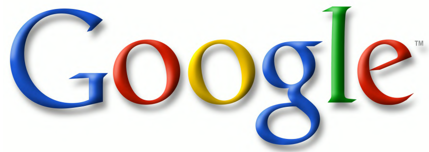

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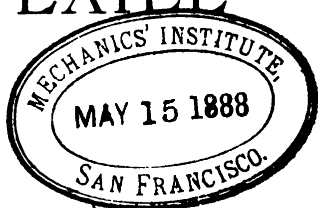
FROM LANDS OF EXILE

FROM

LANDS OF EXILE



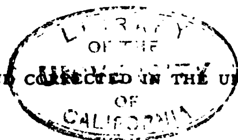
BY

PIERRE LOTI

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

CLARA BELL



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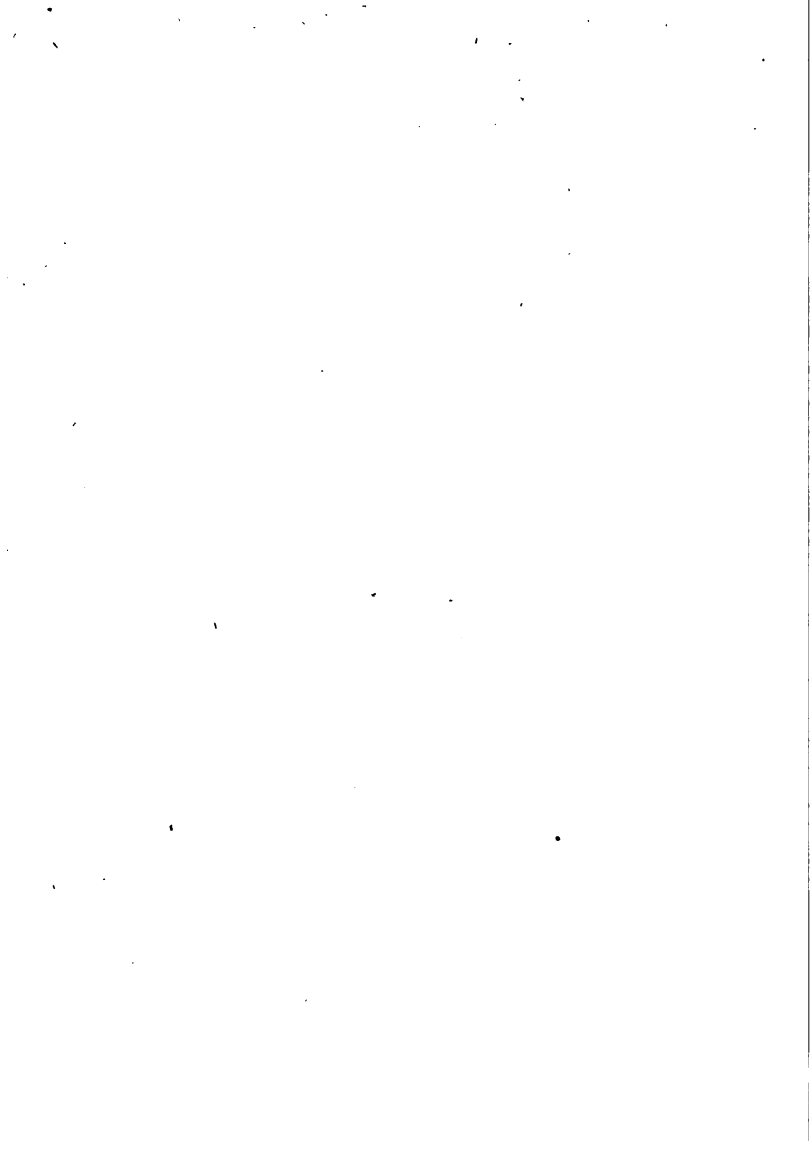

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IN MEMORY OF

MRS. EDWARD LEE CHILDE,

(NÉE BLANCHE DE TRIQUETI.)

I DEDICATE this to the memory of a noble and exquisite woman, whose never-to-be-forgotten image rises before me, strangely vivid, whenever I have time to think.

These notes from the far away "Yellow Land" were originally written for her alone; I used to send them to her out of the distance, as a sort of chat to amuse her during the long, weary months while she was slowly fading out of life — slowly and with a serene smile. From those letters grew this book, as forlorn now as my life is.

For more than a year she has been at rest in the grave;* it is late in the day to speak of her, even to those choicer spirits, the aristocracy by birth or talents who had gathered round her like a little court. I only crave to try to perpetuate

* Died in 1886.

her features which are fading like those of all who die — vanishing from our memories. Books, even those which are soonest forgotten, last longer than human lives; I should like to fix on these pages something of her that may survive her for a while.

We were for the most part "distant friends," as she used to say. I was a wanderer by profession. She retired every summer to her country home, Le Perthuis (near Montargis) and in the winter made her way towards Africa, following the sun which solaced her suffering. We met at most for a few days now and again, in the intervals of long voyages. But our letters, travelling half round the world, brought us near in our thoughts on all subjects. She was my adviser more than once in moments of indecision; with upright and steadfast counsel, which I valued and followed. My only fear is that I may fail to find words of deep enough respect as I write of her and dwell on her memory.

Her home in Paris was in the Champs Élysées — in a large house which projects like the bows of a vessel between the Cours la Reine and the gardens of the Palais de l'Industrie. There it was that in fact I most often saw her; there it is that in my mind's eye I am most apt to see her

now, sitting in her favorite place, a sort of little sanctum she had made for herself at one end of a long drawing-room on the ground-floor, shaded by some tall palms which grew in the room and formed a sort of screen against the outside glare. A fragrance as of the East met you at the entrance. When the doors were opened — beyond draped curtains, in a recess of the drawing-room, and at the end of a sort of avenue of rare objects collected with her own particular taste, you saw her in her nook; she would lift her head to see who was approaching; then having recognized you she sank back into her somewhat reclining attitude, and welcomed the visitor with a smile — kindly to a mere acquaintance, frankly sweet to those she liked to see about her.

How can I describe her person so as to achieve any likeness? — Her distinction was innate and perfect. Tall, slight, erect and yet graceful, with a gait like a dreamy queen — a supple figure and bent head. Her face was small, singularly delicate, pale like wax, thin — sometimes drawn by the beginnings of fatal disease. The profile fragile-looking with a softened outline of a quite peculiar and unique type. And a pair of eyes which seemed indeed to *light up* — a phrase often misused in describing women, but in

her case absolutely true; grey-blue eyes as changeful in color as the sea, their hue appearing to vary with the feeling they expressed. Eyes which sometimes dilated as though looking far, far down, sounding the lowest depths of the soul; which could be as hard as steel at times when they disapproved or were displeased; which were infinitely kind and gentle when they chose. They could smile, too, occasionally, with the subtlest smile, when she was fain to utter some playful remark, some very mild and merciful irony, some quaintly droll and unexpected notion which no one else would have hit upon. And very often, too, those eyes of hers preserved, from sheer weariness, a gaze of total indifference, which many people took for disdain, and which was terribly alarming.

A friend — an Academician I think — said to her one day: "I can draw your outer person in four adjectives: proud, elegant, indifferent, intelligent." And this she was exactly, on the surface. She had an unattainable ideal in all things; disappointed through looking into them too closely, bored with life, surfeited with homage, she had come to shrouding her real self under this disguise. But if I were to describe her truly in four adjectives — the soul beneath the mask

she wore, I should say: "Upright, brave, high-minded and refined."

Upright and frank as few women know how to be; knowing nothing of their thousand petty subterfuges, their trumpery anxieties, their mean spite — living far above all that: a firm and unchanging friend. Upright to bluntness, even in the first unstudied impulses of her mind; a little curt and sharp sometimes when giving advice or blame; always striving to spur her friends towards what she thought right and noble. Brave — as brave as a good man. Brave at the approach of near and certain death, holding out inch by inch against the dark visitant, caring much for life; but without a complaint, without a variation in the serenity of her smile. "Is not fear a stupid, useless thing!" she wrote to me once. — Brave to meet even the wearying daily vexations of life. Exquisitely refined she was in everything; in her mind, language and appearance — even in the persons and things she gathered about her. Attracted by all that is beautiful or delightful in the visible world, she had a natural taste for what was choice and elegant. Speaking once of a great lady who had suddenly fallen into extreme poverty, she said a thing which exactly painted one side of her own nature: "Dear me, one can

always do without conventional necessaries; but she will lose all her luxuries—poor woman!" Conventionalities, the small matters of course and social obligations, which to some people are the aim and end of life, were to her a matter of supreme contempt, though she had (too much good sense not to submit to them to some extent.) She had a great contempt, too, for modern notions, for equalizing theories, for all that is commonly designated as progress; her worship was for the grand and buried past, her reverence was for memories, traditions and religions.

She had a wonderfully active mind; almost a craving to master, or at any rate to apprehend the whole cycle of human knowledge before she died. She was on terms of intimacy with superior minds which she attracted by her serious charm; she read everything that was brought out and worth reading in Europe, and lived in that full tide of the highest intellectual activity which flows only at a level which few women are capable of reaching.

Knowing my aversion for printed matter, she took the trouble to underline passages and turn up corners of the pages which I must not skip; and so, by her aid, I could extract in a few minutes all the essence of a terrible, big book. She

herself wrote with rare and delightful facility. Ah! Those letters which came to me with faithful regularity in the lands of my exile! They were one of my joys out there. How pretty was all she had to say; thoughtful and noble, too, a comfort in hours of dejection, — or merely bright, delicately bright and subtle; and it always rang so true, was so purely and thoroughly good.

At one time, to amuse her leisure, she wrote the narrative of one of her journeys to Egypt; it came out in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and subsequently in a little volume; and when I wrote indignantly at her not having sent it to me — on board ship, wandering Heaven knows where — she sent me this reply: "It was out of a very natural feeling of diffidence; I waited till you should ask me. If I had written a cookery-book, then indeed! I should have been proud of sending it to you to read. But a book about the East — the East, and to you — Loti! I send you that! — never!"

When for a wonder her mind was at rest, her fingers were busy; she was to be seen stitching away with her slender hands, combining colored silks, gold and silver thread, and working with fairy-like swiftness on wonderful embroidery for which she had sketched the pattern on her draw-

ing block in some remote mosque perhaps, at Kaïrouan or elsewhere. — In one of her "traveller's tales" she gives an account of her excursions to and fro in Algiers to get herself initiated into the mysteries of a certain stitch in Arab needlework. — And when she had made these pretty things she would excuse herself for the childish employment, and say with a laugh: "In one of my former existences I must have been a very industrious working-woman, and the passion for work still clings to my finger-tips."

She fancied that this incessant energy kept her going in an artificial manner; that she thus cheated her malady. One day when I found her more exhausted than usual I said: "I do beg of you to go into the country — into the fresh air and sunshine, to some place where you can do nothing, read nothing, see nothing; I feel that you are killing yourself here."

And she answered with a calm smile: "If I were not to kill myself in this way day by day — I should be dead by this time." And she sat down to the piano and played some light, fevered rhapsody. She played very finely, a little like Rubinstein whom she admired; but the feeling was all her own; it fatigued her greatly, but was delightful to listen to.

Deeply graven on my memory is a visit I paid her in March, 1885, just before starting to join the fleet at Formosa under Admiral Courbet. I had gone to Paris to take leave of her. She had been confined to her room since the first days of winter, never to leave it again. It was the beginning of a slow martyrdom, the last long struggle with death. She lay there for fifteen months, prolonging her life by sheer force of will, calm, stoical, admirable; with unfailing sweetness and smiles for those she cared for.

On going into her room I saw her graceful head resting on her pillow in the shade of dark blue curtains, her hair dressed as carefully as for a reception; she was in some pretty wrap, with her bracelets and rings, as one who would not confess herself conquered, and who was only resting from some transient fatigue. But her cheeks were white and sadly hollow. By her bedside knelt her friend the Duchesse de R***, holding her hand on which she rested her fair head. — I shall long remember the picture of the two women.

The room was lofty and light, elegantly simple, with nothing in it to rouse thoughts of sickness or of death; an abundance of flowers, and a steady temperature, skilfully regulated. The winter sun

came in at the window which looked out on the trees of the Cours la Reine.

"Talk to each other, both talk," said she, "I am forbidden to speak. I will make signs of approval with my hands when you say anything very interesting."

As I was about to leave, and stooped to kiss her hand, she no doubt read something in my face, some involuntary expression of my sad emotion in bidding her farewell. Her large eyes turned enquiringly on her friend and then on me, as if to ask us both: "Really! — Has it come to this? Does he think he will not find me alive next year, when the war is over?"

She cheated herself — not as to the fact that she must die, but as to how long she had to live. Deluded by physicians, who know well how to deceive their patients, and who affected to be very plain-spoken with their technical phraseology, she fancied that she had yet four or five years in which to behold the things of earth; that she would have time to finish the alterations she was making at Le Perthuis, and enjoy them for a summer or two; to return to Egypt perhaps, under the healing sun, and see the East and the desert once more.

As we left the room Madame de R***, said

to me: "You will not find this Siren here again."

That name of *Siren* dwelt in my mind; it does not look well written; it sounds heathen and repulsive, a little out of date, too; but uttered then and there by the young *duchesse* in the sense of a Charmer, with the best and sweetest meaning of Charm, it was just the right word. At that moment I felt as though no other could so perfectly have fitted that ideal and dying woman, so pallid with her great grey eyes and waving hair,—with that scarcely audible voice, too, sweet and hollow like muffled music.... one listened as to a murmur from the mysterious nether distance.

All through that last campaign in China my constant dread was that I might never see her again. Her letters came frequently, but they grew shorter and shorter. Her writing, once so firm, had altered. Then I got only little pencilled notes—straggling lines betraying painful effort, a pain to see. On my voyage home, during the long weeks on the blue waters of the Indian seas where no news could reach me, I was

haunted by the saddest thoughts. Then at Port Saïd, at the French consul's office, I found one of those poor little pencilled letters waiting for me — the last she ever wrote me:

PARIS, Dec. 17, 1885.

So I shall see you again, my dear friend. How many times during the last three months have I mentally taken leave of you. — I have been so ill.

But I am a very little better; I do not expect to get over it, but I believe I shall live and drag on a few months; and you are coming and will bring me — who knows — a little health, a little sunshine, in your portmanteau? At any rate you will bring me your own affectionate regard.

For four months I have not left my bed and life grows narrower and narrower around me. Your mother expects you in February. — Can you read my scrawl? I am taking pains to be legible but I am so weak.

At last I reached France; I telegraphed to Paris and in two hours I knew that she still lived,

against the expectations of her doctors: nay, that she was a little better. I had a month's work before me at Toulon in paying off my ship, and had to comfort myself with this "better" which was the flicker before the end.

But one day I received a letter written by her husband at her request; she was suddenly much worse; the physicians feared she could not last a week — perhaps not even another day. I telegraphed at once that I was coming.

And it was late; the Paris express had gone; I must wait till next day to start. I shut myself up alone — in one of those temporary lodgings that one takes hap-hazard on landing to cram it with cases and confusion — and my evening was a gloomy one. Why, why had I not gone at first, at once, instead of allowing myself to hope: "Perhaps not even another day" — and the hours of darkness dragged slowly by. I felt as if I were keeping watch by her — dead — by myself in that cheerless room.

As I reached the house two days later I saw she was still alive: there was nothing altered in its aspect from outside.

I had dreaded to see her, and it was a surprise to find her hardly changed at all; indeed, when I had left her I had seen her as thin — immaterial

so to speak. — She was dressed as before, her hair done up, flowers about her, *exquisite* to the last; determined to receive the dread visitant like a great lady devoid of weakness or fear. For some days she had been kept alive almost artificially, by morphine which stopped everything: life as much as death. I could see this as I gazed closely at her. Her pale and transparent features were set and rigid; but for her eyes she might already have been dead — a fair and decked-out corpse.

But her eyes were living, intensely living — soft, deep, heavenly; larger than ever. It was she herself, her very self whom I saw once more. In the shattered frame, almost bereft of movement and breath, the essence was still detained: that unutterable something which is the soul, the sublimated intellect. . . . and she said: "Thank God that He has allowed me to see you once more!"

There was a long silence, during which I allowed my eyes to wander as though taking note of everything in the room — for fear I might be unable to refrain from tears. But even now there was nothing in the elegant room to suggest the proximity of death. Against the wall, within the curtains of her bed and in reach of her hand, was a set of lacquer shelves on which lay various little

treasures, portraits, souvenirs which she especially valued, a vase filled with roses, a few favorite books — among them the Book of Books: the New Testament.

Then at first we spoke of life and death — she as one who knows, a seer, past already to the further shore. Her voice, only just audible in the silence, broken and breathless, still was sweet; I listened as to a voice no longer of this world. I was impressed with a quite new and unknown emotion by this last interview with a spirit so clear, so calm, so present and yet so remote already, almost departed to the mysterious region beyond death.

Her chief desire seemed to be to spare those whom she was leaving all painful scenes of leave-taking and death-bed suffering; she was more resolutely brave than ever; she would not even seem to suffer. In truth I thought her now too brave — above the measure of human sympathy. A little effusion, a little surrender, a few tears would have been better for her I fancied. But she would none of it, regarding any display of feeling as a weakness; carrying this to excess, in the very hour of death she hardened herself to be stoical. So, to yield to her, and not to weary her, I brought the conversation back to a more

ordinary level. We talked as two friends who have a thousand things to say to each other, not having met for a long time and on the point of a yet longer separation — one of them having to depart for a land which letters can reach no more. She made enquiries as to all I was going to do, all my immediate plans and my schemes for the future. We even fell to talking of travels, news, and acquaintances; and two or three times the subtle smile of former days lighted up her face, the delicate irony of which she had the secret, untainted with bitterness, softened by compassion. Nay, her laugh was still audible.

