A WINTER AMID THE ICE.

## CHAPTER I.

## THE BLACK FLAG.

The curé of the ancient church of Dunkirk rose at five o'clock on the 12th of May, 18--, to perform, according to his custom, low mass for the benefit of a few pious sinners.

Attired in his priestly robes, he was about to proceed to the altar, when a man entered the sacristy, at once joyous and frightened. He was a sailor of some sixty years, but still vigorous and sturdy, with, an open, honest countenance.

"Monsieur the curé," said he, "stop a moment, if you please."

"What do you want so early in the morning, Jean Cornbutte?" asked the curé.

"What do I want? Why, to embrace you in my arms, i' faith!"

"Well, after the mass at which you are going to be present--"

"The mass?" returned the old sailor, laughing. "Do you think you are going to say your mass now, and that I will let you do so?"

"And why should I not say my mass?" asked the curé. "Explain yourself. The third bell has sounded--"

"Whether it has or not," replied Jean Cornbutte, "it will sound many more times to-day, monsieur the curé, for you have promised me that you will bless, with your own hands, the marriage of my son Louis and my niece Marie!"

"He has arrived, then," said the curé "joyfully.

"It is nearly the same thing," replied Cornbutte, rubbing his hands. "Our brig was signalled from the look out at sunrise,--our brig, which you yourself christened by the good name of the 'Jeune-Hardie'!"

"I congratulate you with all my heart, Cornbutte," said the curé, taking off his chasuble and stole. "I remember our agreement. The vicar will take my place, and I will put myself at your disposal against your dear son's arrival."

"And I promise you that he will not make you fast long," replied

the sailor. "You have already published the banns, and you will only have to absolve him from the sins he may have committed between sky and water, in the Northern Ocean. I had a good idea, that the marriage should be celebrated the very day he arrived, and that my son Louis should leave his ship to repair at once to the church."

"Go, then, and arrange everything, Cornbutte."

"I fly, monsieur the curé. Good morning!"

The sailor hastened with rapid steps to his house, which stood on the quay, whence could be seen the Northern Ocean, of which he seemed so proud.

Jean Cornbutte had amassed a comfortable sum at his calling. After having long commanded the vessels of a rich shipowner of Havre, he had settled down in his native town, where he had caused the brig "Jeune-Hardie" to be constructed at his own expense. Several successful voyages had been made in the North, and the ship always found a good sale for its cargoes of wood, iron, and tar. Jean Cornbutte then gave up the command of her to his son Louis, a fine sailor of thirty, who, according to all the coasting captains, was the boldest mariner in Dunkirk.

Louis Cornbutte had gone away deeply attached to Marie, his

father's niece, who found the time of his absence very long and weary. Marie was scarcely twenty. She was a pretty Flemish girl, with some Dutch blood in her veins. Her mother, when she was dying, had confided her to her brother, Jean Cornbutte. The brave old sailor loved her as a daughter, and saw in her proposed union with Louis a source of real and durable happiness.

The arrival of the ship, already signalled off the coast, completed an important business operation, from which Jean Cornbutte expected large profits. The "Jeune-Hardie," which had left three months before, came last from Bodoë, on the west coast of Norway, and had made a quick voyage thence.

On returning home, Jean Cornbutte found the whole house alive. Marie, with radiant face, had assumed her wedding-dress.

"I hope the ship will not arrive before we are ready!" she said.

"Hurry, little one," replied Jean Cornbutte, "for the wind is north, and she sails well, you know, when she goes freely."

"Have our friends been told, uncle?" asked Marie.

"They have."

"The notary, and the curé?"

"Rest easy. You alone are keeping us waiting."

At this moment Clerbaut, an old crony, came in.

"Well, old Cornbutte," cried he, "here's luck! Your ship has arrived at the very moment that the government has decided to contract for a large quantity of wood for the navy!"

"What is that to me?" replied Jean Cornbutte. "What care I for the government?"

"You see, Monsieur Clerbaut," said Marie, "one thing only absorbs us,--Louis's return."

"I don't dispute that," replied Clerbaut. "But--in short--this purchase of wood--"

"And you shall be at the wedding," replied Jean Cornbutte, interrupting the merchant, and shaking his hand as if he would crush it.

"This purchase of wood--"

"And with all our friends, landsmen and seamen, Clerbaut. I have already informed everybody, and I shall invite the whole crew of

the ship."

"And shall we go and await them on the pier?" asked Marie.

"Indeed we will," replied Jean Cornbutte. "We will defile, two by two, with the violins at the head."

Jean Cornbutte's invited guests soon arrived. Though it was very early, not a single one failed to appear. All congratulated the honest old sailor whom they loved. Meanwhile Marie, kneeling down, changed her prayers to God into thanksgivings. She soon returned, lovely and decked out, to the company; and all the women kissed her on the check, while the men vigorously grasped her by the hand. Then Jean Cornbutte gave the signal of departure.

It was a curious sight to see this joyous group taking its way, at sunrise, towards the sea. The news of the ship's arrival had spread through the port, and many heads, in nightcaps, appeared at the windows and at the half-opened doors. Sincere compliments and pleasant nods came from every side.

The party reached the pier in the midst of a concert of praise and blessings. The weather was magnificent, and the sun seemed to take part in the festivity. A fresh north wind made the waves foam; and some fishing-smacks, their sails trimmed for leaving

port, streaked the sea with their rapid wakes between the breakwaters.

The two piers of Dunkirk stretch far out into the sea. The wedding-party occupied the whole width of the northern pier, and soon reached a small house situated at its extremity, inhabited by the harbour-master. The wind freshened, and the "Jeune-Hardie" ran swiftly under her topsails, mizzen, brigantine, gallant, and royal. There was evidently rejoicing on board as well as on land. Jean Cornbutte, spy-glass in hand, responded merrily to the questions of his friends.

"See my ship!" he cried; "clean and steady as if she had been rigged at Dunkirk! Not a bit of damage done,--not a rope wanting!"

"Do you see your son, the captain?" asked one.

"No, not yet. Why, he's at his business!"

"Why doesn't he run up his flag?" asked Clerbaut.

"I scarcely know, old friend. He has a reason for it, no doubt."

"Your spy-glass, uncle?" said Marie, taking it from him. "I want to be the first to see him."

"But he is my son, mademoiselle!"

"He has been your son for thirty years," answered the young girl, laughing, "and he has only been my betrothed for two!"

The "Jeune-Hardie" was now entirely visible. Already the crew were preparing to cast anchor. The upper sails had been reefed. The sailors who were among the rigging might be recognized. But neither Marie nor Jean Cornbutte had yet been able to wave their hands at the captain of the ship.

"Faith! there's the first mate, André Vasling," cried Clerbaut.

"And there's Fidèle Misonne, the carpenter," said another.

"And our friend Penellan," said a third, saluting the sailor named.

The "Jeune-Hardie" was only three cables' lengths from the shore, when a black flag ascended to the gaff of the brigantine. There was mourning on board!

A shudder of terror seized the party and the heart of the young girl.

The ship sadly swayed into port, and an icy silence reigned on its deck. Soon it had passed the end of the pier. Marie, Jean Cornbutte, and all their friends hurried towards the quay at which she was to anchor, and in a moment found themselves on board.

"My son!" said Jean Cornbutte, who could only articulate these words.

The sailors, with uncovered heads, pointed to the mourning flag.

Marie uttered a cry of anguish, and fell into old Cornbutte's arms.

André Vasling had brought back the "Jeune-Hardie," but Louis Cornbutte, Marie's betrothed, was not on board.

## CHAPTER II.

### Jean Cornbutte's Project.

As soon as the young girl, confided to the care of the sympathizing friends, had left the ship, André Vasling, the mate, apprised Jean Cornbutte of the dreadful event which had deprived him of his son, narrated in the ship's journal as follows:--

"At the height of the Maëlstrom, on the 26th of April, the ship, putting for the cape, by reason of bad weather and south-west winds, perceived signals of distress made by a schooner to the leeward. This schooner, deprived of its mizzen-mast, was running towards the whirlpool, under bare poles. Captain Louis Cornbutte, seeing that this vessel was hastening into imminent danger, resolved to go on board her. Despite the remonstrances of his crew, he had the long-boat lowered into the sea, and got into it, with the sailor Courtois and the helmsman Pierre Nouquet. The crew watched them until they disappeared in the fog. Night came on. The sea became more and more boisterous. The "Jeune-Hardie", drawn by the currents in those parts, was in danger of being engulfed by the Maëlstrom. She was obliged to fly before the wind. For several days she hovered near the place of the disaster, but in vain. The long-boat, the schooner, Captain Louis, and the two sailors did not reappear. André Vasling then

called the crew together, took command of the ship, and set sail for Dunkirk."

After reading this dry narrative, Jean Cornbutte wept for a long time; and if he had any consolation, it was the thought that his son had died in attempting to save his fellow-men. Then the poor father left the ship, the sight of which made him wretched, and returned to his desolate home.

The sad news soon spread throughout Dunkirk. The many friends of the old sailor came to bring him their cordial and sincere sympathy. Then the sailors of the "Jeune-Hardie" gave a more particular account of the event, and André Vasling told Marie, at great length, of the devotion of her betrothed to the last.

When he ceased weeping, Jean Cornbutte thought over the matter, and the next day after the ship's arrival, when Andre came to see him, said,--

"Are you very sure, André, that my son has perished?"

"Alas, yes, Monsieur Jean," replied the mate.

"And you made all possible search for him?"

"All, Monsieur Cornbutte. But it is unhappily but too certain

that he and the two sailors were sucked down in the whirlpool of the Maëlstrom."

"Would you like, André, to keep the second command of the ship?"

"That will depend upon the captain, Monsieur Cornbutte."

"I shall be the captain," replied the old sailor. "I am going to discharge the cargo with all speed, make up my crew, and sail in search of my son."

"Your son is dead!" said André obstinately.

"It is possible, Andre," replied Jean Cornbutte sharply, "but it is also possible that he saved himself. I am going to rummage all the ports of Norway whither he might have been driven, and when I am fully convinced that I shall never see him again, I will return here to die!"

André Vasling, seeing that this decision was irrevocable, did not insist further, but went away.

Jean Cornbutte at once apprised his niece of his intention, and he saw a few rays of hope glisten across her tears. It had not seemed to the young girl that her lover's death might be doubtful; but scarcely had this new hope entered her heart, than

she embraced it without reserve.

The old sailor determined that the "Jeune-Hardie" should put to sea without delay. The solidly built ship had no need of repairs. Jean Cornbutte gave his sailors notice that if they wished to re-embark, no change in the crew would be made. He alone replaced his son in the command of the brig. None of the comrades of Louis Cornbutte failed to respond to his call, and there were hardy tars among them,--Alaine Turquiette, Fidèle Misonne the carpenter, Penellan the Breton, who replaced Pierre Nouquet as helmsman, and Gradlin, Aupic, and Gervique, courageous and well-tried mariners.

Jean Cornbutte again offered André Vasling his old rank on board. The first mate was an able officer, who had proved his skill in bringing the "Jeune-Hardie" into port. Yet, from what motive could not be told, André made some difficulties and asked time for reflection.

"As you will, André Vasling," replied Cornbutte. "Only remember that if you accept, you will be welcome among us."

Jean had a devoted sailor in Penellan the Breton, who had long been his fellow-voyager. In times gone by, little Marie was wont to pass the long winter evenings in the helmsman's arms, when he was on shore. He felt a fatherly friendship for her, and she had

for him ah affection quite filial. Penellan hastened the fitting out of the ship with all his energy, all the more because, according to his opinion, André Vasling had not perhaps made every effort possible to find the castaways, although he was excusable from the responsibility which weighed upon him as captain.

Within a week the "Jeune-Hardie" was ready to put to sea. Instead of merchandise, she was completely provided with salt meats, biscuits, barrels of flour, potatoes, pork, wine, brandy, coffee, tea, and tobacco.

The departure was fixed for the 22nd of May. On the evening before, André Vasling, who had not yet given his answer to Jean Cornbutte, came to his house. He was still undecided, and did not know which course to take.

Jean was not at home, though the house-door was open. André went into the passage, next to Marie's chamber, where the sound of an animated conversation struck his ear. He listened attentively, and recognized the voices of Penellan and Marie.

The discussion had no doubt been going on for some time, for the young girl seemed to be stoutly opposing what the Breton sailor said.

"How old is my uncle Cornbutte?" said Marie.

"Something about sixty years," replied Penellan.

"Well, is he not going to brave danger to find his son?"

"Our captain is still a sturdy man," returned the sailor. "He has a body of oak and muscles as hard as a spare spar. So I am not afraid to have him go to sea again!'"

"My good Penellan," said Marie, "one is strong when one loves! Besides, I have full confidence in the aid of Heaven. You understand me, and will help me."

"No!" said Penellan. "It is impossible, Marie. Who knows whither we shall drift, or what we must suffer? How many vigorous men have I seen lose their lives in these seas!"

"Penellan," returned the young girl, "if you refuse me, I shall believe that you do not love me any longer."

André Vasling understood the young girl's resolution. He reflected a moment, and his course was determined on.

"Jean Cornbutte," said he, advancing towards the old sailor, who now entered, "I will go with you. The cause of my hesitation has

disappeared, and you may count upon my devotion."

"I have never doubted you, André Vasling," replied Jean Cornbutte, grasping him by the hand. "Marie, my child!" he added, calling in a loud voice.

Marie and Penellan made their appearance.

"We shall set sail to-morrow at daybreak, with the outgoing tide," said Jean. "My poor Marie, this is the last evening that we shall pass together.

"Uncle!" cried Marie, throwing herself into his arms.

"Marie, by the help of God, I will bring your lover back to you!"

"Yes, we will find Louis," added André Vasling.

"You are going with us, then?" asked Penellan quickly.

"Yes, Penellan, André Vasling is to be my first mate," answered Jean.

"Oh, oh!" ejaculated the Breton, in a singular tone.

"And his advice will be useful to us, for he is able and

enterprising.

"And yourself, captain," said André. "You will set us all a good example, for you have still as much vigour as experience."

"Well, my friends, good-bye till to-morrow. Go on board and make the final arrangements. Good-bye, André; good-bye, Penellan."

The mate and the sailor went out together, and Jean and Marie remained alone. Many bitter tears were shed during that sad evening. Jean Cornbutte, seeing Marie so wretched, resolved to spare her the pain of separation by leaving the house on the morrow without her knowledge. So he gave her a last kiss that evening, and at three o'clock next morning was up and away.

The departure of the brig had attracted all the old sailor's friends to the pier. The curé, who was to have blessed Marie's union with Louis, came to give a last benediction on the ship. Rough grasps of the hand were silently exchanged, and Jean went on board.

The crew were all there. André Vasling gave the last orders. The sails were spread, and the brig rapidly passed out under a stiff north-west breeze, whilst the cure, upright in the midst of the kneeling spectators, committed the vessel to the hands of God.

Whither goes this ship? She follows the perilous route upon which so many castaways have been lost! She has no certain destination. She must expect every peril, and be able to brave them without hesitating. God alone knows where it will be her fate to anchor. May God guide her!

## CHAPTER III.

## A RAY OF HOPE.

At that time of the year the season was favourable, and the crew might hope promptly to reach the scene of the shipwreck.

Jean Cornbutte's plan was naturally traced out. He counted on stopping at the Feroë Islands, whither the north wind might have carried the castaways; then, if he was convinced that they had not been received in any of the ports of that locality, he would continue his search beyond the Northern Ocean, ransack the whole western coast of Norway as far as Bodoë, the place nearest the scene of the shipwreck; and, if necessary, farther still.

André Vasling thought, contrary to the captain's opinion, that the coast of Iceland should be explored; but Penellan observed that, at the time of the catastrophe, the gale came from the west; which, while it gave hope that the unfortunates had not been forced towards the gulf of the Maëlstrom, gave ground for supposing that they might have been thrown on the Norwegian coast.

It was determined, then, that this coast should be followed as closely as possible, so as to recognize any traces of them that

might appear.

The day after sailing, Jean Cornbutte, intent upon a map, was absorbed in reflection, when a small hand touched his shoulder, and a soft voice said in his ear,--

"Have good courage, uncle."

He turned, and was stupefied. Marie embraced him.

