of the moonlit crags, blundered across the open space of the Fountain, and, uttering a startled scream, buried itself in the gloom of the cliffs beyond.

Among the pools were some preserved for domestic purposes, and at these were young girls and children with earthen pitchers and wooden pails, some standing, others coming and going.

Among those lingering stood Marcelle, her pitcher balanced on her head, her eyes turned to the groups of women who chattered near her in the moonlight.

She was not a popular member of that assembly, for she had two great drawbacks in the eyes of the women—her beauty, and her connection with the old Corporal.

As a rule, the Fountain (the place of many pools was always spoken of thus, in the singular number) was a scene of extraordinary animation and merriment. Every matter of public or private interest was discussed and analyzed there; characters were beaten to shreds by tongues as hard as the wooden bats of their owners; the foibles of friends and neighbours were turned inside out and well scrubbed, amid a blinding spray of prattle. Not the congress of women, in the great play of Aristophanes, kept up a more incessant chatter. It must be admitted, moreover, that much of the humour ventilated at the Fountain had an Aristophanic broadness,—reminding one terribly of the "Lysistrata." The *gaudriole* had its place vindicated here, as much as in the page of Béranger. Yet these were modest matrons, meek as mice before their husbands, God−fearing, loving, gentle. They merely prattled together over the secrets of their matronhood, and, though they sometimes laughed coarsely, meant no harm.

As for the younger females, they clustered together, and discussed their love affairs, with much tittering and whispering, and no naughtiness whatever. There were lovely maids among them, but none quite so lovely as Marcelle. Marcelle was stately as a *grande dame,* and never condescended to foolishness; for which characteristic *hauteur,* be certain they loved her none the more.

So there she stood lingering in the moonlight, fair and happy as Marguerite before she learned to sing "Meine

Ruh' ist hin, mein Herz ist schwer!" Something in the gossip of the elder women had struck her ear, and she had paused to listen.

That night there was laughing and singing and chattering enough, but these had ever and anon been interrupted by pauses of thoughtful silence, broken betimes by low anxious whispers.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* it is all true enough, little Joan, as some of us shall soon know to our sorrow!" cried one of the women.

"It will be a sore day for Kromlaix," said another, looking up from the pool over which she was leaning. "Our Piarik was taken the last time, and he has never come back yet."

"Ah, but he lives!" said the first speaker.

"Yes, he lives!"

"It is your house that has the luck," cried a grizzly giantess with grey hair, whose brawny arms were busy in the same pool. "My Jannick and my Gillarm are gone, with never a priest to give them a blessing or a friend to pray their poor souls to God!"

She drew a heavy breath, while her face was contorted with agony, but she had a mighty man's heart, which would break rather than find relief in tears.

"No one says it is not true," said the girl called Joan, a small but adult girl who walked lame, "but the time is not fixed, and some say the Emperor himself does not know his plans. It may be a year—two years—none can tell. Father Rolland was telling mother to−day—for when she heard of it she was very anxious about Hoël and Léon, as you conceive—that the lists do not mean very much. The men may not be wanted for a long time; and, again, there may be peace, and no one may have to go at all."

"One cannot understand why the Emperor does not make peace. Is he not the master? When one is master like that, peace is easy."

The masculine woman who had formerly spoken gave a fierce laugh.

"The Emperor!—Say the Devil, and all is said—does the Devil make peace?"

This was more than Marcelle could bear.

"Silence, Yvonne Penvenn; you have no right to say such things; and as for your sons, they are better where they are than where they used to be, at the *cabaret* fighting and cursing."

Yvonne lifted up her worn face and glared at the speaker, but Marcelle was not to be daunted.

"You know well that what I say is true, and the good God knows I pity you, but you should not talk as you do Listen! It is the English who will not let the Emperor make peace."

All became attentive. Marcelle spoke as one having authority.

"My Uncle Ewen says the Emperor would be glad to rest, but the English have bought over all the kings with their gold, and they will not suffer him. Have you seen a swarm of wasps round a man going to market across the sandhills of Traonili? Well, it is like that! They cannot hurt the great Emperor, these wasps of Prussians and English, but they can keep him troubled—they can prevent him from making peace!"

A general murmur of voices was the answer; some agreed with Marcelle, many dissented strongly—each spoke according to her own stake in the game.

"But why, then," asked a young matron, "is the sergeant in such a hurry about preparing the lists? If there was to be no drawing at all—or only after six months or a year—why should there be such haste to get the names? For my part, I understand it all—the Emperor has a new plan in his head, and we shall hear of it before harvest."

A general groan followed this unpopular prophecy.

As the speaker finished, a little old woman, bent nearly double with age, hobbled in among the group with a crock in one hand and a stout ash staff in the other. Setting the vessel down on the shingle, she stood panting for breath; then, clasping the staff with both hands and resting her chin on her wrists, she surveyed the speaker with a strange glitter in her black eyes.

Meantime, the little maid called Joan answered the would−be prophetess.

"Come must, come will," she said, sententiously. "There is at least this comfort, the Emperor does not want all; each man takes his chance; and the lots are in God's hands, after all"

"And one can light a candle up at Notre Dame de la Garde," said the other. "There is hope yet, and to blame the Emperor is not fair."

She was a young mother, and all her children were little fledglings, who had but lately left the nest of her

enfolding arms. So what cared she? Her husband was fishing on the cod−banks of Newfoundland, and all her brood was safe.

"I cried when our poor Antonin died in the fall of the leaf," said a girl who had not yet spoken, and who was quietly filling the crock of the old woman who had last arrived. "I cried then; but now I do not care, if God has taken him instead of the conscription."

A pathetic murmur answered her. The old woman stood still, leaning on her staff, as if fascinated.

"For our part, we are safe," cried Joan; "I have only one brother, and the Emperor does not take the only sons."

Marcelle, who was slowly retreating, turned sharply at this statement.

"It is a good thing," she cried, with a scornful laugh, "to have three full−grown brothers left, and none of them cowards. One of mine, at least, will look upon the Emperor. Would I were a man that I might go!"

One or two girls echoed the sentiment: it is so easy to be courageous when one is in no personal peril.

"But as for your only sons," she continued, "the Emperor has changed all that this time. Every strong man will take his chance—all except the blind and the poor idiots will have to go if 'tis the Emperor's will. What then? *Vive 1' Empereur!*"

Not a voice echoed her; the women surveyed her in grim silence, and made signs to each other. Only the infirm old creature leaning on her staff uttered a feeble wail. Hobbling over to Marcelle, she clutched her arm.

"That is false, Marcelle Derval!"

"What is false, Mother Goron?"

"That the only sons will be drawn. That is what the sergeant says, but it is false."

"You are right, Mother Goron," sympathetically murmured several voices; and angry faces crowded round Marcelle.

The old woman trembled like an aspen leaf and her thin voice piped despairingly—"Ah, God, it cannot be true. The sergeant says that no one will be exempt—no one at all, but it cannot be true. I have talked to the sergeant, and he says the Emperor must have men—thousands, millions—soon! It is to cut the throats of the Germans, and that is just. But the Emperor shall not have my boy. I have prayed that the Emperor might have victories; while he left me my boy, I say, I have prayed for the Emperor every night. The others are dead—they died young—and I have only Jan."

Marcelle was touched, and laid her hand softly on those of the old woman.

"Have no fear, Mother Goron!" she said. "The sergeant knows all that—and that you have no one but Jan. He will not let him be put down in the lists, and even if his name was drawn, he would not suffer him to go."

"My curse upon them all!" cried the old crone madly. "My Jàn is tall and strong, and they always draw the strong and the tall. Ah, they are cunning; they cheat in the drawing, and take the best. And the Emperor is making ready once more! But he shall not have my Jan: as God is in Heaven he shall not have my Jan!"

With a look of pity, Marcelle departed, walking slowly up the beach in the light of the moon, which had now grown brighter, and was lying like silver on the sands and on the sea. As she reached the shadow of the village, a dark figure joined her, and a low voice murmured her name.

"Marcelle!"

"Rohan!"

There was a silent kiss in the moonlight, and then Rohan lifted up his hands to take the pitcher of water.

"Let me carry it for you—it is heavy!"

No, it is quite light!"

He persisted, but she would not suffer him to release her of her burthen; so he followed quietly at her side.

"You are late at the Fountain, Marcelle. The tide has turned."

"Yes."

That was all they said till they were near the Corporal's door. Rohan was unusually gloomy and taciturn, but to Marcelle there was a delicious pleasure in this silent companionship.

"Will you not come in?" she said, setting down her pitcher.

The street was empty, and they were quite alone.

"Not to−night," answered Rohan.

He had both her hands now, and was drawing her face quietly to his. All at once she drew back, laughing, and said—

"After all, then, the news is true!"

"What news?" he asked, kissing her.

"There will be more war. The Emperor is mad against the Germans."

It was as if the lips of a corpse had been put to his; he drew back shivering.

"What is the matter?" she asked softly.

"It is nothing; only the night is cold. And so there will be more war? Well, that is old news at the best."

He was trying hard to conquer the emotion that was fast mastering him; and his voice did not tremble. All at once, and absolutely for the first time, it flashed upon the girl, looking in his face, that this man, her lover, might be called among the rest. A sharp pain ran through her heart.

"Ah, Rohan," she said, self−reproachfully, "I had forgotten—I did not think—the only sons will be drawn too!"

Rohan laughed. The laugh had fierceness in it, which Marcelle, in her own emotion, scarcely noticed.

"What then?" he asked.

The maid hung her head, still with both her hands clasped in his, and answered, using for the first time that night the endearing second personal pronoun—

"And *thou*!"

There was a pause. Rohan shivered and did not reply. Presently the girl, coming close to him and putting both her arms around his neck, so that he could feel her heart beating against his own, kissed him passionately on the lips of her own accord.

"My Rohan! my brave Rohan! It is true; thy name is down, and may be drawn, and if so, thou wilt leave me—thou wilt go away to serve the great Emperor, and to fight for France. I will not speak falsely—I am praying that thou mayst not go; but if thou goest, I will not cry—I will be brave. It is hard to part with one's best beloved—ah yes, it is hard; but it is for the Emperor's sake—and, for that what would we not do? If it is his will and God's, I will not be sorry. Nay, then, I will be proud!"

She passed her hands across her eyes, which were moist with tears. Just then a voice from the Corporal's threshold cried loudly—

"Marcelle!"

Kissing her lover quickly once again, Marcelle caught up her pitcher and hurried rapidly away, leaving Rohan standing silent in the shadow of the street. He had not answered her, nor interrupted her; he was too amazed, too sick of heart. Her very kiss had seemed terrible to him. He felt now, for the first time, how far their feelings ran apart; how their souls prayed asunder, like worshippers who adore different gods.

And with all this the love within him rose wave by wave, ever stronger and stronger, till, between its rapturous excess and the new terror that was pursuing him, he seemed as a man gone mad.

Nevertheless, as he walked in the moonlight hour after hour that night, sometimes conjuring up the beloved face again and feeling the passionate embrace, sometimes shuddering as he remembered all the fierce bigotry and adoration of the heart he had pressed against his own, he more than once raised his hands to Heaven and cried silently—

"I have sworn it, O my God! *Never, never!*"

Chapter 11. THE RED ANGEL

“For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord! And the blood shall be for a token upon the houses where my people are!”

So whispered Jehovah in the ears of Moses and Aaron, in Egypt long ago, and the passover lambs were slain, and the Angel of the Lord passed over the houses where the blood was set as a token, and the Lord's chosen were saved, and all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.

So was it in Egypt long ago, and there was safety at least for those the Lord loved. So was it not in France at the opening of this century, for the Lord was silent afar, and there were no Moses and Aaron to lead His beloved out of the wicked land.

And instead of God's passover and the blood of the Lamb upon the dwellings of the people, there was a great darkness, and blood indeed upon the houses, but not of lambs; for on almost every threshold there gleamed a crimson token, not God's token but Cain's;—a token, not of deliverance, but of doom.

As a spent storm flies across the earth, Napoleon had hastened from Moscow to Paris, little daunted by the loss of 500,000 men, little heedful of the cries and tears of innumerable widows and orphan children. How had he been greeted by the people of his Empire? With curses and groans, with passionate prayers and appeals? On the contrary, with blessings and acclamations. The cities of his Empire—Rome, Florence, Milan, Hamburg, Mayence, Amsterdam—put their smartest raiment on, and wore lilies in their hair. The public officials flocked in to offer their felicitations. “What is life,” cried the Prefect of Paris, “in comparison with the immense interests which rest on the sacred head of the heir to the Empire?” “Reason,” cried M. de Fontagnes, grand−master of the Imperial University—“Reason pauses before the mystery of power and obedience, and abandons all inquiry to that religion which made the persons of Kings sacred, after the image of God Himself!” To this tune, and with even more hideous flourishes, danced, raved, and blasphemed the scented arch−priests of the imperial Baal.

And meantime the heavens opened and buried the Grand Army deeper and deeper under the silent snows; and in every home there was an empty place, in every house an aching heart; and from every ruined home there went up a bitter cry—“We beseech thee to hear us, O Lord!”

But the lord meant by those who cried was not Jehovah, nor the All−unseen and All−merciful, nor any God of the cold heavens whence these snows came covering those dead. The lord of the broken heart was Napoleon, who usurped the Divine seat, and whispered his awful fiat across a desolated world.

“We beseech thee to hear us, O Lord!”

He brooded in the midst of his city, and his eyes surveyed the silent earth. As a spider in the heart of its web, he lay and waited in the heart of his city. The creature whom Paris had borne in those travails which shook the world, the child of the Revolution which began with the cry of liberated souls and ended with the clang of souls in chains, the soldier fashioned out of fire, the King−destroyer and King−liberator, was now known veritably for what he was—Avatar, and lord of Europe, master and dictator of the earth. What wonder if madmen in their frenzy fell praying in his presence, as to very God.

“We beseech thee to hear us, O Lord!”

If he heard, he smiled. If he understood, he smiled also. But we may believe, indeed, that he neither understood nor heard. An Avatar cannot understand, for he has no wisdom; he cannot hear, for he has no ears. He has neither eyes, nor understanding, heart, nor ears. He looks not upward, for he cannot conceive of God; he gazes not downward, for he cannot perceive humanity. Blind, deaf, irrational, pitiless, terrible, he sits as God—an earth−god, deadly, and born to die.

We shall be answered here that Napoleon was what strange speakers and writers of all times have called a Great Man; that, being such, he must have been supremely human, as indeed many of his utterances and doings seem to show. The explanation is simple. Great men of a certain sort are great through their very negation of ordinary human qualities. Voltaire was great because he could not revere. Rousseau was great because he was incapable of shame. Napoleon was great because, as a sovereign, he was perfectly incapable of realising the consequence of his own deeds—because, in fact, he did not possess even an ordinary share of that faculty of

verification which is allotted to common men, to men who are in no respect great.

It is curious, as illustrating this truth, that Napoleon, when he *saw* suffering, pitied it. He could not bear to contemplate physical pain in any shape, and, like Goethe, he carefully avoided it. As a human being he had his humanities. As a great man, as the conqueror of Europe, he was simply an ignorant and irresponsible Force, without eyes or ears, or heart or understanding, an automaton moved by a blind and pitiless will to dark designs and ever fatal ends.

They were not far wrong, therefore, though they expressed the truth in an image, who pictured him as ever attended in secret by a certain Man in Red, his familiar, or *?a??? da?µ??*. This secret familiar, however, was his own miraculous invention. Napoleon, indeed, was the Frankenstein of the War−monster which he had himself created, and which, from the hour of his creation, never suffered him to sleep in peace.

He might be as God to the people; to this Monster he was a slave.

“Thou hast created me out of chaos—feed me: my food is human life. Thou hast conjured me out of the mighty democratic elements—clothe me: my raiment shall be woven by fatherless children. Thou hast fashioned me and fed me, and clothed me in God's name—find me a Bride, that my race may increase, and inhabit the earth.” And the name of the Bride was Death.

“We beseech thee to hear us, O Lord!”

Perchance, indeed, he might have heard, perchance he did hear, and hesitated. But the Monster continued, “Quick! more food, for I am hungry; more raiment, for I walk naked in rags; and another Bride, for she you gave me is too cold. Deny me, and I will devour thee: thee and thy seed, and thine Empire, and thy hopes for evermore.” So the Emperor cried, in this dark year of 1813, “Peace, Monster! and I will do thy behest;” and leaving the *da?µ??* in the darkness of his secret chamber, he passed smiling forth, amid the worship of his creatures, and flowers were strewn beneath his feet, while music filled his ears. More food was ready—more raiment was being woven. Another ghastly Bride was soon prepared; and the name of this Bride was Slaughter, youngest born of three sisters, whose other names were Famine and Fire.

So Napoleon returned to the Monster and cried unto him, “Be thou my Red Angel, speeding across the land in the darkness of the night; and as thou goest set on each door a crimson mark; and whatsoever house thou markest shall yield up its best beloved to thee and thy Bride. For I am Napoleon! And the blood shall be as a token upon the houses where our victims are!”

“We beseech thee to hear us, O Lord!”

The cry went up, but to what avail? The Evil Angel had flown across the earth, and at dawn the crimson signs were on the doors.

And the number of the newly chosen children of France was two hundred thousand and ten thousand; and at his call they answered, each in his dwelling; and no passover lambs were slain, but each one of the two hundred thousand and ten thousand presented himself as a lamb for the sacrifice, ere the hosts of Napoleon went out anew from the land of France.

Chapter 12. CORPORAL DERVAL HARANGUES THE CONSCRIPTS

Those spring days were bright at Kromlaix; fish were plentiful, and the people had never known a more promising time. The air was full of sweetness, the heavens were blue and peaceful, the sea like a mirror. Yet the Shadow was creeping nearer, and the dreaded hour of the Drawing of Lots was close at hand.

It was now known for certain that Napoleon had raised up his fatal hand, making the signal of the Conscription.

Previous to this, the hundred cohorts of the National Guards—a sort of militia, enrolled under the declaration that they were never on any pretence to cross the frontier—had been turned into regular troops of the line; while the sailors and marines of the French fleet had been gathered in from the sea, and from the sea−ports and villages which they occupied, and turned into corps of artillery. Then to crown all came the decree of the Senate granting to the Emperor the anticipation of the Conscription of 1814—a force of some two hundred thousand raw recruits, which, united to the marines and to the youths of the National Guard, would comprise a new army of at least 340,000 men.

There was much public noise and jubilation, much bustling of functionaries and rejoicing of corporations, but by the fire−side there was silence and a great dread. It was soon made known far and near that, owing to the great national losses and the immense drain on the lives of the population during the last campaigns, the old pleas of exemption from service were to be disallowed. Only sons were to take their chance with the rest. A rigorous inspection would follow the ballot, and few indeed would escape on the score of deformity or bodily infirmity. Every conscript who drew a fatal number would have to go. As to purchasing a substitute, that would be out of the question.

One mercy was afforded to the people, that of immediate relief from the agony of suspense. The ballot was to take place at once, in the little neighbouring town of St. Gurlott.

The morning of the fatal day came soon, and came with blue skies, white clouds, and the softest of winds upon the sea.

As the sun slowly rose, colouring all the ocean to delicate rose and burning brightly on the little village, a head in a red nightcap was thrust out of the street door of Corporal Ewen's house, and the eyes of the Corporal himself looked with an approving twinkle at the weather.

“Soul of St. Gildas!” he muttered to himself; “it is a good omen. The morning of Austerlitz was not more sunny.”

Here, however, he heaved a sigh, and looked down contemptuously at his wooden leg, of which Austerlitz was the cause.

Then, hobbling into the house, he proceeded with his toilette, shaving carefully, brushing up his best semi−military clothes, polishing his red cheeks till they shone again, and chattering to himself like some invalid daw in the privacy of his cage.

When all his preparations were finished, he sat down, in his shirt sleeves, before the fire—which he had already lit with his own hands—and began to smoke his usual “pipe before breakfast.”

He was an early riser, and invariably the first to move about the house and light the fire. He would cook his own breakfast, too, upon occasion, with the skill of an old campaigner.

Hoël and Gildas—the twins—were still snoring in one of the *lits clos* in the kitchen; the other, just vacated by the Corporal, was lying open.

The first to descend the black wooden stairs was Marcelle. She wore her coif and her face was very pale.

The Corporal turned at her step, drew the pipe from his mouth, and as she came up and kissed him on the weatherbeaten cheek, exclaimed quickly,

“*Thou*, little one! But where is thy mother?”

“She sleeps still, and I did not waken her; it is still early.”

Uncle Ewen puffed rapidly, and looked at the fire. It was a fact almost unprecedented to find the busy widow lying in bed after her daughter had risen but the Corporal almost guessed the truth, or some of it. Bright as the day

might seem to him, to *her* it was a day of trouble; and all night long she had been weeping and thinking of her three dead sons, and praying that the good God might spare her those who remained.

"Humph!" grunted the old soldier, glancing at the sleeping twins. "They, too, are sound. Hoël! Gildas! It is time to rise."

While Marcelle walked to the door, leaning against the doorpost and looking out into the street, the young giants rose and were soon sitting with their uncle by the fire. Presently down came Alain and Jannick, looking very cross and sleepy; and last of all, Mother Derval herself white as a ghost, and very silent.

Meantime Marcelle stood in the street, watching the little village wake. Brighter and brighter grew the light windows and doors were thrown open, heads were thrust out, voices were heard; and presently a little girl passed, going to the fountain, for it was low water. The little girl wore a tight white cap, wooden shoes, and a stiff bright. coloured holiday petticoat.

"How, Marrianic," cried Marcelle, "art thou, too, going to St. Gurlott?"

"Yes," answered Marrianic eagerly. "I am going with mother and Uncle Maturin and my brothers. There will be great fun—as good as at the *Pardons*. I must run now, for mother is waiting for water."

And she ran on down the street, smiling gaily and singing to herself an old Celtic song. The Conscription to her meant a holiday, and she was too young to comprehend sorrow in any shape.

Marcelle sighed. Her enthusiasm for the great cause remained, but somehow her mother's tears had troubled her, and she was thinking very sadly of her three dead brothers—and yes! of Rohan. She was selfish enough, despite her principles, to pray that Rohan might not be taken. Her first sip of Love had been so delicious, and her nature was composed of such passionate elements, that she could not bear to lose her lover so soon.

The sun was fully up, and Kromlaix, like a great bee−hive, stood in the sunshine, with its inhabitants moving in and out. Nearly all wore their best. The white caps and coloured skirts and embroidered bodices of the women shone gaily in the sun. The men lounged hither and thither, some in coloured cotton nightcaps, some in broad hats of felt; many in loose breeches and *sabots*, but the greatest number in tight trousers, black gaiters, and rude leather shoes. Early as it was, some had already set forth inland, on the road to St. Gurlott.

Re−entering the house, Marcelle found breakfast ready, her mother still stooping over the fire, the Corporal and his four nephews seated round the table eating black bread. Each of the men had also a tin mug before him, and on the table was a stone jug with cider. The Corporal was rattling his mug and addressing "the Maccabees."

"Attention! I drink to the Emperor!"

The others joined with a certain enthusiasm, for the cider was good, and moreover an unusual luxury. Marcelle sat down and began to break a little bread, but her mother did not turn round.

"Mother, mother," cried Uncle Ewen, with reproachful gentleness, addressing the widow, "come! thou wilt put us out of heart. Have courage! See now, all the world will not be drawn, and perhaps none of thine. If the worst comes to the worst, little woman, thou wilt be proud to serve the Emperor in his trouble, and he may send thee back what thou lovest safe and sound."

The widow's answer was a deep sigh. As for the young men, they looked cheerful enough. They were not sufficiently old to grieve over danger before it came; and besides they all possessed a certain pugnacity and raw courage which the enthusiasm of Uncle Ewen had almost developed into a sentiment.

"For my part," cried Hoël, "I shall take my chance. If I go, I go. It is in God's hands."

"If the drawing is fair!" cried Gildas suddenly, scowling.

The old Corporal struck his fist on the table.

"Soul of a crow! does not the Emperor see to that! And who doubts the Emperor? What Hoël said was right—it is God that shuffles the numbers, and we that draw. He that God picks out should be proud. Look at thy sister Marcelle! Were she a man she would break her heart if she did not go."

"It is all very well to talk," said Hoël , "when one is a woman."

"Bah! then hear me, I who am a man!" said the Corporal, oblivious of the fact that his nephews had heard him almost too often. "This is the way to look at it, mother! When a man's time comes, when the Angel with the white face arrives and knocks, we must get up and let him in. It is no matter where he hides—on land or sea, here or there—he will be found; it may be to−morrow see you, it may be twenty years after; it may be when he is a babe at breast, it may be when he is an old stump like me. Well, that is God's way! You cannot live longer by staying at home if it is God's will that you should die."

"That is quite true, Uncle Ewen," said the widow, "but—"

The Corporal waved his hand with a grim smile.

"Look at *me,* mother! Look at thy good man's brother, little woman! I have been a soldier—I have seen it all—I have dined on thunder and gunpowder, I—and yet I live. *Corbleu!* I live, and but for this accursed leg of a tree, as sound as any man. Have I not followed the Little Corporal to Egypt, to Italy, and across the Alps? Was not that red work, little mother? I knew him General at Cismone, boys, and I lived to see him crowned Emperor of France!—and a year after that I lost my leg! A leg—bah! If it had been the two legs I should have laughed, since it was for the Emperor. But, see you, I did not die—I live to tell you all this. I have had bullets round me like rain, but I was never struck. Why, little mother? Because every bullet is marked by the Hand you know, and not a man falls but it is God's will."

In this strain, talking volubly, sometimes addressing his nephews, sometimes turning to his sister−in−law and Marcelle, the veteran endeavoured to inspire the household with confidence and courage. He was to a certain extent successful, and even the mother assumed a sort of cheer.

Previous to that day Uncle Ewen had not been idle. Stalking from door to door, wherever he was on friendly terms, stumping along in his old uniform with the cross of the Legion of Honour upon his breast, his nose in the air as if he smelt the battle afar off his face crimson with enthusiasm, he had canvassed all Kromlaix on behalf of the Emperor. Such enthusiasm is contagious, and the young fishermen began to laugh and swagger as if the Conscription were a good joke—at all events, they determined not to show the white feather.

So on this bright morning of the drawing of lots all seemed quite festal.

If a quivering lip or a wet cheek was visible here and there, it was soon forgotten in the general display of rustic splendour—embroidered waistcoats, silk−sewn bodices, bright petticoats, snowy caps, ornaments of coarse silver and gold. True, many a poor mother had quietly stolen out in the early grey of dawn to kneel under the Calvary and say a prayer of entreaty to the Blessed One carved in stone in its centre. But now grief seemed all forgotten. There was laughing and shouting as the groups gathered, and more than one man had already been drinking deep.

Fresh and glorious shone the sea, happy and glad seemed the village, with its black boats crowding, like a flock of cormorants, on the water's edge. But over all, dominating the scene, stood the Menhir—black, forbidding, like the imperial Idol looking down upon his creatures.

Out sallied the Corporal at the head of his four nephews.

By his side walked Marcelle, very pale, but dressed, in colours bright as May, with a coif like snow, its lappets reaching to her waist, and her feet clad in pretty shoes with buckles. Then came a strain of wild music; for Jannick carried his *biniou*—or bagpipe—tricked out with long streamers of a dozen colours, and Alain was blowing into his tin whistle.

"Forward!" cried Uncle Ewen.

There was a cheer in the street, and the party was soon joined by many young men, friends of the "Maccabees." Among them came a thin, sinister−looking young fisherman, whom the Corporal greeted by name.

"Good morrow, Mikel Grallon!"

Mikel answered quietly, and joined the party, thrusting himself as close as possible to Marcelle, who noticed his approach with courteous indifference. Her thoughts were elsewhere. She was looking up and down the street for one tall figure; but it was not there.

The Corporal, too, was on the *qui vive.*

"He is late," he muttered. "Pest on him, to lie a−bed on such a day as this!"

"For whom are you looking?" asked Mikel Grallon, as they all paused close to the old *cabaret,* which was distinguished by the bunch of withered mistletoe hung over the door.

"For another sheep of my flock," returned Uncle Ewen. "His name is down in the list, yet he delays."

Grallon smiled significantly.

"If you mean Rohan Gwenfern, I fear he will not come. I met him yesternight, and he told me he should be too busy to go—that thou or another might draw in his name."

The Corporal stood aghast. The very announcement seemed blasphemous. "Too busy" to obey the summons of the Emperor! "Too busy" to perform his duty like a man on that day of all days! Soul of a crow! it was stupefying.

But the Corporal shook his head, and would not believe it.

“By the bones of the blessed St. Gildas!” he cried, naming again the patron saint often invoked by his brother's wife, “it is unheard of—it is not true, Mikel Grallon. If Rohan said that, he was mocking at thee. I see it plain, boys! The rascal has stolen a march upon us and hurried on to the town to be first among the fun. Forward! we shall find him there.”

Alain and Jannick played loudly, and the whole party turned again up the street. Marcelle said nothing then, but she remembered that, some few nights before, Rohan had hinted that he might be absent. “But if I am,” he added, “let thou or our uncle draw for me in my name; it matters little, for the luck will be the same; and if the lot is against me, I shall be as content as if I had drawn myself.” He had said this in the twilight, and his voice was firm; and, fortunately or unfortunately, she had not seen the terrible expression on his face.

As they left the village and hastened along the road they found themselves with many other groups going the same way—women young and old, aged men, young fishermen, and even little boys and girls. As they passed the church and Calvary, Alain and Jannick ceased to play, the Corporal took off his hat, and Marcelle and her brothers knelt down for a moment.

The little *curé* was standing at the church door, with his *vicaire* (or curate), a spectral young man fresh from college. Father Rolland stretched out his plump hands in blessing, and they hurried on.

The town of St. Gurlott lay a good twelve English miles away, in the middle of a fertile valley, but the road to it was through a waste country of heather and enormous granite rocks, most dreary to the eye. It was an old cart−road well worn in between banks of heather and thyme, amid which glimmered the little yellow stars of tormentil. If one lark sang in the hot blue air all around them, there sang a thousand!

Chapter 13. THE DRAWING OF LOTS. “ONE!”

Despite his wooden leg, Uncle Ewen pegged forward gallantly, but after a few miles he was glad enough to take a seat in a rude cart which was jogging along, full of brightly dressed girls, and drawn by two little fat oxen. Marcelle, too, found a seat, while the musicians Alain and Jannick, with Hoël, Gildas, and the rest, followed behind, it was very merry indeed!

Everywhere along the road Marcelle looked for her lover, but he was nowhere to be seen—nor, indeed, the maiden thought to herself any man fit to be his peer.

They had travelled along drowsily for some miles more, and were not far from the town—which was now visible in the sunlight before them—when Marcelle beheld old Mother Goron clinging to the arm of her son—a powerful−looking youth very plainly attired. As they came up, he begged a seat in the cart for his mother, who seemed spent with fatigue; but as they lifted her up, not ungently, she fainted away.

When she recovered she did not speak a word, but sat staring like one in a dream. She was very weak and feeble, and the mental anxiety and bodily fatigue had been too much for her. Her son walked close by the cart's side, for she still held his hand firmly, and would not let it go.

At last they crossed a rude bridge of wood and entered the district town.

It was the quaintest of little old towns, with odd little houses of granite opening on the narrow streets, and old−fashioned churches everywhere. Every street was crowded, and every church was full. In the market−place, which they soon reached, carts stood full of fresh arrivals, wooden stalls were erected for the sale of refreshment, crowds of men and women were jostling together, and all sorts of scenes were being enacted—from the wailing group surrounding some poor woman whose son had drawn a fatal number, down to the laughing skirmish of boisterous farm girls with their rude admirers.

In the corner of the square stood a miserable stone building, in front of which strutted the military officials, in their ridiculous fine plumage. This was the Town Hall, within which the drawing had already commenced.

It must be admitted that few signs of discontentment or grief appeared on the surface. Everything had been done to impart to the affair the appearance of a gala. Flags were hung out from many of the house−roofs, music was heard on all sides, and everywhere old soldiers and agents of the Government were circulating among the peasantry, treating, chatting, telling stories of the glory of the Empire. Many of the young men who were to take their chance that day were hopelessly intoxicated; a wrestling match had begun here and there, and blows were given and taken. Of all the faces gathered there, only those of the elder women seemed utterly despairing.

Alighting from his cart and heading his little procession, Uncle Ewen soon made his way to the Town Hall. Marcelle clung to his arm nervously, and still looked on every side for Rohan.

Corporal Derval was well known, and way was soon made for him. The officials, always instructed to treat disabled veterans of the Empire with respect, greeted him familiarly, and smiled at his attendant band. If his influence had failed, Marcelle's pretty face would have conquered—for a pretty maid is always a power, and most of all to the heart of a military Jean Crapaud.

“Uncle,” she whispered, as she crossed the threshold under the admiring gaze of the “cocked hats,” “uncle, Rohan is not here.”

“Malediction!” cried the old Corporal. “But perhaps he is within!”

As he entered the sacred precincts he took off his hat. Squeezing his way, and drawing Marcelle behind him he was soon in the body of the hall.

It looked very grand and imposing.

At the upper end of the hall, before a large table on which stood the fatal ballot−box, sat the mayor—a grim consequential little man—with the other magnates of the town, and an officer of the line. The mayor had a military look, and wore a blue scarf decorated with several orders. Behind him stood a file of *gendarmes,* all attention. At one end of the table sat a clerk with a large open book, ready to register against each name as it occurred the numbers as they were drawn; and at the other end stood bareheaded a grizzly sergeant of the Grand Army, ready to read the number aloud for the edification of the public.

Each village or hamlet came separately in alphabetical order. As the name of each was proclaimed aloud, those

men of the village whose names were on the list came forward personally or by deputy and drew.

After this drawing, there was still one solitary chance of escape. A week or so later would come the medical examination, when those conscripts who were disqualified would be exchanged for those whose names came next by number. When the total number from each district had been selected, the Conscription would be over, and the conscripts would march.

Now, the number of men demanded from each hamlet was fixed; so each that came to draw knew the odds against him. From Kromlaix the Emperor demanded five and twenty conscripts, and therefore he who drew any number up to five and twenty was chosen, while those who drew above that number were free, always providing the whole five and twenty were pronounced “fit for service.”

The men of Kromlaix had not long to wait before their turn came. The neighbouring hamlet of Gochloän was being disposed of, and as each name was read, sad or glad comments came from the audience. Uncle Ewen surveyed the men critically as they came up one by one, while Marcelle still looked everywhere for Rohan Gwenfern.

At last the officer at the table called out—“Kromlaix.”

The men of Kromlaix crowded up towards the table, while the sergeant rapidly read over the names, including those of Marcelle's brothers, Mikel Grallon, Jàn Goron, and Rohan Gwenfern, among a long list of others.

The crowd near the Corporal trembled, and those whose names took alphabetical precedence were shuffled to the front. But the old Corporal kept his ground, and stood, with Marcelle beside him and his nephews close behind him, in the very front row.

Now, as we have said, Uncle Ewen was a well−known character, and so the sergeant whispered to the officer, and the officer to the *maire*, and then all three smiled.

“Good−day, Corporal!” said the *maire* nodding.

He knew his cue well, and he was not the man to overlook or snub one of Napoleon's veterans.

The Corporal saluted, and reddened with pride as he looked round on his party.

“You are welcome,” said the *maire* again, “and I see you bring us an old soldier's best gift—a nosegay of brave lads for the Emperor. But who is that pretty girl at your side? Surely *she* is not upon the lists?”

At this all laughed, and Marcelle blushed, while the Corporal explained—

“She is my niece, *m'sieu*, and these are her brothers; whose names are down?”

The magnate nodded, and the business proceeded. Name after name was called out, and number after number read aloud, while each man came back from the table and rejoined his friends. Many came back quite merry, and, strange to say, some of those who had drawn fatal numbers—those under twenty−five—laughed loudest, from sheer indifference or simple despair.

“Alain Derval!”

Forward stepped Alain, having handed over his whistle to Jannick. He saluted the authorities, and thrust his hand rapidly into the ballot−box, while Uncle Ewen, watching intently, drew himself up to his full height, and set himself still firmer upon his legs.

Alain drew out his paper, read it rapidly, and without moving a muscle of his countenance, handed it to the Sergeant.

“Alain Derval—one hundred and seventy−three!”

Main came back with real or assumed disappointment on his face.

“Just my luck,” he whispered to Marcelle; “I would rather have been drawn!”

“Gildas Derval!”

The gigantic twin of that name stepped forward, while those at the table surveyed his proportions with admiration.

“What a man!” whispered the *maire* to his neighbour.

The veteran watched with a grim smile, while Gildas phlegmatically drew his number, and read it quietly. Having read it, he scowled, and did not seem well pleased; but he shrugged his shoulders as he handed it to the Sergeant.

“Gildas Derval—*sixteen!”*

“Vive 1' Empereur!” said the Corporal, while Marcelle uttered a little cry. Gildas came slouching back, and when the Corporal shook him by the hand evinced little enthusiasm. “But I don't care,” he said, “if they draw Hoël

also!”

“Hoël Derval!”

The second twin strode out, and, as if eager to know his fate, dipped quickly into the box.

A moment afterwards the Sergeant cried—

“Hoël Derval—twenty−seven!”

The Corporal started, Marcelle drew a deep breath. Hoël himself looked dumfounded. Twenty−seven was all very well if the whole previous twenty−five passed the medical inspection; but that was scarcely possible. So Hoël came back and joined Gildas, with a nervous grin.

There was a slight pause here, the clerks writing busily in their books; and Marcelle whispered eagerly to her uncle—“Uncle Ewen!—it is very strange, but Rohan is not here. What is to be done? He will be blamed, and perhaps punished.”

The Corporal paused.

“There is but one way!—I will draw for him!”

Marcelle looked down for a moment, then said quickly, “No, let *me!* He made me promise to do so if he did not come.”

“Corbleu!” cried the Corporal. “But they will laugh—”

“Hush!” said Marcelle.

Business was brisk again, and the Sergeant read out loudly—

“Jannick Goron!”

Goron stepped forward from the crowd, while his infirm mother, white as death, was held forcibly but kindly back. He was very pale, and his hand trembled ever so slightly. He drew forth his paper, and without opening it, was about, in his nervousness, to hand it to the Sergeant.

“Read it first!” the Sergeant said.

The man, with one pathetic glance at his mother, opened it, and read in a low voice:

“Two hundred!”

“Jàn Goron—*two hundred”* said the stentorian tones.

Through a blinding mist of joyful tears Goron strode back to his mother, who had fainted away at the good news.

Not a soul there begrudged the loving and dutiful son his good luck.

“Mikel Grallon!”

The fisherman came forward nervously, cap in hand. He was very white, and his little fox's eyes twinkled with dread. He bowed somewhat servilely to the authorities, and stood hesitating.

“Draw, my man!”

Grallon had drawn before, and had always been lucky; but this did not lessen his present alarm.

“Mikel Grallon—*ninety−nine*!”

Grallon slipped back to the crowd, and looked delightedly at Marcelle, as if seeking her sympathy in his good fortune. But Marcelle was deathly pale, and with her eyes fixed intently on the box, was praying to herself.

There was another pause; then, loud and distinct, the name—“Rohan Gwenfern!”

No one stirred. The Corporal looked at his niece, she at him.

“Rohan Gwenfern!” repeated the voice.

“Where is the man?” asked the *maire,* pausing and frowning.

The Corporal stepped forward with Marcelle.

“My nephew is not here, *m'sieu*: he is indisposed; but either I or my niece will draw in his name.”

“What sayest thou, little one?” said the *maire.* “His sweetheart, perhaps?”

“I am his cousin,” said Marcelle simply.

“And cousin in good French, little one, means often sweetheart too! Well, thou shalt draw for him, and bring him luck!”

All the grim officials looked on graciously as Marcelle put her pretty hand into the box. She let it stay there so long that the officers smiled. She was still praying.

“Come!” said the officer, stroking his moustache and nodding encouragingly.

She drew forth a paper, and handed it to the Corporal, who opened it, read it with a stare, and uttered his usual

oath.

"Read, Corporal!" said the officer, while Marcelle looked wildly at her uncle.

"It is incredible!" cried Uncle Ewen, with another astonished stare. "*One!*"

He handed the paper over.

"ROHAN GWENFERN—ONE!" shouted the Sergeant, while Marcelle clung to her uncle and hid her face upon his arm.

Chapter 14. A DAY AT SEA

Had the Corporal and his party, as they paused in the centre of Kromlaix on their way to St. Gurlott, turned their eyes oceanward and carefully searched the water, they might have perceived far out to sea a black speck, now visible, now hidden in the deep trough of the waves. This black speck was a boat—a small fishing−boat with a red lug sail, which, with the peak set, and the rudder fastened to leeward, rocked to and fro softly, now "lying−to" admirably, again falling off and running along with the calm breath of the morning breeze.

In the stern sat a man, restless−eyed yet plunged in thought; sometimes looking eagerly towards the shore, where the cold morning light glimmered along the crags and on the sparkling roofs of the village; at others turning his gaze wistfully seaward, where far away on the dim horizon line some white−sailed argosy of England might be dimly seen creeping along to the west.

Rohan Gwenfern had risen before light, and launching the little craft, had urged it, with sail and oar, out to sea, until, at a distance of several miles from land, with the water surrounding him on every side, he could breath freely and feel comparatively secure. Rocking thus, he saw the village awaken—marked the grey smoke gradually arise to heaven—saw bright movements here and there as of folk astir—and caught faintly the sound of music, mingled with far−off inland cries. He had seen such a picture often, but never with such emotions as this day; he had watched before with a sweet indifference, but now he gazed with a sickening fascination.

His hair was wild around a face pale with many sleepless nights; his eyes bloodshot, his brows contracted; but nothing could destroy or even mar the superb beauty of the man. The broad dreamy brow, the brooding eyes, the firm yet mobile smile, were all there, preserving the leonine likeness. There was no ferocity in his look, but something even more dangerous—the strength of an unconquerable will.

Yet the man shivered as if with fear, and looked all round him as if expecting to see some unearthly pursuer upspring from the waves; and laughed to himself sometimes almost hysterically; and wore such a weary, waiting, listening, expectant look, as poor hunted beasts wear when they catch from far away the murmur of voices and the sound of coming feet.

Well, he had thought it all over, again and yet again, and the more he had thought, the more his soul had arisen in determination and in dread. He knew his name was at last on the lists of the Conscription; that the fatal day had broken, and that before night he would hear his doom; and he knew also that his part was chosen—if the worst happened, as he feared, resistance to the death.

He felt with what a power he would be contending. That his country, his fellow−villagers, his own relations, even, perhaps, Marcelle, would be against him; but this did not shake his resolve in the least. He would not serve the Monster of his abhorrence: he would rather die.

It would be most tedious and difficult to describe the long series of thoughts and emotions which had awakened in Rohan Gwenfern's heart his horror and dread of public War; we can do no more than glance again rapidly at the history of his mind. To begin with, he was a man whose life had been very solitary, and in whom solitude, instead of developing morbid introspections, had strengthened the natural instincts of pity and affection. Combined with his extraordinary enjoyment of physical freedom, he possessed a unique sympathy with an attraction for things which were free like himself. He hated bloodshed in any form, and his daily creed was peace—peace to the good God overhead, to man and woman, to the gentle birds that build their nests in the crags, to the black seals that came near to him in the caves and looked at him with human eyes. His immense physical strength had never been exerted for any evil, and even at the inland wrestling matches—whither he had sometimes gone with his gigantic cousins—he had never fought brutally or cruelly. That he rejoiced in his strength is unquestionable; but he had the affections of a man, as well as the magnanimity of powerful animals.

Courage of a certain sort he did not lack; that we have shown already. He had no equal in daring among the cliffs or upon the sea; and his constant explorations, which made him familiar with every secret of that craggy coast, showed even a more adventurous spirit. Yet, the fact is not to be denied, the mere dread of being drawn for the Conscription paralyzed him with *fear*—filled his heart with the sick horror cowards feel—seemed to touch the inmost springs of his enormous strength, and make him tremble to the very soul.

Prejudices, passions, and affections such as Rohan Gwenfern felt do not grow naturally in a peasant's breast.

Fine as the man was by nature, he would never have felt the subtleties of either love or terror, the ecstasies of either freedom or fear, if he had never known Master Arfoll.

Fresh from the teachings of the poor distracted *curé,* Father Rolland s predecessor, Rohan had encountered this other instructor, this peripatetic of the fields and crags. Many a strange lesson had he received secretly while sitting under some lonely dolmen, or in some bright nook on the shore. He had heard the low cadences of the Psalms mingled with strange tales of the Time of Terror, and had followed in his mind, perhaps during the same hour, the mystery of the birth of Jesus and the horror of the death of Marat.

It was thus that Master Arfoll sowed his seeds.

For the most part they fell on barren soil—on soulless natures that could not comprehend. Sometimes, and notably in this instance, they bore fruit that astonished the sower; for soon Rohan's abomination of tyranny and bloodshed equalled that of Arfoll himself, and in the end his horror of the Napoleonic Phantom became as deep as that of any living man.

And the more that Rohan's thoughts grew, the more food they received. As in a glass darkly, he got bloody glimpses of the history of society—he saw the white luminous feet of a Redeemer passing over the waters of a world yet unredeemed; he heard the terrible *persiflage* of Voltaire and the emotional Deism of Rousseau, translated for him by his teacher into pleasant Brezonec; he was taught to comprehend the sins of Kings and the righteousness of Revolutions; he learned to loathe Robespierre and to love Lafayette. This influence from the world without deepened instead of lessening his enthusiasm of physical freedom. Suspended from the highest Kromlaix crag, swimming in the darkest under−cavern where the seals breed, rocking on the waters, he enjoyed his liberty the more because he learned that it was unique. He pictured himself vistas of enslaved generations led by mad and cruel leaders to misery and death, and he thanked the good God who made him a widow's only son.

Slowly, year by year, under Master Arfoll's occasional instructions, he became conscious that Humanity, in the failure of the French Revolution, had lost the mightiest of its chances; that instead of the holy Goddess Freedom, a mighty Force was dominating France and all the world. With his own eyes, year by year, he had seen the Angel of the Conscription parsing over Kromlaix and marking the doors with blood for a sign; with his own ears, year after year, he had heard the widows wail and the children weep; with his own soul and his own reason, still more strongly as every year advanced, he had appraised the ruling Force as the Abominable, and had prayed, while yet rejoicing in his strength and freedom, for the martyrs of the Consulate and Empire.

And now perhaps his turn had come!

What mighty, what loving arms are those of the great calm sea! What a soft beating is this of its solemn heart, as it lifts us in its arms and rocks us on its breast! The stormy spirit of Rohan grew hushed, as he rose and fell in the stillness of the morning light.

The freedom of the waters was with him, and he breathed now securely. As a floating seagull, now hidden, now visible, the boat rose and fell on the great smooth waves.

He heard the tinkling of the chapel bell, he saw the village astir, he caught the hum of music. Then all was still.

As the hours rolled on, the sea−breeze rose a little, and he let the boat run close to the wind. His eye sparkled and his sense of freedom increased. He almost forgot his fear in the delight of the rapid motion.

Midday came, and still he was upon the water. By this time he had reached a great patch of glassy calm, covered with black masses of guillemots and shearwaters, over which the great gulls sailed and the small terns hovered and screamed. As the boat crept in among them, no bird was disturbed; he might almost have reached them with his hand. He leant over the boat's side, and suddenly, like a lightning flash, he saw the innumerable legions of the herring pass, followed closely by the dark shadows of the predatory fishes, from the lesser dog−fish to the non−tropical shark. There was a tremor and a trouble of life all below him; above him and around him, the tremor and trouble too.

As he hung over and gazed, sick fancies possessed him. In the numberless creatures of the ocean he seemed to see the passing of great armies, pursued by mighty legions mad with blood. The mystery and the horror of the Deep troubled him, and he threw up his face to the sunlight. And the predatory birds were killing and feeding, the porpoises were rolling over and over in slow pursuit of food, and half a mile off, a bottle−nosed whale rose, spouted, and sunk.

Before now, it had all appeared most beautiful and pleasant; now it seemed very cruel and dreadful. He was face to face with the law of life, that one thing should prey upon another; and here, in the deepness of his own

personal dread, he realized almost for the first time the quiet cruelty of Nature.

Calmer thoughts ensued. After all, he might not be drawn, though the chances were against him, and the Conscription, he knew, had a mysterious knack of picking out the strongest men. God might be good, and spare him yet. Then he went over in his mind the names of fellow−villagers who, like Mikel Grallon, had escaped again and again, though their names had been repeatedly upon the lists. He was yet perhaps too free, and had been so recently too happy, to feel as acutely as Master Arfoll the pangs of others. His emotion was just now that of a strong animal surrounded, rather than that of a beneficent man feeling for his fellows. It did not even occur to him that his escape would be another man's doom; these were subtleties of sympathy he had yet to learn in sorrow. It was a day of anguish and horrible uncertainty. If he knew his fate he would be prepared, but he could not know it yet. He must wait and wait.

He had been accustomed to go for long days without food. and this day he neither ate nor drank. All his hunger and thirst were in his eyes, watching the land. And lo! as chief cynosure in the prospect, he saw the black Menhir, like some fatal and imperial form, towering over Kromlaix, and warning him away from home.

The day declined. A land breeze rose again, and he beat for a mile against it, towards the shore; and now the sun had declined so far that the purple shadow of the boat ran beside him on the sea, and Kromlaix was glistening in the rays of the afternoon sun, and he could see the stone Christ standing piteous, high up on the hill.

Suddenly he started and listened, like a wild beast afraid. Then he stood up in the boat and gazed eagerly up the hill, where the sunlight illumined the old church and the white road at its gate. He was alone; not another boat was upon the water but his own. The whole village seemed deserted and still. From inland, however, he had caught the sound of music and of human voices.

Yes, they were now quite audible: they were returning; his fate was known. He shuddered and shivered. The sounds came nearer and nearer; he recognised the pipe of the *biniou* and the voices of men singing the national song.

He waited and waited, listening and watching, until he saw the crowd coming over the hill: conscripts marching about half−mad with wine, fishermen and villagers shouting, girls in bright−coloured raiment running and laughing, the *biniou* playing, many singing. Over the hill they came, and up to the church gate, and the little *curé* came out and blessed them, asking the news meanwhile. Rohan could see it all. He could recognise the *curé's* black figure among the crowd.

Then they came flying downhill.

His first impulse had been to land and meet them. Strange to say, eager as he had been all day to know the day's proceedings—whether his name had been drawn at all in his absence, if so, who had drawn in his name, and whether his number was lucky or fatal—eager as he had been to know all this, he now shuddered to hear it. The closer the crowd came, the louder the noise grew, the more his heart sickened within him. He saw the children and old women coming out to the house doors, he heard the little village gradually growing busy, he watched the crowd from the town as they marched down nearer and nearer, he heard the murmur of many voices.

Then, instead of hastening to land, he turned his boat's head round, and ran, with a free sheet, out again to sea.

Night had quite fallen, and the lights of Kromlaix were twinkling like stars on the water's edge, when Rohan Gwenfern ran his boat into the little creek below his mother's house.

All was still here, though a confused murmur came from the village.

He drew the boat up the shingle by means of a wooden windlass and a rope, placed there for the purpose, and put it safely above high−water mark. Then, still keeping in the shadow of the crags, he approached the door of his home.

As he came nearer, a sound of voices fell upon his ears. He stopped, listening, and while doing so, he became conscious of dark figures congregated round the door. He hesitated for a moment; then summoning up all his resolution, strode on.

In another minute he found himself surrounded by an eager crowd, and as the light from the door fell upon his face, all uttered a shout.

“Here he is at last!” cried a voice, which he recognised as that of Mikel Grallon.

Then another, that of Gildas Derval, cried in stentorian tones:

“*Vive l'Empereur!*—and three cheers for NUMBER ONE!”

Chapter 15. “THE KING OF THE CONSCRIPTS?”

While the shouts still rang in his ears and the *biniou* began to play up outside, Rohan pushed his way into the cottage. The moment he crossed the threshold he saw the kitchen was full of men and women, in the midst of whom, with his back to the fire, stood Corporal Derval declaiming.

On a form close to the fire, with her face covered with her apron and her body rocking to and fro in agony, sat the mother, weeping silently; and round her gathered, some crouching at her feet, others bending over her and talking volubly, several sympathizing women. The scene explained itself in one flash, and Rohan Gwenfern knew his fate; but pale as death, he strode across the floor to his mother's side.

As he went he was greeted with cries articulate and inarticulate. The Corporal ceased declaiming, the mother threw the apron off her face and reached out quivering hands to her son.

“Rohan! Rohan!”

Scarcely looking at his mother, Rohan sternly addressed the others.

“What is the matter? What brings you all here?”

Many tongues answered him, but in the confusion few were intelligible.

“Silence!” cried the Corporal, frowning fiercely

“Silence all! Listen, Rohan! I will tell thee all that has taken place. Malediction! these women—they make one deaf! They say I bring thee bad news; but that is false, as I tell them. Thy name has been drawn, and thou art to serve the Emperor—that is all!”

“No, no!” cried Mother Gwenfern—“he cannot go! If he goes I shall die!”

“Nonsense, mother!” said the Corporal. “Thou wilt live and see him come back covered with glory. Ha, ha, boy, thou wilt make a grenadier; the Emperor loves the tall fellows, and thou wilt soon be corporal. Shake hands with thy cousin Gildas. He is drawn too.”

Gildas, who had entered by this time, approached, holding out his hand with a feeble hiccup. It was clear that he had been drinking deep, for his eyes were glazed and his legs most unsteady.

Without noticing the outstretched hand, Rohan glared all round.

“Is this true?” he panted. “Tell me—some one who is *sober!”*

The Corporal scowled. Jàn Goron came forward quietly and put his hand on Rohan's shoulder. They were old friends and companions.

“It is all over, as they say. God has been good to me and my mother, but thou art drawn.”

There was a general murmur of condolence from the old women, and a wail from Mother Gwenfern. Like one dazed, stupefied now his fate had come, Rohan stood silent. Several men flocked round him, some sympathetically, others with jests and laughter. Just then Jannick Derval gave a comic scream with his bagpipes, and there was a loud roar of merriment, in which even the conscripts joined.

“Hands away!” cried Rohan fiercely, thrusting out his arms, and adding, while the men shrank back before him, “It is false! you are doing this to make a jest of me! How can I be drawn? I was not there!”

The Corporal, who, like the rest, had imbibed a little, replied, with a wink at the conscripts—“Oh yes, that is all very well, but the Emperor is not to be done in that way, *mon garz.* More shame for one to be skulking in a corner when he should be standing forth like a man! Thank thy good fortune that thou hadst a brave uncle there to represent thee and explain thy absence. It is all right! *Vive 1' Empereur!”*

Rohan quivered through all his powerful frame. “It is the will of God,” said an old woman aside.

“Thou hast drawn in my name!” cried Rohan.

Uncle Ewen nodded, but proceeded to explain.

“Thou wast not there, *mon garz.* Thy duty called thee, but thou wast elsewhere. Well, I would have drawn for thee, but my pretty Marcelle was by, and she craved so to draw, saying thou hadst bidden her do so if thou wast away. *Corbleu!* how they smiled when the little one came forward and put her hand into the great box. She groped about for a long time—like this!—and I thought to myself *'Parbleu!* she is feeling about for the lucky number.' *'Courage!'* cried *m'sieu le maire,* and she drew it out!”

“Marcelle?”

"Have I not said so, *mon garz!* Ah, she is a brave little one, and brings luck both to thee and to the Emperor. Thou shouldst be proud! Thou art at the head of all in Kromlaix! Thou art King of the Conscripts—and all through the little hand that drew for thee and pulled out 'number one'!"

"Rohan Gwenfern—*number one!"* roared Gildas, mimicking the tones of the Sergeant of the lists. There was a laugh, and Jannick again performed his ridiculous squeak on the *biniou.*

The drink had circulated freely, and the conscripts, what ever their secret feelings might be, were publicly uproarious. Gathering round the door, and flocking into the room, they loudly called on Rohan to join them, Gildas most vehemently of all. But there was no real joy or enthusiasm there. No woman smiled, and many wept bitterly.

Suddenly the cries without increased, and into the house flocked a troop of young girls singing the national hymn. At their head Marcelle.

Pale with excitement, with one hectic spot burning on either cheek, she entered the chamber; then, seeing Rohan, she paused suddenly, and looked at him with questioning eyes.

He had not stirred or spoken from that moment when he had uttered Marcelle's name; he had heard the Corporal declaim, and the conscripts cry, in a horrid stupefaction. Now, when Marcelle entered, he only turned his eyes rapidly towards her, then averted them, and grew more deadly pale.

A hard struggle had gone on in the heart of the girl. When first she had drawn the fatal number she had been horrified and stupefied. Then she had reasoned with herself and her adoration for the Emperor had risen up in her heart, until, carried away by her uncle's enthusiasm, she forgot her self−reproach, and determined to act an heroic part in all the scenes which were to follow.

Few of the conscripts had taken their ill luck personally to heart, and she did not calculate for any extraordinary resistance on the part of Rohan. True, she had often heard him express his loathing of warfare and of the Conscription; but then, so had the other men of Kromlaix; and yet, when the hour came and they were called, they made merry and went.

"Look, Rohan," she cried, holding up in her hand a rosette with a long coloured streamer. "Look! I have brought it for *thee!"*

Every one of the conscripts wore a similar badge, and the old Corporal, to complete the picture, had stuck one upon his own breast. All cheered as Marcelle advanced.

Rohan looked up wildly.

"Keep back! Do not touch me!" he cried with outstretched arm.

"Hear him!" derisively called Mikel Grallon.

"The boy is mad!" cried the Corporal.

"Rohan, do you not understand?" cried Marcelle, terrified by her lover's look. "I drew for thee as I was bidden, and though I did not wish thee to go, God has arranged it all, and thou wilt serve the good Emperor with Gildas and the rest. Thou art not angry, my cousin, that it is so? I had it from thine own lips, and I drew in thy name, and thou art King of the Conscripts, and this is thy badge. Let me fasten it now upon thy breast!"

From the pocket of her embroidered apron she drew a needle and thread and came nearer. He did not stir, but his features worked convulsively; his eyes were still fixed upon the ground. In a moment her soft fingers had attached the rosette to his jacket.

Another cheer rose, and the Corporal nodded, as much as to say, "That is good!"

"And now—forward!" cried the Corporal. "We will drink his health."

There was a movement towards the door, but suddenly Rohan started as if from a trance, and cried—"Stay!"

All stood listening. Mother Gwenfern crept close and gripped his hand.

"You are all mad, I think, and I seem going mad too. What is this you tell me about a Conscription and an Emperor? I do not understand. I only know you are mad, and that my uncle there is maddest of all. You say that my name is drawn, and that I must go to be killed or to kill? I tell you only God can draw my name, and I will not stir one foot,—never, never. Hell seize your Emperor! Hell swallow up him and his Conscription! I commit him as I commit this badge you have given me—to the flame!"

Furious to frenzy, he tore the rosette from his breast, and cast it into the fire. There was a low murmur, and Mother Gwenfern wailed aloud.

"Hush, mother!" he said; then turning again to the conscripts and to the Corporal, he cried; "Your Emperor can

kill me, but he cannot compel me to be a soldier. Before God. I deny his right to summon me to fight for him, for he is a Devil. If every man of France had my heart, he would not reign another day, for he would have no army, no sheep to lead to the slaughter. Go to your Emperor and do his bloody work—I shall remain at home."

All this time he had not once turned his eyes on Marcelle. She now approached him again crying—"Rohan! for God's sake be silent! These are foolish words."

Still he did not look at her or answer her. Gildas Derval broke in with a coarse oath—

"It seems to me that there is only one word for my cousin Rohan. He is *un lâche!"*

Rohan started, but controlling himself looked quietly at the speaker. By this time the old Corporal, who had stood perfectly paralysed with amazement and indignation, recovered his breath.

"Attention!" he cried aloud, purple with passion. "Gildas is right, and Rohan Gwenfern is a coward, but he is something more. He is a *choun,* and he blasphemes. Listen, you who are going to fight like men for your country:—this man is a *lâche,* a *choun,* and he blasphemes. Mother Gwenfern, thy son is accurst! Marcelle, thy cousin is a dog! He has spoken words treasonable and damnable—he has cursed the holy name of our father the Emperor. And yet he lives!"

The scene had now grown terrible. Rohan stood erect facing his uncle and his other antagonists, but still clasping his mother's hand. Mother Gwenfern, poor woman, could not bear to hear such words uttered of her son, and she cried through her tears—

"Ewen Derval, you are wicked to speak so of my boy!"

"Hush, mother!"

The momentary storm was over, and Rohan stood now subdued.

"Attention!" again cried the Corporal. "We will be charitable—perhaps the boy is not well, is under a charm—we will try to think so, my braves. He may come to−morrow and ask forgiveness of the good Emperor, and pray to be allowed to join you others who fight for your country. If not, mark you, we will come to fetch him; he shall not disgrace us without a cause. He thinks he is very strong, but that is a man's strength against ours, against the Emperor's? I tell you we will hunt him down if need be—like a fox, like a dog; and look you, I his uncle will lead you on. . . . Yes, Mother Loïz, I will lead them on! . . . With or without his will he will join you, remember that; and if he goes unwillingly, may the first bullet in his first battle find him out and strike the coward down!"

Rohan said nothing, but still stood with a ghastly smile upon his firm−set face. Words were useless now, since the terrible hour had come. There was a dead silence, during which the men gazed savagely enough at the revolter. Then Marcelle crept up, and stood between Rohan and her uncle.

"Your words are too hard, Uncle Ewen, and you do not understand. Rohan did not mean all he said; he spoke in passion, and then men do not utter their right minds. And he is no coward, but a brave man—yes, the bravest here!"

At this there was a general groan.

"Silence, Marcelle!" said the Corporal.

"I will not be silent, for it is my fault, and it is I that have brought bad luck to my cousin. Rohan, wilt thou forgive me? I prayed it might not be so, but God has willed it—God and His saints, who will watch over you when you go to war!"

Rohan looked sadly into the girl's face, and when he saw the wet eyes, the quivering lips, his heart was stirred. He took her hand and kissed it before them all.

An ill−favoured face was suddenly thrust forward between them.

"It is a pity, is it not," cried Mikel Grallon, "to see a pretty girl wasting all her comfort on a coward, when—"

He did not complete the sentence for Rohan, scarcely stirring his frame, stretched out his hands and smote the speaker down. Grallon fell like a log. A wild cry arose from all the men, the women screamed, Marcelle shrank back aghast, and Rohan strode to the door, pushing his way out.

"Seize him! hold him! Kill him!" cried many voices.

"Arrest him!" cried the corporal.

But Rohan hurled his opponents right and left like so many ninepins. They fell back and gasped. Gildas and Hoël rushed forward, their great frames shaking with wrath. Rohan turned suddenly and faced them at the door, but in a moment they were upon him, hurling themselves forward like two huge battering−rams. It was only for a

moment that Rohan hesitated, remembering that his opponents were his cousins and the brothers of Marcelle. Then, with a dexterous trick well known in Brittany, he tripped up the huge Hoël and grappled with the huge Gildas. Now, Gildas was at no time quite a match for Rohan, and just now he was half seas over; so in another moment he lay shrieking and cursing by the side of his brother.

Then Rohan turned his white face rapidly on Marcelle and passed unmolested out into the darkness.

Late that night the little *curé*, or vicar, sat in the vicarage before a snug fire. His room was furnished with an oaken table, strawbottomed chairs, and a bed with dark serge curtains, and ornamented by rude pictures of saints and a black ebony cross on a stand, before which was a low *prie−dieu.* The little *curé* was reading, not his breviary, but a strongly spiced history of the doings of the Church previous to the Revolution, when a loud knock came at the door.

Directly afterwards the old serving−woman showed in a man, whom Father Rolland recognised at a glance as Rohan Gwenfern.

The moment they were alone, Rohan, who was pale as death, approaching the *curé* and leaning his hand upon the table, said in a low, emphatic, yet respectful voice, “Father Rolland, I have come to ask your help.”

The priest stared, but closing his book and motioning to a chair, said, “Sit down.”

Rohan shook his head, and continued to stand.

“I have been drawn for the Conscription. My own hand did not draw the fatal number, and I might perhaps protest, for I was absent at the drawing; but it would be equal—I knew from the first there could be no escape. The Emperor chooses the strong, and I am strong. But my mind is made up, Father Rolland; I shall never go to war, I have thought it over and over and I will rather die. You open your eyes amazed, as if you did not understand. Well, understand this—I will not become a soldier. That is as certain as death, as unchangeable as the grave.”

Father Rolland had encountered such cases before—many a weeping mother and miserable son had come to him for advice—but none had spoken like this man. They had come in tears and gone in tears, resigned. This man, on the contrary, though under dreadful excitement, was tearless, proud, almost insolent. He stood erect, and his eye never once quailed as it met the priest's.

Father Rolland raised his shoulders and rubbed his hands together.

“You are drawn?—I am sorry for you, my poor fellow, but you will have to submit.”

“There is no exemption?”

“None.”

“Although I am my mother's only son?”

“Ah, that is nothing now. Even the lame and deformed are called upon this time. It is hard, but the Emperor must have men.”

There was a pause, during which Rohan looked fixedly at the priest, to the latter's great discomfort. At last he spoke.

“Very well, Father Rolland;—you have heard my decision. The Emperor will not spare me, my countrymen will not help me. So I have come to *you.*”

“To *me!*“

“To you. You are a holy man; you profess to give absolution, to prepare the souls of the dying, to represent God on earth. I appeal against the Emperor to your God, your Christ crucified. I say to Him and to you that war is abominable, that the Emperor is a devil, that France is a shambles. I will keep your God's commandment—that is, I will do no murder; I will not obey the Emperor—that is, I refuse to do wickedness because I am tempted by the Devil. Your God is a God of Peace; your Christ died rather than raise His hand against His enemies; you say your God lives, your Christ reigns—let Him help me now! It is for His help that I have come.”

It was difficult to tell whether the speaker's manner was quite serious or partly ironical; his tone certainly seemed despairingly aggressive. He stood quite still, always deathly pale, and his voice did not tremble. Father Rolland was staggered. He himself was no particular friend to the Emperor, but such words seemed dreadful under the circumstances. He answered good−naturedly but firmly, with soothing waves of the hand—

“My son, you should be on your knees when you come asking help from God. To the contrite heart, to the spirit that comes in humility and prayer, He grants much—perhaps all. It seems to me you are angry. It is not in anger that Christ should be sought—hem!”

Rohan answered at once, in the same tone.

“I know that; I have heard it before. Well, I have prayed often, but to−night my knees will not bend. Let me ask you, Father Rolland—you who are a good man, with a heart for the poor—is it right that these wars should take place? is it right that five hundred thousand men should have perished as they did with last year's snow? is it right that the Emperor should now call for nearly four hundred thousand more? That is not all. Are not men brothers? Was not that proved in Paris? Is it well for brothers to murder each other, to torture each other, to wade in each other's blood to the ankles? If all this is right, then, mark you, Christ is wrong, and there is no place left in the world for your God!”

This was terrible. The *curé* started up violently and cried aloud—

“No blasphemy!”

Then, standing before the fire and putting on a severe look, he continued—

“You do not understand these things. I do not say that you have no cause for complaint, but as to what you say, there has always been war, and it is in the Book of God. Men are quarrelsome, look you; so are nations; and a nation or a man, it is all one. If a man struck you, *mon garz,* would you not strike him again? And you would be defending your rights? Well, a nation has rights as well as you.”

Rohan smiled strangely.

“Is that what your Christ says? Did he not say rather, 'If a man smite thee on one cheek, hold up to him the other'?”