I knew full well that her last hours could not be like those of any one else; but this amazed me. She frightened me. Perhaps I thought her less lovable, but I was filled with admiration and a sort of pious awe for this choicest spirit, who was withal a woman and who was going to the last Unknown with such unmoved stoicism and serenity.

I had two days' leave to spend in Paris — for this last farewell. When I bid her good-bye in the dusk she said: "Come again to-morrow at any hour; in the morning rather than the evening — it will be safer. I will see you again — if I am here."

But her look and gesture betrayed how little she counted on being still *present* on the morrow. Then her eyes grew dim in spite of herself, with such affectionate sweetness, such human pathos that I kissed her hand with brotherly devotion — her poor hand, so thin, almost withered, with the rings so much too large now and slipping off her fingers.

I returned next day, my heart aching as I thought that this was indeed the very last time. The room was as usual, quiet, bright with flowers; but death had made rapid strides during the night. It was no longer She. Her eyes widened by the morphine of which the dose had been greatly increased to soothe her, gazed at I know not what in vacancy with a lost look; she was excited, wandering a little — quite conquered now, alas!

She had desired her maid to cut all her hair short that morning, saying it made her hot, gave her a head-ache, teased her. She apologized for being seen in this condition, feeling that she was no longer in full dress; but even so she looked like a dying queen; a white lace mantilla was over her head, just showing her short hair.

But it was not herself. — Her head was very full of plans for travelling in the summer; then

she spoke of several visitors whom she had been seeing that morning and, strangely enough, all the persons she mentioned as having come to see her, without exception, were dead. When it was time for me to go we said good-bye with a promise to meet again in the spring, like friends who were certain to see each other once more. Before leaving the room I looked back to see that face for the last time; and as I went away I glanced round the rooms where I had spent hours of never-to-be-forgotten intimacy — at all the trifles arranged by her — at the home of which she had been the soul — where the Eastern perfume she had brought there still lingered.

She lived for nearly a week longer. One morning, at Toulon, I received a telegram: "All is over." And next morning the Figaro, and other papers copying it, contained this announcement: "One of the most remarkable women of Paris, Madame Blanche Lee Childe has just succumbed" — etc. — Some one showed it me, and I read it with a dry lack of emotion, feeling as if it could not refer to her.

Some time after I went to visit her tomb,

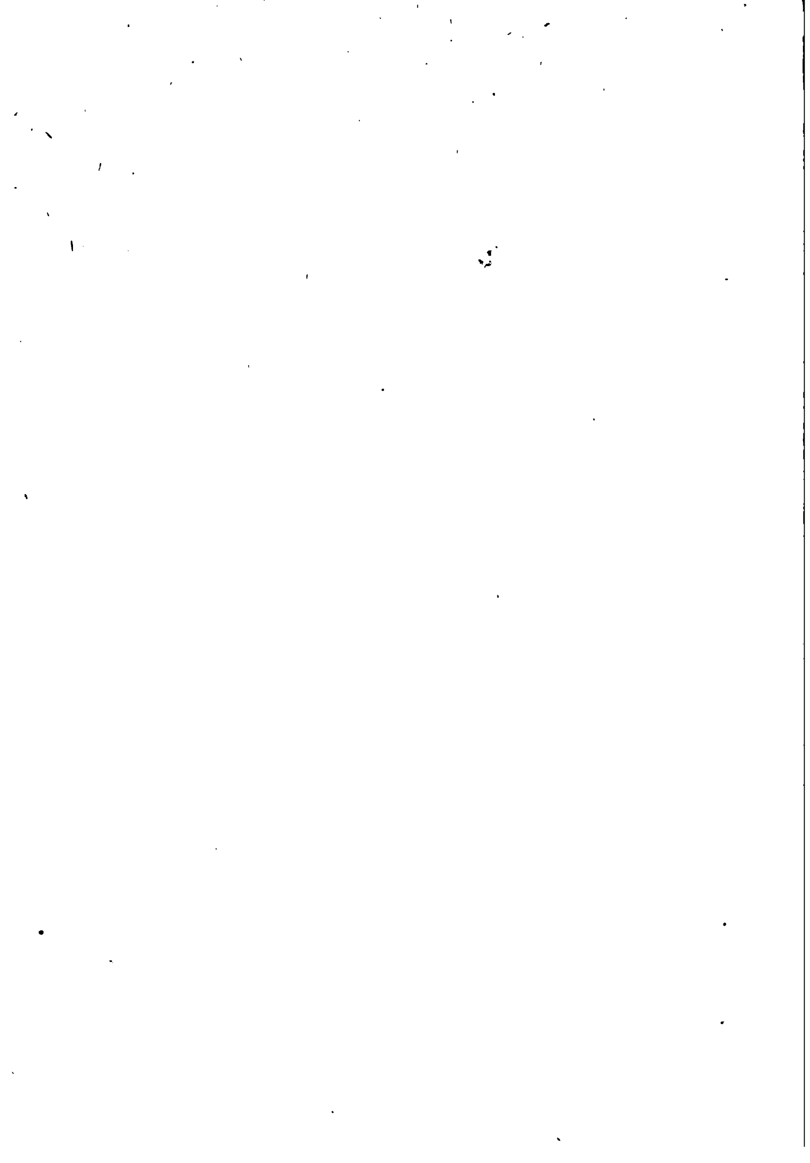
Fresh flowers had been laid on the stone by one who, even more than I, can never forget her — but even then I could not persuade myself to feel that she was lying there — dwelling underneath — that her clear gaze was darkened.

We were accustomed hardly ever to meet, but to be in constant communion of mind. And still I feel as though that communion had not been broken off. How often I think to myself: "I will tell her this or that; I will ask her what she thinks of such a matter." And I look to see her large handsome writing on one of the letters the post brings me.

PIERRE LOTI.

I have the kind permission of Mr. E. Lee Childe to publish a translation of this dedication of 'Pierre Loti's' book to the memory of one who was near and dear to me, too.

CLARA BELL.



FROM LANDS OF EXILE.

FROM LANDS OF EXILE.

I.

A MORNING'S WORK.

24th August, 1883.

DAY is breaking, in Annam, over a sheltered cove. Our ship rides at anchor in the open. It is my turn on duty and I am to go to a little town which is somewhere to be found, not far off; by name Touran. A certain mandarin chief is to be brought from thence and conveyed on board to pay a visit of surrender, so that friendly relations may be established between ourselves and the province given into our charge.

The bay is wide and beautiful; surrounded by

high and gloomy mountains, excepting opposite the opening seaward where there is a flat strip of sand — like a piece of another country used to finish it off for want of something better. Beyond this strand, it would seem, and across the plain is where we are to look for Touran, on the banks of a river of which we do not even see the mouth.

Six seamen, whom I have had leave to pick out for myself, are my force for this expedition; six thorough-bred sailors and well-armed — enough to impress a whole town in Asia.

The sun had not yet risen when we started in one of the ship's boats. Not one of us had ever seen Touran, and it was decidedly amusing to set out in this way at cock-crow to lay down the law in an unknown land. The jagged summits of the mountains had caught rolling masses of clouds which capped them darkly and were piled, black and lowering, above our heads. Out and away, on the contrary, above the low lying belt of plain whither we were bound, there was a clear sky, remote and luminous. There was, too, a singular shape standing against the light: the "Marble

Mountain," quite unlike all the other hills; peculiar in form, it rose apart from its neighbors, alone in the midst of the level. Its intense coloring amid the wide spread of sand had a startling effect: a quite monstrous ruin or the most grotesque of mountains? It was hard to know which to call it; but it was the object that attracted the eye, the prominent feature — the Chinese oddity — of the landscape.

After pulling for about an hour we were of course nearer to the land, near enough to discern a variety of details which looked commonplace enough — low, monotonous sandhills, with trees looking just like ours. We could see the opening up the river — a narrow cut between two sandy spits, and a little house on one of them. The whole effect was like that of a low shore on the Bay of Biscay—on the coast of Saintonge for instance; we could have fancied ourselves pulling to some little French port. — And now and again it is pleasant to give in to this illusion if it comes in one's way. — But the little house as we got nearer looked weird and grim; its deeply con-

cave roof bristling with hideous and diabolical emblems: horns, claws, and in the midst the huge lotus flower — Ah! This is Buddha! This is furthest Asia! — And the sense of exile and of immense remoteness which for a moment we had lost closed in on us once more.

This ancient temple was hedged round by pale tinted aloes, raising their pikes on every side like plants of vicious intent. Censers stood about on little tumble-down stools — each an altar to Buddha. In front there was a square screen of wall close to the water's edge, to hide the approach to the sanctuary; it was carved with a colored bas-relief of a perfect nightmare of a monster writhing, armed with claws and showing its tusks in a ferocious grin. A hideous bat spread its long stone fans above this beast's mane, putting out a scarlet tongue at us. On the ground an earthenware tortoise looked up at us and a multitude of smaller monsters, watchful though lifeless, squatted around as though preparing to spring. They were all very old, worn by time and the fretting of the sand, but there

was something strangely alert in their attitudes and malignant in their look, as much as to say: "We are the Spirits who have long guarded the entrance to the river and we cast evil spells on those who pass by."

We went by, all the same, I need not say. Nor was there in fact a soul to be seen. All was silent and deserted.

Presently we saw a heap of cannon — easily recognizable as French thirty-pounders, no doubt some of those ceded to King Tu-Duc in 1874. There they lay in the sand, under a thatch of hurdles, wrecked and unused. There was, too, a quantity of anchors and iron chains, as if there had been some idea of barring the mouth of the river. Next we passed a very large bastioned fort, the earthworks overgrown with grasses, with pineapple, and cactus. A carved and gilt monster at the top of a pole held in his jaws the flag of Annam which hung motionless in the hot dull air. The sun, though but just risen, was already scorching.

Still not a soul. It was too early no doubt and the world was still asleep.

Nay — there is a sentinel on guard. One of my men, gazing in the air, espied the man above our heads in a sort of gazeebo perched on four wooden stilts, like the watch-boxes one sees on the Cossack steppes. He was squatting in his little lair by the side of a huge tom-tom, to be used for giving an alarm. In his rags he looked like a nasty old woman with a gown on and her hair in a knot. He watched us go by, as motionless as a bonze, only turning his eyes without moving his head.

The river lay before us undevious and fairly wide. Several junks with long yards lay moored under the banks higher up, and beyond these again Touran was now visible: a group of huts with tiled or thatched roofs, scattered at random among trees; Chinese standards at the end of long staves, clumps of bamboo, gazeebos and pagodas. It all looked mean and wretched enough; the houses go rambling away to be sure far into the belt of verdure, but we expected a larger town.

Some one — a human being, fanning itself on the bank, signalled to us with inviting gestures to go near. A man — or a woman? One never can tell in this part of the world, they dress alike, wear top-knots alike, are alike ugly.

But this was Mr. Hoé, an ambiguous functionary, who subsequently played an important part in our diplomatic relations with Touran; a personage consisting of a priest's robe, a monkey-face, a twist of hair very high on his head, with a handkerchief tied round it at the top of all, like an old man prepared for bed. He *chin-chinned* and bowed, and said: "Good-day, gentlemen" in French with an air of offering himself as our guide. So I ran my boat up on the sand close to the bank.

"His worship Hoé, graduate of the college of Adran, interpreter by appointment to His Majesty King Tu-Duc" — such was the title by which he introduced himself, after bowing seven separate bows, one for each of us. Then he held out his rascally little paw — it was covered with warts, with nails a yard long — the nails of a Chinese

man of letters—and he was sitting by me in the boat.

The strand, as we pulled up close along the shore, was wreathed with pink bind-weed and carpeted with another pink creeper, a hot-house plant with us, known as the Madagascar periwinkle.

The foliage was conspicuous for the light, vivid hues which the Chinese are so fond of painting: Datura, cactus, shrubs which though somewhat stunted were brilliantly green, coco-palms rising here and there like huge feather brooms; frail bamboos, taller than the trees but with all the fragility of their grassy nature, drooping and waving as lightly as wild oats. In the midst of this greenery, which was really very pretty, the houses looked doubly squalid and the men doubly hideous; men in petticoats and *chignons*, now running out to stare at us.

The outskirts of Touran were waking up. Ugly lean dogs bark at us; black pigs with remarkably wide-awake eyes scampered off as hard as they could go, followed by a herd of small,

russet-colored, humped cattle. Enormous buffaloes, as square as hippopotamuses, wallowed in the deep grass; they put their moist muzzles and formidable horns to the ground, scenting us and sniffing us — lance at rest, as it were, and ready to charge us.

Then we came to a sort of suburb of straw huts close to the water's edge. Tawny ladies, singularly hideous, came out of them and down to look at us with their feet in the water. They were in morning deshabille and stood wringing their splendid black hair, though it was as harsh as a horse's tail, with an affectation of putting it up carelessly for our benefit. They were chewing betel leaves and areca nut, yawning to display their compact rows of black teeth — as black as ebony, for this is the fashionable color in Annam for beauty's teeth and is acquired by a process of lacquering.

The demi-monde of Touran evidently! those patches on the cheeks, those insinuating smiles — we recognized them at once; the same in every country under the sun. Mr. Hoé, on being ques-

tioned, bashfully admitted the fact. Nay, he gravely designated the ladies by a name familiar to be sure to our forefathers, but sounding so oddly from his lips that my sailors laughed aloud. Then he insisted, still with downcast, mock-modest eyes: "Yes, Sir, indeed, it is quite true; — yes, Sir, they really are."

Meanwhile Number 312, able-bodied seaman, addressing the whole party in a lump with contemptuous familiarity, in the singular as *tu*, gave vent to his impressions in an undertone between his teeth — which were splendidly white:

"So you want to look sweet — she-apes all of you; you fancy you look pretty. If I were a baboon, then indeed I cannot say. . . . But as it is, no — no, never!"

Among the bright green shrubs on the bank some bore sprays of white flowers — ivory white, with a creamy texture like that of the tuberose; others were covered with bunches of scarlet blossoms — intense flame color, their tufts of long pistils ranging out in tassels. They suggested little Chinese fireworks, going off here and there

among the greenery. Then there were butterflies —huge butterflies and large queerly-shaped flies buzzing about the flowers; numbers of black moths, fluttering sideways with fantastic jerks as if they could not steer with their heavy wings which looked like black velvet. A scent of musk was all-pervading—as it is throughout further Asia; the further one goes up the country the stronger it becomes: a heavy musky atmosphere loaded with the exhalations of plant life and of the human middens heated by a tropical sun.

By this time we were passing under the high bows of the junks; each was painted with a pair of eyes and a forepart like a fish's head. All the tribe of fishers were out on the decks, cooking stinking messes of rice and shell-fish over little earthenware fire-pots. Naked children, yellow from head to foot, with hanks of black hair, swarmed and huddled on every deck, or perched on the oars and masts to see us pass, wide awake and hostile; some quite tiny ones — hardly hatched out as it seemed, little pot-bellied crea-

tures with their fists on their thighs, were too funny for anything with their look of defiance.

Mr. Hoé was good enough to point out to us one of the curiosities of the country cropping the grass on the right bank: namely a horse. This was the white one. There was another, it would seem, a black one. At Touran litters are the only conveyance. — Thank you, Mr. Hoé, but we have met with that kind of animal in other parts of the world.

The first houses of the town of Touran were now in sight: huts constructed of bamboo for the most part, quite small, booths rather than houses, having but three walls; the front is closed at night with rattan shutters but by day everything that goes on within is done for the benefit of the public. As we pulled up the inhabitants were in the act of munching their breakfast with their black teeth — rice and fish, everywhere the same, on china bowls painted with blue bogies. Each in turn paused in his meal to stare at us with anxious curiosity.

By this time we, too, were taking it easy, and highly amused by these strange folks.

There were already a few wayfarers on the path along the river-bank. All ranks alike wear a clinging, loose robe, but of various colors; by the side of the dirty grey, which is the hue of the poor, were violet, crimson and apple-green, which seemed to be fashionable for the well-to-do. The hats of plaited straw were of an unheard-of expanse and size; the women wear them flat with a turned-up brim, like an enormous tambourine: the men take it in height — tall and conical, like a huge lamp-shade. All along the river-side on they go, in single file, trotting over the pink periwinkles and bind-weed, with a business-like air and all unconscious of their ridiculous appearance. And at a particular point they all embark on flat boats to be ferried across the river. — More and yet more pagodas slip past us — shabby little sanctuaries, their dingy monsters grimy with age and dust.

At last, at a spot where the shore rose to a wide green slope, Mr. Hoé stopped us in front of

a narrow ascending path; we moored our white boat alongside of a junk and jumped out on the sand. On land the heat was immediately more oppressive; the light bamboos cast a frittered tremulous shade like that of a Chinese blind — a hot shade which is neither refreshing nor restful. We climbed a flight of stone steps and then found ourselves in front of the Mandarin's gate. It had jambs of Indian style and over it was a sort of look-out or watch-box with a tom-tom. Every one seemed still to be sleeping in the dwelling, though the morning sun, already high and fiercely hot, was bathing the world in pitiless light.

We were left alone in a tiny garden, shabby, too, and quaint enough. The central ornament was one of those screens of wall which are so common in Annam, a very ancient bas-relief upright on a pedestal; it represented some spotted deer and other fantastic creatures of inlaid earthenware, in attitudes under Chinese trees of which the leaves were in a kind of mosaic of fragments of green shells; little paths intersected the

plot like a net-work; there were a few flowers — the pink periwinkle trailed over the sand, pomegranates flaunted double flowers, and China rose-trees bore bunches of minute roses stained with dull crimson. The silence and sunshine were crushing, the heavy black butterflies flapped about — the house seemed sealed.