"Marie, my daughter, on board!" he cried.

"The wife may well go in search of her husband, when the father embarks to save his child."

"Unhappy Marie! How wilt thou support our fatigues! Dost thou know that thy presence may be injurious to our search?"

"No, uncle, for I am strong."

"Who knows whither we shall be forced to go, Marie? Look at this map. We are approaching places dangerous even for us sailors, hardened though we are to the difficulties of the sea. And thou, frail child?"

"But, uncle, I come from a family of sailors. I am used to

stories of combats and tempests. I am with you and my old friend Penellan!"

"Penellan! It was he who concealed you on board?"

"Yes, uncle; but only when he saw that I was determined to come without his help."

"Penellan!" cried Jean.

Penellan entered.

"It is not possible to undo what you have done, Penellan; but remember that you are responsible for Marie's life."

"Rest easy, captain," replied Penellan. "The little one has force and courage, and will be our guardian angel. And then, captain, you know it is my theory, that all in this world happens for the best."

The young girl was installed in a cabin, which the sailors soon got ready for her, and which they made as comfortable as possible.

A week later the "Jeune-Hardie" stopped at the Feroë Islands, but the most minute search was fruitless. Mo wreck, or fragments of a

ship had come upon these coasts. Even the news of the event was quite unknown. The brig resumed its voyage, after a stay of ten days, about the 10th of June. The sea was calm, and the winds were favourable. The ship sped rapidly towards the Norwegian coast, which it explored without better result.

Jean Cornbutte determined to proceed to Bodoë. Perhaps he would there learn the name of the shipwrecked schooner to succour which Louis and the sailors had sacrificed themselves.

On the 30th of June the brig cast anchor in that port.

The authorities of Bodoë gave Jean Cornbutte a bottle found on the coast, which contained a document bearing these words:--

"This 26th April, on board the 'Froöern,' after being accosted by the long-boat of the 'Jeune-Hardie,' we were drawn by the currents towards the ice. God have pity on us!"

Jean Cornbutte's first impulse was to thank Heaven. He thought himself on his son's track. The "Froöern" was a Norwegian sloop of which there had been no news, but which had evidently been drawn northward.

Not a day was to be lost. The "Jeune-Hardie" was at once put in condition to brave the perils of the polar seas. Fidèle Misonne,

the carpenter, carefully examined her, and assured himself that her solid construction might resist the shock of the ice-masses.

Penellan, who had already engaged in whale-fishing in the arctic waters, took care that woollen and fur coverings, many sealskin moccassins, and wood for the making of sledges with which to cross the ice-fields were put on board. The amount of provisions was increased, and spirits and charcoal were added; for it might be that they would have to winter at some point on the Greenland coast. They also procured, with much difficulty and at a high price, a quantity of lemons, for preventing or curing the scurvy, that terrible disease which decimates crews in the icy regions. The ship's hold was filled with salt meat, biscuits, brandy, &c., as the steward's room no longer sufficed. They provided themselves, moreover, with a large quantity of "pemmican," an Indian preparation which concentrates a great deal of nutrition within a small volume.

By order of the captain, some saws were put on board for cutting the ice-fields, as well as picks and wedges for separating them. The captain determined to procure some dogs for drawing the sledges on the Greenland coast.

The whole crew was engaged in these preparations, and displayed great activity. The sailors Aupic, Gervique, and Gradlin zealously obeyed Penellan's orders; and he admonished them not to

accustom themselves to woollen garments, though the temperature in this latitude, situated just beyond the polar circle, was very low.

Penellan, though he said nothing, narrowly watched every action of André Vasling. This man was Dutch by birth, came from no one knew whither, but was at least a good sailor, having made two voyages on board the "Jeune-Hardie". Penellan would not as yet accuse him of anything, unless it was that he kept near Marie too constantly, but he did not let him out of his sight.

Thanks to the energy of the crew, the brig was equipped by the 16th of July, a fortnight after its arrival at Bodoë. It was then the favourable season for attempting explorations in the Arctic Seas. The thaw had been going on for two months, and the search might be carried farther north. The "Jeune-Hardie" set sail, and directed her way towards Cape Brewster, on the eastern coast of Greenland, near the 70th degree of latitude.

## CHAPTER IV.

## IN THE PASSES.

About the 23rd of July a reflection, raised above the sea, announced the presence of the first icebergs, which, emerging from Davis' Straits, advanced into the ocean. From this moment a vigilant watch was ordered to the look-out men, for it was important not to come into collision with these enormous masses.

The crew was divided into two watches. The first was composed of Fidèle Misonne, Gradlin, and Gervique; and the second of Andre Vasling, Aupic, and Penellan. These watches were to last only two hours, for in those cold regions a man's strength is diminished one-half. Though the "Jeune-Hardie" was not yet beyond the 63rd degree of latitude, the thermometer already stood at nine degrees centigrade below zero.

Rain and snow often fell abundantly. On fair days, when the wind was not too violent, Marie remained on deck, and her eyes became accustomed to the uncouth scenes of the Polar Seas.

On the 1st of August she was promenading aft, and talking with her uncle, Penellan, and André Vasling. The ship was then entering a channel three miles wide, across which broken masses

of ice were rapidly descending southwards.

"When shall we see land?" asked the young girl.

"In three or four days at the latest," replied Jean Cornbutte.

"But shall we find there fresh traces of my poor Louis?"

"Perhaps so, my daughter; but I fear that we are still far from the end of our voyage. It is to be feared that the 'Froöern' was driven farther northward."

"That may be," added André Vasling, "for the squall which separated us from the Norwegian boat lasted three days, and in three days a ship makes good headway when it is no longer able to resist the wind."

"Permit me to tell you, Monsieur Vasling." replied Penellan, "that that was in April, that the thaw had not then begun, and that therefore the 'Froöern' must have been soon arrested by the ice."

"And no doubt dashed into a thousand pieces," said the mate, "as her crew could not manage her."

"But these ice-fields," returned Penellan, "gave her an easy

means of reaching land, from which she could not have been far distant."

"Let us hope so," said Jean Cornbutte, interrupting the discussion, which was daily renewed between the mate and the helmsman. "I think we shall see land before long."

"There it is!" cried Marie. "See those mountains!"

"No, my child," replied her uncle. "Those are mountains of ice, the first we have met with. They would shatter us like glass if we got entangled between them. Penellan and Vasling, overlook the men."

These floating masses, more than fifty of which now appeared at the horizon, came nearer and nearer to the brig. Penellan took the helm, and Jean Cornbutte, mounted on the gallant, indicated the route to take.

Towards evening the brig was entirely surrounded by these moving rocks, the crushing force of which is irresistible. It was necessary, then, to cross this fleet of mountains, for prudence prompted them to keep straight ahead. Another difficulty was added to these perils. The direction of the ship could not be accurately determined, as all the surrounding points constantly changed position, and thus failed to afford a fixed perspective.

The darkness soon increased with the fog. Marie descended to her cabin, and the whole crew, by the captain's orders, remained on deck. They were armed with long boat-poles, with iron spikes, to preserve the ship from collision with the ice.

The ship soon entered a strait so narrow that often the ends of her yards were grazed by the drifting mountains, and her booms seemed about to be driven in. They were even forced to trim the mainyard so as to touch the shrouds. Happily these precautions did not deprive, the vessel of any of its speed, for the wind could only reach the upper sails, and these sufficed to carry her forward rapidly. Thanks to her slender hull, she passed through these valleys, which were filled with whirlpools of rain, whilst the icebergs crushed against each other with sharp cracking and splitting.

Jean Cornbutte returned to the deck. His eyes could not penetrate the surrounding darkness. It became necessary to furl the upper sails, for the ship threatened to ground, and if she did so she was lost.

"Cursed voyage!" growled André Vasling among the sailors, who, forward, were avoiding the most menacing ice-blocks with their boat-hooks.

"Truly, if we escape we shall owe a fine candle to Our Lady of

the Ice!" replied Aupic.

"Who knows how many floating mountains we have got to pass through yet?" added the mate.

"And who can guess what we shall find beyond them?" replied the sailor.

"Don't talk so much, prattler," said Gervique, "and look out on your side. When we have got by them, it'll be time to grumble. Look out for your boat-hook!"

At this moment an enormous block of ice, in the narrow strait through which the brig was passing, came rapidly down upon her, and it seemed impossible to avoid it, for it barred the whole width of the channel, and the brig could not heave-to.

"Do you feel the tiller?" asked Cornbutte of Penellan.

"No, captain. The ship does not answer the helm any longer."

"Ohé, boys!" cried the captain to the crew; "don't be afraid, and buttress your hooks against the gunwale."

The block was nearly sixty feet high, and if it threw itself upon the brig she would be crushed. There was an undefinable moment of

suspense, and the crew retreated backward, abandoning their posts despite the captain's orders.

But at the instant when the block was not more than half a cable's length from the "Jeune-Hardie," a dull sound was heard, and a veritable waterspout fell upon the bow of the vessel, which then rose on the back of an enormous billow.

The sailors uttered a cry of terror; but when they looked before them the block had disappeared, the passage was free, and beyond an immense plain of water, illumined by the rays of the declining sun, assured them of an easy navigation.

"All's well!" cried Penellan. "Let's trim our topsails and mizzen!"

An incident very common in those parts had just occurred. When these masses are detached from one another in the thawing season, they float in a perfect equilibrium; but on reaching the ocean, where the water is relatively warmer, they are speedily undermined at the base, which melts little by little, and which is also shaken by the shock of other ice-masses. A moment comes when the centre of gravity of these masses is displaced, and then they are completely overturned. Only, if this block had turned over two minutes later, it would have fallen on the brig and carried her down in its fall.

## CHAPTER V.

## LIVERPOOL ISLAND.

The brig now sailed in a sea which was almost entirely open. At the horizon only, a whitish light, this time motionless, indicated the presence of fixed plains of ice.

Jean Cornbutte now directed the "Jeune-Hardie" towards Cape Brewster. They were already approaching the regions where the temperature is excessively cold, for the sun's rays, owing to their obliquity when they reach them, are very feeble.

On the 3rd of August the brig confronted immoveable and united ice-masses. The passages were seldom more than a cable's length in width, and the ship was forced to make many turnings, which sometimes placed her heading the wind.

Penellan watched over Marie with paternal care, and, despite the cold, prevailed upon her to spend two or three hours every day on deck, for exercise had become one of the indispensable conditions of health.

Marie's courage did not falter. She even comforted the sailors with her cheerful talk, and all of them became warmly attached to

her. André Vasling showed himself more attentive than ever, and seized every occasion to be in her company; but the young girl, with a sort of presentiment, accepted his services with some coldness. It may be easily conjectured that André's conversation referred more to the future than to the present, and that he did not conceal the slight probability there was of saving the castaways. He was convinced that they were lost, and the young girl ought thenceforth to confide her existence to some one else.

Marie had not as yet comprehended André's designs, for, to his great disgust, he could never find an opportunity to talk long with her alone. Penellan had always an excuse for interfering, and destroying the effect of Andre's words by the hopeful opinions he expressed.

Marie, meanwhile, did not remain idle. Acting on the helmsman's advice, she set to work on her winter garments; for it was necessary that she should completely change her clothing. The cut of her dresses was not suitable for these cold latitudes. She made, therefore, a sort of furred pantaloons, the ends of which were lined with seal-skin; and her narrow skirts came only to her knees, so as not to be in contact with the layers of snow with which the winter would cover the ice-fields. A fur mantle, fitting closely to the figure and supplied with a hood, protected the upper part of her body.

In the intervals of their work, the sailors, too, prepared clothing with which to shelter themselves from the cold. They made a quantity of high seal-skin boots, with which to cross the snow during their explorations. They worked thus all the time that the navigation in the straits lasted.

André Vasling, who was an excellent shot, several times brought down aquatic birds with his gun; innumerable flocks of these were always careering about the ship. A kind of eider-duck provided the crew with very palatable food, which relieved the monotony of the salt meat.

At last the brig, after many turnings, came in sight of Cape Brewster. A long-boat was put to sea. Jean Cornbutte and Penellan reached the coast, which was entirely deserted.

The ship at once directed its course towards Liverpool Island, discovered in 1821 by Captain Scoresby, and the crew gave a hearty cheer when they saw the natives running along the shore. Communication was speedily established with them, thanks to Penellan's knowledge of a few words of their language, and some phrases which we natives themselves had learnt of the whalers who frequented those parts.

These Greenlanders were small and squat; they were not more than four feet ten inches high; they had red, round faces, and low

foreheads; their hair, flat and black, fell over their shoulders; their teeth were decayed, and they seemed to be affected by the sort of leprosy which is peculiar to ichthyophagous tribes.

In exchange for pieces of iron and brass, of which they are extremely covetous, these poor creatures brought bear furs, the skins of sea-calves, sea-dogs, sea-wolves, and all the animals generally known as seals. Jean Cornbutte obtained these at a low price, and they were certain to become most useful.

The captain then made the natives understand that he was in search of a shipwrecked vessel, and asked them if they had heard of it. One of them immediately drew something like a ship on the snow, and indicated that a vessel of that sort had been carried northward three months before: he also managed to make it understood that the thaw and breaking up of the ice-fields had prevented the Greenlanders from going in search of it; and, indeed, their very light canoes, which they managed with paddles, could not go to sea at that time.

This news, though meagre, restored hope to the hearts of the sailors, and Jean Cornbutte had no difficulty in persuading them to advance farther in the polar seas.

Before quitting Liverpool Island, the captain purchased a pack of six Esquimaux dogs, which were soon acclimatised on board. The

ship weighed anchor on the morning of the 10th of August, and entered the northern straits under a brisk wind.

The longest days of the year had now arrived; that is, the sun, in these high latitudes, did not set, and reached the highest point of the spirals which it described above the horizon.

This total absence of night was not, however, very apparent, for the fog, rain, and snow sometimes enveloped the ship in real darkness.

Jean Cornbutte, who was resolved to advance as far as possible, began to take measures of health. The space between decks was securely enclosed, and every morning care was taken to ventilate it with fresh air. The stoves were installed, and the pipes so disposed as to yield as much heat as possible. The sailors were advised to wear only one woollen shirt over their cotton shirts, and to hermetically close their seal cloaks. The fires were not yet lighted, for it was important to reserve the wood and charcoal for the most intense cold.

Warm beverages, such as coffee and tea, were regularly distributed to the sailors morning and evening; and as it was important to live on meat, they shot ducks and teal, which abounded in these parts.

Jean Cornbutte also placed at the summit of the mainmast a "crow's nest," a sort of cask staved in at one end, in which a look-out remained constantly, to observe the icefields.

Two days after the brig had lost sight of Liverpool Island the temperature became suddenly colder under the influence of a dry wind. Some indications of winter were perceived. The ship had not a moment to lose, for soon the way would be entirely closed to her. She advanced across the straits, among which lay ice-plains thirty feet thick.

On the morning of the 3rd of September the "Jeune-Hardie" reached the head of Gaël-Hamkes Bay. Land was then thirty miles to the leeward. It was the first time that the brig had stopped before a mass of ice which offered no outlet, and which was at least a mile wide. The saws must now be used to cut the ice. Penellan, Aupic, Gradlin, and Turquiette were chosen to work the saws, which had been carried outside the ship. The direction of the cutting was so determined that the current might carry off the pieces detached from the mass. The whole crew worked at this task for nearly twenty hours. They found it very painful to remain on the ice, and were often obliged to plunge into the water up to their middle; their seal-skin garments protected them but imperfectly from the damp.

Moreover all excessive toil in those high latitudes is soon

followed by an overwhelming weariness; for the breath soon fails, and the strongest are forced to rest at frequent intervals.

At last the navigation became free, and the brig was towed beyond the mass which had so long obstructed her course.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE QUAKING OF THE ICE.

For several days the "Jeune-Hardie" struggled against formidable obstacles. The crew were almost all the time at work with the saws, and often powder had to be used to blow up the enormous blocks of ice which closed the way.

On the 12th of September the sea consisted of one solid plain, without outlet or passage, surrounding the vessel on all sides, so that she could neither advance nor retreat. The temperature remained at an average of sixteen degrees below zero. The winter season had come on, with its sufferings and dangers.

The "Jeune-Hardie" was then near the 21st degree of longitude west and the 76th degree of latitude north, at the entrance of Gaël-Hamkes Bay.