The priest coughed and looked confused; then he cried—

“That is the letter, *mon garz,* but we must look to the spirit. Ah yes, the spirit is the thing! Now, we are alone. and I will tell you honestly I do not love the Emperor; he has been rough with the Holy Father, and he is not a King by Divine Right; but there he is, and we must obey, all of us—the Church as well as you others. I will give another quotation, my Rohan. 'Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God the things which are God's.' Now this is the way to look at it. Your soul belongs to God, and He will watch over it; but as for your perishable body, it belongs in the meantime to—humph!—well, to Cæsar—in other words, to the Emperor!”

Rohan did not immediately reply, but walked slowly up and down the room.

The little *curé* thinking to calm him, said in a low solemn voice—

“Let us pray!”

Rohan started.

“To whom?” he asked in a hollow voice.

“To the good God.”

“To whom my soul belongs?”

“Ah yes. Amen!”

The priest crossed himself and approached the *prie−dieu.*

“But not my body?”

“Not thy body, which is dust.”

The priest was about to sink upon his knees, when Rohan placed his strong hand upon his shoulder.

“Not to−night, Father Rolland; I have heard enough; and I know now you cannot help me.”

“How is that, my son? Come, prayer will soothe your troubled spirit, and let you hear the still voice of God.”

“No, I cannot pray; least of all to Him.”

“What!”

“Do not be angry, Father Rolland; I am not to be won by fear. You are a good man, but your God is not for this world, and it is this world that I love.”

“That is sin.”

“Father, I love my life, and my strength, and the woman that is in my heart, and my mother—all these I love; and peace. You call my body dust; well, it is precious to me; and my soul says, 'Other men, too, feel their bodies precious,' and I have sworn never to do any murder at any man's bidding. I will defend myself if I can, that is all; defence may be righteous. Good night.”

He was at the door, when Father Rolland, whose humanity was large, and who really detested to behold suffering of any sort, cried eagerly—

“Stay! stay! my poor fellow, I will assist you if I can.”

"You cannot," replied Rohan; "nor can your God, Father Rolland. He died long ago, and He will never come again; it is the Emperor who rules the world, not He."

Before another word could be uttered, Rohan was gone. The little *curé* sank into a chair, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

At that very hour, while Father Rolland and Rohan Gwenfern were talking together, Marcelle Derval was on her knees in the little chamber already described.

She was alone, the poor weeping mother not having yet retired to rest; and below there was much angry discussion, much tippling, much savage denouncement of Rohan Gwenfern. Of course, no one believed that Rohan would seriously think of resisting the Conscription; there was no chance of that, for the country was all on the *qui vive* for deserters, and no boats of any size were putting to sea. For all that, he was *un lâche*, and the tipsy giant Gildas was loudest of all in his denunciations.

But Marcelle prayed, under the two pictures of Our Lady with the Infant and of St. Napoleon. For the soul of her dead father, for the old Corporal and her beloved mother, for her brothers (and chiefly for poor Gildas, who was drawn); and lastly, she breathed the name of Rohan Gwenfern. "Bless my love for Rohan, O Holy Lady, and bring him back to me from the terrible wars, and make him forgive me for drawing his name out of the lists, and grant me now thy grace, that I may never offend more."

Then she looked up, as was her nightly custom, at the picture of the Emperor.

"And, O merciful God, for the sake of Jesus thy Son and our Holy Mother and all the Saints, preserve the good Emperor, for whom my poor Rohan and Gildas, my brother, are going to fight; and give him victory over his enemies, and bring him back to us safe, as thou bringest *them.* Amen!"

She rose and walked across the room to the window. The moon was shining bright, for it was at the full.

She could see far out on the water the still and vaporous light, and on the housetops it was bright, and in the open streets; but the houses cast great shadows.

Presently something stirred in the shadow of the opposite house, and she saw the figure of a man, leaning and looking up at her window.

Love has wonderful sight, and she recognised Rohan Gwenfern.

She crept close to the window and opened it. The moon shone on her snowy coif and bodice, as she leant out whispering softly—

"Rohan! Rohan!"

He had answered that call, but this time he did not come. He looked up no longer, but moving forward into the open moonlight he passed down the street, without once raising his head.

Chapter 16. A GOOD MAN'S BLESSING

On a bright sunny day, about a week after the drawing of lots in the town of St. Gurlott, there gathered, in a green field twenty miles away, a strange group. In the centre sat an elderly man, with a book in his hand, reading aloud in clear and even tones. Gathered around him, some looking over his shoulders, others seated on the ground—a few indolent and indifferent, most attentive—were eight human figures.

The reader was Master Arfoll; the rest were his pupils.

The eldest was a good−humoured but stupid−looking peasant of about five and twenty, who wore a broad beaver hat and an old−fashioned rusty suit—black jacket, loose black breeches, and black gaiters. He sat with his mouth and eyes wide open, a model of stupidity and curiosity. Next to him was a slender youth of eighteen, with close−shaven hair, like a *kloärek* or religious student; but he too was a farm labourer, or farmer's son. Next to him, two plump stolid girls of fourteen, with bright skirts, enormous coifs, and *sabots*. Then two clumsy and ill−favoured boys. And finally, looking over Master Arfoll's shoulders, a little boy and a little girl of six—the most comical little figures imaginable the boy clad exactly like the adult peasant—in a black suit, tiny *sabots*, and a broad−brimmed hat; the girl with an enormous coif the broad ends of which reached to her waist, a black bodice, a very stiff black skirt, and black stockings terminating also in wooden shoes. The children looked as solemn as a little old man and woman, the girl with her hands folded primly on her bosom, the boy with his little hands stuck firmly in the waistband of his *bragou−bras*.

Inland, scattered here and there, sometimes surrounded by fir trees, more often not sheltered at all, were a number of little farms, from which these pupils came. The green field in which they sat was part of a great plain of heath and gorse, interspersed with broad green pieces of pasture, and stretching along the low granite cliffs of the sea. All was very calm and still, and Master Arfoll, from the knoll where he sat, could trace the sea−coast for many miles away—the blue capes stretching dim in the distance, the cream−white surf breaking in sandy bays, the dark blue waters moving softly under the shadows of the wind.

Here and there on the plain rose a menhir or dolmen; others lay overthrown among the furze. Not twenty yards from the knoll, a moss−grown dolmen—so high that a tall man might stand within it erect—cast its dark shadow on the grass.

Master Arfoll ceased; then he turned smiling to the little maiden, and said—

“Now, my little Katel, read after me.”

The girl came closer, put her little face close into the book, and followed Master Arfoll's finger as it slowly traversed the lines. It was the New Testament she was reading, translated into modern French. When she had read a verse, with much blundering and confusion of Brezonec and French proper, the teacher patted her on the head.

“Good,” he said, and Katel blushed with delight.

Then the little boy tried, with less patience and less success. His French was utterly unintelligible.

“Take time, my Roberd!” said the teacher. But Roberd, although he took time, fared no better than before.

Presently, when the adult peasant came up to try, it was worst of all. His pronunciation of the letters was barbarous, and the smallest word of one syllable was beyond his powers. Nevertheless, he seemed to take great delight in the pursuit of knowledge, and when the other pupils, particularly little Katel, laughed outright at his blunders, he only grinned and scratched his head with the utmost good−humour.

It was a scene for a painter. The sun shone brightly on the happy group, and softly touched the careworn lines of Master Arfoll's face and lit up the quaint costumes of his pupils; while all around him it gleamed on fields and farms, and on the great plain of furze, and on the twinkling sea. Ever and anon a white sea−gull, sailing in from the cliffs, passed softly over their heads; and right above, the dolmen, rising ever higher and higher, a lark was singing.

Then Master Arfoll took the old weather−beaten book, and turning over its worn leaves, read a part of a chapter, translating it rapidly aloud into melodious Brezonec. It was the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, and the part he read was the parable of the man who gave a great supper.

All listened eagerly; it was a story, like one of the tales told at the *veillée,* and they hearkened open−mouthed. When he had finished he said suddenly—

"My children, let us pray!"

All knelt around him, from the peasant to little Katel, who fingered meanwhile a small rosary of oaken beads that hung over her white stomacher.

This was Master Arfoll's prayer—

"Pour forth, I beseech thee, O Lord, Thy grace into the hearts of these Thy children; that they, when the time comes, may know Thee and not Antichrist; may feel Thy Divine assistance always with them, may recognise Thy truth and Thy knowledge, nor come and go upon the earth even as brute beasts of the field. Enlighten them, since they need light. Amen! Teach them, since they are willing to be taught. Amen! Strengthen them, that they kneel not to any graven Image or to any wicked Man. Amen! May their souls through life know the great gospel of love and peace, and may they meet at Thy great Supper, when the days of their life are done. Amen, Amen!"

At every repetition of "Amen," little Katel crossed herself vigorously. To none of the scholars did the prayer seem different from other prayers, though Master Arfoll extemporised it, as was his custom, with profounder meanings.

Then all rose, and clustered round Master Arfoll in the sunlight.

"That is enough for to−day," he said, with his hand on little Katel's head. "To−morrow we will meet here, my children, at the same hour."

"Master Arfoll!" cried little Katel.

"Well, little one?"

"Mother is angry that thou hast not stayed with her since thou camest to Traonili. She bids me tell thee that she hath a pair of leather shoes for thee, and more."

The schoolmaster smiled kindly.

"Tell thy mother I will stay with her to−night."

"Nay, that is not fair," cried out one of the older girls. "You promised Aunt Nola to stay with us."

This vehemently, but with a curtsy.

"We will see, we will see," said Master Arfoll, nodding his head. "Now, hasten home, for the noonday *angelus* has already sounded. Goodman Penvenn, till to−morrow! Patience! You will be a scholar yet!"

The last words were addressed to the eldest of the class, who grinned a delighted reply, and in a thick *patois* pressed the schoolmaster soon to visit his brother, Mikel Penvenn, on whose farm he was a labourer.

A minute more, and the "school" was scattered: Penvenn making his way straight across the plain, the young girls and the lad walking slowly this way and that, the two young boys running with shouts and cries across the fields, and little Katel and her brother trotting hand in hand to the nearest farm.

While the schoolmaster, with a dreamy eye, is watching his little flock retreat, it may be well to explain the peculiarities of his strange vocation.

Before the great Revolution, Brittany had been full of itinerant teachers, educated by the Church, who travelled from village to village, and from farm to farm, teaching children the Latin prayers, the Angelus Domini, and the Catechism. They were generally men whose hopes of following the priesthood had been disappointed. Their lives were hard, their food the commonest, their whole profession allied to mendicancy. Their lessons were given at all hours and under all conditions. Sometimes in the fields, in the intervals of labour; sometimes in the stable and cowshed; sometimes under the Cross in the highway; sometimes within, but oftener without. Their pay was miserable: six sous monthly from each family or value for that amount. Besides this, they had perquisites and presents—bacon, honey, linen, measures of corn. They were welcome to bed and board, wherever they liked to stay, and had a certain honour among the ignorant people; for an odour of sanctity hung about them, seeing that they had been reared in the bosom of the Church. They passed thus from village to village, till they were too weak to travel any longer afoot; then some of them, in their age, contrived to procure an old mule or donkey to bear them, feeding it in the fields or by the deep roadsides, and finally, when they were quite decrepit and beyond imparting the little they knew, many became professional mendicants, begging their bread from door to door.

With the fiery breath of the Revolution, these itinerant schoolmasters were scattered as sparks, and most of them disappeared for ever. During the later years of the Empire, when it was most the cue of Napoleon to appear as the father of religion and the establisher of a new and holy *régime* numbers of them reappeared, following their old vocation.

At the time of the Revolution, Master Arfoll must have been about thirty years of age; but none in that district

of Brittany remembered seeing his face before about the beginning of the new century. His first appearance was as a grave elderly man, who wore upon his features the mark of some terrible trouble, and many of his utterances were so wild and peculiar that his sanity was often called in question. None knew if he had ever studied in any Church seminary; none knew whether or not he was a Breton born. It was generally reported that he had been a dweller in one of the great cities, and that there, during the years of Terror, he had known such experiences as had turned his hair prematurely grey.

However that may be, the people knew him and loved him. A good man, whatever his opinions, disarms opposition; and besides, Master Arfoll never paraded opinions. He was welcome at nearly every farmhouse and little cottage; and when hospitality failed him, he had black bread in his wallet and could find cresses in the brook. His life might be called hard in a certain sense, but it was nevertheless the life of his desires.

The scholars were soon out of sight, and Master Arfoll turned his face towards the sea. He had been "sowing his seed," and he felt happy. A gentle light slept upon his careworn face as, holding his Bible in one hand, and with both hands behind his back, he moved past the moss−grown dolmen.

He was passing by, when suddenly he heard a sound behind his back; at the same moment, a hand was placed upon his shoulder. He turned quickly, and there, as if sprung from the very bowels of the earth, stood Rohan Gwenfern.

Not at the first look did Master Arfoll recognise his pupil; for already the man was cruelly changed. His hair was wild and his beard unshaven, his eyes bloodshot and sunken, his face careworn and pale. It does not take many hours, of hunting to turn a human being into an animal; and already Rohan had the wild listening look of a hunted thing. He seemed almost like a man uprisen from the grave; for his clothes were torn and covered with damp loam, one sleeve of his jacket was rent and his arm bare to the elbow, and, to crown all, his feet were bare.

His height and powerful frame betrayed him most. Moreover, despite his wild appearance, he was still physically beautiful. The head was still that of a lion, the hair still golden; the eyes still full of their far away, visionary, leonine look.

"Rohan!" at last ejaculated Master Arfoll, half questioningly, for he thought Rohan was many miles away, and could scarce believe his eyes.

"Yes, it is I!" answered Rohan, with a quick forced laugh, as if in mockery of his own appearance; and he added, shaking the hair from his eyes, "I was hiding within the dolmen, waiting till you were done with your pupils. By St. Gildas, it was a gloomy tomb that, for a living man I thought you would never have done."

He laughed again. There was a curious restless recklessness in his manner, and his eyes instinctively looked this way and that, all round him.

The schoolmaster placed his hand gently on his arm, looking anxiously into his face.

"Rohan! how is this? What has happened?"

Rohan set his teeth together and answered the look.

"It has come as I feared—that is all."

"What has come?"

"The Conscription."

"That I knew. But then?"

"And I am drawn!" answered Rohan. "Ten days ago was the drawing, and the day before yesterday was the medical inspection. A week since old Pipriac and a file of soldiers called to pay me their first visit. Unfortunately, I was not at home, and could not entertain them."

He laughed again, a laugh full of fierceness and fear. All was now clear to the schoolmaster, and infinite pity filled his heart.

"My poor Rohan!" he said, softly. "I have been praying for thee ever since we parted, and it has come to this. It is a sad fatality, my son, a sad fatality. And thou art in revolt—God help thee, for it is terrible!"

Rohan turned his face away, to hide the mist that clouded his eyes. These tender words shook him like a charm. Suddenly he took both the schoolmaster's hands within his own.

"I knew that it was coming, and it came, though I did not attend the drawing, and the number was drawn in my name. When the conscripts returned, I defied them and the Emperor; some one reported that I was refractory. A message came commanding my appearance at Traonili. I did not go. Another; and I stayed at home. After that it spread, and they came to arrest me. My own friends were worst, for they could not bear that they should go and I

should escape. Four days ago they hunted me from home. I laughed at them, for I knew the ways a thousand times better than they. Well, I was in despair: I thought of thee. I have walked two nights following thee and asking after thee. Yesterday I was nearly trapped in a strange village out there; I had to fling away *sabots* and to run; but a soldier caught me by the sleeve, as you see. It is hot work, Master Arfoll. It is so they hunt wolves in the Forest of Bernard."

He spoke rapidly, as if fearing and deprecating any censure. At every sentence his friend's face grew paler and graver. At the end he sadly shook his head, and was silent. Rohan continued—

"I questioned at night, when they could not recognise me, and I found you were in Traonili. This morning I followed you, always hiding when strangers appeared, for they might know. When you came this way I saw you were not alone, and I hid yonder and waited. I was in dread that you might accompany them up to the farms. Then I sprang out, as you see!"

The plain was solitary, and they walked on side by side seaward. The sward was soft and green beneath their feet, the furze all around them grew breast−high, finches twittered on every spray, and many larks sang overhead. Here and there grew bunches of primroses, and wild violets were stirring under the sod. Beyond, the sea was sparkling, and the purple shadows of the capes stretched out far away.

"Speak, then! what am I to do?"

Master Arfoll started, for he had been plunged in deep thought.

"My son, it is terrible!—I am stupefied—−I cannot advise you, for I see no hope."

"No hope?"

"Only one."

"And that?"

"To deliver yourself up to the authorities and crave forgiveness; men are precious now, and they will rejoice over thee. Otherwise I see no way; for if they find thee afterwards, it is death."

Rohan made a scornful gesture.

"I know that; but in any case I can die, and they shall not take me alive against my will. But say, is this your advice, that I should give myself up?"

"I see no other way."

"That I should become a soldier of the Emperor?"

"If it is against thy will God will acquit thee. Rohan, it is a man against the world."

"Go on."

"And even in battle thou mayst serve God. Thou wilt bear a weapon, but it will be thy fault if it takes any creature's life; and then, thou mayst come back living when all is done."

Rohan listened with downcast eyes.

"What more?" he asked.

"No more. I know no other hope, my son."

"Can I not escape?—out of France?—to another country?"

Master Arfoll shook his head and pointed.

"That way lies Vannes; that way Nantes; that way Brest; and between these towns thousands of villages. On every roadside, at every *cabaret*, they are watching for deserters."

"If I could reach Morlaix, where there are ships!"

"It is impossible. From hence to Kromlaix is the loneliest part of Brittany; all the rest is full of eyes. No disguise would save thee, for thou art a man in a hundred. Thou hast felt it already. They would discover thee, and then,—no mercy!"

Rohan seemed not in the least astonished. He had not questioned Master Arfoll with the air of a man having much hope left: rather like a man who had weighed all his chances and knew them well beforehand. When the schoolmaster had finished, Rohan said quietly, looking up—

"To yield myself up! To become a soldier of the Emperor! Well, that is not the help for which I came."

He paused, and then continued rapidly—

"My father—for you will let me call you that!—you do not do me justice; you think I am weak and infirm of purpose; you advise me as if I were little Katel yonder, or her brother, or any child. That is not fair; for I am a man. When a man swears an oath before God it is that man's place to keep it or die. My father, do you remember

that night when we watched the women at the Fountain, and when I asked you would a man be justified?”

Master Arfoll inclined his head in assent. His eyes now sought Rohan's face with a new astonishment, for he saw there a soul in open revolt with nature against the inhumanities of man. He felt rebuked, for indeed he had given his counsel as to any common creature, hoping and instructing for the best. But now he was reminded, as in many a happier day he had been reminded before, that Rohan Gwenfern was no common creature, but one made in the most unique mould of nature.

“Yes, you remember!” continued Rohan. “Well, your counsel was unkind, for it bade me break my oath. I said I would never become a soldier; that while breath filled my body I would never cause another creature's death; that I might be killed, but that I would never kill. The time has come, and I am to be proved. You say there is no escape; but, as I said before, I can die.”

All the wild recklessness had departed, and he spoke now in a low voice, solemnly and gently. His tones and looks were not to be mistaken; they expressed a decided will and purpose. Master Arfoll's seed had borne fruit indeed; it was the Pupil now who taught and admonished the Master.

Tears were on Master Arfoll's cheeks, and Rohan saw them—saw them and trembled at them, though there were no tears on his own. They walked slowly on, till they came to the edge of the cliffs, and saw beneath them the sea rolling in on dark ribbed sands. Then Rohan sat on a rock close to the edge, and, leaning his cheek on his open palm, looked seaward.

Presently he said, quietly, with the air of one fisherman making a remark to another, “There will be wind to−night, and rain. Look at that bank of clouds creeping up in the south−west.”

Master Arfoll did not reply; never had he seemed so reticent. After a pause, not changing his attitude, Rohan spoke again.

“Master Arfoll, you are not angry?”

Angry! With those tears still gathering in his eyes, with that tender trouble still lingering on his face! He turned to Rohan and answered him, placing one hand on his shoulder.

“I am angry with myself. To be so weak! to feel so helpless! to know such things are done, and yet be unable to lift a hand! My son, I deserved your rebuke, for you are right and I was wrong. It is wrong to acquiesce in evil, even to save one's life; it is accursed to draw a sword for that man, even though France itself is threatened. I weep for thee as for my own child, to see thee so troubled, so pursued; but I say in my heart, 'God bless him! he is right!—he is a brave man, and were I indeed his father I should be proud of such a son.”

Long before the words were finished Rohan had risen to his feet. Stretching out his hands, he cried—

“My father, you have spoken at last, and it was for those words I came.”

He stood trembling, with the sunlight playing on his hair, and on his face a look which, if seen in a poet or a musician, would be called inspiration.

“I came for those words! All are against me, save my mother and thou! all are against me, even the one I love best in the world. A good father would rather have his son die than live dishonoured; and thou art my good father, and to go to war is dishonour, though they think it glory. Thou hast made me strong, my father—strong and happy. Give me now thy blessing, and let me go!”

Master Arfoll started and trembled.

“*My* blessing! Rohan, it is not worth giving! You would say so, if you knew all.”

But Rohan had sunk upon his knees, looking up to Master Arfoll's face.

“*Bless* me, my father! Thou art the only good man I know; men say too thou wast once a Priest. Your words, your love, have made me what I am, and your blessing will make me better and stronger still. You have told me that I am right, that God will approve me, that I shall be justified. Now bless me, and leave all the rest to God.”

He bowed his head; and then and there, touching his hair with gentle hands, and uplifting a pallid face to heaven, Master Arfoll blessed him. Worse blessings have been given, even by Saints well known in the Calendar!

Chapter 17. IN THE STORMY NIGHT

Rohan Gwenfern's well−trained eyes had not deceived him. The bad weather was coming, and that afternoon it came.

Parting from Master Arfoll, who slowly retreated up to the peaceful farms among which he was then dwelling, Rohan pursued his way along the brink of the crags. Between him and the island the yellow−blossomed furze grew a tall man's height, and more than once, to find a path, he had to crawl down and creep like a fly along the very face of the crag, which was touched here and there by the sun to rosy light, with silver glimmers of mica and felspar. The solitude grew lonelier the further he went. Not a soul was to be seen on that dizzy path which wound slowly out to the great promontory of Pointe du Croix.

The expression of his face was now tolerably calm. The wild hunted look had vanished, to be replaced by a sad self−possession; for as the dark waves broke at his feet, as the white gulls hovered over his head, as the goats of the crags walked slowly and fearlessly from his path, he felt the companionship of Nature, the happiness and freedom of a solitude that was not solitary, of a loneliness that was not quite alone. He had always loved such joys; now he loved them almost to madness, for he was a man against the World.

He was in revolt against his fellows. He had refused to follow the Phantom that was beckoning his generation.

Instead of being bound like a slave in a soldier's livery and carrying a soldier's butchering load, he was free—he could move and live as he pleased, and if necessary he could die as he pleased. Not a sea−bird on the wing, not a seal softly floating in the watery empyrean, was more justified than he. The heart of Earth throbbed with him—he could feel it as he threw himself down on the soft green grass. The living waters leaped and rejoiced with him; he could see them glancing for miles on miles with rhythmic joy. The air exulted and blew joyfully upon him; he drank it with slow heavings of the breast, and his strength grew. It was something, after all, to be a man. It was more to be admitted to the sacrament of Nature, partaken of by all those creatures and creations which bemoan the cruelty of Men.

The last touch of this sacrament came from a good Man's blessing. Before that was given he had been weak and afraid; now he came back to Nature, happy and resolved.

Yes, momentarily happy; for persecution brings its happiness, when it draws forth the untold treasures of courage and self−confidence that hide in a human breast. Rohan Gwenfern had always felt himself superior to his fellows; since, let us admit it at once, he combined with his natural beneficence a fierce animal pride. He was not common, nor felt like mere slaves of the sword or the plough. Revolt developed this pride to a passion. He loved the frightful odds against him, and he was ready to meet them.

These were the thoughts and feelings that kept his heart up for many a mile, and made him almost forget his mother and Marcelle; but as the afternoon darkened, and the weather began to change from sunshine to a thin dreary rain, he began again to be conscious of desolation.

By this time he had reached the utmost verge of the promontory of Pointe du Croix.

It was desolate as Death. The rain was now falling heavily. A slate−coloured mountain of water rose over the point, turned to livid white, hovered, and broke in a fourfold cataract right over the outmost rocks. The sound was terrible, like the sound of innumerable chariot wheels, like the roar of a thousand cannon. On the extremest place of safety sat in rows hundreds of cormorants, both black and green; and although the cataracts of foam broke momently close to their webbed feet, many were asleep with their heads beneath their wings.

Here Rohan sat and rested, far away from mortal view. The cormorants below sat within thirty yards of his feet, but none heeded him. Two ravens, a male and a female, passed constantly to and fro above his head, wheeling in beautiful circles, and hunting the cliffs like hawks of prey; often they wheeled so close that he might have struck them with a stone.

Presently he drew from his breast a piece of black bread, and began to eat. He looked round for water, but none was near; so he caught the rain in his hollowed hands, and drank it, and was refreshed.

All this was nothing new. Hundreds of times he had done for sheer pleasure what he now did from sore necessity. Never, however, had solitude possessed so keen a zest.

It was here, seated alone on the promontory of Pointe du Croix, that he conceived his plans. When he arose

and walked again, his ideas were all matured, and he turned his steps eastward, to his native village.

When night fell it found him walking before a wild storm of wind and rain on the desolate track of moorland called Vilaine. Not a habitation was to be seen, not a sign of humanity in any form. Herds of wild cattle crouched together in the rain, and on the edges of the crags ran flocks of wild goats. Lines of menhirs covered this plain, like lines of giants petrified, and as the wild rain smote upon them, and ran like dark tears down their jagged cheeks, they seemed coming to life and stirring in answer to the Spirit of the Storm.

Amidst these stony phantoms Rohan fled. Fortunately, the wind was at his back and smote him on. Sometimes he paused to shelter in the shadow of a menhir; then after a time he hastened on again.

The night grew blacker and blacker, till he could scarcely see a yard along the plain. The rain fell in torrents and the wind shrieked. Overhead there was a confused motion and murmur—

"Dant etiam sonitum patuli super æquora mundi"

—the sound of the clouds roaring over the waters of the wide−spreading upper world. On his left hand, a motion and murmur no less terrible—that of the storm−vexed sea sounding upon its shores. Heaven and ocean seemed confusedly mixed together, as in the awful Promethean tempest. Woe to the traveller on the plain of Vilaine that night, if he had been any other than Rohan Gwenfern.

But Rohan fought his way as if by instinct. He had more than once been on the great plain before, and he knew by the situation of many of the menhirs how to steer his course. Soaked to the skin, drenched so terribly that the wind tore off parts of his dress in strips, bareheaded and barefooted, he rushed along, as a boat with rent sail flees before the wind.

Suddenly he paused and started back.

A flash of crimson light arose from the very edge of the ocean, illuminating the darkness.

At first superstition seized him, and he shrank afraid; but in a moment he recovered himself; crept forward, and looked again.

The flash continued, now coming, now going, like the gleam of a lighthouse lamp.

Suddenly, instead of turning away, he ran forward in the direction of the light. The rain fell heavily, the storm shrieked, but he saw all clearly soon—a great crimson fire burning on the very edge of the crag, and sending a wild stream of light out upon the tempestuous sea.

He crept closer, and saw distinctly, surrounding the fire, some dozen figures running round and round like the fiends of an Inferno.

An ordinary Breton would have crossed himself and flown; and indeed such an apparition, seen in such a solitude and on such an night, might well appal even the stoutest heart. Rohan was not so daunted. He paused and looked, and now, wafted on the wind, he distinctly heard voices.

Then crouching down almost to the ground, he crept fifty yards closer still, and gazed in horror once again.

Close to the edge of the cliffs—held down by ropes attached to enormous stones—stood a huge cage of iron, in which burnt a fire of bog oak, bushes of furze, and dry sods of peat; and surrounding it, as the flame leaped and darted in the wild breath of the tempest, were seven or eight men and two or three old women. Some, running round and round the cage, momently shut out the light from the sea; others sat on the grass glaring at the flame, their features horribly illuminated; and one *groach,* or old woman, like a very Witch of Endor, was leaning forward over the flame and chattering wildly as she warmed her skinny hands.

Within a few yards of this group stood a low menhir, partly sheltering them from the torrents of rain; and crawling up close in the shadow of this, Rohan listened and watched.

"Bad luck to Penruach this night!" said a voice. "It is too dark out there even to see our fire."

"That's as St. Lok wills," croaked the old woman. "If he means to send us luck, the luck will come."

Rohan shuddered. He knew his company now. The creatures on whom he gazed were fishers from Penruach, whose wrecking propensities even the severe laws passed after the Revolution had never been able to extinguish, and who regarded every passing ship as legitimate plunder. This St. Lok of theirs, by whom the old crone swore, had been a wrecker too; for, if tradition was to be believed, he was an antique Christian who spent his time in luring to destruction the ships of infidel invaders, and who was presently canonised for his pains!

Outside the point of vantage where this group gathered, stretched for miles one black neck of fatal reefs, partially covered and partially submerged. Dark as the night was, Rohan could see the flashing of foam−white breakers far out at sea; and wherever the horrible light from the cage fell in one long stream across the water, it

shone only on the whiteness of broken foam or on black edges of rock.

Rohan hesitated. He knew and loathed the horrible work the creatures were about, but he was also cognizant of his own danger and wished to act with caution. His resolution was soon taken, and he acted upon it at once.

“Lok! Lok! send us a ship!” cried another woman, using the first line of an old distich. “St. Lok is deaf it seems!” she added bitterly.

“Don't cry so loud, mother,” cried a man. “'Tis enough to waken the dead. Come, drink! Luck to St. Lok, and luck to the men of Penruach!”

A bottle was passed across to the woman, and she raised it to her lips. As she did so a wild shriek, startling and shrill, broke upon the night. All, men and women alike, leaped panic−stricken to their feet.

“See!” shrieked a man. *“An l du! an l du!”* and he pointed at the menhir.

On the very top of the stone stood a gigantic figure waving its arms, with an unearthly scream. Its form seemed misshapen and bloody, its face glared horribly. Elevated so high, it seemed unspeakably terrible, and the boldest man there was panic−stricken.

“It is St. Lok himself!” shrieked one, flying past into the night.

“An l du! An l du!” said the others, stumbling, shrieking, flying, scattering themselves like foam into the darkness.

In a minute the place was deserted, and Rohan, with a wild laugh, leaped down. His stratagem had succeeded. By fixing his hands and feet in the fissures of the stone, he had slowly attained its summit, and emerged upon the awe−struck sight of the wreckers. Not without some peril was this accomplished, for the sea was shrieking beneath his feet, and one false trick of the wind might have cast him over.

Springing down upon the cage, he seized it with all his strength, loosened it from its ropes and stones, and cast it over into the boiling sea. For one moment it illumined the waters, then it sank and disappeared.

The darkness that followed was so complete that Rohan, whose eyes were blinded by the light, could at first distinguish nothing; and overwhelmed by the fury of wind and rain, he cast himself upon the ground.

Rising presently, when his eyes were accustomed to the darkness, he silently pursued his way.

Chapter 18. THE PRAYERS OF TWO WOMEN

The drawing was over, the medical inspection had taken place, and the conscripts of Kromlaix knew their fate.

Gildas Derval passed the inspection with flying colours; and being by this time fully plied with brandy and martial inspiration, he swaggered about like a very veteran.

Now, it so happened that the wish of his heart was granted, and Hoël was a conscript too. Hoël had drawn "twenty−seven," and as two of those who had drawn lower numbers turned out unfit for service, not to speak of Rohan, who was *non est,* he was enrolled and passed among the fatal twenty−five. The Corporal was in his glory, the twins full of bravado, the mother disconsolate. In a few days they would receive their tickets, and have to march.

Meantime, the hue and cry had begun for the refractory "number one."

A body of *gendarmes* from St. Gurlott, headed by old Jacques Pipriac, were scouring the village day and night while the conscripts were aiding them as far as lay in their power. All in vain. After the first attempt made to arrest him, Rohan was invisible.

"Malediction!" cried Pipriac to poor Mother Gwenfern one day, as for the fourth or fifth time they searched her cabin. "Could I but lay my hand on him, he should sweat for it. Thou hast him hidden—deny it not! Out with him! A thousand devils!"

And they prodded the mattresses with their bayonets, and turned out cupboards too small to conceal a dog, and looked everywhere into most unlikely places, while Mother Gwenfern cried bitterly—

"Ah, Sergeant Pipriac! I never thought you could be so cruel to his father's son!"

The Sergeant, a little one−eyed, hook−nosed martinet, very fond of the bottle, twirled his grey moustache and scowled.

He had been a great friend of her husband, and his present conduct seemed ungrateful.

"Malediction! one must do one's duty. Mother, thy son is a fool; and were I not after him, there would be others far worse to do the job! Come, let us have him, and I vow by the bones of St. Triffine that he shall be pardoned, and become a brave soldier of the Emperor."

And while one of the *gendarmes* pushed his head up the chimney, and another held his nose over the black swinging−pot, as if expecting to find the fugitive there, the mother answered—

"I have told you he is not here! I do not know where he is! Perhaps he has found a ship, and gone to England!"

"Tous les diables! to England!"

"Yes, Sergeant Pipriac."

"Bah! that is not so easy, and he knows better than to trust himself in a land of wild beasts. No, he is here. I know it—I smell it as a dog smells a rat. Malediction! that the son of my good comrade Raoul Gwenfern should turn out a coward."

The widow's pale cheek flushed.

"He is no coward, Sergeant Pipriac."

"He will not fight. He creeps away and hides. He is afraid."

"It is not that. My Rohan is afraid of nothing, but he will never become a soldier."

The old fellow snapped his fingers.

"If I had him here, I would read him a lesson. Ah, if he would but take example by his two brave cousins, Hoël and Gildas. Those are men, if you like! each could strangle an ox! And their uncle, the Corporal, Mother Gwenfern—there's a man!"

Turning to his file of *gendarmes,* he cried—

"Shoulder arms! march! the fox is not here!"

Then turning again at the door, as if still twitted by his conscience, he cried—

"Good day, mother! but, mind you, we shall come again; it is not our fault, but the Emperor's orders. Take my advice, and persuade him; in another day it will be too late. Now, then—march!"

They were gone, and the widow was left to her lonely reflections. She sat silent by the fire, thinking. She was a tall woman, with ashen grey complexion and white hair. She was the half−sister of Margarid Maure, who had

married the fisherman Derval, brother of the Corporal; and being a very quiet, retiring woman, given to her own thoughts, she had seen very little of her sister or her children. People thought her unsociable and melancholy. Indeed her whole heart was filled with her love for her only son.

When she told the Sergeant that she was ignorant of Rohan's whereabouts, she only spoke the truth. She had not seen her son for several days, and she was almost hoping that he had made good his escape to some safer district. Poor woman, she little knew how thickly the country was covered with snares and traps for deserters, and how difficult it was to elude the vigilant eyes of the public officials.

From the beginning she had regretted Rohan's deliberate and terrible revolt. Everybody said it was cowardly. Even his own blood relations turned against him; the whole village talked of him in no flattering way. Twenty times in a day the gossips brought her news which frightened her, and made her poor heart beat painfully, and her lips grow blue. No one thought Rohan could escape for long; and when he was caught, he would be shot like a dog.

Far better, she argued, had he obeyed at once, and trusted to the good God for help. Many had gone and come home safe enough; witness Uncle Ewen, who was covered with old wounds. Her heart was hard against the Emperor, but only as, in days of trouble, it had been hard against God. And the Emperor was like God—so great, so very far away!

She sat listening to the wind, which was rising that afternoon, and to the rain, which was beating against the door. Crouched near to her, with its eyes closed in the sleepy light of the fire, was Jannedik, the she−goat, her son's favourite, and now her only companion.

It was a small room, rudely furnished with coarse oaken table and chairs. The floor was of earth, the black rafters stretched overhead. On the wall hung fishing and fowling nets, a fowler's pole and hook, etc.; and pasted near the fireplace was a coloured print similar to the painting in Notre Dame de la Garde, representing shipwrecked sailors on a raft, kneeling all bareheaded, while a naked child, with a halo round his head, came walking to them on the sea.

The afternoon was very chilly and dreary, and where she sat she could hear the sea moaning as it does when stormy weather is coming. Presently Jannedik rose, pricked up her ears, and listened.

She had quick ears, had Jannedik, and would have been as good as a watch−dog, if only she could have barked her warnings.

She was right; some one was coming. Presently the latch moved.

Mother Gwenfern did not turn round at first; she was too used to the neighbours coming in and out, and she thought it was one of them. But when Jannedik, as if quite satisfied, sank down again on the hearth, Mother Gwenfern moved on the form, and saw her niece Marcelle, taking off a large black cloak which was wet with rain.

They had only met once since that scene on the night of the drawing, and then Mother Gwenfern had been very angry and bitter. Seeing now who it was, she grew pale, and her heart began to palpitate, as, with no greeting, she turned her eyes again upon the fire.

“It is I, Aunt Loïz!” said Marcelle softly.

There was no answer. The widow still felt her heart full of anger against the Dervals, and she was very indignant at seeing Marcelle.

“I could not bear to think of thee sitting here all alone, and though my uncle did not wish it, I have come over. Ah, God, thou art lonely! It is dreadful when all the world is against one's own son.”

The widow stirred in her chair, and said, still looking at the fire—

“It is yet more dreadful when one's own blood relations hate us most. It was an ill day when my sister Margarid married a Derval, for you are all alike, though Ewen Derval is the worst. Some day, when you marry, you will know what it is to suffer like me, and you will pity me then.”

Hanging her cloak against the wall, Marcelle came nearer and sat down upon the form by the window's side. The widow shrank away a little, but said nothing. Marcelle, too, fixed her eyes upon the fire, and leant forward, warming her hands as she continued to speak.

“You are unjust to me, Aunt Loïz. I pity you now—ah, God, how I pity you! Uncle Ewen pities you, too, and he is so vexed and dull that he hardly tastes a morsel. Our house is nearly as sad as this, for Hoël and Gildas are both to go, and mother does nothing but cry.”

It was a curious sight to see those two women—one so old and grey, the other so fresh and pretty—sitting on

one form side by side, not looking in each other's face, but both, whether speaking or listening, only gazing at the fire. Jannedik seemed to have her own opinions on the subject, for she rose quietly and put her large head between Marcelle's knees.

There was a long silence, and the wind and the sea cried still louder outside. Finally the widow said, in the same low voice—

"Why have you come, child? What has brought you here at last?"

"Ah, Aunt Loïz, can you not guess? I came to ask after Rohan—whether he is still safe."

The answer was a short, hard, bitter laugh.

"So! Well, he is safe, if you desire to know. You may go back to those who sent you, and tell them that much from me. Yes!" she continued, her voice rapidly rising in anger, "I know well what you come for, Marcelle Derval. You wish to find out where my poor boy is hidden, and then betray him to Ewen Derval and his enemies. You are a fool for your pains, and may God punish you for your wickedness, though your mother was of my blood!"

Marcelle was a high−spirited girl, and it is doubtful if she would have borne as much from any other woman in the world. Strange to say, she was now quite gentle, and only put her hand on her aunt's arm, saying—

"Don't! don't speak like that, for the love of God!"

Something in the tone startled the widow, and turning, she saw that Marcelle's eyes were blind with tears. She gazed in wonder, for Marcelle was not given to the melting mood.

"Marcelle, what do you mean? Why do you cry?"

The tone was sharp, but the look of the speaker's face was kinder. Marcelle rose, trembling.

"Never mind! You think I have no heart! Well, I will go, for you do not trust me, and I have no right to vex you. But if you knew! if you knew!"

She turned as if to go; but the widow, reaching out her lean hand, restrained her.

"Marcelle, speak!"

Marcelle stood moveless, and, still trembling, looked into her aunt's face.

"Then Rohan has never spoken, Aunt Loïz! Well, I made him promise not to tell!"

"I do not understand!"

But the widow, from the new light on her niece's cheeks. was beginning to understand very well.

"I love Rohan, Aunt Loïz! I did not know it till lately, but now I love him dearly, and I cannot bear to hear you say such hard things of me,—for he has asked me to be his wife!"

The widow uttered an exclamation. The declaration did not surprise her so much in itself, for she had often had her suspicions, but it was startling as coming at that moment and under those circumstances. She looked keenly for a long time at Marcelle, who hung her head, and went alternately red and pale. At last she said, in a more gentle tone than before—"Sit down, Marcelle!"

Marcelle again sat down by her side, comforted and strengthened in so far that her confession was over. Then came a longer silence than ever; for the widow was in her own mind going over the past, and wondering over many things, in a waking dream. Marcelle was beginning to think her angry, when she said, in a low voice, as if talking to herself—

"If you love him as you say, it is strange that you brought him no better luck!"

This was a home−thrust, for Marcelle had often thought the same herself.

"It is strange, as you say!" she cried. "Ah! it was terrible to me, for I had prayed to draw a lucky chance. Aunt Loïz, I did it for the best. He bade me draw; and he was not there; and if none of his kin had appeared for him, the black mark would have been put at once against his name. Uncle Ewen saved him that, for he spoke up and said he was ill. And now, Aunt Loïz, if he would only go! Uncle Ewen has influence, and Rohan would be pardoned; excuses could be made; ah, if he would only give himself up at once! Hoël and Gildas are both going, and he would have company. We two would pray for him night and day while he was away, would we not, Aunt Loïz? Ah, if he would be wise!"

By this time the women were close together, holding each other's hands, and both were weeping. It was blessed, the widow now felt, to weep a little with one who loved her son, when all others were against him. But she cried, between her tears—

"No, it is impossible!"

"If I could only see him and speak to him! But he is so hard to understand. Ah, God! to hear every one, even the children, say our Rohan is afraid—it almost breaks my heart."

"He is not afraid, Marcelle!"

"This is what makes it all so strange. I know he is so brave, braver than all the rest; and yet, look you, he does not act like a man. When the Emperor calls for his children, he stays. When all the others take their chance fairly, he keeps away. When his number is drawn, he hides—he who is so strong. What can I answer, when Gildas and Hoël say that he is afraid, and even Uncle Ewen cries shame upon his name?"

"He is so headstrong! and Master Arfoll has filled his brain with strange notions."

"You are right," cried Marcelle, eagerly: "it is Master Arfoll that is to blame. Ah, he is a wicked man, that, and no friend to the good Emperor, or to God."

Thus the two women conversed together, till the ice between them thawed, and they were quite reconciled. Mother Gwenfern had never doubted that Rohan was mad to resist the imperial authority, and much as her heart ached to think of parting with him, the dreadful uncertainty of his present fate was still more painful. About Master Arfoll, too, she was agreed, as we have seen. She could not understand that extraordinary being, and in her superstition she had often looked upon him with absolute dread. He was too clever to be a safe adviser for her son, and he never went to mass or confession, and men said he had been guilty of strange deeds in his youth. Ah, if her poor Rohan had never met such a teacher! So thought she; and so thought the excited girl at her side.

So by−and−by it came to pass that Mother Gwenfern was holding Marcelle's little hand between her own trembling fingers, and softly smoothing it, with tender words.

"Thou art a good girl," she said, "and I would wish no better for my daughter, if that could be. It was not thy fault that Rohan spoke to thee in that way, instead of first speaking to me; men do foolish things for a girl, and Rohan is not wise—the good God help him! Oh, my son, my son!"

And she began again to weep bitterly, rocking herself to and fro, while Marcelle tried in vain to comfort her; nay, not wholly in vain, for there was solace in the touch of the soft young hands, in the sound of the gentle voice, in the very breathing and presence of one who loved her boy. The two hearts throbbed together, as hand clasped in hand the women wept together; and presently sinking down on their knees, while Jannedik, the goat, blinked great brown eyes in astonishment, both women prayed that the man they loved might cease his mad purpose, might come in and yield to the inevitable decree, might trust himself in the hands of the good God, who would preserve him for them throughout the war.

By such prayer, by the prayer of those nearest and dearest to him, is a man often softly drawn away from an immortal purpose; where power and strength might avail nothing, tears and a little love avail much, to shake the soul's sense of some pitiless duty. An infant's little hands may thus draw the just man from justice, the righteous man from righteousness; for justice and righteousness are alike awful, while to stoop and kiss is sweet. When a man's house is armed in affection against him, when, instead of help and a sword, he finds on his own hearth only feebleness and a love that cannot understand, strong indeed must be his purpose, supreme indeed must be his faith, if he walks still onward and upward to the terrible heights of God.

Chapter 19. DOWN BY THE SHORE

When Marcelle emerged from the widow's cottage, her tears were all dry, and she walked swiftly through the rain in the direction of the village. The wind was still rising upon the sea, and the sea, although it was still calm, had that indescribable hollow concussion which is only to be heard previous to stormy weather. The fishermen were drawing their flat−bottomed boats up higher, and carrying their nets and ropes within doors for shelter, while a few strong old men, in their nightcaps and blue guernseys, were stolidly smoking in the rain and nodding their heads out at the sea. The tide was three−quarters flowed, and all the mountains were long covered.

Instead of turning inland up the main street of the village, Marcelle passed along the wet shingle, until she had to thread her way among the *caloges,* or upturned boats converted into houses and stores, which clustered on the strand just above high−water mark. Most of these *caloges* had iron funnels to let out the smoke; and on their roofs, or keels, thick slimy grass was growing, and on more than one of the roofs goats were contentedly grazing. Many of the doors were closed, for the wind blew right into them; but on one or two thresholds men lounged, or women sat busy knitting, or picturesque children crawled. This was the lower village, exclusively devoted to the fishing population, and quite inferior in social status to the more solid village above.

Marcelle soon found what she was seeking,—a stone cabin built just above these amphibious dwellings, and newly thatched. Here, in the shelter of the doorway, a girl sat in an old−fashioned armchair, busily teasing and cording wool, and singing to herself.

“Welcome, Marcelle!” she said, quietly using the usual Breton greeting.

“God be with you, Guineveve!” answered Marcelle, smiling; then, standing in the doorway and looking down at the busy fingers, she added, “How is Mother Goron?”

“You would say she was ten years younger,” answered Guineveve. “She sings about the place at her work, and she will never rest, and she prays for the Emperor every night, because he has not taken Jàn away.”

A faint colour came into the girl's cheeks as she spoke, but her face, seen in its tight snowy coif, was still very pale. As she sat there, in her dark dress with the white stomacher and sleeves, in her blue petticoat and stockings and leather shoes with buckles, you would have said, had you been a Kromlaix man, “That is the girl I could dance with from night till dawn of day.”

She was not Kromlaix born, but was a native of Brest. When she was a child only a year or two old her parents died, and Mother Goron, who was a distant relation, brought the little one back with her from Brest, where she had been on business concerning a pension she inherited from her husband, Jacques Goron, who had been a marine and had died in the lazaretto. From that day Mother Goron brought up Guineveve as her own child, with her only son Jan.

“What news?” she said, looking up quickly, after a pause.

“None. Aunt Loïz does not know where he is. He has not been near home for many nights, and she is growing afraid.”

“It is very strange.”

“He is quite desperate and mad. I sometimes shudder, for he may have drowned himself in his rage. If I could only speak with him!”

They were talking, of course, of Rohan; but the personal pronoun was quite enough, as the girls were in each other's confidence, and understood one another.

“Gildas is to go?” said Guineveve presently.

“Yes; and Hoël.”

“Even then, your mother has Alain and Jannick; and, then, there is Uncle Ewen. But it is terrible for the woman who has only one. If the Emperor had taken Jan, mother would have died.”

“But Aunt Loïz prays that *he* may go!”

“That is different. Ah, she has courage! If I had a son my heart would break.”

“She is grieving, too,” answered Marcelle. “It is the way of women. For my part, if I had a son and he was afraid, I should never love him any more. Think how terrible it would be if the good Emperor were served so by all his children, for whom he has done so much; he would be massacred, and then what would become of France?

If Rohan were in his right senses he would not hide away."

"Perhaps he is afraid," sighed Guineveve "Well, it is no wonder!"

Marcelle set her white teeth together, and trembled.

"If I thought it was *that,"* she cried, "I should hate him for ever and ever; I should then die of shame What is a man if he has not a man's heart, Guineveve? He is no more than a fish in the sea, that flashes off if you move your hand. No, no, he is brave. But I will tell you what I think—Master Arfoll has put a charm upon him; he is bewitched!"

Marcelle did not speak figuratively; she literally and simply meant that the schoolmaster had affected Rohan by some diabolical art.

"But Master Arfoll is a good man!" cried Guineveve.

"You may think that if you please, but I have my own thoughts. They say he was once a Priest, and now he is friends with no Priest but Father Rolland, who is friends with everybody. He knows cures for men and cattle, and they work like magic. I was told once up in St. Gurlott that he had the evil eye."

Guineveve shuddered, for she too had her superstitions,—how, indeed, could she avoid them, reared as she had been in so lonely and uncultivated an atmosphere? So when Marcelle crossed herself, she crossed herself too; but she looked up with a sad smile, saying—

"I do not believe that of Master Arfoll; and you must not say so to Mother Goron—he did her a great service long ago, and she thinks he is a saint, as pure as one of God's angels. Ah yes, he has the face of a good man!"

Marcelle's eyes flashed, and she was about to repeat her charges even more angrily, when Jàn Goron walked hurriedly up to the door. He paused, surprised at seeing Marcelle there, and then turned smiling to Guineveve, whose face kindled at his coming.

"Welcome, Jan!" said Marcelle.

Goron looked this way and that, as if fearing an eavesdropper; then said in a low voice, rapidly—

"I have news, Marcelle! He is not far away!"

Marcelle was about to utter a cry, when he placed his hand upon her arm.

"Hush! Come within, for the rain is heavy;" and when they were standing inside, with a full view of poor old Mother Goron bustling busily before the fire, he added, "He was seen at Ploubol yesterday, and a man recognised him, and he was nearly taken. He struck down the *gendarmes,* and that will make his case worse. There is no escape; he must soon be caught. He was last seen going in the direction of Traonili."

Marcelle wrung her hands in despair.

"Ah, God, he is lost—he is mad!"

"Have you seen the proclamations?" asked Goron, in the same low voice. "Well, they are posted up along the road, and there is one on the church gate, and another on your own door. They forbid one to give shelter or succour to any deserter on pain of death; they say that every conscript who has not answered to his name will be shot like a dog; there is to be no mercy,—it is too late."

Goron was deeply moved, for he was the one man in Kromlaix of whom Rohan had ever made a friend. In his character and his whole bearing there was a nobility akin to that of Rohan himself. And who that saw the quiet light in his eyes as he looked at Guineveve could doubt that he too loved and was loved in return?

When Goron mentioned the proclamations against deserters, Marcelle's heart went sick.

He had not told her, however, of the sight he had seen with his own eyes—old Corporal Derval himself, pipe in mouth, accompanied by the *gendarme* Pipriac and followed by Hoël and Gildas, strutting forth and sticking up with his own hands the paper that was now to be seen on his own door!

Marcelle was not one of those maidens who wear their hearts on their sleeves: she had martial blood in her veins, and was quite capable, literally and figuratively, of "standing fire." But this gnawing terror overpowered her, and she grew faint. All the memory of that happy day in the Cathedral of St. Gildas swam before her; she felt the embracing arms, the loving kiss; and then she seemed again to behold her lover as he had appeared on the night of the Conscription, wild−eyed, vehement, blaspheming all she held holy and sublime. It was curious, as illustrating the tenacity of her character, that she still stubbornly and firmly refused to believe that Rohan, in his extraordinary conduct, was actuated by the ordinary motives of cowardice and fear. She chose rather to think him the victim of some malignant fate, some diabolic spell such as "wise men" like Master Arfoll knew how to weave, than to dream that he acted under emotions which, in her simple idea, could be only both treasonable and base.

True, she remembered with a shiver his old expressions concerning the Emperor; but these, she always persuaded herself; were uttered when he was not in his “right mind.”

She did not speak now, but, leaning her forehead against the door, gazed drearily out into the rain. All the beautiful dream of her young love seemed blurred and blotted out by mist and tears.

“Marcelle,” whispered Guineveve, taking her hand softly, “do not grieve; all will be well yet!”

There was no answer, but a heavy sigh, and the pale firm face wore an expression of despairing pain.

“After all,” said Goron, sympathetically, “he may be pardoned, for the Emperor wants men. If he would only come in—even now!”

Marcelle was still silent, and presently she kissed Guineveve on either cheek, and held out her hands to Goron.

“I must go now,” she said quietly. “Mother will wonder where I am.”

Slowly, under the rain that was ever falling heavier and heavier, she moved through the streets of the village. She saw nothing, heard nothing—she was wrapt in a dream; though to look upon her as she passed, with her set lips and her quiet eyes, with her cloak wrapped round her, and her foot as firm yet light upon the ground as ever, one would scarcely have thought that she had any care.

Yet the great Sea was rising and crying behind her as she went, and before her soul a storm was spreading, more terrible than any sea.

Chapter 20. “THE POOL OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST”

A few days after the medical inspection of the conscripts, the order to march arrived. They were to go from home to Traonili, from Traonili to Nantes, and thence, after having joined their regiments, right on to the Rhine!

The experiences of the previous year had not brought the Emperor wisdom, and his struggle with Destiny was about to commence on a more enormous scale than ever. The loss of 500,000 men, with all their arms, ammunition, and artillery, had not daunted or even discouraged him; for he had merely uplifted his finger, and legions had come to take their place. Meantime, Prussia and Russia had shaken hands, and the Tugendbund had been formed, and all Germany had risen. On the 16th of March previous to the Conscription, Prussia had declared war; and now the patriotism of the Teuton youth was bursting forth like a volcano. At the head of this host stood the bigot Blucher, pupil of the great Friedrich. As if this were not enough, Sweden too had joined the confederacy against Bonaparte. And already the French had evacuated Berlin, and retreated on the Elbe.

Our story at present, however, concerns not the movements of great armies, but the fortunes of humble individuals. The summons to march had arrived, and the Derval household was as busy as it was troubled. At last came the eve of the departure, and the conscripts were to set forth, all together, at earliest dawn.

There was a busy gathering that night in the Corporal's kitchen. Sergeant Pipriac was there, his little eyes red with brandy; Mikel Grallon and several other friends of the twins had gathered to drink a parting glass. The mother was busy upstairs, turning over and fondling for the last time, and packing up in bundles, her sons' clothes, and weeping bitterly, while Marcelle tried in vain to comfort her. In many houses that night there was such weeping.

The twins sat moodily enough, depressed at heart now the time had indeed come. Even Uncle Ewen was out of spirits; for, after all, he knew the terrible odds of war, and he was very fond of his nephews.

“One thing you will escape, *mes garz,*” he said, puffing his pipe quietly, “and that is, all the hard words of the drill sergeant. You are soldiers ready made! 'Eyes right,' 'eyes left,' 'first position,' 'second position,' 'present arms'—bah! you know all that by heart, for you were bred in a soldier's house. They will be pleased with you for this, and you will get on, you will thrive. There is another thing you must know. When you are receiving cavalry, don't dig into your man in the old way—like this!—but turn your elbow and give a twist of the wrist—like that”—here the old burn−powder illustrated the action with his stick. “That is the trick of it, and you will soon learn.”

“I suppose so,” said Gildas gloomily. “The Russians and the Prussians can play at that trick too!”

“When you have once smelt powder, it will be all right,” returned their uncle; “and the best of it is, you will do that at once. There will be no delay, no worry—you are going straight to the Rhine—straight into the midst of the fun.”

“I wish I was going too!” sighed Alain; “it is like my luck.”

“Come, come,” cried Hoël, “thou wast pale as death that day of the drawing, and would have given thy right arm not to go.”

“I did not know then that you two were going.”

“Thy turn will come,” said the Corporal; “and thine too, Jannick. I will give you another wrinkle, youngsters!” he continued, turning again to the others. “Make friends with the corporal, and with the sergeant too, if you can; a glass of brandy goes a long way, and few of them will refuse. Don't waste your money on the sutler women, by treating all your comrades, like mad conscripts; but treat the corporal if he is willing, and, look you, you will have a friend in need. Don't be frightened at first by his gruff ways—address him with humility, and he will be satisfied.”

“All right, Uncle Ewen,” returned Gildas, holding up a glass of brandy. “Here's his health, whoever he is!”

“I myself have seen to your shoes, *mes garz,*” continued the Corporal. “Two pairs each, but neither new—soft as silk to the feet, and the best leather. I have known many a conscript go lame before he reached Nantes by starting in new shoes. Then there's your knapsacks! you will find them irksome at first, but the true trick is to strap them tight into the small of the back, not to let them hang loose as foolish conscripts do.”

Uncle Ewen gave his instructions very quietly; for the life of him, he could not help feeling dull. The company

was all very sad, and the younger men seemed to regard the twins as lambs in fair prospect of being slaughtered. Mikel Grallon was the only one that laughed. Boisterously, again and again, he clapped the twins on the back, and offered his hand, and clinked glasses with them. But drink had no effect that night in lighting up their hearts. They knew their mother was in tears upstairs, and that Marcelle was grieving too. They saw plainly enough that Uncle Ewen's talk was forced, and that even Sergeant Pipriac was sorry for them in his rough way. They were going to "glory" for the first time, and they would a great deal rather have stayed at home.

Late that evening, while the company in the kitchen were drinking, smoking, and talking, Marcelle quietly left the house and walked up the road which led out of the village.

The moon was at the full, but vast clouds driven by a high wind obscured its rays, and the night was very dark Showers of rain fell from time to time, and between the showers the moon looked out with a wan wistful face.

Running rather than walking, with nothing but her ordinary indoor costume to shield her from the showers, Marcelle rapidly made her way up the hill, passed the church with its churchyard and calvary (in passing which she crossed herself eagerly), and then, some hundred yards further, turned out of the road across an open heath. She was by this time breathless with speed, and her eyes looked from side to side timidly, as she pursued her way through the darkness. The path was obviously familiar to her, and, though she tripped several times, she never lost her way. Once, indeed, she stopped perplexed; but just then the moon looked out in its fullest brilliance, and she ran on again in the right direction.

By this time she had left the village a mile and a half behind. She was in the midst of a lonely heath thickly strewn with grey granite stones, with here and there little clusters of dwarf fir trees and wild furze.

Another shower came, blotting out the light of the moon, and the wind moaned very desolately. Still, with quickly palpitating heart, Marcelle crept on. When the moonlight appeared again in full brightness, she had found what she sought.

Towering above in the moon's rays was a colossal granite Cross, looking up to which she could see the body of the Christ, drooping the head and gazing into the gloom. Clustering all below it were wild shrubs, monstrous weeds, darnel and nettle and foxglove as high as a man's breast.

Marcelle trembled as she gazed up, crossing herself rapidly. Then creeping forward to the base of the Cross, she found a basin of blood−red granite, cracked across, but still capable of holding the rain and dew. It was brimful from the recent showers, and its contents resembled blood.

Now, this solitary basin, called in the dialect of the country the "Pool of the Blood of Christ," was very holy in the eyes of the villagers—more holy even than the wells for holy water in the church itself; for surely as the dews of Heaven fell into that basin they possessed the property of Christ's own blood, and could heal sickness where the sick one had much faith. That was not all. It was a common superstition that if a man or woman went thither when the moon was full, and dipped into the basin any portion of any article of attire or of anything to be worn about the body, that portion of inert matter would become "blessed," and have the power of warding off danger and even death from the wearer. Only one condition was attached to this blessing—that the "dipping" must be done in complete solitude and be kept a secret from all other living beings.

Creeping forward, and kneeling on her knees, despite the rank weeds that clustered round her, Marcelle said a short prayer; then, drawing from her breast two medals, she passed both into her right hand, and dropped them softly into the granite basin. Trembling with awe, she closed her eyes and repeated a prayer for the occasion, mentioning as she did so the names of Hoël and Gildas.

When she had finished she again slipped in her white hand and drew the medals forth.

"Christ be with me!" she said in Breton, thrusting them eagerly into her bosom.

The medals were of copper, and each as large as a crown−piece. They had been given to her long ago by the Corporal, and she had religiously preserved them; but now, when the twins were going away, she meant to give them one each, without explaining, of course, that they possessed a special "charm." They were handsome perforated medals, and, attached to a string, could be hung unseen over the heart. On one side of each was the laurelled image of the Emperor; on the other, the glimpse of a bloody battle, with the inscription—"AUSTERLITZ."

Her excitement had been great, and directly her task was over she moved away. Suddenly, ere she had gone many yards, she heard a sound of footsteps behind her.

She turned again sharply, but the darkness was great and she saw nothing. Crossing herself again, she began to

run.

That moment she again heard the footsteps behind her.

She stopped in terror and looked back. The moon gleamed out for an instant, and she could distinctly perceive a figure, earthly or unearthly, following close at her back.

A less courageous girl, under the tension of such emotions as Marcelle had felt that night, would have fainted; indeed, there was not another woman, and scarcely a man, in Kromlaix who would have ventured alone at such an hour, as she had done, to the “Pool of the Blood of Christ.” Marcelle was terror−stricken, but she still retained her senses. Seeing the figure approaching, she fled again.

But the figure was as fleet as she, and she heard its footsteps coming behind her, nearer and nearer; she ran and ran till her breath failed; the feet came nearer and nearer, and she could hear a heavy breathing behind her back.

With a tremendous effort she turned, determined to face her ghostly pursuer. Close to her, with his face gleaming white in the moon, was a man, and before she could see him clearly he spoke—in a low voice he uttered her name.

“Marcelle!”

She knew the voice instantly as that of her lover; yet, strange to say, though she had longed and prayed for this meeting, she shrank away, and made no answer. The moon came out brightly and illumined his figure from head to foot. Head and feet were bare, his form looked strange and distorted, the hair fell in wild masses about his face. He loomed before her like a tall phantom, and his voice sounded hollow and strange.

“Marcelle!—have you forgotten me? Yes, it is I;—and you are afraid!”

“I am not afraid,” answered Marcelle, recovering herself; “but you startled me—I thought it was a ghost.”

“I was resting yonder, and I saw you come to the 'Pool of the Blood of Christ!'“

Marcelle's reply was characteristic.

“You saw me! Then you have broken my charm.”

“Not at all,” answered Rohan, very coldly. “I do not know your errand, and I could not see you when you knelt. It is a cold night for you to be abroad. There, you shiver—hasten home.”

He spoke as if there was nothing between them, as if he were any stranger advising another; his voice rang cold and clear. She answered in the same tone.

“Hoël and Gildas are going to the wars to−morrow, and that is what brought me here. They will wonder why I stay so long.”

She made a movement as if to go. He did not stir a step to follow her. She turned her face again.

“It is strange to see you here; I thought you were far away. They are looking for you down there.”

Rohan nodded. “I know it.”

“There is a watch upon your mother's house day and night, and upon ours too. There are *gendarmes* from St. Gurlott in the village, with Pipriac at their head. There is a paper posted up on the houses, and your name is upon it; and there is a reward.”

“I know that also.”

Still so cold and calm. He stood moveless, looking upon her as if upon the tomb of a lost love. She could not bear it any longer. Casting away her mad pretence of indifference, she sprang forward and threw her arms around his neck.

“Rohan! Rohan! why do you speak to me like that?”

He did not resist her, but softly disengaged her arms, as she continued—

“We did not know what had happened—I have been heart−broken—Gildas and Hoël are going. They are mad against thee, all of them. It is terrible!”

“But *thou!”*

The endearing second personal pronoun was in requisition at last.

“And I—my Rohan, I have always been on thy side. They said thou wast afraid, but I told them they spoke falsely. They are all angry with me for defending thee. Kiss me, my Rohan! Wilt thou not kiss me?”—and after his cold lips came down and were quite close to hers, she cried, “Ah, my Rohan, I *knew* thou wouldst be wise. It is not too late, and thou wilt be forgiven if thou but march with the rest. Come down, come down! Ah, thank God that it is so! Uncle Ewen will intercede, and Gildas and Hoël will shake hands; it will be all well!”

She looked up in his face with passionate confidence and hope, and as she finished, kissed him again with her

warm ripe lips. With those white arms around his neck, with that fond bosom heaving against his own, he stood aghast.

"Marcelle, Marcelle!" he cried in a heart−broken voice.

"My Rohan!"

"Do you not understand *yet?* My God, will you not understand? It is not that—it is not that I have changed my mind. I cannot come down; I will never give myself up, alive!"

There were no warm arms around him now. Marcelle had drawn back amazed.

"Why, then, have you come back to Kromlaix?"

"To see *thee!* To speak to thee once more, whether I live or die!"

Trembling and crying, Marcelle took both his hands in hers. His were icy cold.

"Thou wilt come down! For my sake, for thy Marcelle! Ah, do not break my heart—do not let me hear them call thee coward. And if not for my sake, for thine own. Thou canst not escape them; they will be after thee day and night; thou wilt die. Mother of God, Son of God!—yes, die! My Rohan, the Emperor will be good to thee—come down!"

"And go to the war?"

"What then? Thou wilt come back like Uncle Ewen; all will look up to thee, and know thee for a brave man."

"And thou?"

"Wilt be thy wife, my Rohan! I swear it, dear. I will love thee, I will love thee."

"But if I die?"

"Then I will love thee more, and I will wear crepe upon my arm till I am old, and I will never wed another man. Thou wilt have died, my brave soldier, fighting for the Emperor. Thou wilt wait for me in Heaven, and I shall come to thee and kiss thee there."

There was passion enough in her voice, in her words, and in her kiss, to have swept away like a torrent any common man's resolve. Her tones, her looks, her living frame, all spoke, all were eloquent in Love's name, as she clung around him and drew him on. He shook before her impetuous appeal; his heart rose, his head swam, and his eyes looked wildly up to the cloudy moonlit heaven; but he was firm.

"Marcelle, it is impossible. I cannot go!"

"Rohan, Rohan!"

He tottered as if overpowered, and held his hand upon his heart. His whole frame trembled; he seemed no longer a strong man, but a shivering affrighted creature. Before he knew it he had sunk upon his knees.

"I cannot go—it is an oath. Farewell!"

She looked at him fixedly, as if to read his very soul. A terrible thought had flashed upon her.

"Rohan, speak! for God's sake, stand up and speak! Is it true what they say—that you are *afraid?"*

He rose to his feet and looked at her strangely.

"Speak, Rohan!"

"Yes, it is true."

"That you are afraid! That you are a—"

"It is all true," he answered. Had it been day she might have seen a strange smile on his tortured face. "I will not serve the Emperor, I will not go to war, because—well, because I am afraid?"

He did not explain his fear, for, had he done so, she could not have comprehended. He continued—

"It is best that you should understand at once, for ever, that I will never fight as soldiers fight; that is against my heart; and that I am all, perhaps, that you say. Were it otherwise, Marcelle, I think your love might tempt me; but I have not the courage to do what you bid me. There, you are shivering—it is so cold. Hasten home!"

Her heart seemed broken now. Not in anger, not in wrath, did she turn upon him; she stabbed him with the crueller pain of tears. In those regions, where physical daring is a man's mightiest dower, a coward is baser than a worm, fouller than a leper of the old times. And she had loved a coward!

Had she been wiser in the world, she might have guessed that he who brands himself with an ill name is not always the fittest to bear it. But she was not wise, and his own confession, corroborating the assertion of her kinsmen, appalled her.

Almost unconsciously, still in tears, she was creeping away.

"Marcelle, will you not give me your hand again? Will you not say good−bye?"

She paused, but said nothing. He seized her hands, and kissed her softly on either cheek.

“Farewell, Marcelle! Thou canst not understand, and I do not blame thee; but if evil comes to me, do not think of me in anger. Perhaps God will be good, and some day you may think better of me. Farewell, farewell!”

