BOOK THE SECOND.

THE HOOKER AT SEA.

CHAPTER I.

SUPERHUMAN LAWS.

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

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

here" is a clap of thunder.

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

Without effluvium a crowd of circumstances would remain enigmatic. Strictly speaking, the changes in the velocity of the wind, varying from 3 feet per second to 220 feet, would supply a reason for the variations of the waves rising from 3 inches in a calm sea to 36 feet in a raging one. Strictly speaking, the horizontal direction of the winds, even in a squall, enables us to understand how it is that a wave 30 feet high can be 1,500 feet long. But why are the waves of the Pacific four times higher near America than near Asia; that is to say, higher in the East than in the West? Why is the contrary true of the Atlantic? Why, under the Equator, are they highest in the middle of the sea? Wherefore these deviations in the swell of the ocean? This is what magnetic effluvium, combined with terrestrial rotation and sidereal attraction, can alone explain.

Is not this mysterious complication needed to explain an oscillation of the wind veering, for instance, by the west from south-east to north-east, then suddenly returning in the same great curve from north-east to south-east, so as to make in thirty-six hours a prodigious circuit of 560 degrees? Such was the preface to the snowstorm of March 17, 1867.

The storm-waves of Australia reach a height of 80 feet; this fact is connected with the vicinity of the Pole. Storms in those latitudes result less from disorder of the winds than from submarine electrical discharges. In the year 1866 the transatlantic cable was disturbed at regular intervals in its working for two hours in the twenty-four--from noon to two o'clock--by a sort of intermittent fever. Certain compositions and decompositions of forces produce phenomena, and impose themselves on the calculations of the seaman under pain of shipwreck. The day that navigation, now a routine, shall become a mathematic; the day we shall, for instance, seek to know why it is that in our regions hot winds come sometimes from the north, and cold winds from the south; the day we shall understand that diminutions of temperature are proportionate to oceanic depths; the day we realize that the globe is a vast loadstone polarized in immensity, with two axes--an axis of rotation and an axis of effluvium--intersecting each other at the centre of the earth, and that the magnetic poles turn round the geographical poles; when those who risk life will choose to risk it scientifically; when men shall navigate assured from studied uncertainty; when the captain shall be a meteorologist; when the pilot shall be a chemist; then will many catastrophes be avoided. The sea is magnetic as much as aquatic: an ocean of unknown forces floats in the ocean of the waves, or, one might say, on the surface. Only to behold in the sea a mass of water is not to see it at all: the sea is an ebb and flow of fluid, as much as a flux and reflux of liquid. It is, perhaps, complicated by attractions even more than by hurricanes; molecular adhesion, manifested among other phenomena by capillary attraction, although microscopic,

takes in ocean its place in the grandeur of immensity; and the wave of effluvium sometimes aids, sometimes counteracts, the wave of the air and the wave of the waters. He who is ignorant of electric law is ignorant of hydraulic law; for the one intermixes with the other. It is true there is no study more difficult nor more obscure; it verges on empiricism, just as astronomy verges on astrology; and yet without this study there is no navigation. Having said this much we will pass on.

One of the most dangerous components of the sea is the snowstorm. The snowstorm is above all things magnetic. The pole produces it as it produces the aurora borealis. It is in the fog of the one as in the light of the other; and in the flake of snow as in the streak of flame effluvium is visible.

Storms are the nervous attacks and delirious frenzies of the sea. The sea has its ailments. Tempests may be compared to maladies. Some are mortal, others not; some may be escaped, others not. The snowstorm is supposed to be generally mortal. Jarabija, one of the pilots of Magellan, termed it "a cloud issuing from the devil's sore side."[2]

The old Spanish navigators called this kind of squall la nevada, when it came with snow; la helada, when it came with hail. According to them, bats fell from the sky, with the snow.

Snowstorms are characteristic of polar latitudes; nevertheless, at times they glide--one might almost say tumble--into our climates; so much ruin is mingled with the chances of the air.

The Matutina, as we have seen, plunged resolutely into the great hazard of the night, a hazard increased by the impending storm. She had encountered its menace with a sort of tragic audacity; nevertheless, it must be remembered that she had received due warning.

CHAPTER II.

OUR FIRST ROUGH SKETCHES FILLED IN.

While the hooker was in the gulf of Portland, there was but little sea on; the ocean, if gloomy, was almost still, and the sky was yet clear. The wind took little effect on the vessel; the hooker hugged the cliff as closely as possible; it served as a screen to her.

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

The motley nature of the group shone out. The women were of no age. A wandering life produces premature old age, and indigence is made up of wrinkles. One of them was a Basque of the Dry-ports. The other, with the large rosary, was an Irishwoman. They wore that air of indifference common to the wretched. They had squatted down close to each other when they got on board, on chests at the foot of the mast. They talked to each other. Irish and Basque are, as we have said, kindred languages. The Basque woman's hair was scented with onions and basil. The skipper of the hooker was a Basque of Guipuzcoa. One sailor was a Basque of the

northern slope of the Pyrenees, the other was of the southern slope--that is to say, they were of the same nation, although the first was French and the latter Spanish. The Basques recognize no official country. Mi madre se llama Montaña, my mother is called the mountain, as Zalareus, the muleteer, used to say. Of the five men who were with the two women, one was a Frenchman of Languedoc, one a Frenchman of Provence, one a Genoese; one, an old man, he who wore the sombrero without a hole for a pipe, appeared to be a German. The fifth, the chief, was a Basque of the Landes from Biscarrosse. It was he who, just as the child was going on board the hooker, had, with a kick of his heel, cast the plank into the sea. This man, robust, agile, sudden in movement, covered, as may be remembered, with trimmings, slashings, and glistening tinsel, could not keep in his place; he stooped down, rose up, and continually passed to and fro from one end of the vessel to the other, as if debating uneasily on what had been done and what was going to happen.

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

The hooker, a fine sailer, was making quick way; still, ten persons, besides their baggage, were a heavy cargo for one of such light draught.

The fact of the vessel's aiding the escape of a band did not necessarily imply that the crew were accomplices. It was sufficient that the captain of the vessel was a Vascongado, and that the chief of the band was another. Among that race mutual assistance is a duty which admits of no exception. A Basque, as we have said, is neither Spanish nor French; he is Basque, and always and everywhere he must succour a Basque. Such is Pyrenean fraternity.

All the time the hooker was in the gulf, the sky, although threatening, did not frown enough to cause the fugitives any uneasiness. They were flying, they were escaping, they were brutally gay. One laughed, another sang; the laugh was dry but free, the song was low but careless.

The Languedocian cried, "Caoucagno!" "Cocagne" expresses the highest pitch of satisfaction in Narbonne. He was a longshore sailor, a native of the waterside village of Gruissan, on the southern side of the Clappe, a bargeman rather than a mariner, but accustomed to work the reaches of the inlet of Bages, and to draw the drag-net full of fish over the salt sands of St. Lucie. He was of the race who wear a red cap, make complicated signs of the cross after the Spanish fashion, drink wine out of goat-skins, eat scraped ham, kneel down to blaspheme, and implore their patron saint with threats--"Great saint, grant me what I ask, or I'll throw a stone at thy head, ou té feg un pic." He might

be, at need, a useful addition to the crew.

The Provençal in the caboose was blowing up a turf fire under an iron pot, and making broth. The broth was a kind of puchero, in which fish took the place of meat, and into which the Provençal threw chick peas, little bits of bacon cut in squares, and pods of red pimento--concessions made by the eaters of bouillabaisse to the eaters of olla podrida. One of the bags of provisions was beside him unpacked. He had lighted over his head an iron lantern, glazed with talc, which swung on a hook from the ceiling. By its side, on another hook, swung the weather-cock halcyon. There was a popular belief in those days that a dead halcyon, hung by the beak, always turned its breast to the quarter whence the wind was blowing. While he made the broth, the Provençal put the neck of a gourd into his mouth, and now and then swallowed a draught of aguardiente. It was one of those gourds covered with wicker, broad and flat, with handles, which used to be hung to the side by a strap, and which were then called hip-gourds. Between each gulp he mumbled one of those country songs of which the subject is nothing at all: a hollow road, a hedge; you see in the meadow, through a gap in the bushes, the shadow of a horse and cart, elongated in the sunset, and from time to time, above the hedge, the end of a fork loaded with hay appears and disappears--you want no more to make a song.

A departure, according to the bent of one's mind, is a relief or a depression. All seemed lighter in spirits excepting the old man of the band, the man with the hat that had no pipe.

This old man, who looked more German than anything else, although he had one of those unfathomable faces in which nationality is lost, was bald, and so grave that his baldness might have been a tonsure. Every time he passed before the Virgin on the prow, he raised his felt hat, so that you could see the swollen and senile veins of his skull. A sort of full gown, torn and threadbare, of brown Dorchester serge, but half hid his closely fitting coat, tight, compact, and hooked up to the neck like a cassock. His hands inclined to cross each other, and had the mechanical junction of habitual prayer. He had what might be called a wan countenance; for the countenance is above all things a reflection, and it is an error to believe that idea is colourless. That countenance was evidently the surface of a strange inner state, the result of a composition of contradictions, some tending to drift away in good, others in evil, and to an observer it was the revelation of one who was less and more than human--capable of falling below the scale of the tiger, or of rising above that of man. Such chaotic souls exist. There was something inscrutable in that face. Its secret reached the abstract. You felt that the man had known the foretaste of evil which is the calculation, and the after-taste which is the zero. In his impassibility, which was perhaps only on the surface, were imprinted two petrifactions--the petrifaction of the heart proper to the hangman, and the petrifaction of the mind proper to the mandarin. One might have said (for the monstrous has its mode of being complete) that all things were possible to him, even emotion. In every savant there is something of the corpse, and this man was a savant. Only to see him you caught science imprinted in the gestures of his body and in the folds of his dress. His was a fossil face, the serious cast of which was counteracted by that

wrinkled mobility of the polyglot which verges on grimace. But a severe man withal; nothing of the hypocrite, nothing of the cynic. A tragic dreamer. He was one of those whom crime leaves pensive; he had the brow of an incendiary tempered by the eyes of an archbishop. His sparse gray locks turned to white over his temples. The Christian was evident in him, complicated with the fatalism of the Turk. Chalkstones deformed his fingers, dissected by leanness. The stiffness of his tall frame was grotesque. He had his sea-legs, he walked slowly about the deck, not looking at any one, with an air decided and sinister. His eyeballs were vaguely filled with the fixed light of a soul studious of the darkness and afflicted by reapparitions of conscience.