Mr. Hoé called, harangued, shouted in his monkey-like voice. A few squalid servants then appeared, looking much alarmed, and hastened to withdraw all the front screens; we walked straight in to the house which was open from end to end like a deep shed — no one was there and it was very dark.

While awaiting the Mandarin, who had to be waked, we took stock of the place. Things which had never been moved since Heaven knows when were hanging from the murky ceiling — ceremonial objects of official state — fly-flappers, state umbrellas, palanquins, all thick with cobwebs and dust. In one corner, screened off by a palm-leaf blind, lurked all the implements for the administration of justice to the natives of

Touran: scales and measures; pillories, wooden stocks, gongs to invoke Spirits, and rattans for flogging. In the center was the high table, round which we took our seats on old carved benches, still waiting for the Mandarin who did not hurry himself.

At last he came in by a door in the background; a very tremulous, very old man in a gown of blue crape with wide sleeves. His face was rather a fine one in spite of the flat Asiatic type of features. His hair looked as if it had been sprinkled with snow and his coarse little beard, cut *à la Mongole*, stuck out like a scrub of white horsehair from his yellow face.

He bowed very low — a ceremonious *chin-chin* — before taking my hand, which I offered in token of peace and which he took with timid amazement. Then, going all round the table where my men sat with me, he shook hands with each, not without some difficulty by reason of the length of his nails which caught in his flapping sleeves. Then he looked at me, waiting to hear what I had to say.

The large dark shed gradually filled with people who came in noiselessly and stayed to listen; many of them old men, as dry and brown as mummies, in miserable raiment, with square Hun-like faces. A party of Chinese wriggled themselves into the front rank close to us—recognizable by the lighter complexion, long pig-tails and rich silk dresses; but they are a very bad lot and the leaven of much discontent in Annam. As a background to all these Asiatic figures we could distinguish more clearly by degrees all sorts of quaint and antique objects hung about the walls: tom-toms, rags of clothing, litters once gorgeous with gilt monsters and now eaten up with dust. My sailors, still sitting there with the cool dignity of conquest, looked more alive, broader, more ample, in the midst of these shrunken dolls of a dead world.

There was solemn silence while I told the tale of the battle of Thuan-an, and our treaty with the king of Hué. The interpreter slowly translated my speech; there was not a sound but the whisper of fans and fly-flappers. Their faces, how-

ever, expressed no emotion; they had evidently heard the news of their defeat through the king's couriers; they merely exchanged nods, and winks of their little slanting eyes, as if to say: "Just so; we know all that; he is speaking the truth at any rate."

Finally, when I came to the purpose of my visit, the old Mandarin took fright again. Go on board a French man-of-war! He quaked at the idea. First he argued, then he entreated. — Well, he would go if he must — but not alone with us in the white boat, like a prisoner. No, no. That was what alarmed him most, would humiliate most. For his own safety, for his dignity, too, for the look of it, if I would take his word for it he would follow within an hour in his own state junk, with his suite and his umbrellas.

In justice to his white hairs and his air of sincerity I agreed to this arrangement, and we at once were the best of friends. Then the audience, finding there was nothing more to hear, filed out, speaking in under-tones, and with no end of bowing and *chin-chin*.

Meanwhile some delicious tea was brewed for us which we must perforce drink before departing. The Mandarin helped us to it himself, pouring it into tiny blue china cups which he refilled again and again as we emptied them. The tray, marvellously inlaid with mother-of-pearl representing butterflies and insects, the tea-pot of old Chinese porcelain, and the little stove of fine copper, were gems fit for a museum; but there was but one spoon, made of lead, to serve for the seven of us, and we handed it around to stir the sugar. When we had actually risen to go, cone-shaped cigarettes were hastily rolled for us.

When, finally, the Mandarin came out to escort us across his little sunburnt garden—preceded by an attendant carrying a black umbrella exactly like those on the Ninevite sculptures—suddenly all the surroundings and the very atmosphere seemed changed, transported back to some infinitely remote period of Asiatic antiquity: for that moment the nineteenth century was no more.

At the bottom of the steps a crowd of natives

were awaiting us to sell us some cocks and hens, which they carried in torturing imprisonment in minute round cages, with eggs, bananas, ducks and lemons. Mr. Hoé remonstrated: "If you want to buy such things you should go to the market," — over there, on the other side of the river, whither we saw every one going. Very good, let us go across, too, and mingle with the populace of Touran. It will be amusing, and we have orders to take back eggs, fruit and fresh provisions for the sick and wounded.

But suddenly Number 312 — fore-top-man — as he takes his oar has a pang of regret; a revulsion of feeling with regard to the ladies we passed just now: With my permission he would like to look in upon them before returning on board. Number 216, main-top-man, would be very happy to accompany him; — along the little flowery path they would be there in no time! — a few minutes — just to see the place, and they would come after me in a *sampan*.

But the flirtation would be too dangerous, I could not risk it. — The responsibility was mine,

and I refused with righteous wrath: all hands on board and pull with a will to the further shore.

What a filthy, swarming scene was that market! It was held under the blazing sun on an open square. On each side was a line of wooden booths under which the sellers squatted. At the further end was the wall of a pagoda on which a number of antique china monsters were perched in a row. — Here were tea-makers serving the boiling drink in little blue cups; pastry cooks; grotesque idols and pictures for sale; minced meat sold in little heaps on green leaves; omelettes with the larva of a particular fly; dogs dried, smoked and split like kippered fish; pigs all alive and packed in rattan cages with a handle to carry them by; objects for the service of the gods, red tapers and sticks of incense. And the people, dirty, squalid and swarming.

Overhead the burning sun, and on all sides beggars, male and female, holding out their claws; mangy vagabonds scratching themselves as briskly as so many monkeys; wretches covered

with sores; old women horribly disfigured and smelling like the dead.

At first all shrunk back from us in some alarm, but they soon crowded round to examine us. Among the mob some quaint little children were to be seen, perfectly naked, with fine bright eyes and a knot of hair at the top of the head. Some of the young girls were almost pretty, with long coarse tresses in a twist above the nape of the neck, and soft kittenish glances; but all had their teeth blackened, and their lips covered with red foam from chewing quids of betel nut and lime. The boys, too, were good-looking; their bodies naked above the waist, slight but well formed, their hair long like a girl's — but all doomed to be hideous at manhood when their beard at last appears: a dozen or so of long, rank hairs drooping like a seal's.

All the faces were in shadow under those incredible hats. On each side hangs a sort of tassel, for all the world like a bell-pull with dangling ornaments in mother-of-pearl which invariably represent bats. One of these main-sheets is

held in each hand when the wind blows, for fear the thing should fly away.

Our boat meanwhile was loaded with the largest fowls and the best bananas. We bought like honest folk, and indeed paid too dear. My men gorged themselves with fruit after their long privation at sea, looked in the girls' faces and even tipped up their hats to see them better. They were rich, too; several rows of *sapecs* — a kind of cash with a hole pierced in it — were strung round their waists. So of course, in their delight in being on dry land once more, they paid at random whatever they were asked, let the saleswoman do the sums or even help herself to what she thought proper — when by chance she was at all young or good-looking.

We still had half an hour to spare; so we took a rapid survey of the town, not losing sight of each other. We soon found ourselves wandering in single file along little sanded paths bordered with hedges of the brightest green, or palisades of bamboos. Here and there rose the low roofs, scattered among a shrubbery of flowers and little

young areca palms with curly plumes of leaves, looking just like bunches of ostrich feathers at the top of cane handles — a prim type of vegetation with no large trees. There were as many pagodas as houses — mortuary chapels the sailors called them — tiny tumble-down temples in which five or six persons could hardly find room with all the images they contained. It seemed as if some visions of hell must have been long ago congealed and set to adorn them; monstrosities and repulsive creatures of every kind covered the walls and roofs — painted, carved and graven: friezes of crabs and scorpions; wreaths of ringed worms — soft-looking maggot-like objects; long caterpillars with claws and horns, rolling their fierce eyes; little bogies, half-dog half-devil — and all laughing with the same inscrutable grin. Scorching suns, briny sea-fogs, the ravaging breath of hurricanes have scoured and cracked and disjointed them all; but in spite of it, and under the grey dust of ages, they are instinct with life; they rear and writhe and bristle up, and keep a leering eye on the entrance, as if they

were ready to fly in a paroxysm of rage at any who may dare come in. Around and about are old sandy garden plots where a few weird plants faint under the heat and glare; empty enclosures, guarded by more uncanny beasts grinning like a death's-head. Every where we came on carved stone screens by the way-side, with fantastic pierced-work and incubus-like beasts that gave one a shudder. Inside these pagodas antiquity is decrepitude; dust and nitrous salts have eaten into the idols and the mother-of-pearl inscriptions on the walls. A lamp like a night-light is constantly kept burning and throws a doubtful light on the monsters with their worm-eaten beards. There is a mingled smell of incense and cavern-mould, and at the back, in the dark, squats Buddha, bloated and obscene, bursting with laughter and contentment, and surrounded by symbolical herons and tortoises.

We went into some of the houses to see what was going on. The inhabitants were out, gone to market no doubt. We found none but old folks or small children who ran away leaving the doors

open; or only a lean dog or two who, after smelling at us, slunk away with their tails between their legs, howling with terror.

These little huts are all alike and wretched enough; they never have more than three sides. The inhabitants sleep at the back on a sort of raised floor screened off by blinds of rattan daubed with color. In the middle, in the place of honor behind a screen to themselves, the Buddhas, the family gods, sit in a niche, surrounded by all the little treasures of the household — pots, hand-screens, small gongs and bells.

The sailors, who had followed a devious course, tacking to right and left, staring, peeping, looking for fresh fruit and pretty girls, suddenly shouted to me to come and see: they had discovered a rich man's house which they declared was splendid. It was dark in the "rich man's" dwelling. The massive columns which supported the beams were of choice woods and covered with fine carving; in the background we could see pierced cornices, a perfect lace-work of sandal-wood, ebony and rose-wood with gilding, and

gilt inscriptions, too, on large lacquered panels. A load of good things were hanging from the elaborately ornate joists: smoked hams, dried dogs, ducks and fish, and some queer monsters made of branches of trees with carved claws, and the roots for heads with eyes put in. Buddha's shrine could not fail to be very interesting in such a dwelling, and my men, who in twenty minutes had become quite familiar with the customs of the country, went boldly in to lift the middle blind and see the gods behind it. There they were, seated in a semicircle and gorgeous with heavy gold plating. The tripod on which incense was burning was of a beautiful and sacred shape with high handles. All about them stood screens inlaid with pink and green mother-of-pearl, peacocks' tails in large blue jars, and silver gongs to attract their attention when prayers were offered.

An old man with a white top-knot, amazed at our appearance, crept out of a corner bowing to the ground and apparently craving mercy with little plaintive bleatings. This no doubt was the "rich man" in person, to whom all these fine

things belonged. To reassure him my head man took it into his head to bid him good-day, in Breton and in French; then we let down the blind in front of the gods and went away to spare him any further alarm.

Outside, the glaring daylight, more dazzling than ever, seemed to clutch us. It was like a fiery furnace burning our brows under our white hats; a sharp pain pierced our temples, and every now and then quite dazed our brains. And still, and everywhere, that musky scent hanging in the air and making it heavy to breathe.

The sailors followed me in a knot more slowly now, gradually quelled by the heat which increased as the murderous sun rose higher and higher. Their bare feet were scorched by the sand and torn by the thorns of the cactus. Now and again one would snatch some unknown blossom from the green thicket and stick it in his shirt, or trifle with it a minute and throw it away, like a child. Here and there we came on a slight paling and saw behind it the huge brown head and outstretched neck of a buffalo, startled and

sniffing the air, motionless however and stupid-looking as he puffed white steam from his moist nostrils.

Still those old little china demons perched on the corners of the temples cast piercing glances from their glassy eyes, as if they were trying to work some horrid Chinese spell on us in the silence of the by-ways and the noontide. They hint to us, as we pass, of the wide gulf which parts us from the men and things of this land; the different darkness in which we had our birth; the disturbing dissimilarity of our primeval origin.

When we reappeared among the shops and dealers we were welcomed as friends returning; this was more than we had bargained for, and in return for a few cash rashly bestowed the beggars also joined the train. Before making our escape we wished to inspect a pagoda in the market-place, one of the largest in Touran, and we went in followed by the crowd. It was almost empty, as if it had been pillaged the day before. A few

state weapons were still hanging on the walls — ancient weapons indeed, complicated and wicked-looking, with teeth and grins, suggesting — as all Chinese things do — the shapes and writhings of monsters. The floor was strewn with umbrellas, lanterns, biers for the dead with grotesque heads. Mr. Hoé informs that, for political reasons, the whole of the previous day had been devoted to removing the Buddhas, the vases and idols; everything had been hidden a long way off, in the country. A perfectly gigantic tom-tom had been left in a corner and my men asked my leave to drum upon it to see what noise it would make.

Why, of course I give you leave! I should like nothing better than a little music.

Boom, boom, boom! as hard as they can hit — a deafening and terrific noise. The people came running out of the shops to know what can be the matter. All round us the crowd is as closely packed as a Touran crowd can be. Let us be off!

But the crowd comes, too; all the rabble of beggars have attached themselves to us. Dirty,

diseased, deformed and disfigured, they are all at our heels, tugging at our sleeves, hopping after us. That first largesse was our ruin; now we can only fling the *sapecks* away in handfuls without stopping to count them. We are routed! Surrounded, clawed and pulled; feeling filthy or thievish hands all over us, we flee, keeping close together, hiding our hands for fear of their being touched, not attempting to strike from sheer pity and disgust; not daring even to look about us. We flee — borne along on a tornado of shrieks and of people.

Happily our boat is there; we leap in. —

"Shove!" — And the whole scene shrinks away from us with a dying murmur, the market disappearing behind the bamboos on the bank. We are away, on the calm current that bears us down-stream. It is over.

At the lower reach the same fair creatures as we had seen in the morning were again on the shore. This time they tried to make a show of ducks and bananas to tempt us, and to give them the appearance of dealers; but this even was un-

successful. Then, in sheer vexation, one of them flung a large egg which came smash on the back of No. 315, captain of the forecastle. — "Really, Madam, your manners are shocking!"

We soon reached the opening of the estuary, and the pagoda on guard. All was silence and a flood of light. The demoniacal creature, standing there on its sand bank in its plot of aloes, greeted us with the same contortions and ferocious grins; then the roadstead opened out before us, a sheet of pale blue glistening water, a smooth mirror for the sun, unruffled by a breath. Not a trace remained of the mists which weighed upon it at daybreak; they were dispersed, melted, under the burning air. The distant hills, running out to sea in headlands, are so peaked and so regular in form that they really look quite Chinese; but they, too, seemed to have shrunk lower and have melted down under this effulgence, the bay seemed to have grown wider.

And our ship so far away! Her outline visible in grey out there, almost on the horizon, floating in the air — an effect of the mirage.

Two hours at the oars on this fiery ocean, with that smiting sun still rising higher and higher, will be cruel work for my poor men though they are hardy and used to expòsure.

What a busy scene now in the bay which had been deserted when we crossed it at dawn! We were astonished to see such a multitude of sampans and fishing junks scattered over the blue, like a swarm of flies. Where could they all have come from? The fishermen with their yellow bodies, bare to the waist under the blazing sun, their heads in the black shadow of their lamp-shade hats, were working away fast — ever so fast, like toys moved by clock-work. The red nets, lightly cast, were being hauled in every minute, and always full of leaping fish which gleamed in the distance like an iridescent spray.

And what is this strange company of huge and weird creatures that have alighted on the face of the waters at the foot of Cape Kien-Cha? Probably the squadron of royal junks loaded with rice for the court, and which was expected to arrive from the island of Haïnan. Such amazing

objects could be nothing else: uncanny sea beasts with long red wings stained with yellow; wings like a bat's — strange scalloped webs stretched from the yards, or butterfly's wings of graceful form, with a great eye in the middle to increase the resemblance. The Chinese have such a strong sense of animal life that, do what they will, they never can escape imitating living forms. These ships had just come in and cast anchor; they were slowly and languidly furling their sails. Their russet hues contrasted sharply with the diffused blue glistening with reflected sunshine; distance and the mirage lent them glamor; they looked huge and aerial things.

Ah! and what good fellows my men were, unflagging in strength, without a murmur or a fear. They took a minute's rest just to drink a little wine I gave them, to peel off their shirts and settle themselves to the work, and then, with a few plucky words off they went, cutting through the water with all their might under the blazing sky. One by one the sand-spits closed up and hid each other till the squalid little town disap-

peared behind the low mounds; these in their turn sank down to a thin line, and we were in the centre of a vast mirror which cast back on us from below, in one dazzling glare, all the sunlight from above.

A large junk had followed us out of the river, carrying a pointed flag striped with red. This was the Mandarin coming on board, faithful to his promise. Well, at any rate our embassy had been successfully carried out.

Bands of a darker blue now began to streak the pale surface of the sea, running along it in a sort of net-work and sweeping across it like a cat's tail, as those light clouds which foretell wind sweep across the sky. Cat's-paws sailors call them — the harbingers of a breeze.

At first we only felt it in little puffs which fluttered our white awning and then died away; but ere long the whole roadstead was covered with this darker blue which spread like a patch of oil; the sea was streaked with blue wrinkles; the breeze was light but steady, and we were alive once more.