He had turned away sobbing, when she caught him by the arm, crying passionately—

“They will find thee; they will kill thee—that will be worse! Where art thou going? Where wilt thou fly?”

“God will help me to a refuge, and I do not think they will find me. Keep me in thy heart!”

Then he was gone indeed.

An hour after that strange meeting Marcelle was back in the cottage trying to comfort her mother. It was midnight when Hoël and Gildas got into bed and fell into heavy sleep. They were to rise before dawn. The Corporal sat by the kitchen−fire, pipe in mouth. He was to remain up till the hour for summoning his nephews, and then afterwards to see them a short distance upon the road.

Meantime Rohan Gwenfern was wandering through the darkness like a dreary spirit of the night. Shaken to the soul by that last interview with her he held dearest in all the world, yet as resolved as ever in his despairing resistance against an evil fate in which she seemed arrayed against him, he flitted to and fro, he scarce knew whither.

The passionate love in his heart fought fiercely against the cold ideal in his soul. He could feel Marcelle's embraces still; for kisses less sweet, he knew, many a man would have given his salvation.

He had not slept for two nights and days, during which he had been creeping back to Kromlaix. The rain was still falling, and with every shower the night seemed to grow darker. Sick and wearied out, he crept back to the CROSS, and there, resting his head against the stone, partially sheltered from the rain by the stone figure above, and entirely hidden by the weeds and furze which rose above his head, he fell into a heavy sleep.

And as he slept he dreamed a dream.

Chapter 21. THE DREAM

He seemed, in his dream, to be still lying on the spot where he had fallen asleep, with his eyes fixed on the crucified figure above him. All was very dark around and over him; the wind moaned, and the rain still fell heavily on the ground and plashed drearily into the granite pool. He lay crouching among the wet weeds and grasses, watching and listening in fascination for he knew not what.

His heart was beating madly, every pulse in his frame was thrilling; for he had been startled by a strange movement above him, by a supernatural sound.

He listened more intently, and this time his ears were startled by a low moan as of a human mouth. It came again;—and behold, to his horror and terror, the figure on the Cross was moving its head from side to side. Not as if in pain, not as if wholly in consciousness, but as a sleeper moves his head, slowly awakening from a heavy sleep.

The heart of Rohan failed within him, a sense as of death stole over him. He would have fled, but his limbs refused to obey his will. He sought to utter a cry, but the sound was frozen in his throat. For a moment, as it seemed, he became unconscious. When he looked again, the Cross above was empty, and the figure was standing at the foot

The rain ceased, the wind grew low, and through parting clouds the moon looked down. Black against the moonlight loomed the Cross; while at its foot, glimmering like marble, stood the Christ.

His eyes were open now, gazing straight down at the crouching form of Rohan; and his arms and limbs moved, and from his lips there came a breath; and he said in a low voice, “Rise!”

The fascinated body of Rohan obeyed that diviner will, and rose at once and stood erect; and at that moment Rohan felt all his fear fall from him, and he gazed up into the Face, but spoke no word. And the Face stilled the troubled waters of his heart with its beauty, as moonlight stills the sea. He would fain have fallen again and worshipped, not in terror now, but in joy.

Then the Christ said, “Follow me!”

As a spirit moves, scarce touching the earth, he descended from the foot of the Cross, and moved silently along. As a man follows a ghost, fearful to lose the vision, yet afraid to approach too near, Rohan followed.

The night was black, but a dim light ran before them on the ground. Silently they passed along, and swiftly; for it seemed to Rohan, in his dream, that he moved with no volition of his own, but as if upborne by invisible hands that helped him on; and the woods and fields seemed moving by, like clouds drifting before the wind, and the earth beneath their feet swept past them like a wind−blown sea.

Now conscious, now unconscious, as it seemed, Rohan followed; for at times his senses seemed flown and his eyes closed; but ever on opening his eyes he saw the white Christ gliding on before him, pausing ever and anon to gaze round, with the pallid moonlight on His face, and with eyes divine to beckon him on.

Time trembles into eternity during sleep—there is no count of mundane minutes; and Rohan, in his dream, seemed to follow his Guide for hours and hours and hours. Through the hearts of lonely woods, over the summits of moonlit hills past spectral rivers gleaming in the moon, by solitary waters hushed as death, through villages asleep in the green hollows. Wheresoever they went all slumbered; the eyes of all the Earth were sealed.

Then they passed through the darkened streets of towns, creeping along in the house−shadows till they emerged again upon the open moonlit plains.

At last, passing through the wide paths of a cultivated wood, and crossing an open space where fountains were leaping, the Figure paused before a great building with windows of glass gleaming in the moon. All around it the greensward stretched, and flowers sprang, and fountains leaped, but it stood very cold and still.

The Figure passed on and stood before the door, uplifting his hand. The door opened and he entered in, and Rohan followed close behind.

The corridors were dark as death, but the strange shining light that ran before the Spirit's feet made all things visible within. They passed through many rooms—some vast and dim, tenanted only by the solitary moon−ray; others dark and curtained, full of the low breathing of men or women in sleep—along silent passages where the wind wailed low at their coming; up ghostly stairs with faces of antique painting glimmering from the walls, and

marble busts and statues gleaming through the dusk. Nothing stirred, nothing woke; sleep like moonlight breathed everywhere, trembling amid darkness. And though their feet fell on hollow corridors and empty floors, their passing awoke no reverberation; but the doors flew open silently, and the sleepers did not stir on their pillows; and the only sound was the low cry of the winds in the silent courts.

Again the dream faded, and Rohan's consciousness seemed to die away. When the eyes of his soul opened again, he was crouching in the shadow of a curtained door, and towering erect close to him, drawing back the curtains with a white hand, stood the Christ, pointing.

Before them, with his back to them, writing busily at a table, sat a Man. The room in which he wrote was an antechamber, and through the open door of the inner room could be seen a heavily curtained bed. On the table stood a lamp, casting down the rays upon the papers before him, and leaving all the rest of the chamber dim.

It seemed as if all Rohan's heart hungered to see the face of this Man; but it remained hidden, bent over the table. Hours seemed to pass; he did not stir.

He was partly undressed for sleep, but though all the world rested, he still wrote and worked. Rohan's soul sickened. It seemed terrible to behold that one Form awake and alone, while all the heart of creation was hushed and still

Again the dream faded. When Rohan looked once more the room was empty; but the lamp still burnt on the table, though the shape of the Man was gone.

He turned his eyes upward and met the divine orbs of his Guide, who pointed to the table and formed with His lips, rather than uttered with His breath, this one word, “Read!”

He crossed the chamber, he bent above the table. It was covered with papers written in a clear hand, but his eyes saw one paper only, on which the ink was scarcely dry, and it contained only two words, his own name—“ROHAN GWENFERN.”

As he read, in his dream, he felt the confused sick horror of a man half stunned. He seemed to understand darkly that his name so written meant something fatal and dreadful, yet he could not sufficiently grasp the sense of how or why: all he seemed to know was the awfulness of this one Man, awake when all creation slept, writing that name down as if for doom; yet for what doom Rohan knew not, any more than he knew the likeness of the Man. Nevertheless, horror possessed him, and he fell on his knees, uplooking in the face of his Guide, and dumbly entreating help from some calamity he could not understand. But during a sudden flash of consciousness the Christ had passed into the inner chamber, and had drawn back the heavy curtain of the bed therein; and lo! Rohan saw clearly, as if in moonlight, the face of the Man, though it was now calm in sleep. He crept forward hungering on the face; and he knew it. White as marble, with closed cold lids and lips still firm in rest; a stony face—such as he had often pictured it waking, such as he had seen on coins and medals of metal, and in rude pictures hung on cottage walls;—the face of the great Emperor.

And the Emperor slept so soundly, that not even his breathing could be heard in the chamber; for as Rohan crept closer, with fascinated eyes, the lineaments of the face grew more fixed in their marble pallor, so that Rohan thought in his dream, “He does not sleep, but is dead.” And one hand on the coverlet looked liked marble too: a white hand like a woman's, a small hand clenched like a sleeping child's.

In that moment of wonder he turned his eyes, and found himself alone.

The figure of the Christ had disappeared. The lamp still burned in the outer chamber, but more dimly. He was alone by the bed of the great Emperor, watching, and shivering from head to foot.

Strangely enough, the supernatural presence had been a source of strength. No sooner had it disappeared than an awful sense of terror and helplessness possessed him, and he would have flown; but he could not move—he could not turn his eyes away. To be there alone with the terrible Master of his life—to be crouching there and seeing the Emperor lying as if dead—was too much for his soul to bear; he struggled and struggled in despair and dread, and at last in the agony of his dream, he uttered a wild cry. The Emperor did not stir, but in a moment the cry was answered from distant rooms—there was a sound of voices, a tramp of feet, a rushing to and fro; he tried again to fly, but was still helpless, as the feet came nearer and nearer; and while the doors of the ante−chamber were burst open, and a haggard light of cruel faces came in, and soldiers rushed upon him with flashing swords to take his life, he swooned away—and woke.

He was lying where he had cast himself down, among the great weeds at the Cross's foot; the dawn was just breaking, and the air was very cold, and the stone Christ hung above him, drooping its heavy head, wet with the

long night's rain.

He was about to rise to his feet and crawl away to some securer shelter, when a sound of voices broke upon his ears, and a tramp of coming feet. Then he remembered how near he was to the highway, and casting himself flat down among the weeds, he lay hidden and still.

The feet came nearer; the voices were singing a familiar song:

“Le matin quand je m'éveille,
Je vois mon Empereur,—
Il est doux à merveille

Rohan shivered as he lay hidden, for he distinctly recognised the voices of Hoël and Gildas Derval. There was a pause on the road, a sudden silence; then another voice, in the unmistakable tones of the old Corporal, cried, “Forward!”

The tramp of feet began again, the voices renewed their singing. All passed close by the Cross, but down in the hollow of the road. Rohan did not stir till every sound of foot or voice had died. The conscripts of Kromlaix, escorted out of the village by many of their friends and fellow villagers, were on their way by dawn to join the armies of the Emperor on the banks of the far−off Rhine.

Chapter 22. MIKEL GRALLON

From that day forth, for many days and weeks, the fate of Rohan Gwenfern remained unknown. Search was made for him high and low, his name was proclaimed through every village for many miles around, blood−money was offered for his apprehension alive or dead—but all without avail. The last occasion on which he had been publicly seen was on that memorable night of the Conscription, when he made his appeal to Father Rolland—whose opinion, by the way, was emphatically to the effect that Rohan had committed suicide. Only one person perhaps knew better, and that was Marcelle Derval. Not one word did she breathe, however, of the meeting under the Cross on the night before the departure of the conscripts.

On this subject of Rohan the Corporal was adamant, and he lost no opportunity of uttering his denunciations. Marcelle no longer protested, for she felt that all was over, since Rohan was either mad or worse than mad; and when Uncle Ewen averred that, while all the other conscripts of Kromlaix were good men and true, Rohan Gwenfern was a wretch and a coward, she could not utter one word in answer—for had not Rohan confessed with his own lips that he was afraid, and had she not seen in his face with her own eyes the sick horror a physical coward must feel?

It was terrible to think of—it was worse even than death itself! Her passion had fed itself upon his glorious manhood, on his mighty physical strength and beauty, on the power and dignity of his nature, and even on his prowess in games of skill and courage; she had exulted in him and gloried in him as even feeble women exult and glory in what is strong; and *now!* It was almost inconceivable to think that he was of despicable fibre even as compared with Hoël, who she knew was timid, and Gildas, who she confessed to herself was stupid. All that leonine look had meant nothing, after all! Even a cripple on a crutch, if beckoned by the Emperor, would have behaved more nobly. Better, she thought, a thousand times better, that Rohan had fallen from the dizziest crag of Kromlaix, and been mourned as a true man, and remembered by all the youth of these shores as “over brave.”

Yet frequently, as these thoughts passed through her fiery brain, Marcelle felt her own conscience pleading against her; for never until that last meeting had she felt so strongly the distance of Rohan's soul from her own, and never since had she failed to say to herself at times, “Perhaps I do not understand.” Something in the looks, the words, made her feel, as she had often felt before, the influence of a strong moral nature asserting itself steadfastly and fearlessly, yet most lovingly, against her prejudice and her ignorance. And this feeling awoke fear and re−created love, for it reclothed Rohan in the strength that women seek.

She could better bear to think him wicked and mad—to look upon him as a fierce enemy of her convictions, and of the great Imperial cause—than to conceive him a coward pure and simple. If the sure conviction of that had lasted for one whole day, we verily believe that Marcelle's love would have turned to repulsion, that her hand would almost have been ready to strike her lover down.

Well, coward or *chouan,* or both, he had disappeared, and if he lived, which many doubted, no man knew where he was hiding. The nose of Sergeant Pipriac, reddened with brandy but keen as an old hound's, could find no scent of the fox in or out of the village. A hundred spies were ready to claim the reward, but no opportunity came. At last the *curé's* private suspicions spread into general certainty, and it was everywhere averred that Rohan Gwenfern had made away with himself, either by leaping from one of the high cliffs, or by drowning himself in the sea. As weeks passed by and no traces of the fugitive were found, even Marcelle began to fear the worst, and her silent reproaches died away in a nameless dread.

But she had her mother to comfort—the work of the house to do—the Fountain to visit—and none of her hours were idle. Had she been able to sit like a lady of romance, with her hands folded before her and her eyes fixed in a dream, her woe would have consumed her utterly; but as it was she was saved by work. Never too sadly introspective, she now looked out upon her pain like a courageous creature. Though her cheek was pale and her eye often dim, her step upon the ground was firm as ever. Her heart and lips were silent of their grief. Only when she stole down to Mother Gwenfern to whisper of Rohan, or when she placed her poor weeping head in the lap of Guineveve, did the trouble of her soul find relief.

An irritating but salutary distraction came at this period in the conduct of Mikel Grallon. Grallon, whom she had more than once suspected of an attachment for herself, began now to show unmistakable indications of a

settled design. True, all he did was to drop in of a night and smoke with the Corporal, to bring little presents of fresh fish to the widow, and to listen humbly hour after hour to the Corporal's stories; but Marcelle, well skilled in the sociology of Kromlaix, knew well that such conduct meant mischief; or in other words matrimony. It was not etiquette in Kromlaix for a bachelor to address himself directly to the maiden of his selection; *that* was the last stage of courtship, the preliminaries consisting of civilities to the elders of the house, a very prosaic account of his own worldly possessions, and a close inquiry into the amount of the bride's dower. Now, Grallon was a flourishing man, belonging to a flourishing family. He was the captain of a boat of his own, and he reaped the harvest of the sea with no common skill. His morals were unexceptionable, though morals of course were a minor matter, and he was in all other respects an eligible match.

He was not a pleasant person, however, this Mikel Grallon. His thin tight lips, his small keen eyes, his narrow forehead and eyebrows closely set together, indicated a peculiar and acquisitive character; his head, set on broad shoulders, was too small for symmetry; and though his bright weather−beaten cheek betokened health and strength, he lacked the open expression of less sophisticated fisher−men. His features, indeed, resembled folded leaves rather than an open flower; for the wind, which blows into open bloom the faces of so many men who sail the sea, had only shut these lineaments tighter together, so that no look whatever of the hidden soul shone directly out of them. He went about with a smile—the smile of secrecy, and of satisfaction that his secrets were so well kept.

The great characteristic of the man was his silent pertinacity. In whatever he did, he spared no pains to insure success; and when he had set his heart upon an object, the peregrine in its pursuit was not more steady.

And so when he began to “woo,” Marcelle at once took the alarm; and although his “wooing” consisted only of a visit two or three nights a week, during which he scarcely exchanged a word with herself she knew well what his visits portended. Every evening, when he dropped in, she tried to make some excuse for leaving the house, and when she was constrained to stay she moved about in feverish *malaise;* for the man's two steadfast eyes watched her with a dumb fascination, and with an admiration there was no mistaking.

Jannick, who saw how matters stood, found a good butt for his jests in Grallon, and was not altogether to be subdued even by gifts of new ribbons for the *biniou.* He loved to tease Marcelle on the subject of the fisherman's passion.

Strange to say, he no longer met with the fiery indignation which had often before been the reward of his impertinence.

Marcelle neither replied nor heeded, only her cheek went a little paler, her lip quivered a little more. A weight was upon her heart, a horrible fear and despair. She was listening for a voice out of the sea or from the grave, and even in her sleep she listened, but the voice never came.

Chapter 23. CORPORAL DERVAL GALLOPS HIS HOBBY

Corporal Derval was smoking rapidly, his face flushed all over to the crimson of a cock's comb, his black eyes burning, the pulses beating in his temples like a roll of drums, and his thoughts far away. As the grey smoke rolled before his eyes it became like the smoke of cannon, and through its mist he saw—not the interior of his Breton home, with the faces of the astonished group around him—but a visionary battle−plain, where a familiar figure, in weather−beaten hat and grey overcoat, sat, with a heavy head sunk deep between his shoulders, watching the fight from his saddle with the stony calmness of an equestrian statue.

The voice of the little *curé,* who was sitting at the fireside, called him back to the common day.

"Corporal Derval!"

The Corporal started, drew his pipe out of his mouth, and straightened himself to "attention." So doing, he became again conscious of his surroundings. A bright fire burnt upon the hearth, and the door was carefully closed,—for a wild cold wind was blowing. Mother Derval was spinning in a corner, and near her, sewing, sat Marcelle. Toasting his little fat toes by the fire sat the *curé,* smoking also, with his throat−band loosened, and a glass of corn brandy at his elbow. Alain and Jannick—the remnant of the Maccabee,—were seated in various attitudes about the chamber; and leaning against the wall, not far from Marcelle, in his fisherman's costume, and with complexion coloured a light tobacco brown by constant exposure on the sea, was Mikel Grallon.

Though the season was early summer, they were holding a sort of *veillée,* or fireside gathering, and the old Corporal, as usual, had been enacting Sir Oracle. The little *curé* had drawn his pipe from his mouth, and was shrugging his shoulders in protestation.

"But see, my Corporal, his treatment of our Holy Father himself, the Pope of Rome!"

The Corporal knitted his brows and puffed vigorously again. All looked at him as if curious to hear his reply, the mother with a little doubtful sigh.

The Corporal was soon prepared.

"Pardon me, *m'sieu le curé,* you do not understand. All that is an arrangement between the Emperor and the Holy Father! There are some who say the Emperor threw His Holiness into a dungeon, and fed him on bread and water. Fools—His Holiness dwelt in a palace, and fed off silver and gold, and was honoured as a saint. Do not mistake, *m'sieu le curé;* the Emperor is not profane. He fears God. Do I not know it, I who speak? Have I not seen with my own eyes, heard with my own ears? He is God−fearing, the Emperor; and he is sent by God to be the scourge of the enemies of France."

Mikel Grallon nodded approval.

"Right, Uncle Ewen!" he exclaimed: "he has made them dance, those Germans and those English!"

The Corporal, without turning his head, continued to address the *curé,* who was sipping his brandy with the air of a man convinced against his will and of his own opinion still. But the priest, good fellow! had few strong convictions of any kind, and hated polemics, especially at the fireside; so he contradicted no longer.

"You do not know it, you others," pursued the veteran; "but it is a grand thing to look on a man like that—to look upon him—to talk with him—to feel his breath about you!"

"As you have done, Corporal!" said the priest approvingly.

Marcelle looked at her uncle with a bright smile of admiration. Every other eye was upon him.

"As I have done!" said the veteran proudly, and with no shame in his pride. "Yes, I who stand here! I have been with him face to face, looking in his eyes, as I do now in yours, Father Rolland! First at Cismone, then twice again. I can see him now; I can hear his voice as plain as I hear yours. Sometimes I hear it sleeping, and I leap up and feel for my gun, and look up, fancying I see the stars above me out over the open camp. I think if he came and spoke again like that above me, I should waken in my grave."

His voice sank very low now, and his keen eye, sheathed like an eagle's half asleep, looked softly on the fire. The turf was bright crimson, and as it shifted and changed he saw in it forms moving and faces flushing, like some spectral army passing in a dream.

There was a pause. Presently, to relieve the excitement of his feelings, the Corporal took from the fire a bright "coal" of turf, and, puffing vigorously, applied it to the bowl of his pipe, which had gone out.

Clearing his throat and thinning with his plump little hand the cloud of smoke which he himself was blowing, the *curé* spoke again—

"Corporal Derval!"

The veteran, still smoking, turned his eye quietly on the speaker, and listened attentively.

"How many years ago was that little affair of Cismone?"

The Corporal's black eyes blazed, and a delighted smile overspread his grim features. Pausing deliberately, he set his pipe down upon the little chimney−piece, close to a tiny china altar and several china casts of the Saints; next, leaning forward, he carefully poked the fire with his wooden leg; and finally, turning round again to the priest, knitting his brows as if engaged in abstruse calculation, and rubbing his hands hard together, he replied in a voice that might have been heard by a whole regiment—

"It was the night of the seventeenth of September, in the year seventeen hundred and ninety−six."

If the words had been a spell, the company could not have looked more thrilled and awed. To be quite candid, we must admit that the announcement was a familiar one, and had been made, with its accompanying veracious narrative, in the same spot and in the same way many and many a night before. But some stories are ever new, and this was one of them. Uncle Ewen's delicious assumption that he was retailing a novelty, the never−failing murmurs of pleased incredulity and astonishment for which he waited at every important turn in the incidents, the enthusiasm of the speaker and the rapt attention of all present, made the occasion always illustrious. Those who knew Uncle Ewen and had not heard his anecdote of Cismone knew him but little—had indeed never been invited to the confidences of his warlike bosom. Every one present that night had heard it a dozen times, yet each one present—with the exception, perhaps, of Mikel Grallon, who looked a little bored, and kept his eyes amorously fixed on Marcelle—seemed eager to hear it again.

Alain Derval listened with gloomy interest, but the face of Jannick was bright and cheerful; for he, of course, had no dread of the Conscription, which was still overshadowing the heart of his grown−up brother. The mother ceased her spinning. The little *curé* nodded his head, like a water−wagtail standing on the ground. Marcelle dropped her sewing into her lap, and gazed, with a look of eager emotion and expectation, at her uncle.

The grenadier, full of that rarest of all emotions—the pride of a prophet who is reverenced in his own country—continued clearly, and as he spoke the figures around him again and again faded, and his eye searched the distance in a sort of waking dream.

"We left Trent on the sixteenth, Father Rolland;—it was in the grey of the dawn. It was a long march, ten leagues of infernal country; a forced move, you see. In the evening we reached a village,—the name I have forgotten, but a quaint little village on a hill. That night we were so weary that we could not have kept awake, only the word had run along the lines that the Emperor—oh, he was only a general then!—that General Bonaparte was with us. Well, we knew that it was true, for we could feel him, we could swear that he was near. In the hospitals, father, the doctor goes from bed to bed, touches the pulses—so!—and says, 'Here is fever—here is health—here is death.' As he comes, the wounded look up and brighten; as he goes, they sink back and groan. All the wards feel him far off—every heart beats quicker at his coming, and slower at his going. Well, that is the way with the army; its pulses were beating all along the lines you would say, 'The General is coming—he is near—he is here—he is gone—he is ten leagues away!'"

He paused for breath, and Mother Derval heaved a heavy sigh. Poor heart! she was not thinking of the Emperor, but of her two great sons, already with the army. The Corporal heard a sigh, and hurried on—

"The moon was still up when we marched again in the morning. We were in three columns like three big winds of the equinox, and we rushed down on the Austrians, who were strongly posted at Primolano. My God, but we caught them napping—we cut our way into them. Mikel Grallon, you have seen a boat run down?—Smash! that was the style. Our cavalry cut off the retreat, and thousands laid down their arms. That would have been enough for an ordinary general, but the Little Corporal was not content. Forward! he gave the word. Wurniser was at Bassano, and Mezaros was marching on Verona. We pushed on at bayonet point till we reached Cismone. It was night, and we were tired out; so when we got the word to halt, it was welcome news."

Here Uncle Ewen suited the action to the word, and halted again. The priest nodded approvingly through his cloud of smoke.

"Now, I had a comrade in those days—a tall fellow, with a cast in his eye, but as good as gold—and his name was Jacques Monier, and he was born inland on the Rhone. We were like brothers; we shared bite and sup, and

many a night lay in each other's arms for warmth. Well, on that night of the seventeenth, Jacques was lying with his feet to the fire we had kindled on the bare ground, and I had gone to find water. When I returned Jacques was standing on his feet, holding in his hand half a loaf of black bread, and beside him, in the light of the fire, stood—whom, think you?—the General himself. He was splashed from head to foot with mud and rain—he looked like any common soldier—but I knew him at once. He was warming his hands over the fire, and Jacques was saying, as he held out the loaf, 'Take it *all*, my General!' As I saw that, I looked into the General's face, and it was white as death with hunger. Think of that; it is true, for I who tell you know what hunger is."

A murmur of amazement ran round the room; not that the fact was new, but that such an expression of feeling was appropriate.

"Did the Emperor take the half loaf?" asked Father Rolland.

"'Take it all,' said Jacques; 'half a loaf is not much.' Well, you should have seen the General smile. He did not answer, but he took the bread into his hands, and broke off a morsel and began to eat, handing Jacques back the rest. Then came my turn! I held in my hand the little tin pot half full of water, and I emptied into it a little brandy that I had saved in my flask, and I handed the pot to the General. Here it is—the same—I keep it still as a souvenir."

So saying, he detached from a hook over the fire the canteen, which Father Rolland examined over and over, and under and under, in honest admiration.

"Drink, my General,' said I, saluting. Ah, I had courage in those days! He drank, and when he tasted the brandy he smiled again! Then he asked us our names, and we told him. Then he looked hard at us over and over again, wrapped his cloak around him, and went away. So Jacques and I sat down by the fire, and finished the bread and the brandy and water, and talked of the Emperor till we fell to sleep."

"That was an adventure worth having!" observed the *curé.* "And the General remembered you for that service, no doubt?"

The Corporal nodded.

"The General remembers everything," he replied. "Nine years afterwards he had not forgotten!"

"Nine years!" ejaculated the *curé.* "It was a long time to wait, Corporal. Did he give you no reward?"

Uncle Ewen turned rather red, but answered promptly—

"What reward would you give for a crust of bread and a drop of brandy, which any one would give to the beggar at his door? Besides, the General had more to think of; and it all passed like a dream. Not that we missed our reward at last. When the time came he remembered well."

"That is certain," said Mikel Grallon, who had often heard the story.

"Tell Father Rolland," cried Marcelle; "he does not know."

The Corporal hesitated, smiling.

"Yes, yes, let us hear all about it!" cried Father Rolland.

"It was in the year 1805, at the camp of Boulogne. Great changes had taken place, the Little Corporal had been declared hereditary Emperor of France, but Jacques Monier and I were still in the ranks. We thought the General had forgotten all about us, and what wonder if he had, seeing how busy he had been knocking off the crowns of your Kings? The grand army was there, and we of the grenadiers were to the front. That day of the coronation was fixed for a general distribution of crosses and medals. Such a day! The mist was coming in from the sea like smoke from a cannon's mouth. On the rising ground above the town was a throne—the great iron chair of the mighty King Dagobert; and all below the throne were the camps of the great armies, and right before the throne was the sea. When the Emperor sat down on the throne, our cry was enough to make the sky fall—*vive 1' Empereur!*—you would have said it was the waves of the sea roaring. But look you, at that very moment the smoke of the sea parted, and the sun glanced out:—you would have said because he waved his hand! Ah, God! such a waving of banners, glittering of bayonets, flashing of swords. Such a sight is seen but once in a lifetime; I should have to talk all night to tell you a tenth of the wonders of that day. But I am going to tell you what happened to Jacques Monier and myself. When the Emperor was passing by—we were in the front ranks, you observe—he stopped short, like *this* / Then he took a huge pinch of snuff from his waistcoat pocket, with his head on one side, like *this,* studying our faces; and then his face lighted up, and he came quite near. This is what he said—ah, that I could give you his voice!—'Come, I have not forgotten Cismone, nor the taste of that black bread and brandy and water.' Then he turned laughingly and spoke rapidly to Marshal Ney, who stood close by him; and

Ney laughed, and showed his white teeth, looking in our direction. Well, then, the great Emperor turned to us, and gave us each the Cross from his own hand, and saluted us as Corporals. I will tell you this—my eyes were dim—I could have cried like a girl; but before we could know whether we stood on our heads or our feet, he was gone!"

Corporal Derval brushed his sleeve across his eyes, which were dim again with the very memory of that interview and its accompanying honours. He stooped over the fire and fidgeted with his little finger in the bowl of his pipe, while a subdued murmur ran round the apartment.

"The Emperor has a good head to remember," observed the little *curé.* "I have been told that a good shepherd can tell the faces of every one of his flock, but this is more wonderful still. How long, do you say, had elapsed after Cismone, before you met again?"

"Nine years," answered the Corporal.

"Nine years!" repeated the *curé.* "And in those nine years, my Corporal, what battles, what thoughts, what confusion of faces!—how much to do, how much to think of! Ah, he is a great man! And was that the last time," he added, after a short pause, "that your eyes beheld him?"

"I saw him once more," said the Corporal, "only once."

"And then?"

"It was only a month or two later—the first day of December. It was the eve of the glorious battle of Austerlitz."

A thrill ran through the assembly at the mention of the magic name. The Corporal lifted his head erect, and looked absolutely Napoleonic as he towered above his hearers. The *curé* started. Mother Derval heaved a heavy sigh, and glanced at the Corporal's wooden leg. Alain and Jannick grew serious. Mikel Grallon gazed curiously at Marcelle, whose pale face wore a strange smile.

The Corporal proceeded—

"We were crouched, seventy or eighty thousand of us, watching and waiting, when some one remembered that just a year ago that night the Little Corporal had been crowned Emperor. The word ran round. We gathered sticks and bundles of straw for joy−fires, and set them blazing to the tune of *vive l' Empereur.* It was pitch−dark, but our fires were crimson. In the middle of it all I saw him riding past The cry ran along the camps like flame, but he passed by like a ghost, his head sunk down between his shoulders, his eyes looking neither to the left nor right. He rode a white horse, and Jacques said he looked like the white Death riding to devour the Russians! Poor Jacques! He got his last furlough next day, and I, my marshal's baton!"

So saying, the veteran struck out his wooden leg, and regarded it with a look half plaintive, half comic. The irreverent Jannick giggled—not at the joke, which was a too familiar one.

"And you never saw him again," said the *curé;* that was the last time."

The Corporal nodded his head slowly and repeatedly, in the manner of a "Chinese mandarin" at a tea−dealer's door. He was about to speak again, when the door was suddenly dashed open, and Sergeant Pipriac, followed by four or five *gendarmes,* rushed into the room.

Chapter 24. “A TERRIBLE DEATH”

Sergeant Pipriac was ghastly pale, and in the midst of his face shone with baleful light his bright Bardolphian nose, while his one eye glared horribly, like the eye of a Cyclops. His voice shook, partly with deep potations, partly with nervous agitation, and his legs flew this way and that with frantic excitement. His men were pale too, but much less moved.

“Soul of a crow!” cried the Corporal, “what is the matter?”

The *curé* rose from his seat by the fire.

“One would say,” he exclaimed, “that the good Sergeant had seen a ghost!”

Sergeant Pipriac glared at the Corporal, then at the *curé*, then all round the room, until he at last found voice.

“And one would say rightly!” he gasped. “Malediction! one would not be far wrong. Look how I shake still,—I, Pipriac, who would not fear the devil himself. A glass of water, mother,—for as I live, I choke.”

The Corporal stumped over to the table and poured out a little glass of brandy.

“Take that, comrade,” he said, with a nod; “it is better than water. And now,” he continued, when Pipriac had swallowed the liquor, “what is all this about? and who is this that you have seen?”

“I will tell you,” said Pipriac, wiping his brow with a great cotton pocket−handkerchief brilliantly ornamented with a portrait of Marshal Ney on his war steed. “What have I seen? A thousand devils! Well, I have seen your own infernal *chouan* of a nephew!”

“Rohan?” ejaculated the Corporal in a voice of thunder, while the women started up in terror and horror, and the little *curé* lifted his hands in astonishment.

“Yes, Rohan Gwenfern—the man or the man's ghost, it is equal. Is there ever a soul here can swear to the man's clothes, for, look you, we have nigh stripped him clean? An eel may slip from his skin, they say well, so can he of whom I speak. Pierre! Andre! who has the plunder?”

The last words were addressed to his *gendarmes*, one of whom now stood forward carrying a peasant's jacket, and another a broad−brimmed peasant's hat.

“If a ghost can wear clothes, these belong to him. Well, it is all the same now; he will never need them more.”

The articles of attire were passed from hand to hand, but there was nothing to distinguish them specially as the property of the fugitive. The coat was torn down the back, as if in a severe scuffle.

Sinking into a seat by the fire, Pipriac sat until he had recovered breath, a consummation not to be achieved until he drank another glass of his favourite stimulant. Then he said grimly, looking at the Corporal—

“His blood be on his own head. It is no fault of mine.” The fierce frown which the Corporal's face had worn at the mention of Rohan's name had relaxed. He was about to speak, when Marcelle, white as death, came between him and Pipriac.

“What do you mean?” she cried. “You have not—”

Without completing the sentence, she cast at the bayonets of the *gendarmes* a look of horror that could not be mistaken. Pipriac shook his head.

“It is not that,” he answered. “Old Pipriac is bad, but not so bad as that, my dear. Malediction! is he not his father's son, and were not Raoul Gwenfern and Pen Pipriac comrades together? By the body of the Emperor, I have not hurt a hair of the villain's head.”

“Thank God!” cried the little *curé*. “Then he has escaped.”

Pipriac screwed up his eye into something very like a significant wink, meant to be sympathetic, but only succeeding in being horrible.

“I will tell you all about it,” he said; “you and the Corporal and all here. You know, we had given him up as dead; we had searched heaven and earth and hell for him without avail; there seemed no place left for him but the bottom of the sea. Well, you may guess it was on quite different business I was prowling about to−night with my men; but that is neither here nor there: we were coming along by the great stone up yonder—returning from a visit we had made to a little farm where there is good brandy”—here Pipriac winked diabolically again—“when we saw close to us in the moonlight, with his back to us, a man. I knew him in a moment, though I could not see his face; but I will tell you frankly this—when he turned round and looked at us I thought it was his ghost, for I had

really believed him dead. Poor devil, he looked thin and lean as a spectre, and white as death, in the moon. Corporal, it was your nephew, Rohan Gwenfern."

"He is no nephew of mine," growled the veteran, but his voice trembled.

"I don't know how it happened, but we were upon him in a moment—I, André, Pierre, and the others. André was the only one that got a hold; he shook off the rest like so many mice. Before we knew it he was twenty yards away, dragging André with him towards the edge of the cliff. *Diable!* it was like a lion of Algiers carrying off a man. André had dropped his gun, and his hat had fallen off and he was screaming to us to help him: the deserter could not shake him off. We fixed our bayonets, and after him we went."

In the excitement of his narrative, Sergeant Pipriac had risen to his feet, and he was now surrounded by all the eager circle of hearers. Marcelle clung to her uncle's arm and listened with cheeks like marble, her large eyes fixed on the speaker's face.

"'No violence,' I shrieked out; 'a thousand devils, take him alive!' When we seized him again, we were not ten yards from the edge of the great crag—you know it—it is like a wall. The tide was in, high spring tide, and the water was black far down below. We fell upon him, all six of us, and soon had him down; it took all our strength, I can tell you. Well, we had him safe and he could not stir."

"Bravo!" said Mikel Grallon.

"It is all very well to cry 'Bravo!'" said the irascible Sergeant, "but let me tell you the devil himself could not hold him! He lay for a minute quite still, and then he began to wriggle. You are a fisherman, and have tried to hold a conger eel; well, it was like that. Before we knew what he was about, he had wriggled almost to the very edge of the cliff!"

A low cry from Marcelle; a nervous movement among the men. Then Pipriac continued—

"We were six to one, I say, but for all that we could not stop him. I held on like Death, with my two hands twisted in his jacket; the others gripped his arms and legs. But when I saw what he was about—when I heard the black sea roaring right under us—my heart went cold. I saw there was but one way, and I loosened one hand and seized the bayonet from André; it was unscrewed, and held in his hand ready to stab. Then I shrieked out, 'A thousand devils, keep still, or I shall bleed you!' He looked up at me with his white face, and set his teeth together. In a moment he had rolled round on his belly, slipped himself out of his jacket, torn himself loose, and was on the very edge of the crag. Heaven, you should have been there! The loose earth on the edge broke beneath his feet; we all stood back. not daring to venture another step, and before we could draw a breath he was gone down."

A loud wail came from the mouth of Mother Derval, mingled with prayers and sobs, and the widow sank on her knees terror−stricken. But Marcelle still stood firm, frozen, motionless. The old Corporal looked pale and conscience−stricken; while the little *curé* lifted up his hands crying—

"Horrible! Down the precipice?"

"Right over," exclaimed Pipriac. "It was a horrible moment; all was pitch−dark below, and we could see nothing. But we listened, and we heard a sound below us—faint, like the smashing of an egg."

"Did he speak? Did he scream?" cried several voices.

"Not he—he had no breath left in him for that; he went down to his death as straight as a stone, and if he escaped the rocks he was drowned in the sea. Corporal Derval, don't say it was any fault of old Pipriac's! I wanted to save him, damn him! but he wouldn't be saved. In the scuffle I touched him; but that was an accident, and I wanted to keep him from his death. Hither with the jacket, Pierre—show it to Corporal Derval and the company!"

The *gendarme* called Pierre held up the jacket, while the Sergeant proceeded—"There is a cut here, through the right sleeve—it is gashed right through; and the left sleeve is wet, see you: that is where I hurt him in the struggle."

"God help us!" cried the *curé*, horror−stricken. "My poor Rohan!"

"Bah! Why did he not give in, then?" growled Pipriac. "But let no man say it was old Pipriac that killed him. He was bent on murdering himself, and perhaps some of *us*—that, I tell you, was his game. For all that, I am sorry I wounded him. This upon the jacket must be blood. André, let me see thy bayonet."

The *gendarme* called André stepped forward, and held up his glittering weapon, now fixed upon his gun.

"Holy Virgin, look there!" cried Pipriac. "Yes, it is blood!"

All crowded round looking upon the weapon, all save the Widow Derval, who still kept upon her knees and wailed to God in the low monotonous fashion of mourning women in Brittany.

“Yes, it is blood!” said one voice and another.

Among the faces that concentrated their gaze on the sight was that of Marcelle. The girl still stood firm, her lips set together, her eyes wide open in horrid fascination. She could see the shining blade glittering in the light—then the dark red stains glimmering upon it—but even then she did not swoon.

“It is the last you will see of Rohan Gwenfern in this world,” said Pipriac, after a pause. “Yes, it is blood, and no mistake!”

So saying, he wetted his forefinger with his lips and drew it deliberately down the bayonet's blade; then he held his finger tip to the light, and showed it moist and red.

A murmur of horror ran round the room, while Marcelle, without uttering a sound, dropped down as if dead upon the floor.

Early the next morning, when it was *morte mer*, or dead low water, a crowd of villagers gathered right under the enormous crag on the summit of which stood the colossal Menhir. Looking up, they saw a precipitous wall of conglomerate and granite, only accessible to the feet of a goat, which was feeding far up on scanty herbage, and moving cautiously along the minute crevices of stone. It was Jannedik, with whose form the reader is already familiar. Looking down from time to time from her dizzy eminence, she inspected the chattering throng below, and then proceeded leisurely with her refreshment.

Right at the foot of the crag lay fragments of loose earth and rock, recently detached from above, but of the body of Rohan Gwenfern there was no trace. At high water, however, the tide washed right up against the foot of the crag, and the waters there were swift and deep; so the presumption seemed to be that Rohan, after falling prone into the sea, had been washed away with the ebb.

Pipriac and his satellites, accompanied by Corporal Derval, inspected every nook and cranny of the shore, poked with stick and bayonet into every place likely and unlikely, swore infinitely, and did their duty altogether to their own satisfaction. The women gathered in knots and wailed. The villagers, with Mikel Grallon and Alain and Jannick Derval, gaped, speculated, and talked in monosyllables. Several boats were busy searching out on the sea, which was dead calm.

Sustained by the unusual courage of her temperament, Marcelle came down, with all her hidden agony in her heart and her face tortured with tearless grief. Since she had swooned the night before, and never before had she so lost consciousness, for she was of no “fainting" breed—she had wept very little, and uttered scarcely a word. Too great a horror was still upon her, and she could not yet realize the extent of her woe. She had scarcely even breathed a prayer.

The decision of the men assembled was unanimous. Rohan must have been killed by the fall before he reached the sea; on reaching it, his body had in all probability sunk, and then been sucked by slow degrees out into the deep water. There was very little chance of finding it for some days; and, indeed, it might never rise to the surface or be recovered at all.

“And between ourselves,” said Pipriac, winking grimly, “he is as well where he is, down there, as buried up yonder with a bullet in his heart. He would have been shot, you see, and he knew that. Don't say old Pipriac killed him, however—it was no fault of mine; but duty is duty after all!”

Mikel Grallon, to whom these remarks were addressed, quite concurred. Honest Mikel was indefatigable in all respects—both in aiding the general search, and in convincing Marcelle that her cousin could by no possibility have escaped. He was if anything a little too zealous, and, taking into consideration the nature of the catastrophe which had just occurred, several degrees too buoyant in his spirits.

Leaving the crowd at the foot of the crag, Marcelle walked slowly along the shore in the direction of Mother Gwenfern's cottage. The sun was shining on the sea, and in her own sweet face, but she was conscious of nothing save a heavy load upon her heart. Lifting the cottage latch, she entered in, and found the widow seated in her usual upright attitude before the fire, her grey face rigid and tearless, her lips set tight together. Standing close to the fire was Jàn Goron, who was speaking in a low voice as she appeared, but grew silent as she entered in.

It was very strange, but the widow showed no sign of absolutely overwhelming grief; her face rather betokened an intense resolve and despair. The news of the extraordinary catastrophe had not struck her to the ground; perhaps its very horror upheld her for the time being.

Silent as a ghost, Marcelle crossed the room, and sat down before the fire.

“There is no hope,” she said in a low voice; “it is all as they said, Aunt Loïz.”

No wail came from the lips of the widow, only a deep shivering sigh. Goron, whose whole manner betokened intense nervous agitation, looked keenly at Marcelle, and said—

“I was there this morning before them all; I could not find a trace. It is a terrible death.”

Chapter 25. THE JUNE FESTIVAL—AN APPARITION

A month had passed since that memorable night of the struggle on the cliffs, and it was the morning of the June Festival. The sea−pink was blooming, the lavender was in flower, the corn had thrust its green fingers from the sweet−soiled earth, and the fields behind the crag were fragrant with the breath of thyme. Heaven was a golden dome, the sea was a glassy mirror, the earth was a living form with a beating heart. In that season to live at all was pleasant, but to live and be young was paradise.

There was a green dell in the meadows behind the cliffs, and in this green dell were the ruins of a dolmen, and to this dolmen they flocked from Kromlaix, with music and singing, happy as shepherds in the golden climes of Arcady. Young men, maidens, and children came gathering merrily together; for here in Kromlaix the usual Breton custom, which excludes from the festival young people under the age of sixteen, was never enforced, and indeed scarcely known. The only members of the population rigorously excluded were the married of both sexes. The feast was the feast of youth and virginity, and no sooner did a man or maid pass the portal of Hymen than his or her festal days were over for ever.

Every youth that could play an instrument was in requisition. Alain Derval was there with a new black flute bought lately in St. Gurlott, and Jannick was to the fore with his *biniou;* but besides these there were half a dozen other *binious,* and innumerable whistles both of tin and wood; and, to crown all, the larks of the air, maddened with rivalry, sang their wildest and loudest overhead. Around the ruined dolmen, clad in all colours of the rainbow, were groups of sunburnt girls and lads; some romping and rolling, some gathering cowslips and twining daisy−chains, some running and shouting, while voices babbled and the medley of music rose. In the broad hat of every man or lad was a blade of corn, and on the breast of every girl was a flower of flax, with or without an accompaniment of wild heath and flowers.

Presently, approaching these groups from the direction of Kromlaix came a little procession, such as might have been seen of old during the Thalysia, and sung in Divine numbers by Theocritus. A flock of little children ran first, their voices singing, their hands full of flowers; and behind them came a group of young men, bearing on their arms a kind of rustic chair, in which, with her lap full of buttercups and flowers of flax, sat Guineveve. By her side, laughing and talking and flourishing his stick, trotted Father Rolland, as eager as any there.

Strange to say, his presence scarcely disturbed the idyllic and antique beauty of the picture; for his black coat was scarcely noticeable in the gleam of colours surrounding him, and he carried his hat in his hand, and his round face was brown as a satyr's, and he was joining with all his lungs and throat in the choric song. The little *curé* was no killjoy, and he had enough Greek spirit in his veins to forget for the nonce that skulls were ever shaven or sackcloth and ashes ever worn.

It was, however, an almost unprecedented thing to behold Father Rolland at such a gathering. The feast was of Pagan origin, discountenanced in many parishes, especially by priests of the new Napoleonic dispensation, and Father Rolland, although he was not bigot enough to interfere with the innocent happiness of the day, had never before been present on such an occasion. His coming was not altogether unexpected, however, and he was greeted on every side with a pastoral welcome.

Corning close up to the Druidic stone of the dolmen, the men set down their burthen, while Father Rolland stood by, wiping his brow with a silk pocket−handkerchief. Then Jàn Goron, who had been one of the bearers, lifted Guineveve in his arms and placed her on a knoll among a group of girls, who greeted her by name and made room for her beside them. The eyes of Guineveve were sparkling brightly, and she spoke rapidly to her comrades in Brezonec;—it was something amusing, for they all laughed and clapped their hands.

At that moment, however, Father Rolland raised his hand. The music and laughter ceased, every face was turned one way, and all became quite still: only the larks kept singing overhead in a very ecstasy of triumph at having (as they imagined) beaten and silenced all other competitors.

Father Rolland's face was very grave. Every face around him suddenly grew grave too.

“Boys and girls,” he said in Brezonec, “do you know what has brought me here? You cannot guess—so I will tell you. It is simple enough and very sad. It is right for you to make merry, *mes garz,* because you are young, and because there will be a good harvest; but it is also right to remember the dead.” Here the little *curé* crossed

himself rapidly, and all the other members of the gathering crossed themselves too. “Sad events have taken place since last you gathered here; many have been taken away by the Conscription, some have died and been buried, and some are sick; but it is not of any of those that I want to speak, but of the poor *garz* who was your patron last year, and who is now—ah, God where is he now? Let us hope at the feet of holy St. Gildas himself and of the blessed Virgin!”

Again, automatically, they made the sign of the cross, even little children joining. Some looked sad, others careless and indifferent, but all knew the little *curé* spoke of Rohan Gwenfern. It was the custom every year for the young people to choose among themselves a sort of king and queen, who led the sports and reigned for the day, and last year Rohan had been king and Marcelle had been queen—or, to translate the dialect of the country, “patron” and “patroness.”

“I am not going to praise or blame him who is gone; he was foolish, perhaps, and wrong; though for all that he came of a fine family, and was a pleasure to look at for strength. Well, he is dead, and there is an end—peace to his soul! Now that you are so merry, don't forget him altogether, nor poor Marcelle Derval, who was his patroness last year, and is too heart−broken, I am sure, to join you to−day.”

Here the little *curé* was greeted with a loud murmur from all his hearers, and all heads were turned, looking away from him. Then, to his amaze, he saw Marcelle herself rise up and approach him. She wore no mourning but a saffron hood; her dress was dark and unadorned, and her face was pallid and subdued.

“I am here, Father Rolland,” she said, as she met his eye.

“Blessed saints!” ejaculated the *curé.* “Well, my child, thou art right to cast off care; it is courageous, and I am pleased.”

Nevertheless the priest looked very serious. In his own heart he thought Marcelle rather unfeeling, and would have been better satisfied to hear that she had stayed away.

“I did not think of coming at first,” she said, approaching close, “but Guineveve begged me, and at last I consented. It is for Guineveve's sake I came, and for Jàn Goron's. My cousin Rohan is not here to−day, and will never be here again, but I know what would have been his wish. He would have wished Jàn Goron to be patron, and Guineveve to be patroness; and that is my wish, too.”

There was a moment's silence, then came a loud crying and clapping of hands. “Yes, yes!” cried the groups of men and girls, only a few dissentient voices crying, “No, no!” But the affair had been settled long before, and that was why Goron had escorted Guineveve thither.

“The blessings of the saints be upon you, Marcelle Derval,” said the *curé,* “for you have a kind heart; though, for that matter, Guineveve is a girl in a thousand. Well boys and girls, is that your choice?”

The answer was unmistakable, the consent almost unanimous. And already, seated on a knoll in the midst of a garland of girls, Guineveve was enjoying her sovereignty with supreme and perfect happiness, light in her face, joy in her heart, flowers on her breast and in her lap; while Goron, clad brightly as a bridegroom, stood over her, looking down into her eyes with perfect admiration and love.

Marcelle saw it all—the bright, the happy smiling faces—and her thoughts went back to last year, when she and Rohan, then almost unconscious of passion, were merrymaking in the same place. Her cheek grew whiter, and for a moment all she saw went dim. Then she thought to herself, “No one must know! I will creep away as soon as I can, for it all seems dreadful now Rohan is dead.”

After a few more words, Father Rolland lifted up his hands to pronounce a blessing; and all knelt down on the grass around him in silence as he prayed. It was done in a minute, and before they could all rise up again the priest was trotting away back to the village. The pipes and *binious* struck up again, sports and rompings began, all voices chattered at once like the voices of innumerable birds, and great grew the fun of the feast.

It was the custom for the new patron and patroness to lead off the *gavotte*, or country dance; so Goron led out Guineveve, and the dance began. One after another couple joined, all uniting hand in hand, till they formed one long chain of shining, glancing bodies, leaping, crying, intertwining, interturning, performing the most extraordinary steps with heel and toe, till the eyes grew dizzy to look at them.

“Marcelle, will you not dance?” said a voice in her ear.

She was standing looking on like one in a dream when she heard the voice, and she did not turn round, for the tones were familiar.

“I shall not dance to−day, Mikel Grallon.”

"That is a pity," said Mikel quietly, for he was too shrewd to show his annoyance. "One turn—come!"

"No, I am going home."

"Going home, and the sport has only just commenced! But you will try your charm on the love−stone before you go?"

It was the custom on that day for every single woman to leave a flower of flax, and every single man a blade of corn, on the stone of the dolmen. So long as flower and blade keep their freshness the hearts of their depositors are faithful; if they wither before the week is out, all will go wrong. So Marcelle answered—

"I have brought no posy, and I shall try no charm. It is all foolish, and I shall not stay."

And truly, in a little time she had slipped away from the company, whose merry laughter sounded in the distance behind her, and was hastening heart−broken homeward. She walked fast, for she was trying in vain to shake off Mikel Grallon, who followed close to her, talking volubly.

"You shall not soil your fingers or carry a load—no, not even a drop of water from the Fountain; and I shall take you sometimes to Brest to visit my uncle who keeps the *cabaret,* and you shall have shoes and new gowns from Nantes. And if the good God sends us children, one of the boys shall be made a priest."

This was plain speaking for a wooer, but Marcelle was not shocked. The height of a Breton mother's ambition is to have a son in the priesthood, and Marcelle was by no means insensible to the promise, especially as she knew that the speaker had means enough to carry it out.

"I shall never marry," she replied vaguely.

"Nonsense, Marcelle! The good Corporal and thy mother wish it, and I will take you without a dower. It is yourself that I wish, for I have enough of my own. I have set my heart upon it. . . . You should see the great press of linen my mother has prepared for the home−coming: soft as silk and white as snow—it would do your heart good, it smells so kindly."

Marcelle glanced at him sidelong, almost angrily.

"I have told you twenty times that I will not have you. If you speak to me of it again, I shall hate you, Mikel Grallon."

Mikel scowled—he could not help it; his brows were knitted involuntarily, and an ugly light shot out of his eyes. He took a false step, and lost his temper.

"I know why you treat me so. You are thinking of that *chouan* of a cousin!"

Marcelle turned upon him suddenly.

"If he was a *chouan,* you are worse. He is dead—his soul is with God: and it is like you to speak of him so."

Mikel saw his blunder, and hastened to retrieve it, if possible.

"Do not be angry, for I did not mean it. Rohan Gwenfern was a good fellow; but, look you, he is dead—besides you were cousins, and the Bishop might not have been willing. 'Drowned man can't marry dry maid,' says the proverb. Look you again, Rohan was poor; my little finger is worth more silver than his whole body. I am a warm man, I, though I say it that should not."

More he uttered in similar strain, but all to the same effect. At last he left her and returned to the gathering, angry with himself, with her, with all creation. For her last words to him were, as she passed down into the village. "Go back and choose a better; I shall never marry but one man, and that man is lying dead at the bottom of the sea."

That night a singular circumstance occurred, which was remembered for many a long year afterwards by the superstitious in Kromlaix. A party of fishermen, returning home late after lobster trawling, and rowing on the glassy sea close under the shadow of the gigantic cliffs, suddenly beheld an apparition.

There was no moon, and, although it was summer−tide, a black veil covered the sky. Under the cliff−shadow all was black and still, save for the solemn crying of the unseen birds and the moaning of the sea on rock and sand. There was not a breath of wind, and the men were rowing wearily home, with sails furled and masts lowered, when their eyes were dazzled by a sudden ray of brilliance streaming out of the Gate of the Cathedral of St Gildas.

Now, as we have seen before, the Cathedral was well known to be haunted, and there was scarcely one man in Kromlaix who would have entered it, sailing or afoot, after sunset. On the present occasion it was high water, and the Cathedral was floored with the liquid malachite of the sea.

Abreast of the Gate before they perceived the light, they raised their terrified eyes and looked in, each man

crossing himself and murmuring a prayer, for the very spot was perilous. In a moment they were petrified by fear,—for the vast Cathedral was illuminated, and high up on the mossy altar stood a gigantic figure holding a torch of crimson fire! The light illumed the face of the cliff behind him, save where his colossal shade trembled, reaching up to heaven. His shape was dark and distorted, his face almost indistinguishable, but every man who gazed, when he came to compare his impression with that of his companions, agreed that the apparition was that of the blessed St. Gildas.

The view was only momentary, but before it ceased another terror was added. Crouched at the feet of the Saint was a dark figure, only the head of which was perceptible, and this head, ornamented with hideous horns and with eyes of horrible lustre, was gazing up awe−stricken in the face of Gildas. The men covered their eyes in horror, and uttered a low cry of terror. Instantly the light was extinguished, the figures vanished, and the whole Cathedral was in pitch darkness. Sick, horrified, praying, and half swooning, the fishermen rowed madly away.

They had seen enough; for in that moment of horror they had not only perceived the terrible Saint so near to God, but had recognised in the figure at his feet, which was doubtless doing some dreadful penance for iniquities to mankind, the horrid lineaments of the EVIL ONE himself!

Chapter 26. MIKEL GRALLON MAKES A DISCOVERY

The day after the miraculous vision on the Cathedral of St. Gildas all Kromlaix was ringing with the tale. No one questioned for a moment the veracity of the eye−witnesses; indeed, everybody was only too ready to accept without question anything supernatural, and the present account possessed every attraction the most superstitious individual could desire. There might have been a certain commonplace about the appearance of the Saint himself—he had often been seen revisiting the glimpses of the moon; but he had never before, within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, been beheld actually in the company of “Master Roberd,” the horned one of Satanic fame. Success emboldens the most timid tale−teller, and the eye−witnesses, finding their hearers ready to accept any and every embellishment, gave full liberty to their superstitious imaginations.

“He had two great eyes, each as red as a boat lantern,” said one of these worthies, an aged fisherman; “and they looked up in the blessed Saint's face all bloodshot and glittering—one flash of them would have withered up a mortal man; but the blessed Saint held up his torch and made him go through his confession like any good Christian word after word.”

The speaker was lying on the shingle surrounded by a group of men and boys, among whom was Mikel Grallon.

“Made him go through his confession?” echoed one of the group.

“How do you know that, old Evran? You could not hear?”

The first speaker nodded his head sagaciously.

“Ask Penmarch! question Gwesklen! They were there. For my own part, I believe 'Master Roberd' was repeating the blessed Litany, and God knows he would rather burn for a hundred hundred years than be made to do so. One thing is certain—here stood the blessed Saint, and there knelt the Black One; and every one knows that is the sort of penance the Saint puts upon him whenever he catches him on holy ground.”

A murmur of wonder went round. Then Mikel Grallon said, knitting his brows heavily—

“It is strange enough. A torch in his hand, you said?”

“A torch. A great wild light like a comet, Mikel Grallon. It made us nearly blind to look.”

“And the Saint—you saw him quite plain?”

“Am I blind, Mikel Grallon? There he stood: you would have said it was an angel from heaven. Gwesklen says he had great wings; for my own part, I did not see the wings, but I will tell you what I did see—the devil's feet, and they were great cloven hoofs, horrible to behold.”

There was a long pause. Presently Mikel Grallon muttered, as if communing to himself—

“Suppose, after all, it had been a man!”

The old fisherman stared at Grallon with prolonged and stupefied amazement.

“A man!” he echoed. “Holy saints keep us, a man!”

The others repeated the words after him, staring at Grallon as if he had been guilty of some horrible blasphemy.

“A man in the Cathedral of St. Gildas at dead of night!” he exclaimed, with a contemptuous laugh. “A man as tall as a tree, shining like moonlight, and with wings, with wings! A man teaching 'Master Roberd' his confession! Mikel Grallon, art thou mad?”

Grallon was in a minority. Less grossly superstitious than many of his fellow−villagers, and disposed to inquire in his own rude manner into matters they took on hearsay, he was regarded by a goodly number of his neighbours as officious and impertinent. For all that, he bore the character of a pious man, and did not care to lose it.

“Oh, I say nothing!” he observed. “Such things have been, and the Cathedral is a dreadful place. But is it not strange that the Saint should carry a light?”

“Strange?” grunted the fisherman. “And what is strange in that, Mikel Grallon? Was it not black−dark with never a peep of moon or star, and how should the blessed Saint see his way without a torch of fire to light him? Strange—ugh! It would have been strange if the blessed one had been standing there with 'Master Roberd' in the dark, like a miserable mortal man.”

This answer was so conclusive that not another word was possible; and, indeed, Mikel Grallon seemed to think he had committed a blunder in making so very absurd a suggestion. This was decidedly the opinion of his hearers, for as Grallon walked away into the village, leaving the group behind him, the old salt observed, shrugging his shoulders—

"Mikel Grallon used to be a sensible man; but he is in love, you see, and perhaps that is why he talks like a fool."

Here, doubtless, the weather−wise worthy was at fault, for Mikel Grallon was no fool; he was only a very suspicious man, who never took anything for granted, always excepting, of course, the dogmas of that religion wherein he had been born and bred. Physically, he was timid; intellectually, he was bold. Had he been one of the original witnesses of the vision in the Cathedral, he would possibly have shared the terror of his comrades to the full, and brought away as exaggerated a narrative; but receiving the account coolly in the broad light of day, reading it in the light of recent events, weighing it in the scales of his judgment against his knowledge of the folly and stupidity of those who brought it, he had—almost involuntarily, for with such men suspicion is rather an instinct than a process of thought—come to a conclusion startlingly at variance with the conclusions of the general populace. What that conclusion was remains to be seen; meantime, he kept it carefully to himself. His time was fully occupied in prosecuting his suit with Marcelle Derval.

Now, he had not exaggerated in the least when he had said that that suit had been favourably heard by the heads of the Derval household. By means of innumerable little attentions, not the least of which lay in his power of listening without apparent weariness to tales that were repeated over and over again, and which had invariably the same Imperial centre of interest, he had quite succeeded in winning the heart of the Corporal; while in the eyes of Mother Derval he was a low−spoken, pious person, of excellent family, well able to maintain a wife, and well worthy of a virtuous girl's esteem. As to Alain and Jannick, he found in them tolerable allies so long as he plied them—particularly the wicked humourist Jannick—with little presents such as youths love. He might, therefore, be said with justice to be already an approved suitor in the eyes of the whole family.

Had Marcelle been a girl of a different stamp, more submissive and less headstrong, the betrothal would have been as good as concluded. Unfortunately for the suit, however, the chief party concerned was resolute in resistance, and they knew her character too well to use harsh measures.

The etiquette for a Kromlaix maiden under such circumstances was to take unhesitatingly the good or bad fortune which her guardians selected for her, to leave all the preliminaries in their hands, and only at the last moment to come forward and behold the object of the family choice. Marcelle, however, had a way of following her own inclinations, and was not likely to alter her habits when choosing a husband.

Just then the very thought of love was terrible to her. No sooner did she feel assured that Rohan was dead, than all her old passion sprang up twentyfold, and she began to bathe the bitter basil−pot of memory with secret and nightly tears. She forgot all his revolt, all his outrage against the Emperor; nay, the Emperor himself was forgotten in the sudden inspiration of her new and passionate grief. "I have killed him!" she cried to herself again and again. "Had I not drawn the fatal number he might be living yet; but he is dead, and I have killed him; and would that I might die too!"

In this mood she assumed mourning—a saffron coif; dress of a dark and sombre dye: there were young widows in the place who did not wear so much. Nor did she now conceal from any one the secret of her loss. "Tell them all, mother; I do not care. I loved my cousin Rohan; I shall love him till I die."

In due time, of course, this travelled to the ears of Mikel Grallon.

Strange to say, honest Mikel, so far from persisting under the circumstances, delicately withdrew into the background, and ceased to thrust his attentions on Marcelle. This conduct was so singular in a being so pertinacious that it even awakened amazement in the Corporal

"Soul of a crow!" he said, "have you no courage? She sees you too little—let her know that you mean to win. Girls' hearts are taken by storm; but you have not the spirit of a fly."

Mikel Grallon sighed.

"It is no use, Uncle Ewen. She is thinking too much of one that is dead."

Corporal Derval scowled, but replied not; he knew well to whom Grallon was referring, and having latterly thought more tenderly and pityingly of his unfortunate nephew, not without certain sharp twinges of the conscience, he did not care to discuss the subject. Under any other circumstances he would have been savage with

Marcelle for having formed her secret attachment to her cousin but the bloodhounds of the Conscription had been unleashed, and the man, his own flesh and blood, had been hunted down to death,—and now, after all, silence was best. It cannot be denied that at this period the Corporal showed an uneasiness under fire unworthy of such a veteran. He who would have cheerfully led a forlorn hope, or marched up to the very jaws of a cannon, now fidgeted uneasily in his chimney corner whenever the great silent eyes of his niece were quietly fixed upon him. He felt guilty, awkward, almost cowardly, and was glad even of Mikel Grallon to keep him company.

But, as we have already hinted, Grallon's attentions began to fall off rapidly soon after that memorable vision of the fishermen at the Gate of St. Gildas. You would have said, observing him closely, that the man was the victim of some tormenting grief. He became secret and mysterious in his ways, fond of solitude, more than ever reticent in his speech; his days were often passed in solitary rambles among the cliffs, his nights in lonely sails upon the sea; and from the cliffs he brought no burthen of weed or samphire, from the sea no fish. He, naturally a busy man, became preternaturally idle. There could scarcely be found a finer example, to all appearance, of melancholia induced by unsuccessful love.

It was one wet day, during one of his long rambles, that, suddenly approaching the Ladder of St. Triffine, he found himself face to face with a woman who leant upon a staff and carried a basket. She was very pale, and breathing hard from the ascent, but when she encountered him her lips went quite blue and a dull colour came into her cheeks.

“What, Mother Gwenfern!” he exclaimed; “you are the last woman one would have thought of meeting in such weather. Shall I carry your basket for you? You must be tired.”

As he held out his hand to take her burthen from her, she drew back shivering. A thick misty rain was falling, and her cloak was dripping wet.

“God's mercy, mother! you are pale as death—you have caught fever, perhaps, and will be ill.”

As he spoke, he watched her with a look of extraordinary penetration, which strongly contradicted the simplicity of his manner. She had been struggling all this time for breath, and at last she found her speech.

“I have been gathering dulse. You are right, Mikel; it is a long journey, and I should not have come so far.”

“It is not good for old limbs to be so fatigued,” replied Grallon simply; “at your age, mother, you should rest. Look you, that is what all the neighbours say is strange.”

“What is strange?” asked the woman sharply.

“A little while ago you were for ever sitting by the fire or busy in the cottage; not even on a holiday did you cross the door; and we all thought it was your sickness and were sorry. Yet since you have lost your son—amen to his soul!—you are never content at home; you are for ever wandering up and down as if you could not rest in peace.”

“That is true,” exclaimed Mother Gwenfern, looking at him fixedly with her cold scared eyes; “I cannot rest since”—she paused a moment shivering—“since they killed my boy.”

“Ah, yes,” said Grallon, forcing into his face a look of sympathy. “But, mother, in such weather!”

“When one has a broken heart, wind and rain cannot make it better or worse. Good day, Mikel Grallon.”

As the tall figure of the old woman disappeared in the direction of the village, Grallon watched it with a strange and cunning look. When it was quite invisible, he quietly descended the Ladder to the sea−shore, walked quickly along the beach, and came as close as possible to the Cathedral: but the tide was too high for a passage round to the Gate. So he stood on the water's edge, like one in profound meditation; then, as if an idea had suddenly occurred to him, he began curiously to examine the shingly shore.

He soon came upon traces of human feet, just where the retiring tide left the shingle still dark and wet; the heavy marks of wooden shoes were numerous and unmistakable—Mother Gwenfern had been wandering to and fro on the water's edge. All at once Grallon stooped eagerly down over a patch of sand, soft as wax to take any impression left upon it; and there, clear and unmistakable, was the print of a naked human foot.

With a patient curiosity worthy of some investigator of natural science, some short−sighted ponderer over “common objects of the sea−shore,” Mikel Grallon examined this footprint in every possible way and light—spanned and measured it lengthways and across, stooped down close over it with an extraordinary fascination. Not the immortal Crusoe, discovering *his* strange footprint on the savage shore, was more curious. Having completed his examination, Mikel Grallon smiled.

It was not a nice smile, that of Mikel Grallon; rather the smile of Reynard the Fox or Peeping Tom of

Coventry—the smile of some sly and cruel creature when some other weaker creature lies at its mercy, though mercy it has none. With this smile upon his face, Mikel reascended the steps and returned quietly and peacefully to his virtuous home.

From that day forth his conduct became more peculiar than ever; his monomania so possessing him that he neglected proper sustenance and lost his natural rest. Curiously enough, he had now so great a fascination for Mother Gwenfern's cottage that he kept it all day in his sight, and when night came was not far from the door. It thus happened that the widow, whenever she crossed her threshold, was almost certain to encounter honest Mikel, who followed her persistently with expressions of sympathy and offers of service; so that, to escape his company, she would return again into her cottage, looking wearied out and pale as death.

And whenever he slept, some other pair of eyes was on the watch; for he had a confidant, some nature silent as his own.

Whatever thought was in his mind it never got abroad. Like one that prepares a hidden powder mine, carefully laying the train for some terrible explosion, he occupied himself night and day, hugging his secret—if secret he had—to his bosom, with the characteristic vulpine smile. Whenever he found himself in the company of Marcelle, this vulpine look was exchanged for one of pensive condolence, as if he knew her sorrow and sympathised—under gentle protest, however—with its cause.

A little later on, Mikel Grallon had another adventure which, however trifling in itself, interested him exceedingly, and led at last to eventful consequences.