Jean Cornbutte made his preliminary preparations for wintering. He first searched for a creek whose position would shelter the ship from the wind and breaking up of the ice. Land, which was probably thirty miles west, could alone offer him secure shelter, and he resolved to attempt to reach it.

He set out on the 12th of September, accompanied by André Vasling, Penellan, and the two sailors Gradlin and Turquiette. Each man carried provisions for two days, for it was not likely that their expedition would occupy a longer time, and they were supplied with skins on which to sleep.

Snow had fallen in great abundance and was not yet frozen over; and this delayed them seriously. They often sank to their waists, and could only advance very cautiously, for fear of falling into crevices. Penellan, who walked in front, carefully sounded each depression with his iron-pointed staff.

About five in the evening the fog began to thicken, and the little band were forced to stop. Penellan looked about for an iceberg which might shelter them from the wind, and after refreshing themselves, with regrets that they had no warm drink, they spread their skins on the snow, wrapped themselves up, lay close to each other, and soon dropped asleep from sheer fatigue.

The next morning Jean Cornbutte and his companions were buried beneath a bed of snow more than a foot deep. Happily their skins, perfectly impermeable, had preserved them, and the snow itself had aided in retaining their heat, which it prevented from escaping.

The captain gave the signal of departure, and about noon they at

last descried the coast, which at first they could scarcely distinguish. High ledges of ice, cut perpendicularly, rose on the shore; their variegated summits, of all forms and shapes, reproduced on a large scale the phenomena of crystallization. Myriads of aquatic fowl flew about at the approach of the party, and the seals, lazily lying on the ice, plunged hurriedly into the depths.

"I' faith!" said Penellan, "we shall not want for either furs or game!"

"Those animals," returned Cornbutte, "give every evidence of having been already visited by men; for in places totally uninhabited they would not be so wild."

"None but Greenlanders frequent these parts," said André Vasling.

"I see no trace of their passage, however; neither any encampment nor the smallest hut," said Penellan, who had climbed up a high peak. "O captain!" he continued, "come here! I see a point of land which will shelter us splendidly from the north-east wind."

"Come along, boys!" said Jean Cornbutte.

His companions followed him, and they soon rejoined Penellan. The sailor had said what was true. An elevated point of land jutted

out like a promontory, and curving towards the coast, formed a little inlet of a mile in width at most. Some moving ice-blocks, broken by this point, floated in the midst, and the sea, sheltered from the colder winds, was not yet entirely frozen over.

This was an excellent spot for wintering, and it only remained to get the ship thither. Jean Cornbutte remarked that the neighbouring ice-field was very thick, and it seemed very difficult to cut a canal to bring the brig to its destination. Some other creek, then, must be found; it was in vain that he explored northward. The coast remained steep and abrupt for a long distance, and beyond the point it was directly exposed to the attacks of the east-wind. The circumstance disconcerted the captain all the more because André Vasling used strong arguments to show how bad the situation was. Penellan, in this dilemma, found it difficult to convince himself that all was for the best.

But one chance remained--to seek a shelter on the southern side of the coast. This was to return on their path, but hesitation was useless. The little band returned rapidly in the direction of the ship, as their provisions had begun to run short. Jean Cornbutte searched for some practicable passage, or at least some fissure by which a canal might be cut across the ice-fields, all along the route, but in vain.

Towards evening the sailors came to the same place where they had encamped over night. There had been no snow during the day, and they could recognize the imprint of their bodies on the ice. They again disposed themselves to sleep with their furs.

Penellan, much disturbed by the bad success of the expedition, was sleeping restlessly, when, at a waking moment, his attention was attracted by a dull rumbling. He listened attentively, and the rumbling seemed so strange that he nudged Jean Cornbutte with his elbow.

"What is that?" said the latter, whose mind, according to a sailor's habit, was awake as soon as his body.

"Listen, captain."

The noise increased, with perceptible violence.

"It cannot be thunder, in so high a latitude," said Cornbutte, rising.

"I think we have come across some white bears," replied Penellan.

"The devil! We have not seen any yet."

"Sooner or later, we must have expected a visit from them. Let us

give them a good reception."

Penellan, armed with a gun, lightly crossed the ledge which sheltered them. The darkness was very dense; he could discover nothing; but a new incident soon showed him that the cause of the noise did not proceed from around them.

Jean Cornbutte rejoined him, and they observed with terror that this rumbling, which awakened their companions, came from beneath them.

A new kind of peril menaced them. To the noise, which resembled peals of thunder, was added a distinct undulating motion of the ice-field. Several of the party lost their balance and fell.

"Attention!" cried Penellan.

"Yes!" some one responded.

"Turquiette! Gradlin! where are you?"

"Here I am!" responded Turquiette, shaking off the snow with which he was covered.

"This way, Vasling," cried Cornbutte to the mate. "And Gradlin?"

"Present, captain. But we are lost!" shouted Gradlin, in fright.

"No!" said Penellan. "Perhaps we are saved!"

Hardly had he uttered these words when a frightful cracking noise was heard. The ice-field broke clear through, and the sailors were forced to cling to the block which was quivering just by them. Despite the helmsman's words, they found themselves in a most perilous position, for an ice-quake had occurred. The ice masses had just "weighed anchor," as the sailors say. The movement lasted nearly two minutes, and it was to be feared that the crevice would yawn at the very feet of the unhappy sailors. They anxiously awaited daylight in the midst of continuous shocks, for they could not, without risk of death, move a step, and had to remain stretched out at full length to avoid being engulfed.

As soon as it was daylight a very different aspect presented itself to their eyes. The vast plain, a compact mass the evening before, was now separated in a thousand places, and the waves, raised by some submarine commotion, had broken the thick layer which sheltered them.

The thought of his ship occurred to Jean Cornbutte's mind.

"My poor brig!" he cried. "It must have perished!"

The deepest despair began to overcast the faces of his companions. The loss of the ship inevitably preceded their own deaths.

"Courage, friends," said Penellan. "Reflect that this night's disaster has opened us a path across the ice, which will enable us to bring our ship to the bay for wintering! And, stop! I am not mistaken. There is the 'Jeune-Hardie,' a mile nearer to us!"

All hurried forward, and so imprudently, that Turquiette slipped into a fissure, and would have certainly perished, had not Jean Cornbutte seized him by his hood. He got off with a rather cold bath.

The brig was indeed floating two miles away. After infinite trouble, the little band reached her. She was in good condition; but her rudder, which they had neglected to lift, had been broken by the ice.

## CHAPTER VII.

## SETTLING FOR THE WINTER.

Penellan was once more right; all was for the best, and this ice-quake had opened a practicable channel for the ship to the bay. The sailors had only to make skilful use of the currents to conduct her thither.

On the 19th of September the brig was at last moored in her bay for wintering, two cables' lengths from the shore, securely anchored on a good bottom. The ice began the next day to form around her hull; it soon became strong enough to bear a man's weight, and they could establish a communication with land.

The rigging, as is customary in arctic navigation, remained as it was; the sails were carefully furled on the yards and covered with their casings, and the "crow's-nest" remained in place, as much to enable them to make distant observations as to attract attention to the ship.

The sun now scarcely rose above the horizon. Since the June solstice, the spirals which it had described descended lower and lower; and it would soon disappear altogether.

The crew hastened to make the necessary preparations. Penellan supervised the whole. The ice was soon thick around the ship, and it was to be feared that its pressure might become dangerous; but Penellan waited until, by reason of the going and coming of the floating ice-masses and their adherence, it had reached a thickness of twenty feet; he then had it cut around the hull, so that it united under the ship, the form of which it assumed; thus enclosed in a mould, the brig had no longer to fear the pressure of the ice, which could make no movement.

The sailors then elevated along the wales, to the height of the nettings, a snow wall five or six feet thick, which soon froze as hard as a rock. This envelope did not allow the interior heat to escape outside. A canvas tent, covered with skins and hermetically closed, was stretched aver the whole length of the deck, and formed a sort of walk for the sailors.

They also constructed on the ice a storehouse of snow, in which articles which embarrassed the ship were stowed away. The partitions of the cabins were taken down, so as to form a single vast apartment forward, as well as aft. This single room, besides, was more easy to warm, as the ice and damp found fewer corners in which to take refuge. It was also less difficult to ventilate it, by means of canvas funnels which opened without.

Each sailor exerted great energy in these preparations, and about

the 25th of September they were completed. André Vasling had not shown himself the least active in this task. He devoted himself with especial zeal to the young girl's comfort, and if she, absorbed in thoughts of her poor Louis, did not perceive this, Jean Cornbutte did not fail soon to remark it. He spoke of it to Penellan; he recalled several incidents which completely enlightened him regarding his mate's intentions; André Vasling loved Marie, and reckoned on asking her uncle for her hand, as soon as it was proved beyond doubt that the castaways were irrevocably lost; they would return then to Dunkirk, and André Vasling would be well satisfied to wed a rich and pretty girl, who would then be the sole heiress of Jean Cornbutte.

But André, in his impatience, was often imprudent. He had several times declared that the search for the castaways was useless, when some new trace contradicted him, and enabled Penellan to exult over him. The mate, therefore, cordially detested the helmsman, who returned his dislike heartily. Penellan only feared that André might sow seeds of dissension among the crew, and persuaded Jean Cornbutte to answer him evasively on the first occasion.

When the preparations for the winter were completed, the captain took measures to preserve the health of the crew. Every morning the men were ordered to air their berths, and carefully clean the

interior walls, to get rid of the night's dampness. They received boiling tea or coffee, which are excellent cordials to use against the cold, morning and evening; then they were divided into hunting-parties, who should procure as much fresh nourishment as possible for every day.

Each one also took healthy exercise every day, so as not to expose himself without motion to the cold; for in a temperature thirty degrees below zero, some part of the body might suddenly become frozen. In such cases friction of the snow was used, which alone could heal the affected part.

Penellan also strongly advised cold ablutions every morning. It required some courage to plunge the hands and face in the snow, which had to be melted within. But Penellan bravely set the example, and Marie was not the last to imitate him.

Jean Cornbutte did not forget to have readings and prayers, for it was needful that the hearts of his comrades should not give way to despair or weariness. Nothing is more dangerous in these desolate latitudes.

The sky, always gloomy, filled the soul with sadness. A thick snow, lashed by violent winds, added to the horrors of their situation. The sun would soon altogether disappear. Had the clouds not gathered in masses above their heads, they might have

enjoyed the moonlight, which was about to become really their sun during the long polar night; but, with the west winds, the snow did not cease to fall. Every morning it was necessary to clear off the sides of the ship, and to cut a new stairway in the ice to enable them to reach the ice-field. They easily succeeded in doing this with snow-knives; the steps once cut, a little water was thrown over them, and they at once hardened.

Penellan had a hole cut in the ice, not far from the ship. Every day the new crust which formed over its top was broken, and the water which was drawn thence, from a certain depth, was less cold than that at the surface.

All these preparations occupied about three weeks. It was then time to go forward with the search. The ship was imprisoned for six or seven months, and only the next thaw could open a new route across the ice. It was wise, then, to profit by this delay, and extend their explorations northward.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## PLAN OF THE EXPLORATIONS.

On the 9th of October, Jean Cornbutte held a council to settle the plan of his operations, to which, that there might be union, zeal, and courage on the part of every one, he admitted the whole crew. Map in hand, he clearly explained their situation.

The eastern coast of Greenland advances perpendicularly northward. The discoveries of the navigators have given the exact boundaries of those parts. In the extent of five hundred leagues, which separates Greenland from Spitzbergen, no land has been found. An island (Shannon Island) lay a hundred miles north of Gaël-Hamkes Bay, where the "Jeune-Hardie" was wintering.

If the Norwegian schooner, as was most probable, had been driven in this direction, supposing that she could not reach Shannon Island, it was here that Louis Cornbutte and his comrades must have sought for a winter asylum.

This opinion prevailed, despite André Vasling's opposition; and it was decided to direct the explorations on the side towards Shannon Island.

Arrangements for this were at once begun. A sledge like that used by the Esquimaux had been procured on the Norwegian coast. This was constructed of planks curved before and behind, and was made to slide over the snow and ice. It was twelve feet long and four wide, and could therefore carry provisions, if need were, for several weeks. Fidèle Misonne soon put it in order, working upon it in the snow storehouse, whither his tools had been carried. For the first time a coal-stove was set up in this storehouse, without which all labour there would have been impossible. The pipe was carried out through one of the lateral walls, by a hole pierced in the snow; but a grave inconvenience resulted from this,--for the heat of the stove, little by little, melted the snow where it came in contact with it; and the opening visibly increased. Jean Cornbutte contrived to surround this part of the pipe with some metallic canvas, which is impermeable by heat. This succeeded completely.

While Misonne was at work upon the sledge, Penellan, aided by Marie, was preparing the clothing necessary for the expedition. Seal-skin boots they had, fortunately, in plenty. Jean Cornbutte and André Vasling occupied themselves with the provisions. They chose a small barrel of spirits-of-wine for heating a portable chafing-dish; reserves of coffee and tea in ample quantity were packed; a small box of biscuits, two hundred pounds of pemmican, and some gourds of brandy completed the stock of viands. The guns would bring down some fresh game every day. A quantity of powder

was divided between several bags; the compass, sextant, and spy-glass were put carefully out of the way of injury.

On the 11th of October the sun no longer appeared above the horizon. They were obliged to keep a lighted lamp in the lodgings of the crew all the time. There was no time to lose; the explorations must be begun. For this reason: in the month of January it would become so cold that it would be impossible to venture out without peril of life. For two months at least the crew would be condemned to the most complete imprisonment; then the thaw would begin, and continue till the time when the ship should quit the ice. This thaw would, of course, prevent any explorations. On the other hand, if Louis Cornbutte and his comrades were still in existence, it was not probable that they would be able to resist the severities of the arctic winter. They must therefore be saved beforehand, or all hope would be lost. André Vasling knew all this better than any one. He therefore resolved to put every possible obstacle in the way of the expedition.

The preparations for the journey were completed about the 20th of October. It remained to select the men who should compose the party. The young girl could not be deprived of the protection of Jean Cornbutte or of Penellan; neither of these could, on the other hand, be spared from the expedition.

The question, then, was whether Marie could bear the fatigues of such a journey. She had already passed through rough experiences without seeming to suffer from them, for she was a sailor's daughter, used from infancy to the fatigues of the sea, and even Penellan was not dismayed to see her struggling in the midst of this severe climate, against the dangers of the polar seas.

It was decided, therefore, after a long discussion, that she should go with them, and that a place should be reserved for her, at need, on the sledge, on which a little wooden hut was constructed, closed in hermetically. As for Marie, she was delighted, for she dreaded to be left alone without her two protectors.

The expedition was thus formed: Marie, Jean Cornbutte, Penellan, André Vasling, Aupic, and Fidèle Misonne were to go. Alaine Turquiette remained in charge of the brig, and Gervique and Gradlin stayed behind with him. New provisions of all kinds were carried; for Jean Cornbutte, in order to carry the exploration as far as possible, had resolved to establish depôts along the route, at each seven or eight days' march. When the sledge was ready it was at once fitted up, and covered with a skin tent. The whole weighed some seven hundred pounds, which a pack of five dogs might easily carry over the ice.

On the 22nd of October, as the captain had foretold, a sudden

change took place in the temperature. The sky cleared, the stars emitted an extraordinary light, and the moon shone above the horizon, no longer to leave the heavens for a fortnight. The thermometer descended to twenty-five degrees below zero.

The departure was fixed for the following day.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE HOUSE OF SNOW.

On the 23rd of October, at eleven in the morning, in a fine moonlight, the caravan set out. Precautions were this time taken that the journey might be a long one, if necessary. Jean Cornbutte followed the coast, and ascended northward. The steps of the travellers made no impression on the hard ice. Jean was forced to guide himself by points which he selected at a distance; sometimes he fixed upon a hill bristling with peaks; sometimes on a vast iceberg which pressure had raised above the plain.

At the first halt, after going fifteen miles, Penellan prepared to encamp. The tent was erected against an ice-block. Marie had not suffered seriously with the extreme cold, for luckily the breeze had subsided, and was much more bearable; but the young girl had several times been obliged to descend from her sledge to avert numbness from impeding the circulation of her blood. Otherwise, her little hut, hung with skins, afforded her all the comfort possible under the circumstances.