There was now a great bustle among the fishing-junks, hitherto so idle. The nets were drawn; masts of extravagant length sprouted as if by magic — long legs, horns and antennæ. Sails of reed matting are unfurled, in shape like every known variety of wing. At a distance they might be sea-mews, beetles or butterflies; it was as though a fairy, by a wave of her wand, had suddenly hatched out a number of huge chrysalides. Then this astounding swarm began to move, sailed away — flew away, to the deep-sea fishing-grounds.

The wind was still rising. Some of these junks almost keeled over under their monstrous spread of sail; to keep them from capsizing the sailors scrambled out on long wooden out-riggers, clinging on like young apes. The craft passed to the right and left of us, brushing against us; or in front of us, crossing our path, with a light swift whirr, scarcely leaving any wake behind them.

We, too, had shipped the oars and spread as much canvas as possible; we made a fairly good

pace, while we drew deep breaths of this saving breeze — a little vexed perhaps all the same by the sense of our slow progress amid all these flying things. . . .

II.

30th August, 1883.

I WOKE and looked down at the fresh moss on which I had been sleeping. It was for all the world like French moss, and there were patches of fine grass, too, reminding me of the familiar woods I had lived in as a child, under the shades of enormous oaks, on a stony soil where the heath grew freely.

I was at the foot of an old low wall in a very shady nook. Nor was there anything strange

about the wall against which I had been resting my head; it was like those of the cottages in our villages, whitewashed once, in country fashion, but now green, with ferns in the chinks: the ruin, no doubt, of some deserted hovel that had stood alone in the midst of a domain with scattered clumps of trees. All round and about me I had a sense of deep green shades.

For two seconds I had the perfect sensation of home and of the charm of the French summer — of having waked as a child again in one of our own woods.

But the sweeping wind in the branches — a steady, broad wind — the wind, I say, was hot, and bore unknown odors; then I heard the complaining of the sea — and overhead another sound — a sound of distant shores, plunging me at once into a confused world of foreign memories. I looked up. Under the flooding light of the sky a coco-palm, high up on its tall column, was wringing its great dishevelled plumes. That is a woeful rustle, peculiar to the shores of Oceanica, and for another moment a keen remembrance

flashed upon me of a thousand scenes in Tahiti, now alas forgotten — wiped out! — I got up: "Am I there?" said I to myself.

No. My eyes fell on the top of the little wall which had reminded me of a French village, and I saw that it was of a strange device, bristling with horns and claws and grotesquely impossible shapes, all time-eaten, while an earthenware monster perched on the eaves and gazed at me with a Chinese grin.

China! Far-away China! That was where I was! It was in some unknown nook of the great Celestial Empire that I had slept that peaceful summer sleep.

A passion of regret came over me for our sweet French summers, for the best, perhaps the last years of my youth, which I was fated to spend here, far from all I loved — all I had ever loved.

Then I was sleeping near an old pagoda, well known to me by this time, which stands alone in

a green island whither the fishermen go to entreat Buddha to fill their nets. And without opening my eyes even, I could see in memory the broad mountain-locked bay which bosoms that islet, and the interior of that temple of the forest, with its idols — three or four little monsters, ancient bogies saturated with saltpetre, slumbering in the damp and gloom.

How did I come here, to this land of Touran, on the shores of the China Sea? And when shall I quit this exile? — Now I remember. It all happened in no time: orders from headquarters arrived like a thunder-clap one fine day in spring. There was war over here, and I had to leave everything at once and embark at Brest, to start without even looking behind me. After a short week of excitement, preparations and leave-taking came the day for sailing; the solemn first muster was called on board while the coasts of Brittany faded away into infinite remoteness.

Soon the sea was bluer, the sky clearer, the

sun hotter; Algeria came in sight; and it turned my head — as it always does. Very brief, very evanescent was this respite in Algiers before going on to the yellow Gehenna of Asia.

The fascination of Algiers is to me a compound of a thousand memories of a past time of my life, mingled with the odors of Africa, and other no less unspeakable and intangible things, pervading the very light and air.

By day delicious idling in the shade, or rides like those of long ago on Spahis' horses with our old friend Si Mohammed. By night, up in the old Moorish town lying white and mysterious under the moon, the little Arab pipes bleating out their stridulous woes for hours on the same monotonous notes, with a loud accompaniment of drums — the only music I ever care to hear now that I am tired of subtle harmonies.

Across the blue and motionless waters once more, as far as Port Saïd — that medley of all the nations of Europe, with Egypt for a background

and a setting of endless sand. Swiftly past the Isthmus of Suez, the blinding strand of the land of Moses, mirages, caravans filing along the dykes, — and we were steaming down the Red Sea.

The heat increased, the blue sky looked dim through sand-clouds, we could hardly breathe. It was July; a wind like the breath of a furnace followed us. At night the very stars were changing: the Southern Cross rose slowly above our heads and I greeted it with a feeling of vague reminiscence.

At last we were out on the Indian Ocean, under a steady breeze and a temperate, clear sky. Calm was settling down on our souls after the wrench of parting — and the fearful distance was still growing!

Then the marvellous isle of Ceylon; a mere glimpse of it, in a hurricane under a black sky. The ground was strewn with leaves and blossoms fallen from the great vault of branches, and soaked with a deluge of rain; the nights were hot and dark and the air was full of a fevering

scent of musk. — And an oppressive, sensuous spell was cast by those strange Indian eyes, by those women with their bronze arms and silver bangles, walking about with the composure of goddesses and wrapped in rose-colored draperies.

Then back to the wholesome, restful life at sea, the solemn peace of wide horizons where all things vanish; we were under full sail now, bound for Malacca; and day after day, beneath the same exquisitely clear sky, the same enchantment of radiant daylight.

One night — it was one in the morning, on the Bay of Bengal — the steersmen had orders to wake me though it was not my watch; we were crossing, as nearly as we could calculate, the spot where, twenty years before, my brother had been consigned to the waters. I got up and went to look about me through the blue transparency of the sea and the night.

Everything was calm — so calm, that night; the moon thinly veiled, the southern horizon in-

finitely far. To the north, on the contrary, where he lay buried, thick mists brooded on the waters, casting long shadows like immense screens.

The monsoon which had filled our sails died away as we neared the equator, and one evening the first point of the Kingdom of Acheen was visible in the golden light. Here, on still hotter waters, the first junks came in sight, their sails all wrinkled like a bat's wings. We had reached further Asia and were at the mouth of the Yellow Hell. And at Singapore, under the grand equatorial vegetation, we found ourselves in the midst of the seething Chinese filth, the monkey-like pantomime of eyes slit up to the temples, shaven polls and long pig-tails.

We were swept up the China Sea, driven by the south-west monsoon.

Oh! our arrival at Tonquin in the dreariest weather and torrents of rain! I got up that day for the first time, still excessively weak from the effects of a sunstroke, the only serious illness I

ever had in my life, and which had brought me within an inch of death. It was quite early in the morning; my sailor, Sylvestre, who had been sitting up with me, seeing me open my eyes, said: "We have got to Tonquin, Captain."

The ship was still under way, but through my open port-hole I could dimly make out a passing show of things of a new type of impossibility: Gigantic *Menhirs*, as they seemed, standing out of the sea. There were thousands of them, following each other in long array; it was like a world of Stonehenges forming avenues, circles and mazes — Brittany * enormously magnified and heated — heated by a latent fire, for the sky was blacker than a winter day in our Celtic province. I half believed that I was still delirious and saw visions — a Dantesque region; so I tried to go to sleep again.

But it was only the Bay of Ha-Long, as strange a spot as exists on earth.

* Brittany is famous for its abundance of sacred stones, the relics of a primeval worship. Similar remains exist in England in the great ring of Stonehenge and in various cromlechs and lines of stones.

A sunstroke does not last long when it does not kill you; next day I was on duty again and could convince myself that the country was real.

We soon quitted this roadstead and anchored at the mouth of the Hué river. Events came quickly, beneath a torrid sky. There was the taking of Tuan-an: three days of bombardment and fighting. After all this excitement came the peaceful sojourn at Touran. A stagnant peacefulness, in crushing heat — the peace of exile for an indefinite period in a forgotten corner of Annam. We were to keep watch over this province and its harbors. We must get used to the climate and perhaps spend the winter there. Merciful Heaven, what a remote and outlandish burial!

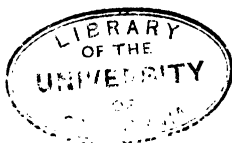
The wide bay in which our ship, the Circe, lay at anchor, was locked by high gloomy hills. Far away, at the bottom of the bay, was the mouth of the river, and at the first reach lay the old dilapidated village, hidden among light bamboos which looked like Brobdingnagian oats. But I know that village so well now, have so walked through it, searched it out, ransacked its most

recondite corners, that it is commonplace to me, a vain repetition. Having lost the first interest of curiosity I can never care for this country, nor for any creature of that dull yellow race. It is to me a true land of exile which holds no tie for me and can never attract me.

So I annexed the isle with the pagoda. I used to go there of an afternoon when the fierce mid-day was past, and the sun was sinking, to revive in the silence and refreshment of plant life. I generally went alone with only my boatmen, and it was an amusing change for them too, though the miniature island is no more than a wood, a tangle of creepers and jessamine inhabited only by monkeys. We were quite at home in the deserted temple; it was our bathing-house; we would leave our clothes there in charge of the Spirits — the hideous little bogies who kept watch over the dark sanctuary, while we took a swim.

The Buddhist temple really inspired us with some respect too; we never moved a thing, and we spoke low within its precincts. — In the first

place it was gloomy; and moreover there is always some unknown spirit hovering in the air about a place where men have prayed for ages. In very old Breton churches, in every ancient temple of any faith all the world over, I have felt that incubus of the Supernatural.



III.

1st September, 1883.

WHAT a jumble is my cabin on board! A medley of queer things: pot-bellied Buddhas, elephants, panels inlaid with mother-of-pearl, tea, parasols, jars, and weapons. There are, too, three toads, real live toads, residing in a cage. It is a wrinkle I picked up from some English sailors to keep off the rats who made forays among my gloves and boots. Sylvestre places the cage at night at the cabin door and the rats, it seems, are frightened and do not come in. But above all

there are flowers in bunches, in sheaves. Flowers which many a fair lady at Paris has never seen in a hot-house, never smelt, never dreamed of, which would fill her with a startling sense of the unknown. Numbers of orchids simulating insect forms and of nameless neutral tints: creamy white tinged with green, the palest yellow-pink shading into blue, like some hues seen in China crape. And the leaves, and the rare perfumes! With all these scents Sylvester when he comes to call me one fine morning will find me stark dead —a poetic end for a poor vagabond tar. My men bring me these flowers every morning when they go to the watering-place in the hill-jungle, where, as Mr. Hoé our interpreter tells us, there is: "Some Mr. Tiger and plenty Mr. Baboon."

20th September.

A TYPHOON swept over Touran yesterday, wrecking everything: whisking off roofs, blowing

down trees, killing many people; complete devastation. Half of the houses are laid low; the inhabitants are camping out on the grass or picking up the pieces of their Buddhas and images.

The Circe rode it out at anchor under the lee of a high hill; but for two hours it was an ugly look-out. High noon, and it was impossible to see a thing; a great and fearful voice was roaring round us and the sea, lashed to dust by the wind, flew in vapor like boiling water.

To-day is fine again; the river is calmly bearing the ruins and drowned creatures down to the sea.

It is at night-fall, after sunset, that one feels so utterly lost here — an exile for ever. How far, far away is the rest of the world!

The hues of twilight are always strange and chill, quite amazing in this torrid land. The mountains turn iron-grey or inky-black against the livid, yellow sky; their jagged peaks stand out high and sharp with a hard outline; at such an hour they look stupendous. It is then that we learn to understand the art of certain Chinese

painters and the landscapes which show a remote distance with colors never seen in nature, while their fantastic oddity is so melancholy as to be quite depressing.

10th October, 1883.

THIS morning to my grief I lost one of my three toads. My man Sylvestre pronounced this short funeral oration in his Breton accents: "They are all nasty vermin, Captain"—and he bore it away to its last home with a pair of tongs.

We are going through a miserable time of "doldrums." We are as much interested as ever in reading the letters that reach us from France, but we are not up to answering them. I know this phase so well; I have gone through it before; it is a shroud which slowly weaves itself over things that are too, too far away; it is the utter exhaustion brought on by sunshine, monotony, and weariness.

IV.

Wednesday, 17th October, 1883.

THE "*Saône*" arrived in hot haste this morning under orders to take half our crew on board — the landing company and the gunners serving the 15 centimetre guns — all our best men in short, and all we could spare — with injunctions to transfer them at night and conceal their departure and the diminished numbers on board from the natives.

They went off this evening after the decks

were cleared. Bad weather, and a black night. Destination unknown. It saddened us to see them all under arms in such a hurry, packing their bags and stowing some victuals, and then taking leave. All my own particular men — those who brought me such beautiful flowers on watering-days — are gone. I had a thousand messages entrusted to me for mothers, sweethearts and wives; some gave me their money to take care of, some their watches — all their little treasures, not knowing whither they were bound.

Only one officer went with them. We had known each other for fifteen years, since our school-days in fact; we have always lived in good fellowship, esteeming each other sincerely, but that was all as far as we knew. But as I received his last messages, and we took leave, I discovered that on the contrary the tie between us was a very strong one, and that we were very warmly attached.

In the black night they crowded into the boats which were to bear them away. A rattle of arms, a muttered farewell, no shouting or huz-

zaing — the silent departure of brave hearts; and then no more but the sound of the sea and the wind, and the thick darkness of the stormy night over those who were gone! Whither? And which of them all will come back no more.

I had been sleeping on this leave-taking for two hours when a sailor came into my cabin, repeating as he lighted a candle the eternal words that have hunted me through so many years: "A quarter to midnight, Sir." The light fell on all my Buddhas in a row, and I woke to a sense of exile and of uttermost Asia. I rose sad at heart and turned out on watch, on board a half empty ship.

Midnight watch at anchor, and the weather calm again; nothing to do.

"Muster the watch!" And I am reminded that there are no men. Very true — I had forgotten. I have to make elaborate arrangements to supply them.

When they are at their posts I try to distract

my thoughts by taking up "Leïla-Hanoum" which has just come to me fresh from Paris, sent me by friends there because it is about Stamboul. I am out of luck — I who never take up a book; I open it at a passage — charming in itself — which brings me an anguish of remembrance.

"Nedjibey, closely veiled, went alone to see Sultan Ahmet; it was a morning in Spring, the bright season when the fragrant blossoms of the jonquil are sold at every street corner. . . ."

Yes indeed, I remember all those flower-sellers and the bright Spring-time. — It was at that very season that I was obliged to quit the Turkish shore. — And now the sweet sentence in "Leïla-Hanoum" tolls dully in my brain like a distant knell. Oh! that departure from Stamboul! How can such impressions, so complex, be put into words, — impressions in which so many things had a place: the agonizing wrench to our love, the deathly dulness of the great city of Islam; then the chain of reviving Spring coming on, the soft breeze strewing the deserted little streets with pink peach-blossoms. The last days

before sailing, the hours of reprieve, the last farewell walks in Stamboul where Spring was having birth "where the fragrant blossoms of the jonquil are sold at every street corner."

I shut the book and went up on deck again. The coast was more silent than usual, and the night even calmer. Nothing was to be heard but the regular moan of a poor wretch dying in the hospital of an abcess in the liver — one of the diseases of this yellow land.

V.

Saturday, 20th October, 1883.

PECULIARLY lovely weather, deliciously warm, exquisitely clear. We are off in a long boat to reconnoitre Shun-An, on the other side of the bay, at the foot of the range of high peaks called by the natives the Gate of Clouds.

Nothing more than a hamlet of miserable fishermen, but with a very pretty, tiny pagoda, a delicate lace-work of plaster and porcelain in a deep shady recess under great, stiff and solemn

trees of the kind they call Pagoda-trees. Throughout this damp region the old walls are hung with maiden-hair ferns of rare and fragile kinds.

The natives are ugly and timid.

"Mr. Tiger" is represented at the approach to the village in bas-relief on a large stone screen; he is painted to imitate nature with whiskers of horse-hair and crystal eyes, and the inevitable Chinese grin. Little red, scented candles are burning before him; this, they tell us, is to propitiate him, for he was heard caterwauling last night in the very street.

Further on we saw a Mandarin's hut in the middle of rice fields of a more tender green than corn in April. We went thither along narrow paths raised on dykes across the flooded fields, like those which in France intersect the salt marshes. The doors were closed, for it seemed that the Mandarin who was very old had just died. His widow, a poor plaintive old monkey of a woman, admitted us however into a low hall, evidently very ancient, where all the ponderous beams were carved into vampires and monsters.

She wanted to sell his spears, his trays, his frippery, his parasols; and our men had as much as they could carry on board the boat with all these remains of the departed Mandarin.

At sunset it was time to return and we put off, rocked on a rolling swell that comes in from the China Sea to die slowly in the gulf; a crisp autumnal freshness, new and reviving, fell on us with the evening, and the twilight was purely golden.

While we were leisurely going home under sail, far away on the horizon the blessed mail ship from France came in sight; she stopped on her way to deliver letters on board the Circe. This for once in a way ended a good day well, and we should have been very cheerful but for the too recent memory of our comrades who left for the unknown but two days since.

Alas! why were we not sent off with them. As we think of it we are almost ashamed of the security of Touran; and besides, this blockade-guard, useful as it may be, is at last too deadly.

VI.