He was moving one evening along the cliffs, not far from the scene of the fatal struggle between Rohan Gwenfern and the *gendarmes*, and he was very stealthily observing the green tract between him and the village, when he suddenly became aware of a figure moving close by him and towards the verge of the crags. Now, it had grown quite late, and the moon had not yet risen, but there was light enough in the summer twilight to discern a shape with its face turned upon his and moving backward like a ghost. For a moment his heart failed him, for he was superstitious; but recovering himself, he sprang forward to accost the shape. Too late; it had disappeared, as if over the very face of the cliff—as if straight down to the terrible spot where the traces of death had been found some weeks before.

Strange to say, this time also, but not until he had recovered from the first nervous shock of the meeting, Mikel Grallon smiled.

After that, his watchings and wanderings grew more numerous than ever, and his reputation as a confirmed night−bird spread far and wide. “I will tell you this,” said one gossip to another; “Mikel Grallon has something on his mind, and he is thinking far too much of the old Corporal's niece.” Even the announcement of the arrival of the mackerel did not alter him; for, instead of taking his seat as captain of his own boat, he put another man in his place, and received only his one share as owner of the boat. He had the air of a man for ever on the watch—a contraband air, as of one ever expecting to surprise or be surprised.

At last, one day, final and complete success having crowned his endeavours, he walked quietly into the Corporal's kitchen, where the family was gathered at the midday meal, and said in a low voice, after passing the usual salutations—

“I bring news. Rohan Gwenfern is not dead: he is hiding in the Cathedral of St. Gildas”

Chapter 27. THE HUE AND CRY

Alain and Jannick were out at the fishing, and the only members of the family present were the Corporal, Mother Derval, and Marcelle. The Corporal fell back in his chair aghast, gazing wildly at Mikel; Mother Derval, accustomed to surprises, only dropped her arms by her side and uttered a deep moan; but Marcelle, springing up, with characteristic presence of mind ran to the door, which had been left wide open, and locked it quickly—then, returning white as death, with her large eyes fixed on Mikel, she murmured—

"Speak low, Mikel Grallon! for the love of God, speak low."

"It is true," said Grallon in a thick whisper; "he lives, and I have discovered it by the merest chance. True, I have suspected it for a long time, but now I know it for a certainty."

"Holy Mother, protect us!" cried the widow. "Rohan—alive!"

By this time the Corporal had recovered from his stupor and advancing on Grallon before Marcelle could utter another word, he exclaimed—

"Are you drunk, Mikel Grallon, or are you come here sober to outrage us with a lie? Soul of a crow! take care or you will see me angry, and then we shall quarrel in good earnest, *mon garz."*

"Speak lower!" said Marcelle, with her hand upon her uncle's arm. "If the neighbours should hear!"

"What I say is the truth," responded Mikel, looking very white round the edges of his lips; "and I sware by the blessed bones of St Gildas himself that Rohan is alive. I know his hiding−place, and I have seen him with my own eyes."

"His spirit perhaps!" groaned the widow. "Ah, God! he died a violent death, and his poor spirit cannot rest."

Mikel Grallon cast a contemptuous look in the widow's direction, and faintly shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not one of those who go about seeing ghosts, mother; and I know the difference between spirits of air and men of flesh and blood. Go to! This is gospel that I am telling you, and Rohan is hiding in the great Cathedral, as I said."

"In the Cathedral!" echoed the Corporal.

"There, or close at hand; of that I am certain. I have tracked him thrice, and thrice he has disappeared into the Cathedral; but I was alone, see you, and I did not care to follow too close, for he is desperate. I should have put my hand upon him once, but he walks the cliffs like a goat, and he went where I could not follow."

The news, though thus quietly announced, fell like a thunderbolt on the hearth of the Corporal, and perfect consternation followed. As for Uncle Ewen, he was completely overpowered, for the announcement of his nephew's death had been pleasant compared with the announcement that he was not dead at all; since to be alive was still to be in open arms against the Emperor, to be still a miserable "deserter," worthy the contempt and hate of all good patriots; to be, last and worst, a doomed man, who might be seized and shot like a dog at any moment. Uncle Ewen was horror−stricken. Of late he had been conscience−twinged on account of Rohan, and had secretly reproached himself for undue harshness and severity; and in his own stern way he had thought very softly of the gentle dead, so that more than once his rough sleeve had been brushed across his wet eyes; but now to hear all at once that his sorrow had been wasted, and that the spectre of family shame was still haunting the village, was simply overwhelming.

Marcelle, for her part, rose to the occasion instead of sinking under it. She was one of those unique women who feel rather than think, and whose feeling at once assumes the form of rapid action. With her eyes so steadily and questioningly fixed on his face that Grallon became quite tremulous and uncomfortable, she seemed occupied for a brief space in reading the honest man's very soul; but speedily satisfying herself that she had completely mastered that not very abstruse problem, she said with decision—

"Tell the truth, Mikel Grallon! Have you spoken of this to any other living soul?"

Mikel stammered and looked confused; he replied, however, in the negative.

"If you have not spoken, then remember—his life is in your hands, and, if he is discovered through you, his blood will be upon your head, and the just God will punish you."

Mikel stammered again, saying—

"Others may have also seen him; nay, I have heard Pipriac himself say that he suspects! Look you, you must

not blame me if he is found, for other men have eyes as well as I. Ever since that night of the vision in the Cathedral, they have been on the watch; for it is clear now that it was not the blessed Saint at all, but a mortal man, Rohan Gwenfern himself."

This was said with such manifest confusion and hesitation, and accompanied with so guilty a lowering of the vulpine eyes, that Marcelle leaped at once to a conclusion fatal to honest Mikel's honour. She fixed her gaze again upon him, so searchingly and so terribly, that he began bitterly to reproach himself for having brought his information in person at all. The truth is, he had expected a wrathful explosion on the part of the Corporal, and had calculated, under cover of that explosion, on playing the part of an innocent and sympathetic friend of the family; but finding that all looked at him with suspicion and horror, as on one who had conjured up some terrible phantom, and who was responsible for all the consequences of the fact he had announced, he lost courage and betrayed too clearly that his conduct had not been altogether disinterested.

At last Uncle Ewen began to find his tongue.

"But it is incredible!" he exclaimed. "Out there among the cliffs, with no one to bear him food, a man would *starve!"*

"One would think so," said Grallon; "but I have seen his mother wandering thither with her basket, and the basket, be sure, was never empty. Then Rohan was not like others; he is well used to living out among the sea−birds and the rock−pigeons. At all events, there he is, and the next thing to ask is, What is to be done?"

The Corporal did not reply; but Marcelle, now pale as death, drew from her breast a small cross of black bog oak, and holding it out to Mikel, said, still with her large eyes fixed on his—

"Will you swear upon the Blessed Cross, Mikel Grallon, that you have kept the secret?"

Mikel looked amazed, even hurt, at the suggestion.

"Have I not just discovered it, and to whom should I speak? If you wish it, I will swear!"

Providence, however, had not arranged that Mikel Grallon was to commit formal perjury; for at that moment some one was heard fingering the latch, and when the door did not open there came a succession of heavy knocks.

"Open!" cried a voice.

Even the Corpora! went pale, while the mother sank on her knees close to the spinning−wheel in the corner, and Marcelle held her hand upon her heart.

"Holy Virgin! who can it be?" whispered Marcelle.

"Perhaps it is only one of the neighbours," responded Mikel, who nevertheless looked as startled as the rest.

"Open!" said the voice; and heavy blows on the door followed.

"Who is there?" cried Marcelle, running over to the door with her hand upon the key.

"In the name of the Emperor!" was the reply.

She threw open the door, and in ran Pipriac, armed, and followed by a file of *gendarmes* with fixed bayonets. His Bardolphian nose was purple with excitement, his little eye was twinkling fiercely, his short legs were quivering and stamping on the ground.

"Tous les diables!" he cried, "why is your door locked at mid−day, I ask you, you who are honest people? Do you not see I am in haste? Where is Corporal Derval?"

"Here," answered the old man, straightening himself to "attention," but trembling with excitement.

"It is strange news I bring you—news that will make you jump in your skins; I cannot linger, but I was passing the door, and I thought you would like to hear. Ah, Mother Derval, good morrow!—Ah, Mikel Grallon! I have a message for you; you must come with us and have some talk."

"What is the matter, comrade?" asked the Corporal in a husky voice.

"This—the dead has risen; ha, ha! what think you of that?—the dead has risen! It is more wonderful than you can conceive, comrade, and you will not know whether to be sorry or glad; but your nephew, the deserter, is not killed,—*corbleu,* he is like a cat or an eel, and I defy you to kill him! Well, he is alive, and that is why we are here again!"

During this little scene Marcelle had scarcely once taken her eyes off Mikel Grallon, who showed more and more traces of confusion; but now she advanced to the Sergeant and said in a voice low, yet quick with agony—

"How do you know he is alive? Have you seen him with your eyes!"

"Not I" answered Pipriac; "but others have seen, and it is on their information I come. Malediction! how the girl stares! She's as pale as a ghost."

"Marcelle!" cried the widow, still upon her knees.

But Marcelle paid no heed; white as a marble woman, she gazed in the irascible face of the little Sergeant.

"You have had information!" she echoed in the same low voice.

"Tous les diables! yes. Is that so strange? Some honest rascal"—here the Sergeant glanced rapidly at Mikel Grallon—"has seen the poor devil in his hiding−place, and has sent us word. If you ask me who has informed, I answer—That is *our* business; though he were the fiend himself he will get the reward. Don't blame old Pipriac for doing his duty, that is all. It is no fault of mine, comrades. But I must not linger—Right about face, march!—and, Mikel Grallon, a word with you."

The *gendarmes* filed out of the cottage, and Pipriac, with a fierce nod to the assembled company, followed. Mikel Grallon was quietly crossing over to the door, when Marcelle intercepted him.

"Stay, Mikel Grallon!"

The fisherman stood still, not meeting the angry eyes of the girl, but glancing nervously at the Corporal, who had sunk into a chair and was holding his hand to his head as if in stupor.

"I understand all now, Mikel Grallon," said Marcelle in a clear voice, "and you cannot deceive me any more. Go! You are an ingrate—you are a wretch—you are not fit to live."

Mikel, thus addressed, even by the woman he professed to love, gave the snarl of all low curs in extremity, and showed his teeth with a malicious expression, but he quailed before the eyes that were burning upon him.

"You have watched night and day, you have hunted him down, and you will have the blood−money when he is found.—Yes, you have betrayed him, and you have come here to deceive my uncle with a lie, that your wickedness might not be known. God will punish you!—may it be soon!"

"It is false!" cried Mikel, scowling wildly.

"It is you that are false; false to my uncle, to my poor cousin, to me. I always hated you, Mikel Grallon, but now I would like to be your death. If I were a man I would *kill* you! Go!"

With a fierce look and an angry shrug of the shoulders the man passed out, quite cowed by the looks and gestures of the angry girl. It was characteristic of Marcelle that she could bear great agony in silence and in reticence, but that she could not bear the storm of her own passionate nature when once it rose. As Mikel disappeared, she uttered a wild cry, threw her arms up in the air, and then, for the second time in her life, swooned suddenly away.

Chapter 28. ON THE CLIFFS

Out there among the cliffs, midway between the top of the precipice above and the wave−washed rocks below, a man is crouching, so still, so moveless, he seems a portion of the crag.

It is one of those dark summer afternoons, when the heavens are misted with their own breath, and a cold blue−grey broods upon the sea, and there is no stir at all, either of sunshine, or wind, or wave. The roar of the sea can be heard miles away inland; all is so very still; and there is something startling in the shrill minute−cry of the great blue−backed gull, as it sails slowly along the water's edge, predatory as a raven, yet white and beautiful as a dove.

Where the man sits, there is a niche in the cliff; a dizzy path leads to the rocks below, but overhead the precipice overhangs and is utterly inaccessible. Not one hundred yards away stands, roofless under heaven, the great natural Cathedral, and the man from where he sits can see the gleaming of its emerald floor, formed now by the risen tide. Over the Cathedral flocks of kittiwake gulls are hovering like white butterflies, uttering low cries which are quite drowned in the heavy cannonade of the sea.

The sun is invisible, but the sullen purple which suffuses the western horizon shows that he is sinking to his setting; and far out upon the water the fishing−boats are crawling like black specks to the night's harvest. It is the dark end of a dark day, a day of warm yet sunless calm.

The man has been crouching in his niche for hours, listening and waiting. At last he stirs, throwing up his head like some startled animal, and his eyes, wild and eager, look up to the dizzy cliffs above his head. Something flutters far above him, like a sea−gull flying, or like a handkerchief waving; and directly he perceives it he rises erect, puts his finger and thumb between his teeth, and gives a shrill whistle. Could any mortal eye behold him now, it would look with pity; for he is bareheaded, his beard has grown wild and long, his features are darkened and distorted with exposure to the elements, and the clothes he wears—a coloured shirt and *bragou−bras*—are almost in rags. His shirt is torn open at the shoulder, and his feet are bare. Altogether, he resembles some wild, hunted being, some wretched type of the primæval woods, rather than a rational and a peaceful man.

Looking up again eagerly, he sees something descending rapidly from the top of the cliff. It is a small basket, attached to a long and slender cord. As it descends, he stretches out his hands eagerly, and when it reaches him he pulls gently at the cord, as a signal to the person who stands above. Then taking from the basket some black bread, some coarse cheese, and a small flask containing brandy, he places them on the rock beside him, and pulls again softly at the cord, when the basket, thus emptied of its contents, rapidly re−ascends.

His niche in the crag is a dizzy one, fitter for the feet of eagle or raven than those of a man; but crouching close against the face of the crag, with his feet set firm, he proceeds rapidly, yet methodically, to satisfy his appetite. He is doubtless too hungry to delay; his eyes, at least, have the eager gleam of famished animals. When his meal is over, he carefully gathers together what remains, and wraps it in a kerchief, which he unloosens from his neck. The brandy is his *bonne−bouche*, and he sips that slowly, drop by drop, as if every drop is precious; and so indeed it is, for already it lights his famished cheek with a new and more lustrous life. He sips only a portion, then thrusts the flask into his breast.

Even now he seems in no hurry to go, but takes his *siesta*, watching the purple darkness deepen across the sea. There is a strange, far−away look in his eyes, which are gentle still, despite the worn and savage lineaments of his face. The smoke of the waters which break far beneath him rises up to his seat, and the great roar is in his ears, but he is too familiar with these things to heed them now; he is occupied with his own thoughts, and half unconscious of external sights and sounds.

But suddenly, as a hare starts in his form, the man stirs again—stands erect—looks up—listens; and now he hears above him a sound more startling than the sea—the sound of human voices. A sick horror overspreads his features, and he begins, with swift and stealthy feet, to descend the dangerous path which leads to the shore; but, as he does so, he is arrested by a cry far overhead.

Looking up, he sees the gleam of human faces overhanging the gulf and glaring down upon him. He staggers for a moment and grows dizzy, but recovering himself in time, glides rapidly on; as he goes, the wild cry rises again faintly overhead, and he knows that his pursuers have at last discovered him and are again upon his track.

Chapter 29. THE FACES IN THE CAVE

Leaving Kromlaix with his *gendarmes,* Sergeant Pipriac at once made his way up to the great Menhir, and thence along the green plateau above the cliffs. In eager conversation with him walked Mikel Grallon, and behind them came excited groups of the population—men, women, and children—all in high excitement now the “hue and cry” had again begun. They had not proceeded far when they encountered Mother Gwenfern, creeping slowly along with her basket on her arm, and looking gaunt and pale as any ghost. Never one who stood upon much ceremony, Pipriac pounced upon the old woman with savage eagerness, and roundly announced his errand.

“Aha! and have we discovered you at last, Mother Loïz? *Tous les diables!* Has old Pipriac found you out, though you thought him so blind, so stupid? What have you got in your basket—tell me that? Where do you come from? where are you going? Malediction! stand and listen. Come, answer, where is he? The Emperor is anxious about his health; quick—spit it out!”

The old woman, now white as death, and with her lips quite blue, looked fixedly in the Sergeant's face, but made no reply.

“So you are dumb, mother!—well, we shall find you a tongue. It is your own fault if old Pipriac is severe, mind that; for you have not treated him fairly—you have led him up and down like a fool. Things like that cannot go on for ever; the Emperor has a long nose to scent out deserters. Malediction!” he added, with mock irascibility, “did you think to deceive the Emperor?”

Despite his air of cruelty and brutality, Pipriac was not altogether bad−hearted, and just then he could not quietly bear the steady reproach of the widow's face, which remained frozen in one terrible look, half agony, half defiance; so there was more pity than unkindness in his heart when he took the basket from her, grumbled a minute over its emptiness, and then, with a comical frown, handed it back. All the time Mother Gwenfern kept silence, with an unearthly expression of pain in her pale grey eyes; and when Pipriac swaggered away at the head of his myrmidons, and women from the village came up garrulously and joined her, she moved on in their midst with scarcely a word. All her soul was busy praying that the good God, who had assisted Rohan so well up to that hour, might still remain his friend, and preserve him again in the hour of his extremity.

Leaving the majority of the stragglers behind them, and accompanied only by Mikel Grallon and a few men and youths of the village, Pipriac and the *gendarmes* pursued their way rapidly along the edges of the cliffs, now pausing to converse in hurried whispers and to gaze down the great granite precipices which lay beneath their feet, again hurrying on like hounds excited by a fresh scent. The party consisted of some twenty in all, and among them there could be counted no friend to the hunted man; indeed, who would have dared, in those days of short shrift and speedy doom, to avow friendship for any opponent of that fatal system which Napoleon was building up on the ashes of the Revolution? In strict truth, there was little or no sympathy for Rohan, now that it was discovered that he still lived; for the old prejudice against him had arisen tenfold, and not one was there, except perhaps Mikel Grallon, believed he was anything more than a feeble and effeminate coward; unless, indeed, as Pipriac individually was inclined to affirm, he was simply a dangerous maniac, not properly responsible for his own actions.

Never had the gigantic cliffs and crags, always lonely and terrible, looked so forbidding as on that day; for the sullen, rayless sunset, and the dead, lifeless calm, deepened the effect of desolation. Rent as by earthquake and fantastically shapened by the sea, the vast columns and monoliths of crimson granite glimmered beneath like the fragments of some extinct world; so that walking on the grass above, and peeping dizzily over, one seemed surveying a place of colossal tombs; and on these tombs the moss and lichen drew their tracery of grey and gold, and out of their niches grew long scrunnel grass and rock ferns, and on them, silent, sat the raven and the speckled hawk of the crags, while the face of the cliff far under was still snowed with the darkening legions of the herring−gull.

Whenever old Pipriac looked over, his head, unaccustomed to such depths, went round like a wheel, and he drew back with an expletive. Mikel Grallon, more experienced, took the survey coolly enough, but even he was careful not to approach too near to the edge. Here and there the sides were so worn away that close approach was highly dangerous; on the very brink the stones had detached and crumbled down, the rocks were loosening, and

the grass was slippery as ice.

Presently Mikel lifted up his hand and called a halt. They were standing on a portion of the cliffs which ran out, by a green ascent, to a sort of promontory.

"Listen," said Mikel. "The Cathedral is right under us, and I will peep over and try if anything is to be seen."

So saying, he cautiously approached the cliff, but when he was within some yards of it, he threw himself upon his stomach and crawled forward upon the ground until his face hung over the edge. He remained so long in this attitude that Pipriac grew impatient, and was growling out a remonstrance, when Mikel turned slowly round, beckoned, and pointed downward. He had gone as white as a sheet.

Instantly, Pipriac and two or three of the *gendarmes* set down their guns, took off their cocked hats, approached, threw themselves on their stomachs, and crawled forward as Mikel Grallon had done.

"Is it he?" growled Pipriac, as he reached the edge.

"Look!" said Mikel Grallon.

In a moment all their heads were hanging over the precipice, and all their faces, eager and open−mouthed, glaring wildly down. At first, all was dizzy and indistinct—a frightful gulf, at the foot of which crawled the sea, too far away for its thunder to be heard; a gulf across which a solitary seagull flashed now and again, like a flake of wavering snow. Right under them, the precipice yawned inward, so that they hung sheer over the void of air. Beneath them, but some distance to the left, they saw the roofless walls of the cathedral of St. Gildas stretching right out into the sea: but these walls, which to one below world seem so gigantic, seemed dwarfed by distance to comparative insignificance, lying as they did far below the heights of the inaccessible crags.

"Where? where?" murmured Pipriac, with a face as red as crimson.

"Right under, with his face looking down upon the sea."

At that moment Rohan Gwenfern, startled by the voice, stirred and gazed up, and all simultaneously uttered a cry. Seen from above, he seemed of pigmy size, and to be walking on places where there was not foothold for a fly; and the cry that followed, when he staggered and looked up again, was one of horror and amaze.

When Pipriac and the rest crawled back and rose to their feet, every face exhibited consternation; and the voice of Pipriac shook.

"He is the Devil!" said the Sergeant. "No man could walk where he has walked, and not be smashed like an egg."

"It was horrible to look at!" said the *gendarme* Pierre.

"No man can follow him," said André.

"Nonsense," cried Mikel Grallon. "He knows the cliffs better than others, that is all, and he is like a goat on his feet. You can guess now how he saved his neck that night when you fancied he was killed. Well, he will soon be taken, and there will be an end of his pranks."

"We are wasting time," exclaimed Pipriac, who had been glaring with no very amiable light in his one eye at Mikel Grallon. "We must descend and follow, down the Stairs of St. Triffine; but you four—Nicole, Jàn, Bertram, Hoël—will stay above and keep watch on all we do. But mind, no bloodshed! If he should ascend, take him alive."

"But if he should resist?" said one of the men.

"Malediction! you are four to one. You others, march! Come, Mikel Grallon!"

Leaving the four men behind, the others hastened on. They had not proceeded far when Pipriac uttered an exclamation and started back; for suddenly, emerging from the gulfs below, a living thing sprang up before them and stood on the very edge of the cliff, gazing at them with large startled eyes. It was Jannedik.

"Mother of God!" cried Pipriac, "my breath is taken away;—yet it is only a goat."

"It belongs to the mother of the deserter," said Grallon; "it is a vicious beast, and as cunning as the Black Fiend. I have often longed to cut its throat with my knife, when I have seen Rohan Gwenfern fondling it as if it were a good Christian."

Having recovered from her first surprise, Jannedik had slowly approached, and passed by the group with supreme unconcern. For a moment she seemed disposed to butt with her horned head at the *gendarmes*, who poked at her grimly with their shining bayonets, but after a moment's reflection over the odds, which were decidedly against her, she gave a scornful toss of her head and walked away.

They had now reached the Ladder of St. Triffine; and, slowly following the steps cut in the solid rock, they

descended until they emerged upon the shore. Looking up when they reached the bottom, they saw Jannedik standing far up against the sky, on the very edge of the chasm, and tranquilly gazing down.

By this time it was growing quite dark in the shadow of the cliffs, and wherever they searched, under the eager guidance of Mikel Grallon, they found no traces of the fugitive. Grallon himself, at considerable risk, ascended part of the cliff down the face of which Rohan had so recently descended; but after he had reached a height of some fifty or sixty feet, he very prudently rejoined his companions on the solid shingle below.

“If one had the feet of a fly,” grumbled Pipriac, “one might follow him, but he walks where no man ever walked before.”

“He cannot be far away,” said Mikel. “Out that way beyond the Cathedral there is no path even for a goat to crawl. It is in the Cathedral we must search, and fortunately the tide has begun to ebb out of the Gate.”

Another hour had elapsed, however, before the passage was practicable, and when, wading round the outlying wall which projected into the sea, they passed in under the Gate, the vast place was wrapped in blackness, and the early stars were twinkling above its roofless walls. Even Pipriac, neither by nature nor by education a superstitious man, felt awed and chilled. A dreadful stillness reigned, only broken by the dripping of the water down the sides of the furrowed rocks, by the low eerie cries of seabirds stirring among the crags, by the rapid whirr of wings passing to and fro in the darkness. Nothing was perceptible; Night there had completely assumed her throne, and the only lights were the rayless lights of heaven far above. Ranged in rows along the walls sat numbers of cormorants, unseen, but ever and anon fluttering their heavy pinions as the strange footsteps startled them from sleep.

The men spoke in whispers, and crept on timidly.

“If we had brought a torch!” said Pierre.

“One would say the Devil was here in the darkness” growled Pipriac.

Mikel Grallon made the sign of the cross.

“The blessed St. Gildas forbid,” he murmured. “Hark, what is that?”

There was a rush, a whirr, and a flock of doves, emerging from some dark cave, crossed the blue space overhead.

“It is an accursed spot,” said Pipriac; “one cannot see well an inch before one's nose. Malediction! one might as well look for a needle in the great sea. If God had made me a goat or an owl I might thrive at this work, but to grope about in a dungeon is to waste time.”

So the retreat was sounded in a whisper, and the party soon retraced their steps from the Cathedral, and were standing in the lighter atmosphere of the neighbouring shore. Total darkness now wrapped the cliffs on every side.

A long parley ensued, throughout which Mikel Grallon protested vehemently that Rohan could not be far away, and that if watch were kept all night he could not possibly escape.

“Otherwise,” averred the spy, “he will creep away directly the coast is clear and fly to some other part of the cliffs. My life upon it, he is even now watching to see us go. If he is to escape, good and well—I say nothing—I have done my duty like a good citizen; but if he is to be caught you must keep your eyes wide open till day.”

In honest truth, Pipriac would gladly have withdrawn for the night and returned to the pursuit in the morning; for, after all, though he was zealous in his duty, he would just as soon have given the deserter another chance. Something in Grallon's manner, however, warned him that the man was a spy in more senses than one, and that any want of energy just then, if followed by the escape of Rohan, might be misrepresented at head−quarters. So it was decided that the Cathedral of St. Gildas, with all the circumjacent cliffs, should be kept under surveillance till daybreak. Despatching two more members of his force to join the others on the cliff, and scattering his own force well over the seashore and under the face of the crags, he lit his pipe and proceeded to keep watch.

The night passed quietly enough, despite some false alarms. At last, when every man was savage and wearied out, the dawn came, with a rising wind from the sea and heavy showers of rain. All the villagers, save only Mikel Grallon, had returned to their homes, shrugging their shoulders over what they deemed a veritable wild−goose chase.

Once more, for the tide had again ebbed, Grallon led the way round under the Gate, and the lone Cathedral echoed with the sound of voices. Great black cormorants were still sitting moveless in the walls; some floundered away to the water with angry wings, but many remained moveless within a few yards of the soldiers' bayonets. All now was bright and visible:—the crimson granite walls stretching out from the mighty cliff, the Gate hung with

dripping moss as green as grass, the fantastic niches with their traceries of lichen green and red, the blocks upon the floor like black tombs, slimy with the oozy kisses of the salt tide, and the mighty architraves and minarets far above the roof of the Cathedral, and forming part of the overhanging crag.

The men moved about like pigmies on the shingly floor, searching the nooks and crannies in the walls, prying this way and that way like men very ill−used, but finding no trace of any living thing. At every step he took Pipriac grew more irritated, for he was sorely missing his morning dram of brandy, and the *gendarmes* shared his irritation.

"Tous les diables!" he cried, "one might come here hunting for crabs or shell−fish, but I see no hiding−place for anything bigger than a bird. Look you here! The high tide fills this accursed place whenever it enters: there is the mark all round, as high as my hand can reach;—and as for hiding up there in the walls, why only a limpet could do that, for they are as slippery as grass. Malediction! let us depart. There is no deserter here. March!"

"Stay," said Mikel Grallon.

Pipriac turned upon him with a savage scowl.

"Perdition! what next?"

"You have not searched everywhere."

Pipriac uttered an oath; his one eye glittered in a perfect fury.

"You are an ass for your pains! Where else shall we search? Down thy throat, fisherman?"

"No," answered Grallon with a sickly smile; "up yonder!" and he pointed with his hand.

"Where?"

"Up in the *Trou!"*

The great Altar of the Cathedral, which we have already described to the reader as consisting of a lovely curtain of moss covering the cliff for about fifty square feet, was glimmering with its innumerable jewels of prismatic and ever−changing dew; and just above it was the dark blot on which Marcelle had gazed in terror when she stood before the Altar with Rohan. High as the gallery of some cathedral, the *Trou,* or Cave, out of the heart of which the mystic water flowed, loomed remote, and to all seemed inaccessible. As Pipriac gazed up, a flock of pigeons passed overhead and plunged into the Cave, but instantly emerging again, they scattered swiftly and disappeared over the Cathedral walls.

"Did you mark that?" said Grallon, sinking his voice.

Pipriac, who was gazing up with a disgusted expression, scowled unamiably.

"What, fisherman?"

"The blue doves. They entered the *Trou,* but no sooner did they disappear than they returned again."

"And then?"

"The Cave is not empty, that is all."

Pipriac uttered an exclamation, and all the men looked in stupefaction at one another, while Grallon smiled complacently and cruelly to himself.

"But it is impossible," exclaimed the Sergeant at last. "Look! The walls are as straight as my hand; and the moss is so slippery and soft that no man could climb; and as to entering from above—why, see how the crags overhang. If he is there, he is the Devil; if he is the Devil, we shall never lay hands upon him. Malediction!"

It certainly did seem incredible at first sight that any human being could have reached the Cave—if Cave it was—from above or from under, unassisted by a ladder or a rope. Mikel Grallon, however, being well acquainted with the place, soon demonstrated that ascent, though difficult and perilous in the extreme, was not altogether impossible. In the extreme corner of the Cathedral, close to what we have termed the Altar, the cliff was hard and dry, and here and there were interstices into which a climber might press his hands and feet, and so crawl tediously upward.

"I tell you this," said Mikel whispering, "it can be done, for I have seen the man himself do it. You have but to insert toes and fingers thus"—here he illustrated his words by climbing a few yards—"and up you go."

"Good," said Pipriac grimly; "I see you are a clever fellow, and understand the trick of it. Lead the way, and by the soul of the Emperor we will follow!"

Mikel Grallon grew quite white with annoyance and mortification.

"I tell you he is there."

"And I tell you we will follow if you will show us how to climb. Malediction! do you think old Pipriac is

afraid? Come, forward! What, you refuse? Well, I do not blame you; for I have said it, only the Devil could climb there."

Turning to his men, however, he continued in a louder voice—

"Nevertheless, we will astonish the birds. Pierre, take aim at the *Trou* yonder. Fire!"

The *gendarme* levelled his piece at the dark hole far above him and fired. There was a crash, a roar, a murmur of innumerable echoes, and suddenly, overhead, hovered countless gulls, shrieking and flying, attracted by the report.

For a moment, it seemed as if the very crags would fall and crush the pigmy shapes below.

"Again!" said Pipriac, signalling to another of his men.

The concussion was repeated; fresh myriads of gulls shut out the sky like a blinding snow, and shrieked their protestations; but there came no other sign.

"One would say the very skies were falling," growled Pipriac. "Bah! he is not there."

At that moment, the *gendarmes*, who were still gazing eagerly upward, uttered an exclamation of wonder. A head was thrust out of the *Trou*, and two large eyes were eagerly gazing down.

The exclamation of wonder was speedily followed by one of anger and disappointment; for the head was not that of a human being but that of a goat; no other, indeed, than our old friend Jannedik, who, with her two fore−feet on the edge of the Cave, and her great grave face gleaming far up in the morning light, seemed quietly demanding the reason of that unmannerly tumult. Mikel Grallon ground his teeth and called a thousand curses on the unfortunate animal, while the *gendarme* Pierre, cocking his piece with a look at his Sergeant, seemed disposed to give Jannedik short shrift.

But Pipriac, with a fierce wave of the hand, bade the *gendarme* desist, and warned his men generally to let Jannedik alone; then turning to Mikel Grallon, he continued sneeringly—

"So this is your deserter, fisherman?—a poor wretch of a goat, with a beard and horns! Did I not say you were an ass for your pains? Malediction! the very beast is laughing at you; I can see the shining of her white teeth."

"Since the brute is yonder," answered Grallon angrily, "the master is not far away. If we had but a ladder! You would see, you would see!"

"Bah!"

And Pipriac turned his back upon Grallon in disgust, and signalled to his men to depart.

"Then if he escapes, do not say that I am to blame," cried the fisherman, still in a low voice. "I would wager my boat, my nets, all I have, that he bides in yonder, and is afraid to show his face. Is not the goat his, and what is the goat doing up in the *Trou?* Ah, I tell you that you are wrong, Sergeant Pipriac! I have watched for nights and nights, and know well where he hides. I did not come to you before I had made certain. As sure as I am a living man, as sure as I have a soul to be saved, he is up yonder, up in the *Trou!"*

Despite the intensity and evident honesty of this assertion, Pipriac did not vouchsafe any further reply;—and he and his men had turned their sullen faces towards the Gate, when a voice far above them said, in low clear tones, which made them start and turn suddenly in a wild amaze—

"Yes, Mikel Grallon, I *am* here."

Chapter 3O. A PARLEY

All looked up; and there, standing high above them at the mouth of the Cave, with dishevelled hair and a beard of many weeks' growth, was the man they sought—so worn and torn, so wild and ragged, that only his great stature made him recognisable. The goat had disappeared, either into the Cave or up the face of the cliff, and Rohan was alone, his whole figure exposed to the view of his pursuers. Standing there in the morning light, with his naked neck and arms, his ruined garment, his uncovered head, his features distorted and full of the quick−panting intensity of a hunted animal, he showed the traces alike of great mental agony and physical suffering; but over and beyond its predominant look of pain, his face displayed another passion, akin to hate in its quick and dangerous intensity, and his eyes, which were fixed on Mikel Grallon, burnt with a fierce fire. At first, indeed, it seemed as if he would precipitate himself like an enraged beast prone down upon the spy,—but such an act would have been certain and immediate death, so great was the height at which he stood. He remained at the mouth of the Cave, panting and watching. As to Grallon, he almost crouched in his sudden consternation and fear; while Pipriac and the *gendarmes* stared up at the vision, too stupefied at first to utter a word.

"Holy Virgin?" cried Pipriac at last, "it is he!"—then he added with a fierce nod and at the pitch of his voice, "So! you are there, *mon garz!"*

Rohan made no reply, but kept his eyes fixed on Mikel Grallon. Pipriac pursued his speech uneasily, like one that felt the awkwardness of the situation.

"We have been waiting a long time, but now we are glad to find you at home. What are you doing up there, so high in the air? *Diable,* one might as well fly like a bird! Well, there is no time to lose, and now that we have found you, you had better come down at once. Come, surrender! In the name of the Emperor!"

At these words the *gendarmes* gripped their guns and fell back in military line, looking up at the *Trou* and ready to fire at the word of command. The situation was an exciting one, but Rohan merely put up his hand to throw back his hair from his eyes, smiled, and waited.

"Come, do you hear?" proceeded Pipriac. "I shall not waste words, mark you, if you delay too long. The game is up;—we have trumped your last card, and you will gain little by stopping up there like a bird on its nest. Descend, Rohan Gwenfern, descend and surrender, that we may lose no time."

The voice of the old martinet rang loudly through the hollow walls of the Cathedral, and died away among the lonely cliffs above. All below was in shadow, but overhead on the cliff the chill light was gleaming as on a polished mirror, and one lonely sunbeam, severed as it were from its companions, was glimmering right down upon the inaccessible *Trou* and on the figure of Rohan. So the man stood dimly illumed, in all his raggedness and physical desolation; and the light touched his matted golden hair, and stole down and glared upon his feet, which were quite naked.

"What do you want?" he asked in a hollow voice.

The irascible Sergeant shook his fist.

"Want? . . . Hear him! . . . Well, you! *Diable,* have we not been searching up and down the earth until our souls are sick of searching? It is a good joke, to ask what we want; you are laughing at us, fox that you are. Surrender, I repeat! In the name of the Emperor!"

Then, as if carried away by a common inspiration, all the *gendarmes* brandished their weapons, echoing "Surrender!" The Cathedral rang with the cry. After a pause, the answer came from above, in a low yet clear and decided voice—

"You are wasting your time. I will never be taken alive."

Pipriac glared up in astonishment; and now, for the first time, Mikel Grallon looked up too, still with sensations the reverse of comfortable, for the figure of the hunted man seemed terrible as that of some wild beast at bay. The black mouth of the Cave was now illuminated, and far overhead clouds of gulls were hovering like flakes of snow in the morning light; but the floor and roofless walls of the Cathedral, never lit unless the sun was straight above them in the zenith, were untouched by the golden gleam.

"No nonsense!" shrieked Pipriac. "Come down! Come, or"—here the speaker glared imbecilely up the inaccessible walls—"or we shall come and take you."

"Come!" said Rohan.

Pipriac was a man who, although his blustering and savage manners concealed a certain fundamental good nature, could never bear to be openly thwarted or placed in a ridiculous position; and now a complication of sentiments made him unusually irritable. In the first place, he would much rather have never discovered the deserter at all; for, after all, he pitied the man and remembered that he was the son of an old friend. Again, he had, he considered, behaved throughout the whole pursuit with extraordinary sympathy and forbearance, and had thereby almost laid himself open to the suspicion of lacking "zeal". Lastly—and this feeling was perhaps the most powerful and predominant at the moment—he had been up all night, without a drop of liquor to wet his lips, and insomuch as that Bardolphian nose of his was a flame that, when not fed with natural stimulants, preyed fiercely on the temper of its owner, he was in no mood to be crossed—especially by one who had so stupidly allowed himself to be discovered. So he took fire instantly at Rohan's taunt, and snatching from one of the *gendarmes* his loaded gun, he cocked it rapidly.

"I will give you one minute," he cried, "then, if you do not surrender, I shall fire. Do you hear that, deserter? Come, escape is useless—do not be a fool, for I mean what I say; I will pick you off from your perch as if you were a crow." After a pause, he added, "Are you ready? time is up!"

Rohan had not stirred from his position; but now, with a strange smile on his face, he stood looking down at his tormentors. Standing thus, with his tall frame fully exposed, he presented an easy mark for a bullet.

"Once more, are you ready? In the name of the Emperor!"

Rohan replied quietly, without stirring—

"I will never surrender."

In a moment there was a flash, a roar, and Sergeant Pipriac had fired. But when the smoke cleared away they saw Rohan still standing uninjured at the mouth of the Cave, tranquilly looking down as if nothing whatever had occurred. The bullet had struck and been flattened against the rock in his close vicinity, but whether Pipriac had really taken aim at his person, or had simply fired off the weapon with the view of intimidating him, is a question that cannot easily be answered. If intimidation was his object, he reckoned without his man, for Rohan Gwenfern was the last person in the world to be scared into submission by any such means.

No sooner was it discovered that Pipriac's bullet had missed its mark than all the other *gendarmes* had their weapons cocked and ready to fire also, but the Sergeant immediately interposed, with a savage growl.

"Halt arms! *Tous les diables*, he who fires before I tell him shall smart for his pains;" then, once more addressing Rohan, he cried, "Well, you are still alive! Perhaps, then, after all you will be rational, and come quietly down and trust to the mercy of the Emperor. Look you, I promise nothing, but I will do my best. In any case, you will be done for if you stay up there, for you cannot escape us, that is certain. Now then! I am giving you another chance. Which is it to be?"

"I will never become a soldier."

"It is too late for that," said Mikel Grallon, speaking for the first time and addressing Pipriac. "Besides, look you, he is a coward."

Rohan, who heard every syllable, so clearly and audibly did sound travel among those silent cliffs, gazed down at the spy with a fierce look, and seemed once more prepared to hurl himself bodily from the height where he stood. Recovering himself, he again addressed his speech to Pipriac.

"I tell you, you are wasting time. Perhaps I am a coward, as Mikel Grallon says; but one thing is certain, that I will never go to war, and that I will never give myself up alive."

"Alive or dead, we shall have you—there is no escape."

"Perhaps."

"Up yonder my men are on the watch; this way, that way, all ways they are posted. Take old Pipriac's word for it, and give in like a sensible man;—you are surrounded."

"That is true."

"Ha ha, then you admit that I am teaching you good sense. Very well! If evil happens, don't say old Pipriac did not warn you! Come along!"

The answer from above was a quick spasmodic laugh, full of the hollow ring of a bitter and despairing heart. Leaning over from the mouth of the Cave, Rohan pointed quietly out at the Gate of St. Gildas, saying—

"If I am surrounded, so are you. Look!" Pipriac turned involuntarily, as did all the other members of the group.

The first man to understand the true position of affairs was Mikel Grallon, who, the moment his eyes glanced through the Gate, uttered the exclamation—

"Holy Virgin, he is right—it is the tide!"

Sure enough, the sea had turned and was foaming whitely just beyond the Gate. A few minutes more, and it would enter the Cathedral, when retreat would be impossible. Grallon rushed towards the Gate, crying, "Follow! there is not a moment to lose;" but Pipriac, who, though irascible under slight provocation, never lost his head in an emergency, stood his ground and looked up at the Cave. Rohan, however, was no longer visible.

"Diable!" cried the Sergeant, shaking his fist up at the spot where the deserter had just been standing. "Never mind! Give him a volley!"

In a moment the *gendarmes* had discharged their pieces right into the mouth of the Cave; there was a horrible concussion, and thunder reverberating far up among the cliffs. Then all fled for their lives.

They were just in time; but passing round the point of land which led to the safe shingle beyond the Cathedral, they had to wade to the waist, for it was a high spring tide. The retreat was decidedly ignominious, and little calculated to improve the temper of Pipriac and his troop. Coming round to the dry land immediately under the Ladder of St. Triffine, they found a great gathering from the village, men and women, young and old, waiting, chattering, wondering. Among them were Alain and Jannick Derval, with their sister Marcelle.

The horrible fascination to see and know the worst had been too great for Marcelle to resist, and she had been drawn thither with the rest, almost against her will. Descending the Ladder, she had found the tide rising round the point which led to the Cathedral, and had crouched down, wildly listening, when the reports from the neighbouring Gate broke upon her ear. What could these shots mean? Had they discovered him—was he fighting for his life, and were they shooting him down? Her face grew like a murdered woman's as she waited, with the hum of voices around her sounding as in a dream. Then as the *gendarmes* appeared wading round to shore with shouldered muskets, she had sprung to her feet, eagerly perusing their faces as they came. Others flocked around them too, with eager questions. But Pipriac, cursing not loud but deep, pushed his way through the crowd followed by his men, neither of whom uttered a word.

Mikel Grallon was following when he felt his arm fiercely seized; he was about to shake off the offending grip, when turning slightly, he recognised Marcelle.

"Speak, Mikel Grallon!" said the girl, her large eyes burning with an unnatural light. "What have they done? Have they found him? Is he killed?"

Honest Mikel shook his head, with what was meant to be a reassuring smile.

"He is safe—yonder in the Cathedral of St. Gildas."

"In the Cathedral?"

"Up in the *Trou*!"

There was a general murmur, for, although the words were specially addressed to Marcelle, an eager throng had caught the news. Marcelle released her spasmodic hold, and Grallon passed on up to the shore, rejoining Pipriac and his satellites, who stood consulting together in a group.

And now, like a fountain that is suddenly unfrozen from its prison in the ground, the long−suppressed love of Marcelle Derval rose murmuring within her heart. All things were forgotten save that Rohan lived, and that he was engaged against overwhelming odds in a frightful fight for life; not even the Emperor was remembered, nor the fact that it was against the Emperor that Rohan stood in revolt; it was enough for the time being to feel that Rohan had arisen, and with him her old passionate dream. Only a few hours before she had moved about like a shadow, certain of nothing save of a great void within her soul, of a great unutterable loss and pain; then had come Mikel Grallon's discovery—then the sound of the hue and cry; so that, indeed, she had scarcely had time to collect her thoughts rightly and to look her fate in the face. Despair had been easy; hope, the faint wild hope that had now come, was not so easy. She had kept still and dead amid the frost of her great grief, but when the light came, and the winds and rains were loosened, she bent like a tree before the storm.

Not without pride did she now remember her lover's strength, and observe how it had hitherto conquered and been successful. He was there, unarmed, within a little distance, and yet he had escaped his enemies again, as he had often escaped them before; indeed, there seemed a charm upon his life, and perhaps the good God loved him after all!

Gradually, from group to group the intelligence spread that Rohan Gwenfern had ensconced himself up in the

Trou à Gildas, the black and terrible abyss into which few feet save his own had ever passed; and that there, night after night, he hid alone, communing perhaps with ghastly spirits of the darkness. For the place, all folk knew, was haunted, and few men there would have cared to pass along that strange Cathedral−floor at dead of night. Did not the phantoms of the evil monks still wander, moaning for mercy to the pitiless Saint who cast them into eternal chains? Had not the awful Saint himself been seen, again and again, holding spectral vigil, while the seals came creeping about his knees, and the great cormorants sat gazing silently at him from the dripping walls? The place was terrible, curst for the living till endless time. He who lingered there safely must either have made an unholy pact with the Prince of Evil, or be under the special protection of the Saint of God.

As to this last point, opinion was divided. A few grim pessimists held firmly that Rohan had sold himself body and soul to “Master Roberd,” who, in his turn, had carried him safely through so many dangers, and was now watching over him carefully in his “devil's nest,” up in the *Trou.* The majority, however, were inclined to think that a good Spirit, not a bad, had taken the matter in hand, and that this good Spirit might be the blessed St. Gildas himself. There was a strong undercurrent of anti−Imperial feeling, which speedily resolved itself into an unmistakable sympathy with the deserter, and a belief that he was under Divine protection.

After a rapid consultation with his subordinates Pipriac determined to despatch a messenger to St. Gurlott for more assistance, and meantime to keep a careful watch from every side on the now inundated Cathedral. Of one thing he was assured, that escape out of the Cave was impossible, so long as the cliffs above and the shore below were carefully guarded. There was no secret way which the fugitive might take; he must either, at the almost certain risk of life, creep right upward along the nearly inaccessible face of the crag, or he must swim out to sea, or he must pass round to the shore by the way the others had gone and come. Further away in the direction of the village, a great precipitous headland projected, surrounded on every side and at all tides by the sea, and quite impassable.

“He is in the trap,” growled Pipriac, “and only God or the Devil can get him out!”

Chapter 31. IN THE CAVE

While his pursuers were speculating and deliberating, Rohan Gwenfern waited solitary up in his hiding−place, making no attempt at flight; which, indeed, he well knew to be at present impossible. Now and then he listened, but the only sound he heard was the sea creeping in and covering the vast Cathedral−floor. He was safe, at least for the time being, since the waters washed below and no human feet could reach him from above.

He lay within a vast natural cave, hewn in the very heart of the granite crags, and dimly lit by the rays that crept in by its narrow mouth, or *Trou.* Great elliptic arches, strangely hung with purple moss and soot−black fungi, loomed overhead, while on every side down the lichen−covered walls sparkled a dewy fretwork resembling that external curtain of glittering mosaic which we have called the “Altar.” The place was vast and shadowy as the vault of some cathedral built by hands, so that one could not well discern its exact extent; and here and there its walls were gashed with streams of water, falling down and stretching out into blackest pools. The air was damp and cold, and would have been fatal to one of tender frame; but Rohan breathed it with the comfort of a hardy animal. In a corner of the Cave he had strewn a thick bed of dried seaweed, on which he was lying. By his side, and near to his hand, were his fowler's staff, a pair of *sabots*, and part of a black loaf; while in a fissure of the wall above his bed was fixed a small rude lamp of tin.

Here, in complete solitude, and often in total darkness, he had passed many a night, and whether it was calm or storm he had slept sound. He was well used to such haunts, and his powerful physique was in no way affected by the exposure—indeed, had it not been for the constant anxiety of mind created by his horrible situation, he might have remained entirely unchanged. But even animals, however vigorous by nature, will waste away to skin and bone under the strain of perpetual fear and persecution; and so Rohan had grown into the shadow of his former self—a gaunt, forlorn, hunted man, with large eyes looking out of a face pale with unutterable pain. His garments, not new when he first took flight, had turned into sorry rags, through which gleamed the naked flesh; his hair fell below his shoulders in a wild and matted mass; his beard and moustache had grown profusely; and upon his arms and limbs were cuts and bruises left by dangerous falls. One foot was swollen and partly useless—a fact over which his pursuers would have gloated—for it left him practically in their power, and less able than usual to pursue his frequent flights among the cliffs, even had an opportunity offered.

Mikel Grallon had suspected shrewdly when he guessed that Rohan owed his daily subsistence to the secret help of his infirm mother. Twice or thrice weekly Mother Gwenfern had come secretly to the neighbourhood, bearing with her such provisions as she was able to prepare with her own hands; these she had secretly given to her son, or placed them with preconcerted signals on the places she knew him to frequent, or even (as we have seen on one occasion) let them right down to his hiding−place from the top of the cliffs. Without this assistance the man would necessarily have starved, for it was physically impossible to exist solely on the shell−fish and dulse which he was in the habit of gathering from the sea.

He was not now alone in the Cave. The goat Jannedik was perambulating uneasily to and fro, carefully keeping at a distance from the mouth, through which so alarming a volley had lately been raining. From time to time she came up close, and rubbed her head into his hand, as if soliciting an explanation of the extraordinary scene which had just taken place.

The visits of Jannedik to her master's hiding−place had been erratic. She had first discovered him by accident, while roaming at random, as was her custom, among the cliffs; then, once acquainted with his haunts, she had come again; and now seldom a day passed without a visit from her, however brief. Her coming and going soon became an exciting event, for when she appeared Rohan did not feel altogether without companionship, and she had strange wild ways to soothe a human heart. Nor was this all. Many a secret communication had been concealed about the goat's thick coat, and borne from the fugitive to his mother in her cottage.

More than an hour had passed since Pipriac and the rest had fled from the Cathedral, when Rohan rose from his seat and passed out again into the open air at the cavern's mouth. All was perfectly still; the green water filled the floor of the Cathedral, covering all its weedy tombs, and a seal was swimming round and round, seeking in vain to find a landing−place along the walls. Standing up there, he felt like one suspended between water and sky.

So far there had been a certain fierce satisfaction in resisting what so many living men deemed the Irresistible.

Weak and single−handed as he was, he had stood up in revolt against the Emperor—had openly and unhesitatingly defied him and abjured him—had conjured up on his behalf all the power and elements of Nature—had cried to the Earth, “Hide me!” and to the Sea, “Protect me!” and had not cried in vain. True, he had suffered in the struggle, as all that revolt must suffer; but so far no specially evil consequence, apart from his own unpleasant experiences, had ensued from the attitude he had taken. He had certainly obeyed the behest of his conscience, and that to him, then, and thenceforth for ever, was the veritable voice of God.

In those hours of dark extremity Marcelle Derval was to him both an anguish and a consolation: an anguish, because he feared that she loved him no longer, that her sympathy was with his enemies, that she believed him to be a renegade from a good cause, a traitor, and a coward—a consolation, because he remembered all that she had been to him, and because, night after night, passionate and loving as of old, she came to him in dreams. Many a lonely hour, when no soul was near, he had lingered in the centre of the Cathedral, going over in his mind all the details of that divine day when first he clasped her in his arms and felt her virgin kiss upon his mouth.

“Solitude to him
Was sweet society,”

when he had for companionship her quiet image. He saw her then as a little child, walking with him hand in hand along the sands of the village; or, as a happy girl, climbing with him the lonely crags, and watching him as he gathered cliff−flowers and sea−birds' eggs; or, as a holy maiden, kneeling by his side before the altar of the little chapel of Notre Dame de la Garde. Such happy memories are consecrated gleams, which make this low earth Heaven.

Yet he had lost her, that was clear; he had chosen his lot with the outcasts of the earth, with those Esaus who refuse to acquiesce in the accepted jurisdiction of the world, and who map out a perilous existence for themselves at the cost of family, caste, peace of body and mind, sympathy, and social honour. He might as well—(nay, far better from this mundane point of view)—have denied his God as have denied his Emperor; for the Emperor seemed omnipotent, while God remained so acquiescent in evil, and so far away. Faith in the divine order of things had long forsaken him. His only reliance now was on Nature, and on his own heart; for if the worst came to the worst he could die.

With every hour and every day that he brooded thus his hate of War grew deeper, the justification of his resistance seemed more absolute. Even if safe submission had then been possible, on the condition that he recanted and joined the great army that did Napoleon's will, he would have resisted with even more tenacity than at the first, for he was a man in whom ideas grow and multiply themselves, and become sinews of strength to the secret will. With his moral certainty deepened his physical horror. In the darkness of that lonely Cave he had conjured up such Phantoms of the battle−field as might fitly people the blood−red fields of Hell; all that he had read, all that he had fancied and feared, took tangible shapes, and moved to and fro along those sunless walls; ghastly spectres and adumbrations of an all too horrible reality, they came there from time to time, paralyzing his heart with despair and fear.

So that, after all, if we must have it so, he was in a certain sense of the word a Coward, capable of the nervous prostration cowards feel. He had senses over keen and subtle, and could detect even there in his Cave the fatal scent which is found in slaughter−houses where cattle are slain, and on battle−fields where men are butchered; he could hear the cry of the stricken, hold the cold hand of the dead; he was conscious of the widow weeping and the orphan wailing; and he beheld the burning trail which the War−Serpent left wherever it crawled, the blood and tears which fell to earth, the fire and smoke which rose to heaven. With more than a poet's vision—with the conjuration of a vivid imagination stirred by deep personal dread—he could *see* and *hear* these things. Each man bears his own Inferno within his breast; and these were Rohan Gwenfern's.

In due time the tide, which had risen high up the walls of the Cathedral, and was shining smooth as glass and green as malachite, began to ebb out through the Gate. Rohan stood watching it from the *Trou*, while gradually it sank lower and lower, till a man might have waded waist−deep on the shingly floor. Gradually the great weed−covered boulders and granite slabs became visible, and a certain space immediately under the Cave was left quite dry. Standing thus, Rohan calculated his chances. Ascent was certainly possible, though difficult in the extreme, and beyond measure dangerous: impossible certainly to a man encumbered by arms or any heavy weapon. Nor could more than one man approach at a time, that was certain. In a word, Rohan's position was virtually impregnable, so long as he kept upon the watch.

Just then Jannedik came out from the Cave, and began quietly to walk upwards. Her path was easy for some distance, being the same path by which Rohan had lately descended, but when she had passed a certain point she became as a fly walking up a perpendicular wall. At last, without once slipping a foot, she disappeared; like a bird fading away into the skies.

Which skies had darkened again, and were blurred with a dark mist. The rain, blown in from the sea, was beating pitilessly against the face of the cliffs, deepening to moist purple their granite stains, and lighting up liquid gleams in their grassy fissures. It fell now heavily on Rohan, but he scarcely heeded it: he was water−proof; besides it was warm rain, such as steals sweet scent from the boughs in autumn woods and lanes.

Slowly, calmly, quite sheltered from the wet wind which blew without, the sea ebbed from the Cathedral, until at last it all disappeared through the Gate, and only the glistening walls and shingle showed that it had been lately there. The sea washed, and the rain fell, and the wind moaned, while Rohan stood waiting and watching. Presently he heard another sound, faintly wafted to him through the Gate. Human voices! His pursuers were returning.

As the sounds came nearer and nearer, he quietly withdrew into the Cave.

Pipriac and the *gendarmes* did not return alone; besides Mikel Grallon, there came a swarm of villagers, men and women, excited and expectant. From time to time the Sergeant turned upon them and drove them back with oaths, but, after retreating a few yards, they invariably drew nigh once more. Pipriac could do nothing, for he was in a minority, and they numbered three or four score; and so now, when he re−entered the Cathedral with his men, the crowd, chattering and pointing, blocked up the Gate and partially filled the Cathedral.

From the darkness of his Cave, Rohan, himself unseen, could behold this picture; leaning forward to the *Trou*, but keeping well in darkness, he looked down upon the pigmy shapes below him,—first, Pipriac and the others, crawling up towards the “Altar” like so many dwarfs, their bayonets glittering, their voices muttering,—then the villagers in their quaint dresses of many colours, gazing up in wonder and tremulous anticipation. Suddenly his heart leapt within him and he grew ghastly pale; for behold, standing apart, some yards in front of the group from the village, he recognised Marcelle, quietly looking upward. He could see her pale face set in its saffron coif, he could feel the light of her large upturned eyes. What had brought her there? Ah, God, was *she* leagued against him with his persecutors? Had she come to behold his misfortune and degradation, perhaps his death? Sick with such thoughts, he strained his painful sight upon her, forgetting all else in the intensity of his excitement. So a wild animal gazes from its lair when the cruel hunters are close at hand.

And now, O Pipriac, to business; for ye are many against one, and the Emperor is impatient to settle the affair of this revolter, that of him may be made a terror and a shining example to all the flock! Fetch him down, O Pipriac, from his hiding−place: draw the fox from his hole into full day; spare not, but take him alive, with a view to full and proper retribution! It is useless, indeed, to stand here with thy myrmidons, with so many gaping throats, staring up, as if the deserter would drop into thy mouth!

Yet this is exactly what Pipriac is doing, and, indeed, the more he stares and gapes the more puzzled does he become. If one were a bird or a fly, yea, or a snail, one might climb up yonder to the Cave, but being a man, and moreover a man not too steady on the legs, Pipriac justly deems the feat impossible; nevertheless, he suggests to this comrade and to that, and notably to Mikel Grallon, the performance of that forlorn hope; with not much result, save grumbling refusals and mutinous looks. Meantime, he grows savage, for he believes the villagers are laughing at his discomfiture, and, finding deeds impossible, again has recourse to words.

“What ho, deserter! Listen! Are you here? *Diable*, do you hear me? Attend!”

There is no answer save the echoes reverberating from cliff to cliff.

“Malediction!” cries the Sergeant. “If he should be gone.”

“That is impossible,” said Mikel Grallon. “Unless he is a ghost, he is still there.”

“And who the devil says he is *not* a ghost?” snarls Pipriac. “Fisherman, you are an ass—stand back! If we had but a ladder, we would do; malediction! if we had only a ladder.” And he shrieked aloud again at the top of his voice, “Deserter! Number one! Rohan Gwenfern!”

But there was no answer whatever, no stir, no sound. The villagers looked at one another and smiled, while Marcelle crossed herself and prayed.

Chapter 32. A SIEGE IN MINIATURE

It is necessary to be precise as to the date of these occurrences. When the fishermen beheld that memorable midnight vision in the Cathedral, and mistook for St. Gildas and the Fiend the living shapes of Rohan and Jannedik the goat, it was just after the June festival. Many weeks had elapsed while Mikel Grallon was secretly upon the scent of the fugitive; but nearly three entire months had passed away before he actually discovered the whole truth that Rohan lived and was hiding in the great Cathedral. So that it was now the end of September, 1813.

A memorable time, out in the great storm−beaten world, as well as here in lonely Kromlaix; other tides were turning besides that which comes and goes with weary iteration on the sea−shore; stranger storms were gathering than any little Kromlaix knew: nay, had gathered, and were bursting now around the figure of the one Colossus who bestrode the world. On the Rhine had Napoleon paused, facing the multitudinous waves of avenging hosts; had lifted up his finger, like King Canute of old, crying, “Thus far and no farther!”—yet to his wonder the waves still roared, and the tide still rose, and the living waters were now washing blood−red about his feet. Would he be submerged? Would his evil genius fail him at last? These were the supreme questions of Autumn, 1813. All the World was against him; nay, the World and the Sea and the Sky; yet he had tamed all these before, and might again; and his word was still a power to conjure with, his presence still an inspiration, his shadow still a portent and a doom. He might emerge; and then? Why, there was little left for the stabbed and bleeding Earth but to die; for, alas! she could bear no more.

Our business is not yet with the movement of great armies, with the motion of those elemental forces against which the Avatar was then struggling; our picture is to contain the microcosm, not the macrocosm; yet the one is potential in the other, as one monera of Haeckel represents the aggregate of a million moneras visibly covering the sea−bottom, but germinated from one invisible speck. No human pen, piling horror upon horror, can represent the aggregate of war; it can only catalogue individual agonies, each of which brings the truth nearer home than any number of generalities. And we, who are about to chronicle to the best of our power a siege in miniature, begin by affirming that it represents the spirit of all sieges, however colossal in scale, however aggrandised by endless combinations of the infinitesimal.

Here in Kromlaix the matter is simple enough—it is one man against many; up till now it has been bloodless, and so far as the one man himself is concerned it may remain so till the end.

And now, O Muse, for a pen of fire to chronicle the doings of Pipriac the indomitable, as at last, with fiery Bardolphian nose lifted in the air, he collects his martial forces together. Small pity now is left in his heart for the creature whom he pursues; all his fierce passions are aroused, and his only aspiration is for cruel victory; his voice is choked, his eyes are dim with rage and bloodthirst. He, Pipriac, commissary and representative of the Emperor, to be defied and held at bay by a single peasant, crouching unarmed like a fox in a hole!—by a miserable deserter, who has openly refused to fight for his country, who is a *chouan* and a coward, with a price upon his head! It is utterly incredible, and not to be endured. Up, some of you, and drag him down! André, Pierre, Hoël, climb! *Tous les diables,* is there not a man among you—not a creature with the heart of a fly? Ha, if Pipriac were not old, if his legs were not shaky, would he not read you a lesson, rogues that you are!

Stimulated by the curses of his superior, Pierre takes off his shoes, puts his bayonet between his teeth, and begins to climb; the rocks are perpendicular and slippery, but there are crevices for the hands and feet. Pierre makes way, watched eagerly by all the others; suddenly, however, his foot slips and down he comes with a groan. Fortunately, he had not gone far, and beyond a few bruises he is little hurt.

Now it is André's turn; André, a dark, beetle−browed, determined−looking dog, with powerful legs and sinewy hands. He makes even better way than Pierre; foot by foot, bayonet between teeth, he goes up: there is not a word, there is scarcely a breath; he is half−way, clinging to the treacherous rocks with fingers and toes like a Cat's claws, and wearing a cat−like determination in his face, when suddenly one utters a cry, and points up. André looks up too, and there, stretched out above him, are two hands, and in those two hands, poised an enormous fragment of rock. A white murderous face glares over at him—the face of Rohan Gwenfern.

It would be easy now to pick off the deserter, but if this were done, what of André?—down would descend the

stone, and woe to him who clung below. André does the best he can under the circumstances: he descends hand over hand, more rapidly than he ascended. By the time that he drops again upon the shingle the face and arms above are gone.

"Malediction!" cries Pipriac; "then he means to fight!"

Yes, Pipriac, make sure of that; for is it not written that the very worm will turn, and that even innocent things become terrible when they struggle for sweet life? Nor shall this man be blamed if he becomes what you make him,—a murderous and murdering animal, with all the gentle love and pity burnt up within his veins,—and with one thought uppermost only, that of overthrowing and destroying those who would overthrow and destroy him,—which thought may in due time be kindled to fiercer bloodthirst and more hideous hunger for vengeance. In every strong man's heart there is a devil; beware how you rouse it *here!*

Another volley into the mouth of the Cave, given furiously at a signal from the Sergeant, is only waste of ammunition. The bullets patter on the top of the *Trou,* and fall down flattened on the spot where Rohan lately stood. The cliffs roar, the villagers utter a terrified murmur; then there is silence.

Other attempts to climb follow, all without success. Once the poised rock descends, and André, who was climbing again, only just drops to the earth and draws aside in time. Curses and threats rise to the Cave; Pipriac utters horrible imprecations. Shots are fired again and again; but all miss their mark, for Rohan now is upon his guard. The siege has begun in earnest.

Sunset comes, and nothing has been done; the situation seems actually unassailable. The rain has been falling more or less all day, and every man is wet through and out of temper. The crowd of villagers, with Marcelle among them, still looks on, in stupefied content that the *gendarmes* are baffled at every turn.

Now the tide creeps up to the Gate once more, and all precipitately retreat, the military with an *au revoir* of threats and objurgations. The great Cathedral is empty, all is silent. But who is this that, lingering behind the rest, creeps up close under the "Altar," turns her white face upward, and moans out the deserter's name.

"Rohan! Rohan!"

There is no reply; she stands uplifting her arms, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Rohan! speak to me! Ah, God, can you not hear?"

Still there is silence, and, turning sadly, she walks down the dark Cathedral and follows the rest out of the Gate. She is in time, but at the promontory the water is knee−deep as she wades round.

Yes, he had heard; lying in there upon his bed of weeds, he had heard the voice, and peering down, himself in darkness, he had seen the piteous face he loved, looking upward. He had no heart to answer; her face shook his soul more painfully than even those fierce faces of his enemies; but the excitement of the day had made him mad, suspicious, and distrustful even of her. He saw her pass away after the rest he gazed after her with a dull, dumb despair, like one in a dream; then when she had gone, he threw himself down upon his bed and wept.

Ah, those tears of a strong man!—wrung like drops from stone, like moisture from iron; shed not for sorrow, not in self−pity, but in pure surcease of heart. With the apparition of that face came upon him the consciousness of all that he had lost, of all the love and peace that he had nearly won the certainty of what he was now, who had once been so strong and glad; the knowledge of his almost certain doom, for was not the fatal mark already upon his forehead? "Marcelle! Marcelle!" The name went up into the hollows of the Cave, and voices answered him like cries from his own heart, and all his force was broken. So night came, and found him wearied out.

All that night he was left in peace, but he knew well that close watch was kept without the Cathedral; in no case would he have stirred, for no other place was so safe, and his foot was still in pain. He rested in the total darkness, without a light of any kind; he heard the pigeons come in to their roosts in the rocks, and he saw the bats slip in and out against the dim blue gleam at the Cave's mouth; and harmless living creatures crawled over him as he lay. About midnight, when the tide was ebbing, he waited expectant; but no one returned. A cold moon rose, flooding the Cathedral with her beams, and shining far out with one silvery track upon the sea.

It was then that he first bestirred himself and laboured in preparation for his enemies. Scattered on the floor of the Cave were many loose pieces of rock, both huge and small, which in course of time had detached themselves from the cliffs; these he carefully carried to the mouth of the Cave, piling them one upon another in readiness to be cast over on any assailant who might climb from below; lifting some, rolling others; now and then involuntarily letting one slip from his aching hold, and crash down on the beach below. For hours he laboured, for it was no easy task; some of the stones being heavy enough, falling from that height, to crush an ox. When he had

done, his hands were bleeding, cut by the sharp edges of the stones. Finally, when the tide crept into the place once more, he threw himself on his bed and slept.

When he awoke it was broad day—the mouth of the Cave was bright, and a confused murmur broke upon his ear. He started up and listened. A loud authoritative voice was calling him by name. Crawling forward to the mouth of the Cave, now partially blocked up by the rocks and stones, he peered cautiously over, and saw, standing on the shingle below him, a crowd of men, almost all of whom wore uniform and carried bayonets while in their midst calling out his name, was a tall grey−headed man in semi−military dress, whom he recognised as the Mayor of St. Gurlott.

Again, the Mayor, holding a paper in his hand, called his name aloud. After a moment's hesitation, he answered, “I am here!” There was a babble of voices, a flashing of weapons; then the Mayor said again—

“Silence!—Gwenfern, are you attending?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know me?”

“Yes.”

The answers were given distinctly, but Rohan was careful to keep his person totally concealed.

“You were drawn for the Conscription in the early summer, and your name was first upon the list. Wretched man, you are at last discovered, as every one will be who deserts his country in the hour of need; there is no longer any chance of escape; why do you still persist in a miserable resistance? In the name of the Emperor, I bid you yield yourself up.”

No answer.

“Do you hear me? Are you still refractory? Have you not one word to say for yourself? None?”

After a moment's pause, the voice from the Cave replied—

“Yes, one.”

“Speak, then!”

“If I surrender as you desire, what then?”

The Mayor shrugged his shoulders.

“You will be *shot,* of course, as a warning to others.”

“And if I refuse?”

“Why, then, you will die too, but like a dog. There is but one law for deserters—one law and short shrift. Now, do you understand?”

“I understand.”

“And to save trouble, will you surrender?”

“Not while I live.”

The Mayor, folding up his paper, handed it to Sergeant Pipriac with an air that said, “I have done my duty, and wash my hands of the whole affair.” A long colloquy ensued, at the end of which the Mayor said, frowning—

“The rest is in your hands, and should be easy; he is only one man, while you are many. I leave it to you, Sergeant Pipriac—he must be taken, dead or alive.”