From time to time the chief of the band, abrupt and alert, and making sudden turns about the vessel, came to him and whispered in his ear. The old man answered by a nod. It might have been the lightning consulting the night.

CHAPTER III.

TROUBLED MEN ON THE TROUBLED SEA.

Two men on board the craft were absorbed in thought--the old man, and the skipper of the hooker, who must not be mistaken for the chief of the band. The captain was occupied by the sea, the old man by the sky. The former did not lift his eyes from the waters; the latter kept watch on the firmament. The skipper's anxiety was the state of the sea; the old man seemed to suspect the heavens. He scanned the stars through every break in the clouds.

It was the time when day still lingers, but some few stars begin faintly to pierce the twilight. The horizon was singular. The mist upon it varied. Haze predominated on land, clouds at sea.

The skipper, noting the rising billows, hauled all taut before he got outside Portland Bay. He would not delay so doing until he should pass the headland. He examined the rigging closely, and satisfied himself that the lower shrouds were well set up, and supported firmly the futtock-shrouds--precautions of a man who means to carry on with a press of sail, at all risks.

The hooker was not trimmed, being two feet by the head. This was her weak point.

The captain passed every minute from the binnacle to the standard compass, taking the bearings of objects on shore. The Matutina had at first a soldier's wind which was not unfavourable, though she could not lie within five points of her course. The captain took the helm as often as possible, trusting no one but himself to prevent her from dropping to leeward, the effect of the rudder being influenced by the steerage-way.

The difference between the true and apparent course being relative to the way on the vessel, the hooker seemed to lie closer to the wind than she did in reality. The breeze was not a-beam, nor was the hooker close-hauled; but one cannot ascertain the true course made, except when the wind is abaft. When you perceive long streaks of clouds meeting in a point on the horizon, you may be sure that the wind is in that quarter; but this evening the wind was variable; the needle fluctuated; the captain distrusted the erratic movements of the vessel. He steered carefully but resolutely, luffed her up, watched her coming to, prevented her from yawing, and from running into the wind's eye: noted the leeway, the little jerks of the helm: was observant of every roll and pitch of the vessel, of the difference in her speed, and of the variable gusts of wind. For fear of accidents, he was constantly on the lookout for squalls from off the land he was hugging, and above all he was cautious to keep her full; the direction of the breeze indicated by the compass being uncertain from the small size of the instrument. The captain's eyes, frequently lowered, remarked every change in the waves.

Once nevertheless he raised them towards the sky, and tried to make out

the three stars of Orion's belt. These stars are called the three magi, and an old proverb of the ancient Spanish pilots declares that, "He who sees the three magi is not far from the Saviour."

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

No care troubled the other fugitives.

Still, when the first hilarity they felt in their escape had passed away, they could not help remembering that they were at sea in the month of January, and that the wind was frozen. It was impossible to establish themselves in the cabin. It was much too narrow and too much encumbered by bales and baggage. The baggage belonged to the passengers, the bales to the crew, for the hooker was no pleasure boat, and was engaged in smuggling. The passengers were obliged to settle themselves on deck, a condition to which these wanderers easily resigned themselves. Open-air habits make it simple for vagabonds to arrange themselves for the night. The open air (la belle étoile) is their friend, and the cold helps them to sleep--sometimes to die.

This night, as we have seen, there was no belle étoile.

The Languedocian and the Genoese, while waiting for supper, rolled themselves up near the women, at the foot of the mast, in some tarpaulin which the sailors had thrown them.

The old man remained at the bow motionless, and apparently insensible to the cold.

The captain of the hooker, from the helm where he was standing, uttered a sort of guttural call somewhat like the cry of the American bird called the exclaimer; at his call the chief of the brand drew near, and the captain addressed him thus,--

"Etcheco Jaüna." These two words, which mean "tiller of the mountain," form with the old Cantabri a solemn preface to any subject which should command attention.

Then the captain pointed the old man out to the chief, and the dialogue continued in Spanish; it was not, indeed, a very correct dialect, being that of the mountains. Here are the questions and answers.

"Etcheco jaüna, que es este hombre?"

"Un hombre."

"Que lenguas habla?"

"Todas."

"Que cosas sabe?"

"Todas."

"Quai païs?"

"Ningun, y todos."

"Qual dios?"

"Dios."

"Como le llamas?"

"El tonto."

"Como dices que le llamas?"

"El sabio."

"En vuestre tropa que esta?"

"Esta lo que esta."

"El gefe?"

"No."

"Pues que esta?"

"La alma."[3]

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

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

Proudly, like a bold swimmer, the Matutina crossed the dangerous Shambles shoal. This bank, a hidden obstruction at the entrance of Portland roads, is not a barrier; it is an amphitheatre--a circus of sand under the sea, its benches cut out by the circling of the waves--an arena, round and symmetrical, as high as a Jungfrau, only drowned--a coliseum of the ocean, seen by the diver in the vision-like transparency which engulfs him,--such is the Shambles shoal. There hydras fight, leviathans meet. There, says the legend, at the bottom of the gigantic shaft, are the wrecks of ships, seized and sunk by the huge spider Kraken, also called the fish-mountain. Such things lie in the fearful shadow of the sea.

These spectral realities, unknown to man, are manifested at the surface

by a slight shiver.

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

CHAPTER IV.

A CLOUD DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS ENTERS ON THE SCENE.

The old man whom the chief of the band had named first the Madman, then the Sage, now never left the forecastle. Since they crossed the Shambles shoal, his attention had been divided between the heavens and the waters. He looked down, he looked upwards, and above all watched the north-east.

The skipper gave the helm to a sailor, stepped over the after hatchway, crossed the gangway, and went on to the forecastle. He approached the old man, but not in front. He stood a little behind, with elbows resting on his hips, with outstretched hands, the head on one side, with open eyes and arched eyebrows, and a smile in the corners of his mouth--an attitude of curiosity hesitating between mockery and respect.

The old man, either that it was his habit to talk to himself, or that hearing some one behind incited him to speech, began to soliloquize while he looked into space.

"The meridian, from which the right ascension is calculated, is marked in this century by four stars--the Polar, Cassiopeia's Chair, Andromeda's Head, and the star Algenib, which is in Pegasus. But there is not one visible."

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

The skipper broke in, "My lord!"

The old man, perhaps rather deaf as well as very thoughtful, went on,--

"Too few stars, and too much wind. The breeze continually changes its direction and blows inshore; thence it rises perpendicularly. This results from the land being warmer than the water. Its atmosphere is lighter. The cold and dense wind of the sea rushes in to replace it. From this cause, in the upper regions the wind blows towards the land from every quarter. It would be advisable to make long tacks between the true and apparent parallel. When the latitude by observation differs from the latitude by dead reckoning by not more than three minutes in thirty miles, or by four minutes in sixty miles, you are in the true course."

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

the deep.

He continued his soliloquy, which was perhaps intended to be heard.

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

The skipper bowed a second time, and said, "My lord!"

The old man's eye rested on him; he had turned his head without moving his body.

"Call me Doctor."

"Master Doctor, I am the skipper."

"Just so," said the doctor.

The doctor, as henceforward we shall call him, appeared willing to converse.

"Skipper, have you an English sextant?"

"No."

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

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

"Be careful you are not taken aback."

"I keep her away when necessary."

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

"Yes."

"When?"

"Just now."

"How?"

"By the log."

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

"Yes."

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

"Yes."

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

"Yes."

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

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

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

"Yes."

"Have you tested the log?"

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

"Of what size was the shot?"

"One foot in diameter."

"Heavy enough?"

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

"Which was in the Armada?"

"Yes."

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

"Shipwreck knows it."

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

"By means of a German scale."

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

"Yes."

"What was the result?"

"The resistance of the water was 170 pounds."

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

"And three Dutch leagues."

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

"Undoubtedly."

"Whither are you steering?"

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

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

"Yes, as near as I can."

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

"Traidores."[4]

"No abuse. The sea understands. Insult nothing. Rest satisfied with watching."

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

"Have you a chart?"

"No; not for this channel."

"Then you sail by rule of thumb?"

"Not at all. I have a compass."

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

"A man with one eye can see."

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

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

"To guess is all very well. To know for certain is better."

"Christopher guessed."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"All goes well at present."

The doctor's eyes were fixed on the north-east. The skipper continued,--

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

The skipper broke off; the doctor was no longer listening.

The doctor gazed at the north-east. Over that icy face passed an extraordinary expression. All the agony of terror possible to a mask of stone was depicted there. From his mouth escaped this word, "Good!"

His eyeballs, which had all at once become quite round like an owl's,

were dilated with stupor on discovering a speck on the horizon. He added,--

"It is well. As for me, I am resigned."

The skipper looked at him. The doctor went on talking to himself, or to some one in the deep,--

"I say, Yes."

Then he was silent, opened his eyes wider and wider with renewed attention on that which he was watching, and said,--

"It is coming from afar, but not the less surely will it come."

The arc of the horizon which occupied the visual rays and thoughts of the doctor, being opposite to the west, was illuminated by the transcendent reflection of twilight, as if it were day. This arc, limited in extent, and surrounded by streaks of grayish vapour, was uniformly blue, but of a leaden rather than cerulean blue. The doctor, having completely returned to the contemplation of the sea, pointed to this atmospheric arc, and said,--

"Skipper, do you see?"

"What?"

"That."

"What?"

"Out there."

"A blue spot? Yes."

"What is it?"

"A niche in heaven."

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

A silence ensued. The skipper, remembering the two names given by the chief to this man, asked himself the question,--

"Is he a madman, or is he a sage?"

The stiff and bony finger of the doctor remained immovably pointing, like a sign-post, to the misty blue spot in the sky.

The skipper looked at this spot.

"In truth," he growled out, "it is not sky but clouds."

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

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

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

"No."

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

The skipper again turned his attention to the horizon.

Continuing to observe the cloud, he muttered between his teeth,--

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

"And the waterspout is a monster," said the doctor, adding, after a pause, "Here it comes." He continued, "Several winds are getting up together--a strong wind from the west, and a gentle wind from the east."