SYLVESTRE MOAN, my sailor-servant, is from the country about Goëlo — like Monsieur Renan and my brother Yves — born in a hamlet of Ploubazlanec. I knew him some time since, through my friend Yann the Giant, when he was but a cabin boy and fishing in Iceland. A little too big for the place, that is the only complaint I have to make of him, and that, to be sure, is

no fault of his — taller and broader across the shoulders than my door-way, with terrific arms and a very black beard. At a distance alarming to behold — close at hand a sweet pleasant face, sweet and innocent; nineteen years of age; boyish blue eyes; the ways, the tones of voice, the candid freshness of a little child. He and Tu-Duc — (Tu-Duc is the ship's cat, stolen at Algiers: a grey tabby coat, a very deep expression, a white shirt front and white tip to his tail) — he and Tu-Duc are perhaps the two creatures who love me most on board. They are alike, too, in spite of their dissimilar dimensions; they have the same way of moving, and the same insinuating gait; their minds are equally virgin soil; they are equally creatures of native impulse. As I lie in my aloes-fibre hammock I see them, Sylvestre and Tu-Duc, one carrying the other, coming in or going out, attending to their little duties in my room among the Buddhas and the flowers with the same noiseless dexterity. Tu-Duc knows how to jump when I make a hoop with my hands. Sylvestre, indeed, does not; but he

can write to his grandmamma at Goëlo which must be far from difficult.

We are no longer very hot here at Touran; only in the middle of the day, but in the evening we feel very plainly the approach of winter. The green islet has lost much of its foliage and the water round it is colder. We have rain, and short, dark days like the autumn days in Brittany. This is dismal detail which we had not foreseen. At night-fall we get quite that November feeling which chills the heart like the passing touch of death, and fancy dreams of jolly winter evenings in France — the gladdening blaze on the hearth at home.

We are enduring, through our own want of foresight, a number of privations; a total absence of the little everyday conveniences which one brings out from home, and which nothing can replace when they are exhausted. We have not a penny in our purses, for want of communication with the outside world. And there is no soap

left on board; the men wash our linen in brackish water and it smells of Chinaman *(sent le Chinois)*.

The force of circumstances has made the Circe a receptacle for all sorts and conditions of men: the wounded and the convalescent, interpreters, Matas from Annam, shipwrecked natives of Tonquin, pirates from Haïnan — the yellow element invading us more and more; and we are forced to close our doors as if we were in some squalid neighborhood. But it is amusing to watch the high-handed coolness with which the seamen manage to treat the long-haired races.

VII.

20th November, 1883.

SEVERAL things have happened during the last ten days, things heroic or grotesque, amusing or absurd; and then, as the impressions of the morrow overlay the not very deep marks left by yesterday, they all fade away and leave no trace.

A slight typhoon, which cleared our atmosphere; people no one cared about who died and were buried; rumors of news; the arrival of our comrades forming the landing party; a deputation and some magnificent gifts sent from our

government to the King of Annam in token of alliance. — These were lost on the way inland and we had to run after them searching through the villages.

To-day — a heavy calm: Saturday — washing day on board: noon — the hour of siesta, and I, as it happens, am not asleep. My room smells of "Chinaman," an odor which has gradually become all-pervading; we, our clothes, our small possessions, all smell of it. My Buddhas and elephants and mystic herons stand in regular files on the shelves, drilled by my sailor as if for an inspection.

Not far from me Sylvestre, like a great child, is conscientiously furbishing up a temple-lamp, putting out his tongue now and then when the job is rather difficult — in the corners. Out of my port-hole I can see the peaked hills of Kien-Cha, always the same with their look of Chinese quaintness; the spread of blue sea reflecting the white sunshine and on this mirror villages of junks — motionless to-day, like nasty dead flies. There is not a sound in the ship,

which nevertheless vibrates to the least sound as a huge guitar might. Through the open door I look straight into the gun-deck of the Circe. The smell of Chinaman is much stronger there than in my room; the floor is strewn with strange objects, heterogeneous humanity made kin for the moment by heavy noon-tide slumber. Soldiers' knapsacks, bags of rice, bowls and sails. Tu-Duc, the cat, asleep curled up in a gong; sailors sleeping naked, their heads propped on their muscular arms; Chinese as lean as Fakirs sleeping flat at full length, in their black silk gowns; young Annamese riflemen in feminine attitudes, their long hair combed back and fastened up in an Apollo's knot at the nape of the neck, a Watteau shepherdess' hat above all tied under the knot with a red ribbon; pirates from the island of Haïnan sleeping open-mouthed and showing their white teeth — a fine type of Asiatic these, their black hair twisted turban-like round manly heads; — and some poor soldiers, gunners wounded in fight or worn out by dysentery and panting in their fevered sleep.

And all these are on board to work — excepting the sick — to fill the place of half our hands who have been taken from us. This morning, by my orders, they were all hauling at the capstan at my feet — the capstan is the enormous reel which has to be turned like the roundabouts at a fair. Round you go sailors — round you go Watteau shepherdesses; Chinese hampered with their tails, Matas, prisoners, pirates, round and round! — And this medley of humanity, picked up at random on the spot, was a very fair picture of what is going on on a large scale in these remote ends of Asia.

VIII.

On an uninhabited tract of the shore there is a melancholy plain which we visit now and then in the evening. There sleep the dead of 1863; they rest in the red earth — twelve or fifteen hundred Frenchmen, sailors and soldiers, carried off in one summer by typhus at the time of the first attempt at settlement in the country. Now the remains of their poor little wooden crosses are hardly visible where they have fallen among briars and creepers. Under the hot rains every-

thing perishes very quickly and vegetative nature is more all-devouring here than elsewhere.

Our relations with the people of Touran continue friendly to all appearance. If by chance in the morning crowd at market one of us gets angry we are at once met with *chin-chin* and the humblest subjection; then it is impossible to help laughing and that is an end of it; we are disarmed. It is impossible to be serious, even in anger, with these childish senile creatures.

An expedition now and then to reconnoitre the neighboring bays, or in pursuit of some suspicious-looking junks — otherwise there is nothing to enliven these days of blockade service. Depression has clutched us all, and the sailors are hardly ever to be heard singing.

IX.

DREAMS here assume a startling importance, especially during the heavy noontide nap. They leave an impression of detached images, incoherent, and for the most part mysterious, which haunt me till evening.

To-day I saw the terrace of an old country-house, which was dear to me in my childhood. It was a very hot summer night in my dream, far away I looked over heath-grown downs. By me stood a group of young girls wearing costumes of very different periods, though they all looked of

much the same age. These young girls were my mother, my grandmothers, my great aunts,— recognizable without the slightest hesitation though all grown young — about sixteen years of age — and dressed in the antiquated garb of their time. There was even the youngest-born of our family, and she really is quite young, with long fair hair; nor did they seem surprised at finding themselves all together or at seeing me in their midst as they chatted gaily of long-past things.

Flights of pink flamingoes, almost luminously bright, soared across very high against the sky which was gloomy and oppressive; the air was full of the sweetest summer scents. The stones of the terrace were out of joint and mossy, like those of a ruin, and over them trailed branches of jessamine, an old-fashioned little flower which the young girls of a past time used to place in their bodice.

Over the dark and distant moor the heavens had turned perfectly black, as black as a pall, and now a sinister something, a pallid disk, was slowly rising from the verge of the horizon.

They said it was the moon, and that it had kept them waiting for it, and in their delight at seeing it they began to laugh — a happy laugh, quite unlike the laughter of phantoms.

For my part, that moon had to me an ominous face; as it rose in the black sky it expanded enormously and grew paler and paler; it was gradually dissolving into a vast diaphanous halo, a hardly visible aureola.

After this moon a second appeared, coming up from the same spot as if rising out of the earth; then I was afraid, apprehending, even in my dream that I was witnessing a subversion of eternal Cosmos. . . .

"Nay," said they all, "It is foretold in the Astronomical Almanac; — and there will be two more."

In point of fact two moons rose together — and melted away into vast dim halos, giving a pale uncertain light: I really was very much frightened.

They laughed at me: "Come away then, as

he does not like it.' — But really he is a great coward for a man!" — So we went away, down an avenue of tall, bowery trees cut into an arcade, where it grew hotter and darker every moment; as far as I could see the trees were hawthorns loaded with a profusion of flowers, as though it were May.

The girls led the way, as young as ever — all of them. The oldest had dresses of the time of Louis XV. or of the *Directoire*, with waists fastened very high up under the arms, as in portraits of the date of their youth. — And now the little youngest-born — she who is really young — suddenly found her fair hair caught by the thorn trees.

They all stopped to help her; the curls had twisted like snakes round several branches. It took a long time to disentangle them: a tiring task which seemed never ending and made us still hotter. In the darkness the long locks seemed wilfully obstinate; new ones grew and got caught as the first were freed; at last there were some that flew out with a noise like a rocket and

were lost I know not where in the dense brushwood.

"It must be cut — cut off; it will grow again;" said one of the strange young girls — a great aunt whom I had only known as a very old woman past eighty, but who remained to the end a hasty-tempered woman, blunt in her notions. She cut it all quite close, snip, snip, snip! with a large pair of scissors that hung by a chain to her waist-band. And the party went on its way, dancing to the tune of: *Nous n'irons plus au bois!*

At the end of the garden we came to an old summer-house, overgrown with trellised roses, and they went in. There were no more than two or three chairs on which, after some little ceremony, the eldest seated themselves — those with gigot sleeves and short waists that is to say.

It was still hot summer twilight, full of the fragrance of hay and flowers. But the young girls sang no more, and the assembly had suddenly assumed to me an extremely solemn character.

Those who remained standing opened a cup-

board which was hidden in the thickness of the wall and took out a little infant's frock that had been laid by there, and showed it to me. — A relic of death or a promise of life? — They held it out to me with smiles of silent mystery and I understood. As I gazed at the little frock a sweet tender feeling came over me, an emotion so keen and so powerful that I woke. . . .

It is all over; the spell broken; the thread snapped and for ever lost. The summer twilight, the young girls, the fragrance of the past all vanished in an instant into the dark and intangible world of visions. It is broad daylight, at two in the afternoon; I am in my ship's cabin and in the land of exile.

There is Tu-Duc, sleeping at my feet, and I see Sylvestre too, masking the port-hole with his broad shoulders: he had just concluded an important bargain for some bananas with *The Moon* who is standing in her canoe outside, and whose large, chubby face is visible beyond. This Moon (no connection with the too numerous moons of my dream) is a native dealer of eighteen or

twenty, who comes alongside of the Circe every day to sell fruit. She answers to this name of Moon, given to her by the sailors because she is so round.

She stretches up her dimpled arm and yellow hand with insinuating grimaces, wanting to count out the hundred sapecks for herself, as if to save Sylvestre the trouble. He, on the contrary, replies in a low voice, so as not to wake me:

"No, no, not you. You, hussy, understand? You . . . Moon, thief . . ." And he reluctantly doles out the last string of copper cash which for the moment constitutes all my fortune.

I believe it was the Moon's comical and puzzled face that cast a reflection of fun on all this: for any one who has never seen it my little story has no meaning.

Behind lies a rather fine background: under the bright daylight, the great hill over which runs the road to Hué, that Gate of the Clouds that has to be past before reaching the capital of the invisible; and in front, on the stagnant sea, still the swarm of junks.

Till night time I was haunted by a sense of the soft deep, tender feeling, unexplained and inexplicable, that came over me at the sight of that little frock.

X.

27th November, 1883.

ONE in the morning. At our moorings at the entrance of the Hué river before Tuan-an, the town we burnt in August.

For two days we have been waiting for the weather to mend to send a convoy with provisions across these eternal breakers to the corps in occupation of the forts. But the weather does not mend. It is calm and the night is starlit, but still that slowly-heaving, enormous swell, never

weary. We roll and roll without respite, and from the shore comes the ceaseless roar of the surf.

A drama is being performed this night in that town of Hué, so close at hand. At this very moment, within the walls of the innermost royal sanctum, a thousand furies are dilating the little slanting eyes of those Court personages whom no man may see under pain of death. The King who signed the treaty of peace is being dethroned —having his head cut off in all probability.

We were looking this evening, through the telescope, at the minaret of the palace as it shone in the sunset; a longing of curiosity came over us to be inside that impenetrable dwelling and look on at those scenes enacted by invisible performers.

The war-party have triumphed; according to the latest news the Bishop's house and the French legation were threatened by the mob. And there is no way of sending a single man to land across those hollow billows; no possibility either of throwing shells at random into the

crowd where there are so many of our own people. So here we stay, as bored and as impotent as ever.

XI.

1st December, 1883.

ALL has been settled once more. The new reign has restored tranquillity to the walled city, and we are back again *at home* in our Gulf of Exile. To-day the first signboard with a French inscription has been put up in Touran: *Shang-Hoo, fournisseur de la marine.* It is written on a board at the end of a long stick. It is a mere trifle, but it has fallen like a bombshell into the midst of the little town of pagodas and dust.

On board, this man Shang-Hoo has been called the green-Chinaman by our men, by reason of the color he commonly wears. He was attracted hither by our presence, and gradually, by a sort of insinuating grace, he has made himself our indispensable familiar. He supplies everything, is very obliging, very cute, very young, very comical; neat in person, cherishing his elegant tail, as slight as a bamboo and smelling of sandal-wood. In his impromptu stores — sheds of cane by the river bank — buyers are briskly served by very fat employés with silky pig-tails, tightly-gartered stockings, and bare stomachs, displaying their rotundity with much complacency like Chinese images. An equally protuberant Buddha, against the wall, presides over the business. Coals are sold there, live oxen, strings of cash, bags of rice, jars of *sam chow*. The place is redolent of *Chinaman*, as our sailors say, and above it tall bamboos flourish their thin foliage where mosquitoes dance in clouds.

Mrs. Shang-Hoo — a more recent arrival from

Canton, lackadaisical and full of airs, has eyes so much — so excessively aslant that her eyelashes, which, like her face, are in constant motion, seem to unroll from the upper corner; she is perpetually toddling about on her doll-feet.

Combining the two, the fancy loses itself in imagining what a little Shang-Hoo will be like whose arrival is announced for next month.

XII.

At the top of a high hill on a rainy day. A void and silence. Below my feet the green slopes go down towards the deep sea.

I had gone up there on duty, having been sent by the officer in command to do some surveying, and verify the bearings of a certain bay. The seaman in charge of the chronometers was helping me in the work, and we had carefully laid out our copper instruments on a rock car-

peted with delicate ferns. Other and higher mountains towered above us — gloomy heights and hanging greenery; from time to time grey mists came down from them, drenching us as they swept by. Silent and motionless we bent our heads to the showers, waiting for gleams of light on the horizon to enable us to take the bearings of the distant headlands which again and again were shrouded in fog.

While we thus waited, our spirits had travelled far away. The sailor — a man from the Landes — was dreaming no doubt of his pinewood. As for me, I was trying to fancy myself in Dalmatia; the illusion had come upon me of its own accord, suggested by the sharp high air, the immense wooded slopes and the distant sea. The country about Cattaro, the pastoral highlands coasting the Adriatic — really that corner of Asia was very much like them. Scarlet lilies, a Chinese flower, mimicked the gorgeous hues which the pomegranates there scatter over the hill-sides, and a white-blossomed shrub took the place of the myrtle-bushes.

Half-shutting my eyes to look through a veil as it were, I lost myself little by little in my day-dream — utterly. My memories of that country rose up, very clear, very detailed, very living; they were almost cruel, full of the keen pathos of past things which can never, never return: — The Gulf of Cattaro — A mild and somewhat melancholy Autumn — Reveries on the skirts of the woods — Slumbers under the myrtles — and a certain maiden of Herzegovina, following her sheep day by day in the peaceful solitude.

Suddenly, breaking in on the silence of the hill-top and open space, a slight rustle! Delicate hands with grey gloves on as it seemed, pulled aside the branches and some one was looking at us: two large monkeys! A sort of Orang, with pink human faces and white beards. They must have been behind us for some time; guessing that we were doing nothing harmful they examined us with intense, human curiosity, rapidly winking their light-colored eyes. My sailor, without even a smile, made them a hasty bow and then waved his hand with one of those gestures of amiable

politeness which stand in every language for an invitation: "Pray, gentlemen — make yourselves at home — we shall be only too happy. . . ."

This frightened them; they went down on four paws like mere brutes and off at a gallop. We watched them as they fled through jessamine and green shrubbery.

As they ran they looked like nothing so much as large greyhounds; there was nothing human about them now but their puzzling heads and old men's beards.

XIII.

SHUFFLING steps on the pavement, and the sound of a sob.

I had been sitting quietly for a long time in a dark nook of the pagoda, bewildering myself with trying to draw the monsters and bogies — all the nightmare creatures that writhed over the ceiling. I turned my head towards the door to see who was coming in.

A very, very old woman, wretched-looking

and almost naked. She had in her hands three little saucers of rice and fish, and three little pink tapers. She must have come a long distance; she seemed broken with fatigue, and her grief was terrible. All her possessions, her widow's mite, had no doubt gone to buy the little offering she had come to place on the altar in front of the colossal smiling god, sparkling with gold. And then she set to work to hit the gong and ring the bell to summon the Spirits, as if to say: "Come, Buddha, and see what I have brought you. I have done my best in this gift; have pity on me, have mercy, grant the thing I ask. . . .

The little candles were burnt out, the flies had settled on the three saucers and were eating the offering — the poor old woman turned to go. Suddenly with a heartrending cry she came back towards the altar. Something warned her that her prayer was not heard, — yet this gift to her god was all she had in her power. She hurried back, almost running, and drummed on the gong and rang with all her might, sobbing and wailing aloud in her misery. Boom, boom, boom, ting-

tang, ting-tang, ting-tang, one and then the other, as hard as she could, furiously: "Buddha, you have not heard me, not even looked down on me! It is impossible that you should still be so cruel, that you should not listen to me, that I should be such a wretched old woman!" And her tears flowed down her yellow parchment cheeks.