“That is more easily said than done,” said Pipriac; “it is more than a man's life is worth to climb up there; and besides, without ladders only one man could ascend at a time.”

The Mayor mused; he was a grim, pale−looking man, with cruel grey eyes and pitiless mouth.

“The example is a dangerous one, Sergeant Pipriac; at all risks he must be reached. Are there no ladders in the village?”

“Ah, m'sieu,” returned Pipriac, “just cast your eye up at the *Trou;* it would be a long ladder indeed to reach so far, and even then—”

At this moment Mikel Grallon, hat in hand, approached the Mayor as if to speak.

“*M'sieu le Maire.*“

“What man is this?” asked the Mayor, scowling.

“This is the man who first gave information,” said Pipriac. “Stand back, fisherman! What do you want?”

Mikel Grallon, instead of falling back, came closer, and said in a low voice—

“Pardon, *M'sieu le Maire.* but there is one way if all the rest fail—”

“Well?”

“The deserter is without means of subsistence. If the worst come to the worst, he must starve to death.”

Chapter 33. HUNGER AND COLD

Mikel Grallon, with characteristic and cruel foresight, had hit upon the truth: that however successful Rohan Gwenfern might be in keeping his assailants at bay from his seemingly impregnable position, he must inevitably, unless provisioned for a period which was altogether unlikely, either yield himself up, or famish and die. To secure this latter end it was necessary carefully to cut off all avenues of supply, which, indeed, Pipriac had already done, every portion of the cliffs, both above and below, being well watched and guarded; and now the only question was whether to try at once to take the position by storm, or to wait patiently until such time as the deserter either capitulated or perished of starvation. Pipriac, being a man of action, was for an immediate attack; with which view he sent messengers to scour the village for ladders of some sort; but when these messengers returned empty−handed, after searching high and low, he saw the hopelessness of rapid attack, and determined to conduct the siege passively until such time as capitulation came. It should never be said that old Pipriac was baffled and defied by a peasant, smiling as it were within a stone's−throw of his hand. *Tous les diables,* duty was duty, and it should be done though it took him a score if years!

In the meantime, however, he sent to St. Gurlott for ladders, which might be useful sooner or later, if not for reaching the deserter alive, at least for recovering his dead body. Then, pending their arrival, he sat down, like a mighty general with his army surrounding a beleaguered town, before the *Trou à Gildas.*

Figuratively, not literally; for the constant ebbing and flowing of the tide left the Cathedral quite out of the question for headquarters; and, moreover, it was necessary for Pipriac to pass to and fro, inspiring and directing his men, both those stationed on the high cliffs and those below.

A day and a night passed; and the prisoner made no sign.

It would be tedious to describe the various harmless sallies of the besiegers. At every *morte mer* they watched the Cave and reconnoitred, but saw nothing of the besieged; sometimes they called aloud upon him, at others they crept in and crept out in silence. All the night double watch was kept, not one avenue of escape being overlooked; and, to make assurance doubly sure, Pipriac refused to let any villager, man or woman, approach the scene of the siege. Twice Marcelle Derval was driven back, almost at bayonet−point, for the men were growing savage through sheer impatience. What her errand was none knew; but one suspected that it was to carry the deserter bread.

On the morning of the second day the sea rose high, and the wind blew boisterously from the south−east; by noon the wind had risen to a storm; before night it was blowing a gale, with heavy blinding rain. For two days and nights more the storm continued, growing fiercer and fiercer, on the land and on the sea; the great cliffs shook, the cormorants sat half−starving in their ledges looking at the raging sea. The *gendarmes* kept their posts, relieving each other at regular intervals. The sentinels bore lanterns, which were flashed full all night upon the cliffs in the neighbourhood of the Cave.

In the tumult of these tempestuous nights Rohan might possibly have escaped, but he did not try: out in the open country he would have soon been taken, and he knew no “coign of vantage” equal to the position he occupied. Twice, at considerable peril, he made his way in the darkness up the cliff to the spot where he had been discovered by Mikel Grallon and the rest; and on the second occasion a hand from above, as before, let him down food—black bread and coarse cheese. So he did not starve—yet.

And now the storm abated, and calm days came, and nights with a bright moon. The besiegers made no attempt to reach him; they had clearly determined on starving him out.

On the fifth night from the commencement of the siege the besiegers made a discovery. The sentinels on the crags above, as they stood 'twixt sleeping and waking at their posts, saw a dark figure creeping, almost crawling, on the edges of the crags; sometimes it paused and lay quite still, at others it almost ran; and at first they crossed themselves superstitiously, for they deemed it something unearthly. There was a moon, but from time to time her light was buried in dense clouds. Now, whenever the moonlight shone out, the figure lay still; whenever all became dark it again moved forward.

One *gendarme,* separating himself from his fellows, followed on his hands and knees—moved when the figure moved—paused when the figure paused—and at last, with a powerful effort of the will—for he had his

superstitions—sprang forward, seized the figure and found it flesh and blood.

Then the others, running up with lanterns, flashed them in the pale face of a woman, who uttered a loud wail: Mother Gwenfern.

Her errand was instantly discovered; she carried food, which she was obviously about to convey to her son by means of a hempen cord, which they also found upon her person. It was a pitiful business, and some there would fain have washed their hands of it; but the more brutal ones, faithful to their duty, drove the old woman back to her cottage at the bayonet−point. From that time forth a still closer watch was kept, so that no soul could possibly have left the village and approached the great cliff−wall unseen.

“He will die!”

“Mother, he shall not die!”

“There is no hope—there is no way; ah, my curse on Pipriac, and on them all!”

“Pray to the good God! He will direct us!”

“Why should I pray? God is against us, God and the Emperor; my boy will die, my boy will die!”

It was evening; and the two women—Mother Gwenfern and Marcelle—sat alone in the widow's cottage, clinging together and crying in despair; for the widow's last attempt to send succour to her son had failed, and now her very door was watched by cruel eyes. Ah, it was terrible! to think that the son of her womb was out yonder starving in the night, that he had not tasted bread for many hours, that she was powerless to stir to help him any more! What she had previously been able to convey to him had been barely sufficient to support life, yet it had sufficed; but *now!—a* whole day and night had passed since she had vainly tried to reach him and had been discovered in the attempt. Merciful God! to think of the darkness, and the cold, and the dreary solitude of the Cave; and then, to crown all, the hunger!

The agony of those months of horror had left their mark on the weary woman; gaunter and more grim than ever, a skeleton only sustained by the intensity of the maternal fire that burnt within her, she waited and watched: that ominous blue colour of the lips often proclaiming the secret disease that prayed within. Her comfort in those desolate hours had been Marcelle, who, with a daughter's love and more than a daughter's duty, had watched over her and helped her in her holy struggle.

Come back to the Cathedral of St. Gildas. It is night, the tide is full, and the moon is shining on the watery floor. Far above on the cliffs the sentinels are watching; on the shores around they are scattered, standing or lying; Pipriac is not with them, but he, too, wherever he is, is on the *qui vive.* All is still and calm: stillest of all that white face gazing seaward out of the Cave.

The pinch has come at last, the cruel pinch and pang which no strength of will can subdue, which nothing but bread can appease. Last night Rohan Gwenfern ate his last crust; then, climbing up to the old spot, watched for the old signal, as he had watched the night before, in vain. When food *had* come he had husbanded it with care—only partaking of just enough to support simple life, dividing the rest into portions for the future hours; but he had come to the end at last. Down on the shores there might be shell−fish capable of nourishing life, but thither he dared not fare: he must remain, like a rat, within his hole; and help from the sea−birds there was none, for the puffins had all fled many weeks before, and the gulls were strong−winged and beyond his reach. Water he lacked not; the cold rocks distilled *that* liberally enough; but food he had none—nay, not even the dulse of the sea to gnaw. He was caged, trapped; and now he starved.

What wonder, then, if his face looked wild and despairing as he gazed out on the lonely sea? Far out in the moonlight, creeping like black water−snakes along the water, he saw the fishing boats going seaward; ah, how merrily had he sailed with them in those peaceful days that were gone! He had lost all that; he had lost the world. . . . Yet he could bear all, he would not care, if he had only a crust of bread to eat!

Sometimes his head swooned round, for already hunger had begun to attack the citadels of life; sometimes he fell away into a doze and awoke shivering; yet, waking or asleep, he sat watching at the Cave's mouth in desolation and despair.

“Rohan! Rohan!”

He starts from his half−sleep, looking wildly round him. Almighty God! is it a dream? Something black stirs there in the moonlight; something black, and amidst it something white. It is too dim for him to see well—to distinguish shapes—but he can hear the well−known voice, though it comes only in a whisper. Can it be real?

“Rohan! Rohan!”

Yes, it is real! Peering down he sees, floating under the Altar, a small boat containing two figures. Yes, surely a boat, by the movement of the muffled oars. It moves softly up and down in the great swell that rises and falls in the Cathedral.

"Rohan, are you there? Listen, it is I—Marcelle! Ah, now I see you—whisper low, for they are on the watch."

"Who is with you?"

"Jàn Goron; we crept along close to shore through the Porte d'Ingnal, and no one saw; but there is no time to lose. We have brought you food!"

The man's eyes glitter as he bends over the descent, looking down at the boat. As he hangs in this attitude, a sound strikes upon his ears, and he listens wildly; again! yes, it is the sound of oars beyond the Gate.

"Quick! Begone!" he cries; "they are coming! . . .See! throw the food down on the shingle and fly!"

The tide is still nearly full, but just under the *Trou* there is a narrow space of shingle from which the water has just ebbed, and on which the boat's prow strikes at intervals. On this shingle Marcelle, leaning quickly forward, deposits what she bears; then, with an impulsive movement, she stretches her arms eagerly up to him who hangs above her, as if to embrace him, while Jàn Goron, with a few swift strokes of the oars, forces the light boat across the Cathedral floor, through the Gate, and out to the sea beyond. Scarcely has he passed the shadow of the Gate, however, when a gruff voice demands, "Who goes there?" and a black pinnace, rowed by sailors of the coast−guard, bears down from the darkness. In an instant a heavy hand is laid on the gunwale of Goron's boat; bayonets and cutlasses glisten in the dim moonlight, and a familiar voice cries—

"*Tout les diables!* It is a woman!"

The speaker is Pipriac, and he stands in the stern of the pinnace, glaring over at Marcelle.

"The lantern! let us see her face!"

Some one lifts a lighted lantern from the bottom of the boat and flashes its rays right into the face of Marcelle. She is soon recognised; and then the same proceeding is gone through with Goron, whose identity is hailed with a volley of expletives.

"Is this treason?" cries Pipriac. "Malediction! answer, one or both. What the foul fiend are you doing out here by the Gate at such an hour? Do you know what will be the consequence if you are discovered aiding and abetting the deserter? Well, it will be death!—death, look you—even for you, Marcelle Derval, though you are only a girl and a child!"

Marcelle answers with determination, though her heart is sick with apprehension lest her errand is discovered—

"Surely one may row upon the water without offence, Sergeant Pipriac."

"Ah, bah! tell that to the fishes; old Pipriac is not so stupid. Here, one of you, search the boat."

A man leaps, lantern in hand, from the larger boat into the smaller, searches it, and finds nothing: at which Pipriac shakes his head and growls. It is characteristic of Pipriac that when he is least really angry he vociferates and objurgates the most; when most subdued he is most dangerous.

On the present occasion his language is quite unquotable. When he has finished, one of the men inquires quietly if Marcelle and Goron are to be arrested or suffered to go about their business.

"Curses upon them, let them go! but we must keep our eyes open henceforth. Jàn Goron, I suspect you—be warned, and take no more moonlight excursions. Marcelle, you too are warned; you come of a good stock, and I should be sorry to see you get into trouble. Now, away with you—Home, like lightning! And, hark you, when next you come out here by night you will find it go hard with you indeed. Begone!"

So Marcelle and Goron go free—partly, perhaps, through the secret good−nature of the Sergeant. Goron pulls rapidly for the village, and soon his boat touches the shore immediately beneath the cottage of Mother Gwenfern.

Meantime Pipriac has peered through the Gate into the Cathedral; seeing all quiet and in darkness, he gives the order to depart, and so his boat, too, disappears from the scene. No sooner has the sound of his oars quite died away in the distance than a dark figure begins to descend from the Cave; hanging by feet and hands to creep down from crevice to crevice of the dangerous wall, until it reaches the space of shingle beneath: there it finds the burthen which Marcelle brought, which it secures carefully before again climbing; then, even more rapidly than it came down, it proceeds to re−ascend, and, ere long, in perfect safety, it returns to the mouth of the Cave. So Rohan Gwenfern is saved from famine for the time being.

Chapter 34. A FOUR−FOOTED CHRISTIAN

The siege has lasted nearly a fortnight, and still the deserter seems as far off from surrendering as ever. It is inscrutable, inconceivable; for every avenue of aid is now blocked, and there is no known means by which a human being could bring him help, either by land or sea. Save for the fact that from time to time glimpses are caught of his person, and indications given of his existence, one would imagine the deserter to be dead. Yet he is not dead; and he does not offer to surrender; and, indeed, he is tiresomely on the alert. Naturally, the patience of his pursuers is exhausted; but they do not neglect their usual precautions. Pipriac, in his secret mind (where he is superstitious), begins to think he is dealing with a ghost after all; for surely no human being, single−handed, could so consummately and so calmly set at defiance all the forces of the law, of Pipriac, and of the great Emperor. Of one thing Pipriac is certain, that no human hand brings the deserter food; and yet he lives; and to live he must eat! and how all the devils does he provide the wherewithal? Unless he is mysteriously fed by an angel, or (which is far more probable in Pipriac's opinion) by a spirit of a darker order, he must himself be something more than human: in which case affairs look grim, and yet ridiculous indeed. Food does not—at least in these degenerate days—drop from heaven; nor does it, in a form suitable for human sustenance, grow in rocks and caves of the sea. How then by all that is diabolic does the deserter procure that food which is so terrible and commonplace a human necessity? It puzzles thinking.

What the open−minded and irascible soldier, too fair and too fiery for subtle suspicions, fails altogether to discover, is finally, after many nights and days, rooted out and brought to light by the mole−like burrower in mean soil, Mikel Grallon. Honest Mikel has been all this time, more or less, a hanger−on to the skirts of the besieging party: coming and going at irregular intervals, but never quite abandoning his functions as scout and spy in general. Him Pipriac ever regards with a malignant and baleful eye, but to Pipriac's dislike he is skin−proof. His business now is to ascertain by what secret means the deserter sets his enemies at defiance and cannot even be starved out of, or in, his citadel. Here Grallon, unlike the Sergeant, has no superstitions; he is convinced, with all his crafty mind, that there are sound physical reasons for all that is taking place: Rohan Gwenfern is receiving ordinary sustenance—but *how*?

It comes upon Grallon in one illuminating flash, as he stands, not far from Pipriac, at the foot of the Stairs of St. Triffine, looking upward. Westward, on the cliff's face, not far from the Cathedral, something is moving, walking with sure footsteps on paths inaccessible to man: it pauses ever and anon, gazing round with quiet unconcern; then it leisurely moves on; nor does it halt until it has descended the green side in the very neighbourhood of Rohan's *Trou*. Great inspirations come suddenly; to Grallon it seems “as if a star has burst within his brain.” He runs up to Pipriac, who is sullenly sitting on a rock with a group of his men around him.

“Look, Sergeant, look!”

And he points at the object in the distance. Pipriac rolls his one eye round in no amiable fashion, and demands by all the devils what Mikel Grallon means.

“Look!” repeats Mikel. “The goat!”

“And what of the goat, fisherman?”

“Only this: it is going to the *Trou*, and it goes there by day and night to feed its master: now at the cottage, then at the cave. What fools we have been!”

Here Grallon chuckles silently, much to the anger of the Sergeant.

“Cease grimacing, and explain!” cries Pipriac. “Well?”

“I have my suspicions—nay, am I not certain?—that Madame Longbeard yonder is in the plot. Is she not ever wandering to and fro upon the cliffs, and will she not come to the deserter's call, and would it not be easy to conceal food about her body?—no matter how little; a crust will keep life alive. Look! she descends—she is out of sight; she is going straight down to the Cave!”

Pipriac keeps his live−coal of an eye fixed on Grallon's, looking through rather than upon him, in a grim abstraction; then he rises, growling, to his feet, and calls a consultation, the result of which is that the goat shall be strictly watched.

The morning after Jannedik is intercepted as she emerges on the cliff surrounded, and “searched,” but, nothing

being discovered, she is suffered to go. The morning afterwards, however, Pipriac is more fortunate; for he finds, carefully buried among the long hair of the goat's throat, and suspended by a strong cord round the neck—a small basket of woven reeds containing black bread and strong cheese. It is now clear enough that Jannedik has been the bearer of supplies from time to time.

"It would be only just," says one of the gendarmes, "to shoot her for treason against the Emperor."

Pipriac scowled.

"No, let her go," he cried, "the beast knows no better;" and as Jannedik leapt away without the load, and began descending the cliffs in the direction the Cathedral, he muttered, "She will not be so welcome to−day as usual, without her little present."

So the *gendarmes* eat the bread and cheese, and laugh as they reflect that Rohan is circumvented at last; while Pipriac paces up and down, in no lamb−like mood, for he is secretly ashamed of the whole business. Still, duty is duty, and the Sergeant, with dogged pertinacity, means to perform his.

Henceforth all efforts to use Jannedik as the bearer of supplies are unavailing;—a *gendarme* is posted at the widow's door night and day, with strict orders to watch the whole family, especially the goat. He notices that Jannedik seldom goes and comes at all, and never stays long out of doors; for lying on the hearth within she has a little kid, who requires constant maternal attention. When one night, the kid dies and Jannedik is left lamenting, the *gendarme* regards the affair as of no importance;—but he is wrong.

More days pass, and still the deserter is not dead but liveth. Wild winds blow with rain and hail, the sea roars night and day, the besiegers have a hard time of it and are growing furious. How the fierce rains lash the cliff! how the spindrift flies in from the foaming waters!—and yet screened from all this sits the deserter, while the servants of the Emperor are dripping like drowned rats. Hours of storm, when Pipriac's loudest malediction is faint as the scratch of a pin, unheeded and scarce heard! Is this to last for ever?

To Pipriac and the rest, pacing there in mist and cloud, peeping, muffled to the throat, there come from time to time tidings from the far−off seat of war. The great Emperor has met with slight reverses, and some of his old friends are falling away from him; indeed, if Pipriac could only discern it, the cloud no bigger than a prophet's hand is already looming on the German Rhine. The *gendarmes* laugh and quote the bulletins as they tramp up and down. They are amused at the folly of those who have fallen off from the Emperor, and look forward for the news of French victory which is to come soon!

Once more, as they stand below the cliffs, Mikel Grallon points upward, calling the attention of Pipriac.

"Well?" snaps the Sergeant.

"That accursed goat; it goes to the *Trou* oftener than ever."

"What then? It goes empty, fisherman—we take care of that. Pshaw, you are an ass!"

Mikel trembles and quivers spitefully as he replies—

"I will tell you one thing that you have overlooked, clever as you think yourself; if you had thought of it you would never have let the goat go."

"Well?"

"The goat is in full suck, though her kid is dead; and a mouth draws her milk each day!"

Pipriac utters an exclamation; here is a new light with a vengeance!

"Is this true?" he growls, glaring round. "Malediction! but this Mikel Grallon is the devil! After all, a man cannot live on the milk of a goat."

"It may suffice for a time," says Mikel Grallon; "there is Life in it. Curses on the beast! If I were one of you, I would soon settle its business."

As he speaks the goat is passing overhead, at a distance of several hundred yards, leisurely pausing ever and anon, and cropping the thin herbage as she goes. A diabolical twinkle comes into the Sergeant's eye.

"Can you shoot, fisherman?" he asks.

"I can hit a mark," is the reply.

"I will wager a bottle of good brandy you could not hit a barn−door at a hundred yards! Nevertheless—Hoël, give him your gun."

The *gendarme* hands his weapon to Mikel Grallon, who takes it silently, with a look of interrogation at Pipriac.

"Now, fire!"

"At what?"

“Malediction! at the goat; let us see what you are made of. Fire,—and miss!”

The thin lips of Mikel Grallon are pressed tight together and his brow comes down over his eyes. His hand does not tremble as, kneeling down on one knee, he steadies the piece and takes aim. Up above him Jannedik, with her side presented full to him, pauses unconscious.

He is so long in taking aim that Pipriac swears.

“Malediction!—*fire!*“

There is a flash, a report, and the bullet flies on to its mark above. For a moment it appears to have missed, for the goat, though it seemed to start at the sound, still stands in the same position, scarcely stirring; and Hoël is snatching his gun back with a contemptuous laugh, when Pipriac, pointing upwards, cries—

“*Tous les diables!*—she is hit; she is coming down!”

But the niche where the goat stands is broad and safe, and she has only fallen forward on her knees; it is obvious she is hurt, for she quakes and seems about to roll over; restraining herself however, she staggers to her legs, and then, as if partially recovered, she runs rapidly along the cliffs in the direction of the Cave.

Chapter 35. VIGIL

For a second time Mikel Grallon, with the cunning of his class, had guessed correctly; and for two long days and nights Rohan Gwenfern had received no other sustenance than the milk of the goat. At first, after the death of her kid, Jannedik had been running about the cliffs distracted, burthened with the weight of the milk the little lips could no longer draw; and the famished man in the Cave, finding in her discomfort his bodily salvation, had in direst extremity put his mouth to her teeming udder and drunk. From that moment forth Jannedik returned many times a day to be relieved of her painful burthen; and the more relief came the freer the milk flowed—a vital and an invigorating stream.

But by this time the struggle was well−nigh over, and Rohan Gwenfern knew well that the end was near. The hand of Death seemed upon him, the wholesome flesh had worn from off his bones, and his whole frame was shrunken and famine−stricken. No eye undimmed with tears could have seen him there, crouching like a starved wolf upon his dark bed, with wild eyes glaring out through hair unkempt, his cheeks sunken, his jaw dropping in exhaustion and despair. From time to time he wailed out to God inarticulate sounds of misery: and often his head grew light and he saw strange visions flitting about him in the gloom. But always, when there came any sound from below, he was ready, with all his fierce instinct upon him, to watch and to resist.

He was sitting thus towards evening, while the tide was full and the waves were roaring in storm underneath the Cave, when the entrance was darkened, and Jannedik crept in, and passing across the damp and slimy floor, lay down at his bed. For a time he scarcely noticed her, for he was light−headed, muttering and murmuring to himself; but presently his attention was attracted by the rough tongue licking his hand. Turning his hollow eyes upon her, he murmured her name and touched her softly, at which she stirred, looking up into his face and uttering a low cry of pain; and then, quivering from head to foot in agony, she rolled over at his feet. He then saw, with horror, that she was suffering from a terrible wound in the side, some distance behind the shoulder; and from that wound her life's blood was ebbing fast.

Pitiful—even more pitiful than the pain of human beings whose lips can speak—are the fatal pangs of poor beasts that the good God made dumb. By an instinct diviner than our reason they know and fear the approach of death, and sometimes they seem to love life well—so well, they dare not die. Shall we weep by mortal deathbeds and keep dry eyes by these? or shall we not rather deem that the Shadow that darkens our hearts is terrible to theirs, and that the blessing we ask upon our last sleep should be spoken on theirs as well: with the same hope of awakening, with the same poor gleam of comfort, with the same faith born of despair in the presence of that great darkness we cannot understand?

To Rohan, this poor goat had been more than succour and solace: she had been a friend and a companion, almost human in the comfort she brought. So long as she came to him, with or without tidings from the world, he did not seem quite deserted, he did not feel quite heart−broken. Several times he had flung his arms around her neck, and almost wept, as he thought of the loving ones from whom she came, and her familiar presence, seen from day to day, had made the dark cave almost like home.

And now she lay at his feet panting, dying, her large eyes upturned beseechingly to his. He uttered a wild groan, and knelt beside her.

“Jannedik! Jannedik!”

The poor beast knew her name and licked the hand of her master; then, with one last quiver of the bleeding frame, she dropped her gentle head, and died.

Darkness came, and found Rohan Gwenfern still kneeling by the side of his dead friend, his face white as death and lit with frenzy, his frame trembling from head to foot. All his own physical troubles were forgotten for the time, in this new surprise and pain; he gazed on the dead goat as on a murdered man, innocent yet martyred; and again and again he called his heart's curse on the hand that struck her low. A sick horror possessed him: he could not rise nor stir, but the wild thoughts coursed across his brain like clouds across the sky.

The moon rose in the high heavens, but the wind had not abated, and the sea was still thundering on the shore. It was one of those wild autumn nights when there is a great shining in the upper air, with a strange trouble and conflict of the forces below; when the moon and stars fulfil their ministrations to an earth that trembles in

darkness and a sea that moans in pain; a night of elemental contradictions: vast calm in the heavens, but mighty tumult under the heavens; the clouds drifting luminously yet softly overhead, but the North−West Wind going forth tumultuously below, with his foot on the neck of the Deep.

The cold moonlight from the sky crept into the Cave and touched the dead goat, and trembled on Rohan's face and hands as if in benediction; but no benediction came; and the man's heart was fierce as a beast's within him, and the man's brain was mad. As a wild beast broods in its cave, gazing out through the lunar sheen with glazed and mindless eyes, Rohan crouched in his place in a sort of savage trance. One hour—two—passed thus. He seemed scarcely to see or hear.

Meanwhile the foaming, surging tide had drifted out through the Gate, and the tomblike rocks and stones were again visible on the weedy, shingly shore. The sea roared farther off, beyond the Gate, but its roar was still deafening. The wind, moreover, was yet rising, and there was a halo like Saturn's ring round the vitreous Moon.

All at once Rohan leapt to his feet and listened; for, above the roar of the sea and the shriek of the wind, he heard a startling sound. In a moment he sprang to the mouth of the Cave—and not too soon; for the Cathedral was full of men, and wild faces were moving up from beneath towards his hiding−place. Ladders had at last been procured and, lashed together, placed against the dripping Altar. Up these ladders men were clambering. But when Rohan appeared like a ghost above them in the moonlight, they shrank back with a loud cry.

Only for an instant; then they began to swarm up again.

Chapter 36. VICTORY

It was the work of a moment for Rohan, exerting all his extraordinary strength, to hurl back the two ladders, the highest rungs of which rested against the foot of the *Trou*. Fortunately those upon them had not climbed far, and fell backwards shrieking, but little harmed; while, urged to frenzy by the appearance of the besieging crowd, Rohan straightway commenced to hurl down upon the mass the ponderous fragments of rock which he had placed, ready for use, at the Cave's mouth. Shrieks, cries, oaths arose: and the men withdrew tumultuously out of reach. Then a voice shrieked “Fire!” and a shower of bullets rained round the deserter's form; but all missed their mark.

It was now quite clear that Pipriac, weary of so long waiting, had made up his martial mind to carry the position by storm. Under cover of the firing a number of *gendarmes* advanced again, and the ladders were once more placed against the dripping wall of the “Altar”; but in another moment the besiegers were again baffled and driven back by terrible showers of rocks and stones. More like a wild beast than a human creature, Rohan flitted above in the dark mouth of the Cave: silently, with mad outreaching arms, gathering and discharging his rude ammunition; gazing hungrily and fiercely down on the cruel faces congregated below him; taking no more heed of the bullets pouring around him than he might have done of falling rain or hail. In their excitement and fury the men aimed wildly and at random; so that, although his body was a constant target for their bullets, the deserter remained unharmed.

Presently, discovering all attempts to be unavailing, the *gendarmes* withdrew out of reach in eager consultation. Behind them, filling the aperture of the Gate, gathered villagers of both sexes, from whose lips from time to time came low cries of terror and amaze.

Finding the position his own and his security no longer assailed, Rohan withdrew back into the Cave.

But the patience of the besiegers had been long exhausted, and the suspension of attack was not destined to last long. Now that they possessed scaling ladders and other implements of attack ready to their hand, they were determined, at any risk, to unearth the creature who had resisted them so calmly for so prolonged a period. Dead or alive, they would secure him; and that night. The storm which was raging all around did not interfere with their manuvres; on the contrary, it facilitated them; and from time to time, when the moon was veiled under the clouds and all was darkness and confusion, the assault seemed easy.

Under cover of a sharp fire of bullets given by a file of *gendarmes* told off for that purpose, a number of men again advanced to the attack. Lying flat on his face, Rohan kept himself well concealed behind the heap of rocks and stones which he had accumulated at the mouth of the Cave; so that, although he presented no mark for the bullets, his arms were ready to precipitate his heavy missiles on those below. So soon as the advance was made, and the ladders were rested against the face of the cliff, the defence began anew.

Showers of rocks; great and small, rolled down from the *Trou*. Had some of the larger missiles struck their mark the result would speedily have been fatal; but the besiegers were wary, and by their rapid movements escaped much of Rohan's point−blank fire. From time to time, indeed, there was a yell of fury when a stray stone struck home and caused some furious besieger to limp or crawl back to his comrades in the safe part of the Cathedral; but as yet no man was dangerously hurt, and ere long the ladders were again safely placed against the cliff, and men began rapidly to ascend. It was now that Rohan, springing erect and holding high in the air a huge fragment of rock, dashed it down with incredible force and fury on one of the ladders. Fortunately, no human being had reached the point where the rock struck; but the rungs of the ladder snapped like dry faggots, and amid a yell of execration, the entire ladder itself collapsed, and those who were climbing fell back heavily, bleeding and half stunned.

“Fire! fire!” shrieked Pipriac, pointing at the figure of Rohan, which was now distinctly visible above him in the moonlight. Before the command could be obeyed Rohan had crouched down under shelter, and the bullets rained harmlessly round the spot where he had just stood.

“Devil! deserter! *Chouan!*” yelled the infuriated Sergeant, shaking his fist impotently at the *Trou*. “We will have you alive or dead!”—and turning again to his men, he cried, “Forward again! to the attack!”

Again the body of men moved forward under cover of fire, and again the extraordinary contest was renewed.

It was a scene to be remembered. The dark masses moving and crying in the Cathedral, with glistening of bayonets and flashing of guns; the wild astonished groups of villagers congregated at the Gate, far without which the sea was roaring and gleaming in furious storm; the great black cliffs above, reaching up as it were into the very heaven, and ever and again gleaming like sheet−lightning under the sudden illumination of the moon; and high up above the Cathedral floor the lonely Cave, with the wild figure of a man coming and going across it like a ghost. To the cannonade of wind and sea, before which the mighty crags seemed to take to their foundations, there was added the sharp sound of the muskets and the hoarse roaring from the throats of men; but at intervals, when all sounds ceased for an instant, both the roar of the elements and the disturbing cries of mortals, the stillness was deathlike though momentary, and you could distinctly hear the cry of some disturbed sea−bird far up among the crags.

The conflict grew tumultuous. As a succession of huge clouds came up obscuring the moon for many minutes together, there was frequently almost total darkness.

Only the extraordinary impregnability of Rohan's position prevented it from being carried twenty times over; for as the time flew, and the attack continued unabated, the man's strength began to fail him. Hours passed, and he still succeeded in keeping his enemies at bay; but his hands were bleeding from the sharp rocks, his head seemed whirling round, his eyes were blinded with fatigue, and he heard rather than saw the crowd that raged and climbed beneath his feet. For, remember, he was spent with hunger, worn with long watching and waiting, and he possessed only a tithe of his old gigantic strength.

Again and again the besiegers were repulsed; more than one was wounded and had crept away; but the shower of rocks continued terrific whenever they approached again. Over all the other tumult rose the voice of Pipriac urging on his men.

Had the *gendarmes* been marksmen Rohan would have fallen early in the fight; but partly from want of skill, and partly from excessive excitement, they fired at random, until their ammunition was almost spent.

Many hours had passed away when the besiegers made a final attack, more desperate than any that had taken place before. Advancing under cover of darkness, they set their ladder against the cliff, while their comrades covered the mouth of the Cave with their guns. In a moment Rohan, had sprung up again, and had hurled back the ladder with tremendous strength. There was a flash—a roar—and once more the bullets rained round him. He drew back startled, and before he could recover himself the assault was renewed.

Simultaneously with the central attack two *gendarmes*, taking off their shoes and holding their bayonets between their teeth, began, completely unseen and unsuspected, to make their way upward by the fissures in the rock at the side of the “Altar.” Rohan had twice again hurled back the ladder, and was in the act of discharging a fresh volley of stones, when he was startled by the apparition of two human faces rising at his feet and glaring upward. A wild exclamation burst from his lips, and, stooping down, he loosened from the rock at his feet two convulsive human hands.

With a shrill cry, the man fell backward into the crowd below; fortunately, his fall was broken by the moving, heaving mass, and although he was half stunned, and half stunned several others, he was not killed. Meantime his companion, fearful of meeting the same fate, had rapidly descended.

But in the meantime the ladder was again fixed and held firmly down against the cliff, while more men were climbing. By this time Rohan was well−nigh exhausted and yielding rapidly to a species of vertigo. He no longer saw his enemies; but, seizing rock after rock, hurled them down furiously into the darkness. Suddenly, however, he became conscious of dark figures rising to him from below. His head swam round. Uplifting with all his strength a gigantic fragment of rock, almost the last remaining of his store, he poised it for one moment over his head, and then, with a wild cry, hurled it downward at the shapes he saw approaching! There was a crash, a shriek; under the frightful weight of the rock the ladder yielded, and the figures upon it shrank groaning down; horrible cries followed, of agony and terror;—and then, overcome by his excitement and fatigue, Rohan swooned away.

How long he lay unconscious he could not tell; but when he opened his eyes he was lying unmolested in the mouth of the Cave. The wind was still crying and the sea was still roaring, but all other sounds were silent; and when, remembering his recent peril, and half expecting to find himself face to face with his enemies, he started up and gazed around him, he saw no sign of any human being. The moon was out without a cloud, her beams were flooding the Cathedral of St. Gildas; and lo! the foaming tide had entered the Gate and was rapidly creeping

nearer and nearer to the great Altar. The silence was now explained. The besiegers had withdrawn, as before, at the tide's approach, and left him master of the situation.

Peering over into the gloom he saw the shingle below thickly strewn with huge rocks and stones, the *débris* of the recent struggle, but of any lingering human being there was no sign. Indeed, for any one remaining in the Cathedral, and lacking the skill or power to ascend to the Cave, there would only have been one doom—a swift death in the cruel, crawling tide. Inch by inch, foot by foot, the stormy waters were coming in, and already the great Cathedral floor was half paved with the liquid, shimmering pools.

Well, the battle was over, and he had conquered; and indeed properly provisioned for the purpose, and duly recovered from the effects of his long privation, he could have held the position for an indefinite period against hundreds of men. But now, alas! all his force had gone from him. Hunger and cold had done their work, and the last citadel of his bodily strength seemed overcome. Trembling and shivering he looked around him, conscious of no feeling save a sense of utter desolation and despair. He had held out bravely, but he felt that he could hold out no longer; he was safe for a little space, but he knew that his persecutors would soon return; and altogether both man and God seemed against him, as he had feared and believed from the beginning.

The Gate of the Cathedral was now full of the boiling, rushing, whirling waves, and the floor was more than two thirds covered. A roar like thunder was in the air, and the salt flakes of foam were blown by the wind up into his very face. As he stooped again, gazed down, he beheld for the first time, right under him in the moonlight, something which riveted his attention, something dark and moveless, extended on the shingle immediately below the Cave, and towards which the tide was rapidly rushing, with white lips ready to touch and tear!

He gazed on for some moments in silent fascination, his heart quite cold and sick with dread; then eager to satisfy a wild curiosity, he prepared to descend the face of the cliff.

Chapter 37. THE MIRAGE OF LEIPSIC

Slowly, swinging in the darkness, Rohan descended the face of the cliff until he reached the narrow place of shingle below, on which the troubled tide was momentarily creeping; and suddenly the moonlight came out anew upon the Cathedral, flooding its weedy walls and watery floor with streams of liquid silver. The wind still shrieked and moaned, and the sea roared terribly without the Gate; but within the Cathedral there was a solemn calm, as in some consecrated temple made by hands.

Slipping down upon the wet shingle, and involuntarily looking from side to side in dread of a pursuer, Rohan saw the sea rushing in through the Gate with a roar like thunder and a snow−white flash of foam; and the waters as they entered boiled in eddies, whirling round and round, while the great far−away heart of the ocean uplifted them in one throbbing pulsation till they washed and splashed wildly against the dripping walls. Overhead the moving heavens, roofing the great Cathedral, were sailing past, drifting and changing, brightening and darkening, in one wild rush of wavelike shades and gleams. So loud was the tumult that it would have drowned a strong man's shriek as easily as an infant's cry.

But the light of the moon increased, illuming the boiling surge within the Gate and creeping onward until it touched the very feet of the fugitive. Rohan shivered, as if a cold hand had been laid on his shoulder; for the rays fell luminously on something horrible—on a white face upturned to the sky.

He drew back with a shudder. After a moment he looked again. The face was still there, touched by the glimmering fingers of the moon; and half resting on the shingle, half submerged in the waters of the still rising tide, was the body of a man.

One of the great rocks hurled down by Rohan in his mad fury had struck the creature down; hence, doubtless, that wild shriek of horror which had arisen from his pursuers before they fled. The rock still lay upon the man's crushed breast, for death had been instantaneous. One white hand glimmered from beneath, while the awful face looked with open eyes at heaven.

Words cannot depict, human language is too weak to represent, the feelings which at that moment filled the soul of Rohan Gwenfern. A dull, dumb sensation, morally the analogue of the physical feeling of intense cold, numbed and for the time being paralysed his faculties; so that he staggered and almost fell; and his own heart seemed crushed under a load like the rock upon the dead man's breast. Fire flashed before his eyes, with a horrid glimmer of blood. He was compelled to lean his head against the crag, breathing hard like a thing in mortal pain.

His first wild emotions of wrath and bloodthirst had worn away, now that his enemies were no longer near to fan the fierce flames to fury. The Battle was over, and he was the Victor, standing alone upon the field; and at his feet, the Slain.

If at that moment his persecutors had returned he might have renewed the fray, have struck again, and have been thenceforth insensible to blood; but it had been so willed that his victory should be complete as well as single; his enemies would not return that night, and they had left behind them, glimmering solitary in the moonlight, their dead

Bear in mind that Rohan, like all men of his race and religion, had been familiar with Death before, under other and more beautiful conditions. The gentle sleep of men and women dying in their beds; the low farewell of wearied−out old age, blest by the Church and consecrated by the priest—these he knew well; and he had loved to hear the solemn music of the Celtic dirge sung round the shrouded forms of those who had passed away under natural circumstances. His hands were bloodless then. He had now to realize, under the fullest and most terrible of conditions, the presence of the cold Phantom as it appears to the eyes of murderers and of uninitiated men upon the battle−field. He had now to conceive, with a horrible and sickening fascination, that his hands had destroyed that strangest and solemnest of mysteries—a breathing, moving human life.

True, he was vindicated by the circumstance that he had merely stricken in self−defence; but what is circumstance to one whose soul, like Rohan Gwenfern's, is fashioned of stuff as sensitive as the feelers of the gleaming medusæ of the ocean? For him there was but one perception. A blinding white light of agony arose before him. He, whose heart was framed of gentleness, whose nature was born and bred in love and kindness, he out of whose hand the lamb ate and the dove fed, who had never before destroyed any creature with life, not even

the helpless sea−birds of the crags, had now done dreadful murder, had hurried into eternity the miserable soul of a fellow man. For him, for Rohan Gwenfern, there was no vindication. Life was poisoned to him; the air he breathed was sick and sacrificial. This, then, was the end of all his dreams of love and peace!

The clouds drifted above him with flying gleams of moonlight, the wind shrieked and the sea roared with hollow cannonade beyond the Gate, as, partially recovering his self−possession, he stooped down to gaze at the face of the murdered man. In his terror he was saying that he might recognise some bitter enemy—Mikel Grallon, for example, and thus discover a partial justification for his own deed. The first look made him despair. The man wore uniform, and his hair and beard were quite white. It was Pipriac himself; gazing with a bloodless face at heaven!

Strangely enough, he had never, although Pipriac led the besieging party, looked upon him in the light of a deadly foe. He had been his father's boon−comrade; under all his fierce swash−buckler air, there had ever existed a certain rude generosity and *bonhomie*, and after all he had only been doing his duty in attempting to secure a deserter dead or alive. In his own mind, moreover, Rohan knew that Pipriac would cheerfully have winked at his escape, had such escape been possible.

Death gives strange dignity to the commonest of faces, and the features of the old Sergeant look solemn and venerable in their fixed and awful pallor. The moon rises high over the Cathedral, within which the tide has now grown calm; but the waters, the deep ululation of which fills the air, have now reached to Rohan's feet. Above, the mighty crags rise black as jet, save where at intervals some space of moist granite flashes in the changeful light. . . . Rohan listens. Far overhead there is a sound like human voices, dying faintly away.

And now, old Pipriac, all thy grim jokes and oaths are over, all thy voice is hushed for ever, and the frame that once strutted in the sunshine floats idly as a weed in the shallows of the tide. Bottle of red wine or flask of corn brandy will never delight thee more. Thou, too, hast fallen at thy post with many a thousand better men, in the cause of the great Colossus who bestrides the world; and though thy fall has been inglorious and far away from all the splendours of the busy field, thou hast fulfilled thine allotted task, my veteran, as truly as any of the rest. After all, thou wast a good fellow, and thy heart was kindly, though thy tongue was rough. So at least thinks Rohan Gwenfern, as he bends above thee, looking sadly in thy face.

Ah God, to kill!—to quench the living spark in howsoever base a heart it burns! To strike down the quivering life, to let loose the sad and perhaps despairing soul! Better to be dead like Pipriac, than to be looking down with this agony of the heart, as Rohan is looking now.

The heavy rock still lies on Pipriac's breast; but now, stooping softly, Rohan lifts it in his arms and casts it out into the tide. The corpse, freed from its load, washes upward and swings from side to side as if it lived, and turning over on its stomach, floats face downward at Rohan's feet. And now the place where Rohan stands is ankle−deep, and the tide has yet another hour to rise. With one last despairing look at the dead man, Rohan turns away, and slowly, with feet and hands that tremble in the fissures of the rock, reascends to the Cave above.

Scarcely has he reached his old position when his sense is once more attracted by the sound of voices far above him. He starts, listening intently, and looks upward. Then, for the first time, the reality of his situation returns upon him, and he remembers the consequences of his own deed. Though he has slain a man in self−defence, rather than become an authentic and accredited slayer of men, his act, in the eye of the law, is murder, and doubtless, sooner or later, he will have to die a murderer's death.

Stooping over from the Cave, he gazes down on the spot where he so lately stood. The floor of the Cathedral is now completely covered, and there, glimmering in one gleaming patch of moonlight, is the sight he dreads. He utters a wild cry of agony and despair and falls upon his knees.

Hear him, O merciful God, for he is praying! Have pity, and hearken to his entreaty, for he is in Thy hand! Ah, but this wild cry which rises on the night is not a gentle prayer for pity or for mercy; say rather, it is a frantic wail for redress and for revenge. “I have been innocent in this thing, O God; not on my head be the guilt, but on his who hunted me down and made me what I am; on him whose red Sword shadows all the world, on him who points Thy creatures on to doom, let the just retribution fall! As he has curst my days, be his accurst; and spare him not, O God!” Even thus, not in such speech, but with the same annihilating thought, prays—or curses—Rohan Gwenfern. Then, rising wildly to his feet, careless now of his life, he follows the dizzy path that leads up the face of the cliffs.

The date of that night is memorable. It was the 19th of October, 1813.

The circumstance which we are now about to relate is variously given by those familiar with Rohan Gwenfern's life−history. Some, among the more credulous and superstitious, believe that the man actually on that occasion beheld an apocalyptic vision; others, although admitting that he seemed to see such a vision, affirm that it must have been merely mental and psychical, due to the wanderings of a naturally wild and temporarily conscience−stricken imagination; while the purely sceptical, forming a small minority, go the length of affirming that the fancy only occurred to the man in after years, when mind and memory were so confused as to blend all associations into one extraordinary picture. Be that as it may, the story, resting on the solemn testimony of the man himself; asserts that Rohan Gwenfern, as he fled upward that night from the scene of his conflict and left the body of Pipriac floating in the sea below him, was suddenly arrested by a miraculous Mirage in the heavens.

The moon had passed into a cloud, whence, as from the folds of a transparent tent, her light was diffused over the open sky; tumultuously, in troubled masses, the vapours still continued to drift in the direction in which the wind was blowing: when suddenly, as if at the signal of a Hand, the wind ceased, the clouds stood still, and there was silence both in sky and sea. This terrible silence only lasted for a moment, during which Rohan hung his head in horrible expectation. Gazing up once more, he saw the forms of heaven again in motion; and lo! they had assumed the likeness of mighty Armies tumultuously passing overhead. The vision grew. He saw the flashing of steel, the movement of great bodies of men,—the heavy squadrons of soldiers on foot, the dark *silhouette* of the artillery rapidly drawn!

The Mirage extended. The whole heavens became as the moonlit earth, crossed by moving bodies of men, and strewn with dead and dying; and in the heart of heaven was a great river, through which the tumultuous legions came.

Clear and distinct, yet ghostlike and unreal, the Shapes passed by; and far away as the faces loomed he seemed to see each one distinctly, like that dead face from which he was flying. Presently, however, all his faculties became absorbed in the contemplation of one Form which rose gigantic, close to the semi−lucent cloud which veiled the moon.

It sat on horseback, cloaked and hooded, with one hand pointing onward; and though its outline was gigantic, far exceeding that of any human thing, its face seemed that of a man. He saw the face clearly, white as marble, cold as death.

Slowly, as a cloud moves, this Form passed across the heavens; and all around it the flying legions gathered, pointed on in flight by the index finger of its hand; but the head was dejected; the chin drooped upon the breast, and the eyes, cold and pitiless, looked down in still despair. Awe−stricken, amazed, Rohan stood stretching his hands upwards with a cry, for the lineaments on which he gazed seemed almost godlike, and the Form too seemed divine. But as he looked the features took another likeness and grew terribly familiar, until he recognised the face which had so long haunted his life, and which the white Christ had once revealed to him in dream!

Column after column moved past, the whole heavens were darkened, and in their midst, satanic and commanding, moved the Phantom of Bonaparte.

It was the 19th of October 1813, and at that very moment the French armies were in full retreat from Leipsic—with Bonaparte at their head.

Chapter 38. “HOME THEY BROUGHT THEIR WARRIOR DEAD”

When the besieging party returned to the Cathedral they found the body of the Sergeant stranded high and dry near the Gate. Not without fear and trembling, they again placed their ladders against the wall, and mounting without opposition searched the Cave. However, not a trace of Rohan was to be found; horror−stricken, doubtless, at his own deed, he had fled—whither they knew not, nor did they greatly care just then to know, for the death of Pipriac had filled them with terror and amaze. By this time dawn had come and the storm had ceased. Dejectedly enough, followed by a crowd of villagers, they bore their burthen away—out through the Gate, up the stairs of St. Triffine, and along the green plateau towards the village. It was a sorrowful procession, for, with all his faults, the Sergeant was a favourite.

Passing underneath the bunch of mistletoe which hung as a sign over the door of the little *cabaret,* they bore in their burthen and placed it down on the great table which stood in the centre of the kitchen. Then Hoël the *gendarme* took off his greatcoat and placed it over the corpse, covering the blood−stained face from sight. Poor old Pipriac! Many a morning had he swaggered into that kitchen to taste the widow Cloriet's brandy! Many a time had he smoked his pipe beside that kitchen fire! Many a time, also, with a wink of his one eye, had he wound his arm in tipsy affection round the waist of the red−haired waiting wench Yvonne! It was all over now, and there he lay, a statelier and more solemn figure than he had ever been in life; while the trembling widow, in honour of the sad occasion, distributed little cordial glasses all round.

The *cabaret* was soon full, for the dreadful news had spread far and wide. Ere long the little Priest, with a face as white as a sheet, entered in, and, kneeling by the dead man's side, said a long and silent prayer. When he had finished he rose to his feet and questioned the *gendarmes.*

“And the other—Rohan—where is he? Is he taken?”

The *gendarme* Hoël shook his head.

“He is not taken, and never will be taken, alive; we have searched the Cave, the cliffs; but the Fiend protects him, Father Rolland, and it is all in vain.”

There was a loud murmur of astonishment and acquiescence.

“How did it all happen?” pursued the Priest. “You attempted to take him, and he struck in self−defence; but then?”

This was the signal for Hoël to launch forth into a long description of the latter part of the siege, during which he was ever and anon interrupted by his excited comrades. The consensus of testimony went to show that Rohan, in his maniacal resistance, had neither been alone nor unassisted, but that, in the shadow of the night, and amid the loudness of the storm, he had conjured to his aid the powers of darkness, whose hands had hurled down upon the besiegers fragments of rock far too huge to be uplifted by human strength. That he had sold himself to the Devil, who had formally undertaken to protect him from the Emperor, was a statement which received general affirmation. “Master Roberd,” it was well known, was ever on the look−out for such bargains; and the belief that he had been leagued with the deserter against them flattered alike the vanity of the *gendarmes* and their superstition

Down from his cottage stumped the old Corporal, followed by the remnant of his “Maccabees;” and when he looked in the dead man's face his eyes were for a moment dim.

“Peace to his soul—he was a brave man!” ejaculated the veteran. “He did his duty to the Emperor, and the good God will give him his reward.”

“And after all,” said the Priest in a low voice, “he died in fair fight, as it might be on the open field.”

“That is not so,” answered the Corporal firmly, looking very white round the edges of his mouth. “That is not so, *m'sieur le curé,* for he was foully murdered by a coward and a *chouan,* whom God will punish in his turn. Hear me—I say it, though the man was flesh and blood of mine.”

The little *curé* shook his head dolefully.

“It is a sad thing, and it all comes, doubtless, of resisting the laws of the Emperor; but look you, it was a matter of life and death, and if he had not stricken in self−defence, he would have been taken and slain. After all, it was one man against many.?”

“One man!—a thousand Devils!” cried Hoël, unconsciously repeating his dead leader's favourite expression.

“He was wrong from the beginning,” pursued the Priest moralising. “One man cannot set the world right if it is in error; and it is one's place to obey the law, and to do one's duty to God and the Emperor. He would not obey, and now he has shed blood, for which, alas! the good God will have a reckoning late or soon.”

To such purpose, and in so many words, moralised Father Rolland; and those who heard shuddered and crossed themselves in fear. It occurred to no one present to reflect that Pipriac had fallen in fair war, in a war, moreover, in which he was the aggressor; and that Rohan Gwenfern was as justified in the sight of Heaven as any qualified licentiate of the art of killing. So strange a law is it of our human consciousness, that murder loses its horror when multiplied by twenty thousand! Those who would have calmly surveyed a battle−field strewn with dead could not regard one solitary corpse with equanimity. Those who would have adored Napoleon as a great man, who would have kissed his raiment hem in reverence and tears, turned their hearts against Gwenfern as against some base and abominable creature.

“Aunt Loïz, it is all true! Pipriac is dead, and they have carried his body up yonder; but Rohan is yet alive. Yes, he has killed Pipriac.”

“What could he do? It was a fight for life.”

“And now no man will pity him, for there is blood upon his hands; and no man will give him bread or yield him shelter; and till he yields himself up no priest will shrive his poor soul and make his peace with God.”

“ Is that so, Marcelle?”

“Yes, they all say it is murder—even Father Rolland, who has a kind heart. But it is false, Aunt Loïz!”

“Of course it is false; for what could he do? It is they who are to blame, not he, not my poor persecuted boy. May the good God forgive him, for he struck in self−defence, and he was mad. O my son, my son!”

They sat together in the cottage under the cliff, and they spoke, with sobs and tears, clinging to each other. The horror of Rohan's deed lay upon them like some frightful shadow. It seemed like horrible blasphemy to have struck down the emissary of the great Emperor; and they knew that for such a deed, however justifiable, there would be no mercy, and that for such a murderer there would be no pity. Rohan was outlawed for ever, and every human hand would now be raised against him.

To them, as they sat together, came Jàn Goron, with more tidings of what was going on in the village. The *gendarmes,* furious and revengeful, had been searching the Cave and scouring the cliffs again, but not a trace of Rohan could now be found. In the darkness and confusion of last night's storm he had doubtless sought some other hiding−place.

“There is other news,” said Goron, anxious to change the sad subject. “The King of Saxony has deserted the Emperor, and the armies of France have fallen back on Leipsic. Some say the Emperor is meeting his match at last, and that all the Kings are now against him. Well, he has eaten half a dozen Kings for breakfast before now, and will do so again.”

At another time these tidings would have greatly excited Marcelle Derval; but now they seemed almost devoid of interest. The fortunes of France and the Emperor were utterly forgotten in her individual trouble. However, she shrugged her pretty shoulders incredulously when Goron hinted at defeat, and said listlessly—

“At Leipsic, say you?—both Hoël and Gildas will be there.” And she added in a low weary voice, “We had a letter from Gildas last week, and he has been three times under fire without so much as a scratch or a burn. He has seen the Emperor quite close, and he says he is looking very old. Hoël, too, is well . . Ah, God, if my cousin Rohan were with them as he might have been, happy and well and strong, fighting for the Emperor!”

As she spoke her tears burst forth again, and Mother Gwenfern answered her with a bitter wail. Yes, this doubtless was the bitterest of all: the feeling that Rohan had been madly flying from a mere phantom, and that, had he quietly accepted his fate, he would still have been living honoured and happy, like Hoël and Gildas. By doing his duty and becoming a brave soldier, he would have avoided all that series of troubles and sins which had been the consequence of his resistance. Blood he might have shed, but only the blood of enemies; which, as all good patriots knew, would have been of small consequence! It was not for simple women like these to grasp the sublime truth that all men are brothers, and that even staunch patriots may wear the livery of Cain.

Night came on, black and stormy. The wind, which had fallen during the day, rose again, and heavens and seas were blindly blent together. In the cottage, which quaked with every blast and cowered before the fierce torrents of rain, Marcelle still lingered, having sent word home that she would not return that night.

The turf fire had burnt nearly out, and the only light in the hut was cast by a miserable lamp which swung from the rafters. Side by side, now speaking in whispers, now silent, the women sat on the rude form before the fire; feeling all the world against them, heart−broken, soul−stricken, listening to the elements that raved without and echoed the hopeless wail of their own weary lives. Suddenly, above the roaring of the wind and the beating of the rain, they heard a sound without—something tapping at the pane.

Marcelle rose and listened. The sound was repeated, and followed by a low knocking at the door, the latch of which was secured for the night

"Open!" cried a voice without.

Something in the sound woke a wild answer in their hearts. The mother rose to her feet, white as death; Marcelle tottered to the door and threw it open; and silently, swiftly, crouching like some hunted animal, a man crept in.

There was no need for one look, for one word, of recognition; swift as an electric flash the recognition came, in one mad leaping of the heart; and before they could grasp his hand or gaze into his face they knew it was he—the one creature they held dearest in the world.

Rapidly, with her characteristic presence of mind, Marcelle secured the door; then, while Rohan ran shivering across to the nearly extinguished fire, she carefully drew the curtain of the window, closing all view from without. Then, too excited to speak, the women stood gazing with affrighted eyes at the new corner. Ragged and half naked, soaking and dripping, with his wild hair falling over his shoulders, and a beard of many weeks' growth covering his face, he stood, or rather crouched, before them, with his eyes on theirs.

Certainly the dark heavens that night did not look down on any creature more pitiable; and most pitiable of all was the white light upon his face, the dull dead fire that burned in his eyes.

With no word or sign of greeting he gazed round him; then, pointing with his hand, he cried, hoarsely—

"Bread!"

Now for the first time they remembered that he was starving, and knew that the mad light in his face was the light of famine. Swiftly, without a word, Marcelle brought out food and placed it before him; he seized it fiercely, and devoured it like a wild beast. Then the mother's heart broke to see him eat. Kneeling by his side, while he was eagerly clutching food with his right hand, she took the other hand and covered it with kisses.

"O my son, my son!" she sobbed.

He did not seem to heed; all his faculties seemed absorbed in seeking sustenance, and his eyes only moved this way and that like a hungry hound's. When Marcelle brought brandy and placed it before him—he drank; then, and not till then, his eyes fell on hers with some sort of recognition, and he said, in a hard and hollow voice—

"Is it thou, Marcelle?"

She did not reply, but her eyes were blind with tears; then he laughed vacantly, and looked down at his mother.

"I was starving, and so I came; they are busy up there, and they will not follow; but if they do, I am ready. You have heard of Pipriac? the old fool has got his deserts, that is all! What a night!"

There was something in his tone so reckless, so distraught, that they almost shrank away from him, and ever and anon he gave a low mindless laugh, very painful to hear. Presently he gazed again at Marcelle, saying—

"You keep your good looks, little one: ah, but you have never known what it is to starve! But for the starvation, look you, it would all have been a good joke. See, I am worn to the bone—I have no flesh left—if you met me out of doors you would say I was a ghost. How you look at me! I frighten you, and no wonder, Marcelle Derval. Ah, God! you are afraid!"

"No, Rohan, I am not afraid!" answered the girl, sobbing.

For a moment or two he looked fixedly at her, then his breast heaved painfully, and he held his hand upon his heart.

"Tell me, then," he cried quickly, "why do you look at me like that? Do you hate me? Mother of God, answer! Do you hate me, *now?"*

"No, no!—God help you, Rohan!"

And she sank, still sobbing, at his feet; and while the widow grasped one hand, she held the other, resting her head upon his knee. He sat spell−bound, like one between sleep and waking, while his frame was shaken with the sobs of his mother and his beloved. Suddenly he snatched his hands away.

"You are mad, I think, you women; you do not know what you are touching; you do not know whom you are

embracing. God and men are against me, for I am a murderer, and for murderers there is no mercy. Look you, I have killed Pipriac, who was my father's friend. Ah, if you had seen—it was horrible! The rock crushed in his breast like a crab's shell, and in a moment he was dead—old Pipriac, whom my father loved!"

Their answer was a low wail, but they only clung the closer to him, and both his hands were wet with tears. His own soul was shaken, and his feverish eyes grew dim and moist. Reaching out his trembling arms, he drew the women to him with a low heart−broken cry.

"Mother! Marcelle! you do not hate me, you are not afraid?"

They looked up into his face, and their features shone with that love which passeth understanding. The old worn woman and the pale beautiful girl alike looked up with the same passionate yearning, holding him the dearer for his sorrows, even for his sins. His eyes lingered most on the countenance of Marcelle; *her* devotion was an unexpected revelation. Then across his brain flashed the memory of all the happy past, and, hiding his face in his hands, he sobbed like a child, but almost without tears—for tears his famished heart was too dry.

Suddenly, while they watched him in awe and pain, his attitude changed, and he sprung wildly to his feet, listening with that fierce look upon his face which they at first had feared so much. Despite the sound of wind and rain, his quick ear had detected footfalls on the shingle outside the cottage.

Before they could say another word a knock came to the door.

"Put out the light!" whispered Marcelle; and in a moment Rohan had extinguished the swinging lamp, which, indeed, had almost burnt out already. The cottage was now quite dark; and while Rohan, creeping across the floor, concealed himself in the blackest corner of the chamber, Marcelle crossed over to the door.

"Within there!" cried a voice. "Answer, I say! Will you keep a good Christian dripping here all night like a drowned rat?"

"You cannot enter," said Marcelle; "it is too late, and we are abed."

The answer was a heavy blow on the door, which was only secured by a frail latch.

"I know your voice, Marcelle Derval, and I have come all this way to find you out. I have news to tell you; so open at once. It is I, Mikel Grallon!"

"Whoever you are, go away!" answered Marcelle in agony.

"Go away? Not I, till I have seen and spoken with you. Open the door, or I will break it open—Ah!"

As he spoke, the man dealt heavy blows upon the frail woodwork, and suddenly, before Marcelle could interfere, the latch yielded, and the door, to which there was no bolt, flew open. Mother Gwenfern uttered a scream, while, amid a roar of wind and a shower of rain, Mikel Grallon entered in. But white as death Marcelle blocked up the entrance, and when the man's heavy form fell against her, pushed it fiercely back.

"What brings you here at this time, Mikel Grallon?" she demanded. "Stand still—you shall not pass another step. Ah, that Alain, or Jannick, or even my uncle were here, you would not dare! Begone, or I shall strike you, though I am only a girl"

The reply was an imbecile laugh; and now for the first time Marcelle perceived that Grallon was under the influence of strong drink. His usually subdued and deliberate air was exchanged for one of impudent audacity, and his voice was insolent, threatening, and devil−may−care.

"Strike me!" he cried huskily; "I do not think your little hand will hurt much; but I know you do not mean it—it is only the way of you women. Ah, my little Marcelle, you and I understand each other, and it is all settled; it is all settled, and your uncle is pleased. Now that that coward of a cousin is done for, you will listen to reason—will you not, Marcelle Grallon? Ah, yes, for Marcelle Grallon sounds prettier than Marcelle Derval!"

Leering tipsily, he advanced, and before she could resist had thrown his arms around her; she struggled in his hold, and struck him with her clenched hand upon the face, but he only laughed. Strange to say, she uttered no cry. Her heart was too full of terror lest Rohan, whom she knew to be listening, should betray himself or be discovered.

"Let me go!" she said in a low intense voice. "In God's name, let me go!"

So saying, with a powerful effort, she shook herself free, while Grallon staggered forward into the centre of the room. Recovering himself with a fierce oath, he found himself face to face with Mother Gwenfern, who, with wild skeleton frame and gleaming eyes, stood before him like some weary ghost. "Aha, you are there, mother!" he cried, as his eyes fell upon her. "Well, I suppose you have heard all the news, and you know now what to think of your wretch of a son. He has killed a man, and when he is caught, which will be soon, he will be tortured like a

dog. This is your reward for bringing cowards into the world, old woman. I am sorry for you, but it is you that are to blame."

"Silence, Mikel Grallon!" said Marcelle, still terror stricken; "silence, and go away. For the love of the Virgin go away this night, and leave us in peace."

She had come quite close to him as she spoke, and he again reached out his arms and seized her with a laugh.

"I have come down to fetch you back," he said, "for you shall not sleep under this roof. As sure as you will be Marcelle Grallon you shall not stay; the home of a *chouan* and a coward is no place for you, and Mother Gwenfern knows that as well as I know it. Do not be obstinate, or I shall be angry—I, who adore you. Ah! you may struggle, but I have you fast."

His arms were around her, and his hot face was pressed close to hers, when suddenly a hand interposed, and, seizing Grallon by the throat with terrific grip, choked him off. It was the work of a moment; and Grallon, looking up in stupefaction, found himself in the hold of a man who was gazing down upon him with eyes of murderous rage. Then his blood went cold with terror, for even in the dimness of the room he recognised Gwenfern.

"Help! the deserter! help!" he gasped; but one iron hand was on his throat, and another was uplifted to smite and bruise him down.

"Silence!" said Rohan, while the wretch groaned half strangled; then he said in a lower, more intense voice, "I have you now, Mikel Grallon. If you know a prayer say it quickly, for I mean to kill you. Ah, wretch! to you I owe so much that I have suffered; you have hunted me down like a dog, you have driven me mad with hunger and cold, but now it is my turn. Pipriac is dead, but you are more guilty than Pipriac, and you shall follow him to−night."

Grallon struggled and gasped for breath; sober now through sheer excess of terror, he glared up at his captor and writhed in vain to set himself free. It would doubtless have gone ill with him, had not the two women interfered and called in agonised tones upon Rohan not to take his life. The sound of their beseeching voices seemed to allay the fury in Rohan's breast and to call him to a sense of his own danger. He threw off Grallon, and made a movement as it to approach the door.

At this juncture Grallon, finding himself free, and seeing Rohan about to escape, had the indiscretion to interfere once more.

"Help!—the deserter!—help!" he shrieked in a loud voice.

Before he could repeat the alarm Rohan had turned again upon him, uplifted him in his powerful arms, and dashed him down with great force upon the hard earthen floor, where he lay senseless as if dead. Then Rohan, with one last look at his mother and Marcelle, passed out through the door and disappeared into the night.

Chapter 39. “A CHAPEL OF HATE”

In the autumn of 1813, it was wild weather out in the great world where Emperors and Kings were wildly struggling in a grasp of death. On earth, were the red shadows of armies; in heaven, were the black shadows of rain; and the wind blew these and those to and fro on the faces of earth and heaven, so that the eye looked in vain this way and that for a spot of sunshine and peace. The great Tidal Wave which had deluged Europe with blood was at last subsiding, and the strand was strewn with the wreck of empires and kingdoms and the great drifts of dead.

Through this general storm, physical as well as political, Bonaparte was rapidly retreating on France: before him, the startled faces of his people; behind him, the angry murmur of his foes; and at every step he took the way darkened and the situation became more dire. Nevertheless, if chronicle is to be trusted, his face was calm, his mien composed. The fifty thousand Frenchmen lost at Leipsic sent no spectres to trouble him; or, if the spectres came, he waved them down! Spectres of the living—mad famished Frenchmen who made hideous riot wherever they came—preceded and followed him: scarecrows of his old glory and his old renown. In this wise he came to Erfurt, where, so few years before, he had presided at the memorable Congress of Kings.

Things were indeed changed—even in the man's own soul. He could not fail to foresee—for he was not destitute of prophetic vision—that this was only the beginning of the end. One by one the powers of the earth had fallen away from him, and, like Death on his white steed, he was riding he knew not whither—shadows around and behind him; and above him, still, the Shadow of the Sword.

On the 25th of October, says the chronicler, he left Erfurt, “amid weather as tempestuous as his fortunes.”

It was wild weather, too, down in lonely Brittany, and in all the quiet old hamlets, set, like Kromlaix, by the sea. Black mists charged with rain brooded night and day over the great marshes, and over the desolate plains and moors and the salt scum and foam blew inland for miles, bringing rumours of the watery storm. Kromlaix crouched and trembled, looking seaward; and deep under its steep street a voice murmured—the hidden river moaning as it ran.

On a dark afternoon the solitary figure of a man struggled across the great plain which stretches within the high sea−wall to the north of Kromlaix. With few landmarks to guide him, and these few looming confusedly through a grey vapour of thin rain, he was proceeding slowly in the direction of the village, which was still several miles away. The wind had been rising all day, and was blowing half a gale, while mountains of rain−charged vapour were rising ever upward from the sea. He was an old man, and with wind and rain beating furiously in his face he made but little way. Again and again, to avoid the fury of the blast, he almost crouched upon the ground.

He was thinly clad, in the peasant costume of the country; on his back he carried a bag resembling a beggar's wallet, and he leant for support upon an oaken staff.

At every step he took the storm deepened and the darkness grew, until he veritably seemed walking through the clouds. Ever and anon wild cattle, rushing for shelter, passed like ghosts across his path; or some huge pile of stone glimmered and disappeared. At last, he stood confused and undecided, with a sound in his ears like the roaring of the sea. Just then he discerned, looming through the vapour, the outline of a building which stood alone in the very centre of the waste. Eager to find shelter, he hurried towards it, and soon stood before the door.

The building was a ruin; the four walls, with a portion of the roof, being intact, but door and windows had long since been swept away—perhaps by human hands in the days of the Revolution. The walls were black and stained with the slime of centuries. Above the doorway, but half obliterated, were these words written in antique characters—“Notre Dame de la Haine;” in English, “Our Lady of Hate.”

For the moment the traveller hesitated; then, with a peculiar smile, he quietly entered. Just within the doorway was a stone form, on which he sat down, well screened from the storm, and surveyed the interior of the Chapel.