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

* * * * *

The blue cloud was growing larger.

"If the snow," said the doctor, "is appalling when it slips down the mountain, think what it is when it falls from the Pole!"

His eye was glassy. The cloud seemed to spread over his face and simultaneously over the horizon. He continued, in musing tones,--

"Every minute the fatal hour draws nearer. The will of Heaven is about to be manifested."

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

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

"This is the first time."

The doctor, who was absorbed by the blue cloud, and who, as a sponge can take up but a definite quantity of water, had but a definite measure of anxiety, displayed no more emotion at this answer of the skipper than was expressed by a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"How is that?"

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

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

"We are in twenty-five fathoms here."

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

"We'll sound as we get on."

"The Channel is not an ordinary sea. The water rises fifty feet with the spring tides, and twenty-five with neap tides. Here we are in slack water. I thought you looked scared."

"We'll sound to-night."

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

"Why not?"

"On account of the wind."

"We'll try."

"The squall is close on us."

"We'll sound, Master Doctor."

"You could not even bring to."

"Trust in God."

"Take care what you say. Pronounce not lightly the awful name."

"I will sound, I tell you."

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

"I say that I will try for soundings."

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

"The first time."

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

The tone of the word "listen" was so commanding that the skipper made an obeisance.

"Master Doctor, I am all attention."

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

"What do you mean?"

"Steer your course to the west."

"Caramba!"

"Steer your course to the west."

"Impossible."

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

"But, Master Doctor, steer west?"

"Yes, skipper."

"The wind will be dead ahead."

"Yes, skipper."

"She'll pitch like the devil."

"Moderate your language. Yes, skipper."

"The vessel would be in irons."

"Yes, skipper."

"That means very likely the mast will go."

"Possibly."

"Do you wish me to steer west?"

"Yes."

"I cannot."

"In that case settle your reckoning with the sea."

"The wind ought to change."

"It will not change all night."

"Why not?"

"Because it is a wind twelve hundred leagues in length."

"Make headway against such a wind! Impossible."

"To the west, I tell you."

"I'll try, but in spite of everything she will fall off."

"That's the danger."

"The wind sets us to the east."

"Don't go to the east."

"Why not?"

"Skipper, do you know what is for us the word of death?"

"No."

"Death is the east."

"I'll steer west."

This time the doctor, having turned right round, looked the skipper full in the face, and with his eyes resting on him, as though to implant the

idea in his head, pronounced slowly, syllable by syllable, these words,--

"If to-night out at sea we hear the sound of a bell, the ship is lost."

The skipper pondered in amaze.

"What do you mean?"

The doctor did not answer. His countenance, expressive for a moment, was now reserved. His eyes became vacuous. He did not appear to hear the skipper's wondering question. He was now attending to his own monologue. His lips let fall, as if mechanically, in a low murmuring tone, these words,--

"The time has come for sullied souls to purify themselves."

The skipper made that expressive grimace which raises the chin towards the nose.

"He is more madman than sage," he growled, and moved off.

Nevertheless he steered west.

But the wind and the sea were rising.

CHAPTER V.

HARDQUANONNE.

The mist was deformed by all sorts of inequalities, bulging out at once on every point of the horizon, as if invisible mouths were busy puffing out the bags of wind. The formation of the clouds was becoming ominous. In the west, as in the east, the sky's depths were now invaded by the blue cloud: it advanced in the teeth of the wind. These contradictions are part of the wind's vagaries.

The sea, which a moment before wore scales, now wore a skin--such is the nature of that dragon. It was no longer a crocodile: it was a boa. The skin, lead-coloured and dirty, looked thick, and was crossed by heavy wrinkles. Here and there, on its surface, bubbles of surge, like pustules, gathered and then burst. The foam was like a leprosy. It was at this moment that the hooker, still seen from afar by the child, lighted her signal.

A quarter of an hour elapsed.

The skipper looked for the doctor: he was no longer on deck. Directly the skipper had left him, the doctor had stooped his somewhat ungainly form under the hood, and had entered the cabin; there he had sat down near the stove, on a block. He had taken a shagreen ink-bottle and a

cordwain pocket-book from his pocket; he had extracted from his pocket-book a parchment folded four times, old, stained, and yellow; he had opened the sheet, taken a pen out of his ink-case, placed the pocket-book flat on his knee, and the parchment on the pocket-book; and by the rays of the lantern, which was lighting the cook, he set to writing on the back of the parchment. The roll of the waves inconvenienced him. He wrote thus for some time.

As he wrote, the doctor remarked the gourd of aguardiente, which the Provençal tasted every time he added a grain of pimento to the puchero, as if he were consulting it in reference to the seasoning. The doctor noticed the gourd, not because it was a bottle of brandy, but because of a name which was plaited in the wickerwork with red rushes on a background of white. There was light enough in the cabin to permit of his reading the name.

The doctor paused, and spelled it in a low voice,--

"Hardquanonne."

Then he addressed the cook.

"I had not observed that gourd before; did it belong to Hardquanonne?"

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

The doctor went on,--

"To Hardquanonne, the Fleming of Flanders?"

"Yes."

"Who is in prison?"

"Yes."

"In the dungeon at Chatham?"

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

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

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

The doctor arose and approached the stove, meeting the ship's motion with his knees dexterously bent, dried as best he could, at the stove

where the pot was boiling, the lines he had written, refolded the parchment in the pocket-book, and replaced the pocket-book and the inkhorn in his pocket.

The stove was not the least ingenious piece of interior economy in the hooker. It was judiciously isolated. Meanwhile the pot heaved--the Provençal was watching it.

"Fish broth," said he.

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

CHAPTER VI.

THEY THINK THAT HELP IS AT HAND.

Through his growing preoccupation the doctor in some sort reviewed the situation; and any one near to him might have heard these words drop from his lips,--

"Too much rolling, and not enough pitching."

Then recalled to himself by the dark workings of his mind, he sank again into thought, as a miner into his shaft. His meditation in nowise interfered with his watch on the sea. The contemplation of the sea is in itself a reverie.

The dark punishment of the waters, eternally tortured, was commencing. A lamentation arose from the whole main. Preparations, confused and melancholy, were forming in space. The doctor observed all before him, and lost no detail. There was, however, no sign of scrutiny in his face. One does not scrutinize hell.

A vast commotion, yet half latent, but visible through the turmoils in space, increased and irritated, more and more, the winds, the vapours, the waves. Nothing is so logical and nothing appears so absurd as the ocean. Self-dispersion is the essence of its sovereignty, and is one of

the elements of its redundance. The sea is ever for and against. It knots that it may unravel itself; one of its slopes attacks, the other relieves. No apparition is so wonderful as the waves. Who can paint the alternating hollows and promontories, the valleys, the melting bosoms, the sketches? How render the thickets of foam, blendings of mountains and dreams? The indescribable is everywhere there--in the rending, in the frowning, in the anxiety, in the perpetual contradiction, in the chiaroscuro, in the pendants of the cloud, in the keys of the ever-open vault, in the disaggregation without rupture, in the funereal tumult caused by all that madness!

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

Every vestige of day had faded away. This was the moment when the child, watching from the distant cliff, lost sight of the hooker. Up to then his glance had remained fixed, and, as it were, leaning on the vessel. What part had that look in fate? When the hooker was lost to sight in the distance, and when the child could no longer see aught, the child went north and the ship went south.

All were plunged in darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

SUPERHUMAN HORRORS.

On their part it was with wild jubilee and delight that those on board the hooker saw the hostile land recede and lessen behind them. By degrees the dark ring of ocean rose higher, dwarfing in twilight Portland, Purbeck, Tineham, Kimmeridge, the Matravers, the long streaks of dim cliffs, and the coast dotted with lighthouses.

England disappeared. The fugitives had now nothing round them but the sea.

All at once night grew awful.

There was no longer extent nor space; the sky became blackness, and closed in round the vessel. The snow began to fall slowly; a few flakes appeared. They might have been ghosts. Nothing else was visible in the course of the wind. They felt as if yielded up. A snare lurked in every possibility.

It is in this cavernous darkness that in our climate the Polar waterspout makes its appearance.

A great muddy cloud, like to the belly of a hydra, hung over ocean, and in places its lividity adhered to the waves. Some of these adherences resembled pouches with holes, pumping the sea, disgorging vapour, and refilling themselves with water. Here and there these suctions drew up cones of foam on the sea.

The boreal storm hurled itself on the hooker. The hooker rushed to meet it. The squall and the vessel met as though to insult each other.

In the first mad shock not a sail was clewed up, not a jib lowered, not a reef taken in, so much is flight a delirium. The mast creaked and bent back as if in fear.

Cyclones, in our northern hemisphere, circle from left to right, in the same direction as the hands of a watch, with a velocity which is sometimes as much as sixty miles an hour. Although she was entirely at the mercy of that whirling power, the hooker behaved as if she were out in moderate weather, without any further precaution than keeping her head on to the rollers, with the wind broad on the bow so as to avoid being pooped or caught broadside on. This semi-prudence would have availed her nothing in case of the wind's shifting and taking her aback.