When night, or rather sleeping-time, came, the little hut was carried under the tent, where it served as a bed-room for Marie.

The evening repast was composed of fresh meat, pemmican, and hot tea. Jean Cornbutte, to avert danger of the scurvy, distributed to each of the party a few drops of lemon-juice. Then all slept under God's protection.

After eight hours of repose, they got ready to resume their march. A substantial breakfast was provided to the men and the dogs; then they set out. The ice, exceedingly compact, enabled these animals to draw the sledge easily. The party sometimes found it difficult to keep up with them.

But the sailors soon began to suffer one discomfort--that of being dazzled. Ophthalmia betrayed itself in Aupic and Misonne. The moon's light, striking on these vast white plains, burnt the eyesight, and gave the eyes insupportable pain.

There was thus produced a very singular effect of refraction. As they walked, when they thought they were about to put foot on a hillock, they stepped down lower, which often occasioned falls, happily so little serious that Penellan made them occasions for bantering. Still, he told them never to take a step without sounding the ground with the ferruled staff with which each was equipped.

About the 1st of November, ten days after they had set out, the caravan had gone fifty leagues to the northward. Weariness

pressed heavily on all. Jean Cornbutte was painfully dazzled, and his sight sensibly changed. Aupic and Misonne had to feel their way: for their eyes, rimmed with red, seemed burnt by the white reflection. Marie had been preserved from this misfortune by remaining within her hut, to which she confined herself as much as possible. Penellan, sustained by an indomitable courage, resisted all fatigue. But it was André Vasling who bore himself best, and upon whom the cold and dazzling seemed to produce no effect. His iron frame was equal to every hardship; and he was secretly pleased to see the most robust of his companions becoming discouraged, and already foresaw the moment when they would be forced to retreat to the ship again.

On the 1st of November it became absolutely necessary to halt for a day or two. As soon as the place for the encampment had been selected, they proceeded to arrange it. It was determined to erect a house of snow, which should be supported against one of the rocks of the promontory. Misonne at once marked out the foundations, which measured fifteen feet long by five wide. Penellan, Aupic, and Misonne, by aid of their knives, cut out great blocks of ice, which they carried to the chosen spot and set up, as masons would have built stone walls. The sides of the foundation were soon raised to a height and thickness of about five feet; for the materials were abundant, and the structure was intended to be sufficiently solid to last several days. The four walls were completed in eight hours; an opening had been left on

the southern side, and the canvas of the tent, placed on these four walls, fell over the opening and sheltered it. It only remained to cover the whole with large blocks, to form the roof of this temporary structure.

After three more hours of hard work, the house was done; and they all went into it, overcome with weariness and discouragement. Jean Cornbutte suffered so much that he could not walk, and André Vasling so skilfully aggravated his gloomy feelings, that he forced from him a promise not to pursue his search farther in those frightful solitudes. Penellan did not know which saint to invoke. He thought it unworthy and craven to give up his companions for reasons which had little weight, and tried to upset them; but in vain.

Meanwhile, though it had been decided to return, rest had become so necessary that for three days no preparations for departure were made.

On the 4th of November, Jean Cornbutte began to bury on a point of the coast the provisions for which there was no use. A stake indicated the place of the deposit, in the improbable event that new explorations should be made in that direction. Every day since they had set out similar deposits had been made, so that they were assured of ample sustenance on the return, without the trouble of carrying them on the sledge.

The departure was fixed for ten in the morning, on the 5th. The most profound sadness filled the little band. Marie with difficulty restrained her tears, when she saw her uncle so completely discouraged. So many useless sufferings! so much labour lost! Penellan himself became ferocious in his ill-humour; he consigned everybody to the nether regions, and did not cease to wax angry at the weakness and cowardice of his comrades, who were more timid and tired, he said, than Marie, who would have gone to the end of the world without complaint.

André Vasling could not disguise the pleasure which this decision gave him. He showed himself more attentive than ever to the young girl, to whom he even held out hopes that a new search should be made when the winter was over; knowing well that it would then be too late!

## CHAPTER X.

## BURIED ALIVE.

The evening before the departure, just as they were about to take supper, Penellan was breaking up some empty casks for firewood, when he was suddenly suffocated by a thick smoke. At the same instant the snow-house was shaken as if by an earthquake. The party uttered a cry of terror, and Penellan hurried outside.

It was entirely dark. A frightful tempest--for it was not a thaw--was raging, whirlwinds of snow careered around, and it was so exceedingly cold that the helmsman felt his hands rapidly freezing. He was obliged to go in again, after rubbing himself violently with snow.

"It is a tempest," said he. "May heaven grant that our house may withstand it, for, if the storm should destroy it, we should be lost!"

At the same time with the gusts of wind a noise was heard beneath the frozen soil; icebergs, broken from the promontory, dashed away noisily, and fell upon one another; the wind blew with such violence that it seemed sometimes as if the whole house moved from its foundation; phosphorescent lights, inexplicable in that

latitude, flashed across the whirlwinds of the snow.

"Marie! Marie!" cried Penellan, seizing the young girl's hands.

"We are in a bad case!" said Misonne.

"And I know not whether we shall escape," replied Aupic.

"Let us quit this snow-house!" said André Vasling.

"Impossible!" returned Penellan. "The cold outside is terrible; perhaps we can bear it by staying here."

"Give me the thermometer," demanded Vasling.

Aupic handed it to him. It showed ten degrees below zero inside the house, though the fire was lighted. Vasling raised the canvas which covered the opening, and pushed it aside hastily; for he would have been lacerated by the fall of ice which the wind hurled around, and which fell in a perfect hail-storm.

"Well, Vasling," said Penellan, "will you go out, then? You see that we are more safe here."

"Yes," said Jean Cornbutte; "and we must use every effort to strengthen the house in the interior."

"But a still more terrible danger menaces us," said Vasling.

"What?" asked Jean.

"The wind is breaking the ice against which we are propped, just as it has that of the promontory, and we shall be either driven out or buried!"

"That seems doubtful," said Penellan, "for it is freezing hard enough to ice over all liquid surfaces. Let us see what the temperature is."

He raised the canvas so as to pass out his arm, and with difficulty found the thermometer again, in the midst of the snow; but he at last succeeded in seizing it, and, holding the lamp to it, said,--

"Thirty-two degrees below zero! It is the coldest we have seen here yet!"

"Ten degrees more," said Vasling, "and the mercury will freeze!"

A mournful silence followed this remark.

About eight in the morning Penellan essayed a second time to go

out to judge of their situation. It was necessary to give an escape to the smoke, which the wind had several times repelled into the hut. The sailor wrapped his cloak tightly about him, made sure of his hood by fastening it to his head with a handkerchief, and raised the canvas.

The opening was entirely obstructed by a resisting snow. Penellan took his staff, and succeeded in plunging it into the compact mass; but terror froze his blood when he perceived that the end of the staff was not free, and was checked by a hard body!

"Cornbutte," said he to the captain, who had come up to him, "we are buried under this snow!"

"What say you?" cried Jean Cornbutte.

"I say that the snow is massed and frozen around us and over us, and that we are buried alive!"

"Let us try to clear this mass of snow away," replied the captain.

The two friends buttressed themselves against the obstacle which obstructed the opening, but they could not move it. The snow formed an iceberg more than five feet thick, and had become literally a part of the house. Jean could not suppress a cry,

which awoke Misonne and Vasling. An oath burst from the latter, whose features contracted. At this moment the smoke, thicker than ever, poured into the house, for it could not find an issue.

"Malediction!" cried Misonne. "The pipe of the stove is sealed up by the ice!"

Penellan resumed his staff, and took down the pipe, after throwing snow on the embers to extinguish them, which produced such a smoke that the light of the lamp could scarcely be seen; then he tried with his staff to clear out the orifice, but he only encountered a rock of ice! A frightful end, preceded by a terrible agony, seemed to be their doom! The smoke, penetrating the throats of the unfortunate party, caused an insufferable pain, and air would soon fail them altogether!

Marie here rose, and her presence, which inspired Cornbutte with despair, imparted some courage to Penellan. He said to himself that it could not be that the poor girl was destined to so horrible a death.

"Ah!" said she, "you have made too much fire. The room is full of smoke!"

"Yes, yes," stammered Penellan.

"It is evident," resumed Marie, "for it is not cold, and it is long since we have felt too much heat."

No one dared to tell her the truth.

"See, Marie," said Penellan bluntly, "help us get breakfast ready. It is too cold to go out. Here is the chafing-dish, the spirit, and the coffee. Come, you others, a little pemmican first, as this wretched storm forbids us from hunting."

These words stirred up his comrades.

"Let us first eat," added Penellan, "and then we shall see about getting off."

Penellan set the example and devoured his share of the breakfast. His comrades imitated him, and then drank a cup of boiling coffee, which somewhat restored their spirits. Then Jean Cornbutte decided energetically that they should at once set about devising means of safety.

André Vasling now said,--

"If the storm is still raging, which is probable, we must be buried ten feet under the ice, for we can hear no noise outside."

Penellan looked at Marie, who now understood the truth, and did not tremble. The helmsman first heated, by the flame of the spirit, the iron point of his staff, and successfully introduced it into the four walls of ice, but he could find no issue in either. Cornbutte then resolved to cut out an opening in the door itself. The ice was so hard that it was difficult for the knives to make the least impression on it. The pieces which were cut off soon encumbered the hut. After working hard for two hours, they had only hollowed out a space three feet deep.

Some more rapid method, and one which was less likely to demolish the house, must be thought of; for the farther they advanced the more violent became the effort to break off the compact ice. It occurred to Penellan to make use of the chafing-dish to melt the ice in the direction they wanted. It was a hazardous method, for, if their imprisonment lasted long, the spirit, of which they had but little, would be wanting when needed to prepare the meals. Nevertheless, the idea was welcomed on all hands, and was put in execution. They first cut a hole three feet deep by one in diameter, to receive the water which would result from the melting of the ice; and it was well that they took this precaution, for the water soon dripped under the action of the flames, which Penellan moved about under the mass of ice. The opening widened little by little, but this kind of work could not be continued long, for the water, covering their clothes, penetrated to their bodies here and there. Penellan was obliged

to pause in a quarter of an hour, and to withdraw the chafing-dish in order to dry himself. Misonne then took his place, and worked sturdily at the task.

In two hours, though the opening was five feet deep, the points of the staffs could not yet find an issue without.

"It is not possible," said Jean Cornbutte, "that snow could have fallen in such abundance. It must have been gathered on this point by the wind. Perhaps we had better think of escaping in some other direction."

"I don't know," replied Penellan; "but if it were only for the sake of not discouraging our comrades, we ought to continue to pierce the wall where we have begun. We must find an issue ere long."

"Will not the spirit fail us?" asked the captain.

"I hope not. But let us, if necessary, dispense with coffee and hot drinks. Besides, that is not what most alarms me."

"What is it, then, Penellan?"

"Our lamp is going out, for want of oil, and we are fast exhausting our provisions.--At last, thank God!"

Penellan went to replace André Vasling, who was vigorously working for the common deliverance.

"Monsieur Vasling," said he, "I am going to take your place; but look out well, I beg of you, for every tendency of the house to fall, so that we may have time to prevent it."

The time for rest had come, and when Penellan had added one more foot to the opening, he lay down beside his comrades.

## CHAPTER XI.

## A CLOUD OF SMOKE.

The next day, when the sailors awoke, they were surrounded by complete darkness. The lamp had gone out. Jean Cornbutte roused Penellan to ask him for the tinder-box, which was passed to him. Penellan rose to light the fire, but in getting up, his head struck against the ice ceiling. He was horrified, for on the evening before he could still stand upright. The chafing-dish being lighted up by the dim rays of the spirit, he perceived that the ceiling was a foot lower than before.

Penellan resumed work with desperation.

At this moment the young girl observed, by the light which the chafing-dish cast upon Penellan's face, that despair and determination were struggling in his rough features for the mastery. She went to him, took his hands, and tenderly pressed them.

"She cannot, must not die thus!" he cried.

He took his chafing-dish, and once more attacked the narrow opening. He plunged in his staff, and felt no resistance. Had he

reached the soft layers of the snow? He drew out his staff, and a bright ray penetrated to the house of ice!

"Here, my friends!" he shouted.

He pushed back the snow with his hands and feet, but the exterior surface was not thawed, as he had thought. With the ray of light, a violent cold entered the cabin and seized upon everything moist, to freeze it in an instant. Penellan enlarged the opening with his cutlass, and at last was able to breathe the free air. He fell on his knees to thank God, and was soon joined by Marie and his comrades.

A magnificent moon lit up the sky, but the cold was so extreme that they could not bear it. They re-entered their retreat; but Penellan first looked about him. The promontory was no longer there, and the hut was now in the midst of a vast plain of ice. Penellan thought he would go to the sledge, where the provisions were. The sledge had disappeared!

The cold forced him to return. He said nothing to his companions. It was necessary, before all, to dry their clothing, which was done with the chafing-dish. The thermometer, held for an instant in the air, descended to thirty degrees below zero.

An hour after, Vasling and Penellan resolved to venture outside.

They wrapped themselves up in their still wet garments, and went out by the opening, the sides of which had become as hard as a rock.

"We have been driven towards the north-east," said Vasling, reckoning by the stars, which shone with wonderful brilliancy.

"That would not be bad," said Penellan, "if our sledge had come with us."

"Is not the sledge there?" cried Vasling. "Then we are lost!"

"Let us look for it," replied Penellan.

They went around the hut, which formed a block more than fifteen feet high. An immense quantity of snow had fallen during the whole of the storm, and the wind had massed it against the only elevation which the plain presented. The entire block had been driven by the wind, in the midst of the broken icebergs, more than twenty-five miles to the north-east, and the prisoners had suffered the same fate as their floating prison. The sledge, supported by another iceberg, had been turned another way, for no trace of it was to be seen, and the dogs must have perished amid the frightful tempest.

André Vasling and Penellan felt despair taking possession of

them. They did not dare to return to their companions. They did not dare to announce this fatal news to their comrades in misfortune. They climbed upon the block of ice in which the hut was hollowed, and could perceive nothing but the white immensity which encompassed them on all sides. Already the cold was beginning to stiffen their limbs, and the damp of their garments was being transformed into icicles which hung about them.

Just as Penellan was about to descend, he looked towards André. He saw him suddenly gaze in one direction, then shudder and turn pale.

"What is the matter, Vasling?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied the other. "Let us go down and urge the captain to leave these parts, where we ought never to have come, at once!"

Instead of obeying, Penellan ascended again, and looked in the direction which had drawn the mate's attention. A very different effect was produced on him, for he uttered a shout of joy, and cried,--

"Blessed be God!"

A light smoke was rising in the north-east. There was no

possibility of deception. It indicated the presence of human beings. Penellan's cries of joy reached the rest below, and all were able to convince themselves with their eyes that he was not mistaken.

Without thinking of their want of provisions or the severity of the temperature, wrapped in their hoods, they were all soon advancing towards the spot whence the smoke arose in the north-east. This was evidently five or six miles off, and it was very difficult to take exactly the right direction. The smoke now disappeared, and no elevation served as a guiding mark, for the ice-plain was one united level. It was important, nevertheless, not to diverge from a straight line.

"Since we cannot guide ourselves by distant objects," said Jean Cornbutte, "we must use this method. Penellan will go ahead, Vasling twenty steps behind him, and I twenty steps behind Vasling. I can then judge whether or not Penellan diverges from the straight line."

They had gone on thus for half an hour, when Penellan suddenly stopped and listened. The party hurried up to him.

"Did you hear nothing?" he asked.

"Nothing!" replied Misonne.

"It is strange," said Penellan. "It seemed to me I heard cries from this direction."

"Cries?" replied Marie. "Perhaps we are near our destination, then."

"That is no reason," said André Vasling. "In these high latitudes and cold regions sounds may be heard to a great distance."

"However that may be," replied Jean Cornbutte, "let us go forward, or we shall be frozen."

"No!" cried Penellan. "Listen!"

Some feeble sounds--quite perceptible, however--were heard. They seemed to be cries of distress. They were twice repeated. They seemed like cries for help. Then all became silent again.