For Chapel it was, though seemingly deserted and forsaken; and such buildings still stand in Brittany, as ghastly reminders of what, in its darkest frenzy, religion is capable of doing. Nor was it so forsaken as it seemed. Hither still, in hours of passion and pain, came men and women to cry curses on their enemies: the maiden on her false lover, the lover on his false mistress, the husband on his false wife; praying, one and all, that Our Lady of

Hate might hearken, and that the hated one might die “within the year.” So bright and so deep had the gentle Christian light shone within their souls! Many, as their own passions, were the names of the Mother of God; and this one of Lady of Hate was surely as sweet to them as that other—Mother of Love.

The interior of the Chapel was dark with vapours and shadows. At the further end, which was quite roofless, loomed a solitary window, and through this the rain was wildly beating, striking in pitilessly on a mutilated stone image of Our Lady, which still stood on its pedestal within the space where the altar once had been;—a dreary image, formless and deformed; rudely hewn of coarse stone, and now marred almost beyond recognition. Yet that Our Lady's power had not altogether fled, or rather that firm faith in that power still remained, was attested by the rude gifts scattered at her feet: strings of black beads, common rosaries, coarse lockets of brass and tin, even fragments of ribbon and scraps of human attire. One of these lockets was quite new, and held a lock of human hair. Woe to the head on which that hair grew, should Our Lady hear the prayer of her who placed it there!

The floor of the Chapel had been paven, but few of the slabs remained. Everywhere grew long grass, nettles, and weeds, dripping with the rain; at the ruined altar the nettles and weeds grew breast−high, touching Our Lady's feet, and climbing up as if to cover her from human sight; but at the front of the altar was a paven space, where men and women might kneel.

The old man glanced into the dreary place, and sighed; then taking his wallet from his back and opening it, he drew forth a piece of black bread and began to eat. He had scarcely begun, when he was startled by a sound as of a human voice, coming from the interior of the chapel; peering through the darkness, he failed to distinguish any human form, but immediately after, on the sound being repeated, he rose and walked towards the altar, and beheld, stretched on the ground before the stone image, the figure of a man.

Face downward, like a man asleep or in a swoon; with the heavy rain pouring down upon him from the window above; moaning and murmuring as he lay;—an object more forlorn it was scarcely possible to conceive; for his rags scarcely covered his nakedness, his wild unkempt hair swept to his shoulders, and he seemed stained from head to foot with the clammy moisture of the storm.

As the old man approached and bent above him, he did not stir; but when, with a look of recognition, the old man stooped and touched him, he sprang to his feet like a wild beast, and, as if awakened from stupor, glared all round with bloodshot eyes. His face was so wild and terrible, covered with its matted hair and beard, and the light in his eyes was so fierce, yet so vacant and woe−begone, that the old man shrunk back startled.

“Rohan!” he said, in a low voice, “Rohan Gwenfern!”

The arms of Rohan, which had been outstretched to clutch and tear, dropped down to his side, and his eyes rolled wildly on the speaker. Gradually the feline expression faded from his face, but the woe−begone light remained.

“Master Arfoll!”

It was indeed the itinerant schoolmaster, little changed, though somewhat greyer and sadder than when we last saw him. He stretched out his arms, and with both hands grasped the right hand of Rohan, looking tenderly into his face. Not a word more was uttered for some minutes, but the powerful frame of Rohan shook with agitation.

“You live! you live!” at last exclaimed Master Arfoll. “Over there, at Travnik, there was a report that you were dead, but I did not believe it, and I hoped on. Thank God; you live!”

Such life as lingered in that tormented frame seemed scarce worth thanking God for. Better to have died, one would have thought, than to have grown into this—a ghost—

“A shadow,
Upon the skirts of human nature dwelling.”

All wild and persecuted things are pitiful to look on, but there is no sadder sight on earth than the face of a hunted man.

Presently, Master Arfoll spoke again.

“I was going through Kromlaix, and I came hither to shelter from the storm. Of all the places on the earth to find you here! Ah, God, it is an evil place, and those who come here have evil hearts. What were you doing, my Rohan? Praying?—To Notre Dame de la Haine!”

Rohan, whose eyes had been fixed upon the ground, looked up quickly and answered,

“Yes!”

“Ah, you have great wrongs, and your enemies have been cruel indeed. May God help you my poor Rohan!”

A sharp expression of scorn and semi−delirium passed over Rohan's face,

“It is not God I ask,” he answered in a hollow voice, “not God, but her! None can help me now if she cannot. Look you, I have prayed here again and again. I have torn my heart out in prayer against the Emperor—in curses on his head, that she may hunt him down.” Suddenly turning to the altar, and stretching out his hands, he cried, “Mother of God, hear me! Mother of Hate, listen! Within a year, within a year!”

A new access of passion possessed him; his face flashed white as death, and he seemed about to cast himself again on the stones before the altar. But Master Arfoll stretched out his hands again, and touched him gently on the shoulder.

“Let us sit down and talk together,” he said softly. “There is news. I have bread in my wallet and a little red wine;—let us eat and drink together as in old times, and you shall hear all I know.”

Something in the manner of the speaker subdued and soothed Rohan, who suffered himself to be led across the Chapel to the stone seat close to the door. Here the two men sat down side by side. By this time the Chapel had grown quite dark, but, although the wind blew more furiously than ever, the rain had almost ceased to fall. Little by little, the excitement of Rohan was subdued. Gently pressed to eat, he did so automatically, and it was evident that he was sadly in need of sustenance. Then Master Arfoll drew forth a leathern bottle, which had been filled with wine that morning by a farmer's wife whose children he had been teaching. Rohan drank, and his pale cheek kindled; but by this time all his passion had departed, and he was docile as a child.

Gradually Master Arfoll elicited from him many particulars of his position. After several days passed in the open plains and among the great salt marshes, he had at last returned again to the Cave of St. Gildas, whence, in a sort of delirium, he had issued that day to pray, or rather to curse, in the Chapel of Hate.

“If they should return to seek me,” he said, “I have discovered a way. The Cave has an outlet which they will never find, and which I only learned by chance.”

He paused a moment; then in answer to Master Arfoll's questioning look, he proceeded:

“You know the great Cave? Ah, no; but it is vast, like the Cathedral at St. Emlett, and no man except myself has ever searched it through. After I had killed Pipriac I returned, for all other places were dangerous; and as I entered Pipriac stood before me as if in life, with his great wounds bleeding, and his eyes looking at me. That was only for a moment, then he was gone; but he came to me again and again till I was sick with fear. Master Arfoll, it is terrible to have shed blood, and old Pipriac was a good fellow, after all—besides, he was my father's friend, and that is worse. Mother of God, what a death! I think of it always, and it gives me no peace!”

As he spoke, his former manner returned, and he shivered through and through as if with violent cold; but the touch of Master Arfoll's hand again calmed him, and he proceeded:

“Well, at last, one night, when there was black storm, I could bear it no longer, and I struck a light with flint and steel, and I lit my torch, and to pass away the hours I began measuring round and round the walls with my feet, counting the paces. It was then I discovered, in the far darkness of the great Cave, a hole through which a man might crawl, a hole like a black stain; one might search for days and not find it out. I crawled through on hands and knees, and a little way in I found another Cave, nearly as large as the first. Then! thought, 'Let them come when they like, I shall be safe; I can crawl in here.' That was not all, for I soon found that the cliffs were hollowed out like a great honeycomb, and whichever way I searched there were stone passages winding into the heart of the earth.”

“It is the same along there at La Vilaine,” said Master Arfoll; “the entrances are known, but no men have searched the caverns through, for they believe them haunted. Some say the Romans made them long ago. But who can tell?”

Rohan did not reply, but seemed to have fallen again into a sort of waking trance. At last he looked up, and pointing at the window of the Chapel, said quietly:

“See, the rain is over, and the moon is up.”

The rain had indeed ceased, and through the cloudy rack above a stormy moon was rising and pouring her vitreous rays on a raging surf of cloud. The wind, so far from abating, roared more wildly than ever, and the face of heaven was as a human face convulsed with torturing passion and illumed by its own mad light.

Master Arfoll gazed upwards for some moments in silence; then he said quietly:

“And now, what will you do? Ah, that I could help you! but I am so feeble and so poor. Have you no other friend?”

“Yes, one—Jàn Goron. But for him I should have died.”

“God reward him!”

“Three times since Pipriac died Jàn has hidden food under the dolmen in the Field of the Festival; and my mother has made torches of tallow and pitch, that I might not go mad in the dark; and besides these I have a lantern and oil. Jàn hides them and I find them, under the dolmen.”

Master Arfoll again took the outcast's hands between his own, and pressed them affectionately.

“God has given you great courage, and where another man's heart would have broken, you have lived. Have courage still, my poor Rohan—there is hope yet. Do you know, there has been a great battle, and the Emperor has lost.”

That one word “Emperor” seemed enough to conjure up all the madness in Rohan's brain. He rose to his feet, reaching out his arms to the altar of the chapel, while Master Arfoll continued—

“There are wild sayings afloat. Some say the Emperor is a prisoner in Germany others that he has tried to kill himself; but all say, and it is certain, that he has been beaten as he was never beaten before, and that he is in full retreat. The world has arisen against him at last.”

An hour later the two men stood together at the Chapel door.

“I shall visit your uncle's house,” said the itinerant, “and I shall see your cousin Marcelle. Shall I give her any message?”

Rohan trembled, but answered quietly:

“Tell her to comfort my mother—she has no one else left in the world.”

Then the men embraced, and Master Arfoll walked away into the night. For a space Rohan stood in the chapel entrance, watching the figure until it disappeared; then, throwing up his arms with a bitter cry, he too fled from the place, like a man flying from some evil thing.

Chapter 4O. INTRODUCES A SCARECROW OF GLORY

Early the next day, as the Derval household were assembled at their morning meal, Master Arfoll entered the quaint old kitchen, and with the quiet salutation of the country—“God save all here!”—took his seat uninvited by the fire. The Corporal nodded his head coldly, Alain and Jannick smiled, and the women murmured the customary “welcome;” but an awkward silence followed, and it was clear that the entrance of Master Arfoll caused a certain constraint. Indeed, the Corporal had just been engaged, spectacles on nose, in deciphering aloud a bulletin from the seat of war—one of those fanciful documents on which Bonaparte was accustomed to expend all the splendour of a mendacious imagination. But even Bonaparte, on this occasion, was unable to concoct a narrative totally misleading as to the true state of the situation. Amid all his pomp of sounding words, and all his flourish of misleading falsehoods, there peeped out the skeleton fact that the imperial army had been terribly and almost conclusively beaten, and that it had been compelled to give up all its dreams of conquest, and to retreat (“confusedly,” as old stage directions have it) back to the frontier.

Now, the Corporal was no fool, and in reality his heart was very sore for the sake of his favourite; but he was not the man to admit the fact to unsympathetic outsiders. So when Master Arfoll entered he became silent, and stumping over to the fireside, began to fill his pipe.

“You have news, I see,” said the itinerant, after a long pause. “Is it true, then, Corporal Derval?”

The Corporal scowled down from his height of six feet, demanding—

“Is what true, Master Arfoll?”

“About the great battle, and the retreat. Is not the Emperor still marching on France, as they say?”

The Corporal gave a fierce snort, and crammed the tobacco down savagely in the bowl of his pipe.

“As they say?” he repeated, contemptuously. “As the geese say, Master Arfoll! Ah! if you were an old soldier, and if you knew the Emperor as I know him, you would not talk about retreating. Soul of a crow, does a spider 'retreat' into his hole when he is trying to coax the flies? Does a hawk 'retreat' into the sky when he is looking out for sparrows? I will tell you this, Master Arfoll: when the Little Corporal plays at 'retreating,' his enemies may keep their eyes open like the owls; for just as they are laughing and running after him, as they think, up he will pop in their midst and at their backs, ready to eat them up!”

The itinerant saw how the land lay, and offered no contradiction; only he said after a little, looking at the fire:

“Before Leipsic it was terrible. Is it not true that fifty thousand Frenchmen fell?”

The Corporal had now lighted his pipe, and was puffing furiously. Master Arfoll's quiet questions irritated him, and he glared round at his nephews, and down at the visitor, with a face as red as the bowl of his own pipe.

“I do not know,” he replied, “and I do not care. You are a scholar, Master Arfoll, and you know a good deal of books, but I will tell you frankly, you do not understand war. A great general does not count these things; fifty men killed or fifty thousand, it is all the same; he may lose twice as many men as the enemy, and yet he may have won the victory for all that. Fifty thousand men, bah! If it were twice fifty thousand it would be all the same. Go to! the Emperor knows what he is about.”

“But your own nephews,” said Master Arfoll, “they, at least, are safe?”

The Corporal cast an uneasy glance at the widow, who had lifted her white face eagerly at Master Arfoll's words, then he smiled grimly.

“Good lads, good lads!—yes; when we last heard from them they were safe and well. Gildas wrote for both; as you know, he writes a brave hand, and he was in high spirits, I can tell you. He had a little scratch, and was nursed at the hospital for a month, but he was soon all right again, and merry as a cricket. Ah! it is a brave life, he says: plenty to eat and drink, and money to spend; that is the way, too, one sees the world.”

“Were your nephews in the great battle, Corporal Derval?”

With another uneasy glance at the widow, the Corporal snorted a reply:

“I do not know; powers of heaven, I cannot tell, for we have not heard since; but this I know, Master Arfoll, wherever the Emperor pointed with his finger, and said to them 'Go,' Hoël and Gildas were there.”

“Then you are not sure that they survive?” said Master Arfoll, sinking his voice.

The white face of the widow was uplifted again, and the Corporal's voice trembled as he replied:

“They are in God's hands, and God will preserve them. They are doing their duty like brave men in a glorious service, and He will not desert them; and of this I am sure,—that we shall hear from them soon.”

[But ah, my Corporal, what of the fifty thousand who fell on Leipsic field? Were they all in God's hands too, and did He desert them? Each hearth for its own; and from fifty thousand went up a prayer, and from fifty thousand the same fond cry, “We shall hear from them soon!”]

As the Corporal ceased to speak, the company became conscious of the figure of a man, which had entered quietly at the open door, and now stood regarding them. A pitiful object, indeed, and grim as pitiful! His face was dirty and unshaven, and round his head was twisted a coloured handkerchief instead of hat or cap. A ragged great−coat reached to his knees; beneath it dangled ragged ends of trousers; the feet were bare, and one was wrapped up in a bloody handkerchief. He leant upon a stick, surveying the circle, and on his face there was an expression of rakish wretchedness, such as might be remarked in a very old jackdaw in the last stage of moulting and uncleanliness.

“God save all here!” he said in a shrill voice.

“Welcome, good man!” said the Corporal, motioning the mendicant—for such he seemed—to a seat by the fire.

The new comer did not stir, but, leaning on his staff, wagged his head from side to side with a diabolical grin at Marcelle, and then winked frightfully at Alain and Jannick.

The widow sprang up with a scream.

“Mother of God, it is Gildas!”

All started in amazement: the boys from their seats at the table, Marcelle from her spinning−wheel, while the Corporal dropped his pipe and gazed. In another moment Mother Derval had embraced the apparition, and was crying over him, and kissing his hands.

It was, indeed, Gildas Derval—but so worn, and torn, and stained with travel, so begrimed with dust of the road, and so burnt and blistered with the sun, that only his great height made him recognisable. His face was covered with a sprouting beard, and over his right eye he had a hideous scar. A more disreputable scarecrow never stood in a green field, or darkened a respectable door.

Before another word could be said the mother screamed again.

“Mother of God, he has lost an arm!”

It was but too true. From the soldier's left side dangled an empty ragged sleeve There was another wail from the mother, but Gildas only laughed and nodded knowingly at his uncle. Then Marcelle came up and embraced him; then Jannick and Alain; and, finally, the Corporal, with flaming face and kindling eye, slapped Gildas on the back, wrung him by the hand, and kissed him on both cheeks.

The poor mother, fluttering like some poor bird about her young, was the first to think of the fledgling who was far away. When Gildas was ensconced in the great chair, with Mother Derval kneeling at his feet, and resting her arms on his knees, while Marcelle was hanging over him and kissing him again, came the question,—

“And Hoël? where have you left Hoël?”

Gildas stretched out his great hand and patted his mother on the head. In every gesture of the man there was a swaggering patronage quite different to his former stolid manner, and he was obviously on the best terms with himself and with the world.

“Hoël is all right, mother, and sends his love. Ah, he has never had a scratch, while I, look you, have had my old luck.” Turning to Master Arfoll, who still sat in the ingle, he continued, “You see I am invalided, worse luck, just as the fun is beginning. A bullet wound, uncle, and they thought at first I should not be maimed; but when I was lying in the hospital, well content, in comes the surgeon−major with his saw—grrr!” (Here he ground his teeth to imitate the instrument at work)—“and before I could squeal, off it came, and left me as you see!”

As he spoke, his mother trembled, half fainting, and the boys looked at him in admiration. The Corporal nodded his head approvingly, as much as to say, “Good! this is a small matter; but the boy has come through it well.”

“Where did you get your wound?” asked Master Arfoll.

“Before Dresden,” replied the soldier, “on the second day; then I was carried in the ambulance to Leipsic; and when I was strong, I received my discharge. I had a government pass as far as Nantes, and plenty of good company; after that, I and a comrade tramped to St. Gurlott, where we parted, and I came home. Well, here I am

at home, and that's the way of the world—ups and downs, ups and downs!”

By this time the Corporal had brought out a bottle, and was filling out little glasses of corn brandy.

“Drink, *mon garz*!” he said.

Gildas tipped off his glass, and then held it out to be refilled, while the mother, with many sighs and ejaculations to herself, was furtively taking stock of his dilapidated attire. When her eyes fell upon his bandaged foot, she wept, quietly drying her eyes with her apron.

“It is not bad stuff,” said the hero. “To you all!”

He tossed off the fiery fluid without winking; then looking up at Marcelle, who was still bending over him, he said roguishly, with the air of a veteran—

“I will tell you this, little one. The German girls are like their own hogsheads, and I have not seen as pretty a face as yours since I left France. They are greedy, too, these fat frauleins, and will rob a soldier of his skin.”

Marcelle stooped down and whispered a question in his ear; whereat he smiled and nodded, and quietly opening the breast of his shirt, showed her, still hanging by a ribbon round his neck, one of the medals she had dipped before his departure in the Pool of the Blood of Christ. Marcelle kissed him again, and raised her eyes to heaven, confident now that her charm had wrought his preservation.

Unwilling to intrude longer on the family circle, Master Arfoll rose, and again felicitating Gildas on his safe return, took his departure. Left to themselves, the excited family eagerly surrounded the hero, and plied him with question after question, all of which he answered rather by imagination than by strict matter of fact. Scarecrow as he was, he was surrounded in their eyes by a halo of military glory, and by his side even the Corporal, with his stale associations, seemed insignificant. Indeed, he patronised his uncle like the rest, in a style worthy of an old veteran: and, brimful of his new and raw experience, quietly pooh−poohed the other's old−fashioned opinions.

“And you have seen the Emperor, *mon garz?*” said the Corporal “You have seen him with your own eyes?”

Gildas nodded his “I believe you,” and then said, with his head cocked on one side, in his uncle's own fashion—

“I saw him last at Dresden. It was raining cats and dogs, and the little man was like a drowned rat; his grey coat soaked, and his hat drawn over his eyes, and running like a spout. Diable! how he galloped about—you would have said it was an old woman on horseback, riding straddle−legged to market. He may be a great general, I admit,” added the irreverent novice, “but he does not know how to ride.”

“Not know how to ride! the Emperor!” ejaculated the Corporal, aghast. In his days such criticism would have been treated as blasphemy; but now, when misfortunes were beginning, the rawest recruit passed judgment on his leader.

“He sits hunched up in a lump—like this,” said Gildas, suiting the action to the word, “and no rascally recruit from the Vosges is more shabby. You would not say he was the Emperor at all, but a beggar who had stolen a horse to ride on. Ah, if you want something like a general to look at, you should see Marshal Ney.”

“Marshal Ney!” echoed the Corporal with a contemptuous snort.

“He dresses himself for battle as if he were going to a ball, and his hair is all oiled and perfumed, and he has rings on his fingers, and his horse is all silver and gold and crimson like himself. And then, if you please, he can ride like an angel! His horse obeys him like a pretty partner, and he whirls and curvets and dances till your eyes are dazzled.”

“Bah!” cried the Corporal. “The great doll!”

It is just possible that the veteran and his nephew might have come to words on the subject of their favourites; only just then the mother brought warm water to bathe the soldier's sore feet, and, with a look at her brother−in−law to deprecate further argument, knelt down and unrolled the bandage from the foot that was cut and lame. With many loving murmurs she then bathed the feet, and anointed them with sweet oil, while Marcelle prepared clean linen for Gildas to wear. “To−morrow,” thought the widow, “little Plouët shall come in to trim his hair and shave his beard, and then he will look my own handsome boy again.” Plouët was an individual who to his other avocations added the duties of village barber, and wielded the razor, to use the popular expression, “like an angel.”

Happy is he, however lowly, to whom loving hands minister, and who has such a home to receive and shelter him in his hour of need! Gildas might complain of his bad luck, but in his heart he knew that he was a fortunate fellow. From a stranger's point of view, just then, he was certainly as disreputable a looking object as could be

found in a day's march. Long before the widow had dried his aching feet, he had collapsed in his chair, and was snoring lustily. With his chin sunk deep into his great−coat, his matted hair escaping from the coloured handkerchief which covered his head, his empty sleeve dangling, and his two ragged legs outstretching, he looked more and more a scarecrow, more and more capable of frightening off the small birds of his village from the paths of glory. But to the trembling mother he was beautiful, and her heart yearned out to him with unutterable pity and affection. He had come back to her in life, though sadly marred, and, like Bottom, “marvellously transformed;” but he had paid his contribution to glory, and, come what might, he could never go to war again.

Chapter 41. GLIMPSES OF A DEAD WORLD

Rohan Gwenfern needed to have had little apprehension that fresh search would be made for him in the Cave of St. Gildas. After once searching the Cave, and finding it empty, the *gendarmes* were glad of any pretext to keep away: not that they were actually afraid, or that they would have hesitated to raise the siege anew, but the death of Pipriac, occurring as it did, had filled them with a superstitious dread.

For some days after Pipriac's death vigorous exertions were made to discover the whereabouts of his murderer; but although the *gendarmes* were more than once upon his track, and although he had come into personal collision with Mikel Grallon, all the pursuit was unavailing. The authorities at St. Gurlott stormed; a fresh reward was offered in well−posted placards; but Rohan still remained at large. And before many days had elapsed, his very existence seemed forgotten in the excitement of the news from the seat of war.

In vain was it for Corporal Derval and others of his way of thinking to hold forth in the street and by the fireside, and to prove that the sun of Bonaparte was not setting but actually rising. In vain was it for the "scarecrow of glory," trimmed by the barber, and made sweet by clean linen, to hold forth in the *cabaret* that all would be well so long as the Emperor had "Marshel Ney" at his right hand. In vain did the lying bulletins come in from Paris to St Gurlott, and from St. Gurlott to its tributary villages. A very general impression was abroad that things were in a bad way. The loyalist party in Kromlaix began to look at each other and to smile.

From the little upper chamber in the Corporal's dwelling still went up a virgin's prayers for the great Emperor, mingled with more passionate prayers for Rohan Gwenfern. Marcelle could not, or would not, understand that the Emperor was the cause of her lover's misfortunes; no, he was too great, too good, and—ah! if one could only reach his ear! He loved his people well; he had given her uncle the Cross, and all men knew he had a tender heart. How could he know what wicked men did in his name? If she could only go to him, and fall at his feet, and ask for her lover's life! Alas, how rash and foolish Rohan had been! It was wicked for him to refuse to help the Emperor; but then he had not been himself, he had been mad. And here was the end!—here was Gildas come back covered with glory and alive and well, while Rohan was still a hunted man, with Pipriac's blood upon his head. If Rohan had only been brave like her brother, God would have brought him back.

While Marcelle was pleading and praying, Rohan Gwenfern was moving like a sleepless spirit through the darkness of the earth. Was it broad awake, or in a wondrous dream, that he crept through sunless caverns, torch in hand, exploring night and day? It did not seem real, and he himself did not feel real. Phantoms troubled him, voices cried in his ears, cold hands touched him, and again and again the ghost of Pipriac uprose before him with rebuking eyes.

It was all real, nevertheless. The discovery of the mysterious inlet from the Cave of St. Gildas led to a series of discoveries no less remarkable. He had not exaggerated when he had asserted to Master Arfoll that the cliffs were veritably "honeycombed."

In sheer despair, to keep his thoughts from driving him completely mad, he prosecuted his lonely search. From the great inner cave which he had by accident discovered, ran numerous narrow passages, some far too small to admit a human body, others high and vaulted. Most of these passages, after winding for greater or less distances into the solid cliff, terminated in *cul de sac*. After minute examination he discovered one which did not so terminate, but which, after extending for a long distance parallel with the face of the cliff, and gradually ascending upward, ended in a small cave well lighted by a narrow chink in the cliff. From this chink, which was like a window in the very centre of the most inaccessible and perpendicular crag on the coast, he could see the ocean for miles around him, the fishing vessels coming from and going to the beach of the village, and, higher still, a glimpse of the lower extremity of the village itself, quite a mile away. Beneath him there was no beach, only the sea washing at all sides on the base of the cliff, and creeping here and there into the gloomy water−caverns which the superstitious fishermen never ventured to explore.

With a strange sense of freedom and exultation he discovered this new hiding−place, the aperture of which, to any one sailing on the sea below, would have seemed like a mere dark stain on the crag's face. Here he soon made his headquarters, free to enjoy the light of sun and moon. Inaccessible as an eagle in its eyrie, he could here draw the breath of life in peace.

A day or so later he ascertained that this cave communicated by a precipitous passage with the sea below. Not without considerable danger he descended through the darkness, and, after feeling his way cautiously for hours, he found himself standing on a narrow shelf of slippery rock in the very heart of a great water−cave.

Vast crimson columns, hung with many coloured weeds and mosses, supported a vaulted roof which distilled a perpetual glistening dew and shook it down on the deep waters beneath, which were clear as crystal and green as malachite. A faint phosphorescent light, which seemed to issue from the water itself, but stole in imperceptibly from the distant mouth of the cave, showed purple flowers and flags stirring gently far below, and strange living creatures that moved upon a bottom of shining sand.

As Rohan stood looking downward, a large female seal, splashing down from a shelf of rock, began swimming round and round the cavern without any effort to escape; and Rohan, listening, could hear the bleat of its tiny lamb coming from the darkness. After a minute it disappeared, and the faint bleat ceased.

A little reflection showed Rohan where he stood. Quite a hundred yards away was the mouth of the cavern—a space some twelve feet broad but only a few high, and so hung with moss and fungi as to be almost concealed. Around this mouth the sea was many fathoms deep, and a boiling current eddied for ever at all states of the tide. Rohan remembered well how often he had rowed past, and how his fellow−fishermen had told awful legends of foolhardy mortals who, in times remote, had tried to enter “Hell's Mouth,” as they called it, and how no boat that sailed through was ever known to return. Certain it was that at times there issued thence terrific volumes of raging water, accompanied by sounds as of internal earthquake, which served to make the place terrible even without the aid of superstition. Later on the causes of these phenomena will be sufficiently apparent.

There is something awful to a sensitive mind in coming by accident on any strange secret of Nature, in penetrating unaware to some solemn arcanum of the Mother−goddess where never human foot before has trod, and where the twilight of primæval mystery lingers for ever. Even in those solemn caves of the sea which are safely accessible to man there is something still and terrible beyond measure. In no churches do we pause half so reverently, in no shrines are we so strangely constrained to pray. To the present writer these natural temples are familiar, and he has spent within them his most religious hours.

To Rohan Gwenfern, who had crouched so long in darkness, and who had suffered so dark a persecution from all the forces of the world without, it suddenly seemed as if Nature, in a mystery of new love and pity, had taken him to her very heart; had touched his lids with a new balm, his soul with a new peace, and, folding him softly in her arms, had revealed to him a faëry vision of her own soul's calm—a divine glimpse of that

“Central peace subsiding at the heart
Of endless agitation,”

which so few men that live are permitted to feel and enjoy. He could not have expressed his happiness in æsthetic phrases, but he had it none the less; and by those new discoveries his soul was greatly strengthened. Up there in the aërial cave he could bask in the sunlight without fear; and down here, in a silent water−world, he could spend many wondering hours.

A stranger discovery was yet to come. He had found the key to a mystery, and it opened many doors.

Along the sides of the water−cavern ran a narrow ledge, communicating with that on which he had first descended; although it was slippery as glass, it afforded a footing for Rohan's naked feet. Creeping along this ledge for some thirty yards, and clinging to the crimson columns for partial support, he reached the extreme inner end of the cave and leaped down upon a narrow space of steep shingle, against which the still, green water washed. He had no sooner done so than he discovered, to his astonishment, a vaulted opening, gleaming with stalactite and crimson moss, leading apparently into the heart of the cliffs. It was very dark. After groping his way stealthily forward till all light faded, he retraced his steps.

His curiosity was now thoroughly aroused. Returning to his aërial hiding−place, he procured a rude horn lantern with which Jàn Goron had supplied him, lit it carefully, and then again descended. Finally, lantern in hand, he again entered the dark passage, determined to explore it to its furthest limits.

It was just so broad that he could touch both walls with the tips of the fingers of his outstretched hand; so high that, standing on tiptoe, with the tips of his fingers he could touch the roof. It seemed of solid stone, and fashioned as symmetrically as if by human hands. Wherever the light fell the walls glimmered smooth and moist, without any trace of vegetation. The air was damp and icy cold, like the air of a sepulchre, but it did not seem otherwise impure. He had crept forward some hundred yards or more, when he came to an ascending flight of stone steps.

Yes, his eyes did not deceive him: red granite steps, carefully and laboriously hewn. His heart gave a great leap, for now he knew for certain, what he had indeed suspected from the first, that the excavations were not natural, but had been wrought by human hands.

Simple as this fact may appear, it filled him with a kind of terror, and he almost turned to retrace his way. Recovering himself, however, he ascended the steps, and entered, at their top, another passage, which bore unmistakably the signs of human workmanship.

After he had proceeded another hundred yards he came to another ascent of steps, and, after ascending these, to another passage. The air now became suffocating and oppressive, and the light in the lantern grew faint almost to dying. Crawling forward, however, he emerged in a space so vast and so forbidding that he stood trembling in consternation—a mighty Vault or Catacomb compared to which all the other caverns he had explored were insignificant. Vast walls of granite supported a roof high as the roof of a cathedral, from which depended black fungi bred of perpetual moisture and dripping an eternal dew. The interior was wrapped in pitch darkness, and full of a murmur as of the sea. The floor was solid black stone, polished to icy smoothness, but covered by a slippery sort of moss.

Rohan stood in awe, half−expecting to see appalling phantoms start from the darkness and drive him forth. Into what place of mystery had he penetrated? Into what catacomb of the dead? Into what ghostly abode of spirits? His head swam; for a moment his customary seizure came, and he heard and saw nothing. Then he crept cautiously forward into the cavern.

As he moved, the sea−like murmur grew deeper, seeming to come from the very ground beneath his feet. He drew back listening,—and just in time; for he was standing on the very edge of a black gulf, at the foot of which a moaning water ran. He peered over, flashing the light down. A black liquid glimmer came from beneath, from water in motion, rapidly rushing past.

He then perceived that the gulf and its contents occupied the entire interior of the great vault, and that the floor on which he stood was merely a narrow shelf artificially fashioned. The vast columns rose on every side of him, glittering with silvern damp, and the curtain of fungi stirred overhead like a black pall.

Suddenly, as he flashed his light over the place, he started aghast. Not far away stood another figure, on the edge of the gulf, looking down.

Rohan was superstitious by nature, and his mind had been unsettled by his privations. He stood terror−stricken, and the lanthorn almost fell from his hands. Meantime the figure did not stir.

Chapter 42. THE AQUEDUCT

Eager to satisfy himself, Rohan drew nearer, and at last recognised, in the shape which he had at first deemed human or ghostly, a gigantic Statue of black marble set on a pedestal on the very edge of the chasm.

Lifeless as it was, the Shape was terrible. It had stood there for centuries, and the perpetual drops distilling from the roof above had eaten into its solid mass, so that part of the face was destroyed and portions of the body had melted away. Its lower limbs were completely enwrapped in a loathsome green vegetation, crawling up, as it seemed, out of the water beneath. In size it was colossal, and standing close beside it Rohan seemed a pigmy.

Little by little Rohan discerned that it had represented an imperial figure, clad in the Roman toga, bareheaded, but crowned with bay. Though the face was mutilated, the contour of the neck and head remained, and recalled the bull−like busts of Roman emperors and conquerors which may be seen on ancient medals, engravings of which Rohan had noticed in the French translation of Tacitus given him by Master Arfoll. In a moment the mind of Rohan was illuminated. He recalled all the popular traditions concerning the Roman towns submerged under Kromlaix. He remembered the strange pictures conjured up by Master Arfoll—of the houses of marble and temples of gold, the great baths and theatres, the statues of the gods. Then, it was all true! Not far away, perhaps, the City itself glimmered, and this was a first glimpse of its dead world.

But this water, flowing so murmurously through the cave, whence did it come, and whither did it go? He was still speculating when he perceived close to the Statue's pedestal a broad flight of steps leading downward. They were slippery with green slime, but with extreme care one could descend.

He crawled down cautiously, feeling his way foot by foot and stair by stair; and at last he ascertained that the steps descended into the very water itself, which rushed past his feet with a cry like a falling torrent, but black as jet. He reached out his hand, lifted some of the water to his lips and found that it was quite fresh, with the flavour of newly−fallen rain.

Then, for the first time, he remembered the subterranean River, about which superstition was so garrulous, and above the buried bed of which Kromlaix was said to be built. All the memories of mysterious sounds heard in times of storm came back upon his brain; and he remembered how often, down in the village, he had pressed his ear against the earth and listened for the murmur of the River far below. The dark waters on which he was now gazing were doubtless a tributary stream, if not the very river itself; and were he to launch himself upon them, he would come perchance to the doomed ruins of the City. It was all real, then; yet so strange, so like a wonderful dream!

Returning to his aërial chamber on the face of the great cliff, Rohan sat and brooded in a new wonder. He was like a man who had been down into the grave and had interviewed the dead, and had brought with him strange secrets of the sunless world. His discovery of the great Roman vault, with its dark passages communicating with the sea, came upon him with a stupefying surprise. And even as he sat he thought of that black Statue, standing like a living thing in its place, the emblem of a world that had passed away.

HE, too, whoever he was, had lived and reigned, as the Emperor was then reigning; he too, perhaps, robed in purple and filleted with bay, had “bestrode the world like a Colossus,” and urged a bloody generation on. Temples and coliseums, baths of precious marble and amphitheatres adorned with gold, had arisen at his bidding; at the lifting of his finger victories had been won and lands been lost; and ere his death mortals had hailed him as a god. That statue of him had been set there by his slaves, and other statues of him had been set elsewhere in street and mart, that men might know the glory of his name, and cry, “Hail, O Cæsar, we who are about to die salute thee!” And the Statue stood there still in its place, buried from the light of the sun, but of *his* footprints in the world there was no sign.

For two days the burthen of his discovery was so heavy upon him that Rohan did not dare to return to the mysterious Vault. He sat listening to the wind, whose fierce wings flapped with iron clang against the face of the cliff and gazing out upon the white and troubled sea. For some time there had been heavy rain, and it was still falling, falling.

The morning of the third day broke dark and peaceful; rain still fell, but there was no wind, and the sea was calm as glass. Gazing from the window of his cave, Rohan saw the still waters, stained with purple shadows, and

broken here and there by outlying reefs, stretching smooth and still as far as Kromlaix; and the red fishing boats crawling this way and that among the reefs, and here and there a great raft drifting between the reefs and the shore. For it was close upon the season for gathering the sea−wrack, or *goëmon,* a harvest which takes place twice a year; and the produce of which is used for fuel as well as for manuring the land. Rafts are made of old planks and barrels, rudely lashed together, piled high with the wrack gathered from the weedy reefs, and suffered to drift to shore before the wind or with the tide.

There was companionship, at least, in watching others at the work he knew so well. How often had not Rohan lashed his raft together, and piloted himself along the rocky coast—not without many a swim in the deep sea, when his raft was too much ladened and had overturned.

He sat looking on for hours. As the day advanced, however, great banks of cloud drifted up from the south, and a black vapour crawling in from the sea covered the crags, and entirely obscured the prospect in every direction. There was a dreary and oppressive silence, broken only by the heavy falling of a leaden rain. The air seemed full of a nameless trouble, like that which precedes a thunderstorm and shakes the forest leaves without a breath.

As the afternoon advanced, the rain fell more heavily, but the mists did not rise. Weary and dreary, Rohan prepared his lantern and determined again to visit the mysterious Vault. By this time, he had almost ceased to realize his own discovery; it seemed more and more a dream, a vision, such as those to which his troubles had made him accustomed and he was quite prepared to find himself in the position of the man who, having once found and forsaken a fairy treasure, sought in vain to discover it again.

He descended rapidly to the basaltic water−cave communicating with the sea, and found it calm, beautiful, and unchanged; then, passing along the rocky ledge to its innermost extremity, he leapt down upon the shingle, and stood again before the vaulted opening, leading into the heart of the cliffs.

As he entered, there came from within a strange sound which he had not previously remarked—a dull, heavy murmur, as of water struggling and rushing between trembling barriers. He hesitated, and listened. He seemed to hear strange voices moaning and crying, and another sound like the flapping of the great wind against the crag.

After a few minutes' pause he hurried onward, through the clammy passages, up the flights of marble steps, nearer and nearer to the Roman vault. As he advanced the murmur grew to a roar, and the roar to thunder, until it seemed the solid earth was quaking all around him; and when, trembling and shuddering, he entered the great Vault itself, he seemed surrounded by all the thunders and ululations of an Inferno.

The cause of the commotion now became unmistakable. The river was tumbling and shrieking in the gulf, and tearing at the walls of stone between which it ran. He crept forward along the slippery floor, which seemed quaking beneath his feet, and approached the Statue of stone. It still stood there, colossal and awful, but it was trembling in its place like a mortal man quivering with awe; indeed, the whole Vault was quaking as with the throes of a sudden earthquake.

He gazed over the flight of black stairs leading to the River, and flashed his light down. In a moment he perceived that the water had risen, so that only a few steps remained uncovered; and as it foamed and fretted, and whirled and eddied past, boiling and shrieking in its bed, flakes of fierce foam were beaten up into his face.

Rushing he knew not whence, roaring he knew not whither, the water filled the gulf, and shook its solid barriers with the force that only water possesses. Another look convinced him that it was rapidly and tumultuously rising.

Already it was within a few feet of the base of the Statue, and still it was swelling upward with inconceivable rapidity. It was as if the tide itself had rushed into the gulf filling and overflooding it.

The mind of Rohan was well skilled in danger, and perceived instantaneously the full peril of the situation. To remain where he stood would be to encounter instantaneous death.

With the thunder of the waters in his ears, the walls of solid stone quaking around him, and the ground trembling beneath his feet, he turned and fled.

Not a moment too soon. Down the vaulted passages he passed, until he emerged upon the great water−cave far beneath.

As he touched the narrow space of shingle he heard behind him a horrible concussion, a sound as if the very crags were crumbling down together; then a roar as of many waters escaping, as of a great river rushing after him, and coming ever nearer and nearer.

Swift as thought he climbed up on the rocky ledge above the water, and made his way to the aperture by which

he had descended from his aërial cave. Pausing there, and clinging to the rocks, he beheld vast volumes of smoke and water belching from the passage by which he had just escaped; roaring and rushing down tumultuously to mingle with the sea, till all the still green waters of the cave, stained brown and. black, were bubbling like a great cauldron at his feet.

Chapter 43. “THE NIGHT OF THE DEAD”

It was All Saint's Eve, 1813.

While Rohan Gwenfern was penetrating, torch in hand, into the ghostly Roman Vault or Aqueduct, deep−buried in the heart of the cliffs, the chapel bells of Kromlaix were ringing, and crowds were flocking through the darkness to hear the priest say mass, a task in which he and his “vicaire” would be engaged unceasingly till the coming of dawn. The night was dark and still, but the rain was falling heavily, and a black curtain covered the sea. Everywhere in the narrow streets of Kromlaix were glistening pools formed by the newly fallen rain, and into these the heavy drops plashed incessantly, making a dreary murmur. But fainter and deeper than the sound of the rain came another sound, like a cry from the earth beneath: a strange far−off murmur, like the distant moaning of the sea

The doors stood open wide, and in every house the supper−table stood spread, with a clean linen cloth, lights, and the evening meal; and around the table stood vacant chairs; and on the hearth there burnt a fire carefully arranged to last till dawn. For it was the Night of the Dead; and after the death−bell had been tolled, the dead−mass said, the supper eaten, and the household retired to rest, the Souls of the Dead would enter in and partake of the solemn feast in the dwellings where they had died, or where their kin abode. Then the household would listen, and hear strange wailings in the rooms and at the doors; and then they would rise from their beds, fall upon their knees, and pray that, but for this one waking night of the year those they loved might sleep in peace.

Not only from the little churchyard on the hill−side, where the light was gleaming through the open chapel door, would the Souls of the Dead come; but over the wild wastes inland, and down the lonely roads from the far−off towns, and most of all, in from the washing waters of the sea. Strange phosphorescent lights were moving already to and fro upon the deep. High in the air strange eerie voices were crying. From land and sea, from all the places where they slept, the Dead were coming back to the homes they loved in life.

At one o'clock in the morning the moon would be full, and it would be *grandemer* or high tide. There was no moonlight, and in deep windless darkness fell the rain; but lights flashed in all the windows, and a lurid gleam came from the little chapel, where Father Rolland and his “vicaire” were performing the mass. The living were praying, and ghosts were hovering in the black air, when Marcelle Derval, leaving her mother behind her in the chapel, came down through the darkness with some companions of her own age and sex, and parted with them at her uncle's door.

Entering in she found the kitchen bright and cleanly swept, lights upon the table, a great fire on the hearth, and the hero of Dresden seated alone in the chimney corner.

“Are you there, Marcelle?” he cried with a nod, withdrawing from his mouth a great wooden pipe which he had brought back with him from Germany. “The old one was anxious about you, and he has gone up the street to look after you. Where is mother,—and the boys?”

“She is still at chapel, and will not return till it strikes twelve.”

“And you?”

“I am tired, and I shall go to bed”

“Supper is ready,” said Gildas; “sit down and eat.”

Marcelle shook her head. She looked very pale, and her whole manner betokened bodily or mental fatigue.

“Good night,” she said, kissing Gildas; then she lit her lamp, and went wearily up the stairs. All that day her heart had been full of Rohan, and now, when night came, she was thinking of him with strange pain. It was the Night of the Dead, but she was too young to have much to mourn for, and, beyond her two brothers, who had died in battle, had known no losses. Nevertheless, the burthen of the time lay heavily upon her, and she trembled before the shadow of something that did not live. Rohan Gwenfern was *her* dead, lost to her and the world, buried out yonder in the black night, as surely as if he no longer breathed at all. While others had been praying for their lost, whom the good God had stricken, she had been praying for hers, whom God had no less surely taken away. With the dead there was peace; for the dead−living there was only pain. So her sorrow was the worst to bear.

With this great agony in her heart she had yearned to be alone in her chamber—to think, to pray; and so she

had come home. The others would soon follow, and, after midnight struck, the room below would be left in silence, that the poor ghosts might come in and take their place at the board. Ah God! if *he* too might come, eating for one night at least the blessed bread of peace!

Left alone again in the great kitchen, Gildas Derval smoked away in his corner, ever and anon giving vent to an expression of impatience. The rain still fell without with weary and ceaseless sound, and there was a murmuring from the black streams pouring down the narrow street. Once or twice Gildas arose, and gazed out into the pitch−black night—a Night of Death indeed!

As the minutes crept on, and the hands of the Dutch clock in the corner pointed to half−past eleven, Gildas grew more uneasy. The witching hour was close at hand, and the silence was growing positively sepulchral. At every sound he started, listening intently. Hero as he was, he felt positively afraid, and bitterly regretted that he had suffered Marcelle to go to bed.

“What the devil can detain my uncle?” he muttered again and again.

At last the door opened and the Corporal staggered in, wrapped in his old military coat, and dripping from head to foot; his cocked hat, which he wore *à l' Empereur,* formed a miniature waterspout upon his head.

“Soul of a crow!” he cried, “was there ever such a night? Are they not returned?”

“Only Marcelle,” growled Gildas; “the rest are still at the chapel, though it is time all good Christians were abed.”

The Corporal stumped across the room, and remained with his back to the fire, his wet clothes steaming as he stood.

“I went up the street to look for them, but seeing they did not come, I went to the shore. The tide is up to the foot of the street, and it has still some time to flow. They are frightened down there, and will not sleep to−night; but the sea is calm as glass.”

As the Corporal ceased to speak Gildas sprang to his feet, and simultaneously the house shook to its very foundations as if smitten by a sudden squall of wind.

“What's that?” cried Gildas, now quite pale, crossing himself in his terror.

“It must be the wind rising,” said the Corporal; but when he walked to the door, and threw it open to listen, there was not a breath.

“It is strange,” he said in a low voice coming back to the fire. “I have heard it twice before to−night, and one would say the earth was quaking underfoot.”

“Uncle!” murmured Gildas.

“Well, *mon garz?”*

“If it is the Souls of the Dead!”

The old Corporal made a gesture of reverence, and, turning his face round, looked at the fire. Several minutes passed in uneasy silence. Then suddenly, without warning of any kind, the house shook again! This time it did not seem as if stricken by wind; but there came to both Gildas and the Corporal that strange unconscious sickening dread which is the invariable accompaniment of earthquake. The sound, like the sensation, was only momentary, but as it ceased, the men looked aghast at one another.

“It is dreadful,” said the Corporal. “Soul of a crow why does the woman linger?”

With a suddenness which startled Gildas and made him growl in nervous irritation, the little trap−door of the Dutch clock sprang open, and the wooden cuckoo sprang out, uttering his name twelve times, and proclaiming the hour Midnight! The Corporal, full of a nameless uneasiness, could no longer restrain himself.

“It is unaccountable,” he exclaimed. “I will go again and see.”

Before Gildas could interpose he had wrapped his coat once more about him and sallied forth into the night.

Through the heavy murmuring of the rain and the rushing of the waterspouts and streams Gildas could hear the “clop clop” of the wooden leg dying up the street; then all was silence.

Of all situations this was the one Gildas was least fitted to face with advantage. He was not deficient in brute courage, and in good company he might have faced even a visitor from another world; but his little “campaign” had disturbed his nervous system, and that night of all nights in the year he did not care to be left alone. And, indeed, a far more enlightened being would, under the circumstances, have shared his trepidation. The air was full of a sick uncomfortable silence, broken only by the “plopping” and “pinging” of the heavy metallic rain, and ever and anon, when the house trembled with those mysterious blasts, the effect was simply paralytic.

Gildas stood at the door, looking out into the rain. The darkness was complete, but the light from the chamber glistened on a perfect stream of black rain running down the street. As he stood there listening, mysterious hands seemed outstretched to touch him, cold breaths blew upon his cheek, and there was a sound all round him as of the wailing dead. Lights burned in the windows down the street, and many doors stood open like his own, but there was no sign of any human being.

Re−entering the kitchen, he approached the wooden stairs, and called gruffly—

“Marcelle! Marcelle!”

There was no answer.

“Marcelle! are you asleep?”

The door of the room above opened, and Marcelle's voice replied—

“Is it my uncle?”

“No, it is I—Gildas. Are you abed?”

“I am undressed, and was half asleep. What is it?”

Gildas did not care to confess that he was afraid, and wanted company; so he growled—

“Oh, it is nothing! Mother has not come home yet, that is all; but my uncle has gone to look after her. It is raining cats and dogs!”

“She told me she would not return till midnight, and she has the boys. Good−night again, Gildas!”

“Good−night!” muttered the hero of Dresden; then just as the door above was closing he called, “Marcelle!”

“Yes.”

“You—you need not close your door—I may want to speak to you again.”

“Very well.”

There was silence again, and Gildas returned to the fireside. As he did so the cottage again trembled as before. He drew back to the foot of the staircase.

“Marcelle!” he cried.

“Yes,” answered the voice, this time obviously from between the sheets.

“Did you hear that?”

“The noise? Ah, yes; it is only the wind.”

“It is only the Devil,” muttered Gildas to himself, and, inwardly cursing Marcelle's coolness, he stepped again to the street door and looked out. A black wall of rain and darkness still stared him in the face. He stood for some minutes in agitation, with the cold drops splashing into his face. There was not a breath of wind, and by listening closely he could distinctly hear the murmur of the sea.

Suddenly his ears were startled by a sound which made his heart leap into his mouth and his blood run cold. From inland, from the direction of the chapel, there came a murmur, a roar, as if the sea lay *that* way, and was rising in storm. Before he could gather his wits together there rose far away a sound like a human shriek, and all at once, through the dreary moaning of the rain, came the rapid tolling of a bell. Simultaneously he saw dark figures rushing rapidly up the street from the direction of the sea shore. Though he called to them they did not reply.

Yes, there could be no mistake. A bell was tolling faintly in the distance; doubtless the chapel bell itself. Something unusual was happening—what, it was impossible to guess.

Two or three more figures passed rapidly, and he again demanded what was the matter. This time a voice answered, but only with a frightened cry—“This way, for your life!”

Anything was better than to stand there in suspense; so without a moment's reflection Gildas ran after the others up the street.

There had been rain for weeks, and the valleys inland were already half flooded; but to−night it poured still as if all the vials of the aqueous heavens had been opened. Well might the ground tremble and the hidden River roar! At last, as if at a preconcerted signal, the elements awoke in concert, and sounded the signal of storm. The sea rose high on the shore, the wind began to blow, the River rose blackly in its bed, and, most terrible of all, the pent−up floods burst their barriers among the hills.

With the natural position of Kromlaix our readers are already familiar. Situated in the gap of the great sea−wall, and lying at the mouth of a narrow valley, it was equally at the mercy of inundations from inland and of inundations from the ocean. Rocked, as it were, upon the waves of the sea which crawled in beneath it to meet the

subterranean river, it had nevertheless endured from generation to generation.

Only once in the memory of the oldest inhabitant had destruction come. That was many years ago, so far back in time that it seemed an old man's tale to be heard and forgotten. Yet there had been warnings enough of danger during this same autumn of 1813. Never for many a long year had there been such a rainfall; never had there been such storms to mark the period of the autumnal equinox. Night after night the hidden river had given its warning, so that sometimes the very earth seemed shaken by its cry. The spring−tides, too, were higher than they had been for many seasons past.

And now, on this Night of the Dead, when earth, air, and sea were covered with ghastly processions trooping to their homes, when the little churches all along the coast were lighted up, and death−lights were placed in every house, the waters rose and rushed down upon their prey. Down through the narrow valleys above the village came, with the fury of a torrent, the raging Flood, filling the narrow chasm of the valley, and bearing everything before it towards the sea. It came in darkness, so that only its voice could be heard; but could the eye of man have beheld it as it came, it would have been seen covered with floating prey of all kinds—with trees uprooted from the ground, fences and palings torn away, thatched roofs of houses, and even enormous stones. Well might those shriek who heard it come! Faster than a man might gallop on the fleetest horse, swifter than a man might sail in the swiftest ship, it rolled upon its way, fed by innumerable tributary torrents rushing down from the hills on either side, and gathering power and volume as it approached. But when it reached the dreary tarns of Ker Léon, some miles above the village, it hesitated an hour, as if prepared to sink into the earth like the River which there ends his course; then, recruited by new floods from the hillsides, and from the overflowing tarns themselves, it rushed onward, and the fate of Kromlaix was sealed.

During that brief space of indecision up among the tarns, the farmer of Ker Léon, a brave man, had leapt upon his horse without stopping to use saddle or bridle, and galloped down to Kromlaix, shrieking warning as he went. At midnight he reached the chapel on the hill−side, and without ceremony, wet, dripping, and as white as a ghost from the dead, delivered his awful news. Fortunately the large portion of the population was still in the chapel. Shrieks and wails arose.

“Sound the alarm!” cried Father Rolland; and the chapel bell began to toll.

It was at this moment that the old Corporal, soaking and out of temper, arrived at the chapel door, and found the widow and his two nephews just ready to return home. He passed through the wailing groups of men and women, and accosted the farmer himself.

“Perhaps, after all, it will not come so far,” he cried; “the pools of Ker Léon are deep.”

The answer came, but not from the farmer; the roar of the waters themselves coming wildly down the valley.

“To the hill−sides!” cried Father Rolland. “For your lives!”

Through the pitch darkness, struggling, screaming, stumbling, fled the crowd, leaving the chapel behind them illumined but deserted. The rain still fell in torrents. Guided by a few spirits more cool and courageous than the rest, the miserable crowd rushed towards the ascents which closed the valley on either side, and which fortunately were not far distant. The old Corporal caught the general panic, and with eager hands helped on his affrighted sister−in−law. They had not gone far when a voice cried in the darkness close by—

“Mother! uncle!”

“It is Gildas, and alone,” cried Mother Derval. “Almighty God! where is Marcelle?”

The voice of Gildas replied—

“I left her in the house below. But what is the matter? Are you all mad?”

A wild shriek from the panic−stricken creatures around was the only answer. “The Flood! the Flood!” they cried, flying for their lives; and, indeed, the imminent hour had come, for the lights of the chapel behind them were already extinguished in the raging waters, and the flood was rushing down on Kromlaix with a fatal roar. answered by a fainter murmur from the rising Sea.

Chapter 44. DELUGE

After emerging into the great water cave and clinging to its walls as the furious torrents came boiling down to mingle with the sea, Rohan Gwenfern paused for some minutes, awestricken and amazed; for it seemed as if the very bosom of the Earth had burst and all the dark streams of its heart were pouring forth. The tumult was deafening, the concussion terrific, and it was with difficulty that Rohan kept his place on the slippery ledge above the water. When his first surprise had abated he left the cave and ascended to his aërial home on the face of the cliff.

All there was dark, for night had now fallen. Leaning forth through the cranny which served him as a window, he saw only a great wall of blackness, heard only the heavy murmur of torrents of rain. There was no wind, and the leaden drops were pattering like bullets into the sea, in straight perpendicular lines.

He sat for a time in the darkness, pondering on the discoveries that he had made. Although his brain was to a certain extent deranged by the agonies he had undergone, and although he was subject to alarming cerebral seizures during which he was scarcely accountable for what he thought or did, the general current of his ideas was still clear, and his powers of observation and reflection remained intact. He was perfectly able, therefore, to perceive the obvious explanation of what he had seen and discovered. The subterranean cave and its passage communication with the sea formed an enormous Aqueduct, fashioned, doubtless, for the purpose of letting the overflowing waters escape in times of flood. He had read of similar contrivances, and he knew that an aqueduct had been excavated not many leagues away, beyond La Vilaine. In fashioning the extraordinary place advantage had doubtless been taken of natural passages which had existed there from time immemorial; but how the work was effected was a question impossible to answer, unless on the supposition that the Roman colonists had possessed an engineering skill little short of miraculous.

He remembered now all the old stories he had heard concerning former submersions of his native village, as well as the popular tradition that the buried Roman city had been itself destroyed by inundations. Was it possible, then, that the river which he had discovered crawling through the heart of the cliffs was the same river which plunged into the earth among the tarns of Ker Léon, and which, after winding for miles, eventually crept under Kromlaix and poured itself into the sea? If this was the case, all the phenomena were intelligible. The Roman colonists, fearful of floods and of the rising of the river, had constructed the Aqueduct for purposes of overflow, so that when the hour came, the angry waters, before reaching their City, might be partially diverted into the great water cave, and thence through “Hell's Mouth” to the open ocean. How carefully the hands of man had worked! How grandly, under the inspiration of that dead Cæsar whose marble shadow still stood below, the mind of man had planned and wrought the Aqueduct! Yet all had been of no avail. At last the finger of God had been lifted, and the shining City by the sea was seen no more.

Real and simple as seemed the explanation, the fact of the discovery was nevertheless awful and stupefying. It seemed no less a dream than Rohan's other dreams. He saw the ghost of a buried world, and his heart went sick with awe.

As he sat thinking he suddenly remembered that that night was the Night of the Dead.

No sooner had the remembrance come than a nameless uneasiness took possession of him, and, approaching the loophole, he gazed forth again. And now to his irritated vision there seemed faint lights here and there upon the black waste of waters. He listened intently. Again and again amid the heavy murmur of the rain there came a sound like far−off voices. And yonder in Kromlaix the mass was being spoken and the white boards were being spread, for the Souls which were flocking from all quarters of the earth that night.

He lit his lantern, and sat for some time in its beam; but the dull dim light only made his situation more desolately sad. Pacing up and down the cave in agitation, and pausing again and again to listen to the sounds without, he waited on. The darkness grew more intense, the sound of the rain more oppressively sad. Repeatedly, from far beneath him, he heard a thunderous roar, which he knew came from the waters rushing into the great ocean−cave.

As the hours crept on there came upon his soul a great hunger to be near his fellow−beings, to escape from the frightful solitude which seemed driving him to despair. In the dense darkness of that night he would be safe

anywhere. As for the rain, he heeded it not. There was a fire in his heart which seemed to destroy all sense of wet or cold.

At last, yielding to his uncontrollable impulse, he groped his way slowly downward through the natural passages and caves, until he emerged at the great Trou of St. Gildas. Here he paused until his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, and at last he was able dimly to discern the outline of the vast natural Cathedral. It was nine o'clock, and the tide had scarcely three parts flowed, so that not a drop had yet touched the Cathedral floor, and egress through the Gate was still possible.

Descending rapidly in his customary fashion, he reached the shingle below. Familiar even in darkness with every footstep of the way, he passed out through the Gate and waded round the promontory, where the water was only knee deep, until he reached the shore beyond. The rain was still falling in torrents, and he was soaking to the skin; but, totally indifferent to the elements, he proceeded on his way. Yet he was bare−headed, and the ragged clothes he wore were only enough to cover his nakedness. Accustomed to exposure and to hardships of all kinds, he did not feel cold; it would be time enough for that when winter came.

Crossing the desolate shingle, he ascended the Ladder of St. Triffine.

At midnight Rohan Gwenfern stood leaning against the Menhir, and gazing down into the blackness where Kromlaix lay. The rain still continued, and the night was pitch−dark; but he could see the blood−red gleam of the window lights and the faint flickerings of lanterns carried to and fro. Inland, in the direction of St. Gurlott, streamed glittering rays from the windows of Father Rolland's chapel. Listening intently he could hear at times the cry of a human voice.

It was the Night of the Dead, and he knew that in every house that night the board would be left spread with remnants that the dead might enter and eat. Less houseless and less outcast than himself, they were welcome, that night at least, wherever they chose to knock; while he, condemned to a daily living death, only creeping forth from his tomb in the cliffs like any other wandering and restless ghost, dare not even at such a time approach close to any human hearth. He had resisted “even unto blood,” and Cain's mark was upon him. For him there was no welcome; he was outcast for evermore.

As he stood thus, watching and thinking, the bell of the chapel began to peal violently. The sound, coming thus unexpectedly from the darkness, was as the sudden leaping of a pulse in the wrist of a dead man. Almost simultaneously Rohan heard a faint far−off human scream. At first, with the superstitious instinct that had been bred in him and had not yet altogether forsaken him, he thought of the poor outcast ghosts peopling the rainy night, and wondered if the sounds he heard were not wholly supernatural—whether dead hands were not touching the ropes of the chapel bell, while corpses gathered round the belfry and wailed a weary echo to the sound. But the bell pealed on, and more human cries followed. Something terrible was happening, and the alarm was being given.

He had not long to wait for an explanation. Soon, from inland, came a roaring like the sea, as the mighty torrents approached; shrieks arose from the gulf, on which the black rain still poured; and lights flitted this way and that, moving rapidly along the ground. He heard voices sounding clearer, as the flitting lights came nearer, and on the hill−side opposite lights were moving too. Rohan understood all in a moment. The inundation was coming, and those who had been warned were taking to the heights.

It was now past midnight, and with the rising of the high tide there had risen a faint wind, which, as if to deepen the horror of the catastrophe, now blew back the clouds covering the moon, then at the full. Although the rain continued to fall in torrents, the air was suddenly flooded with a watery gleam, and the village stood revealed in silhouette, with the black tide glistening coldly at its feet; and above it, approaching with terrific rapidity from the inland valley, and towering up like a great wall, rolled the Flood. Simultaneously, from a hundred throats, rose horror−stricken screams; and Rohan distinctly beheld, on the slope beneath him, the human figures clustering and looking down. Meantime, all seemed quiet down in the village itself: the lights gleamed faintly in the windows, and the moonlight lay on the dark roofs, on the empty streets, on the *caloges* close to the water's edge, and on the black line of smacks and skiffs which now floated, as if at anchor, on the high tide.

Again the clouds covered the moon, and the picture of Kromlaix was hidden. Amidst the darkness, with a roaring like that of a strong sea, the Flood entered the village and began its dreadful work of destruction and of death. It was dreadful to stand up there on the hill−side, and to hear the unseen waters struggling in the black gulf; like a snake strangling its victim and stifling his dying cries. The tumult continued, deadened to a heavy roar,

through the heart of which pierced sharp shrieks and piteous calls for help. One by one the lights were extinguished. Like a Thug strangler crawling and killing in the night, the waters ran from place to place, feeling for their prey.

When the clouds again drifted off the face of the moon, and things were again dimly visible, the Flood had met the Tide, and wherever the eye fell a black waste of water surrounded the houses, many of which were flooded to the roofs; the main street was a brawling river, and the lanes on all sides were its tributary streams; many of the boats had driven from shore and were rocking up and down as if on a stormy sea: and there was a sound in the air as of an earthquake, broken only by frantic human cries. The desolation was complete, but the destruction had only just begun. From the inland valley fresh torrents were tumultuously flowing to recruit the floods; so that the waters were every moment rising; and the tide, flowing into the streets, mingled with the rivers of rain. Under the fury of the first attack many buildings had fallen, and the fierce washing of the waters was rapidly undermining others. And still there was no sign of the cessation of the rain. Deluge was pouring upon deluge. It seemed as if the wrath of Heaven had only just begun.

Chapter 45. “MID WATERS WILD”

Situated apart, some distance from the main village, and built close upon the sea−shore under the shelter of the eastern crag, the house of Mother Gwenfern stood, with several other scattered abodes, far out of danger. The only peril which seemed to threaten it came from the high tide, which that night rose nearly to the threshold, and, augmented by the rains of the flood, surged threateningly close upon it. Leading from the cottage to the heights above was a rocky path, and on this, gazing awe−stricken in the direction of the village, stood Mother Gwenfern, gaunt as a spectre in the flying gleams of moonlight. Around her gathered several neighbours, chiefly women and children, the latter crying in terror, the former crouching on the ground.

Hard by was a group of men, including Mikel Grallon. Little had been said; the situation was too appalling for words. While the flood played tiger−like with his victim, the women prayed wildly and the men crossed themselves again and again. From time to time an exclamation arose when the moon looked out and showed how the work of destruction was progressing.

“Holy Virgin! old Plouët's house is down!”

“Look—there was a light in the *cabaret*, but now it is all black!”

“They are screaming out yonder!”

“Hark, there!—it is another roof falling!”

“Merciful God! how black it is! One would say it was the Last Judgment!”

The heights on each side of the village were now dotted with black figures, many carrying lights. It was clear that, owing to the superstitious customs of the night, many of the population had made good their escape. It was no less certain, however, that many others must have perished, or be perishing, amid the raging waters or in the submerged dwellings. Hope of escape or rescue there seemed none. Until the flood abated nothing could be saved.

The group of men on the face of the cliff continued to gaze on and mutter among themselves.

“The tide is still rising,” said Mikel Grallon, in a low voice. He was comparatively calm, for his house, being situated apart from the main village, had so far escaped the fury of the inundation.

“It has nearly an hour yet to flow!” said another of the men.

“And *then!”* cried Grallon, significantly. All the men crossed themselves. Another hour of destruction, and what would then be left of Kromlaix and of those poor souls who still lingered within it?

As they stood whispering a figure rapidly descended the path from the heights above them, and, joining the group, called out the name of Mikel Grallon. The moon was once more hidden, and it was impossible to distinguish faces.

“Who wants Mikel Grallon? I am here!”

The new comer replied in a voice full of excitement and terror.

“It is I, Gildas Derval! Mikel, we are in despair. The old one and all the rest are safe up there: all of our family are safe but my sister Marcelle. Holy Virgin protect her, but she is in the house, out yonder amid the flood. My uncle is mad, and we are heart−broken. Can she not be saved?”

“She is in God's hands,” cried an old man. “No man can help her now.”

Gildas uttered a moan of misery, for he was really fond of his sister. Mother Gwenfern, who stood close by and had heard the conversation, now approached, and demanded in her cold, clear voice—

“Can nothing be done? Are there no boats?”

“Boats!” echoed Mikel Grallon. “One might as well go to sea in a shell as face the flood in any boat this night; but, for all that, boats there are none. They are all out yonder, where the flood meets the tide, save those that are already carried out to sea.”

The widow raised her wild arms to heaven, murmuring Marcelle's name aloud. Gildas Derval almost began to blubber in the fury of his grief.

“Ah God! that I should come back from the great wars to see such a night as this! I have always had bad luck, but this is the worst. My poor Marcelle! Look you, before I went away she tied a holy medal around my neck, and it kept me from harm. Ah, she was a good little thing! and must she die?”

“The blessed Virgin keep her!” cried Mikel Grallon; “what can we do?”

“It is not only Marcelle Derval,” said the old man who had already spoken; “it is not only one, but many, that shall be taken this night. God be praised I have neither wife nor child to die so sad a death.”

As the speaker finished and reverently crossed his breast, another voice broke the silence.

“Who says there are no boats?” it demanded in strange sharp tones.

“I,” answered Mikel Grallon. “Who speaks?”

There was no reply, but a dark figure, pushing through the group of men, rapidly descended the crag in the direction of the sea.

“Mother of God!” whispered Grallon, as if struck by a sudden thought, “it is Gwenfern.”

Immediately several voices cried aloud, “Is it thou, Ronan Gwenfern?” and Rohan—for it was he—answered from the darkness, “Yes; come this way!”

In the great terror and solemnity of the moment no one seemed astonished at Rohan's appearance, and, strange to say, no one, with the exception perhaps of Mikel Grallon, dreamed of laying hands on the deserter. The apparition of the hunted and desperate man seemed perfectly in keeping with all the horrors of that night. Silently the men followed him down to the shore. The tide was now lapping at the very door of his mother's cottage. He paused, looking down at the water, and surrounded by the men.

“Where are all the rafts?” he asked.

“The rafts! What raft could live out yonder?” cried Gildas Derval; and he added, in a whisper to Mikel Grallon, “My cousin is mad.”

At that moment Rohan's foot struck against a black mass washing on the very edge of the sea. Stooping down he discovered, by touch rather than by eye−sight, that it was one of those smaller rafts which were rudely constructed at that season of the year for the purpose of gathering the *goëmon* or sea−wrack from the reefs. It consisted of several trunks of trees and tree branches, crossed with fragments of old barrels, and lashed together with thick slippery ropes twisted out of ocean−tangle. A man might safely in dead calm weather pilot such a raft when loaded, letting it drift with the tide or pushing it with a pole along the shallows; and that it had quite recently been in use was clear from the fact that it was still partially loaded and kept under water by clinging masses of slippery weed.