A deep rumbling was brewing up in the distance. The roar of the abyss, nothing can be compared to it. It is the great brutish howl of the

universe. What we call matter, that unsearchable organism, that amalgamation of incommensurable energies, in which can occasionally be detected an almost imperceptible degree of intention which makes us shudder, that blind, benighted cosmos, that enigmatical Pan, has a cry, a strange cry, prolonged, obstinate, and continuous, which is less than speech and more than thunder. That cry is the hurricane. Other voices, songs, melodies, clamours, tones, proceed from nests, from broods, from pairings, from nuptials, from homes. This one, a trumpet, comes out of the Naught, which is All. Other voices express the soul of the universe; this one expresses the monster. It is the howl of the formless. It is the inarticulate finding utterance in the indefinite. A thing it is full of pathos and terror. Those clamours converse above and beyond man. They rise, fall, undulate, determine waves of sound, form all sorts of wild surprises for the mind, now burst close to the ear with the importunity of a peal of trumpets, now assail us with the rumbling hoarseness of distance. Giddy uproar which resembles a language, and which, in fact, is a language. It is the effort which the world makes to speak. It is the lisping of the wonderful. In this wail is manifested vaguely all that the vast dark palpitation endures, suffers, accepts, rejects. For the most part it talks nonsense; it is like an access of chronic sickness, and rather an epilepsy diffused than a force employed; we fancy that we are witnessing the descent of supreme evil into the infinite. At moments we seem to discern a reclamation of the elements, some vain effort of chaos to reassert itself over creation. At times it is a complaint. The void bewails and justifies itself. It is as the pleading of the world's cause. We can fancy that the universe is engaged in a lawsuit; we listen--we try to grasp the reasons given, the

redoubtable for and against. Such a moaning of the shadows has the tenacity of a syllogism. Here is a vast trouble for thought. Here is the raison d'être of mythologies and polytheisms. To the terror of those great murmurs are added superhuman outlines melting away as they appear--Eumenides which are almost distinct, throats of Furies shaped in the clouds, Plutonian chimeras almost defined. No horrors equal those sobs, those laughs, those tricks of tumult, those inscrutable questions and answers, those appeals to unknown aid. Man knows not what to become in the presence of that awful incantation. He bows under the enigma of those Draconian intonations. What latent meaning have they? What do they signify? What do they threaten? What do they implore? It would seem as though all bonds were loosened. Vociferations from precipice to precipice, from air to water, from the wind to the wave, from the rain to the rock, from the zenith to the nadir, from the stars to the foam--the abyss unmuzzled--such is that tumult, complicated by some mysterious strife with evil consciences.

The loquacity of night is not less lugubrious than its silence. One feels in it the anger of the unknown.

Night is a presence. Presence of what?

For that matter we must distinguish between night and the shadows. In the night there is the absolute; in the darkness the multiple. Grammar, logic as it is, admits of no singular for the shadows. The night is one, the shadows are many.[5]

This mist of nocturnal mystery is the scattered, the fugitive, the crumbling, the fatal; one feels earth no longer, one feels the other reality.

In the shadow, infinite and indefinite, lives something or some one; but that which lives there forms part of our death. After our earthly passage, when that shadow shall be light for us, the life which is beyond our life shall seize us. Meanwhile it appears to touch and try us. Obscurity is a pressure. Night is, as it were, a hand placed on our soul. At certain hideous and solemn hours we feel that which is beyond the wall of the tomb encroaching on us.

Never does this proximity of the unknown seem more imminent than in storms at sea. The horrible combines with the fantastic. The possible interrupter of human actions, the old Cloud compeller, has it in his power to mould, in whatsoever shape he chooses, the inconsistent element, the limitless incoherence, the force diffused and undecided of aim. That mystery the tempest every instant accepts and executes some unknown changes of will, apparent or real.

Poets have, in all ages, called this the caprice of the waves. But there is no such thing as caprice. The disconcerting enigmas which in nature we call caprice, and in human life chance, are splinters of a law revealed to us in glimpses.

CHAPTER VIII.

NIX ET NOX.

The characteristic of the snowstorm is its blackness. Nature's habitual aspect during a storm, the earth or sea black and the sky pale, is reversed; the sky is black, the ocean white, foam below, darkness above; a horizon walled in with smoke; a zenith roofed with crape. The tempest resembles a cathedral hung with mourning, but no light in that cathedral: no phantom lights on the crests of the waves, no spark, no phosphorescence, naught but a huge shadow. The polar cyclone differs from the tropical cyclone, inasmuch as the one sets fire to every light, and the other extinguishes them all. The world is suddenly converted into the arched vault of a cave. Out of the night falls a dust of pale spots, which hesitate between sky and sea. These spots, which are flakes of snow, slip, wander, and flow. It is like the tears of a winding-sheet putting themselves into lifelike motion. A mad wind mingles with this dissemination. Blackness crumbling into whiteness, the furious into the obscure, all the tumult of which the sepulchre is capable, a whirlwind under a catafalque--such is the snowstorm. Underneath trembles the ocean, forming and re-forming over portentous unknown depths.

In the polar wind, which is electrical, the flakes turn suddenly into hailstones, and the air becomes filled with projectiles; the water crackles, shot with grape.

No thunderstrokes: the lightning of boreal storms is silent. What is sometimes said of the cat, "it swears," may be applied to this lightning. It is a menace proceeding from a mouth half open and strangely inexorable. The snowstorm is a storm blind and dumb; when it has passed, the ships also are often blind and the sailors dumb.

To escape from such an abyss is difficult.

It would be wrong, however, to believe shipwreck to be absolutely inevitable. The Danish fishermen of Disco and the Balesin; the seekers of black whales; Hearn steering towards Behring Strait, to discover the mouth of Coppermine River; Hudson, Mackenzie, Vancouver, Ross, Dumont D'Urville, all underwent at the Pole itself the wildest hurricanes, and escaped out of them.

It was into this description of tempest that the hooker had entered, triumphant and in full sail--frenzy against frenzy. When Montgomery, escaping from Rouen, threw his galley, with all the force of its oars, against the chain barring the Seine at La Bouille, he showed similar effrontery.

The Matutina sailed on fast; she bent so much under her sails that at moments she made a fearful angle with the sea of fifteen degrees; but her good bellied keel adhered to the water as if glued to it. The keel resisted the grasp of the hurricane. The lantern at the prow cast its light ahead.

The cloud, full of winds, dragging its tumour over the deep, cramped and eat more and more into the sea round the hooker. Not a gull, not a sea-mew, nothing but snow. The expanse of the field of waves was becoming contracted and terrible; only three or four gigantic ones were visible.

Now and then a tremendous flash of lightning of a red copper colour broke out behind the obscure superposition of the horizon and the zenith; that sudden release of vermilion flame revealed the horror of the clouds; that abrupt conflagration of the depths, to which for an instant the first tiers of clouds and the distant boundaries of the celestial chaos seemed to adhere, placed the abyss in perspective. On this ground of fire the snow-flakes showed black--they might have been compared to dark butterflies flying about in a furnace--then all was extinguished.

The first explosion over, the squall, still pursuing the hooker, began to roar in thorough bass. This phase of grumbling is a perilous diminution of uproar. Nothing is so terrifying as this monologue of the storm. This gloomy recitative appears to serve as a moment of rest to the mysterious combating forces, and indicates a species of patrol kept in the unknown.

The hooker held wildly on her course. Her two mainsails especially were doing fearful work. The sky and sea were as of ink with jets of foam running higher than the mast. Every instant masses of water swept the

deck like a deluge, and at each roll of the vessel the hawse-holes, now to starboard, now to larboard, became as so many open mouths vomiting back the foam into the sea. The women had taken refuge in the cabin, but the men remained on deck; the blinding snow eddied round, the spitting surge mingled with it. All was fury.

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

"We are free!"

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

"Hurrah!" shouted the chief.

And the band shouted in the storm,--

"Hurrah!"

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

"Silence!"

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

The voice spoke again,--

"Listen!"

All were silent.

Then did they distinctly hear through the darkness the toll of a bell.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHARGE CONFIDED TO A RAGING SEA.

The skipper, at the helm, burst out laughing,--

"A bell! that's good. We are on the larboard tack. What does the bell prove? Why, that we have land to starboard."

The firm and measured voice of the doctor replied,--

"You have not land to starboard."

"But we have," shouted the skipper.

"No!"

"But that bell tolls from the land."

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

A shudder passed over these daring men. The haggard faces of the two women appeared above the companion like two hobgoblins conjured up. The doctor took a step forward, separating his tall form from the mast. From the depth of the night's darkness came the toll of the bell.

The doctor resumed,--

"There is in the midst of the sea, halfway between Portland and the Channel Islands, a buoy, placed there as a caution; that buoy is moored by chains to the shoal, and floats on the top of the water. On the buoy is fixed an iron trestle, and across the trestle a bell is hung. In bad weather heavy seas toss the buoy, and the bell rings. That is the bell you hear."

The doctor paused to allow an extra violent gust of wind to pass over, waited until the sound of the bell reasserted itself, and then went on,--

"To hear that bell in a storm, when the nor'-wester is blowing, is to be lost. Wherefore? For this reason: if you hear the bell, it is because the wind brings it to you. But the wind is nor'-westerly, and the breakers of Aurigny lie east. You hear the bell only because you are between the buoy and the breakers. It is on those breakers the wind is driving you. You are on the wrong side of the buoy. If you were on the right side, you would be out at sea on a safe course, and you would not hear the bell. The wind would not convey the sound to you. You would pass close to the buoy without knowing it. We are out of our course. That bell is shipwreck sounding the tocsin. Now, look out!"

As the doctor spoke, the bell, soothed by a lull of the storm, rang slowly stroke by stroke, and its intermitting toll seemed to testify to

the truth of the old man's words. It was as the knell of the abyss.

All listened breathless, now to the voice, now to the bell.

CHAPTER X.

THE COLOSSAL SAVAGE, THE STORM.

In the meantime the skipper had caught up his speaking-trumpet.

"Strike every sail, my lads; let go the sheets, man the down-hauls, lower ties and brails. Let us steer to the west, let us regain the high sea; head for the buoy, steer for the bell--there's an offing down there. We've yet a chance."

"Try," said the doctor.

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

The orders of the skipper were obeyed. The Languedocian made a third sailor. All bore a hand. Not satisfied with brailing up, they furled the sails, lashed the earrings, secured the clew-lines, bunt-lines, and leech-lines, and clapped preventer-shrouds on the block straps, which thus might serve as back-stays. They fished the mast. They battened down the ports and bulls'-eyes, which is a method of walling up a ship. These evolutions, though executed in a lubberly fashion, were, nevertheless, thoroughly effective. The hooker was stripped to bare poles. But in

proportion as the vessel, stowing every stitch of canvas, became more helpless, the havoc of both winds and waves increased. The seas ran mountains high. The hurricane, like an executioner hastening to his victim, began to dismember the craft. There came, in the twinkling of an eye, a dreadful crash: the top-sails were blown from the bolt-ropes, the chess-trees were hewn asunder, the deck was swept clear, the shrouds were carried away, the mast went by the board, all the lumber of the wreck was flying in shivers. The main shrouds gave out although they were turned in, and stoppered to four fathoms.