Sylvestre, who has a very poor old grandmother at home, in Brittany, was the first to rise and give her all the money he had about him — about five francs in copper cash. I also gave her my purse, and she thanked us in much amazement with a great deal of *chin-chin.* It was something to be sure, this unexpected fortune; but all the same — no, she was not comforted. She expressed this to us by signs: she had come to ask something else, something beyond the aid of human pity.

XIV.

14th December.

A STORMY day. High wind from the East and a gloomy sky. Outside Tuan-an these two days past. This morning at sunrise the anchorage was not safe so we had to trip anchor in a very high sea — a dangerous manœuvre — and take shelter at Touran our usual refuge. I was on watch, and rough work it was, and yet I did

it with a kindlier feeling than usual, wondering quite sadly whether it might not be for the last time.

For a mail steamer as it passed yesterday brought me a very unexpected recall to Paris. The *Correze*, transport-ship, is to carry me home to France; on her way back from Ha-long she will stop at Touran long enough to pick me up — and we hear she is to return to-morrow! Always at a few minutes notice, in the Navy.

By two o'clock we are in our Bay of Touran once more, where the sea is calm. Now to make haste and pack. Everything is upside down in my cabin. Packing cases, ordered in a hurry from the Green Chinaman, come off in a sampan, and Sylvestre, being very hot, is frantic; three others are at work under his command, doing the more elaborate packing, and have stripped to be more at their ease.

Night comes and finds me ready — ready to follow my destiny and say good-bye to my hapless companions in exile. I regret them all,

greatly. — And I am long going to sleep, quite upset by this sudden change in my life.

Saturday, 15th December, 1883.

WAKED this morning by a sailor singing an old Breton ballad under my port-hole, a very monotonous air full of old-world sadness. Weather calm, clear, exquisite, rarer every day at this time of year and in this land of clouds and gusts. The hills opal-tinted, the sea intensely blue; all the soft splendor, the deep transparency of the tropics, and it is restful after the squalls and storms.

There is nothing more to be done; I have surrendered my duties, my trunks are locked, Sylvestre has done with swaddling up my gods and monsters which are ready to accompany me in travelling trim.

In all my hurried life I do not remember so

quiet a departure. All day I watch the horizon, the line of sky in the offing, trying to discover the *Corréze* which is to come and take me away — and nothing is to be seen: nothing but the flock of white-winged junks.

Shang-Hoo, the Green Chinaman, comes towards sun-down to take leave of me, in a superb dress of brocaded silk he has had from Canton for the cool season.

As the sun gets low it is almost cold, and we have quite a December feeling.

No *Corréze;* another night to spend in this bay, shut in by the gloomy heights which have imprisoned me these five months, and which, doubtless, I shall never see again. As this last night closes in I gaze at them rather wistfully — It is odd how, in time, one clings to anything. — They are absolutely black against the yellow sunset, even the most remote of them; all idea of relative distance is lost; it might be one single range of slaty peaks standing up against the icy background of wintry sky.

The *Corréze*, by all calculations, ought to

have arrived to-day at latest; she is much behind-hand. To-morrow morning she must certainly be here.

After the evening clearance I have a number of visitors from my friends of the captain's room to give me commissions, messages for France, and to say good-bye. The last to come, at nearly nine o'clock, is Sylvestre, ostensibly to see that there is nothing to put away. Very shyly he offers me a little picture which is a relic of his first communion, and which he regards rather as an amulet: "If you would take it with you Cap'en — as a remembrance. . . ."

He believes it will be a protection to me; the fact is that this recall to France — he and my warm-hearted sailors have scarcely understood it, and have fancied that something unconfessed is about to happen to me, or to be done to me.

I put his poor little gift away with tender care. It represents a child on its knees in the midst of a very black storm with the words: "The great waters had overwhelmed, but thou hast delivered me O Lord!"

Then I made him sit down for a few minutes, as if he, too, were a visitor, and we talked of Brittany. As I sometimes have business in the vicinity of his native district of Goëlo, we agreed that I am to go to see him in his grandmother's cottage at Ploubazlanec. It is quite close to Plouherzel, my brother Yves' village, half an hour's walk beyond the bridge of Lèzardrieux; I am to give him notice by letter and he will come as far as the bridge to meet me.

Then he became very thoughtful: Brittany is so remote as seen from hence! — At home again, in his own village under the grey sky, walking to meet me at the bridge of Lèzardrieux! Can that ever come true? It is strange indeed to think of it all when we are in Annam, and a shroud, as it were, hangs between us and the land we love.

Suddenly the idea of receiving me at home disturbed his mind, and he said, holding his head down — so like my brother Yves' way —: "At our place, you know — it is only a straw thatch." Poor, grown-up child! As he owned to the straw roof I grasped his hand and sent him off to

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bed. If only he knew how dear they are to me — those straw thatches of the old Breton roofs.

The *Corréze* which is to bear me away arrived during the night. I was roused by the noise of the wash she made as she passed close by the Circe, and by the voices of the men heaving the lead. I am really off this time; this is indeed the end of this stage of my life; and all endings are sad — even that of exile it would seem.

Sunday, 16th December, 1883.

STILL superb weather. From early dawn we are in the all bustle of departure; the *Corréze* is to get up steam by nine. All my faithful friends are there — Sylvestre and the sailors, getting in each other's way to finish cording my luggage, standing in a row at my door to bid me good-bye. It does one good to feel that such brave souls can regret one.

My fellow-officers parted from me affectionately; some of them were hardly awake, dressed any-how to see the last of me, and when I had to cut the matter short and get into the boat that was waiting for me I felt very tight about the heart.

The *Corrèze* was under way, almost fairly off when a junk — the Mandarin's junk, hurried after us, signalling to us to wait. It was from the Green Chinaman, bringing me some boxes of a particularly choice tea for the voyage.

We passed close to the Circe where the crew were standing in rows on deck for the Sunday morning's inspection. Officers and sailors waved their caps in token of farewell, and I felt so sad that I could have cried when it all faded out of sight — when the bay of Touran was slowly shut in by its familiar hills, and the rigging of the Circe, on which I long kept my eyes, disappeared at last.

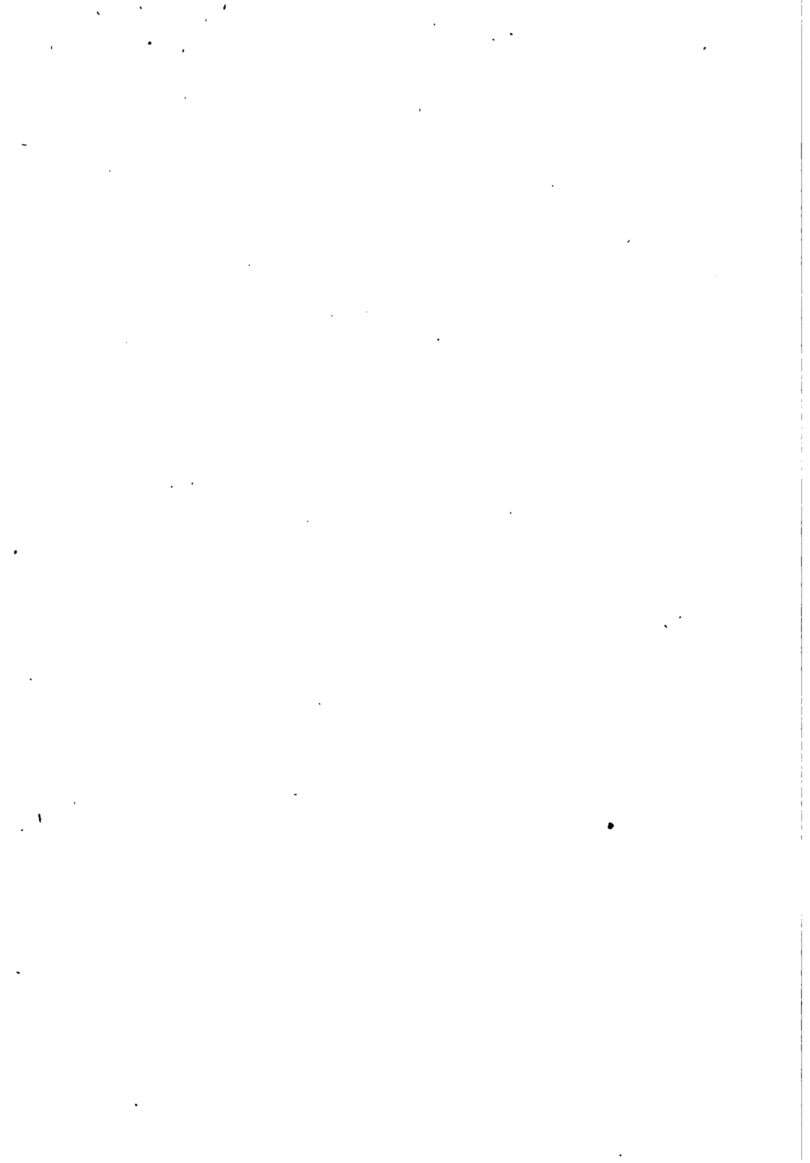
XV.

It vanished swiftly, lost in the blue distance. Before noon we were out of sight of land.

Then the peace of the ocean came over me: the ocean which changes and swallows up everything; it is like a final stroke firmly set at the bottom of the recent past. And in the midst of that silence the Circe and the bay of Touran seemed to founder in a moment, to be lost in ut-

termost distance, leaving scarcely a trace in my memory. I had known that they would thus vanish, but such rapidity confounded me. But—after all, Love alone has ever proved able to attach me for any length of time to some few spots on earth.

THREE HOURS RESPITE



THREE HOURS RESPITE.

ON THE HIGH-ROAD FROM CHINA TO FRANCE.

23d December, 1883.

NINE o'clock in the evening, in a café open to the air, and frightfully hot. Doubtful-looking tables smelling of anise and brandy. Walls of a dirty white, hung with lithographs representing Queen Victoria and her family. Two fair-haired damsels — bar-maids — exerting themselves with no end of airs and graces to serve some sun-burnt

gentlemen in white jackets, talking in various European tongues. — It is very hot, tremendously hot; mosquitoes and moths are buzzing round the petroleum lamps that hang from the ceiling. An English waiter is turning the handle of a grinding piano which gives forth a familiar opera-tune, and it seems to jar very discordantly with a stranger noise that comes in from the outside.

Through the front, which is open from end to end, a long straight street is visible, half a mile or more, with a full tide of vehicles and thousands of lamps — a rolling torrent. It might be the Paris Boulevard on a summer evening.

Looking more closely, it is startling to see men go by in Eastern robes, smelling of opium and musk; then others, many others, bare-shouldered, yellow-skinned, with hanging tails of hair. Look closer still, and behold all this make-believe Europe is nothing but a grotesque and filthy swarm of Chinamen. Three-fourths of these carriages are drawn, and quickly too, by men harnessed in place of horses: those who pull are

Chinese, bare-backed, their tails fastened up in a knot, their hats like conical lamp-shades; those who are pulled — Chinese too, their tails dangling behind them, flaunting fans. The shops — Chinese; the painted lanterns — Chinese; the voices, the clamor, the wrangling — Chinese. All yellow, bustling, greedy, simian, obscene. The heat is oppressive and stormy, there is a reek of perspiring humanity, fermenting fruit, disgusting food spread on the ground, burning incense and foulest filth; and strongest of all, of musk, a fevering and sickening mixture, quite unbearable.

This is Singapore. In the crowd we see Indians as beautiful as gods, Malabars, Malays, Parsees, English in pith helmets, sailors of every nationality and ladies of the streets imported from Japan; but they are lost, drowned in the seething mass of Chinese.

Along the central High Street stand the temples of all these people, in a row under the always oppressive sky: Hindoo temples with mysterious images; Chinese pagodas with hide-

ous demonry; Mussulman mosques; Christian churches, protestant or Roman catholic; — all side by side, in a suspicious fraternity which English policemen have the task of maintaining.

Ten o'clock in the evening, — a music hall. It is built of wood, but of enormous size with a colonnade in a severe style, an imitation, and a mockery, of a Greek temple. An orchestra of women, Hungarians, are playing a waltz by Strauss with noisy energy. Then a French woman, a Bordelaise, comes on to the platform with a rowdy song. Indians selling birds wander round the tables where the audience are drinking pale-ale, and offer Java-sparrows, wonderful paroquets and macaws of every hue that look as if they had been painted.

Two hundred yards further on is a quiet square; there young ladies are airing themselves on a grass lawn closely mown in the English fashion. In the midst rises the black belfry of a

church of Saxon architecture. But the air is loaded and oppressive, and full of fire-flies.

Eleven in the evening. — Only two paces from the carriages and the crowd, the great court enclosing the Hindoo temple is deserted and silent. It is lighted by the moon — that moonlight of equatorial nights, like pale pink daylight. In this exquisitely-tinted radiance the numberless domes of the temple stand out — domes built up of rows and pyramids of gods; the broad, faintly-blue shadows make it look as aerial as an enchanted place that may vanish utterly; one could fancy it pervaded by supernatural essences; a religious peace reigns about the spot. — It seems remote indeed from the squalid Chinese mob outside.

Through the open door of the sanctuary hanging lamps are seen glimmering. In the extreme background huge gods with wicked heads are visible, surrounded by obscure sym-

bols, and in front of them flowers without stems are profusely strewn, giving out a perfume of jessamine and tuberose.

Three or four Indians are keeping watch: Youths scantily clad in a short loin-cloth, with hair like a girl's falling low over their shoulders; their expression is wild, and the white of their eyes gleams like enamel. Their features are fine and their chins beardless, but a disgusting black fur grows over their full chests; the whole effect is startling and repulsive; there is something of the woman about them, something of the monkey and of the wild beast.

Here, under the eye of the gods, they chat and laugh quite at their ease, as being familiar with them. One of them takes an armful of jessamine flowers threaded in chaplets, and crosses the court-yard in the rosy moonlight, to a sort of chapel standing by itself, quite small, and the abode of an idol which seems much more antique. It is a god with six arms, a tall head-dress, and large glass eyes; his expression is savage and lowering; his attitude vehement, writhing,

frantic. There he dwells alone in company with a little lamp which burns before him in token of respect. And the lad heaps the flowers on a tray at his feet, not even looking at him, as if he were bringing fodder to an ox.

Midnight. — The last houses, the last lights of Singapore have disappeared behind a point of the shore; before us lies open country and greenery. The green jungle begins at the very edge of the town, a dense impenetrable tangle covering the whole of this unhealthy peninsula.

How dark it is, and how beautiful! Trees which take the place of our oaks, poplars, and magnolias, but on a far larger scale; and then they are covered with fragrant blossoms. And fans, and palms! Palms of every form, and glistening in the moonshine like metallic foliage; Coco-palms with immense fingered leaves; areca-palms, waving tufts of curled plumes very high aloft, and at the very end of long slender columns

as straight and slight-looking as bulrushes; and strangest of all the Travellers' tree, with broad fans very symmetrically arranged in a flat semi-circle, like the spread tail of a turkey-cock — or like an enormous Chinese screen planted in the forest. And all this verdure is so intensely green that even at midnight, under the warm — tinted moonlight, it is still wonderfully green.

The road was very lonely. But suddenly, at the end of the aisle of branches, we saw the lanterns of a number of vehicles coming towards us at a great pace, with no noise of hoofs. They whisked past. Tiny carriages each ridden by an English sailor in white ducks, and drawn by a naked Chinese, breathless with fatigue.

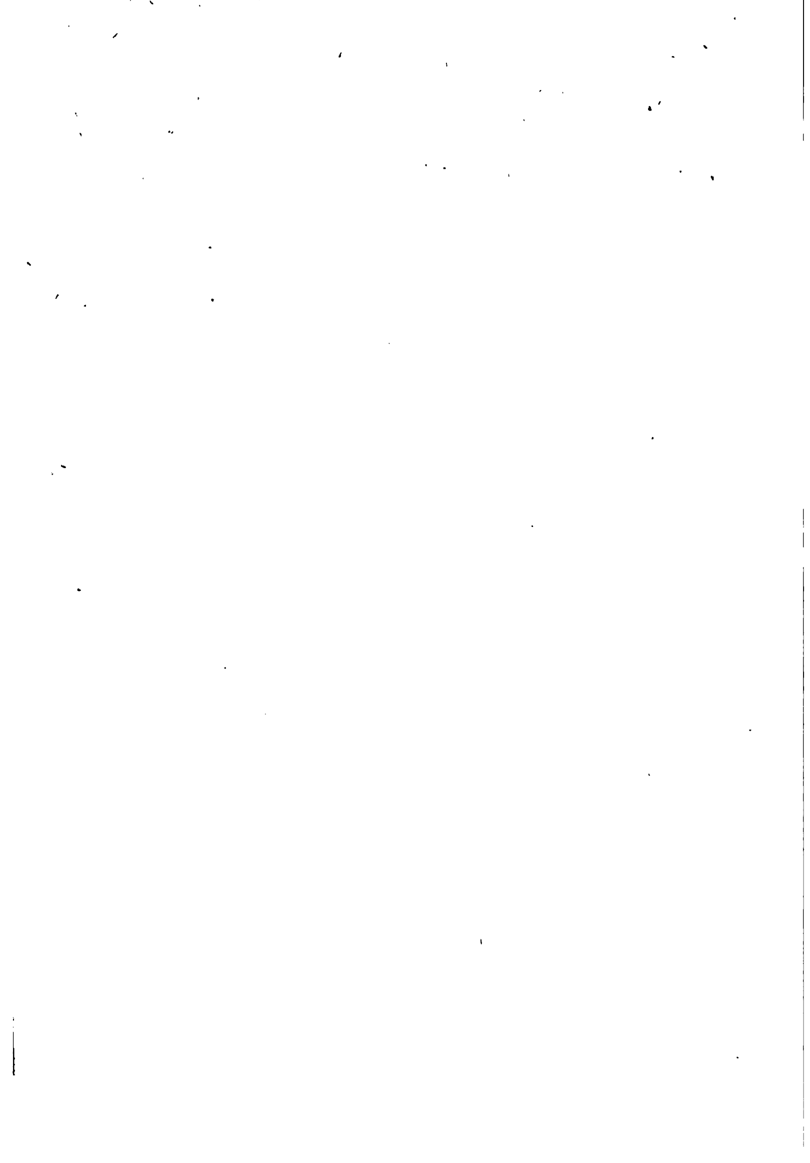
They are evidently running a match and have laid a bet on the winner; sitting quite upright and solemn, they encourage the runners by little shouts, clicking their tongues and clapping their hands.