"I was not mistaken," said Penellan. "Forward!"

He began to run in the direction whence the cries had proceeded. He went thus two miles, when, to his utter stupefaction, he saw a man lying on the ice. He went up to him, raised him, and lifted his arms to heaven in despair.

André Vasling, who was following close behind with the rest of the sailors, ran up and cried,--

"It is one of the castaways! It is our sailor Courtois!"

"He is dead!" replied Penellan. "Frozen to death!"

Jean Cornbutte and Marie came up beside the corpse, which was already stiffened by the ice. Despair was written on every face. The dead man was one of the comrades of Louis Cornbutte!

"Forward!" cried Penellan.

They went on for half an hour in perfect silence, and perceived an elevation which seemed without doubt to be land.

"It is Shannon Island," said Jean Cornbutte.

A mile farther on they distinctly perceived smoke escaping from a snow-hut, closed by a wooden door. They shouted. Two men rushed out of the hut, and Penellan recognized one of them as Pierre Nouquet.

"Pierre!" he cried.

Pierre stood still as if stunned, and unconscious of what was

going on around him. André Vasling looked at Pierre Nouquet's companion with anxiety mingled with a cruel joy, for he did not recognize Louis Cornbutte in him.

"Pierre! it is I!" cried Penellan. "These are all your friends!"

Pierre Nouquet recovered his senses, and fell into his old comrade's arms.

"And my son--and Louis!" cried Jean Cornbutte, in an accent of the most profound despair.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE RETURN TO THE SHIP.

At this moment a man, almost dead, dragged himself out of the hut and along the ice.

It was Louis Cornbutte.

"My son!"

"My beloved!"

These two cries were uttered at the same time, and Louis Cornbutte fell fainting into the arms of his father and Marie, who drew him towards the hut, where their tender care soon revived him.

"My father! Marie!" cried Louis; "I shall not die without having seen you!"

"You will not die!" replied Penellan, "for all your friends are near you."

André Vasling must have hated Louis Cornbutte bitterly not to

extend his hand to him, but he did not.

Pierre Nouquet was wild with joy. He embraced every body; then he threw some wood into the stove, and soon a comfortable temperature was felt in the cabin.

There were two men there whom neither Jean Cornbutte nor Penellan recognized.

They were Jocki and Herming, the only two sailors of the crew of the Norwegian schooner who were left.

"My friends, we are saved!" said Louis. "My father! Marie! You have exposed yourselves to so many perils!"

"We do not regret it, my Louis," replied the father. "Your brig, the 'Jeune-Hardie,' is securely anchored in the ice sixty leagues from here. We will rejoin her all together."

"When Courtois comes back he'll be mightily pleased," said Pierre Nouquet.

A mournful silence followed this, and Penellan apprised Pierre and Louis of their comrade's death by cold.

"My friends," said Penellan, "we will wait here until the cold

decreases. Have you provisions and wood?"

"Yes; and we will burn what is left of the 'Froöern.'"

The "Froöern" had indeed been driven to a place forty miles from where Louis Cornbutte had taken up his winter quarters. There she was broken up by the icebergs floated by the thaw, and the castaways were carried, with a part of the débris of their cabin, on the southern shores of Shannon Island.

They were then five in number--Louis Cornbutte, Courtois, Pierre Nouquet, Jocki, and Herming. As for the rest of the Norwegian crew, they had been submerged with the long-boat at the moment of the wreck.

When Louis Cornbutte, shut in among the ice, realized what must happen, he took every precaution for passing the winter. He was an energetic man, very active and courageous; but, despite his firmness, he had been subdued by this horrible climate, and when his father found him he had given up all hope of life. He had not only had to contend with the elements, but with the ugly temper of the two Norwegian sailors, who owed him their existence. They were like savages, almost inaccessible to the most natural emotions. When Louis had the opportunity to talk to Penellan, he advised him to watch them carefully. In return, Penellan told him of André Vasling's conduct. Louis could not believe it, but

Penellan convinced him that after his disappearance Vasling had always acted so as to secure Marie's hand.

The whole day was employed in rest and the pleasures of reunion. Misonne and Pierre Nouquet killed some sea-birds near the hut, whence it was not prudent to stray far. These fresh provisions and the replenished fire raised the spirits of the weakest. Louis Cornbutte got visibly better. It was the first moment of happiness these brave people had experienced. They celebrated it with enthusiasm in this wretched hut, six hundred leagues from the North Sea, in a temperature of thirty degrees below zero!

This temperature lasted till the end of the moon, and it was not until about the 17th of November, a week after their meeting, that Jean Cornbutte and his party could think of setting out. They only had the light of the stars to guide them; but the cold was less extreme, and even some snow fell.

Before quitting this place a grave was dug for poor Courtois. It was a sad ceremony, which deeply affected his comrades. He was the first of them who would not again see his native land.

Misonne had constructed, with the planks of the cabin, a sort of sledge for carrying the provisions, and the sailors drew it by turns. Jean Cornbutte led the expedition by the ways already traversed. Camps were established with great promptness when the

times for repose came. Jean Cornbutte hoped to find his deposits of provisions again, as they had become well-nigh indispensable by the addition of four persons to the party. He was therefore very careful not to diverge from the route by which he had come.

By good fortune he recovered his sledge, which had stranded near the promontory where they had all run so many dangers. The dogs, after eating their straps to satisfy their hunger, had attacked the provisions in the sledge. These had sustained them, and they served to guide the party to the sledge, where there was a considerable quantity of provisions left. The little band resumed its march towards the bay. The dogs were harnessed to the sleigh, and no event of interest attended the return.

It was observed that Aupic, André Vasling, and the Norwegians kept aloof, and did not mingle with the others; but, unbeknown to themselves, they were narrowly watched. This germ of dissension more than once aroused the fears of Louis Cornbutte and Penellan.

About the 7th of December, twenty days after the discovery of the castaways, they perceived the bay where the "Jeune-Hardie" was lying. What was their astonishment to see the brig perched four yards in the air on blocks of ice! They hurried forward, much alarmed for their companions, and were received with joyous cries by Gervique, Turquiette, and Gradlin. All of them were in good health, though they too had been subjected to formidable dangers.

The tempest had made itself felt throughout the polar sea. The ice had been broken and displaced, crushed one piece against another, and had seized the bed on which the ship rested. Though its specific weight tended to carry it under water, the ice had acquired an incalculable force, and the brig had been suddenly raised up out of the sea.

The first moments were given up to the happiness inspired by the safe return. The exploring party were rejoiced to find everything in good condition, which assured them a supportable though it might be a rough winter. The ship had not been shaken by her sudden elevation, and was perfectly tight. When the season of thawing came, they would only have to slide her down an inclined plane, to launch her, in a word, in the once more open sea.

But a bad piece of news spread gloom on the faces of Jean Cornbutte and his comrades. During the terrible gale the snow storehouse on the coast had been quite demolished; the provisions which it contained were scattered, and it had not been possible to save a morsel of them. When Jean and Louis Cornbutte learnt this, they visited the hold and steward's room, to ascertain the quantity of provisions which still remained.

The thaw would not come until May, and the brig could not leave the bay before that period. They had therefore five winter months

before them to pass amid the ice, during which fourteen persons were to be fed. Having made his calculations, Jean Cornbutte found that he would at most be able to keep them alive till the time for departure, by putting each and all on half rations. Hunting for game became compulsory to procure food in larger quantity.

For fear that they might again run short of provisions, it was decided to deposit them no longer in the ground. All of them were kept on board, and beds were disposed for the new comers in the common lodging. Turquiette, Gervique, and Gradlin, during the absence of the others, had hollowed out a flight of steps in the ice, which enabled them easily to reach the ship's deck.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE TWO RIVALS.

André Vasling had been cultivating the good-will of the two Norwegian sailors. Aupic also made one of their band, and held himself apart, with loud disapproval of all the new measures taken; but Louis Cornbutte, to whom his father had transferred the command of the ship, and who had become once more master on board, would listen to no objections from that quarter, and in spite of Marie's advice to act gently, made it known that he intended to be obeyed on all points.

Nevertheless, the two Norwegians succeeded, two days after, in getting possession of a box of salt meat. Louis ordered them to return it to him on the spot, but Aupic took their part, and André Vasling declared that the precautions about the food could not be any longer enforced.

It was useless to attempt to show these men that these measures were for the common interest, for they knew it well, and only sought a pretext to revolt.

Penellan advanced towards the Norwegians, who drew their cutlasses; but, aided by Misonne and Turquiette, he succeeded in

snatching the weapons from their hands, and gained possession of the salt meat. André Vasling and Aupic, seeing that matters were going against them, did not interfere. Louis Cornbutte, however, took the mate aside, and said to him,--

"André Vasling, you are a wretch! I know your whole conduct, and I know what you are aiming at, but as the safety of the whole crew is confided to me, if any man of you thinks of conspiring to destroy them, I will stab him with my own hand!"

"Louis Cornbutte," replied the mate, "it is allowable for you to act the master; but remember that absolute obedience does not exist here, and that here the strongest alone makes the law."

Marie had never trembled before the dangers of the polar seas; but she was terrified by this hatred, of which she was the cause, and the captain's vigour hardly reassured her.

Despite this declaration of war, the meals were partaken of in common and at the same hours. Hunting furnished some ptarmigans and white hares; but this resource would soon fail them, with the approach of the terrible cold weather. This began at the solstice, on the 22nd of December, on which day the thermometer fell to thirty-five degrees below zero. The men experienced pain in their ears, noses, and the extremities of their bodies. They were seized with a mortal torpor combined with headache, and

their breathing became more and more difficult.

In this state they had no longer any courage to go hunting or to take any exercise. They remained crouched around the stove, which gave them but a meagre heat; and when they went away from it, they perceived that their blood suddenly cooled.

Jean Cornbutte's health was seriously impaired, and he could no longer quit his lodging. Symptoms of scurvy manifested themselves in him, and his legs were soon covered with white spots. Marie was well, however, and occupied herself tending the sick ones with the zeal of a sister of charity. The honest fellows blessed her from the bottom of their hearts.

The 1st of January was one of the gloomiest of these winter days. The wind was violent, and the cold insupportable. They could not go out, except at the risk of being frozen. The most courageous were fain to limit themselves to walking on deck, sheltered by the tent. Jean Cornbutte, Gervique, and Gradlin did not leave their beds. The two Norwegians, Aupic, and André Vasling, whose health was good, cast ferocious looks at their companions, whom they saw wasting away.

Louis Cornbutte led Penellan on deck, and asked him how much firing was left.

"The coal was exhausted long ago," replied Penellan, "and we are about to burn our last pieces of wood."

"If we are not able to keep off this cold, we are lost," said Louis.

"There still remains a way--" said Penellan, "to burn what we can of the brig, from the barricading to the water-line; and we can even, if need be, demolish her entirely, and rebuild a smaller craft."

"That is an extreme means," replied Louis, "which it will be full time to employ when our men are well. For," he added in a low voice, "our force is diminishing, and that of our enemies seems to be increasing. That is extraordinary."

"It is true," said Penellan; "and unless we took the precaution to watch night and day, I know not what would happen to us."

"Let us take our hatchets," returned Louis, "and make our harvest of wood."

Despite the cold, they mounted on the forward barricading, and cut off all the wood which was not indispensably necessary to the ship; then they returned with this new provision. The fire was started afresh, and a man remained on guard to prevent it from

going out.

Meanwhile Louis Cornbutte and his friends were soon tired out. They could not confide any detail of the life in common to their enemies. Charged with all the domestic cares, their powers were soon exhausted. The scurvy betrayed itself in Jean Cornbutte, who suffered intolerable pain. Gervique and Gradlin showed symptoms of the same disease. Had it not been for the lemon-juice with which they were abundantly furnished, they would have speedily succumbed to their sufferings. This remedy was not spared in relieving them.

But one day, the 15th of January, when Louis Cornbutte was going down into the steward's room to get some lemons, he was stupefied to find that the barrels in which they were kept had disappeared. He hurried up and told Penellan of this misfortune. A theft had been committed, and it was easy to recognize its authors. Louis Cornbutte then understood why the health of his enemies continued so good! His friends were no longer strong enough to take the lemons away from them, though his life and that of his comrades depended on the fruit; and he now sank, for the first time, into a gloomy state of despair.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## DISTRESS.

On the 20th of January most of the crew had not the strength to leave their beds. Each, independently of his woollen coverings, had a buffalo-skin to protect him against the cold; but as soon as he put his arms outside the clothes, he felt a pain which obliged him quickly to cover them again.

Meanwhile, Louis having lit the stove fire, Penellan, Misonne, and André Vasling left their beds and crouched around it. Penellan prepared some boiling coffee, which gave them some strength, as well as Marie, who joined them in partaking of it.

Louis Cornbutte approached his father's bedside; the old man was almost motionless, and his limbs were helpless from disease. He muttered some disconnected words, which carried grief to his son's heart.

"Louis," said he, "I am dying. O, how I suffer! Save me!"

Louis took a decisive resolution. He went up to the mate, and, controlling himself with difficulty, said,--

"Do you know where the lemons are, Vasling?"

"In the steward's room, I suppose," returned the mate, without stirring.

"You know they are not there, as you have stolen them!"

"You are master, Louis Cornbutte, and may say and do anything."

"For pity's sake, André Vasling, my father is dying! You can save him,--answer!"

"I have nothing to answer," replied André Vasling.

"Wretch!" cried Penellan, throwing himself, cutlass in hand, on the mate.

"Help, friends!" shouted Vasling, retreating.

Aupic and the two Norwegian sailors jumped from their beds and placed themselves behind him. Turquiette, Penellan, and Louis prepared to defend themselves. Pierre Nouquet and Gradlin, though suffering much, rose to second them.

"You are still too strong for us," said Vasling. "We do not wish to fight on an uncertainty."

The sailors were so weak that they dared not attack the four rebels, for, had they failed, they would have been lost.

"André Vasling!" said Louis Cornbutte, in a gloomy tone, "if my father dies, you will have murdered him; and I will kill you like a dog!"

Vasling and his confederates retired to the other end of the cabin, and did not reply.

It was then necessary to renew the supply of wood, and, in spite of the cold, Louis went on deck and began to cut away a part of the barricading, but was obliged to retreat in a quarter of an hour, for he was in danger of falling, overcome by the freezing air. As he passed, he cast a glance at the thermometer left outside, and saw that the mercury was frozen. The cold, then, exceeded forty-two degrees below zero. The weather was dry, and the wind blew from the north.

On the 26th the wind changed to the north-east, and the thermometer outside stood at thirty-five degrees. Jean Cornbutte was in agony, and his son had searched in vain for some remedy with which to relieve his pain. On this day, however, throwing himself suddenly on Vasling, he managed to snatch a lemon from him which he was about to suck.

Vasling made no attempt to recover it. He seemed to be awaiting an opportunity to accomplish his wicked designs.

The lemon-juice somewhat relieved old Cornbutte, but it was necessary to continue the remedy. Marie begged Vasling on her knees to produce the lemons, but he did not reply, and soon Penellan heard the wretch say to his accomplices,--

"The old fellow is dying. Gervique, Gradlin, and Nouquet are not much better. The others are daily losing their strength. The time is near when their lives will belong to us!"

It was then resolved by Louis Cornbutte and his adherents not to wait, and to profit by the little strength which still remained to them. They determined to act the next night, and to kill these wretches, so as not to be killed by them.

The temperature rose a little. Louis Cornbutte ventured to go out with his gun in search of some game.

He proceeded some three miles from the ship, and often, deceived by the effects of the mirage and refraction, he went farther away than he intended. It was imprudent, for recent tracts of ferocious animals were to be seen. He did not wish, however, to return without some fresh meat, and continued on his route; but

he then experienced a strange feeling, which turned his head. It was what is called "white vertigo."

The reflection of the ice hillocks and fields affected him from head to foot, and it seemed to him that the dazzling colour penetrated him and caused an irresistible nausea. His eye was attacked. His sight became uncertain. He thought he should go mad with the glare. Without fully understanding this terrible effect, he advanced on his way, and soon put up a ptarmigan, which he eagerly pursued. The bird soon fell, and in order to reach it Louis leaped from an ice-block and fell heavily; for the leap was at least ten feet, and the refraction made him think it was only two. The vertigo then seized him, and, without knowing why, he began to call for help, though he had not been injured by the fall. The cold began to take him, and he rose with pain, urged by the sense of self-preservation.