The magnetic currents common to snowstorms hastened the destruction of the rigging. It broke as much from the effect of effluvium as the violence of the wind. Most of the chain gear, fouled in the blocks, ceased to work. Forward the bows, aft the quarters, quivered under the terrific shocks. One wave washed overboard the compass and its binnacle. A second carried away the boat, which, like a box slung under a carriage, had been, in accordance with the quaint Asturian custom, lashed to the bowsprit. A third breaker wrenched off the spritsail yard. A fourth swept away the figurehead and signal light. The rudder only was left.

To replace the ship's bow lantern they set fire to, and suspended at the stem, a large block of wood covered with oakum and tar.

The mast, broken in two, all bristling with quivering splinters, ropes, blocks, and yards, cumbered the deck. In falling it had stove in a plank of the starboard gunwale. The skipper, still firm at the helm,

shouted,--

"While we can steer we have yet a chance. The lower planks hold good. Axes, axes! Overboard with the mast! Clear the decks!"

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

"Now," continued the skipper, "take a rope's end and lash me to the helm." To the tiller they bound him.

While they were fastening him he laughed, and shouted,--

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

And when secured he clutched the helm with that strange hilarity which danger awakens.

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

An enormous wave came down abeam, and fell on the vessel's quarter. There is always in storms a tiger-like wave, a billow fierce and decisive, which, attaining a certain height, creeps horizontally over the surface of the waters for a time, then rises, roars, rages, and

falling on the distressed vessel tears it limb from limb.

A cloud of foam covered the entire poop of the Matutina.

There was heard above the confusion of darkness and waters a crash.

When the spray cleared off, when the stern again rose in view, the skipper and the helm had disappeared. Both had been swept away.

The helm and the man they had but just secured to it had passed with the wave into the hissing turmoil of the hurricane.

The chief of the band, gazing intently into the darkness, shouted,--

"Te burlas de nosotros?"

To this defiant exclamation there followed another cry,--

"Let go the anchor. Save the skipper."

They rushed to the capstan and let go the anchor.

Hookers carry but one. In this case the anchor reached the bottom, but only to be lost. The bottom was of the hardest rock. The billows were raging with resistless force. The cable snapped like a thread.

The anchor lay at the bottom of the sea. At the cutwater there remained

but the cable end protruding from the hawse-hole.

From this moment the hooker became a wreck. The Matutina was irrevocably disabled. The vessel, just before in full sail, and almost formidable in her speed, was now helpless. All her evolutions were uncertain and executed at random. She yielded passively and like a log to the capricious fury of the waves. That in a few minutes there should be in place of an eagle a useless cripple, such a transformation is to be witnessed only at sea.

The howling of the wind became more and more frightful. A hurricane has terrible lungs; it makes unceasingly mournful additions to darkness, which cannot be intensified. The bell on the sea rang despairingly, as if tolled by a weird hand.

The Matutina drifted like a cork at the mercy of the waves. She sailed no longer--she merely floated. Every moment she seemed about to turn over on her back, like a dead fish. The good condition and perfectly water-tight state of the hull alone saved her from this disaster. Below the water-line not a plank had started. There was not a cranny, chink, nor crack; and she had not made a single drop of water in the hold. This was lucky, as the pump, being out of order, was useless.

The hooker pitched and roared frightfully in the seething billows. The vessel had throes as of sickness, and seemed to be trying to belch forth the unhappy crew.

Helpless they clung to the standing rigging, to the transoms, to the shank painters, to the gaskets, to the broken planks, the protruding nails of which tore their hands, to the warped riders, and to all the rugged projections of the stumps of the masts. From time to time they listened. The toll of the bell came over the waters fainter and fainter; one would have thought that it also was in distress. Its ringing was no more than an intermittent rattle. Then this rattle died away. Where were they? At what distance from the buoy? The sound of the bell had frightened them; its silence terrified them. The north-wester drove them forward in perhaps a fatal course. They felt themselves wafted on by maddened and ever-recurring gusts of wind. The wreck sped forward in the darkness. There is nothing more fearful than being hurried forward blindfold. They felt the abyss before them, over them, under them. It was no longer a run, it was a rush.

Suddenly, through the appalling density of the snowstorm, there loomed a red light.

"A lighthouse!" cried the crew.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CASKETS.

It was indeed the Caskets light.

A lighthouse of the nineteenth century is a high cylinder of masonry, surmounted by scientifically constructed machinery for throwing light. The Caskets lighthouse in particular is a triple white tower, bearing three light-rooms. These three chambers revolve on clockwork wheels, with such precision that the man on watch who sees them from sea can invariably take ten steps during their irradiation, and twenty-five during their eclipse. Everything is based on the focal plan, and on the rotation of the octagon drum, formed of eight wide simple lenses in range, having above and below it two series of dioptric rings; an algebraic gear, secured from the effects of the beating of winds and waves by glass a millimetre thick[6], yet sometimes broken by the sea-eagles, which dash themselves like great moths against these gigantic lanterns. The building which encloses and sustains this mechanism, and in which it is set, is also mathematically constructed. Everything about it is plain, exact, bare, precise, correct. A lighthouse is a mathematical figure.

In the seventeenth century a lighthouse was a sort of plume of the land on the seashore. The architecture of a lighthouse tower was magnificent and extravagant. It was covered with balconies, balusters, lodges, alcoves, weathercocks. Nothing but masks, statues, foliage, volutes, reliefs, figures large and small, medallions with inscriptions. Pax in bello, said the Eddystone lighthouse. We may as well observe, by the way, that this declaration of peace did not always disarm the ocean.

Winstanley repeated it on a lighthouse which he constructed at his own expense, on a wild spot near Plymouth. The tower being finished, he shut himself up in it to have it tried by the tempest. The storm came, and carried off the lighthouse and Winstanley in it. Such excessive adornment gave too great a hold to the hurricane, as generals too brilliantly equipped in battle draw the enemy's fire. Besides whimsical designs in stone, they were loaded with whimsical designs in iron, copper, and wood. The ironwork was in relief, the woodwork stood out. On the sides of the lighthouse there jutted out, clinging to the walls among the arabesques, engines of every description, useful and useless, windlasses, tackles, pulleys, counterpoises, ladders, cranes, grapnels. On the pinnacle around the light delicately-wrought ironwork held great iron chandeliers, in which were placed pieces of rope steeped in resin; wicks which burned doggedly, and which no wind extinguished; and from top to bottom the tower was covered by a complication of sea-standards, banderoles, banners, flags, pennons, colours which rose from stage to stage, from story to story, a medley of all hues, all shapes, all heraldic devices, all signals, all confusion, up to the light chamber, making, in the storm, a gay riot of tatters about the blaze. That insolent light on the brink of the abyss showed like a defiance, and inspired shipwrecked men with a spirit of daring. But the Caskets light was not after this fashion.

It was, at that period, merely an old barbarous lighthouse, such as Henry I. had built it after the loss of the White Ship--a flaming pile of wood under an iron trellis, a brazier behind a railing, a head of hair flaming in the wind.

The only improvement made in this lighthouse since the twelfth century was a pair of forge-bellows worked by an indented pendulum and a stone weight, which had been added to the light chamber in 1610.

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

To a full-rigged ship in good trim, answering readily to the pilot's handling, the Caskets light is useful; it cries, "Look out;" it warns her of the shoal. To a disabled ship it is simply terrible. The hull, paralyzed and inert, without resistance, without defence against the impulse of the storm or the mad heaving of the waves, a fish without fins, a bird without wings, can but go where the wind wills. The lighthouse shows the end--points out the spot where it is doomed to disappear--throws light upon the burial. It is the torch of the sepulchre.

To light up the inexorable chasm, to warn against the inevitable, what more tragic mockery!

CHAPTER XII.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE ROCK.

The wretched people in distress on board the Matutina understood at once the mysterious derision which mocked their shipwreck. The appearance of the lighthouse raised their spirits at first, then overwhelmed them. Nothing could be done, nothing attempted. What has been said of kings, we may say of the waves--we are their people, we are their prey. All that they rave must be borne. The nor'-wester was driving the hooker on the Caskets. They were nearing them; no evasion was possible. They drifted rapidly towards the reef; they felt that they were getting into shallow waters; the lead, if they could have thrown it to any purpose, would not have shown more than three or four fathoms. The shipwrecked people heard the dull sound of the waves being sucked within the submarine caves of the steep rock. They made out, under the lighthouse, like a dark cutting between two plates of granite, the narrow passage of the ugly wild-looking little harbour, supposed to be full of the skeletons of men and carcasses of ships. It looked like the mouth of a cavern, rather than the entrance of a port. They could hear the crackling of the pile on high within the iron grating. A ghastly purple illuminated the storm; the collision of the rain and hail disturbed the mist. The black cloud and the red flame fought, serpent against serpent; live ashes, reft by the wind, flew from the fire, and the sudden assaults of the sparks seemed to drive the snowflakes before

them. The breakers, blurred at first in outline, now stood out in bold relief, a medley of rocks with peaks, crests, and vertebræ. The angles were formed by strongly marked red lines, and the inclined planes in blood-like streams of light. As they neared it, the outline of the reefs increased and rose--sinister.

One of the women, the Irishwoman, told her beads wildly.

In place of the skipper, who was the pilot, remained the chief, who was the captain. The Basques all know the mountain and the sea. They are bold on the precipice, and inventive in catastrophes.

They neared the cliff. They were about to strike. Suddenly they were so close to the great north rock of the Caskets that it shut out the lighthouse from them. They saw nothing but the rock and the red light behind it. The huge rock looming in the mist was like a gigantic black woman with a hood of fire.

That ill-famed rock is called the Biblet. It faces the north side the reef, which on the south is faced by another ridge, L'Etacq-aux-giulmets. The chief looked at the Biblet, and shouted,--

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

No answer.

No one on board knew how to swim, not even the sailors--an ignorance not

uncommon among seafaring people.

A beam nearly free of its lashings was swinging loose. The chief clasped it with both hands, crying, "Help me."

They unlashed the beam. They had now at their disposal the very thing they wanted. From the defensive, they assumed the offensive.

It was a longish beam of heart of oak, sound and strong, useful either as a support or as an engine of attack--a lever for a burden, a ram against a tower.

"Ready!" shouted the chief.

All six, getting foothold on the stump of the mast, threw their weight on the spar projecting over the side, straight as a lance towards a projection of the cliff.