They pass and vanish; all things relapse into the calm mystery of night. One sees but dimly, as if there were an exhalation of green, under the

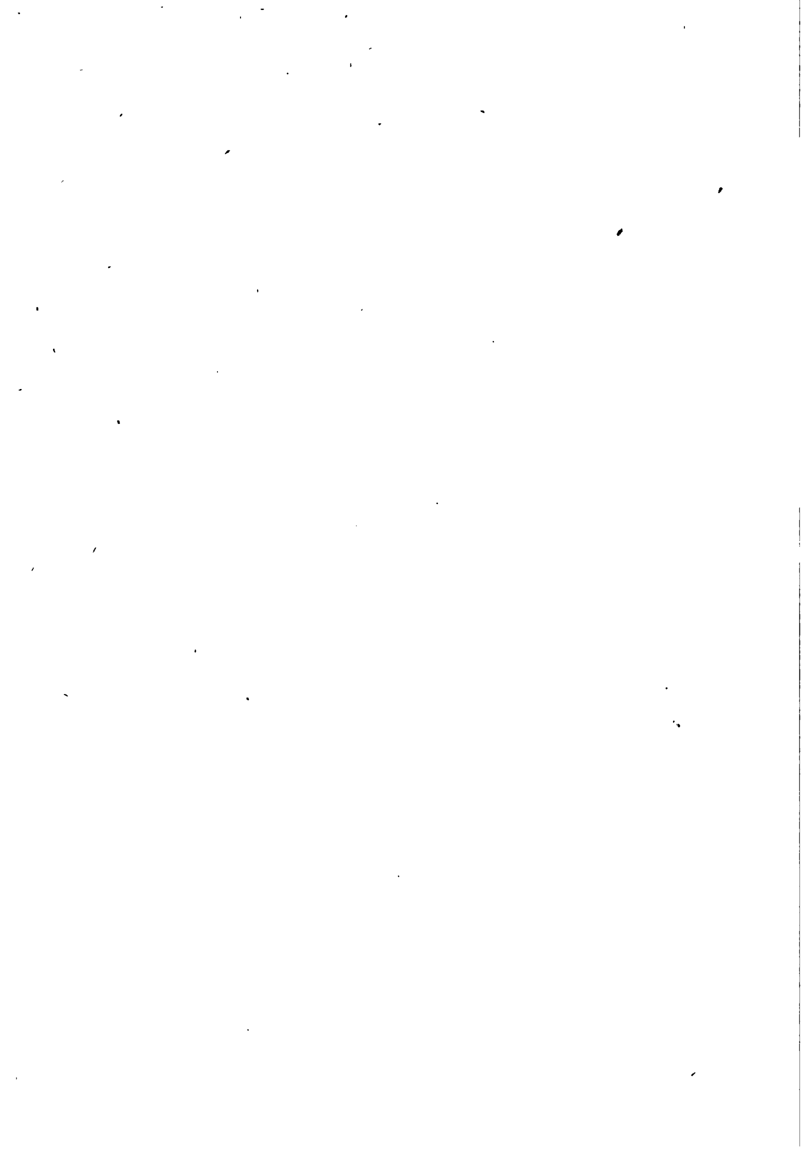
vaulted trees through which the soft gleam filters; but here and there broad moonbeams pierce them from above and light up the tracery of the ferns or of the tall and splendid palm-trees, — all as motionless as in an enchanted garden.

Oh! that stillness, that glory, that faint music of the cicada, those odors of the soil, of spices, of flowers!

And that irritating scent of musk everywhere predominant, even in the midst of the forest! Everything is musky in this Malayan land; even the little nocturnal beasts, like rats, which cross our path every minute chirping out suddenly with glad, bird-like little voices: " Queek, queek, queek!" and leaving a musky trail in the stagnant air.



MAHÉ.



MAHÉ.*

I.

Friday, 1st January, 1884.

A PLACID little territory under a vault of palm-trees.

The vault is unbroken, an endless awning over everybody and everything. The giant palms scarcely show a gap against the sky through which the daylight can fall; they cross and intermingle, some waving like the long

* A French settlement on the Malabar coast.

plumes in a lady's hat, others in curled bunches like tufts of feathers, or bent backwards and drooping. And the vault is very high overhead, lightly supported on long frail columns as pliant as reeds. We move about under it in the eternal shade — a translucent green twilight.

At about five in the afternoon I disembarked there on a sandy shore at the mouth of a little river which makes a cutting, a winding bay through the dense wood. I had come from afar, from furthest Asia, and had almost forgotten the charm and splendor of Hindostan; at such a time it is enchantment to see it again; unique as it is, and matchless. The sun was already low and shed a glory of color on the river up which I had come; the palms where it touched them were gold — wonderful gold, and the air seemed full of gold-dust. On the slope of each bank, at the feet of the palms which form vast green hangings, sat groups of Indians watching my boat pulled in. They took grand attitudes, like gods, wrapped in white, red or orange-colored draperies; and they, and their trees, and their land, and

their sky, were all bathed in the radiance of an apotheosis.

A house with a verandah, a white house with green outside shutters, stands close to the shore on a rocky headland — a handsome structure enough, and very old, having survived from the time of the East India Company: the Government house of this shady settlement. Crossing the sand in a few steps, I entered a terrace garden belonging to this residence, and here, as elsewhere spread the verdant vault. Under this delicious awning it might be a fairy's plot of ground: unknown flowers, and foliage as gorgeous as the blossoms, violet, crimson, splashed with white and yellow as if painted on purpose. The little formal, old-fashioned walks, the stone benches, green and moss-grown, had an antiquated, deserted look, like those country gardens where the master of the place is dead and no one ever comes.

After crossing the garden and closing the

gate behind me, I found myself in something resembling a street, making its way with difficulty through the grove; one might fancy it a village from the south of France — very old and almost deserted — transplanted hither and overwhelmed by the tremendous tropical vegetation. The grand palm-trees cast an all-prevailing shade though their crowns were still amazingly golden in the setting sun; — and how low the houses were by comparison with those tall slender trunks.

There was a little *Mairie* displaying the tricolor, with bronze sepoys in red tunics on guard at the door; there was a funny little hotel for Heaven knows what travellers, a little school, and some little shops where Indians were selling bananas and spices. And nothing more. It all straggled away into avenues of trees and was lost in green depths. The soil was bright red, like red chalk, making the hues of the foliage look more gaudy and unnatural. Overhead the glimpses of sky peeping here and there between the palms were blazing with light and looked in-

finitely remote; and among these slim trees, waving their huge plumes over the path, flocks of falcons flew to and fro uttering a harsh cry. Nature was exuberantly, magnificently alive, and her beasts and plants; but the little town cowering under it all seemed dead.

The people we met in these dusky ways were all handsome, placid and dignified, with large velvety eyes, those Indian eyes with their mysterious fascination of blackness. They wore antique-looking draperies of white or red muslin, the upper part of the body left bare; the women with a goddess-like mien and splendid brown busts that might have been copies in bronze, slightly exaggerated, of Greek marbles: the men full-chested and with slender waists like the women, but broader-shouldered; blue-black beards curling like those of antique heads. They bid us good-day in French, as our own peasants do, seeming proud to have remained ours; they evidently would have liked to stop and chat; those who could talk a little French smiled and began a coversation — about the war and affairs

in China, saying "*our* soldiers, *our* sailors." It was unexpected and startling. Yes, this is really French ground. — And I remembered how once, in the Court-house at Saïgon, one of these Indians, accused of I know not what misdemeanor, retorted on a Corsican magistrate who regarded him as a savage: "We were French two hundred years before you were."

We met a sort of covered wagons, each drawn by two white oxen, humped like camels and with long, dull, grotesque faces. They are the only vehicles to be seen here; they travel to Tellichery or Cannanore, the nearest towns of British India. There were several wide roads crossing each other under the canopy of palms, like the streets of a town. They were almost all of them sunk below the general level of the ground, and all the damper and shadier for that; the banks on each side carpeted with exquisite ferns and the most delicate mosses. Among the clumps of brushwood the traces may be seen of the walls which enclosed the town of Mahé at a time when it was a place of importance; the ruins of the

gates in the style of Louis XIV., the remains of its draw-bridges. In fact everything is old in this now almost-deserted colony. It has a past, like our western cities; and these memories of a greater age sleeping beneath its magnificent shroud of verdure give it a peculiar melancholy.

The people we met were of different castes and complexions; some merely brown, the white of their large eyes tinted bluish; others almost black, wild looking but handsome nevertheless, with the stamp of that inimitable Indian beauty. Some even were wearing European dress — magnates of the place no doubt — and they slackened their pace as we crossed their path, like children who want to attract notice. The dress suits them very badly, and it is a great pity. The women especially, in their smart "costumes" would be excessively absurd but for that look in their eyes which checks every impulse to smile, and which one plucks, as it were, in passing, like a mysterious blossom of darkness.

The natives' huts, scattered at random under the trees planted about with bananas, flowering

lantanas, and scarlet hibiscus, a various vegetation like an enchanted garden in the green gloom under the endless vault of palm-trees;—little cabins with whitened walls, and windows without glass, latticed with bars. It was almost too dark inside to see, the foliage was so thick; the rooms were bare and almost empty. But we hardly ever failed to see a mother-of-pearl ink-bottle on a table with some papers. In these huts, as an every-day matter of course, are written and re-written the old Indian texts which date from the beginning of the world, and which our savants are studying for the origin of our Western tongues.

The day was dying; the light perceptibly fading. A few golden touches still lingered here and there on the tops of the palms, and then those last gleams were extinct. Green night closed in on all sides and sadness seemed to fall on these avenues of trees which were more and more deserted. A young girl passed close to me whose cheeks were but slightly bronzed, dressed in a blue European gown. With her unfashion-

able dress, her slender figure and her black curls, she reminded me of the young Creoles of old-world romances: of "Virginia" or "Cora," and I watched her with pensive interest. She was probably only a very poor Indian girl, for she went in under the trees and glided, as if at home, into a hut buried among the branches, vanishing in the silence and darkness of that lonely nest.

Then a man came by, almost touching me, with the stealthy swiftness of a deer, as the road darkened increasingly. He was of a different caste, of another and more primitive race: almost naked but with knives stuck in his belt, his skin very dark and his chest covered with hair as thick as a bear's fell. He stopped before an immensely tall palm-tree, higher and straighter than a ship's mast, and began to climb it, hand and foot, very quickly, as though he had important business up there, to be settled that night. Strangely near to the monkey was this one! I lost sight of him among the palm-tops where all was night.

In the last dim gleam of evening, when I re-

turned to the river to get into my boat again, a troop of long-haired children, tightened up in the scantiest loin-cloths, crowded round me to sell bent-grass fans, oranges and nosegays, which I could hardly see but which breathed of tuberose and of some other exquisite and heady perfume.

A few strokes of the oar carried us across the bar of this miniature river. The sea lay spread before us like a waste of green mother-of-pearl—highly iridescent mother-of-pearl and having a light of its own. The nosegays I had bought of the children smelt stronger than ever in the darkness as the earth gradually receded with its various intruding odors; we must have left a sweet wake behind us on the water, a trail of the scent of tuberoses.

The horizon, red beneath, then violet, then green, steel blue, peacock blue, was shaded in bands of color like a rainbow. The stars shone so brightly that one could fancy them nearer the earth than usual; and from the spot where the

sun had set broad sheaves of rays still shot up, clearly defined and quite distinct, crossing the whole immense vault like zodiacal lights of pale rose flung across the dark-blue sphere. And so, when it was already night, there was still a festal radiance over all, like a magical illumination.

II.

MAHÉ has no roadstead, and the shoal coast compelled us on our arrival to cast anchor three miles out; there we lay in the open on the wide blue sea, not in India but only near India: we could see the outline of the forests and the iridescent peaks of the high mountains, but they were almost remote.

The weather was calm, with a very faint breeze that scarcely availed to swell the sails of

the boats. I left the ship at noon under a raging sun and did not set foot on land till two o'clock. At two o'clock the oppression of mid-day is not yet overpast, and the little town was asleep beneath its crushing verdure; but the shadow was so dense that under the shelter of the palms I could almost fancy that it was cool.

Going along the Cannanore road, which I took by chance, followed by two conversational Indians, I suddenly heard the most astounding music proceeding from a garden. A wedding, it would seem, was being celebrated with much ceremony. A troupe of hired dancers had come from Cannanore and were to perform figure-dances; I was assured that I might go in and be certain of a welcome, for that the young couple were French "just like me," and all their family, though their house happened to be on English territory outside the French settlement.

The garden was shaded by white awnings tied to the trunks of the tall palm-trees with garlands of leaves. At the end stood the house, and at one side, on a raised platform, sat a number of

men wearing gold necklaces and white muslin raiment. These were the wedding guests, just anybodies — dwellers in the neighboring huts; and yet they might have been an assembly of gods so beautiful and so benign were their faces, so noble their attitudes, so large and solemn their gaze! They wore light draperies knotted on one shoulder and leaving their arms bare with half of the splendidly-moulded torso. Through the tent, and through the loftier canopy of palm fronds, came the golden radiance, the all-pervading apotheosis-glow which in India is the mere light of day.

They made me take a seat of honor — and I felt ashamed, for my part, by the side of those men, of my tight jacket with its single row of buttons, of my broad-brimmed hat, of my appearance generally. — Indoors are the women, half-veiled, half-hidden, peeping at us through the windows. The heat was suffocating in the midst of this crowd; the golden light, so beautiful and so universally diffused, might almost be an atmosphere of fire. Musky scents rose up

from the soil, from the plants and trees, and the Indians about me.

The entertainment began with a dance by children, performed very slowly to a melancholy air and the time marked by cymbals. Thirty little creatures standing in a circle swayed gently to and fro and then turned; their eyes half-closed as if they were asleep. They had bucklers on their right arms and held wide short daggers in their left hands. Girls or boys? It was difficult at a first glance to decide; but they were all pretty, with large eyes and long fringing black lashes. Their waving hair, bound round the temples with a fillet, like an antique bust, fell unconfined over their shoulders and down to their waists. They had full rounded busts and were amazingly slender, their waists rather tightly bound in long loin cloths that clung like a sheath. Their forms were indeed too slight; there was something unnatural about it resembling the hieratic figures in ancient Egyptian bas-reliefs.

This type accounts for those antique Hindoo pictures representing beautiful beings of ambiguous sex, full-bosomed but without hips, with waists so slender as to look as if they might break, and a half-mystical, half-sensual grace.

At first the dance was no more than a sort of rhythmic march to a solemn chant; by degrees it grew faster and faster still — very fast indeed.

There are constant sudden changes of rhythm and tune. The bucklers clash together with a dead clang; the swords meet with a clear metallic ring. Faster, faster, faster. — The voices of the children, at first low and sweet, begin to sound low and sinister like the voices of demons. Still faster; the shields clatter louder. Now the orchestra has caught the fever; the drummers are drubbing frantically, the flute-players puff out their cheeks and blow into their wooden pipes, their veins swollen and eyes blood-shot. It is like a crescendo of bag-pipes gone mad and trying to catch up the cymbals.

An old man who looked like a wizard, and who directed the dance by signs, snatched up a

beast's hoof mounted on a stick, and glaring as if he, too, were frenzied, his eyes starting out of his head, he whipped the slow ones as hard as he could on the hams till they leaped higher and shouted louder than the rest. It was an indistinguishable medley of little arms, little legs little writhing bodies and wild floating hair uncoiling like black snakes. It was a sort of torment only to watch, with breathless heed, this exasperated climax of motion and noise, — a strident hubbub that pierced one's brain — a whirlwind, a dizzy maze, a demoniacal thing. . . .

And suddenly it stopped — stopped short — dancing, music, everything ceased at once — still, stricken, silent. The figure was ended; the little performers wiped their faces with perfect calm, and the old ballet-master, quite paternal again, gave them something to drink.

Next came some youths, almost grown men, and placed themselves in a circle as the children had done. Like them they had slender waists, full chests, long lustrous black hair and exquisite feminine grace in the most trifling movements;

they were all of remarkable beauty, with muscles as clean as antique statues, and with more delicate articulations. In the first and quieter part of their dance there were pauses full of languor, in drooping, dying attitudes. The crescendo was terrific, and towards the end there was an exotic feeling infused into their growing frenzy. Then suddenly they were revealed as astounding acrobats: all rushing forward at once, as if flung from an immense spring-board, they spun round, head downwards, in space; dropped on their feet, and repeated their somersaults again and again to the sound of nondescript music that made one shudder. Some seemed to be lying down in mid-air, turning over horizontally from right to left, as though perpetually falling but keeping themselves up by sheer speed; spurring the earth from time to time with a sinewy leg, and maintaining their attitude against all preconceived notions of the equilibrium of things. Their thick black hair uncoiled in black ringlets, making them look like Furies. Under the violent blows of their feet the earth trembled and rang in hollow cadence.