As Rohan bent over the raft the moon shone out in full brilliance, and the village was again illumined. The flood roared loudly as ever, and the black waters of the sea seemed nearly level with the roofs of the most low−lying dwellings. Upon the edge where flood and sea met, the waters boiled like a cauldron, and *dèbris* of all descriptions came rushing down in the arms of the rivers of rain. There was another heavy crash, as of houses falling in. As if the terror had reached its completion, the rain now ceased, and the moon continued visible for many minutes together.

“Quick! bring me a pole or an oar!” cried Rohan, turning to his companions.

Several men ran rapidly along the beach in quest of what he sought; for though they did not quite understand how he intended to act, and although, moreover, they believed that to launch forth on the raft was to put his life in jeopardy, they were under the spell of his stronger nature, and offered neither suggestion nor opposition.

“Rohan! my son!” cried Mother Gwenfern, creeping down and holding him by the hand; “what are you going to do?”

“I am going to Marcelle Derval!”

“But you will die! you will perish in the waters!”

In the excitement of the moment Mother Gwenfern, like all the rest, forgot the man's actual relation to society, forgot that his life was forfeited, and that all hands would have been ready, under other circumstances, to drag him to the guillotine. All she remembered was his present danger; that he was going to certain death.

In answer, Rohan only laughed strangely. Seizing a large oar from Gildas Derval, who ran up with it at that moment, he sprang on the raft and pushed from shore. Under his weight, the raft swayed violently and sank almost under water.

“Come back! come back!” cried Mother Gwenfern; but, with vigorous pushes of the oar, which he thrust to the bottom and used as a pole, Rohan moved rapidly away. For better security, since the raft seemed in danger of capsizing, he sank on his knees, and thus, partially immersed in the cold waters that flowed over the slippery planks, he disappeared into the darkness.

The men looked at one another shuddering.

“As well die that way,” muttered Mikel Grallon, “as *another!”*

Chapter 46. MARCELLE

The wind had risen, and was blowing gently off the land; and the sea, at the confluence of flood and tide, was broken into white waves. As Rohan approached the vicinity of the submerged village his situation became perilous, for it was quite clear that the raft could not live long in those angry waters. Nevertheless, fearlessly, and with a certain fury, he forced the raft on by rowing, now at one side, now at another. Though the work was tedious, it was work in which he was well skilled, and he was soon tossing in the broken water below the village. The tide all round him was strewn with *débris* of all kinds—trunks of trees, fragments of wooden furniture, bundles of straw, thatch from sunken roofs—and it required no little care to avoid perilous collisions.

The moon was shining clearly, so that he had now an opportunity of perceiving the extent of the disaster. The houses and *caloges* lying just above high−water mark were covered to the very roofs, and all around them the sea itself was surging and boiling; while above them the buildings of the main village loomed disastrously amid a gleaming waste of boiling pools; muddy rivers and streams, and stagnant canals. Many dwellings, undermined by the washing of the torrents, had fallen in, and others were tottering.

A heavy roar still came from the direction whence the flood had issued, but it was clear that the full fury of the inundation had ceased. Nevertheless, it being scarcely high tide, it was impossible to tell what horrors were yet in store; for though the rivers of rain in the main streets were growing still, the water was working subtly and terribly at the foundations of the houses.

How many living souls had perished could not yet be told. Some, doubtless, dwelling in one−storied buildings, had been found in their beds and quietly smothered, almost before they could utter a cry. Fortunately, however, the greater portion of the population had been astir, and had been able to escape a calamity which would otherwise have been universal.

Eighty or a hundred yards from shore a crowd of unwieldy vessels, with masts lowered, tossed at anchor; others had floated off the land and were being blown farther and farther out to sea; and here and there in the waters around were drifting nets which had been swept away from the stakes where they had been left to dry. More than once the raft struck against dead sheep and cattle, floating partially submerged, and as it drifted past the nets Rohan saw, deep down in the tangled folds, something which glimmered like a human face.

Once among the troubled waters, he found it quite impossible to navigate the raft. The waters pouring downward drove it back towards the floating craft and threatened to carry it out to sea. At last, to crown all, the rotten ropes of tangle gave way, the trunks and staves fell apart, and Rohan found himself struggling among the troubled waves of the tide.

He was a strong swimmer, but his strength had been terribly reduced by trouble and privation. Grasping the oar with one hand and partially supporting himself by its aid, he struck out to the nearest of the deserted fishing craft; reaching which, he clung on to the bowsprit chain and drew his body partially out of the water. As he did so, he espied, floating a few yards distant, at the stern of a smack, a small boat like a ship's “dingy.”

To swim to the boat, and to drag himself into it by main force, was the work of only a few minutes. He then discovered to his joy that it contained a pair of paddles. Unfortunately, however, it was so leaky and so full of water that his weight brought it down almost to the gunwale, and threatened to sink it altogether.

Every moment was precious. Seizing the rope by which the boat was attached to the smack, he climbed up over the stern of the latter, and searching in its hold found a rusty iron pot. With this he in a few minutes baled out the punt; then seizing the paddles, he pulled wildly towards the shore.

The work was easy until he again reached the confluence of flood and tide. Here the waters were pouring down so rapidly, and were moreover so strewn with dangerous *débris*, that he was again and again in imminent danger.

Exerting all his extraordinary strength, he forced the boat between the roofs of the *caloges*, and launched out into the stream of the main river pouring from the village. Swept back against a nearly covered *caloge*, he was almost capsized; but, leaping out on the roof, he rapidly baled his boat, which was already filling with water. Fortunately the flood was decreasing in violence and the tide had turned, but it nevertheless seemed a mad and hopeless task to force the frail boat further in the face of such obstacles. The main street was a rapid river, filled with great boulders washed down from the valley, and with flotsam and jetsam of all kinds. To row against it was

utterly impossible; the moment he endeavoured to do so he was swept back and almost swamped.

Another man, even if he had possessed the foolhardiness to venture so far, would now have turned and fled. But perhaps because his forfeited life was no longer a precious thing to him, perhaps because his strength and courage always increased with opposition, perhaps because he had determined once and for ever to show how a "coward" could act when brave men were quaking in their shoes, Rohan Gwenfern gathered all his strength together for a mighty effort. Rowing to the side of the river, he threw down his oars and clutched hold of the solid masonry of a house; and then dragging the boat along by main force from wall to wall, he rapidly accomplished a distance of fifteen or twenty yards. Pausing then, and keeping firm hold of the projecting angle of a roof, while the flood was boiling past, he beheld floating among the other *débris,* the body of a child.

Repeating the same manuvre, he again dragged the boat on; again rested; again renewed his toil; until he had reached the very heart of the village. Here fortunately the waters were less rapid, and he could force his way along with greater ease. But at every yard of the way the picture grew more pitiful, the feeling of devastation more complete. The lower houses were submerged, and some of the larger ones had fallen. On many of the roofs were gathered groups of human beings, kneeling and stretching out their hands to heaven.

"Help! help!" they shrieked, as Gwenfern appeared; but he only waved his hand and passed on.

At last, reaching the narrow street in which stood the Corporal's dwelling, he discovered to his joy that the house was still intact. The flood here was very swift and terrible, so that at first it almost swept him away. He now to his horror perceived, floating seaward, many almost naked corpses. Opposite to the Corporal's house a large barn had fallen in, and within the walls numbers of cattle were floating dead.

The Corporal's house consisted, as the reader is aware, of two stories, the upper forming a sort of attic in the gable of the roof. The waters had risen so high that the door and windows of the lower story were entirely hidden, and a powerful current was sweeping along right under the window of the little upper room where Marcelle slept.

Ah God! if she did not live! If the cruel flood had found her below, and before she could escape had seized her and destroyed her like so many of the rest!

The house was still some twenty yards away and very difficult to reach. Clinging with one hand to the window−frame of one of the houses below, Rohan gathered all his strength, baled out his boat, and then prepared to drag it on. To add to the danger of his position the wind had now grown quite violent, blowing with the current and in the direction of the sea. If once his strength failed, and he was swept into the full fury of the mid−current, the result must be almost certain death.

With the utmost difficulty he managed to row the boat to the window of a cottage two doors from that of the Corporal; here, finding further progress by water impracticable, for the current was quite irresistible, he managed to clamber up to the roof, and, clutching in his hand the rope of the boat, which was fortunately long, to scramble desperately on. At this point his skill as a cragsman stood him in good stead. At last, after extraordinary exertions, he reached the very gable of the house he sought, and, standing erect in the boat, clutched at the window−sill. In a moment the boat was swept from beneath his feet, and he found himself dangling by his hands, while his feet trailed in the water under him.

Still retaining, wound round one wrist, the end of the rope which secured the boat, he hung for a few seconds suspended; then putting out his strength and performing a trick in which he was expert, he drew himself bodily up until one knee rested on the sill. In another moment he was safe. On either side of the window were clumsy iron hooks, used for keeping the casement open when it was thrown back. Securing the rope to one of these by a few rapid turns, he dashed the casement open and sprang into the room.

"Marcelle! Marcelle!"

He was answered instantly by an eager cry. Marcelle, who had been on her knees in the middle of the room, rose almost in terror. Surprised in her sleep, she had given herself up for lost, but with her characteristic presence of mind she had hurriedly donned a portion of her attire. Her feet, arms, and neck were bare, and her hair fell loose upon her shoulders.

"It is I—Rohan! I have come to save you, and there is no time to lose. Come away!"

While he spoke the house trembled violently, as if shaken to its foundations. Marcelle gazed on her lover as if stupefied, his appearance seemed unaccountable and preternatural. Stepping across the room, the floor of which seemed to quake beneath his feet, he threw his arms around her and drew her towards the window.

"Do not be afraid:" he said, in a hollow voice. "You will be saved yet, Marcelle. Come!"

He did not attempt any fonder greeting; his whole manner was that of a man burthened by the danger of the hour. But Marcelle, whom recent events had made somewhat hysterical, clung to him wildly and lifted up her white face to his.

“Is it thou, indeed? When the flood came I was dreaming of thee, and when I went to the window and saw the great waters and heard the screaming of the folk I knelt and prayed to the good God. Rohan! Rohan!”

“Come away! there is no time to lose.”

“How didst thou come? One would say thou hadst fallen from heaven. Ah, thou hast courage, and the people lie!”

He drew her to the window, and pointed down to the boat which still swung below the sill. Then in hurried whispers he besought her to gather all her strength and to act implicitly as he bade her, that her life might be saved.

Seizing the rope with his left hand, he drew the boat towards him until it swung close under the window. He then assisted her through the window, and bade her cling to his right arm with both hands while he let her down into the boat. Fearful but firm, she obeyed, and in another minute had dropped safely down. Loosening the rope and still keeping it in his hand, he leapt after her. In another instant they were drifting seaward on the flood.

It was like a ghastly dream. Swept along on the turbid stream, amid floating trees, dead cattle and sheep, flotsam and jetsam of all kinds, Marcelle saw the houses flit by her in the moonlight, and heard troubled voices crying for help. Seated before her, Rohan managed the paddles, restraining as far as possible the impetuous progress of the boat. Again and again they were in imminent peril from collision, and as they proceeded the boat rapidly filled. Under Rohan's directions, however, Marcelle baled out the water, while he piloted the miserable craft with the oars.

At last they swept out into the open sea, where the tide, beaten by the wind and meeting with the flood, was “chopping” and boiling in short sharp waves. The danger was now almost over. With rapid strokes Rohan rowed in the direction of the shore whence he had started on the raft. Gathered there to receive him, with flashing torches and gleaming lanterns, was a crowd of women and men.

After a moment's hesitation he ran the boat in upon the strand.

“Leap out!” he cried to his companion.

Springing on the shore, Marcelle was almost immediately clasped in the arms of her mother, who was eagerly giving thanks to God. Amazed and aghast, the Corporal stood by with his nephews, gazing out at the dark figure of Rohan.

Before a word could be said Rohan had pushed off again.

“Stay, Rohan Gwenfern!” said a voice.

Rohan stood up erect in the boat.

“Are there no men among you,” he cried, “that you stand there useless and afraid? There are more perishing out there, women and children. Jàn Goron!”

“Here,” answered a voice.

“The flood is going down, but the houses are still falling in, and lives are being lost. Come with me, and we will find boats.”

“I will come,” said Jàn Goron; and wading up to the waist, he climbed into the boat with Rohan. Marcelle uttered a low cry as the two pushed off in the direction of the village.

“God forgive me!” murmured the Corporal. “He is a brave man!”

The tide was now ebbing rapidly; and though the village was still submerged, the floods were no longer rising. Nevertheless, the devastation to a certain extent continued. and every moment added to the peril of those survivors who remained in the village.

Aided by Jàn Goron, Rohan soon discovered, among the cluster of boats at anchor, several large fishing skiffs. Springing into one, and abandoning the small boat, the two men managed with the aid of the paddles to row to the shore, towing astern another skiff similar to the one in which they sat. A loud shout greeted them as they ran into land.

Totally forgetful of his personal position, Rohan now rapidly addressed the men in tones of command. Oars were found and brought, and soon both skiffs were manned by powerful crews and pulling in the direction of the village. In the stern of one stood Rohan, guiding and inspiring his companions.

What followed was only a repetition of Rohan's former adventure, shorn of much of its danger and excitement. The inundation was now comparatively subdued, and the men found little difficulty in rowing their boats through the streets. Soon the skiffs were full of women and children, half fainting and still moaning with fear. After depositing these in safety, the rescuing party returned to the village and continued their work of mercy.

It was weary work, and it lasted for hours. As the night advanced other boats appeared, some from neighbouring villages, and moved with flashing lights about the dreary waste of waters. It was found necessary again and again to enter the houses and to search the upper portions for paralyzed women and helpless children; and at great peril many creatures were rescued thus. Where the peril was greatest, Rohan Gwenfern led: he seemed, indeed, to know no fear.

At last, when the first peep of dawn came, all the good work was done, and not a living soul remained to be saved. As the dim chill light rose on the scene of desolation, showing more clearly the flooded village with its broken gables and ruined walls, Rohan stepped on the shore close to his mother's cottage, and found himself almost immediately surrounded by an excited crowd. Now for the first time the full sense of his extraordinary position came upon him, and he drew back like a man expecting violence. Ragged, half naked, haggard, ghastly, and dripping wet, he looked a strange spectacle. Murmurs of wonder and pity arose as he gazed on the people. A woman whose two children he had saved that night rushed forward, and with many appeals to the Virgin kissed his hands. He saw the Corporal standing by, pale and troubled, looking on the ground; and near to him Marcelle, with her passionate shining white face towards him.

Half stupefied, he moved up the strand. The crowd parted, to let him pass.

“In the name of the Emperor!” cried a voice. A hand was placed upon his arm. Turning quietly, he encountered the eyes of Mikel Grallon.

Grallon's interference was greeted with angry murmurs, for the popular sympathy was all with the hero of the night.

“Stand back, Mikel Grallon!” cried many voices.

“It is the deserter!” said Grallon, stubbornly; and he repeated, “In the name of the Emperor!”

Before he could utter another word he found himself seized in a pair of powerful arms and hurled to the ground. Rohan Gwenfern himself had not lifted a finger. The attack came from quite another quarter. The old Corporal, red with rage, had sprung upon Grallon, and was fiercely holding him down.

Scarcely paying any attention, Rohan passed quietly through the crowd and rapidly ascended the cliff. Pausing on the summit, he looked down quietly for some seconds; then he disappeared.

But the Corporal still held Mikel Grallon down, shaking him as a furious old hound shakes a rat.

“In the name of the Emperor!” he cried, angrily echoing the prostrate man's own words. “Beast, lie still!”

Chapter 47. THE GROWING OF THE CLOUD

And now the darkness of winter fell, and days and weeks and months passed anxiously away.

Down at lonely Kromlaix, by the sea, things were sadder than they had been for many winters past. When the flood subsided, and the full extent of the desolation could be apprehended, it was found that more lives had been lost than had at first been calculated. Many poor souls had perished quietly in their beds; others, while endeavouring to escape, had been crushed under the ruins of their crumbling homes. The mortality was chiefly among women and little children. Although the greater part of the corpses were recovered and buried with holy rites in the little churchyard, some had been carried out to the bottom of the deep ocean and were never seen again.

When the Corporal went down to take stock of his dwelling, he found that portion of the walls had yielded, and that some of the roof had fallen in; so that Marcelle, had she remained a little longer in the house on that fatal night, would most certainly have encountered a terrible and cruel death. It took many a long day to rebuild the ruined portion of the dwelling, and to make good the grievous loss in damaged household goods; and not until the new year had come boisterously in was the place decently habitable again.

Meantime, Famine had been crawling about the village, hand in hand with Death, for much grain had been destroyed,—and when grain fails, the poor must starve and die. And then, following close upon the flood, had come the news of the new conscription of 300,000 men, of which little Kromlaix had again to supply its share. Well might the poor souls think that God was against them, and that there was neither hope nor comfort anywhere under Heaven.

Over all these troubles we let the curtain fall. Our purpose in these pages is not to harrow up the heart with pictures of human torture—whether caused by the cruelty of Nature or the tyranny of Man—nor to light up with a lurid pen the darkness of unrecorded sorrows. It is rather our wish, while telling a tale of human patience and endurance, to reveal from time to time those higher spiritual issues which fortify the thoughts of those who love their kind, and which make poetry possible in a world whose simple prose is misery and despair. Let us, therefore, for a time darken the stage on which our actors come and go. When the curtain arises again, it is to the sullen music of the great Invasion of 1814.

Like hungry wolves the Grand Army was being driven back before the scourges of avenging nations. For many a long year France had sent forth her legions to feed upon and destroy other lands; now it was her turn to taste the cup she had so freely given. Across her troubled plains, moving this way and that, and shrieking to that *da?µ??* who seemed at last to have deserted him, flew Bonaparte. Already in outlying districts arose the old spectre of the White, causing foolish enthusiasts to trample on the tricolor. Mysterious voices were heard again in old chateaux, down in lonely Brittany. Loyalists and Republicans alike were beginning to cry out aloud even in the public ways, despite the decree of death on all those who should express Bourbon sympathies or give assistance to the Allies. Duras had armed Touraine, and the Abbé Jacquilt was busy in La Vendée.

Meantime, to those honest people who hated strife, the terror deepened. While the log blazed upon the hearth and the cold winds blew without, those who sat within listened anxiously and started at every sound; for there was no saying in what district the ubiquitous and child−eating Cossack (savage forerunner of the irrepressible Uhlan of a later and wickeder invasion) might appear next, pricking on his pigmy steed. The name of Blucher became a household word, and men were learning another name,—that of Wellington.

The hour came when Bonaparte, surrounded and in tribulation, might have saved his Imperial Crown by assenting to the treaty of Chatillon; but, overmastered by faith in his destiny, and a prey, moreover, to the most violent passions, he let the saving hour glide by, and manuvred until it was too late. By the treaty of March, 1814, Austria, Russia, Prussia, and England bound themselves individually to keep up an army of 150,000 men, until France was reduced within her ancient limits; and by the same treaty, and for the same purpose, that of carrying on the war, four millions were advanced by the “shopkeepers” of England. Nevertheless, the Emperor, still trusting in his lurid star, continued to insist on the imperial boundaries. So insisting, he marched upon Blucher at Soissons, and began the last act of the war.

Thus the terrible winter passed away. Spring came, and brought the violet; but the fields and lanes were still

darkened with strife, and all over France still lay the Shadow of the Sword.

Meantime, what had become of Rohan Gwenfern? After that night of the great flood he made no sign, and all search for him virtually ceased. It was clearly impossible that he could be still in hiding out among the cliffs, for the severe weather had set in: no man could have lived through it under such conditions. That Rohan was not dead Marcelle knew from various sources, although she had no idea where he was to be found: and she blessed the good God, who had preserved him so far, and who would perhaps forgive all his wild revolt, for the sake of the good deeds that he had done on the terrible Night of the Dead. Doubtless some dark roof was sheltering him now, and, fortunately, men were too full of affairs to think much about a solitary revolter. Ah, if he had not killed Pipriac! If the guilt of blood were off his hands! Then the good Emperor might have forgiven him and taken him back, like the prodigal son.

In one respect, at least, Marcelle was happy. She no longer lay under the reproach of having loved a coward; her lover had justified himself and *her;* and he had vindicated his courage in a way which it was impossible to mistake. Ah, yes, he was brave! and if Master Arfoll and other wicked counsellors had not put a spell upon him, he would have shown his bravery on the battle−field! It was still utterly inscrutable to her that Rohan should have acted as he did. General principles she could not understand, and any abstract proposition concerning the wickedness and cowardice of War itself would have been as incomprehensible to her as a problem in trigonometry or a page of Spinosa. War was one of the institutions of the world—

“It had been since the world began,
And would be till its close.”

It was as much a thing of course as getting married or going to confession; and it was, moreover, one of the noble professions in which brave men, like her uncle, might serve their ruler and the State.

Although it was now subtly qualified by anxiety for her lover's fate, her enthusiasm in the Imperial cause did not many degree abate. Marcelle was one of those women who cling the more tenaciously to a belief the more it is questioned and decried, and the more it approaches the state of a forlorn faith; so that as the Emperor's star declined, and people began to look forward eagerly for its setting, her adoration rose, approaching fanaticism in its intensity. It was just the same with Corporal Derval. All through that winter the Corporal suffered untold agonies, but his confidence and his faith rose with the darkening of the Imperial sphere. Night after night he perused the bulletins, eagerly construing them to his master's triumph and glory. His voice was loud in its fulminations against the Allies, especially against the English. He kept the Napoleonic pose more habitually than ever—and he prophesied; but, alas! his voice now was as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and there were none to hearken.

For, as we have already more than once hinted, Kromlaix was too near to the châteaux not to keep within it many sparks of Legitimist flame ready to burn forth brilliantly at any moment; and although Corporal Derval had been a local power, he had ruled more by fear than by love, receiving little opposition because opposition was scarcely safe. When, however, the tide began to turn, he found, like his master, that he had been miscalculating the true feelings of his neighbours. Again and again he was openly contradicted and talked down. When he spoke of “the Emperor,” others began to speak boldly of “the King.” He heard daily, in his walks and calls, enough “blasphemy” to make his hair stand on end, and to make him think with horror of another Deluge. One evening, walking by the sea, he saw several bonfires burning up on the hill−sides. The same night he heard that the Duc de Berri had landed in Jersey.

Among those who seemed quietly turning their coats from parti−red to white was Mikel Grallon; and, indeed, we doubt not that honest Mikel would have turned his skin also, if that were possible, and if it could be shown to be profitable. He seemed now to have abandoned the idea of marrying Marcelle, but he none the less bitterly resented her fidelity to his rival. As soon as the tide of popular feeling was fairly turned against Napoleon, Grallon quietly ranged himself on the winning side, secretly poisoning the public mind against the Corporal, in whom, ere long, people began to see the incarnation of all they most detested and feared. Things grew, until Corporal Derval, so far from possessing any of his old influence, became the most unpopular man in Kromlaix. He represented the fading superstition, which was already beginning to be regarded with abhorrence.

The Corporal's health had failed a little that winter, and these changes preyed painfully on his mind. He began to show unmistakable signs of advancing age: his voice lost much of its old ring and volume, his eyes grew dimmer, his step less firm. It required vast quantities of tobacco to soothe the trouble of his heart, and he would sit

whole evenings silent in the kitchen, smoking and looking at the fire. When he mentioned Rohan's name, which was but seldom, it was with a certain gentleness very unusual to him; and it seemed to Marcelle, watching him, that he quietly reproached himself with having been unjust to his unfortunate nephew.

“I am sure uncle is not well,” Marcelle said in a low voice, glancing across at the Corporal sitting by the fire.

“There is only one thing that can cure him,” said Gildas, whom she addressed, “and that is, a great Victory.”

Chapter 48. “VIVE LE ROI!”

While the great campaign was proceeding in the interior, and the leaders of the allied armies were hesitating and deliberating, a hand was waving signals from Paris and beckoning the invaders on. So little confidence had they in their own puissance, and so great, despite their successes, continued their dread of falling into one of those traps which Bonaparte was so cunning in preparing, that they would doubtless have committed fatal delays but for encouragement from within the City.

“You venture nought, when you might venture all!
Venture again!”

wrote this hand to the Emperor Alexander. The hand was that of Talleyrand.

So it came to pass, late in the month of March, that crowds of affrighted peasants, driving before them their carts and horses and their flocks and herds, and leading their wives and children, flocked into Paris, crying that the invaders were approaching on Paris in countless hosts. The alarum sounded, the great City poured out its swarms into the streets, and all eyes were gazing in the direction of Montmartre. Vigorous preparations were made to withstand a siege—Joseph Bonaparte encouraging the people by assurances that the Emperor would soon be at hand.

“It is a bad look−out for the enemy,” said Corporal Derval nervously, when this news reached him. “Every step towards Paris is a step further away from their *supplies.* Do you think the Emperor does not know what he is about? It is a trap, and Paris will swallow them like a great mouth—snap! one bite, and they are gone. Wait.”

A few days later came the news of the flight of the Empress. The Corporal turned livid, but forced a laugh.

“Women are in the way when there is to be fighting. Besides, she does not want to see her relations, the Austrians, eaten up alive.”

The next day came the terrible announcement that Paris was taken. The Corporal started up as if a knife had entered his heart.

“The enemy in Paris!” he gasped. “Where is the Emperor?”

Ah, where indeed? For once in his life Bonaparte had fallen into a trap himself, and while Paris was being taken, had been lured towards the frontier out of the way. It was useless now to rush, almost solitary, to the rescue; yet the Emperor, seated in his carriage, rolled towards the metropolis, far in advance of his army. His generals met him in the environs, and warned him back. He shrieked, threatened, implored; but it was too late. He then heard with horror that the authorities had welcomed the invaders, and that the Imperial government was virtually overthrown. Heartsick and mad, he rushed to Fontainebleau.

To the old Corporal, sitting by his fireside, this news came also in due time. Father Rolland was there when it came, and he shook his head solemnly.

“The allied sovereigns refuse to treat with the Emperor,” he read aloud. “Well, well!”

This “well, well” might mean either wonder, or sympathy, or approval, just as the hearer felt inclined to construe it for Father Rolland was a philosopher, and took things calmly as they came. Even a miracle done in broad day would not have astonished him much; to his simple mind, all human affairs were miraculous, and miraculously commonplace. But the veteran whom he had addressed was not so calm. He trembled, and tried to storm.

“They refuse!” he cried, with a feeble attempt at his old manner. “You will say next that the mice refuse to treat with the lion. Soul of a crow! what are these emperors and kings? Go to! The Little Corporal has unmade kings by the dozen, and he has eaten empires for breakfast. I tell you, in a little while the Emperor Alexander will be glad enough to kiss his feet. As for the Emperor of Austria, his conduct is shameful, for is he not our Emperor's kith and kin?”

“Do you think there will be more fighting, my Corporal!” demanded the little priest.

The Corporal set his lips fight together, and nodded his head automatically.

“It is easier to put your hand in the lion's mouth than to pull it out again. When the Emperor is desperate, he is terrible—all the world knows that; and now that he has been trampled upon and insulted, he is not likely to rest till he has obliterated these *canaille* from the face of the earth.”

"I heard news to−day," observed Gildas, looking up from his place in the ingle, and joining in the conversation for the first time. "They say that Duc de Berri has landed again in Jersey, and that the King—"

Before he could complete the sentence, his uncle uttered a cry of rage and protestation.

"The King! Malediction! What king?"

Gildas grinned awkwardly.

"King Louis, of course!"

"A bas le Bourbon!" thundered the Corporal, pale as death, and trembling with rage from head to foot. "Never name him, Gildas Derval! King Louis! King Capet!"

The little *curé* rose quietly and put on his hat.

"I must go," he said; "but let me tell you, my Corporal, that your language is too violent. The Bourbons were our kings by divine right, and they were good friends to the Church; and if they should return to prosperity, I, for one, will give them my allegiance."

So saying, Father Rolland saluted the household and quietly took his departure. The Corporal sank trembling into a chair.

"If they should return!" he muttered. "Ah, well, there is no danger of *that* so long as the little Corporal is alive!"

Corporal Derval was wrong. A fanatic to the heart's core, he did not at all comprehend the true fatality of the situation; and although his thoughts were full of secret alarm, he hoped, believed, and trusted still. The idea of the total overthrow of the god of his faith never occurred to him at all; as easily might the conception of the fall of Mahomet have entered the brain of a proselytising Mussulman. As for the return of the exiled family—why, that, on the very face of it, was too ridiculous!

He was, of course, well acquainted with the state of popular sentiment, and he knew how strong the Legitimist party was even in his own village. Here, too, was little Father Rolland, who had no political feelings to speak of, and who had served under the Emperor so long, beginning to side with the enemies of truth and justice! The priest was a good fellow, but to hear *him* talk about "divine right" was irritating. As if there was any right more divine than the sovereignty of the Emperor!

A few mornings afterwards, as the Corporal was preparing to sally forth, he was stopped by Marcelle.

"Where are you going?" she said, placing herself in his way.

She was very pale, and there was a red mark around her eyes as if she had been crying.

"I am going down to old Plouët to get shaved," said the Corporal; "and I shall hear the news. Soul of a crow! what is the matter with the girl? Why do you look at me like that?"

Marcelle, without replying, gazed imploringly at her mother and at Gildas, who were standing on the hearth—the former agitated, like her daughter, the latter phlegmatically chewing a straw. Wheeling round to them, the Corporal continued—"Is there anything wrong? Speak, if that is so!"

"There is bad news," answered the widow, in a low voice.

"About Hoël!"

The widow shook her head.

"Do not go out this morning," said Marcelle, crossing the kitchen and quietly closing the door. As she did so, there came from without a loud sound of voices cheering, and simultaneously there was a clatter as of feet running down the road.

"What is that?" cried the Corporal. "Something has happened. Speak! do not keep me in suspense."

He stood pale and trembling; and as he stood the finger of age was heavy upon him, marking every line and wrinkle in his powerful face, making his cheeks more sunken, his eyes more darkly dim. A proud man, he had suffered tormenting humiliations of late, and had missed much of the respect and sense of power which had formerly made his life worth having. Add to this, the fact already alluded to, that his physical health had been quietly breaking, and it is easy to understand why he looked the ghost of his old self.

But the veteran's nature was aquiline; and an eagle, even in sickness and amid evil fortune, is an eagle still

"Speak, Gildas!" he said. "You are a man, and these are only women. What is the meaning of all this? Why do they seek to detain me in the house?"

Gildas mumbled something inarticulate, and nudged his mother with his elbow. At that moment the cheering was repeated. Some gleam of the truth must have flashed upon the Corporal, for he grew still paler and increased

his expression of nervous dread.

"I will tell you, uncle," cried Marcelle, "if you will not go out. They are proclaiming the King!"

Proclaiming the King? So far as the Corporal is concerned they might almost as well proclaim a new God. Have the heavens fallen? Sits the sun still in his sphere? The Corporal stared and tottered like a man stupefied. Then, setting his lips tight together, he strode towards the door.

"Uncle!" cried Marcelle, interposing.

"Stand aside!" he cried in a husky voice. "Don't make me angry, you women. I am not a child, and I must see for myself. God in Heaven! I think the world is coming to an end."

Throwing the door wide open, he walked into the street. It was a bright spring morning, much such a morning as when, about a year before, he had cheerily sallied forth at the head of the conscripts! The village, long since recovered from the effects of the inundation, sparkled in the sunshine. The street was quite empty, and there was no sign of any neighbour bustling about, but as he paused at the door he again heard the sound of shouting far up the village.

Determined to make a personal survey of the state of affairs, Derval stumped up the street, followed closely by Gildas, whom the women had besought to see that his uncle did not get into trouble. In a few minutes they came in sight of a crowd of people of both sexes, who were moving hither and thither as if under the influence of violent excitement. In their midst stood several men, strangers to the Corporal, who were busily distributing white cockades to the men and white rosettes to the girls. These men were well dressed, and one had the air of a gentleman and indeed he was Le Sieur Marmont, proprietor of a neighbouring château, but long an absentee from his possessions.

Then Derval distinctly heard the odious cry, again and again repeated—*"Vive le Roi! Vive le Roi!"*

The nobleman, who was elegantly clad in a rich suit of white and blue, had his sword drawn: his wrinkled face was full of enthusiasm.

"Vive le Roi! Vive le Sieur Marmont! cried the voices.

Among the crowd were many who merely looked on smiling, and a few who frowned darkly; but it was clear that the Bonapartists were in a terrible minority. However, the business that was going forward was quite informal—a mere piece of preparatory incendiarism on the part of Marmont and his friends. News had just come of the Royalist rising in Paris, and the white rose had already begun to blossom in every town.

"What is all this?" growled the Corporal, elbowing his way into the crowd. "Soul of a crow! what does it mean?"

"Have you not heard the news?" shrieked a woman. "The Emperor is dead, and the King is risen."

The nobleman, whose keen eye observed Derval in a moment, stuck a cockade of white cotton on the point of his sword, and pushed it over politely across the intervening heads.

"Our friend has not heard," he said with a wicked grin. "See, old fellow, here is a little present. It is not true that the usurper is dead, but he is dethroned—so we are crying '*Vive le Roi.*'"

Many voices shouted again; and now the Corporal recognised, talking to a tall priest−like man in black who kept close to Marmont, his little friend the *curé.*

"It *is a* LIE!" he cried, fixing his eye upon Marmont. *"A bas les Bourbons! à bas les emigrés!"*

The nobleman's face flushed, and his eye gleamed fiercely.

"What man is this?" he asked between his set teeth.

"Corporal Derval!" cried several voices simultaneously. The tall priest, after a word from Father Rolland, whispered to Marmont, who curled his lips and smiled contemptuously.

"If the old fool were not in his dotage," he said, "he would deserve to be whipped; but we waste our time with such *canaille!* Come, my friends, to the chapel—let us offer a prayer to Our Blessed Lady, who is bringing the good King back."

The Corporal who would have joined issue with the very fiend when his blood was up, uttered a great oath, and flourishing his stick, approached the nobleman. The villagers fell back on either side, and in a moment the two were face to face.

"A bas le Roi!" thundered the Corporal. *"A bas les emigrés!"*

Marmont was quite pale now, with anger, not fear. Drawing himself up indignantly, he pointed his sword at the Corporal's heart.

“Keep back, old man, or I shall hurt you!”

But before another syllable could be uttered the Corporal, with a sabre−cut of his heavy stick, had struck the blade with such force that it was broken.

“A bas le Roi!” he cried, purple with passion. *“Vive l'Empereur!”*

This was the signal for general confusion. The Royalist, furious at the insult, endeavoured to precipitate himself on his assailant, but was withheld by his companions, who eagerly besought him to be calm; while the Corporal, on his side, found himself the centre of a shrieking throng of villagers, some of whom aimed savage blows at his unlucky head. It would doubtless have gone ill with him had not Gildas and several other strong fellows fought their way to his side and diligently taken his part. A *mêlée* ensued. Other Bonapartists sided with the minority; blows were freely given and taken; cockades were torn off and trampled on the ground. Fortunately, the combatants were not armed with any dangerous weapons, and few suffered any serious injuries. At the end of some minutes the Corporal found himself standing half stunned, surrounded by his little party, while the crowd of Royalist sympathisers, headed by Marmont, was proceeding up the road in the direction of the Chapel.

When the Corporal recovered from the full violence of his indignation his heart was very sad. The sight of the nobleman and his friends was ominous, for he knew that these gay−plumaged birds only came out when the air was very loyal indeed. He knew, too, that Marmont, although part of his estates had been restored to the family by the Emperor, had long been a suspected resident abroad; and it was quite certain that his presence there meant that the Bonapartist cause had reached its lowest ebb.

Hastening down into the village, and into the house of Plouët the barber, the veteran eagerly seized the journals, and found there such confirmation of his fears as turned his heart sick and made his poor head whirl wildly round. Tears stood in his old eyes as he read, so that the old horn−spectacles were again and again misted o'er.

“My Emperor! my Master!” he murmured; adding to himself, in much the same words that the great heart−broken King of Israel used of old, “Would to God I might die for thee!”

Chapter 49. THE CORPORAL'S CUP IS FULL

About the beginning of the month of April a strange rumour spread over France, causing simple folk to gaze at each other aghast, as if the sun were falling out of heaven. It was reported, on good authority, that the Emperor had attempted suicide.

The rumour was immediately contradicted, but not before it had caused grievous heart−ache to many a hero−worshipper, and, among others, to our Corporal. It seemed so terrible that he who had but lately ruled the destinies of Europe should now be a miserable being anxious to quit a world of which he was weary, that to some minds it was simply inconceivable. If this thing was true, if indeed Bonaparte was at last impotent, and upon his knees, then nothing was safe—neither the stars in their spheres, nor the solid earth revolving in its place—for Chaos was come.

How strange, and yet how brief had been the glory of the man! It seemed but the other day that he was a young general, with all his laurels to win. What a Drama had been enacted in the few short hours since then! And already the last scene was being played—or nearly the last.

It seemed, however, as if the Earth, released from an intolerable burthen, had begun to smile and rejoice; for the primrose had arisen, and the wild roses were lighting their red lamps at the sun, and the birds were come back again to build along the great sea−wall. Clear were the days and bright, with cool winds and sweet rains; so that Leipsic and many a smaller battle−field, well manured by the dead, were growing rich and green, with the promise of abundant harvest.

On such a day of spring Corporal Derval sat on the cliffs overlooking the sea, with a distant view of Kromlaix basking in the light. By his side, distaff in hand, sat Marcelle, a clean white coif upon her head and shoes on her shapely feet. She had coaxed her uncle out that day to smell the fresh air and to sit in the sun, for he had been very frail and irritable of late, and had become a prey to the most violent despondency. He was not one of those men who love Nature, even in a dumb unconscious animal way, and, although the scene around him was very fair, he did not gladden. Sweeter to him the sound of fifes and drums than the soft singing of the thrush. As for prospects, if he could only have seen, coming down the valley, the gleam of bayonets and darkness of artillery, *that* would have been a prospect indeed!

He was very silent, gazing moodily down at the village and over the sea, while Marcelle watched him gently, only now and then saying a few commonplace words. They had sat thus for hours, when suddenly the Corporal started as if he had been shot, and pointed up the valley.

“Look! what's that?”

Marcelle gazed in the direction indicated, but saw nothing unusual. She turned questioningly to her uncle.

“There! at the Chapel,” he cried, with peevish irritation. “Do you not see something white?”

She gazed again, and her keen eyes at once detected—what his feebler vision had only dimly guessed—that a flag was flying from a pole planted above the belfry of the little building. A Flag, and *white!* She knew in a moment what it betokened, and, though a sharp pain ran through her heart, her first fear was for her uncle. She trembled, but did not answer.

The old man, violently agitated, rose to his feet, gazing at the Chapel as at some frightful vision.

“Look again!” he cried. “Can you not see? What is it, Marcelle?”

Marcelle rose, and, still trembling, gazed piteously into his face. Her eyes were dry, her lips set firm, her cheeks pale as death. She touched her uncle on the arm, and said in a low voice—

“Come, uncle; let us go home.”

He did not stir, but drawing himself to his height and shading his eyes from the sun, he looked again with a face as grimly set as if he were performing some terrible military duty.

“It is white, and it looks like a flag,” he muttered, as if talking to himself. “Yes, it is a flag, and it stirs in the wind.” He added after a minute, “It is the White Flag!—some villain has set it there!”

Just then there rose upon the air the sound of voices cheering, followed by a short report as of guns firing. Then he distinguished, flocking on the road near the Chapel, a dark crowd of people moving rapidly hither and thither. It was clear that something extraordinary had occurred; and, indeed, Marcelle knew perfectly the true state

of affairs, and had for that reason among others coaxed the veteran out of harm's way. That very morning orders had arrived from St. Gurlott to hoist the Bourbon *fleur de lys* on the chapels of Kromlaix. Bonaparte's last stake was lost, and the heir of legitimate Kings was hourly expected in Paris.

Corporal Derval had known that it was coming—the last scene, the wreck of all his hope; but his faith had kept firm to the last, and he had listened eagerly for the sign that the lion had burst the net and that the enemies of France—for such he held all the enemies of the Emperor—were overthrown. He was not a praying man, but he had prayed a good deal of late; prayed indeed that God might perfect a miracle and "resurrect" the Empire. So the sight of the emblem of despair, which it certainly was to him, caused a great shock to his troubled heart. He stood gazing and panting and listening, while Marcelle again sought to lead him away.

"A bas le Bourbon!" he growled mechanically; then shaking his hand menacingly at the flag, he said, "If there is no other man to tear thee down, I will do it, for the Emperor's sake. I will trample on thee as the Emperor will trample on the King, thy master!"

Marcelle did not often cry, but her eyes were wet now: even wrath was forgotten in pity for the idol of her faith. Despite her uncle's fierce words she saw that his spirit was utterly crushed, that his breast was heaving convulsively, and that his voice was broken. She bade him lean upon her arm to descend the hill; but, trembling and in silence, he sat down again on the green grass. Just then, however, they heard footsteps behind them, and Marcelle, looking over her shoulder, recognised no other than Master Arfoll.

Now, if at that moment she would have avoided one man more than another, that man was the itinerant schoolmaster. His opinions were notorious, and he was associated in her mind with revolt and irreverence of the most offensive kind. His appearance at that particular time was specially startling and painful. He seemed come for the purpose of saying, "I prophesied these things, and you see they have come true."

Marcelle would gladly have escaped, but Master Arfoll was close upon them. Just as the Corporal, noticing her manner, turned and saw who was following, Master Arfoll came up quietly with the usual salutation. He seemed paler and more spectre−like than ever, and his face scarcely lighted up into its usual smile.

As he recognised him, the veteran frowned. He too felt constrained and vexed at the schoolmaster's presence.

Just then the sound of shouting and firing again rose upon his ears. A constrained silence ensued, which was at last broken again by Master Arfoll's voice.

"Great changes are taking place, my Corporal. Here you live so far out of the world that much escapes you, and the journals are full of lies. It is certain, however, that the Emperor has abdicated."

Marcelle turned an appealing look on the speaker, as if beseeching him to be silent, for she feared some outburst on the part of the Corporal. Derval, however, was very quiet; he sat still, with lips set tight together, and eyes fixed on the ground. At last he said grimly, fixing his hawk−like eye on Arfoll—

"Yes, there are great changes; and *you* . . . do *you* too wear the white cockade?"

Master Arfoll shook his head.

"I am no Royalist," he replied; "I have seen too much of Kings for that. The return of the Bourbon will be the return of all the reptiles whom the Goddess of Liberty drove out of France; we shall be the sport of *parvenus* and the prey of priests; there will be peace, but it will be ignominious, and we shall still ask in vain for the Rights of Man."

The Corporal's eye kindled, his whole look expressed astonishment. After all, then, Master Arfoll was not such a fool as had been supposed; if he could not appreciate the Emperor, he could at least despise King Louis. Without expressing surprise in any direct way, Derval said, as if wishing to change the subject—

"You have been a great stranger, Master Arfoll. It is many months since you dropped in."

"I have been far away," returned the itinerant, seating himself by the Corporal's side. "You will wonder when I tell you that I have been to the great City itself."

"To Paris!" ejaculated the Corporal, while Marcelle looked as astonished as if Master Arfoll had said that he had visited the next world.

"I have a kinsman at Meaux, and I was sent for to close his eyes; he had no other friend on earth. While I was there, the Allies marched on Paris, and I beheld all the horrors of the war. My Corporal, it was a war of devils; both sides fought like fiends, and between them both the country was laid waste. The poor peasants fled to the woods, and hid themselves in caves, and the churches were full of women and children. You could see the fires of towns and villages burning day and night. No man had any pity for his neighbour, and the French conscripts were

as cruel to their own countrymen as if they themselves were Cossacks or Croats. Fields and farms, the abodes of man and beast, all were laid waste, and in the night great troops of hungry wolves came out and fed on the dead."

"That is war," said the Corporal, nodding his head phlegmatically, for he was well used to such little incidents.

"At last, with many thousands more, I found my way into the great City, and there I remained throughout the siege. Those were days of horror! While the defenders were busy fighting, the outcasts of the earth came out of their dark dens and filled the streets, shrieking for bread; they were as thick and loathsome as vermin crawling on a corpse; and when they were denied, murder was often done. Ah, God! they were mad! I have seen a mother, maniacal with starvation, dash out her babe's brains on the pavement of the street! Well, it was soon over, and I saw the great allied armies march in. Our people cheered and embraced them as they entered—many fell upon their knees and blessed them—and some strewed flowers."

"Canaille!" hissed the Corporal between his teeth, which he ground together viciously.

"Poor wretches, they knew no better, and if they were wrong, God will not blame them. But all this is not what I wished to tell you; it is something which will interest you more. I saw the Emperor—at Fontainebleau."

"The Emperor!" repeated Derval in a low voice, not lifting his eyes. His face was very pale, and during the description of the siege he had with difficulty suppressed his agitation. For all this sorrow and desolation meant only one thing to him—his Idol was overthrown. The entry of the Allies into Paris, and their welcome by the excited populace, was only a final proof of human perfidy—of national treachery to the greatest and noblest of beings. All had fallen away from the "Little Corporal;" all but those who, like Derval, were impotent to help him. Yet the sun still shone. Yet the heavens were still blue, the earth still green! And there—ah, God of Battles!—they were upraising the White Lily, the abominable *Fleur de lys!*

By this time Marcelle, too, was seated on the sward close to her uncle's feet, and her eyes were raised half eagerly, half imploringly, to Master Arfoll's face. Very beautiful indeed she looked that day, though paler and somewhat thinner than on the day, about a year before, when she had first heard Rohan Gwenfern's confession of love. She, too, was eager to hear what an eye−witness had to say of him whom she still passionately adored.

"It was a memorable day," said Master Arfoll; "the day of his adieu to the Old Guard."

He paused a moment, gazing sadly and thoughtfully out seaward, while the Corporal's heart began to beat violently as at the roll−call of drums. The very name of the Imperial Guard touched the fountain of tears deep hidden in his breast. His bronzed cheek flushed, his lips trembled. Quietly, almost unconsciously, Marcelle slipped her hand into his, and he held it softly as he listened on.

"I will tell you the truth, my Corporal. When I saw the Guard called out, I was grieved, for they were a sorry show; many were quite ragged, and others were sick and ill. They were drawn up in a line close to the Palace, and they waited a long time before he appeared. At last he came, on horseback, with the brave Macdonald by his side, and other generals following; and at his appearance there was so great a shout it seemed bringing down the skies. He came up slowly, and dismounted; then he held up his hand; and there was dead silence. You could have heard a pin drop. He wore his old overcoat and cocked hat; I should have known him anywhere, from the pictures."

"How did he look?" asked the Corporal. "Ill? Pale?—but there, he was always that!"

"I was very close, and I could see his face; it was quite yellow, and the cheeks hung heavily, and the eyes were leaden−coloured and sad. But when he approached the ranks he smiled, and you would have thought his face made of sunshine! I never saw such a smile before—it was godlike! I say this, though he was never god of mine. Then he began to speak, and his voice was broken, and the tears rolled down his cheeks."

"And he said?—he said?" gasped the Corporal, his voice choked with emotion.

"What he said you have perhaps read in the journals, but words cannot convey the look, the tone. He said that France had chosen another ruler, and that he was content, since his only prayer was for France; that some day perhaps, he would write down the story of his battles for the world to read. Then he embraced Macdonald, and called aloud for the Imperial Eagle; and when the standard was brought he kissed it a hundred times. . . Corporal, my heart was changed at that moment, and I felt that I could have died to serve him. He is a great man! . . . A wail rose from the throats of the Guard, and every face was drowned in tears; old men wept like little children; many cast themselves upon their knees imploring him not to forsake them. The ranks broke like waves of the sea. Marshal Macdonald hid his face in his hands and almost sobbed aloud, and several generals drew their swords and shouted like men possessed, *Vive l'Empereur!* This lasted only for a little; then it was all over. He mounted his horse, and rode slowly and silently away."

Master Arfoll added in a solemn voice—

"That night he left his palace, never to return."

Silence ensued; then suddenly Marcelle, who had been sitting spell−bound listening, uttered a wild cry, with her eyes fixed in terror on her uncle. As she did so, the Corporal, without a word or a sign, dropped his chin upon his breast, and fell forward upon his face.

"He is dead! he is dead!" cried Marcelle, as Master Arfoll raised the insensible form in his arms. And indeed the hue of death was on the Corporal's cheeks, and his features were drawn and fixed as if after the last agony. Casting herself on her knees, and chafing his hand in hers. Marcelle called upon him passionately and in despair. Many minutes elapsed, however, before there came any change. At last, he stirred, moaned feebly, and opened his eyes. When he did so his look was vacant, and he seemed like one who talks in sleep.

"It is an epilepsy," said Master Arfoll gently; "we must try to get him home."

"Who's there?" murmured the old man, speaking articulately for the first time. "Is it thou, Jacques?" Then he muttered as if to himself, "It is the Emperor's orders—tomorrow we march."

Gradually, however, recognition came back, and he attempted in vain to struggle up to his feet. Looking round him wildly, he saw Marcelle's face full of tender solicitude.

"Is it thou, Marcelle?" he asked. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong," she answered, "but you have not been well. Ah God, but you are better now. Master Arfoll, help him to rise."

With some difficulty the Corporal was assisted to his feet; even then he would have staggered and fallen but for Master Arfoll's help. Dazed and confused, he was led slowly down the hill towards his own house, which was fortunately not far away. As he went, the sound of firing and cheering again rose on his ear. He drew himself up suddenly and listened.

"What's that?" he said sharply.

"It is nothing," answered Arfoll.

"It is the enemy beginning the attack," said the Corporal in a low voice. "Hark again!"

"Uncle! uncle!" cried Marcelle.

"His thoughts are far away," observed Master Arfoll, "and perhaps it is better so,"

They walked on without interruption till they reached the cottage; entering which, they placed the Corporal in the great wooden arm−chair, where he sat like one in a dream. While the widow brought vinegar to wet his hands and forehead, Marcelle turned eagerly to Arfoll, and sought his advice as to the course next to be taken.

"If something is not done soon, he will surely die."

"There is but one way," said the schoolmaster; "he must be bled at once."

Ten minutes later Plouët, the village barber, who added to his other avocations that of village surgeon and leech, came briskly up the street with lance and basin, and having procured clean linen from the widow, proceeded dexterously to open a vein. Plouët, a little weazel−like man of fifty, was an old crony of the Corporal, and attended to the case *con amore.*

"I have said always," he explained, as the blood was flowing gently into his basin, "that the Corporal was too full−blooded; besides, he is a man of passion, look you, and passion is dangerous, for it mounts to the brain. But see, he stirs already." . . And, indeed, before an ounce of the vital stream had been taken away, the Corporal drew a great breath, and looked around him with quite a different expression, recognising everybody and understanding the situation. With the assistance of Plouët, he was got to bed; and when there he soon sank into a heavy slumber.

"Let him not be disturbed," said the phlebotomist, as he washed his hands. "The sounder he sleeps the better, and I will look round and see him in the morning."

"His heart is broken!" cried Marcelle, weeping on her mother's bosom. "He will die!"

"He thinks too much of the Emperor," said Gildas, "but the Emperor would not fret for *him*, let me tell you. Emperor or King, it is one to me; but I knew it was all up when he lost Marshal Ney."

They were alone in the kitchen, talking in whispers. Night had come, and beyond the village were burning large bonfires, the signals for general rejoicing. They had no lamp, for the Corporal lay in the *lit clos* in the corner, and they were afraid of dazzling his eyes and disturbing his rest. Ever and anon they heard the sound of footsteps hastening up or down the street, sometimes accompanied with shouting and singing; and it was clear that the village was full of excitement.

"They are keeping it up," said Gildas; and, after fidgeting uneasily for some time, he took his hat and sauntered forth. He knew one or two choice spirits who might be disposed to be convivial, and he had no objection to join them.

An hour passed on. The sounds continued, but still the Corporal slept peacefully. At last Marcelle rose with a weary sigh.

"I cannot rest," she said. "You will not want me, mother, and I will go and see what they are doing."

So saying, after one last loving look at her uncle, to see that he was quite at rest, she drew her cloak round her, and softly opening the door, slipped out into the night.

Chapter 50. THE HERO OF THE HOUR

The Chapel was illuminated; all along the hillsides bonfires were burning, and at the mastheads of many of the fishing boats in the bay swung coloured lamps. The *cabaret* was crammed full of those thirsty souls who find in any public event, glad or sad, an excuse for moistening their throats and muddling their brains, The white flag still waved on the Chapel, and the crimson rays issuing from the windows lit up its golden *fleur de lys*.

The street was quite deserted as Marcelle stepped forth. The night wind blew coldly, and a fresh scent swept in from the sea. For some minutes she stood outside the door, gazing out towards the dark ocean; then, with a soft sigh, she walked up the street. Her heart was very heavy that night, for all things seemed against her. The great good Emperor had fallen from his throne, and fickle men, forgetful of all his greatness, were already proclaiming a new King; while here at Kromlaix, on her own hearth, the shadow of doom had also fallen, and her uncle had been stricken down. God seemed against her and her house! It was like the Day of Judgment; only the wicked were not being judged, and the good were being punished instead of the bad.

Curiosity drew her towards the Chapel, in the neighbourhood of which there seemed most noise and bustle. As she approached she found straggling groups of men and women upon the road, but it was too dark for any one to recognise her. Most were talking and laughing merrily, and from time to time she heard cries of *"Vive le Roi!"* Each cry went through her heart like the stab of a knife. She had never felt so deserted and forlorn. Ever since she could remember well, the Emperor had been as the sun in heaven, gradually arising higher and higher until he reached the Imperial zenith; and though his glory had been far away, some of it had always reached her uncle's house, with a sort of reflected splendour which grew with years. Ever since she could remember, her uncle had been an authority in the place, honoured as well as feared; though a poor man, he had seemed "clothed on" with a glory surpassing riches. And now all was changed. The sun had set in blood, and night had come indeed; and the old veteran, forlornly clinging to an old faith, was ignominiously and miserably cast down.

If she had only been born a man−child, as Uncle Ewen often said she should have been! If, as it was, she could only do something, however little, to help the good Emperor and to heal her uncle's heart! Ah, God! that she had a man's hand to tear that white abomination down!

She could dimly see the flag lying against the dark blue heaven, and her heart heaved with a fierce passion inherited from her father.

Creeping along from group to group she came to the graveyard of the Chapel, and to her astonishment found it filled with an excited crowd. Great streams of light flowed from the Chapel windows, but many men held torches which threw a lurid glare on the upturned faces. Something particular was taking place, and some one was addressing the people in a loud voice. As she stood at the gate Marcelle beheld, standing on a high green mound in the centre of the crowd, a group of men, chief of whom was the Sieur Marmont.

Marmont was the speaker, and his face flashed wildly in the light of the torches. Some gentlemen surrounding him, who looked like officers, had drawn their swords, and were waving them in the air, applauding his words; and among them were several Priests.

In the eyes of Marcelle, this Marmont seemed a wretch unfit to live; for she remembered his terrible rencontre with her uncle, and his wicked seditious words. As for the Priests, surely God had cast them out, and filled them with a devilish ingratitude, otherwise they would remember how good the Emperor had been to them, and how he had called them back to France, like the holy man he was, when the atheists would have banished them for ever.

Entering the graveyard, and advancing nearer, she saw standing near to Marmont, but on the lower ground, so that his head only reached to the other's outstretched hands, the figure of a man. His back was turned to Marcelle, and he was looking up at the speaker.

"Listen, then!" she heard Marmont saying in a ringing voice. "Listen, all you who fear God and love the King; and if there be one among you who blames the man, let him stand forward and give me the lie. I say the man was justified. He refused to draw sword for the Usurper: for this alone he was hunted down, even as the wolves of the woods are hunted; and if in the despair of his heart he shed blood, I say he was again justified. Look at the man! God above, who sees all things, could tell you what he has suffered, since God only has preserved him as a testimony and a sign against the dynasty which has fallen for ever. Look at him—his famished cheeks, his wasted

form, his eyes still wild with hunger and despair. You tell me he has slain a man; I tell you the Emperor who made him what he is has slain thousands upon thousands. You tell me he is a deserter and a revolter; I tell you that he is a hero and a martyr." He added with an eager cry, "Embrace him, my brothers!"

The figure so referred to did not stir; and could Marcelle have seen the expression of his face, she would have noticed only a strange and vacant indifference. But suddenly, with a common impulse, the crowd began to cheer, hysterical women began to sob, and the man was surrounded by a surging mass of living beings, all stretching out arms to reach him. As if to avoid their touch, he stepped up on the mound beside Marmont, and turned his face towards Marcelle.

"Rohan Gwenfern! Rohan Gwenfern!" they cried.

It was Rohan, little less wretched and ragged than when Marcelle last beheld him on the night of the flood. He gazed out on the crowd like one in a dream; and when the Sieur Marmont and the Priests flocked around him and grasped his hands, he did not seem to respond to their enthusiasm. Perhaps he estimated that enthusiasm at its worth, and knew that Marmont and his friends were only too glad to avail themselves of any circumstance which would cast discredit on the fallen Empire. Perhaps he knew also that the crowd was merely yielding to an excited impulse, and would have been as ready to tear him to pieces if Marmont's speech had pointed in that direction.

He did not utter a word, but, after gazing down in silence, he descended the mound, and made his way straight to the spot where Marcelle stood. The crowd parted to make way for him, but continued to cheer and call his name. Almost immediately he was face to face with Marcelle, and his eyes were fixed on hers.

"Come, Marcelle!" he said quietly, with no other word of greeting, and exhibiting no surprise at her presence. Stretching out his hand he took hers.

Seeing this, and recognising Marcelle, several began to groan.

"It is the Corporal's niece! *A bas le Caporal!"*

"Silence!" cried the voice of the Sieur Marmont. "Let the man depart in peace."

Trembling and stupefied Marcelle suffered herself to be led out of the churchyard. The apparition of Rohan, under those circumstances, had been painful beyond measure; for, although her first impulse had been one of joy at seeing him alive and strong, she had almost immediately shrunk shuddering away. In the lurid light of that scene she beheld, not the playmate of her childhood and the lover of her youth, but the murderer of Pipriac and the enemy of the Emperor. Honoured by those who hated her idol, welcomed and applauded by those who had broken her uncle's heart, he could not have come back under circumstances less auspicious and sympathetic. Despite all that he had suffered, her heart hardened against him. She almost forgot for the moment that she had loved him, and that she owed him her life, in the horror of seeing him again in the ranks of the abominable.

Nevertheless, in a sort of stupor, she walked on by his side down the dark road, until they were quite alone. He did not say a word, and the silence at last became so painful to her that she trembled through and through. Then she drew away her hand, and he did not attempt to detain it. It was not often that Marcelle felt hysterical—she was woven of too soldier−like a stuff, but she certainly did so on the present occasion. Her feelings had been strung up so terribly before the meeting, that they threatened now to overcome her.

It was a dim starlight night, and she could just see the glimmer of her companion's face. At last, when the silence had become unbearable, he broke it suddenly with a laugh, so wild and unearthly that it made her frightened heart leap within her; a laugh with no joy in it, but full of an unnatural excitement. Then, turning his eyes upon her, and putting his hand upon her arm, he said in a hoarse voice—

"Well, it is all over, and I have come home. But where is *your* welcome, Marcelle?"

His voice sounded so strangely that she looked at him in terror; then, clinging to his arm and yielding to the tremor of her heart, she cried wildly—

"Oh, Rohan, Rohan, do not think I am not glad! We scarcely thought to see you alive again, and I have prayed for you every night as if your soul was with God, and I have sat with your mother and talked about you when all the others thought I was asleep. But all is changed, and the Emperor is taken prisoner, and Uncle Ewen's heart is broken, and we are all miserable, miserable, and all this night I have prayed to die, to die!"

Entirely losing her self−command, she hid her face upon his arm and sobbed aloud. Strange to say, Rohan showed no agitation whatever, but watched her quietly till the storm of her pain was over, when he said in the same peculiar tones—

"Why do you weep, Marcelle? Because the Emperor is hunted down?"

She did not answer, but sobbed on. With the sharp fierce laugh that had startled her before, Rohan continued—

"When I found that Christ would not help me, I went to Notre Dame de la Haine, and for a long time I thought she was deaf too. But I prayed, and my prayers have come to pass—she heard me!—within a year, within a year!"

Recalled to herself either by the violence of his tones or the strangeness of his words, Marcelle drew back and looked aghast in the speaker's face, which seemed wild and excited in the dim light.

"Almighty God!" she murmured, "what are you saying, Rohan?"

Rohan continued in a lower voice, as if talking to himself—

"I did not expect it so soon, but I knew it must come at last; old Pipriac told me that in a dream. It has been a long chase, but at last we have hunted him down, and now Our Lady of Hate will gnaw his heart, and I . . I shall go home and rest, for I am tired."

"Rohan!"

"Yes, Marcelle."

"Why do you talk like that? Why are you so strange?"

He bent down his head and looked at her quietly.

"Am I strange?" he said.

"Yes; and I am afraid of you when you wander so."

Rohan drew his hand across his forehead, and knitted his

"I believe you are right, Marcelle," he said, slowly, and with a very different manner. "Sometimes I think that I am not in my right mind. I have had great troubles to bear, and I have had so long to wait that no wonder I am wearied out. Do not be angry with me; I shall be well soon."

Something in his tone awoke the tears within her again, but she conquered herself, and took his hand. By this time they had reached the main street of the village and were not far from her uncle's door. Rohan, however, seemed almost unconscious where he was, so wearily was he following his own thoughts.

"There is sickness in the house, or I would ask you in. Oh, Rohan, Uncle Ewen is very ill, and I fear that he will die. He is heart−broken because the Emperor is cast down."

Rohan echoed, in a hollow voice—

"Because the Emperor is cast down?"

"I know you do not love the Emperor, because you think he has made you suffer; but you are wrong—he could not know everything, and he would pity you if he really knew. Rohan, once more, do not think I am not glad! You are safe now."

"Yes; they say so," answered Rohan.

"Your mother will be full of joy—it is a happy night for *her*. Good−bye, good−bye!"

She stretched out both her hands and he took them in his; then he quietly drew her to his breast, and kissed her gently on the brow.

"You are prettier than ever, Marcelle!"

He could feel the heaving of her gentle bosom, the trembling of her warm form; he drew her closer, and she looked up into his face.

"Rohan, do you ever pray?"

He smiled strangely.

"Sometimes. Why do you ask?"

Her voice trembled as she replied, softly releasing herself from his embrace—

"Pray for Uncle Ewen, that the good God may make him well!"

Then they parted, Marcelle entering the cottage, and Rohan moving slowly away in the direction of his own home.

Chapter 51. BREATHING−SPACE

Rohan Gwenfern was right—he was quite safe at last, and had no cause for fear; on the contrary, his wild story, spreading over the province, raised him up many friends and sympathisers. Even those who had been bitterest against him dared not say a word. The Mayor of St Gurlott, who had been among the fiercest of his persecutors, openly proclaimed that he was a martyr, and that something ought to be done for him by his countrymen: a change of opinion which becomes intelligible when we observe that the Mayor, like so many others of his chameleonic species, had changed from tricoloured to dazzling white directly Bonaparte's cause became utterly hopeless. As for Pipriac's death, it was simply “justifiable homicide;” the savage old “burn−powder” had only met with his deserts.

So Rohan sat again by his own hearth, a free man, and his mother's eyes brightened with joy because God had restored to her the child of her womb. Her happiness, however, was destined to be of brief duration. She soon perceived that Rohan was fearfully and wonderfully changed. His frame was bent and weakened, his face had lost its old look of brightness and health, his eyes were dim, and, alas! his hair had in parts grown quite grey. But this was not all. The physical change was nothing compared to the moral and mental transformation. It was quite obvious that his intellect was to a certain degree affected by what he had undergone. He was subject to strange trances, when reason absolutely fled and his speech became positively maniacal; and on coming out of these—they were fortunately very brief, often merely momentary—he was like a man who emerges from the shadow of the grave. At night his sleep was troubled with frightful dreams, and his soul was constantly travelling back to the time of the siege in the Cave and of Pipriac's death. No smile lit his once happy face. He drooped and sickened, and would sit whole days looking into the fire.

During the long winter he had remained in hiding among the lonely huts of St. Lok, the inhabitants of which were systematic wreckers, but he was not betrayed. His brain, however, was kept in a constant state of tension, as he was liable to capture at any moment, and he had undergone great privations. But the circumstance which had left most mark upon him was Pipriac's death; the rest he might have forgotten, but this he could not shake away;—for he was conscience−stricken. The world might justify him, but he could not justify himself. To have blood upon his hands was terrible, and the blood of his father's friend! Better to have died!

The whole burthen of events was too much for his delicate organisation. He was overshadowed with darkness as of a dead and a living world, and the peace of his life was poisoned for ever. Mental horror and physical pain combined had stupefied him. He seemed still paralysed with the terror and the despair of those ghastly nights in the Cave.

He saw too, but dimly as in a dream, that a moral shadow had arisen between his soul and that of Marcelle. His salvation had been her sorrow. His hope was her despair. What had lifted him up again into the light of day had stricken down her Uncle as into the darkness of the grave. She was still the same to him when they met—gentle, honest, truthful, and kind; but her looks were without passion, her manners shrinking and subdued. She seemed of another religion, of a sadder, intenser faith. He had still a portion of her heart, but the shadow of Bonaparte had estranged her soul.

During these days, indeed, Marcelle seemed wholly wrapped up in her uncle. Uncle Ewen came out of his illness bravely, only keeping his bed a few days, for he could not bear to lie there like a useless log; but ever after that he was only the ghost of his old self—a shattered man, liable to frequent attacks of the same complaint, sometimes violent, but generally having merely the character of what French physicians term the *petit mal*. Excitement of any kind now shook him to pieces, and the household carefully endeavoured to conceal from him any news which was likely to cause agitation. They could not, however, keep him from examining the journals—from following in his mind's eye the journey of Bonaparte from France and his arrival on the island of Elba, the pageant of the King's entry into the capital of France, the changes which were everywhere announcing the arrival of the old *régime*. Indeed, the Corporal had only to stand at his own door looking forth, in order to see that the spirit of things was marvellously transformed. The Chapel bells were ever ringing, religious processions were ever passing, solemn ceremonies were ever being performed; for the King was a holy King, and his family were a holy family, and Heaven could not be sufficiently propitiated for having overthrown the Usurper.

“The locusts are overrunning the land!” said Master Arfoll; and the Corporal—who was beginning to think Master Arfoll a good fellow—nodded approval of the metaphor.

By the “locusts,” Master Arfoll meant the priests. Where during the Emperor's time the eye had fallen upon a military coat, it now fell upon a *soutane.* All the swarms who had left France with the *emigrés* came buzzing back, and it became a question how to fill their mouths. The air rang with the names of a thousand Saints—there was one for every day in the week, and several for Sunday. “Te Deums" were said from morning to night. Brittany recovered its old sacred glory—chapels were repaired, forgotten shrines remembered and redecorated, Calvaries rebuilt, graven images of the Virgin and the Saints erected at every corner. Every old religious ceremonial that had fallen into disuse since the Revolution came once more into observance. It was astonishing how rapidly the dead ideas and customs sprang up again: like flowers—or fungi—rising up in a night.

All these things brought no joy to the Corporal's household. The widow, who was nothing if not religious, of course took part in most of the ceremonials, but her conduct had no political meaning. She had adored God and the Saints under Napoleon, and she adored them under King Louis. She had a new source of uneasiness in the continued absence of her son Hoël, who had made few signs for several months, and who ought long ago to have returned home.

Since the changes that had taken place Marcelle disliked the Chapel where Father Rolland officiated, and went thither as seldom as possible. She could not forgive the little *curé* for being friendly with the Sieur Marmont and the other Royalists; for, although she knew he had no strong opinions of his own, she felt that he was certainly no friend to the Emperor. Instead of hearing public mass, she got into the habit of paying quiet visits to Notre Dame de la Garde, the little lonely chapel on the summit of the cliffs. Here she could pray in peace, for the place was seldom visited by any other living creature.