It was a dangerous manoeuvre. To strike at a mountain is audacity indeed. The six men might well have been thrown into the water by the shock.

There is variety in struggles with storms. After the hurricane, the shoal; after the wind, the rock. First the intangible, then the immovable, to be encountered.

Some minutes passed, such minutes as whiten men's hair.

The rock and the vessel were about to come in collision. The rock, like a culprit, awaited the blow.

A resistless wave rushed in; it ended the respite. It caught the vessel underneath, raised it, and swayed it for an instant as the sling swings its projectile.

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

The beam was couched, the six men were one with it, its sharp bolts tore their arm-pits, but they did not feel them.

The wave dashed the hooker against the rock.

Then came the shock.

It came under the shapeless cloud of foam which always hides such catastrophes.

When this cloud fell back into the sea, when the waves rolled back from the rock, the six men were tossing about the deck, but the Matutina was floating alongside the rock--clear of it. The beam had stood and turned the vessel; the sea was running so fast that in a few seconds she had left the Caskets behind.

Such things sometimes occur. It was a straight stroke of the bowsprit

that saved Wood of Largo at the mouth of the Tay. In the wild neighbourhood of Cape Winterton, and under the command of Captain Hamilton, it was the appliance of such a lever against the dangerous rock, Branodu-um, that saved the Royal Mary from shipwreck, although she was but a Scotch built frigate. The force of the waves can be so abruptly discomposed that changes of direction can be easily managed, or at least are possible even in the most violent collisions. There is a brute in the tempest. The hurricane is a bull, and can be turned.

The whole secret of avoiding shipwreck is to try and pass from the secant to the tangent.

Such was the service rendered by the beam to the vessel. It had done the work of an oar, had taken the place of a rudder. But the manoeuvre once performed could not be repeated. The beam was overboard; the shock of the collision had wrenched it out of the men's hands, and it was lost in the waves. To loosen another beam would have been to dislocate the hull.

The hurricane carried off the Matutina. Presently the Caskets showed as a harmless encumbrance on the horizon. Nothing looks more out of countenance than a reef of rocks under such circumstances. There are in nature, in its obscure aspects, in which the visible blends with the invisible, certain motionless, surly profiles, which seem to express that a prey has escaped.

Thus glowered the Caskest while the Matutina fled.

The lighthouse paled in distance, faded, and disappeared.

There was something mournful in its extinction. Layers of mist sank down upon the now uncertain light. Its rays died in the waste of waters; the flame floated, struggled, sank, and lost its form. It might have been a drowning creature. The brasier dwindled to the snuff of a candle; then nothing; more but a weak, uncertain flutter. Around it spread a circle of extravasated glimmer; it was like the quenching of: light in the pit of night.

The bell which had threatened was dumb. The lighthouse which had threatened had melted away. And yet it was more awful now that they had ceased to threaten. One was a voice, the other a torch. There was something human about them.

They were gone, and nought remained but the abyss.

CHAPTER XIII.

FACE TO FACE WITH NIGHT.

Again was the hooker running with the shadow into immeasurable darkness.

The Matutina, escaped from the Caskets, sank and rose from billow to billow. A respite, but in chaos.

Spun round by the wind, tossed by all the thousand motions of the wave, she reflected every mad oscillation of the sea. She scarcely pitched at all--a terrible symptom of a ship's distress. Wrecks merely roll. Pitching is a convulsion of the strife. The helm alone can turn a vessel to the wind.

In storms, and more especially in the meteors of snow, sea and night end by melting into amalgamation, resolving into nothing but a smoke. Mists, whirlwinds, gales, motion in all directions, no basis, no shelter, no stop. Constant recommencement, one gulf succeeding another. No horizon visible; intense blackness for background. Through all these the hooker drifted.

To have got free of the Caskets, to have eluded the rock, was a victory for the shipwrecked men; but it was a victory which left them in stupor. They had raised no cheer: at sea such an imprudence is not repeated

twice. To throw down a challenge where they could not cast the lead, would have been too serious a jest.

The repulse of the rock was an impossibility achieved. They were petrified by it. By degrees, however, they began to hope again. Such are the insubmergable mirages of the soul! There is no distress so complete but that even in the most critical moments the inexplicable sunrise of hope is seen in its depths. These poor wretches were ready to acknowledge to themselves that they were saved. It was on their lips.

But suddenly something terrible appeared to them in the darkness.

On the port bow arose, standing stark, cut out on the background of mist, a tall, opaque mass, vertical, right-angled, a tower of the abyss. They watched it open-mouthed.

The storm was driving them towards it.

They knew not what it was. It was the Ortach rock.

CHAPTER XIV.

ORTACH.

The reef reappeared. After the Caskets comes Ortach. The storm is no artist; brutal and all-powerful, it never varies its appliances. The darkness is inexhaustible. Its snares and perfidies never come to an end. As for man, he soon comes to the bottom of his resources. Man expends his strength, the abyss never.

The shipwrecked men turned towards the chief, their hope. He could only shrug his shoulders. Dismal contempt of helplessness.

A pavement in the midst of the ocean--such is the Ortach rock. The Ortach, all of a piece, rises up in a straight line to eighty feet above the angry beating of the waves. Waves and ships break against it. An immovable cube, it plunges its rectilinear planes apeak into the numberless serpentine curves of the sea.

At night it stands an enormous block resting on the folds of a huge black sheet. In time of storm it awaits the stroke of the axe, which is the thunder-clap.

But there is never a thunder-clap during the snowstorm. True, the ship has the bandage round her eyes; darkness is knotted about her; she is like one prepared to be led to the scaffold. As for the thunderbolt, which makes quick ending, it is not to be hoped for.

The Matutina, nothing better than a log upon the waters, drifted towards this rock as she had drifted towards the other. The poor

wretches on board, who had for a moment believed themselves saved, relapsed into their agony. The destruction they had left behind faced them again. The reef reappeared from the bottom of the sea. Nothing had been gained.

The Caskets are a figuring iron[7] with a thousand compartments. The Ortach is a wall. To be wrecked on the Caskets is to be cut into ribbons; to strike on the Ortach is to be crushed into powder.

Nevertheless, there was one chance.

On a straight frontage such as that of the Ortach neither the wave nor the cannon ball can ricochet. The operation is simple: first the flux, then the reflux; a wave advances, a billow returns.

In such cases the question of life and death is balanced thus: if the wave carries the vessel on the rock, she breaks on it and is lost; if the billow retires before the ship has touched, she is carried back, she is saved.

It was a moment of great anxiety; those on board saw through the gloom the great decisive wave bearing down on them. How far was it going to drag them? If the wave broke upon the ship, they were carried on the rock and dashed to pieces. If it passed under the ship....

The wave did pass under.

They breathed again.

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

CHAPTER XV.

PORTENTOSUM MARE.

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

They were now in a short and chopping sea. A turgid sea indicates its constraint. Even in a fog the entrance into a strait may be known by the boiling-like appearance of the waves. And thus it was, for they were unconsciously coasting Aurigny. Between the west of Ortach and the Caskets and the east of Aurigny the sea is hemmed in and cramped, and the uneasy position determines locally the condition of storms. The sea suffers like others, and when it suffers it is irritable. That channel is a thing to fear.

The Matutina was in it.

Imagine under the sea a tortoise shell as big as Hyde Park or the Champs Elysées, of which every striature is a shallow, and every embossment a

reef. Such is the western approach of Aurigny. The sea covers and conceals this ship-wrecking apparatus. On this conglomeration of submarine breakers the cloven waves leap and foam--in calm weather, a chopping sea; in storms, a chaos.

The shipwrecked men observed this new complication without endeavouring to explain it to themselves. Suddenly they understood it. A pale vista broadened in the zenith; a wan tinge overspread the sea; the livid light revealed on the port side a long shoal stretching eastward, towards which the power of the rushing wind was driving the vessel. The shoal was Aurigny.

What was that shoal? They shuddered. They would have shuddered even more had a voice answered them--Aurigny.

No isle so well defended against man's approach as Aurigny. Below and above water it is protected by a savage guard, of which Ortach is the outpost. To the west, Burhou, Sauteriaux, Anfroque, Niangle, Fond du Croc, Les Jumelles, La Grosse, La Clanque, Les Eguillons, Le Vrac, La Fosse-Malière; to the east, Sauquet, Hommeau Floreau, La Brinebetais, La Queslingue, Croquelihou, La Fourche, Le Saut, Noire Pute, Coupie, Orbue. These are hydra-monsters of the species reef.

One of these reefs is called Le But, the goal, as if to imply that every voyage ends there.

This obstruction of rocks, simplified by night and sea, appeared to the

shipwrecked men in the shape of a single dark band, a sort of black blot on the horizon.

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

A plaything--ghastly epithet!

The Matutina was a little above Aurigny, which was not an unfavourable

position; but she was drifting towards its northern point, which was fatal. As a bent bow discharges its arrow, the nor'-wester was shooting the vessel towards the northern cape. Off that point, a little beyond the harbour of Corbelets, is that which the seamen of the Norman archipelago call a "singe."

The "singe," or race, is a furious kind of current. A wreath of funnels in the shallows produces in the waves a wreath of whirlpools. You escape one to fall into another. A ship caught hold of by the race, winds round and round until some sharp rock cleaves her hull; then the shattered vessel stops, her stern rises from the waves, the stem completes the revolution in the abyss, the stern sinks in, and all is sucked down. A circle of foam broadens and floats, and nothing more is seen on the surface of the waves but a few bubbles here and there rising from the smothered breathings below.

The three most dangerous races in the whole Channel are one close to the well-known Girdler Sands, one at Jersey between the Pignonnet and the Point of Noirmont, and the race of Aurigny.

Had a local pilot been on board the Matutina, he could have warned them of their fresh peril. In place of a pilot, they had their instinct. In situations of extreme danger men are endowed with second sight. High contortions of foam were flying along the coast in the frenzied raid of the wind. It was the spitting of the race. Many a bark has been swamped in that snare. Without knowing what awaited them, they approached the spot with horror.

How to double that cape? There were no means of doing it.

Just as they had seen, first the Caskets, then Ortach, rise before them, they now saw the point of Aurigny, all of steep rock. It was like a number of giants, rising up one after another--a series of frightful duels.