Suddenly, without being able to account for it, he smelt an odour of boiling fat. As the ship was between him and the wind, he supposed that this odour proceeded from her, and could not imagine why they should be cooking fat, this being a dangerous thing to do, as it was likely to attract the white bears.

Louis returned towards the ship, absorbed in reflections which soon inspired his excited mind with terror. It seemed to him as if colossal masses were moving on the horizon, and he asked

himself if there was not another ice-quake. Several of these masses interposed themselves between him and the ship, and appeared to rise about its sides. He stopped to gaze at them more attentively, when to his horror he recognized a herd of gigantic bears.

These animals had been attracted by the odour of grease which had surprised Lonis. He sheltered himself behind a hillock, and counted three, which were scaling the blocks on which the "Jeune-Hardie" was resting.

Nothing led him to suppose that this danger was known in the interior of the ship, and a terrible anguish oppressed his heart. How resist these redoubtable enemies? Would André Vasling and his confederates unite with the rest on board in the common peril? Could Penellan and the others, half starved, benumbed with cold, resist these formidable animals, made wild by unassuaged hunger? Would they not be surprised by an unlooked-for attack?

Louis made these reflections rapidly. The bears had crossed the blocks, and were mounting to the assault of the ship. He might then quit the block which protected him; he went nearer, clinging to the ice, and could soon see the enormous animals tearing the tent with their paws, and leaping on the deck. He thought of firing his gun to give his comrades notice; but if these came up without arms, they would inevitably be torn in pieces, and

nothing showed as yet that they were even aware of their new danger.

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE WHITE BEARS.

After Louis Cornbutte's departure, Penellan had carefully shut the cabin door, which opened at the foot of the deck steps. He returned to the stove, which he took it upon himself to watch, whilst his companions regained their berths in search of a little warmth.

It was then six in the evening, and Penellan set about preparing supper. He went down into the steward's room for some salt meat, which he wished to soak in the boiling water. When he returned, he found André Vasling in his place, cooking some pieces of grease in a basin.

"I was there before you," said Penellan roughly; "why have you taken my place?"

"For the same reason that you claim it," returned Vasling: "because I want to cook my supper."

"You will take that off at once, or we shall see!"

"We shall see nothing," said Vasling; "my supper shall be cooked

in spite of you."

"You shall not eat it, then," cried Penellan, rushing upon Vasling, who seized his cutlass, crying,--

"Help, Norwegians! Help, Aupic!"

These, in the twinkling of an eye, sprang to their feet, armed with pistols and daggers. The crisis had come.

Penellan precipitated himself upon Vasling, to whom, no doubt, was confided the task to fight him alone; for his accomplices rushed to the beds where lay Misonne, Turquiette, and Nouquet. The latter, ill and defenceless, was delivered over to Herming's ferocity. The carpenter seized a hatchet, and, leaving his berth, hurried up to encounter Aupic. Turquiette and Jocki, the Norwegian, struggled fiercely. Gervique and Gradlin, suffering horribly, were not even conscious of what was passing around them.

Nouquet soon received a stab in the side, and Herming turned to Penellan, who was fighting desperately. André Vasling had seized him round the body.

At the beginning of the affray the basin had been upset on the stove, and the grease running over the burning coals, impregnated

the atmosphere with its odour. Marie rose with cries of despair, and hurried to the bed of old Jean Cornbutte.

Vasling, less strong than Penellan, soon perceived that the latter was getting the better of him. They were too close together to make use of their weapons. The mate, seeing Herming, cried out,--

"Help, Herming!"

"Help, Misonne!" shouted Penellan, in his turn.

But Misonne was rolling on the ground with Aupic, who was trying to stab him with his cutlass. The carpenter's hatchet was of little use to him, for he could not wield it, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he parried the lunges which Aupic made with his knife.

Meanwhile blood flowed amid the groans and cries. Turquiette, thrown down by Jocki, a man of immense strength, had received a wound in the shoulder, and he tried in vain to clutch a pistol which hung in the Norwegian's belt. The latter held him as in a vice, and it was impossible for him to move.

At Vasling's cry for help, who was being held by Penellan close against the door, Herming rushed up. As he was about to stab the

Breton's back with his cutlass, the latter felled him to the earth with a vigorous kick. His effort to do this enabled Vasling to disengage his right arm; but the door, against which they pressed with all their weight, suddenly yielded, and Vasling fell over.

Of a sudden a terrible growl was heard, and a gigantic bear appeared on the steps. Vasling saw him first. He was not four feet away from him. At the same moment a shot was heard, and the bear, wounded or frightened, retreated. Vasling, who had succeeded in regaining his feet, set-out in pursuit of him, abandoning Penellan.

Penellan then replaced the door, and looked around him. Misonne and Turquiette, tightly garrotted by their antagonists, had been thrown into a corner, and made vain efforts to break loose. Penellan rushed to their assistance, but was overturned by the two Norwegians and Aupic. His exhausted strength did not permit him to resist these three men, who so clung to him as to hold him motionless Then, at the cries of the mate, they hurried on deck, thinking that Louis Cornbutte was to be encountered.

André Vasling was struggling with a bear, which he had already twice stabbed with his knife. The animal, beating the air with his heavy paws, was trying to clutch Vasling; he retiring little by little on the barricading, was apparently doomed, when a

second shot was heard. The bear fell. André Vasling raised his head and saw Louis Cornbutte in the ratlines of the mizen-mast, his gun in his hand. Louis had shot the bear in the heart, and he was dead.

Hate overcame gratitude in Vasling's breast; but before satisfying it, he looked around him. Aupic's head was broken by a paw-stroke, and he lay lifeless on deck. Jocki, hatchet in hand, was with difficulty parrying the blows of the second bear which had just killed Aupic. The animal had received two wounds, and still struggled desperately. A third bear was directing his way towards the ship's prow. Vasling paid no attention to him, but, followed by Herming, went to the aid of Jocki; but Jocki, seized by the beast's paws, was crushed, and when the bear fell under the shots of the other two men, he held only a corpse in his shaggy arms.

"We are only two, now" said Vasling, with gloomy ferocity, "but if we yield, it will not be without vengeance!"

Herming reloaded his pistol without replying. Before all, the third bear must be got rid of. Vasling looked forward, but did not see him. On raising his eyes, he perceived him erect on the barricading, clinging to the ratlines and trying to reach Louis. Vasling let his gun fall, which he had aimed at the animal, while a fierce joy glittered in his eyes.

"Ah," he cried, "you owe me that vengeance!"

Louis took refuge in the top of the mast. The bear kept mounting, and was not more than six feet from Louis, when he raised his gun and pointed it at the animal's heart.

Vasling raised his weapon to shoot Louis if the bear fell.

Louis fired, but the bear did not appear to be hit, for he leaped with a bound towards the top. The whole mast shook.

Vasling uttered a shout of exultation.

"Herming," he cried, "go and find Marie! Go and find my betrothed!"

Herming descended the cabin stairs.

Meanwhile the furious beast had thrown himself upon Louis, who was trying to shelter himself on the other side of the mast; but at the moment that his enormous paw was raised to break his head, Louis, seizing one of the backstays, let himself slip down to the deck, not without danger, for a ball hissed by his ear when he was half-way down. Vasling had shot at him, and missed him. The two adversaries now confronted each other, cutlass in hand.

The combat was about to become decisive. To entirely glut his vengeance, and to have the young girl witness her lover's death, Vasling had deprived himself of Herming's aid. He could now reckon only on himself.

Louis and Vasling seized each other by the collar, and held each other with iron grip. One of them must fall. They struck each other violently. The blows were only half parried, for blood soon flowed from both. Vasling tried to clasp his adversary about the neck with his arm, to bring him to the ground. Louis, knowing that he who fell was lost, prevented him, and succeeded in grasping his two arms; but in doing this he let fall his cutlass.

Piteous cries now assailed his ears; it was Marie's voice. Herming was trying to drag her up. Louis was seized with a desperate rage. He stiffened himself to bend Vasling's loins; but at this moment the combatants felt themselves seized in a powerful embrace. The bear, having descended from the mast, had fallen upon the two men. Vasling was pressed against the animal's body. Louis felt his claws entering his flesh. The bear, was strangling both of them.

"Help! help! Herming!" cried the mate.

"Help! Penellan!" cried Louis.

Steps were heard on the stairs. Penellan appeared, loaded his pistol, and discharged it in the bear's ear; he roared; the pain made him relax his paws for a moment, and Louis, exhausted, fell motionless on the deck; but the bear, closing his paws tightly in a supreme agony, fell, dragging down the wretched Vasling, whose body was crushed under him.

Penellan hurried to Louis Cornbutte's assistance. No serious wound endangered his life: he had only lost his breath for a moment.

"Marie!" he said, opening his eyes.

"Saved!" replied Perfellan. "Herming is lying there with a knife-wound in his stomach."

"And the bears--"

"Dead, Louis; dead, like our enemies! But for those beasts we should have been lost. Truly, they came to our succour. Let us thank Heaven!"

Louis and Penellan descended to the cabin, and Marie fell into their arms.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## CONCLUSION.

Herming, mortally wounded, had been carried to a berth by Misonne and Turquiette, who had succeeded in getting free. He was already at the last gasp of death; and the two sailors occupied themselves with Nouquet, whose wound was not, happily, a serious one.

But a greater misfortune had overtaken Louis Cornbutte. His father no longer gave any signs of life. Had he died of anxiety for his son, delivered over to his enemies? Had he succumbed in presence of these terrible events? They could not tell. But the poor old sailor, broken by disease, had ceased to live!

At this unexpected blow, Louis and Marie fell into a sad despair; then they knelt at the bedside and wept, as they prayed for Jean Cornbutte's soul, Penellan, Misonne, and Turquiette left them alone in the cabin, and went on deck. The bodies of the three bears were carried forward. Penellan decided to keep their skins, which would be of no little use; but he did not think for a moment of eating their flesh. Besides, the number of men to feed was now much decreased. The bodies of Vasling, Aupic, and Jocki, thrown into a hole dug on the coast, were soon rejoined by that of Herming. The Norwegian died during the night, without

repentance or remorse, foaming at the mouth with rage.

The three sailors repaired the tent, which, torn in several places, permitted the snow to fall on the deck. The temperature was exceedingly cold, and kept so till the return of the sun, which did not reappear above the horizon till the 8th of January.

Jean Cornbutte was buried on the coast. He had left his native land to find his son, and had died in these terrible regions! His grave was dug on an eminence, and the sailors placed over it a simple wooden cross.

From that day, Louis Cornbutte and his comrades passed through many other trials; but the lemons, which they found, restored them to health.

Gervique, Gradlin, and Nouquet were able to rise from their berths a fortnight after these terrible events, and to take a little exercise.

Soon hunting for game became more easy and its results more abundant. The water-birds returned in large numbers. They often brought down a kind of wild duck which made excellent food. The hunters had no other deprivation to deplore than that of two dogs, which they lost in an expedition to reconnoitre the state of the icefields, twenty-five miles to the southward.

The month of February was signalized by violent tempests and abundant snows. The mean temperature was still twenty-five degrees below zero, but they did not suffer in comparison with past hardships. Besides, the sight of the sun, which rose higher and higher above the horizon, rejoiced them, as it forecast the end of their torments. Heaven had pity on them, for warmth came sooner than usual that year. The ravens appeared in March, careering about the ship. Louis Cornbutte captured some cranes which had wandered thus far northward. Flocks of wild birds were also seen in the south.

The return of the birds indicated a diminution of the cold; but it was not safe to rely upon this, for with a change of wind, or in the new or full moons, the temperature suddenly fell; and the sailors were forced to resort to their most careful precautions to protect themselves against it. They had already burned all the barricading, the bulkheads, and a large portion of the bridge. It was time, then, that their wintering was over. Happily, the mean temperature of March was not over sixteen degrees below zero. Marie occupied herself with preparing new clothing for the advanced season of the year.

After the equinox, the sun had remained constantly above the horizon. The eight months of perpetual daylight had begun. This continual sunlight, with the increasing though still quite feeble

heat, soon began to act upon the ice.

Great precautions were necessary in launching the ship from the lofty layer of ice which surrounded her. She was therefore securely propped up, and it seemed best to await the breaking up of the ice; but the lower mass, resting on a bed of already warm water, detached itself little by little, and the ship gradually descended with it. Early in April she had reached her natural level.

Torrents of rain came with April, which, extending in waves over the ice-plain, hastened still more its breaking up. The thermometer rose to ten degrees below zero. Some of the men took off their seal-skin clothes, and it was no longer necessary to keep a fire in the cabin stove day and night. The provision of spirit, which was not exhausted, was used only for cooking the food.

Soon the ice began to break up rapidly, and it became imprudent to venture upon the plain without a staff to sound the passages; for fissures wound in spirals here and there. Some of the sailors fell into the water, with no worse result, however, than a pretty cold bath.

The seals returned, and they were often hunted, and their grease utilized.

The health of the crew was fully restored, and the time was employed in hunting and preparations for departure. Louis Cornbutte often examined the channels, and decided, in consequence of the shape of the southern coast, to attempt a passage in that direction. The breaking up had already begun here and there, and the floating ice began to pass off towards the high seas. On the 25th of April the ship was put in readiness. The sails, taken from their sheaths, were found to be perfectly preserved, and it was with real delight that the sailors saw them once more swaying in the wind. The ship gave a lurch, for she had found her floating line, and though she would not yet move forward, she lay quietly and easily in her natural element.

In May the thaw became very rapid. The snow which covered the coast melted on every hand, and formed a thick mud, which made it well-nigh impossible to land. Small heathers, rosy and white, peeped out timidly above the lingering snow, and seemed to smile at the little heat they received. The thermometer at last rose above zero.

Twenty miles off, the ice masses, entirely separated, floated towards the Atlantic Ocean. Though the sea was not quite free around the ship, channels opened by which Louis Cornbutte wished to profit.

On the 21st of May, after a parting visit to his father's grave,

Louis at last set out from the bay. The hearts of the honest sailors were filled at once with joy and sadness, for one does not leave without regret a place where a friend has died. The wind blew from the north, and favoured their departure. The ship was often arrested by ice-banks, which were cut with the saws; icebergs not seldom confronted her, and it was necessary to blow them up with powder. For a month the way was full of perils, which sometimes brought the ship to the verge of destruction; but the crew were sturdy, and used to these dangerous exigencies. Penellan, Pierre Nouquet, Turquiette, Fidèle Misonne, did the work of ten sailors, and Marie had smiles of gratitude for each.

The "Jeune-Hardie" at last passed beyond the ice in the latitude of Jean-Mayer Island. About the 25th of June she met ships going northward for seals and whales. She had been nearly a month emerging from the Polar Sea.

On the 16th of August she came in view of Dunkirk. She had been signalled by the look-out, and the whole population flocked to the jetty. The sailors of the ship were soon clasped in the arms of their friends. The old curé received Louis Cornbutte and Marie with patriarchal arms, and of the two masses which he said on the following day, the first was for the repose of Jean Cornbutte's soul, and the second to bless these two lovers, so long united in misfortune.

# THE FORTIETH FRENCH ASCENT OF MONT BLANC

BY PAUL VERNE.

I arrived at Chamonix on the 18th of August, 1871, fully decided to make the ascent of Mont Blanc, cost what it might. My first attempt in August, 1869, was not successful. Bad weather had prevented me from mounting beyond the Grands-Mulets. This time circumstances seemed scarcely more favourable, for the weather, which had promised to be fine on the morning of the 18th, suddenly changed towards noon. Mont Blanc, as they say in its neighbourhood, "put on its cap and began to smoke its pipe," which, to speak more plainly, means that it is covered with clouds, and that the snow, driven upon it by a south-west wind, formed a long crest on its summit in the direction of the unfathomable precipices of the Brenva glaciers. This crest betrayed to imprudent tourists the route they would have taken, had they had the temerity to venture upon the mountain.

The next night was very inclement. The rain and wind were violent, and the barometer, below the "change," remained stationary.