Summer came, and the White Lily was golden indeed, shaking its glory over France, and filling all hearts with the hope of prosperity and peace. The great sea−wall of Brittany was white with happy birds, and in the green slopes above the grass grew and the furze shone with yellow stars; while inland, across the valleys, the wheat waved, and among the wheat burnt the poppies like “clear bright bubbles of blood;" and on the great marshes the salt crystals lay and sparkled in the sun, and the rivers sank low among the reeds, dwindling often to silvern threads. It was a glorious summer, and the world was turned into a garden. People forgot all their troubles in the rapture of living and the certainty of a good harvest; only the soldiers grumbled, for their trade seemed done.

One bright day Marcelle, as she issued from the little chapel, saw Rohan standing close by as if waiting for her to appear. She approached him with her old bright smile, and lifted up her face for his salute. He looked very pale and sad, but his face was quite calm and his manner gentle in the extreme.

After a few words of greeting, they walked along side by side close to the edge of the cliffs—following the very path which they trod together little more than a year before. Far below them they saw the waters crawling, with a cream−white edge of foam; and the colours of the bottom, golden with sand, or red with rock and weed, or black with mud, were clearly visible through the transparent shallows of the crystal sea. At last Marcelle paused, for they were walking away from the village.

“I must go home,” she said; “I promised not to stay.”

Rohan turned too, and they walked slowly back towards the chapel. No word of love was spoken between them, but presently Rohan said, pointing out seaward—

“I often wonder what he is doing and thinking—now.”

She looked at him in surprise.

“*He?* of whom do you speak?”

“Of the Emperor. They have put him on one side, and he is far away from all help or hope. They call him King of Elba, but that is only in jest, I suppose, for all his power is gone for ever.”

As Rohan spoke, his eyes were fixed as if in a trance, and his face grew strangely agitated. Marcelle, alarmed, walked on more rapidly, while he continued—

“After all, Master Arfoll was wrong when he said that the Emperor was only flesh and blood like ourselves. Sometimes I have thought he is a spirit, a shadow like the shadow of God; for it is hard to think of a man bearing all that upon his soul! Thousands upon thousands of dead gathering round his pillow every night, and crying out his name. No man's heart could bear it without breaking.”

Marcelle did not quite catch the drift of the words, but she knew that they referred to him she deemed

immaculate, and her heart heaved in anger; but when she looked into her companion's face, which was blanched and worn as if the light of reason had flown, her thoughts were all pity and pain. So she said gently, to change the subject—

"Uncle Ewen often asks for you—he thinks it unkind that you do not come to the house."

Without replying, Rohan gave that strange low laugh which she had first noticed and feared on the night when they had met in the churchyard. As she heard it, she remembered with a thrill a cruel whisper that was already going about the village, to the effect that Rohan Gwenfern was no longer in his right senses, and that at certain times he was dangerously violent

Passing the Chapel, and descending the grassy slopes, they soon reached the village. To Marcelle's astonishment Rohan remained with her until they were close to her uncle's cottage, and when she paused and put out her hand to say good−bye, he quietly said—"I shall go in with you to see uncle Ewen."

She started, for she had not exactly expected this, and when she had introduced her uncle's name, it was merely with a view to distract Rohan's wandering attention. In her secret heart she had a dread of a meeting between the two men, lest by a stray word, a passing opinion, they might come again into open opposition. Thus pressed, however, she could hardly make an objection; so she merely said, with a pleading look—

"Promise me, first, not to speak of the Emperor."

Rohan, who now seemed quite calm and collected, promised without hesitation, and in another minute they crossed the threshold of the cottage. They found the Corporal sitting in his arm−chair alone by the fireside, busily reading, with the aid of his spectacles, an old newspaper.

Marcelle tripped first into the chamber, and, leaning over her uncle's chair, said, smiling—

"I have brought you a visitor, Uncle Ewen! See!" The Corporal looked and saw Rohan standing before him, so worn, so grey, so strange and old, that he scarcely knew him. He rubbed his eyes, then blinked them in amaze. When recognition came he exclaimed, rising from his chair—

"Is it thou, *mon garz!* Soul of a crow! how thou art changed! I did not know thee!"

"Yes, Uncle Ewen, it is I!" said Rohan calmly; and the two men shook hands, with considerable emotion on the part of the Corporal.

"I will tell thee this, Marcelle—he is brave—he has the heart of a lion, but there is something wrong *here!"*

The Corporal as he spoke tapped his forehead significantly. It was some weeks after that little reconciliation, and Rohan had since been a frequent visitor to his uncle's house. Strange to say, he and his uncle got on singularly well together, and even when the name of Bonaparte came up they had no disputes. The Corporal was not so dogmatic as he used to be, while Rohan on his part was very reticent; so they promised to be excellent friends.

The Corporal proceeded:

"We might have guessed it when he first refused to take up arms. Master Arfoll is cracked, look you, and Rohan has caught it of him—it is as bad as the fever. Well, I freely forgive him all, for he is not at present in his right mind."

Of course, the Corporal, an undoubted monomaniac himself, had the most implicit belief possible in his own personal sanity.

Chapter 52. RESURGAM!

So the summer passed, and once again the sun moved on to the equinox. France was at rest, lulled into a drowsy doze by the sounds of hymns and prayers. Sceptics shook their heads; revolutionists burrowed like moles, and threw up little mounds of conspiracy; the Imperial Guard frowned with “red brows of storm;” but the new dynasty lay comfortably on its padded pillow, amid a little rosy cloud of incense, counting its beads. As for the prisoned Lion, he made no sign. Restlessly and fretfully he was pacing up and down his narrow cage. One heard from time to time of his doings—his mimicry in miniature of his old glory, his old ambition; but the Kings of Europe only nodded merrily at one another—he was safely caught, and there, on his island, might roar himself hoarse.

As the months rolled on, Corporal Derval resigned himself to the situation, and began to speak of the Emperor with a solemn sorrow, as of some dead Saint who could never rise again. Falling into this humour, instead of crossing it, Rohan Gwenfern greatly rose in the estimation of the Corporal. “He is a brave man,” Uncle Ewen would say, “and the more brave because he knows how to respect a losing cause! I did him wrong!”

And gradually, under the softening influences which now surrounded him, Rohan brightened into something dimly resembling his old self. His cheeks were still sunken, his hair still sown with grey, but his frame recovered much of its former vigour. He began again to wander about the crags and upon the shore, and in these rambles Marcelle often accompanied him—as when they were younger and happier. The Corporal approved, saying to the widow: “He saved her life, and it is his, little woman. Why should they not wed?” And Mother Derval, whose heart was burthened with the new loss of her son Hoël, who never returned from the war, saw no reason to dissent. If the truth were told, the poor woman was going more and more over to the enemy. In her secret heart she believed not only in the Pope, and the Saints, and the Bishops, but in the King. Bonaparte had taken her children, and the priest told her he was a Monster; so she prayed God that he would never rule France more.

Only Marcelle Derval, perhaps, besides the mother who bore him, knew how it really stood with Rohan Gwenfern. The shock of those terrible days had struck at the very roots of his life, and the bloom of his spiritual nature was taken off for ever. Time might heal him more and more, but the process would be very sad and slow. His nervous system was deeply shaken, and his reason still trembled and tottered at times.

Although he showed by countless signs that he loved his cousin tenderly and deeply, his affection for her seldom now rose into actual passion, such as had carried him away when he made his first half−involuntary confession. There was something almost brotherly sometimes in his manner and in his tone. Yet once or twice he caught her to his breast and wildly kissed her, in a rush of feeling that changed him for the moment into a happy man.

“She will never marry Gwenfern,” said gossips at the Fountain; “for he is mad.”

They little knew the nature of Marcelle. The very shadow which lay at times upon Rohan's mind made her more eager to fulfil her plight. Moreover, she had strong passions, though these had been lulled to sleep by solemn thoughts and fears; and the strongest passion in her soul was her love for her cousin.

Mikel Grallon now seldom crossed her path; he knew better than to provoke the wrath of the man he had persecuted. A zealous adherent of the new *régime*, he carefully avoided the Corporal's house, and cast his eyes elsewhere in search of a fitting helpmate.

When winter came in good earnest there was many a quiet gathering by the Corporal's fireside. Uncle Ewen, whom ill−health confined a good deal within doors, presided, and now and then told his memorable story of Cismone, while Gildas was eloquent about the exploits of Marshal Ney. Rohan, who was constantly present, coldly held his tongue when the name of Bonaparte came up, but the widow would quietly cross herself in the corner. After all, Uncle Ewen seemed only talking of a dead man: of one whose very existence had faded into a dream; who was calendared, for the Corporal and for Marcelle, among the other departed Saints.

One day, when the snow was on the ground, and all was peaceful and white and still, Rohan said to Marcelle:

“Do you remember what you told me, long ago, that morning when I carried you out of the Cathedral of St. Gildas? That you loved me, and that you would marry me.”

“I remember.”

“And will you keep your word?”

She hesitated for a moment; then looking at him quietly with her grey truthful eyes, she answered—

“Yes, Rohan—if Uncle Ewen is willing.”

They were standing down by the Fountain, looking at the sea. As Marcelle replied, her heart was touched with pity more than love; for her lover's face wore a sad far−away look full of strange suggestions of past suffering. After a space he said again—

“I am changed, Marcelle, and I think I shall never be quite myself. Think again! There are many others who would love you well.”

She put her hand gently in his.

“But I love you, Rohan,” she replied.

That very day they told the Corporal, and he cheerfully gave them his blessing. Father Rolland was spoken to by the widow, and readily undertook to procure the assent of the Bishop, which was necessary to complete a marriage between cousins. When the affair was bruited about the village many shook their heads—Mikel Grallon particularly. “The Bishop should interfere,” said honest Mikel; “for, look you, the man is dangerous.”

The Bishop, however made no obstacle, and it was arranged that the marriage should take place in the spring.

Early in March, 1815, Rohan Gwenfern entered the cottage and found Marcelle alone in the kitchen. She was dressed in a white gown, and was busy at some household work. As he entered, she walked up to him confidently and held up her lips to receive his kiss.

“Spring is come indeed,” he said, looking quite radiant “Look, Marcelle, I have brought this for a sign.”

In Brittany they measure the seasons by flowers and birds and other natural signs, as much as by Saints' days and holidays; and it had been arranged that these two should be married in spring, when “the violet came.” Marcelle blushed deep crimson, but took the flower gently and put it in her breast. Then, as Rohan folded his arms around her, she leant her head upon his shoulder, and looked up, radiant, into his face.

Suddenly, as they stood there full of happiness, the door was dashed open, and Uncle Ewen tottered in, reeling like a drunken man. He held a newspaper in his hand and his face was white as death.

“Marcelle! Rohan!” he gasped. “Here is news?”

“What is the matter?” cried Marcelle, releasing herself from Rohan's arms.

Uncle Ewen waved the newspaper ecstatically round his head.

“A bas les Bourbons!” he cried, with something of his old vigour. “On the 1st of March the Emperor landed at Cannes, and he is now marching on Paris. VIVE L'EMPEREUR!”

As the Corporal spoke the words, Rohan threw his arms up into the air, and shrieked like a man shot through the heart!

Chapter 53. “IBI OMNIS EFFUSIS LABOR!”

The news of the Emperor's escape was, as all the world knows, only too true. After months of cunning preparation, during which he had affected all the virtues of a Cincinnatus harmlessly contemplating his own acres, Bonaparte had at last slipped out of his cage (the captors had taken care to leave the door very wide open), and was again on French soil at the head of a thousand men. To use the expressive language of the French pulpit, “The Devil had again broken loose.” White−stoled priests might thunder from a thousand shrines, but what did Satanus care?

On Rohan Gwenfern the news came like a thunderbolt, and literally smote him down. As a man scorched by lightning, but still breathing, gazes panting at the black wrack whence the fiery levin has fallen, he lay in horror looking upward. To him this resurrection of the Execrable meant outlawry, misery, despair, and death. What was God doing that He suffered such a thing to be? With the passing away of the Imperial pest, quiet and rest had come to France, bringing a space of holy calm, when men might breathe in peace; and to Rohan, among others, the calm had looked as if it might last for ever. Slowly and quietly the man's tortured mind had composed itself, until the dark marks of suffering were obscured if not obliterated; every happy day seemed furthering the cure of that spiritual disease to which the man was a martyr; and at last he had had courage enough to reach out his hands to touch once more the sacramental cup of love. At that very moment, when God seemed to be making atonement to him for his long and weary pains, Heaven was obscured again, and the cruel bolt struck him down.

While Europe was shaken as by earthquake, while Thrones tottered again, and Kings looked aghast at one another, Rohan trembled like a dead leaf ready to fall. He was instantly transformed; before the sun could set again upon his horror, he seemed to have grown very old.

Our Lady of Hate had answered his prayer indeed, but in how mocking a measure. She had struck the Avatar down, only to uplift him again to his old seat. “Within a year!” It seemed as if she had given the world a brief glimpse of rest, only that its torture might be more terrible when the clouds closed again.

At first, indeed, there was little hope. The priests thundered and prayed, the Royalists swaggered and shrugged their shoulders, as much as to say, “This little business will soon be settled!” But every bulletin brought fresh confirmation of the true state of affairs. Bonaparte had not only risen again, but the waves of the old Storm were rising with him.

On one figure Rohan gazed with horror as great as filled him when he thought of the Emperor. This was the figure of Corporal Derval. It seemed as if the news of the uprising had filled the Corporal with new life. Colossus−like, he again bestrode his own hearth; assumed the Imperial pose; cocked his hat jauntily; looked the world in the face. His cheeks were alike sunken and yellow, his eyes dim, but this only made more prominent the fiery and natural redness of nose and brows. He was weak upon his legs, but his right arm performed the old sweep when he took snuff, *à l'Empereur*. No looking down *now,* as he hied down to little Plouët's to read the journals. His Master had arisen, and he himself had arisen. Oh, to march at the double, and to join the little Corporal in the open field!

As the smallest village pond becomes during the storms and rains of equinox, a miniature of the Ocean—overflows its banks, breaks into strong waves, darkens, brightens, trembles to its depth, even so did the Corporal's breast reflect in miniature the Storm which was just seen sweeping over France. A very poor affair indeed might *his* commotion seem in the eye of the great political leaders of the hour, just as *their* commotion, in their eyes oceanic, might seem a mere pond−business from the point of view of God or a philosopher. The microcosm, however, potentially includes the macrocosm; and the spirit of Bonaparte was only the spirit of Corporal Derval indefinitely magnified.

Kromlaix was Royalist still, and indeed it had been so from time immemorial. The movements of the Corporal were regarded with no sympathy and little favour. There was a general disposition to knock the old fellow on the head—a deed which would have been done, if he had not reserved his more violent ebullitions of enthusiasm for his own fireside. Here, legs astride, snuff−box in hand, he thundered at Gildas, who wanted the Emperor to win, but thought his case hopeless, owing to the fact that Marshal Ney was for the King! But when the great news came that Ney had gone over with his whole army, and had flung himself into the arms of his old master, uncle

and nephew embraced with tears, avowing that the Imperial cause was as good as won!

Coming and going like a shadow, Rohan listened for a word, a whisper, to show him that there was still a chance. But every day darkened his hopes. Wherever the feet of Bonaparte fell, armies seemed to spring up from the solid earth; and from vale to vale ran the sound of his voice, summoning up a hidden harvest of swords.

In this time of terrible epidemic the contagion spread even to Marcelle; and this was the hardest of all to bear. A new fire burnt in her eyes, a new flush dwelt upon her cheek. When the old man delivered his joyful harangues she listened eagerly to every word, and her whole nature seemed transformed. Rohan watched her in terror, dreading to meet her eyes. Had she then forgotten all the horror and suffering through which he had passed, and did she forget that this thing which caused her such joy was his own signal of doom? . . .

. . . Out there among the silent crags, Rohan Gwenfern waited and listened. He did not wholly despair yet, though day by day the woeful news had been carried to his ear. He could not rest at home, nor at the fireside where the Corporal declaimed; his only place of peace was in the heart of the earth which sheltered him before in the period of his peril. Since the tidings of the collusion between Ney and Bonaparte, he had scarcely spoken to Marcelle, but had avoided her in a weary dread. As yet no attempt had been made to lay a finger upon him, or to remind him of his old revolt against the Emperor; men indeed were as yet too busy watching the progress of the great game in which Bonaparte was again trying to outwit his adversaries. But the call might come at any moment, as he knew. So he wandered on the shore, shivering, expectant, and afraid.

One day a wild impulse seized him to revisit the scenes of his old struggle. It was calm and sunny weather, and entering the great Cathedral, he found it alive with legions of birds, who had flocked back from the south to build their nests and rear their young. He climbed up to the *Trou,* still full of the traces of his old struggle, and thence, through the dark winding passages, to the aërial chamber in the face of the crag. Gazing out through the window of the Cave, he saw again the calm Ocean crawling far beneath him, softly stained with red reefs and shallows of yellow sands; the fishing−boats were becalmed far out on the glassy mirror, and the sun was shining in the heavens, like the smile of God. He saw the gentle scene, and thought of him—of that red Shadow who was again rising on the peaceful world; and he wondered if God would suffer him still to be. As he stood a frightful thought passed through his brain, and his face was convulsed. He thought of Pipriac. and how he struck him cruelly down.

Oh, to strike that other down, to crush and kill *him* underneath the rock of his mortal hate!

Later on in the day, he crawled down the dark passages which led to the gigantic Water−cave, and ere long he was hanging over the deep green pools, which showed no traces now of that terrible flood which transformed the Cave into a boiling cauldron. All was still and peaceful, full of the pulsations of the neighbouring sea, and a great grey seal swam slowly out towards the narrow passage of exit known as “Hell's Mouth.” He passed along the narrow shelf communicating with the top of the Cave, and, leaping down upon the shingle, faced the black mouth of the Aqueduct. Here the storm had left its ravages indeed. The shingle was strewn with great fragments of earth and stone, and the rock all round was blackened and torn as by tooth and claw, with the fury of the flood.

Advancing a little distance into the passage, he soon found further progress impossible, for the passage was choked now by all sorts of *débris,* which it would take many years to wash away. Retracing his steps, he stumbled over a dark mass lying upon the slippery floor. It was the Statue of black marble which he discovered formerly in the inner chamber of the Aqueduct.

Washed from its pedestal by the unexampled fury of the waves, and driven like a straw downward by the force of the torrents, it had at last paused here, wedged in between the narrow walls. Black and silent it lay, still green and slimy with the moisture of centuries, still hideous and deformed. *Ave Cæsar Imperator!* As he fell in whose likeness thou wast fashioned, so didst thou too fall at last. Sooner or later the great waters would have thee, would tear thee from thy place, and wash thee away towards the great sea. Even so they destroy Man and all his works. Sooner or later all shall vanish like footprints on the shore of that Ocean of Eternity where wander for ever shadows that seem to live!

As Rohan bent over the cast−down image, did he think for a moment of that other Image whom men were endeavouring to uplift to its old Imperial pedestal? Did he see in the black bull−like head of the fallen Statue any far−off likeness of one who was rising out yonder in the world, crowned with horrible laurel, and shod with sandals of blood! One might have thought so; for he bent over it in fascination, dimly tracing its lineaments in the feeble green light that trembled from the Water−cave. It was shapen like a colossal human thing, and one might almost have regarded it as the corpse of what once was a man—nay, an Emperor! But, thank God, the breath of

life could never fill those marble veins, the light of power could never gleam upon that pitiless carven face!

When he came out into the open air, it was sunset, and the light dazzled and blinded him. The cold and mildew and darkness of that dead world still lay upon him, and he shivered from head to foot. Passing out by the Cathedral, and ascending the stairs of St. Triffine, he made his way slowly along the summit of the crags. The western sky was purple−red and dashed with shadows of the bluff March wind that was to blow next morrow; but now, all was still as a summer eve. A thick carpet of gold and green was spread beneath his feet, the broom was blazing golden on every side, and one early star, like a primrose, was already blossoming in the still cool pastures of Heaven. He seemed to have arisen from the tomb, and to be floating in divine air. That dead world *was*, he knew; no less surely did he know that this living world is too—

"A calm, a happy, and a holy world!"

If He who made the tiger makes the lamb, and the one strange Hand that set that star up yonder, and wrote of the human breast, "Love one another," moulded the iron hearts of a hundred Cæsars, and once more liberated Bonaparte.

Chapter 54. THE LAST CHANCE

As he passed the door of the Chapel of Notre Dame de la Garde, a figure emerged, and turned upon him a face full of horror and despair. It was his mother; gaunt, white, terror−stricken, she looked fearfully around her and clutched him by the arm. He saw her message in her face before she spoke.

“Fly, Rohan,” she cried; “they are out after thee again, and they are searching from house to house. There is terrible news. The Emperor is in Paris, and war is proclaimed.”

The world darkened—he staggered and held his hand upon his heart. He had expected this, but it nevertheless came upon him as the lightning from Heaven.

“Come into the Chapel!” he cried, suiting the action to the word.

Crossing the threshold they found the little building already full of the evening shadows. All was as it had been not long ago, when the lovers, after first plighting their happy troth, knelt before the altar. The figure of the Virgin stood at the altar, and the votive gifts still lay undisturbed at her feet; the sailors in the picture still drifted upon their raft, kneeling and fixing eyes on the luminous apparition that rose from the waters.

In a few rapid sentences, Mother Gwenfern gave further particulars of the situation:—The village was in a state of disturbance, the news of the Emperor's complete triumph not being yet accepted by the Royalists in the neighbourhood; but a file of *gendarmes* from St. Gurlott had already appeared hunting up deserters “in the name of the Emperor.” Yes, that was certain, for they had searched her own house. The death of Pipriac was remembered, and was to be avenged.

In a few brief moments was undone the gentle work of months. The same light which Marcelle saw and feared in Rohan's face that night when he returned home, the same light which she had dreaded often since, when her lover was under the influence of strong excitement, now appeared there and shone with a lurid flame. The man's brain was burning; his heart seemed bursting. He did not speak, but laughed strangely to himself—hysterically, indeed, if we may apply the term to one of the male sex; but in his laugh there was something more than hysteria, than mere nervous tension: there was the sign of an incipient madness which threatened to overthrow the reason and wreck the soul.

“Rohan! Rohan!” cried the terrified woman clinging to him, “speak! Do not look like that! They shall not take you, my Rohan!”

He looked at her without replying, and laughed again. Terrified at the expression in his face she burst into sobs and moans.

Late at night Corporal Derval sat at his own hearth and read the journals to the widow and Marcelle. He was excited with the great news that had just come from Paris—that Europe refused to treat on amicable terms with the Usurper, and that the mighty hosts of the Great Powers were again rising like great clouds on the frontier. The Allied Congress sat at Frankfort, directing, as from the centre of a web, the movements of a million men. The Emperors of Russia and Austria with the King of Prussia had again taken the field. England had given her characteristic help in the shape of thirty−six millions of *money*, to say nothing of the small contingent of eighty thousand men, under the Duke of Wellington.

“The cowards!” hissed the Corporal between his clenched teeth. “A million of men against France and the Little Corporal; but you shall see, he will make them skip. I have seen a little fellow of a drummer thrash a great grenadier, and it will be like that!”

“There will be more war?” murmured the widow questioningly. And her poor heart was beating to the tune of one sad word, her son's name, “Hoël! Hoël!”

“It is a fight for life, little woman,” said Uncle Ewen with solemnity. “The Emperor must either kill these rascals, or himself be killed. Soul of a crow! there will be no quarter! They are fortifying Paris so that the enemy may never take it again by any stratagem. In a few days the Emperor will take the field.” He added, with a smack of his lips, “It sounds like old times!”

Enter Gildas the one−armed, with his habitual military swagger. He had been quenching his thirst down at the *cabaret* (it was wonderful how thirsty a mortal he had become since his brief military experience), and his eyes were rather bloodshot.

"Has any one seen Rohan?" he said, standing before the fireplace. "They are after him out there!"

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder towards the door, which he had left open. With an uneasy glance at Marcelle, who sat pale and trembling, the Corporal replied—

"They called here, and I told them it would be all right. Rohan can redeem his credit now and for ever, and save his skin at the same time. There is but one plan, and he had better take it without delay."

Marcelle looks up eagerly.

"And what is that, Uncle Ewen?"

"Soul of a crow! it is simple. The Emperor is in need of men—all the wolves of the world are against him—−and who helps him now, in time of need, will make amends for all the past. Let Rohan go to him, or, what is the same thing, to the nearest station of the grand army, saying—'I am ready now to fight against the enemies of France;' let him take his place in the ranks like a brave man,—and all will be forgiven."

"I am not so sure," observed Gildas. "I have been having a glass with the gendarme Penvenn, old Pipriac's friend, and he says that Rohan will be shot in spite of his teeth; if so, it is a shame."

Uncle Ewen shifted nervously in his chair, and scowled at his nephew.

"Penvenn is an ass for his pains; do you think I have no influence with the Emperor? I tell you he will be pardoned if he will fight. What sayest thou, little one?" he continued, turning to Marcelle who seemed plunged in deep thought. "Or is thy lover still *un lâche?*"

"Uncle!" she cried with trembling lips.

"You are right, Marcelle, and I did him wrong; I forgot myself, and he is a brave man. But if he should fail us now! now when Providence itself offers him a way to save himself, and to wipe the stain off the name he bears!—now when the Little Corporal needs his help, and would welcome him, like the Prodigal Son, into the ranks of the Brave!"

As Uncle Ewen ceased, Marcelle sprang to her feet with an exclamation; for there, standing in the chamber and listening to the speech, was Rohan himself—so changed already that he looked like an old man. It seemed as if the sudden shock had had the power to transform him to his former likeness of a famished hunted animal; to make his physical appearance a direct image of his tortured moral being. Gaunt and wild, with great hungry−looking eyes gazing from one to another of the startled group, he stood in perfect silence.

"It is himself!" cried the Corporal gasping for breath. "Gildas, close the door."

It was done, and, to make all secure, Gildas drew the bolt. The two women were soon by the side of Rohan; the widow weeping, Marcelle white and tearless. Uncle Ewen rose to his feet, and somewhat tremulously approached his nephew.

"Do not be afraid, *mon garz,"* he exclaimed; "they are after you, but I will make it all right, never fear. You have been refractory, but they will forgive all that when you step forward like a man. There is no time to lose. Cross the great marsh, and you will be at St. Gurlott before them. Go straight to the Rue Rose, and ask for the Capitaine Figuier, and tell him from me—Mother of God!" cried the old man, pausing in his hurried instructions, "is the man mad?"

Indeed the question seemed a very pertinent one, for Rohan, without seeming to hear a word of what was being said, was gazing wildly at the air and uttering that strange unearthly laugh which had more than once before appalled Marcelle. Trembling with terror, the girl was clinging to his arm, and looking into his face.

"Rohan! Do you not understand! they are looking for you, and if you do not go in first, you will be killed!"

Turning his eyes upon her, he asked calmly enough, but in a strange hard voice—

"If I surrender, what then?"

"Why then," broke in the Corporal, "it will be all forgotten. They will just give you your gun and knapsack, and you will join the grand army, and cover yourself with glory; and then, when the war is over—which will be very soon—back you will come like a brave man, and find my little Marcelle waiting for you, ready and willing to keep her troth."

The old man spoke eagerly, and with a cheerfulness that he was far from feeling, for the look upon the other's face positively appalled him. Still with his eyes fixed on Marcelle, Rohan asked again—

"If I do not surrender, what then?"

"You will be shot," answered the Corporal, "like a dog; but there—God knows you will not be so insane! You will give yourself up, like a wise man and a brave."

"Is there no other way?" asked Rohan, still watching Marcelle.

"None! none! You waste time, *mon garz!"*

"Yes, there is another," said Rohan in the same hard voice, with the same look. Then, when all eyes were questioningly turned towards him, he continued—

"If the Emperor should himself die! If he should be killed!"

Uncle Ewen started back in terror.

"Saints of Heaven forbid! The very thought is treason!" he cried, trembling and frowning.

Without heeding his uncle, Rohan, who had never withdrawn his eyes one moment from Marcelle's, said in a whisper, as if addressing her solely, and yet communicating mysteriously with himself, in a sort of dream—

"If one were to find him sleeping in the darkness alone, it would be a good deed! It would be one life instead of thousands, and then, look you, the world would be at peace!"

"Rohan!" cried Marcelle. "For the love of God!"

Well might she shrink from him in horror and agony, for the light of Murder was in his eyes. His face was distorted, and his hands clutched as at an invisible knife. The Corporal gazed on stupefied. He heard and dimly understood Rohan's words. They seemed too execrable and awful to be the words of any one but a raving madman.

"Bones of St. Triffine!" murmured Gildas, "he is speaking of the Emperor!"

"Come from his side," cried the Corporal to Marcelle; "he blasphemes—he is dangerous!"

Rohan turned his white face on the speaker.

"That is true; but I shall not harm *her*, or any here. Good night, Uncle Ewen—I am going." And he moved slowly towards the door.

"Stay, Rohan!" cried Marcelle, clutching his arm. "*Whither* are you going?"

Without replying, he shook off her hold, and turned to the door, and in another moment he was gone. The Corporal uttered a despairing exclamation, and sank into his chair; Gildas gave out a prolonged whistle, expressive of deep surprise; the widow threw her apron over her head, and sobbed; and Marcelle stood panting with her lips asunder, and her hand pressed hard upon her heart. So he left them, passing like a ghost out of sight. And when dawn came, and the emissaries of Bonaparte were searching high and low, no trace of him was to be found.

Chapter 55. THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The scene changes for a moment. Instead of the arid cliffs and green pastures of Kromlaix, scented with springtide and shining calmly by the side of the summer sea, we behold a dim prospect far inland, darkened with the drifting clouds of the rain. Through these clouds glide moving lights and shadows, passing slowly along the great highways: long processions that seem endless—columns of men that tramp wearily afoot, bodies of cavalry that move more lightly along, heavy masses of artillery, baggage−waggons, flotsam and jetsam of a great host. The air is full of a deep, sea−like sound, broken at times by a rapid word of command, or a heavy roll of drums. All day the processions pass on, and when night comes they are still passing. Somewhere in the midst of them hovers the Spirit of all, silent and unseen as Death on his white steed.

The Grand Army is moving towards the frontier, and wherever it goes the fields of growing grain are darkened, and no song of the birds of spring is heard. The road is worn into deep ruts by the heavy wheels of cannon. In the village streets halt the cavalry, picketing their horses in the open square. The land is full of that deep murmur which announces and accompanies war. Slowly, league by league, the gleaming columns advance. obedient to the lifted finger that is pointing them on. In their rear, when the main body has passed by, flock swarms of human kites and crows—all those wretches who hover in the track of armies, seeking what refuse they may find to devour.

Among those who linger here and there in the track of the advancing columns, is a man who, to judge from his appearance, seems to have emerged from the very dregs of human wretchedness; a gaunt, wild, savage, neglected−looking creature, who seems to have neither home nor kindred; and who, as a hooded crow follows huntsmen from hill to hill, watching for any prey they may overlook or cast aside, follows the dark procession moving forward to the seat of war. His hair hangs over his shoulders, his beard is long and matted, his feet and arms are bare, and the remainder of his body is wretchedly covered. Night after night he sleeps out in the open air, or in the shelter of barns and farm outbuildings, whence he is often driven by savage dogs and more savage men. He speaks French at times, but for the most part he mutters to himself in a sort of *patois* which few inhabitants of these districts can understand; and ever for those whom he accosts he has but one question: “Where is the Emperor? Will he pass this way?”

All who see him treat him as a maniac, and mad indeed he is, or seems. Dazed by the vast swarms that surround him and ever pass him by; swept this way and that by their violence as they flow like great rivers through the heart of the land; ever perceiving with wild, anxious eyes the living torrents of faces that rush by him on their headlong course, he wanders stupefied from day to day. That he has some distinct object is clear from the firm−set face and fixed determined eyes; but wafted backward and forward by the stream of life, he appears helpless and irresponsible. How he lives it is difficult to tell. He never begs, but many out of pity give him bread, and sometimes the officers throw him small coins as they ride by, radiant and full of hope. He looks famished, but it is spiritual famine, not physical, that is wearing him away.

More than once he is seized for theft, and then driven away with blows. On one occasion he is taken as a spy, his hands are tied behind him, and he is driven into the presence of a grizzly commander, who stands smoking by a bivouac fire. Hastily condemned to be shot, he gives so strange a laugh that the closer attention of his captors is attracted to his condition, and finally, with scornful pity, he is set at liberty to roam where he will.

As the armies advance, he advances, but lagging ever in the rear. Still his face looks backward, and he whispers—“The Emperor—when will he come?”

How golden waves the corn in these peaceful Belgian fields! How sweet smells the hay down there in the flat meads through which the silvern river runs, lined on each side by bright green pollard trees! How deep and cool lie the woods on the hill−sides, overhung with lilac and the wild rose, and carpeted with hyacinths and violets, blue as Heaven! How quietly the wind−mills turn, with their long arms against the blue sky!

But what is that gleaming in the distance there, under the village spire! It seems like a pool shining in the sun, but it is the clustered helmets of Prussian cuirassiers. And what is that dark mass moving like a shadow between the fields of wheat? It is a body of Prussian infantry, advancing slowly along the dusty way. And hark now!—from the distance comes a murmur like the sound of an advancing sea, and from the direction whence it

comes, light cavalry trot up constantly, and solitary messengers gallop at full speed. The allied forces have already quietly occupied Belgium, and the French host at last is coming up.

It approaches and spreads out upon the fertile earth with some portion of its old strength. Sharp sounds of firing, and white wreaths of smoke rising here and there in the hollows, show that skirmishing has begun. The contending armies survey each other, like wild beasts preparing to spring and grapple.

All round them hover the human birds of prey, watchful and expectant, but the villages are deserted, the wind−mills cease to turn, and the happy sounds of pastoral industry are heard no more. The crops grow unwatched, and the cattle wander untended; only the chapel bell is sometimes heard, sounding the *Angelus* over deserted valleys.

Hush! far away in the direction of Quatre Bras sounds the heavy boom of cannon—thunder follows thunder deep as the roar of the sea. Part of the armies have met, and a terrible struggle is beginning; cuirassiers gallop hither and thither along the roads. Groups of peasants gather here and there, preparing for flight and listening to the terrific sounds.

At the top of a woody hill stands the same woeful figure that we have seen before in the track of the Grand Army. Wild and haggard he seems still, like some poor wretch whom the fatal fires have burned out of house and home. He stands listening, and gazing at the road which winds through the valley beneath him. The rain is falling heavily, but he does not heed.

Suddenly, through the vaporous mist, appears the gleam of helms and lances rapidly advancing; then the man discerns a solitary Figure on horseback coming at full gallop, followed by a group of mounted officers; behind these rolls a travelling carriage drawn by four horses.

After pausing for a moment at the foot of the hill, the Figure gallops upward, followed by the others.

Quietly and silently the man creeps back into the shadow of the wood.

Chapter 56. UNCLE EWEN GETS HIS FURLOUGH

“Uncle! uncle! look up, listen—there is brave news—there has been a battle and the Emperor is victorious—look up! It is I—Marcelle!”

The corporal lay in his arm−chair as if asleep, but his eyes were wide open and he was breathing heavily. Coming hastily in one afternoon with the journal in her hand, Marcelle found him so, and, thinking at first that he slept, shook him gently. Then she screamed, perceiving that he was senseless and ill. The widow, hastily descending from upstairs where she had been busy, came trembling to her assistance. They chafed his palms, threw cold water on his face, moistened his lips with brandy, but it was of no avail.

“He will die!” cried Marcelle, wringing her hands. “It is one of the old attacks, but worse than ever. Mother, hasten down and bring Plouët—he must be bled at once—Master Arfoll said that was the only way.”

The widow hesitated: then she cried—

“Had I not better run for the Priest?”

Poor soul, her first fear was that her brother−in−law might be hurried into the presence of his Maker before he could be properly blest and “anointed.” But Marcelle, more worldly and practical, insisted that Plouët should be first sent for; it would be time enough to prepare for the next world when all hopes of preserving him for this one were fled.

In a very short time the little barber appeared, armed with all the implements of office, and performed. with his usual skill the solemn mystery of bleeding. The operation over, he shook his head. “The blood flows feebly,” he said; “he is very weak, and it is doubtful if he will recover.”

Not until he was undressed and placed in bed, did the Corporal open his eyes and look around him. He nodded to Plouët, and tried to force a smile, but it was sad work. When Marcelle knelt weeping by his bedside, he put his hand gently on her head, while the tears rose in his eyes and made them dim.

“Cheer up, neighbour!” said Plouët. “How are we now? Better, eh!—well, I will tell you something that will do you good. Our advanced guard has met the Prussians at Charleroi, and has thrashed them within an inch of their lives.”

Uncle Ewen's eye kindled, and his lips uttered an inarticulate sound.

“It is true, Uncle Ewen!” sobbed Marcelle, looking fondly at him.

“That is good news,” he murmured presently, in a faint voice; then he sank back upon his pillow and closed his eyes, with a heavy sigh.

The excitement of the last few weeks had been too much for him. Day after day he had overstrained his strength, stumping up and down the village, and assuming to a certain extent his old sway. Do what he might, he could not remain calm. His pulse kept throbbing like a roll of drums, and his ears were pricked up as if to listen for trumpet sounds in the distance. All the world was against the “Little Corporal,” and the “Little Corporal,” God willing, was about to beat all the world! His own pride and expectation were at stake in the matter, for with the fortunes of the Emperor his own fortunes rose and fell. When his master was a despised prisoner, he too was despised—his occupation gone, his life a burthen to him, since he coveted respect in his sphere and could not endure contradiction. It had almost broken his heart. But when the Emperor re−emerged, like the sun from a cloud, Uncle Ewen partook his glory, and recovered caste and position; men were afraid then to give him the lie, and to deny those things which he deemed holy. Proud and happy, he resumed his sceptre, though with a feebler hand, and waved down all opposition both at home and at the *cabaret.* Joy, however, is “dangerous” in more senses than one, and the excess of his exultation had only heightened that constitutional malady to which he was a martyr.

In the agony of this new sorrow, Marcelle almost forgot the anxiety which had been weighing on her heart for many days. Nothing had been heard of Rohan since his departure, and no man could tell whether he was living or dead; so her mind was tortured on his account, and her nights were broken, and her days were full of pain. All she could do was to pray that the good God would guard her lover's person and bring him back to his right mind.

From this last attack Uncle Ewen did not emerge as freely as on former occasions. He kept his bed for days and seemed hovering on the brink of death. He would not hear, however, of sending for Father Rolland, whose

Royalist proclivities had aroused his strongest indignation. However much he had liked the little *curé* personally, he felt that he was unfaithful to a great cause, and that in his heart he hated the Emperor.

Even while in bed he persisted in having the journals read to him; fortunately for him, they contained only "good news." When, about a week after his first attack, he was able to be dressed and to sit by the fireside, he still sent diligently to inquire after the latest bulletins from the seat of war.

To him, as he sat thus, entered one day Master Arfoll. At first, Marcelle, who sat by, trembled to see him, but Uncle Ewen seemed so pleased at his appearance that her fears were speedily dispelled. She watched him anxiously, however, ready to warn him should he touch on forbidden topics. But Master Arfoll was not the man to cause any fellow creature unnecessary pain, and he knew well how to humour the fancies of the Corporal. When he went away that day Uncle Ewen said quietly, as if speaking to himself—

"I was unjust: he is a sensible fellow."

Next day Master Arfoll came again, and sat for a long time chatting. Presently the conversation turned on politics, and Uncle Ewen, feeble as he was, began to mount his hobby. So far from contradicting him, Master Arfoll assented to all his propositions. Only a great man, he admitted, could win so much love and kindle so much enthusiasm. He himself had seen the Emperor, and no longer wondered at the affection men felt for him. Ah, yes, he was a great man!

Marcelle scarcely knew how it came to pass, but that day Master Arfoll was reading aloud to Uncle Ewen out of the Bible which he used for teaching purposes; and reading out of the New Testament, not the Old. Uncle Ewen would doubtless have relished to hear the recital of some of those martial episodes which fill the Old Books, but, nevertheless, the quiet peaceful parables of Jesus pleased him well.

"After all," said Master Arfoll as he closed the Book, "War is a terrible thing, and Peace is best."

"That is quite true," replied the Corporal; "but War, look you, is a necessity."

"Not if men would love one another."

Uncle Ewen smiled grimly, the very ghost of his old smile.

"Soul of a crow! how can one love one's enemies? . . .Those Prussians! those English!"

And he ground his teeth angrily, as if he would have liked to worry and tear them. Master Arfoll sighed and quietly dropt the subject.

When he had said *au revoir* and passed across the threshold, he heard Marcelle's voice close behind him.

"Master Arfoll," said the girl in a quick low voice, "do you think he will die?"

"I cannot tell. . . . He is very ill!"

"But will he recover?"

The schoolmaster paused in thought before he replied.

"He is not a young man, and such shocks are cruel. I do not think he will live long." He added gently, "There is no word of your cousin?"

She answered in the negative, and sadly returned into the house.

That very night there was considerable excitement in the village; groups of Bonapartist enthusiasts paced up and down the streets, singing and shouting. News had come of the battle of Ligny, and the triumph of the French arms now seemed certain.

"It is true, uncle," said Gildas, entering tipsily into the kitchen. "The little one has thrashed those brutes of Prussians at last, and he will next devour those accursed English."

"Where is the journal?" asked Uncle Ewen, trembling from head to foot and reaching out his hands.

Gildas handed it over, and the Corporal, putting on his horn spectacles, began to read it through. But the letters swam before his eyes, and he was compelled to entrust the task to Marcelle, who in a clear voice read the news aloud. When she had done, his eyes were dim with joy and pride.

That night he could not sleep, and before dawn he began to wander.

It was clear that some great change for the worse had taken place. He tossed upon his pillow, talked to himself mentioned the names of old comrades, and spoke frequently of the Emperor. Suddenly he sprang up, and began scrambling out of bed.

"It is the *réveille!"* he cried, gazing vacantly around him. The voice of Marcelle, who was up and watching, seemed to recall him partially to himself, and he sank back quietly upon his pillow. Ever and anon after that he would start up nervously, as if at a sudden call.

Early in the morning Master Arfoll came and sat by his side, but he did not recognise him. The schoolmaster, who had no little skill in such cases, pronounced his condition to be critical, and, upon hearing this, Mother Derval persisted in sending for the priest. When Father Rolland arrived he found Uncle Ewen quite incapable of profiting by any holy offices.

"I fear he is dying," said Master Arfoll.

"And without the last sacrament," moaned the widow.

"He shall have it," said Father Rolland, "if he will only understand. Look up, my Corporal. It is I, Father Rolland!"

But Uncle Ewen's soul was far away—out on a great battlefield, in sight of smoking villages and fiery towns, watching the great columns of armies moving to and fro, while a familiar figure in cocked hat and grey overcoat sat silent as stone on horseback, watching from an eminence! Over and over again he repeated in his mind that wonderful episode of Cismone. He talked of Jacques Monier, and, stretching out his open hands over the coverlet, fancied he was warming them over the bivouac fire. Sometimes his face flashed, as he fancied himself in the grand *mêlée* of battle, and he cried out in a loud voice, "No quarter!" The summer sun shone brightly in upon him, as he lay thus full of his ruling passion.

Marcelle, quite heart−broken, sobbed at his bedside, while the widow spent all her minutes in fervent prayer. Gildas stood on the hearth quite subdued, and ready to blubber like a great boy. On one side of the bed sat Master Arfoll; on the other, the little Priest.

"He has been a brave man," said Father Rolland, "but an enthusiast, look you, and this affair of Ligny has got into his head. He has been a good servant to the Emperor and to France!"

It seemed as if the very name of the Emperor had a spell to draw the Corporal from his swoon, for all at once he opened his eyes, and looked straight at the Priest. He did not seem quite to recognise him, and turning his face towards Master Arfoll, he smiled—so faintly, so sadly, that it tore Marcelle's heart to see him.

"Uncle Ewen! Uncle Ewen!" she sobbed, holding his hand.

"Is it thou, little one?" he murmured faintly. "What was it that thou wast reading about a great Battle?"

She could not answer for sobs, and Father Rolland interposed, speaking rapidly—

"It is no time to think of battles now, my Corporal, for you are very ill and will soon be in the presence of your God. I have come to give you the last sacrament to prepare your soul for the change that is about to come upon it. There is no time to lose. Make your peace with Heaven!"

Quietly all withdrew from the kitchen, leaving the little *curé* alone with his sick charge. There was a long interval, during which the hearts of the two women were sick with anxiety; then Father Rolland called them all back into the chamber. Uncle Ewen was lying quietly on his pillow with his eyes half closed, and on the bed beside him lay the crucifix and the priest's breviary.

"It is finished," said the little *curé;* "he is not quite clear in his head, and he did not recognise me, but God is good, and it will suffice. His mind is now calm, and he is prepared to approach, in a humble and peaceful spirit, the presence of his Maker!"

"Amen," cried the widow, with a great load off her mind. At that moment, while they were approaching the bedside, the Corporal opened his eyes and gazed around him. His look was no longer vacant, but quite collected. Suddenly his eyes fell upon the face of Father Rolland; now, for the first time, he recognised him, and a faint flush came into his dying face—

"A bas le Bourbon!" he cried, "VIVE L'EMPEREUR!"

And with that war−cry upon his lips he drifted out to join the great bivouac of the armies of the dead.

Chapter 57. BONAPARTE

Come back now to the golden valleys where the bloody struggle of armies is beginning; to the verge of the dark wood into which crept that pitiable outcast man. As the man retreats into hiding, the figure on horseback reaches the hill summit, dismounts, and stands looking in the direction of Ligny. The rain pours down upon him, but he too is heedless of the rain. Spurred and booted, wrapt in an old grey overcoat, and wearing a cocked hat from which the rain drips heavily, he stands wrapt in thought, posed, with his hands clasped behind his back, his head sunk deep between his shoulders. His staff follow, and stand in groups behind him and close to him.

The heavy sound of cannon continues, rolling in the far distance. Presently it ceases, and the Figure is still there, looking in the direction whence it comes. He paces up and down impatiently, but his eyes are fixed now on the rainy road. Suddenly on the road appears the figure of a mounted officer, galloping bareheaded as if for dear life. He sees the group on the height above him and gallops up. In a few minutes he is in the presence of the Emperor.

Bonaparte sees good tidings in the officer's face, but he opens and reads the despatch which he brings; then he smiles, and speaks rapidly to those surrounding him; in another moment he is encircled by a flash of swords, and there is a cry of *Vive 1' Empereur!* The Prussians are in retreat from Ligny; the first blow of the war is victory!

Without attempting to mount again, the Emperor walks quietly down the hill.

When all again is still, the man creeps out of the wood; he is trembling now and shivering, and his eyes are more wild and hungry than ever. He hastens along like an animal that keeps close to the ground. He sees the bright group moving along the foot of the hill, but he creeps along the summit. The rain pours down in torrents, and the prospect is darkening towards fall of night.

Still following the line of the wooded hill−tops, the man runs, now fleet as a deer, through the shadows of the deepening darkness. He meets no human soul. At last he pauses, close to a large building erected on the hill−side and looking down on long reaches of fertile pasture and yellow corn. It is one of those antique farms so common in Belgium—a quaintly gabled dwelling surrounded by barns, byres, and fruit gardens. But no light burns in any of the windows, and it seems temporarily deserted, save for a great starved dog that prowls around it, and flies moaning at the man's approach.

The man pauses at the open doer and looks down the hill. Suddenly he is startled by the sound of horses' feet rapidly approaching; there is a flash, a gleam in the darkness, and a body of cavalry gallop up. Before they reach the door, he has plunged across the threshold.

Within all is dark, but he gropes his way across the great kitchen and into a large inner chamber dimly lit by two great window casements. In the centre stands a ladder leading to a small dark hay−loft, but the room is comfortably furnished with rude old−fashioned chairs and table, and has in one corner a great fire−place of quaintly carved oak. It is obvious that the place has been lately occupied, for on the table is a portion of a loaf with some coarse cheese. Great black rafters stretch overhead, and above them is the opening of the loft.

There is a tramp of feet and a sound of voices; the soldiers are entering the house, and approaching the room. Swift as thought the man runs up the ladder, and disappears in the darkness of the loft above.

An officer enters, followed by attendants bearing a lamp. He looks round the empty room, takes up the fragment of bread, and laughs; then he gives some orders rapidly, and in a few moments they bring in an armful of wood and kindle a fire on the hearth. As they do so, their soaking clothes steam. Suddenly there comes from without the sound of more horses galloping, of voices rapidly giving the word of command. The farm is surrounded on every side by troops, and the rooms within begin to fill. The fire burns up on the hearth of the large inner chamber, and the air becomes full of a comfortable glow. Meantime the rain falls in torrents, with occasional gleams of summer lightning.

Entering bareheaded, attendants now place on the table a small silvern lamp, and draw close the great moth−eaten curtains which cover the two antique casements. They speak low, as if in awe of some superior presence. All at once, through the open door, comes a familiar Figure, who wears his cocked hat on his head, and has his grey overcoat still wrapt around him. It is the Emperor of France.

He casts off the dripping overcoat and stands in simple general's uniform, warming his hands at the fire. They

bring in plain bread and wine, which they set before him on the table. He breaks a little of the bread and drinks some the wine; then he speaks rapidly in a clear low voice, and, glancing round the chamber, motions his attendants to withdraw. They do so deferentially, closing the door softly behind them. He is left entirely alone.

Alone in the great chamber, with the black rafters stretching over his head dimly illumed by the red glare of the fire and the faint gleam of the lamp. All is so silent that he can hear the pattering of the rain−drops on the great casements, and on the roof above. Although the place is surrounded by troops their movements are very hushed and still, and, save for a low murmur of voices from the outer rooms, there is no human sound. But overhead, buried in the blackness, a wild face watches and looks down.

Slowly, with chin drooping forward on his breast, and hands clasped upon his back, he paces up and down. The sentinel pacing to and fro beyond the window is not more methodical in his march than he. The rain pours without, and the wind moans, but he hears nothing; he is too attentively listening to the sound of his own thoughts. What sees he?—what hears he? Before his soul's vision great armies pass in black procession, moving like storm−clouds on to some bourne of the inexorable will; burning cities rise in the distance, like the ever−burning towers of Hell; and the roar of far−off cannon mingles with the sound of the breakers of Eternity thundering on a starry shore. For this night, look you, of all nights, the voice of God is with the man, bringing dark prescience of some approaching doom. Mark how the firelight plays upon his cheeks, which are livid as those of a corpse! See how the eagle eye sheathes itself softly, as if to close upon the sorrow pent within! It is night, and he is alone—alone with the shadows of Sleep and Death. Though he knows his creatures are waking in the chambers beyond, and that his armies are stretching all around him on the rainy plain, he is nevertheless supremely solitary. The darkness seems a cage, from which his fretful mind would willingly escape; he paces up and down, eager for the darkness to uplift and disclose the stormy dawn.

All his plans are matured, all his orders are given; he is but resting for a few brief hours before he takes the victory for which his soul so long has waited. Victory?—ah, yes, that is certain!—his lurid star will not fail at last to dart blinding beams into the eyes of his enemies!— like a destroying angle will arise, more mighty and terrible than he ever yet has been!—they think they have him in a net, but they shall see!

He walks to the window, and peers out into the night. Although it is summer, all is dark and cold and chill. As he stands for a moment gazing forth, he hears low sounds from the darkness around him; sounds as of things stirring in sleep. The measured foot−falls of the sentries, the tramp of horses' feet, the cry of voices giving and receiving the password of the night, all come upon his ear like murmurs in a dream. He draws the curtain, and comes forward again into the firelight, which wraps him from head to foot like a robe of blood. The great black rafters of the roof stretch overhead, and as something stirs among them, his dead−white face looks up. . . . A rat crawling from its hole and running along the beam—that is all.

Again he begins his monotonous march up and down.

There is a knock at the door. “Enter,” he says, in a low clear voice; and an aide−de−camp enters, bareheaded, with a despatch. He tears it open, runs his eye over it, and casts it aside without a word. As the aide−de−camp is returning he calls him back. Unless important despatches arrive let no one disturb him for the next two hours; for he will sleep.

The door is gently dosed, and he is again alone in the chamber. He stands upon the hearth, and for a long time seems plunged in deep reflection—his lips firmly set, his brow knitted. Presently he approaches the table, again takes up the despatch, looks it through, then once more places it aside. Unloosening his neckerchief from his throat he approaches the old arm−chair of oak, which is set before the fire. And now—merciful God! what is this? He has sunk upon his knees.

To pray? He?

Yes; here, in the loneliness of the night, quite unconscious that he is watched by any human eyes, he secretly kneels, covers his eyes, and prays. Not for long; after a minute he rises, and his face is wonderfully changed—softened and sweetened by the religious light that has shone upon it for a little space. No little child rising from saying “Our Father” by an innocent bedside, could look more calm yet doubtless he prayed for “victory,” that his enemies might be blotted from the face of the earth, that God might once more cement his throne with blood and forge his sceptre of fire. “The pity of it, Iago; oh! the pity of it!” Wise was he who said that “the wicked are only poor blind children, who know not what they do.”

At last, throwing himself into the arm−chair, he lies back, and quietly closes his eyes.

To sleep? Can he, on whose head rests the fate of empires, sleep this night? As easily and as soundly as a little child! The constant habit of seeking slumber under all sorts of conditions—out in the dark rain, on the bare ground, in the saddle, in the travelling−carriage—has made sleep his slave. Scarcely has he closed his eyes when the blessed dew falls upon them. And yet, O God, at this very hour, how many good men are praying for rest that will not come!

As he sits there with his chin drooping upon his breast, his jaw falling heavily, and his eyes half open yet glazed and sightless, one might fancy him a corpse—so livid is his cheek, so wan and wild his look. All the dark passions of the man, his buried cares and sorrows, which the waking will crushed down, now flow up to the surface and tremble there in ghastly lights and shades. He seems to have cast off his strength, like a raiment only worn by day. Great God, how old he looks! how pitiably old and human! One sees now, or one might see, that his hair is tinged with grey it falls in thin straggling lines upon his forehead, which is marked deep with weary lines. This is he who to half a weeping world has seemed like God; who has let loose the angels of his wrath, swift as the four winds, to devastate the earth; who has stood as a shadow between man's soul and the sun which God set up in heaven in the beginning, and who has swept as lightning to scorch up the realms of emperors and kings. God “giveth His beloved sleep!” And to those He loves *not?*—Sleep too! This is Napoleon—a weary man, grey−haired and very pale; he slumbers sound, and scarcely seems to dream. All over the earth lie poor guilty wretches, wailing miserably, conscience−stricken because they have taken life—in passion, in cruelty, in wrath; the Eye is looking at them as it looked at Cain, and they cannot sleep. This man has waded in blood up to his armpits; yea, the blood he has shed is as a river rushing up to stain the footstool of the Throne of God. Yet he slumbers like a child

The fire burns low, but it still fills the room with a dim light, which mingles with the rays of the lamp upon the table. Up among the black rafters all is dark; but what is that stirring there and gazing down? The black loft looms above, and the ladder rests against the topmost beams. Something moves up there, a shadow among the shadows. Swift as lightning, and as silent, something descends;—it is the figure of a man.

Chapter 58. “SIC SEMPER TYRANNUS”

The Emperor moans in his sleep, which is easily disturbed, but he does not quite waken. The figure crouches for a moment in the centre of the floor; then crawling forward, and turning towards the sleeper, it approaches him without a sound, for its feet are naked. It rises erect, revealing a face so wild and strange as to seem scarcely human, but rather to resemble the lineaments of an apparition. The hair, thickly sown with white, streams down over half−naked shoulders; the cheeks are sunken as with famine or disease; the lips lie apart, like the mouth of some panting wild animal. The form seems gigantic, looming in the dim light of the lamp—and it is wrapt from head to foot in hideous rags.

As the creature crawls towards the sleeping Emperor, something gleams in his hands; it is a long bayonet−like knife, such as hunters use in the Forest of Ardennes. His eyes burn with strange light, fixing themselves upon the sleeper. If this is an assassin, then surely that sleeper's time is come

And now, knife in hand, he stands close to the Emperor, looking upon his face, and reading it line by line; as he does so, his own gleams spectre−like and wild and mad. His gaze is full of spiritual famine; he seems as he looks to satisfy some passionate hunger. His eyes come closer and closer, charmed towards the object on which they gaze, until his breath could almost be felt upon the cold white cheek. Simultaneously the knife is raised, as if to strike home to the sleeper's heart.

At this moment the sleeper stirs, but still does not waken, for he is thoroughly exhausted with many hours of vigil, and his sleep is unusually heavy. If he but knew how near his sleep is to death! He has climbed to the summit of earthly glory; he has chained to the footstool of his throne all the kings of the earth; and is this to be the end? To be slaughtered miserably at midnight by an assassin's steel.

There is a movement as of feet in the outer chamber; then the voice of the sentry is heard crying *“Qui vive?”* and all is still again. The wild figure pauses, listening, still with large eyes fixed upon the sleeper's face. . . .

Still stars of eternity, gleaming overhead in the azure arch of heaven, look down this night through the mundane mist and rain, and behold, face to face, these two creatures whom God made. Spirit of Life, that movest upon the air and upon the deep, enwrap them with the mystery of Thy breath; for out of Thee each came, and unto Thee each shall return! Which is Imperial now? The gigantic creature towering there with wild face in all the power of maniac strength, or the feeble form that lies open to the fatal blow that is to come? Behold these two children of primæval Adam, each with the flesh, blood, heart, and soul of a man; each miraculously made, breathing the same air, feeding on the same earthly food; and say, which is Abel? which is Cain? The look of Cain is on the face of him who stands erect and grips the knife—the look of Cain when he overthrew the altar and prepared to strike down his lamb−like brother in God's sight. . . . Yet so surely as those stars shine in heaven, it is the wretched Abel who hath arisen, snatching, mad with despair, the fratricidal knife!

Feature by feature, line by line, he reads the Emperor's face. His gaze is fixed and awful, his face still preserves its ashen pallor. His maniacal abstraction is no less startling than his frightful physical strength. He hears a sentry approach the window and pause for a moment, and the knife is lifted mechanically as if to strike; but the sentry passes by, and the knife is dropped. Then he again catches a movement from the antechamber. Perhaps they have heard sounds, and are approaching. No; all again is still.

How soundly the Emperor sleeps! The lamplight illumes his fate and marks its weary lines, while the firelight casts a red glow round his reclining form. There is no Imperial grandeur here—only a weary wight, tired, like any peasant dozing by the hearth; only a weak, sallow, sickly creature, whom a strong man could crush down with a blow of the hand. One hand lies on the arm of the chair—it is white and small like a woman's or a child's; yet is it not the hand that has struck down Christ and the Saints, and cast blood upon the shrines of God? Is it not the hand of Cain, who slew his brother?

And now, O assassin, since such thou art, strike home! it is thy turn now. Thou hast waited and watched on wearily for this—thou hast prayed madly to God and to Our Lady of Hate that this moment might come—and lo! the Lord has put thine enemy, the enemy of thee and of thy kind, into thy hand. Kill, kill, kill! This is Napoleon, whose spirit has gone forth, like Cain's, to blight and make bloody the happy homes of earth, who has wandered from east to west knee−deep in blood, who has set on every land his seal of flame, who has cast on every field,

where once the white wheat grew, the bones of Famine and the ashes of Fire. Remember D'Enghien, Pichegru, Palm; and kill! Remember Jena, Eylau; and kill! Dost thou hesitate? Then, remember Moscow! Remember the Beresina, choked up with its forty thousand dead! Remember the thousands upon thousands sleeping in the great snows!—and kill, kill, kill!

Dost thou doubt that this is he, that thou hesitatest so long? Thy face is tortured, and thy hand trembles, and thy soul is faint. Thou camest hither to behold a Shadow, an Image, a thing like that Form of black marble set up as a symbol in the dark earth. Far away the Emperor seemed colossal, unreal, inhuman: a portent with the likeness of a fiend. To that thou didst creep, thinking to grapple with the Execrable. And now thou art disarmed, because thou seest only a poor pale weary *Man!*

Think of thy weary nights and famished days; and kill! Think of the darkness that has come upon thy life, of the sorrow that has separated thee from all thou lovest best—think too of the millions who have cried even as sheep driven to the slaughter; and kill! He had no pity; do thou have none. Remember, it is this one life against the peace and happiness of Earth. Obliterate this creature, and Man perhaps is saved. If he awakens again, war will awaken!—Fire, Famine, and Slaughter, will awaken too! Kill, kill! . . .

. . . The sleeper stirs once more, his glazed eyes half open, and his head rolls to one side. His face preserves a marble pallor, but is lit by a strange sad smile. He murmurs to himself, and his small hand opens and shuts—like the child's little hand that clutches at the butterfly in sleep, when—

“One little wandering arm is thrown
At random on the counterpane,
And oft the fingers close in haste
As if their childish owner chased
The butterfly again.”

A crown or a butterfly—is not all one? And in God's eyes, perchance, he who sleeps here is only a poor foolish child!

Be that as it may, God has drawn round the sleeper's form a circle which thou canst not pass. Thine indeed is not the stuff of which savage assassins are made, and though there is madness in thy brain, there is still love in thine heart. Kill thou canst not *now,* though thou camest to kill. Lost as thou art, thou feelest no hate even for thine enemy, now; thou knowest indeed how poor and frail a creature thou hast been fearing and hating so long. God made him and God sent him; bloody as he is, he too is God's child.

Perhaps if he had not *prayed* before he slept it might have been easier; but he did pray, and his face became beautiful for the moment, and fearlessly as a child he sank to rest. Wilt thou kill what God has sanctified with His sleep? Because this creature has broken the sacraments of Nature, wilt thou become as he? No; thou hast seen him and thou knowest him—that is enough—thou wilt leave him in the hands of God.

Amen! Safely and justly mayest thou so leave him, for the vengeance of God is sure as the mercy of God is deep. One spectre of a slain man comes to thee nightly in dream; how many come to *him?* Perhaps not one, though at his bidding thousands upon thousands have been miserably slain. Yet be thou assured, though no ghosts rise, the Spirit of Life will demand an account. Look again at the closed Imperial eyes! See the cold light sleeping deep and pitiless on that face that ruled a world! To those dead eyes, cold as a statue's stony orbs, thou, poor wretch, hast been offered up by a world grown mad like thee. As an Idol on a pedestal, as an Idol of stone with dull dumb stare surveying its worshippers, this man has stood aloft supremely crowned. Not while he stood up there, could the Spirit of Life find him; not till the hands of man have cast him down, shall the Spirit of Love chasten him and turn him back to flesh . . . When men go by the place where the Idol is lying low, and murmur, beholding it broken upon the ground, “This was Napoleon! the thing we wondered at and worshipped for a time!” and smiling turn away, *then* perhaps in the cold breast the human heart shall beat more freely, humbled and awe−stricken before its Maker. .

. . . Turn, poor wretch, ere thou goest, and look again. There sleeps on that Imperial face no loving living light, but an inward eating fire—a fire consuming and destroying and redeeming in its own despite the soul on which it feeds. He who hath had no mercy for mankind shall learn the bitter lesson of self−mercy, and, realising his own utter loneliness and pain yearn outward to the woes of all the world. And in that hour this cold light thou beholdest shall spread through all his spirit, and become as that mad sorrow and despair which lights now those wretched eyes of thine. Leave him then to God, and go thy way. . .

. . . The man no longer holds the knife. On silent naked feet he has withdrawn back towards the great inner casement of the chamber. For a moment he pauses with one last look—trembling like one who, having plunged into a raging sea, is suddenly uplifted by the hair, and gazing with wild eyes and quivering lips on the pale Imperial face. Then he draws back the heavy curtain, and, dashing open the great window, leaps out into the darkness.

There is a loud cry in the distance, then the sound of shots, then a tramp of feet,—and silence. The man has disappeared as he came, like a ghost of the night.

Meanwhile, the sleeper, startled by the sounds, has sprung up in his chair. As he stands trembling and looking round him, there lies in the gloom at his feet a huge naked knife, such as hunters use; but he sees it not, and little dreams that such a weapon only a few minutes since was pointed at his own heart. His attendants enter anxiously and find the window open, but no clue as to what hand threw it wide. The hero of a hundred battles shivers, for he is superstitious, but he cannot help them to an explanation.

But now—to horse! He has rested too long, and it will soon be dawn. . . . Drums beat and trumpets sound, as he rides on through the dark night, his heavy travelling carriage, surrounded by lancers, lumbering behind. Leave him still to God. . . . Close before him, clouding the lurid star of his destiny, rises the blood−red Shadow—WATERLOO

Epilogue.

A year has passed away. The yellow lamps of the broom are again burning on the crags; the flocks of sea−birds have come from the south to whiten the great sea−wall; the corn is growing golden inland, and the lark, poised over the murmuring farms, is singing loud; while the silvern harvest of the deep is growing too, and the fishermen creep from calm to calm, gathering it up in their brown nets. The sea is calm as glass, and every crag is mirrored in it from base to brow. It is the anniversary of the great battle which decided fatally the destinies of Bonaparte.

On the summit of the cliff immediately overlooking the Cathedral of St. Gildas sit two figures, gazing downward. Far below them, over the roofless Cathedral wall, hover flocks of gulls, and the still green sea, faintly edged with foam that does not seem to stir, is approaching the red granite Gate of St. Gildas. Away beyond, further than eyes can see, stretches the Ocean, faintly shaded by the soft grey mists of Heaven.

One figure, very gaunt and tall, sits like a statue, with large grey eyes turned seaward; his hair is quite grey and flows on to his shoulders, his face is marked with strange furrows, left by some terrible sorrow or terror that has passed away. The other figure, that of a beautiful young girl, sits just below him, holding his hand and looking up into his face. She wears a dark dress and saffron coif, both signs of mourning, and her face is very pale.

Day after day, in the golden summer weather, the two come here and sit for hours in silence and in peace. Day by day the girl watches for the passing away of the cloud which obscures the soul of her companion. He seems—why, she knows not—to derive a strange solace from merely sitting here, holding her hand, and contemplating the waters. His eyes seem vacant, but strange spiritual light still survives in their depths.

To−day, he speaks, not turning his gaze from the Sea.

“Marcelle!”

“Yes, Rohan!”

“If one could sail, and sail, and sail, out there, one would come to the rock where *he* is sitting, with the waves all round him. Sometimes I see him yonder, looking over the black waters. He is by himself; and his face looks white as it did when I saw it, before the great battle was fought!”

She gazes at him in troubled tenderness, her eyes dim with tears.

“Rohan, dear! of whom do you speak?”

He smiles but does not answer. His words are a mystery to her. Since the day when, after long months of absence, he returned home a broken man, he has often spoken of wondrous things—of battles, of the Emperor, of strange meetings, but it has all seemed like witless wandering. She has been waiting wearily till the cloud should lift and all become dear; and there seems hope, for day by day he has grown more peaceful and gentle, and now he can be guided like a child.

He is silent, still gazing seaward. Behind him rises the great Menhir, with the village lying far beneath. The sunlight falls above him and around him, clothing as with a white veil his figure and that of the gentle girl. All is not lost, for with his desolation her love has grown, and she herself remains to him, chastened, subdued, faithful unto death. . . .

. . . .But he does not rave when he speaks of one who lingers in the waste out yonder. Far away, under a solitary palm−tree, sits another Form, waiting, watching, and dreaming, while the waters of the deep, sad and strange as the waters of Eternity, stretch measureless around, and break with weary murmurs at his feet.

So sit those twain, thousands of miles apart,
Each cheek, on hand, gazing upon the Sea!