Charybdis and Scylla are but two; the Caskets, Ortach, and Aurigny are three.

The phenomenon of the horizon being invaded by the rocks was thus repeated with the grand monotony of the abyss. The battles of the ocean have the same sublime tautology as the combats of Homer.

Each wave, as they neared it, added twenty cubits to the cape, awfully magnified by the mist; the fast decreasing distance seemed more inevitable--they were touching the skirts of the race! The first fold which seized them would drag them in--another wave surmounted, and all would be over.

Suddenly the hooker was driven back, as by the blow of a Titan's fist. The wave reared up under the vessel and fell back, throwing the waif back in its mane of foam. The Matutina, thus impelled, drifted away from Aurigny.

She was again on the open sea.

Whence had come the succour? From the wind. The breath of the storm had changed its direction.

The wave had played with them; now it was the wind's turn. They had saved themselves from the Caskets. Off Ortach it was the wave which had been their friend. Now it was the wind. The wind had suddenly veered from north to south. The sou'-wester had succeeded the nor'-wester.

The current is the wind in the waters; the wind is the current in the air. These two forces had just counteracted each other, and it had been the wind's will to snatch its prey from the current.

The sudden fantasies of ocean are uncertain. They are, perhaps, an embodiment of the perpetual, when at their mercy man must neither hope nor despair. They do and they undo. The ocean amuses itself. Every shade of wild, untamed ferocity is phased in the vastness of that cunning sea, which Jean Bart used to call the "great brute." To its claws and their gashings succeed soft intervals of velvet paws. Sometimes the storm hurries on a wreck, at others it works out the problem with care; it might almost be said that it caresses it. The sea can afford to take its time, as men in their agonies find out.

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

After believing themselves buried, they declare their resurrection; they feverishly embrace what they do not yet possess; it is clear that the bad luck has turned; they declare themselves satisfied; they are saved; they cry quits with God. They should not be in so great a hurry to give receipts to the Unknown.

The sou'-wester set in with a whirlwind. Shipwrecked men have never any but rough helpers. The Matutina was dragged rapidly out to sea by the remnant of her rigging--like a dead woman trailed by the hair. It was like the enfranchisement granted by Tiberius, at the price of violation.

The wind treated with brutality those whom it saved; it rendered service with fury; it was help without pity.

The wreck was breaking up under the severity of its deliverers.

Hailstones, big and hard enough to charge a blunderbuss, smote the vessel; at every rotation of the waves these hailstones rolled about the deck like marbles. The hooker, whose deck was almost flush with the water, was being beaten out of shape by the rolling masses of water and its sheets of spray. On board it each man was for himself.

They clung on as best they could. As each sea swept over them, it was with a sense of surprise they saw that all were still there. Several had their faces torn by splinters.

Happily despair has stout hands. In terror a child's hand has the grasp

of a giant. Agony makes a vice of a woman's fingers. A girl in her fright can almost bury her rose-coloured fingers in a piece of iron. With hooked fingers they hung on somehow, as the waves dashed on and passed off them; but every wave brought them the fear of being swept away.

Suddenly they were relieved.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PROBLEM SUDDENLY WORKS IN SILENCE.

The hurricane had just stopped short. There was no longer in the air sou'-wester or nor'-wester. The fierce clarions of space were mute. The whole of the waterspout had poured from the sky without any warning of diminution, as if it had slided perpendicularly into a gulf beneath. None knew what had become of it; flakes replaced the hailstones, the snow began to fall slowly. No more swell: the sea flattened down.

Such sudden cessations are peculiar to snowstorms. The electric effluvium exhausted, all becomes still, even the wave, which in ordinary storms often remains agitated for a long time. In snowstorms it is not so. No prolonged anger in the deep. Like a tired-out worker it becomes drowsy directly, thus almost giving the lie to the laws of statics, but not astonishing old seamen, who know that the sea is full of unforeseen surprises.

The same phenomenon takes place, although very rarely, in ordinary storms. Thus, in our time, on the occasion of the memorable hurricane of July 27th, 1867, at Jersey the wind, after fourteen hours' fury, suddenly relapsed into a dead calm.

In a few minutes the hooker was floating in sleeping waters.

At the same time (for the last phase of these storms resembles the first) they could distinguish nothing; all that had been made visible in the convulsions of the meteoric cloud was again dark. Pale outlines were fused in vague mist, and the gloom of infinite space closed about the vessel. The wall of night--that circular occlusion, that interior of a cylinder the diameter of which was lessening minute by minute--enveloped the Matutina, and, with the sinister deliberation of an encroaching iceberg, was drawing in dangerously. In the zenith nothing--a lid of fog closing down. It was as if the hooker were at the bottom of the well of the abyss.

In that well the sea was a puddle of liquid lead. No stir in the waters--ominous immobility! The ocean is never less tamed than when it is still as a pool.

All was silence, stillness, blindness.

Perchance the silence of inanimate objects is taciturnity.

The last ripples glided along the hull. The deck was horizontal, with an insensible slope to the sides. Some broken planks were shifting about irresolutely. The block on which they had lighted the tow steeped in tar, in place of the signal light which had been swept away, swung no longer at the prow, and no longer let fall burning drops into the sea. What little breeze remained in the clouds was noiseless. The snow fell thickly, softly, with scarce a slant. No foam of breakers could be

heard. The peace of shadows was over all.

This repose succeeding all the past exasperations and paroxysms was, for the poor creatures so long tossed about, an unspeakable comfort. It was as though the punishment of the rack had ceased. They caught a glimpse about them and above them of something which seemed like a consent, that they should be saved. They regained confidence. All that had been fury was now tranquillity. It appeared to them a pledge of peace. Their wretched hearts dilated. They were able to let go the end of rope or beam to which they had clung, to rise, hold themselves up, stand, walk, move about. They felt inexpressibly calmed. There are in the depths of darkness such phases of paradise, preparations for other things. It was clear that they were delivered out of the storm, out of the foam, out of the wind, out of the uproar. Henceforth all the chances were in their favour. In three or four hours it would be sunrise. They would be seen by some passing ship; they would be rescued. The worst was over; they were re-entering life. The important feat was to have been able to keep afloat until the cessation of the tempest. They said to themselves, "It is all over this time."

Suddenly they found that all was indeed over.

One of the sailors, the northern Basque, Galdeazun by name, went down into the hold to look for a rope, then came above again and said,--

"The hold is full."

"Of what?" asked the chief.

"Of water," answered the sailor.

The chief cried out,--

"What does that mean?"

"It means," replied Galdeazun, "that in half an hour we shall founder."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST RESOURCE.

There was a hole in the keel. A leak had been sprung. When it happened no one could have said. Was it when they touched the Caskets? Was it off Ortach? Was it when they were whirled about the shallows west of Aurigny? It was most probable that they had touched some rock there. They had struck against some hidden buttress which they had not felt in the midst of the convulsive fury of the wind which was tossing them. In tetanus who would feel a prick?

The other sailor, the southern Basque, whose name was Ave Maria, went down into the hold, too, came on deck again, and said,--

"There are two varas of water in the hold."

About six feet.

Ave Maria added, "In less than forty minutes we shall sink."

Where was the leak? They couldn't find it. It was hidden by the water which was filling up the hold. The vessel had a hole in her hull somewhere under the water-line, quite forward in the keel. Impossible to find it--impossible to check it. They had a wound which they could not

stanch. The water, however, was not rising very fast.

The chief called out,

"We must work the pump."

Galdeazun replied, "We have no pump left."

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

"Where is the land?"

"I don't know."

"Nor I."

"But it must be somewhere."

"True enough."

"Let some one steer for it."

"We have no pilot."

"Stand to the tiller yourself."

"We have lost the tiller."

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

"The carpenter's box is overboard, we have no tools."

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

"The rudder is lost."

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

"The boat is lost."

"We'll row the wreck."

"We have lost the oars."

"We'll sail."

"We have lost the sails and the mast."

"We'll rig one up with a pole and a tarpaulin for sail Let's get clear of this and trust in the wind."

"There is no wind."

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

The end was near!

Wind, hail, the hurricane, the whirlwind--these are wild combatants that may be overcome; the storm can be taken in the weak point of its armour; there are resources against the violence which continually lays itself open, is off its guard, and often hits wide. But nothing is to be done against a calm; it offers nothing to the grasp of which you can lay hold.

The winds are a charge of Cossacks: stand your ground and they disperse. Calms are the pincers of the executioner.

The water, deliberate and sure, irrepressible and heavy, rose in the hold, and as it rose the vessel sank--it was happening slowly.

Those on board the wreck of the Matutina felt that most hopeless of catastrophes--an inert catastrophe undermining them. The still and sinister certainty of their fate petrified them. No stir in the air, no

movement on the sea. The motionless is the inexorable. Absorption was sucking them down silently. Through the depths of the dumb waters--without anger, without passion, not willing, not knowing, not caring--the fatal centre of the globe was attracting them downwards. Horror in repose amalgamating them with itself. It was no longer the wide open mouth of the sea, the double jaw of the wind and the wave, vicious in its threat, the grin of the waterspout, the foaming appetite of the breakers--it was as if the wretched beings had under them the black yawn of the infinite.

They felt themselves sinking into Death's peaceful depths. The height between the vessel and the water was lessening--that was all. They could calculate her disappearance to the moment. It was the exact reverse of submersion by the rising tide. The water was not rising towards them; they were sinking towards it. They were digging their own grave. Their own weight was their sexton.

They were being executed, not by the law of man, but by the law of things.

The snow was falling, and as the wreck was now motionless, this white lint made a cloth over the deck and covered the vessel as with a winding-sheet.

The hold was becoming fuller and deeper--no means of getting at the leak. They struck a light and fixed three or four torches in holes as best they could. Galdeazun brought some old leathern buckets, and they

tried to bale the hold out, standing in a row to pass them from hand to hand; but the buckets were past use, the leather of some was unstitched, there were holes in the bottoms of the others, and the buckets emptied themselves on the way. The difference in quantity between the water which was making its way in and that which they returned to the sea was ludicrous--for a ton that entered a glassful was baled out; they did not improve their condition. It was like the expenditure of a miser, trying to exhaust a million, halfpenny by halfpenny.