Towards daybreak, however, several thunder-claps announced a change in the state of the atmosphere. Soon the clouds broke. The

chain of the Brevent and the Aiguilles-Rouges betrayed itself. The wind, turning to the north-west, brought into view above the Col de Balme, which shuts in the valley of Chamonix on the north, some light, isolated, fleecy clouds, which I hailed as the heralds of fine weather.

Despite this happy augury and a slight rise in the barometer, M. Balmat, chief guide of Chamonix, declared to me that I must not yet think of attempting the ascent.

"If the barometer continues to rise," he added, "and the weather holds good, I promise you guides for the day after to-morrow--perhaps for to-morrow. Meanwhile, have patience and stretch your legs; I will take you up the Brevent. The clouds are clearing away, and you will be able to exactly distinguish the path you will have to go over to reach the summit of Mont Blanc. If, in spite of this, you are determined to go, you may try it!"

This speech, uttered in a certain tone, was not very reassuring, and gave food for reflection. Still, I accepted his proposition, and he chose as my companion the guide Edward Ravanel, a very sedate and devoted fellow, who perfectly knew his business.

M. Donatien Levesque, an enthusiastic tourist and an intrepid pedestrian, who had made early in the previous year an interesting and difficult trip in North America, was with me. He had already

visited the greater part of America, and was about to descend the Mississippi to New Orleans, when the war cut short his projects and recalled him to France. We had met at Aix-les-Bains, and we had determined to make an excursion together in Savoy and Switzerland.

Donatien Levesque knew my intentions, and, as he thought that his health would not permit him to attempt so long a journey over the glaciers, it had been agreed that he should await my return from Mont Blanc at Chamonix, and should make the traditional visit to the Mer-de-Glace by the Montanvers during my absence.

On learning that I was going to ascend the Brevent, my friend did not hesitate to accompany me thither. The ascent of the Brevent is one of the most interesting trips that can be made from Chamonix. This mountain, about seven thousand six hundred feet high, is only the prolongation of the chain for the Aiguilles-Rouges, which runs from the south-west to the north-east, parallel with that of Mont Blanc, and forms with it the narrow valley of Chamonix. The Brevent, by its central position, exactly opposite the Bossons glacier, enables one to watch the parties which undertake the ascent of the giant of the Alps nearly throughout their journey. It is therefore much frequented.

We started about seven o'clock in the morning. As we went along, I thought of the mysterious words of the master-guide; they annoyed me a little. Addressing Ravanel, I said,--

"Have you made the ascent of Mont Blanc?"

"Yes, monsieur," he replied, "once; and that's enough. I am not anxious to do it again."

"The deuce!" said I. "I am going to try it."

"You are free, monsieur; but I shall not go with you. The mountain is not good this year. Several attempts have already been made; two only have succeeded. As for the second, the party tried the ascent twice. Besides, the accident last year has rather cooled the amateurs."

"An accident! What accident?"

"Did not monsieur hear of it? This is how it happened. A party, consisting of ten guides and porters and two Englishmen, started about the middle of September for Mont Blanc. They were seen to reach the summit; then, some minutes after, they disappeared in a cloud. When the cloud passed over no one was visible. The two travellers, with seven guides and porters, had been blown off by the wind and precipitated on the Cormayeur side, doubtless into the Brenva glacier. Despite the most vigilant search, their bodies could not be found. The other three were found one hundred and fifty yards below the summit, near the Petits-Mulets. They

had become blocks of ice."

"But these travellers must have been imprudent," said I to Ravanel. "What folly it was to start off so late in the year on such an expedition! They should have gone up in August."

I vainly tried to keep up my courage; this lugubrious story would haunt me in spite of myself. Happily the weather soon cleared, and the rays of a bright sun dissipated the clouds which still veiled Mont Blanc, and, at the same time, those which overshadowed my thoughts.

Our ascent was satisfactorily accomplished. On leaving the chalets of Planpraz, situated at a height of two thousand and sixty-two yards, you ascend, on ragged masses of rock and pools of snow, to the foot of a rock called "The Chimney," which is scaled with the feet and hands. Twenty minutes after, you reach the summit of the Brevent, whence the view is very fine. The chain of Mont Blanc appears in all its majesty. The gigantic mountain, firmly established on its powerful strata, seems to defy the tempests which sweep across its icy shield without ever impairing it; whilst the crowd of icy needles, peaks, mountains, which form its cortege and rise everywhere around it, without equalling its noble height, carry the evident traces of a slow wasting away.

From the excellent look-out which we occupied, we could reckon, though still imperfectly, the distance to be gone over in order to attain the summit. This summit, which from Chamonix appears so near the dome of the Goûter, now took its true position. The various plateaus which form so many degrees which must be crossed, and which are not visible from below, appeared from the Brevent, and threw the so-much-desired summit, by the laws of perspective, still farther in the background. The Bossons glacier, in all its splendour, bristled with icy needles and blocks (blocks sometimes ten yards square), which seemed, like the waves of an angry sea, to beat against the sides of the rocks of the Grands-Mulets, the base of which disappeared in their midst.

This marvellous spectacle was not likely to cool my impatience, and I more eagerly than ever promised myself to explore this hitherto unknown world.

My companion was equally inspired by the scene, and from this moment I began to think that I should not have to ascend Mont Blanc alone.

We descended again to Chamonix; the weather became milder every hour; the barometer continued to ascend; everything seemed to promise well.

The next day at sunrise I hastened to the master-guide. The sky was cloudless; the wind, almost imperceptible, was north-east. The chain of Mont Blanc, the higher summits of which were gilded by the rising sun, seemed to invite the many tourists to ascend it. One could not, in all politeness, refuse so kindly an invitation.

M. Balmat, after consulting his barometer, declared the ascent to be practicable, and promised me the two guides and the porter prescribed in our agreement. I left the selection of these to him. But an unexpected incident disturbed my preparations for departure.

As I came out of M. Balmat's office, I met Ravanel, my guide of the day before.

"Is monsieur going to Mont Blanc?" he asked.

"Yes, certainly," said I. "Is it not a favourable time logo?"

He reflected a few moments, and then said with an embarrassed air,--

"Monsieur, you are my traveller; I accompanied you yesterday to the Brevent, so I cannot leave you now; and, since you are going

up, I will go with you, if you will kindly accept my services. It is your right, for on all dangerous journeys the traveller can choose his own guides. Only, if you accept my offer, I ask that you will also take my brother, Ambrose Ravanel, and my cousin, Gaspard Simon. These are young, vigorous fellows; they do not like the ascent of Mont Blanc better than I do; but they will not shirk it, and I answer for them to you as I would for myself."

This young man inspired me with all confidence. I accepted his proposition, and hastened to apprise M. Balmat of the choice I had made. But M. Balmat had meanwhile been selecting guides for me according to their turn on his list. One only had accepted, Edward Simon; the answer of another, Jean Carrier, had not yet been received, though it was scarcely doubtful, as this man had already made the ascent of Mont Blanc twenty-nine times. I thus found myself in an embarrassing position. The guides I had chosen were all from Argentière, a village six kilometres from Chamonix. Those of Chamonix accused Ravanel of having influenced me in favour of his family, which was contrary to the regulations.

To cut the discussion short, I took Edward Simon, who had already made his preparations as a third guide. He would be useless if I went up alone, but would become indispensable if my friend also ascended.

This settled, I went to tell Donatien Levesque. I found him

sleeping the sleep of the just, for he had walked over sixteen kilometres on a mountain the evening before. I had some difficulty in waking him; but on removing first his sheets, then his pillows, and finally his mattress, I obtained some result, and succeeded in making him understand that I was preparing for the hazardous trip.

"Well," said he, yawning, "I will go with you as far as the Grands-Mulets, and await your return there."

"Bravo!" I replied. "I have just one guide too many, and I will attach him to your person."

We bought the various articles indispensable to a journey across the glaciers. Iron-spiked alpenstocks, coarse cloth leggings, green spectacles fitting tightly to the eyes, furred gloves, green veils,--nothing was forgotten. We each had excellent triple-soled shoes, which our guides roughed for the ice. This last is an important detail, for there are moments in such an expedition when the least slip is fatal, not only to yourself, but to the whole party with you.

Our preparations and those of the guides occupied nearly two hours. About eight o'clock our mules were brought; and we set out at last for the chalet of the Pierre-Pointue, situated at a height of six thousand five hundred feet, or three thousand above

the valley of Chamonix, not far from eight thousand five hundred feet below the summit of Mont Blanc.

On reaching the Pierre-Pointue, about ten o'clock, we found there a Spanish tourist, M. N----, accompanied by two guides and a porter. His principal guide, Paccard, a relative of the Doctor Paccard who made, with Jacques Balmat, the first ascent of Mont Blanc, had already been to the summit eighteen times. M. N---- was also getting himself ready for the ascent. He had travelled much in America, and had crossed the Cordilleras to Quito, passing through snow at the highest points. He therefore thought that he could, without great difficulty, carry through his new enterprise; but in this he was mistaken. He had reckoned without the steepness of the inclinations which he had to cross, and the rarefaction of the air. I hasten to add, to his honour, that, since he succeeded in reaching the summit of Mont Blanc, it was due to a rare moral energy, for his physical energies had long before deserted him.

We breakfasted as heartily as possible at the Pierre-Pointue; this being a prudent precaution, as the appetite usually fails higher up among the ice.

M. N---- set out at eleven, with his guides, for the Grands-Mulets. We did not start until noon. The mule-road ceases at the Pierre-Pointue. We had then to go up a very narrow zigzag path,

which follows the edge of the Bossons glacier, and along the base of the Aiguille-du-Midi. After an hour of difficult climbing in an intense heat, we reached a point called the Pierre-a-l'Echelle, eight thousand one hundred feet high. The guides and travellers were then bound together by a strong rope, with three or four yards between each. We were about to advance upon the Bossons glacier. This glacier, difficult at first, presents yawning and apparently bottomless crevasses on every hand. The vertical sides of these crevasses are of a glaucous and uncertain colour, but too seducing to the eye; when, approaching closely, you succeed in looking into their mysterious depths, you feel yourself irresistibly drawn towards them, and nothing seems more natural than to go down into them.

You advance slowly, passing round the crevasses, or on the snow bridges of dubious strength. Then the rope plays its part. It is stretched out over these dangerous transits; if the snow bridge yields, the guide or traveller remains hanging over the abyss. He is drawn beyond it, and gets off with a few bruises. Sometimes, if the crevasse is very wide but not deep, he descends to the bottom and goes up on the other side. In this case it is necessary to cut steps in the ice, and the two leading guides, armed with a sort of hatchet, perform this difficult and perilous task. A special circumstance makes the entrance on the Bossons dangerous. You go upon the glacier at the base of the Aiguille-du-Midi, opposite a passage whence stone avalanches often

descend. This passage is nearly six hundred feet wide. It must be crossed quickly, and as you pass, a guide stands on guard to avert the danger from you if it presents itself. In 1869 a guide was killed on this spot, and his body, hurled into space by a stone, was dashed to pieces on the rocks nine hundred feet below.

We were warned, and hastened our steps as fast as our inexperience would permit; but on leaving this dangerous zone, another, not less dangerous, awaited us. This was the region of the "seracs,"--immense blocks of ice, the formation of which is not as yet explained.

These are usually situated on the edge of a plateau, and menace the whole valley beneath them. A slight movement of the glacier, or even a light vibration of the temperature, impels their fall, and occasions the most serious accidents.

"Messieurs, keep quiet, and let us pass over quickly." These words, roughly spoken by one of the guides, checked our conversation. We went across rapidly and in silence. We finally reached what is called the "Junction" (which might more properly be called the violent "Separation"), by the Côte Mountain, the Bossons and Tacconay glaciers. At this point the scene assumes an indescribable character; crevasses with changing colours, ice-needles with sharp forms, seracs suspended and pierced with the light, little green lakes compose a chaos which surpasses everything that one can

imagine. Added to this, the rush of the torrents at the foot of the glaciers, the sinister and repeated crackings of the blocks which detached themselves and fell in avalanches down the crevasses, the trembling of the ground which opened beneath our feet, gave a singular idea of those desolate places the existence of which only betrays itself by destruction and death.

After passing the "Junction" you follow the Tacconay glacier for awhile, and reach the side which leads to the Grands-Mulets. This part, which is very sloping, is traversed in zigzags. The leading guide takes care to trace them at an angle of thirty degrees, when there is fresh snow, to avoid the avalanches.

After crossing for three hours on the ice and snow, we reach the Grands-Mulets, rocks six hundred feet high, overlooking on one side the Bossons glacier, and on the other the sloping plains which extend to the base of the Goûter dome.

A small hut, constructed by the guides near the summit of the first rock, gives a shelter to travellers, and enables them to await a favourable moment for setting out for the summit of Mont Blanc.

They dine there as well as they can, and sleep too; but the proverb, "He who sleeps dines," does not apply to this elevation, for one cannot seriously do the one or the other.

"Well," said I to Levesque, after a pretence of a meal, "did I exaggerate the splendour of the landscape, and do you regret having come thus far?"

"I regret it so little," he replied, "that I am determined to go on to the summit. You may count on me."

"Very good," said I. "But you know the worst is yet to come."

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, "we will go to the end. Meanwhile, let us observe the sunset, which must be magnificent."

The heavens had remained wonderfully clear. The chain of the Brevent and the Aiguilles-Rouges stretched out at our feet. Beyond, the Fiz rocks and the Aiguille-de-Varan rose above the Sallanche Valley, and the whole chains of Mont Fleury and the Reposoir appeared in the background. More to the right we could descry the snowy summit of the Buet, and farther off the Dents-du-Midi, with its five tusks, overhanging the valley of the Rhone. Behind us were the eternal snows of the Goûter, Mont Maudit, and, lastly, Mont Blanc.

Little by little the shadows invaded the valley of Chamonix, and gradually each of the summits which overlook it on the west. The chain of Mont Blanc alone remained luminous, and seemed encircled

by a golden halo. Soon the shadows crept up the Goûter and Mont Maudit. They still respected the giant of the Alps. We watched this gradual disappearance of the light with admiration. It lingered awhile on the highest summit, and gave us the foolish hope that it would not depart thence. But in a few moments all was shrouded in gloom, and the livid and ghastly colours of death succeeded the living hues. I do not exaggerate. Those who love mountains will comprehend me.

After witnessing this sublime scene, we had only to await the moment of departure. We were to set out again at two in the morning. Now, therefore, we stretched ourselves upon our mattresses.

It was useless to think of sleeping, much more of talking. We were absorbed by more or less gloomy thoughts. It was the night before the battle, with the difference that nothing forced us to engage in the struggle. Two sorts of ideas struggled in the mind. It was the ebb and flow of the sea, each in its turn. Objections to the venture were not wanting. Why run so much danger? If we succeeded, of what advantage would it be? If an accident happened, how we should regret it! Then the imagination set to work; all the mountain catastrophes rose in the fancy. I dreamed of snow bridges giving way under my feet, of being precipitated in the yawning crevasses, of hearing the terrible noises of the avalanches detaching themselves and burying me, of disappearing,

of cold and death seizing upon me, and of struggling with desperate effort, but in vain!

A sharp, horrible noise is heard at this moment

"The avalanche! the avalanche!" I cry.

"What is the matter with you?" asks Levesque, starting up.

Alas! It is a piece of furniture which, in the struggles of my nightmare, I have just broken. This very prosaic avalanche recalls me to the reality. I laugh at my terrors, a contrary current of thought gets the upper hand, and with it ambitious ideas. I need only use a little effort to reach this summit, so seldom attained. It is a victory, as others are. Accidents are rare--very rare! Do they ever take place at all? The spectacle from the summit must be so marvellous! And then what satisfaction there would be in having accomplished what so many others dared not undertake!

My courage was restored by these thoughts, and I calmly awaited the moment of departure.

About one o'clock the steps and voices of the guides, and the noise of opening doors, indicated that that moment was approaching. Soon Ravanel came in and said, "Come, messieurs, get up; the weather

is magnificent. By ten o'clock we shall be at the summit."

At these words we leaped from our beds, and hurried to make our toilet. Two of the guides, Ambrose Ravanel and his cousin Simon, went on ahead to explore the road. They were provided with a lantern, which was to show us the way to go, and with hatchets to make the path and cut steps in the very difficult spots. At two o'clock we tied ourselves one to another: the order of march was, Edward Ravanel before me, and at the head; behind me Edward Simon, then Donatien Levesque; after him our two porters (for we took along with us the domestic of the Grands-Mulets hut as a second), and M. N----'s party.