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

During the storm they had lashed together the few chests which were on deck. These remained tied to the stump of the mast. They undid the lashings and rolled the chests overboard through a breach in the gunwale. One of these trunks belonged to the Basque woman, who could not repress a sigh.

"Oh, my new cloak lined with scarlet! Oh, my poor stockings of birchen-bark lace! Oh, my silver ear-rings to wear at mass on May Day!"

The deck cleared, there remained the cabin to be seen to. It was greatly encumbered; in it were, as may be remembered, the luggage belonging to the passengers, and the bales belonging to the sailors. They took the luggage, and threw it over the gunwale. They carried up the bales and cast them into the sea.

Thus they emptied the cabin. The lantern, the cap, the barrels, the

sacks, the bales, and the water-butts, the pot of soup, all went over into the waves.

They unscrewed the nuts of the iron stove, long since extinguished: they pulled it out, hoisted it on deck, dragged it to the side, and threw it out of the vessel.

They cast overboard everything they could pull out of the deck--chains, shrouds, and torn rigging.

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

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HIGHEST RESOURCE.

The wreck being lightened, was sinking more slowly, but none the less surely.

The hopelessness of their situation was without resource--without mitigation; they had exhausted their last expedient.

"Is there anything else we can throw overboard?"

The doctor, whom every one had forgotten, rose from the companion, and said,

"Yes."

"What?" asked the chief.

The doctor answered, "Our Crime."

They shuddered, and all cried out,--

"Amen."

The doctor standing up, pale, raised his hand to heaven, saying,--

"Kneel down."

They wavered--to waver is the preface to kneeling down.

The doctor went on,--

"Let us throw our crimes into the sea, they weigh us down; it is they that are sinking the ship. Let us think no more of safety--let us think of salvation. Our last crime, above all, the crime which we committed, or rather completed, just now--O wretched beings who are listening to me--it is that which is overwhelming us. For those who leave intended murder behind them, it is an impious insolence to tempt the abyss. He who sins against a child, sins against God. True, we were obliged to put to sea, but it was certain perdition. The storm, warned by the shadow of our crime, came on. It is well. Regret nothing, however. There, not far off in the darkness, are the sands of Vauville and Cape la Hogue. It is France. There was but one possible shelter for us, which was Spain. France is no less dangerous to us than England. Our deliverance from the sea would have led but to the gibbet. Hanged or drowned--we had no alternative. God has chosen for us; let us give Him thanks. He has vouchsafed us the grave which cleanses. Brethren, the inevitable hand is in it. Remember that it was we who just now did our best to send on high that child, and that at this very moment, now as I speak, there is perhaps, above our heads, a soul accusing us before a Judge whose eye is on us. Let us make the best use of this last respite; let us make an

effort, if we still may, to repair, as far as we are able, the evil that we have wrought. If the child survives us, let us come to his aid; if he is dead, let us seek his forgiveness. Let us cast our crime from us. Let us ease our consciences of its weight. Let us strive that our souls be not swallowed up before God, for that is the awful shipwreck. Bodies go to the fishes, souls to the devils. Have pity on yourselves. Kneel down, I tell you. Repentance is the bark which never sinks. You have lost your compass! You are wrong! You still have prayer."

The wolves became lambs--such transformations occur in last agonies; tigers lick the crucifix; when the dark portal opens ajar, belief is difficult, unbelief impossible. However imperfect may be the different sketches of religion essayed by man, even when his belief is shapeless, even when the outline of the dogma is not in harmony with the lineaments of the eternity he foresees, there comes in his last hour a trembling of the soul. There is something which will begin when life is over; this thought impresses the last pang.

A man's dying agony is the expiration of a term. In that fatal second he feels weighing on him a diffused responsibility. That which has been complicates that which is to be. The past returns and enters into the future. What is known becomes as much an abyss as the unknown. And the two chasms, the one which is full by his faults, the other of his anticipations, mingle their reverberations. It is this confusion of the two gulfs which terrifies the dying man.

They had spent their last grain of hope on the direction of life; hence

they turned in the other. Their only remaining chance was in its dark shadow. They understood it. It came on them as a lugubrious flash, followed by the relapse of horror. That which is intelligible to the dying man is as what is perceived in the lightning. Everything, then nothing; you see, then all is blindness. After death the eye will reopen, and that which was a flash will become a sun.

They cried out to the doctor,--

"Thou, thou, there is no one but thee. We will obey thee, what must we do? Speak."

The doctor answered,--

"The question is how to pass over the unknown precipice and reach the other bank of life, which is beyond the tomb. Being the one who knows the most, my danger is greater than yours. You do well to leave the choice of the bridge to him whose burden is the heaviest."

He added,--

"Knowledge is a weight added to conscience."

He continued,--

"How much time have we still?"

Galdeazun looked at the water-mark, and answered,--

"A little more than a quarter of an hour."

"Good," said the doctor.

The low hood of the companion on which he leant his elbows made a sort of table; the doctor took from his pocket his inkhorn and pen, and his pocket-book out of which he drew a parchment, the same one on the back of which he had written, a few hours before, some twenty cramped and crooked lines.

"A light," he said.

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

The doctor replaced his pocket-book in his pocket, put down the pen and inkhorn on the hood of the companion, unfolded the parchment, and said,--

"Listen."

Then in the midst of the sea, on the failing bridge (a sort of shuddering flooring of the tomb), the doctor began a solemn reading, to

which all the shadows seemed to listen. The doomed men bowed their heads around him. The flaming of the torch intensified their pallor. What the doctor read was written in English. Now and then, when one of those woebegone looks seemed to ask an explanation, the doctor would stop, to repeat--whether in French, or Spanish, Basque, or Italian--the passage he had just read. Stifled sobs and hollow beatings of the breast were heard. The wreck was sinking more and more.

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

Then, turning towards the others, he said,--

"Come, and sign."

The Basque woman approached, took the pen, and signed herself, ASUNCION.

She handed the pen to the Irish woman, who, not knowing how to write, made a cross.

The doctor, by the side of this cross, wrote, BARBARA FERMOY, of Tyrrif Island, in the Hebrides.

Then he handed the pen to the chief of the band.

The chief signed, GAIZDORRA: Captal.

The Genoese signed himself under the chief's name. GIANGIRATE.

The Languedocian signed, JACQUES QUARTOURZE: alias, the Narbonnais.

The Provençal signed, LUC-PIERRE CAPGAROUPE, of the Galleys of Mahon.

Under these signatures the doctor added a note:--

"Of the crew of three men, the skipper having been washed overboard by a sea, but two remain, and they have signed."

The two sailors affixed their names underneath the note. The northern Basque signed himself, GALDEAZUN.

The southern Basque signed, AVE MARIA: Robber.

Then the doctor said,--

"Capgaroupe."

"Here," said the Provençal.

"Have you Hardquanonne's flask?"

"Yes."

"Give it me."

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

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

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

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

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

The doctor corked the flask with a bit of rope, and asked for some tar. Galdeazun went forward, extinguished the signal light with a piece of tow, took the vessel in which it was contained from the stern, and brought it, half full of burning tar, to the doctor.

The flask holding the parchment which they had all signed was corked and tarred over.

"It is done," said the doctor.

And from out all their mouths, vaguely stammered in every language, came the dismal utterances of the catacombs.

"Ainsi soit-il!"

"Mea culpa!"

"Asi sea!"

"Aro raï!"

"Amen!"

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

The doctor turned away from his companions in crime and distress, and took a few steps towards the gunwale. Reaching the side, he looked into space, and said, in a deep voice,--

"Bist du bei mir?"[8]

Perchance he was addressing some phantom.

The wreck was sinking.

Behind the doctor all the others were in a dream. Prayer mastered them by main force. They did not bow, they were bent. There was something involuntary in their condition; they wavered as a sail flaps when the breeze fails. And the haggard group took by degrees, with clasping of hands and prostration of foreheads, attitudes various, yet of humiliation. Some strange reflection of the deep seemed to soften their villainous features.

The doctor returned towards them. Whatever had been his past, the old man was great in the presence of the catastrophe.

The deep reserve of nature which enveloped him preoccupied without disconcerting him. He was not one to be taken unawares. Over him was the calm of a silent horror: on his countenance the majesty of God's will comprehended.

This old and thoughtful outlaw unconsciously assumed the air of a pontiff.

He said,--

"Attend to me."

He contemplated for a moment the waste of water, and added,--

"Now we are going to die."

Then he took the torch from the hands of Ave Maria, and waved it.

A spark broke from it and flew into the night.

Then the doctor cast the torch into the sea.

The torch was extinguished: all light disappeared. Nothing left but the huge, unfathomable shadow. It was like the filling up of the grave.

In the darkness the doctor was heard saying,--

"Let us pray."

All knelt down.

It was no longer on the snow, but in the water, that they knelt.

They had but a few minutes more.

The doctor alone remained standing.

The flakes of snow falling on him had sprinkled him with white tears, and made him visible on the background of darkness. He might have been the speaking statue of the shadow.

The doctor made the sign of the cross and raised his voice, while

beneath his feet he felt that almost imperceptible oscillation which prefaces the moment in which a wreck is about to founder. He said,--

"Pater noster qui es in coelis."

The Provençal repeated in French,--

"Notre Père qui êtes aux cieux."

The Irishwoman repeated in Gaelic, understood by the Basque woman,--

"Ar nathair ata ar neamh."

The doctor continued,--

"Sanctificetur nomen tuum."

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

"Naomhthar hainm," said the Irishwoman.

"Adveniat regnum tuum," continued the doctor.

"Que votre règne arrive," said the Provençal.

"Tigeadh do rioghachd," said the Irishwoman.

As they knelt, the waters had risen to their shoulders. The doctor went on,--

"Fiat voluntas tua."

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

And the Irishwoman and Basque woman cried,--

"Deuntar do thoil ar an Hhalàmb."

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

No voice answered him.

He looked down. All their heads were under water. They had let themselves be drowned on their knees.

The doctor took in his right hand the flask which he had placed on the companion, and raised it above his head.

The wreck was going down. As he sank, the doctor murmured the rest of the prayer.

For an instant his shoulders were above water, then his head, then nothing remained but his arm holding up the flask, as if he were showing it to the Infinite.

His arm disappeared; there was no greater fold on the deep sea than there would have been on a tun of oil. The snow continued falling.

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