The guides and porters having distributed the provisions between them, the signal for departure was given, and we set off in the midst of profound darkness, directing ourselves according to the lantern held up at some distance ahead.

There was something solemn in this setting out. But few words were spoken; the vagueness of the unknown impressed us, but the new and strange situation excited us, and rendered us insensible to its dangers. The landscape around was fantastic. But few outlines were distinguishable. Great white confused masses, with blackish spots here and there, closed the horizon. The celestial vault shone with remarkable brilliancy. We could perceive, at an uncertain distance, the lantern of the guides who were ahead, and

the mournful silence of the night was only disturbed by the dry, distant noise of the hatchet cutting steps in the ice.

We crept slowly and cautiously over the first ascent, going towards the base of the Goûter. After ascending laboriously for two hours, we reached the first plateau, called the "Petit-Plateau," at the foot of the Goûter, at a height of about eleven thousand feet. We rested a few moments and then proceeded, turning now to the left and going towards the edge which conducts to the "Grand-Plateau."

But our party had already lessened in number: M. N----, with his guides, had stopped; his fatigue obliged him to take a longer rest.

About half-past four dawn began to whiten the horizon. At this moment we were ascending the slope which leads to the Grand-Plateau, which we soon safely reached. We were eleven thousand eight hundred feet high. We had well earned our breakfast. Wonderful to relate, Levesque and I had a good appetite. It was a good sign. We therefore installed ourselves on the snow, and made such a repast as we could. Our guides joyfully declared that success was certain. As for me, I thought they resumed work too quickly.

M. N---- rejoined us before long. We urged him to take some nourishment. He peremptorily refused. He felt the contraction of the stomach which is so common in those parts, and was almost

broken down.

The Grand-Plateau deserves a special description. On the right rises the dome of the Goûter. Opposite it is Mont Blanc, rearing itself two thousand seven hundred feet above it. On the left are the "Rouges" rocks and Mont Maudit. This immense circle is one mass of glittering whiteness. On every side are vast crevasses. It was in one of these that three of the guides who accompanied Dr. Hamel and Colonel Anderson, in 1820, were swallowed up. In 1864 another guide met his death there.

This plateau must be crossed with great caution, as the crevasses are often hidden by the snow; besides, it is often swept by avalanches. On the 13th of October, 1866, an English traveller and three of his guides were buried under a mass of ice that fell from Mont Blanc. After a perilous search, the bodies of the three guides were found. They were expecting every moment to find that of the Englishman, when a fresh avalanche fell upon the first, and forced the searchers to abandon their task.

Three routes presented themselves to us. The ordinary route, which passes entirely to the left, by the base of Mont Maudit, through a sort of valley called the "Corridor," leads by gentle ascents to the top of the first escarpment of the Rouges rocks.

The second, less frequented, turns to the right by the Goûter,

and leads to the summit of Mont Blanc by the ridge which unites these two mountains. You must pursue for three hours a giddy path, and scale a height of moving ice, called the "Camel's Hump."

The third route consists in ascending directly to the summit of the Corridor, crossing an ice-wall seven hundred and fifty feet high, which extends along the first escarpment of the Rouges rocks.

The guides declared the first route impracticable, on account of the recent crevasses which entirely obstructed it; the choice between the two others remained. I thought the second, by the "Camel's Hump," the best; but it was regarded as too dangerous, and it was decided that we should attack the ice-wall conducting to the summit of the Corridor.

When a decision is made, it is best to execute it without delay. We crossed the Grand-Plateau, and reached the foot of this really formidable obstacle.

The nearer we approached the more nearly vertical became its slope. Besides, several crevasses which we had not perceived yawned at its base.

We nevertheless began the difficult ascent. Steps were begun by

the foremost guide, and completed by the next. We ascended two steps a minute. The higher we went the more the steepness increased. Our guides themselves discussed what route to follow; they spoke in patois, and did not always agree, which was not a good sign. At last the slope became such that our hats touched the legs of the guide just before us.

A hailstorm of pieces of ice, produced by the cutting of the steps, blinded us, and made our progress still more difficult. Addressing one of the foremost guides, I said,--

"Ah, it's very well going up this way! It is not an open road, I admit: still, it is practicable. Only how are you going to get us down again?"

"O monsieur," replied Ambrose Ravanel, "we will take another route going back."

At last, after violent effort for two hours, and after having cut more than four hundred steps in this terrible mass, we reached the summit of the Corridor completely exhausted.

We then crossed a slightly sloping plateau of snow, and passed along the side of an immense crevasse which obstructed our way. We had scarcely turned it when we uttered a cry of admiration. On the right, Piedmont and the plains of Lombardy were at our feet.

On the left, the Pennine Alps and the Oberland, crowned with snow, raised their magnificent crests. Monte Rosa and the Cervin alone still rose above us, but soon we should overlook them in our turn.

This reflection recalled us to the end of our expedition. We turned our gaze towards Mont Blanc, and stood stupefied.

"Heavens! how far off it is still!" cried Levesque.

"And how high!" I added.

It was a discouraging sight. The famous wall of the ridge, so much feared, but which must be crossed, was before us, with its slope of fifty degrees. But after scaling the wall of the Corridor, it did not terrify us. We rested for half an hour and then continued our tramp; but we soon perceived that the atmospheric conditions were no longer the same. The sun shed his warm rays upon us; and their reflection on the snow added to our discomfort. The rarefaction of the air began to be severely felt. We advanced slowly, making frequent halts, and at last reached the plateau which overlooks the second escarpment of the Rouges rocks. We were at the foot of Mont Blanc. It rose, alone and majestic, at a height of six hundred feet above us. Monte Rosa itself had lowered its flag!

Levesque and I were completely exhausted. As for M. N----, who had rejoined us at the summit of the Corridor, it might be said that he was insensible to the rarefaction of the air, for he no longer breathed, so to speak.

We began at last to scale the last stage. We made ten steps and then stopped, finding it absolutely impossible to proceed. A painful contraction of the throat made our breathing exceedingly difficult. Our legs refused to carry us; and I then understood the picturesque expression of Jacques Balmat, when, in narrating his first ascent, he said that "his legs seemed only to be kept up by his trousers!" But our mental was superior to our physical force; and if the body faltered, the heart, responding "Excelsior!" stifled its desperate complaint, and urged forward our poor worn-out mechanism, despite itself. We thus passed the Petits-Mulets, and after two hours of superhuman efforts finally overlooked the entire chain. Mont Blanc was under our feet!

It was fifteen minutes after twelve.

The pride of success soon dissipated our fatigue. We had at last conquered this formidable crest. We overlooked all the others, and the thoughts which Mont Blanc alone can inspire affected us with a deep emotion. It was ambition satisfied; and to me, at least, a dream realized!

Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in Europe. Several mountains in Asia and America are higher; but of what use would it be to attempt them, if, in the absolute impossibility of reaching their summit, you must be content to remain at a lesser height?

Others, such as Mont Cervin, are more difficult of access; but we perceived the summit of Mont Cervin twelve hundred feet below us!

And then, what a view to reward us for our troubles and dangers!

The sky, still pure, had assumed a deep-blue tint. The sun, despoiled of a part of his rays, had lost his brilliancy, as if in a partial eclipse. This effect, due to the rarefaction of the air, was all the more apparent as the surrounding eminences and plains were inundated with light. No detail of the scene, therefore, escaped our notice.

In the south-east, the mountains of Piedmont, and farther off the plains of Lombardy, shut in our horizon. Towards the west, the mountains of Savoy and Dauphiné; beyond, the valley of the Rhone. In the north-west, the Lake of Geneva and the Jura; then, descending towards the south, a chaos of mountains and glaciers, beyond description, overlooked by the masses of Monte Rosa, the Mischabelhoerner, the Cervin, the Weishorn--the most beautiful of crests, as Tyndall calls it--and farther off by the Jungfrau, the Monck, the Eiger, and the Finsteraarhorn.

The extent of our range of vision was not less than sixty leagues. We therefore saw at least one hundred and twenty leagues of country.

A special circumstance happened to enhance the beauty of the scene. Clouds formed on the Italian side and invaded the valleys of the Pennine Alps without veiling their summits. We soon had under our eyes a second sky, a lower sky, a sea of clouds, whence emerged a perfect archipelago of peaks and snow-wrapped mountains. There was something magical in it, which the greatest poets could scarcely describe.

The summit of Mont Blanc forms a ridge from southwest to north-east, two hundred paces long and a yard wide at the culminating point. It seemed like a ship's hull overturned, the keel in the air.

Strangely enough, the temperature was very high--ten degrees above zero. The air was almost still. Sometimes we felt a light breeze.

The first care of our guides was to place us all in a line on the crest opposite Chamonix, that we might be easily counted from below, and thus make it known that no one of us had been lost. Many of the tourists had ascended the Brevent and the Jardin to watch our ascent. They might now be assured of its success.

But to ascend was not all; we must think also of going down. The most difficult, if not most wearisome, task remained; and then one quits with regret a summit attained at the price of so much toil. The energy which urges you to ascend, the need, so natural and imperious, of overcoming, now fails you. You go forward listlessly, often looking behind you!

It was necessary, however, to decide, and, after a last traditional libation of champagne, we put ourselves in motion. We had remained on the summit an hour. The order of march was now changed. M. N----'s party led off; and, at the suggestion of his guide Paccard, we were all tied together with a rope. M. N----'s fatigue, which his strength, but not his will, betrayed, made us fear falls on his part which would require the help of the whole party to arrest. The event justified our foreboding. On descending the side of the wall, M. N---- made several false steps. His guides, very vigorous and skilful, were happily able to check him; but ours, feeling, with reason, that the whole party might be dragged down, wished to detach us from the rope. Levesque and I opposed this; and, by taking great precautions, we safely reached the base of this giddy ledge. There was no room for illusions. The almost bottomless abyss was before us, and the pieces of detached ice, which bounded by us with the rapidity of an arrow, clearly showed us the route which the party would take if a slip were made.

Once this terrible gap crossed, I began to breathe again. We descended the gradual slopes which led to the summit of the Corridor. The snow, softened by the heat, yielded beneath our feet; we sank in it to the knees, which made our progress very fatiguing. We steadily followed the path by which we ascended in the morning, and I was astonished when Gaspard Simon, turning towards me, said,--

"Monsieur, we cannot take any other road, for the Corridor is impracticable, and we must descend by the wall which we climbed up this morning."

I told Levesque this disagreeable news.

"Only," added Gaspard Simon, "I do not think we can all remain tied together. However, we will see how M. N---- bears it at first."

We advanced towards this terrible wall! M. N----'s party began to descend, and we heard Paccard talking rapidly to him. The inclination became so steep that we perceived neither him nor his guides, though we were bound together by the same rope.

As soon as Gaspard Simon, who went before me, could comprehend what was passing, he stopped, and after exchanging' some words in

patois with his comrades, declared that we must detach ourselves from M. N----'s party.

"We are responsible for you," he added, "but we cannot be responsible for others; and if they slip, they will drag us after them."

Saying this, he got loose from the rope. We were very unwilling to take this step; but our guides were inflexible.

We then proposed to send two of them to help M. N----'s guides. They eagerly consented; but having no rope they could not put this plan into execution.

We then began this terrible descent. Only one of us moved at a time, and when each took a step the others buttressed themselves ready to sustain the shock if he slipped. The foremost guide, Edward Ravanel, had the most perilous task; it was for him to make the steps over again, now more or less worn away by the ascending caravan.

We progressed slowly, taking the most careful precautions. Our route led us in a right line to one of the crevasses which opened at the base of the escarpment. When we were going up we could not look at this crevasse, but in descending we were fascinated by its green and yawning sides. All the blocks of ice detached by

our passage went the same way, and after two or three bounds, ingulfed themselves in the crevasse, as in the jaws of the minotaur, only the jaws of the minotaur closed after each morsel, while the unsatiated crevasse yawned perpetually, and seemed to await, before closing, a larger mouthful. It was for us to take care that we should not be this mouthful, and all our efforts were made for this end. In order to withdraw ourselves from this fascination, this moral giddiness, if I may so express myself, we tried to joke about the dangerous position in which we found ourselves, and which even a chamois would not have envied us. We even got so far as to hum one of Offenbach's couplets; but I must confess that our jokes were feeble, and that we did not sing the airs correctly.

I even thought I discovered Levesque obstinately setting the words of "Barbe-Bleue" to one of the airs in "Il Trovatore," which rather indicated some grave preoccupation of the mind. In short, in order to keep up our spirits, we did as do those brave cowards who sing in the dark to forget their fright.

We remained thus, suspended between life and death, for an hour, which seemed an eternity; at last we reached the bottom of this terrible escarpment. We there found M. N---- and his party, safe and sound.

After resting a little while, we continued our journey.

As we were approaching the Petit-Plateau, Edward Ravanel suddenly stopped, and, turning towards us, said,--

"See what an avalanche! It has covered our tracks."

An immense avalanche of ice had indeed fallen from the Goûter, and entirely buried the path we had followed in the morning across the Petit-Plateau.

I estimated that the mass of this avalanche could not comprise less than five hundred cubic yards. If it had fallen while we were passing, one more catastrophe would no doubt have been added to the list, already too long, of the necrology of Mont Blanc.

This fresh obstacle forced us to seek a new road, or to pass around the foot of the avalanche. As we were much fatigued, the latter course was assuredly the simplest; but it involved a serious danger. A wall of ice more than sixty feet high, already partly detached from the Goûter, to which it only clung by one of its angles, overhung the path which we should follow. This great mass seemed to hold itself in equilibrium. What if our passing, by disturbing the air, should hasten its fall? Our guides held a consultation. Each of them examined with a spy-glass the fissure which had been formed between the mountain and this alarming ice-mass. The sharp and clear edges of the cleft betrayed a recent breaking off,

evidently caused by the fall of the avalanche.

After a brief discussion, our guides, recognizing the impossibility of finding another road, decided to attempt this dangerous passage.

"We must walk very fast,--even run, if possible," said they, "and we shall be in safety in five minutes. Come, messieurs, a last effort!"

A run of five minutes is a small matter for people who are only tired; but for us, who were absolutely exhausted, to run even for so short a time on soft snow, in which we sank up to the knees, seemed an impossibility. Nevertheless, we made an urgent appeal to our energies, and after two or three tumbles, drawn forward by one, pushed by another, we finally reached a snow hillock, on which we fell breathless. We were out of danger.

It required some time to recover ourselves. We stretched out on the snow with a feeling of comfort which every one will understand. The greatest difficulties had been surmounted, and though there were still dangers to brave, we could confront them with comparatively little apprehension.

We prolonged our halt in the hope of witnessing the fall of the avalanche, but in vain. As the day was advancing, and it was not

prudent to tarry in these icy solitudes, we decided to continue on our way, and about five o'clock we reached the hut of the Grands-Mulets.

After a bad night, attended by fever caused by the sunstrokes encountered in our expedition, we made ready to return to Chamonix; but, before setting out, we inscribed the names of our guides and the principal events of our journey, according to the custom, on the register kept for this purpose at the Grands-Mulets.

About eight o'clock we started for Chamonix. The passage of the Bossons was difficult, but we accomplished it without accident.

Half an hour before reaching Chamonix, we met, at the chalet of the Dard falls, some English tourists, who seemed to be watching our progress. When they perceived us, they hurried up eagerly to congratulate us on our success. One of them presented us to his wife, a charming person, with a well-bred air. After we had given them a sketch of our perilous peregrinations, she said to us, in earnest accents,--

"How much you are envied here by everybody! Let me touch your alpenstocks!"

These words seemed to interpret the general feeling.

The ascent of Mont Blanc is a very painful one. It is asserted that the celebrated naturalist of Geneva, De Saussure, acquired there the seeds of the disease of which he died in a few months after his return from the summit. I cannot better close this narrative than by quoting the words of M. Markham Sherwell:--

"However it may be," he says, in describing his ascent of Mont Blanc, "I would not advise any one to undertake this ascent, the rewards of which can never have an importance proportionate to the dangers encountered by the tourist, and by those who accompany him."

THE END.