Only to look at them made my head spin; the hot exhalations, the heavy air loaded with perfumes, that golden light in which everything floated, the vaulted palms weighing one down, the piercing bag-pipe notes, the writhing flesh, the giddy motion became possession, an intoxication; I lost my head, my senses seemed to fail me in the overpowering noise, I ceased to see anything clearly.

This Mahé is larger than one fancies it. As I walked about the green avenues I discovered quarters which at first I had not suspected, so well were they hidden among the palms: a church built in a square, or rather in a clearing in the wood; a priest's residence, very peaceful and countrified; a little convent of good sisters; and a few lofty houses, inhabited now by poor Indians but with an air of old-world dignity still remaining to them. The church is rather humble, rather *colonial* in its dress of white-wash, but it is old enough to have already the charm of a

past and to suggest devout meditation, as our village churches do at home.

Then I came on a purely Indian suburb, lively, not to say noisy, with groups of people singing; a gaudy splendor of white and red drapery thrown about dusky bodies; stalls of fruit, gourds, loin-cloths and fans; a fish-market — the fish displayed on the ground, and the earth as usual the color of red chalk — and squabbling Hindoo fishwives, wrinkled, shrivelled, hideous, with breasts like the udders of black goats or empty bags, and rings through their noses dragging down the nostrils.

Night fell when I had gone still farther and found me in the wildest part of the fishing village. It is on the open strand facing the breakers — the infinite expanse of the Indian ocean, without an island in the offing, unbroken by a reef or a sail; the waters were rocked that evening by a warm breeze from the west and my ship was to be seen far, far away — hardly visible, a solitary speck lost in the furthest distance of the heaving blue. — Then came naked fishermen, with limbs

of bronze, dragging a long canoe to the water; they made ready for some nocturnal expedition, and shot the boat off on the roaring surf where it was soon lost to sight. All round me there were hovels built of reeds, reminding me of I know not what that I had seen elsewhere; there were tall slim coco-palms, swaying in the sea-wind with a sound I had known before, and that seemed familiar; and I was walking on a strand strewn with dried palm-leaves, black boulders, branches of coral. It was all so like Polynesia! — A shiver ran through me and I stood still, feeling some invisible clutch upon me — of a memory, very keen, swift and fleeting: once more that sense of the spell and the sadness of the shores of Oceania, which I have never been able to find words for, which at last, in the lapse of years I had forgotten, but which comes over me at long intervals with mysterious emotion.

III.

Sunday, 3d January.

AT four o'clock, when my watch is ended, all the ship's boats have gone off. So to go on shore to-day I must charter one of the Indian canoes which have come out to sell coco-nuts to the men. It is a long narrow canoe, sharp at each end — very crank — as we say of a light boat that may be swept along or upset by a breath — and already full of water. There are three miles to be made in that canoe, with

paddles, and against a sea of chopping, foam-crested waves. It will take above an hour. Well, it cannot be helped! I step in and take my seat. This narrow cockle-shell is just wide enough to sit in.

Off we go with loud shouts, sprinkled by the spray; but by the time we have gone a hundred yards the paddlers begin to reflect, and pull up; they are ready and willing to take me as a passenger, you know, but before going any farther they would like to know how much I mean to pay. When I promise to give them a rupee, or more perhaps if they ply their paddles briskly, zeal rises to enthusiasm; they shelter me under a large umbrella, they fan me — they even try to amuse me by singing.

The man who is told off to sing to me squats down in front of me, very, very close to me, so close that I can scarcely move. We are both sitting in the water on the bottom of the boat, our knees touching. Our eyes are below the level of the little blue waves that dance about us; we sweep through their very midst, in and be-

neath them as it were, commonly seeing them from below as if we were swimmers floating on the water. They are so vividly blue that one could fancy them stained with indigo. Sometimes a very large one sweeps by, meeting us like a hill of lapis-lazuli and hiding for a while the beautiful green line yonder — which is India.

My Hindoo's songs are long, and begin again and again; the paddles beat the water as an accompaniment. He comes as close to me as he can get, shouts them in my face, opening his mouth very wide and showing all his white teeth. I feel his breath on my cheek and it has something of the musky smell of snakes. At certain passages it ceases to be a song; it is nothing but a bellow in quick jerks, his teeth chattering fast all the time as if he were trembling. Then he looks strangely savage and, though he is handsome, might be a huge monkey.

Instead of going up the little estuary as usual we are to land, it seems, at the fishing-village on the open strand, within the breakers. I do not interfere, not being in command on the present

occasion. — We make fairly good way, shaken by the strokes of the paddles, rocked on the blue rollers, with the burning sun above us.

The breakers, then the shore! — All my Indians get out into the water with much shouting; they fling their canoe up on to the coral-bank, hold out their arms to make a hand-rail, and I spring on land in a great splash of surf.

Half-past five. The sun was by this time low and sending level beams beneath the palms; there was a light like the reflection of a conflagration on their tall grey stems. The light is always golden, but at this hour the gold is ruddier, more amazing than the gold of morning and of noon. Three persons came forth from the wood and advanced to inspect me: Two old men, white-bearded and of noble aspect, draped like the Saints in our churches, and a young girl, bare-bosomed and singularly handsome, carrying a basket of fruit on her head. As I gazed at them approaching me from that wonderful scene in that golden glow, I was fain to think of the remotest pre-historic past; just such as this has

my imagination pictured primeval times in a world where all was peace and beauty, where human beings and all things else shone in a glory now unknown to us.

I wandered, aimless in the twilight, along the shady alleys leading to Government House. Sunday evening; and in this almost European quarter the inhabitants were airing themselves in their Sunday best. Hindoo men and women dressed in French fashions: the men in black frock-coats, the women in hats with feathers or flowers. And it reminded me exactly of the evening promenade after vespers in our smallest provincial towns. It is curious to note how, at certain times, all countries achieve a certain resemblance, how much things are alike all the world over, how truly Humanity is one, and how small the globe is!

Among all the children who run out of the huts and *swarm* at my heels like flies, there are two whose entreaties have moved me to allow them

about me as "guides." Two brothers of about ten and twelve. They said to me, in French: "You see, Sir, we are orphans, we are very poor; you can give us whatever you please and we shall be satisfied." They speak fairly well, pronouncing slowly, with a quaint accent. They are nice little fellows, and seem to be poor indeed, for they have nothing to wear but little loincloths all in rags. So it is agreed: they are to be my companions in my walks, one on my right and one on my left, till I go for good.

Night closes in quickly under the spreading palms. The only street and the side roads near Government House are lighted by petroleum lamps at the top of wooden poles, and this gives the finishing touch to the queer look Mahé has of a little French town that has lost its way amid exotic vegetation.

There is a kind of immense avenue, however, which is not lighted; but there is still a gleam of twilight there because it is at least a hundred

yards across. It is like a clearing cut straight through the palm-forest and leads to the English territory. Exactly down the middle of this vast roadway runs a raised path, very narrow, for foot passengers; the rest lying on either side is inundated rice-fields, full of water. And here, this evening, the good folks of Mahé are taking a walk under the open sky, a refreshing change no doubt from the everlasting bower under which they dwell. At this twilight-hour the rice-fields look much like the fields of France before the harvest, and as several of these promenaders are in European dress the whole effect keeps up the impression of a Sunday in the country, and recalls the pleasant idling of a June evening in our villages at home, among the standing corn. Here come the good Sisters, followed by a procession of little Indian girls walking very properly, two and two: darling little dusky imps, most amusing to watch. I pass close by these little school-maids on the dyke-path where there is no room to make way; their little busts are already formed, their little figures perfect. Each, one after another, raises

her beautiful eyes, as deep as gulfs of blackness, and which say as plainly as can be: "It is only for a joke that we are so very good and wear such neat linen caps. Only for a joke — it will not last long: we are of the blood of the Bayadères and the Apsâras, and we mean to take flight before long when we are old enough."

They pass along without any fuss or noise, looking like little nuns again as they go on their way. A queer little train is that, poor good Sisters! and one which will give you a heartache bye-and-bye.

On either hand, beyond the wide clearing where we are airing ourselves, stretches the belt of palm forest like a grand and gloomy curtain; it must be dark night in there by this time. The grasshoppers are chirping; the sky is full of the most extraordinary purple glow, as if colored fires were being burnt; the stars, which are beginning to appear, are little sparks sprinkled over a crimson ground.

I had made friends the day before hereabouts, and had come to see them again: two old In-

dians who kept a tiny stall for bananas and spices on the fringe of the forest. To whom on earth did they sell them? No one ever went near their lonely little hut; the rice-meadow lay between them and the embankment where there was an occasional passer-by. On my arrival with my two faithful guides I was at once recognized; at once the finest bananas were picked out for me to eat. I was enthroned on a mat in front of the door, and the hanging-lamp was lighted — a copper lamp of antique shape with branches forming a star. The hut, so tiny, so minute, at the foot of the great trees, was built on five or six layers of stones forming steps, like a temple. My guides sat down on the step below me. By this time we could hardly see. The passers-by, now very few on the raised path, were no more than indistinct shades, black or white. The sky was still rose and crimson, all its stars lighted up and the outline of the palm-tops clearly delineated against the heavenly light in a fringe of black plumes. Grasshoppers were chirping all round us in the rice-meadows. It

was almost cool. Moths and mosquitoes came humming round the hanging-lamp which was fed from time to time with coco-nut oil by means of a spoon with a long handle. Soon hardly any one passed by; the spot was very lonely. But children came to stare at me; I know not whence these little ones sprang — from the grove behind no doubt. They squatted on the steps at my feet looking up at me. More came, and every minute more, their bare feet making no sound, running up very lightly with some rag of white drapery floating on the air and about their brown limbs. They made their appearance suddenly and sat down without a word, like large nocturnal dragon flies, or locusts settling down. There were at least twenty of them in stages below me. — And still the long feathery leaves of the palms lay black against the night sky where the crimson dye had all but faded out; a cool mist came up from the rice marsh and spread over the whole avenue, like white smoke floating over the fields close to the ground.

The little ones whispered together in their

own language, communicating their opinions concerning me no doubt. Then they were plotting something to astonish me, that I could see, and to beg a few coppers afterwards as a reward —what was it to be? Suddenly one of them, about ten years old, stood up, quite grave, cleared his throat as if about to recite a monologue, and began in a deep parrot's voice, very hoarse and funny:

> La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure
> Nous l'allons prouver tout à l'heure. . . . *

Astonished? I certainly was. It was so unexpected, so immensely funny that if I had not been alone I must have gone into a fit of laughing. But alone one can only laugh internally.

They were all watching me to see the effect on me. Not that he knew any more; he stopped short like a blackbird when it whistles

* The first two lines of La Fontaine's fable of The Wolf and the Lamb:

> "The argument of the strongest is always the best
> As we are prepared to prove."

the beginning of its song; he had got no further than this at school, yet — and my little guides suggested that I should do well to reward him with a ten-sous piece at least for his learning and his trouble.

It is strange to hear all these children talking our language — more or less — and taking a pride in belonging to our nation.

I rose to leave. It was growing dismal in this dark, lonely spot. Besides, I was almost cold in white linen clothes and sitting on the stones.

I bid good-night to all the "Frenchmen" who were eager to attend me, keeping only my two guides. To make some use of them I asked them whether there were not a pagoda to be seen in the neighborhood; I had not observed one any where near. Yes, there was one hard by, whither they would conduct me at once although it was night. It was a temple of their own religion *Tiss* — for they were neither Christians nor Mussulmans these little people; no: *Tiss;* and they repeated the word, greatly sur-

prised at my seeming not to know what it meant.

At first we skirted the wood, which hung over us like a high black wall above our heads; we walked on a little raised slope on which our feet slipped in the darkness, plunging now and again into the liquid ooze of the rice fields. And then we turned into the thicket, down what was meant for a path, under the vaulting palms in thick darkness — absolute night. They led me, each holding a hand, as two very gentle and very intelligent little dogs might lead a blind man; and I gave myself up to them, walking with the doubtful tread of a man whose eyes are bandaged. They guided me with the greatest care and the skill of American redskins, keeping me always in the middle of the path while their own feet were entangled in the way-side plants, or slipped into holes. There were creatures that we could hear fleeing before us into the depths of the wood: lizards, or birds, or beasts of some kind, who were asleep and whom we scared. Sometimes I felt myself treading a narrow plank while

their feet splashed through water—a little bridge over some runlet that crossed the road. It was so totally dark that I preferred keeping my eyes shut. Branches and straggling weeds whisked across my face. — And here again was the hot musky smell rising from the soil which is so unpleasant the moment one is under cover of the woods.

Now we are at our journey's end, they say.

I opened my eyes, and through the leafy tracery I beheld an amazing number of lights, twinkling and flickering as if they were dying out,—such subdued and tiny sparks that they might have proceeded from luminous insects. They were, however, very regularly arranged in quincunx; one might fancy that a large chess-board was erected there and lighted at every corner by a glow-worm. "That is the pagoda," said they, "the front of it lighted up in this strange way."

We found ourselves in a little glade, open to the light of the stars, and this gave me a sense of relief after the black darkness and suffocation of

the forest. The temple was in front of us, mysteriously illuminated, the lights quivering under the imperceptible breezes of the night and gradually dying out. It was a very humble sanctuary, very low — a mere hut of old worm-eaten wood. Into the boards forming the walls a kind of spoons were stuck by the handles, at regular intervals all over the front from the ground to the roof; they were filled with oil, and in each there was a waxed wick, as thin as a blade of grass, and now almost burned out.

There was no one near and probably no one within, for the door was bolted outside. Who had been here to light all these little lamps, these evanescent fires only capable of a few minutes of life? For what furtive ceremony had this brief display been prepared? My little guides could not tell me much about it: "It is often done in the evening — when something is to be prayed for."

The lights were dying, dying; soon we should be in the dark once more. But first the little ones were very anxious to show me the

inside of their temple and the idols that dwelt in it. There they stood, shaking the old door, breaking their nails with the iron fastenings; it remained fast; they had to give it up. The tiny lights on the wall were nearly extinct. What was to be done? At least they were determined to show me one god, a very old one that had been cast out on the rubbish heap behind the temple — but even this one they could not find. Ah! I see him or rather guess at him; it must be that frightful gnome squatting on the ground with his back to the wall.

Taking one of the little wicks that was still alight, and holding it in their fingers at a risk of burning them, they lighted up the image from below its chin and I could make out a horrible rudimentary face, two rows of teeth and a forehead and eyes all eaten by wood-lice. By its side fragments of carving lay in the grass looking like the ruins of monsters — legs and jaws.

Still they had something to show me — quick, quick! They were familiars of the spot, that was evident. While the younger one

hunted about in great excitement, his fingers dripping with oil, for any scraps of wick left in the spoons which might be long enough to light again, the elder, stretching himself on tip-toe and pulling himself up, felt about under the beams of the roof. At last he laid his hand on the person he was seeking: a very small monster, also of wood, coarse and much defaced, just distinguishable as an elephant's head on a man's body. They laughed at him to his face, both those little boys, and then made haste to stuff him back into his hole. What could he be doing there — that god; why does he dwell up there under the roof among the birds' nests?

The children had succeeded in fishing out some more little wicks: they would light them one after another on the way, and if we set out at once these would serve to light us through the wood as far as the broad avenue whence we had come. We had hardly any light from these queer little tapers, which they held with timid finger tips and the air of scalded kittens; the glimmer showed us now and then the outline of a

leaf, the under side of a palm-tree, or perhaps some orchid-flower suddenly revealed against the deep green background.

Then, fizz, they flung the last into the grass, having really burnt their fingers that time. And then we were worse off than ever, all our six eyes seeing nothing whatever; my little guides were puzzled and led me astray into impenetrable jungle, till I found my feet in the water and my body wedged in among boughs.

However, we got out of the scrape all the same, and back again to the five straight avenues of the civilized quarter. In these avenues, here and there, large flames were to be seen walking about, incessantly dancing to keep them alive. They are carried by the promenaders who light their way thus in the ancient Indian fashion; carrying a bunch of burning twigs in their hands and waving them as they went with a wide flourish of the arms to revive the flame. These torches passed and crossed in every direction, waving and leaving a fragrant smoke in the air.

There was still at least an hour to spare before the time when my boat was to come to the river mouth to take me up for the night passage back to the ship. There was nothing to do meanwhile. I paid my little guides, needing them no longer; but they insisted on remaining with me to the last out of disinterested good-will and affection. In front of the church, in the middle of the open square, there was a stone bench under a tree — a tree which for a wonder was not a palm-tree, but, by night, looked almost like one of our grand French oaks. There I sat down to wait, my little companions by my side.

All round the open space other trees formed a black screen in which no detail was distinguishable, nothing to characterize any particular region. And the church rising before me, white and silent under the stars, made me think of one of the villages where I used to spend the summer in my childhood. The two little fellows sitting close to me and telling me stories, spoke my own tongue — and many a little peasant expresses himself worse than they did. The grass smelt

sweet, the crickets chirped—just as they do at home through the glorious June nights. — The beautiful starry night, peaceful night, night of mild splendors, wonderful night! — To think that this stone bench where I sat resting in such delicious quiet was in a foreign far-away land, whither the chances of life had brought me for a day, and which I should no doubt never see again. Strangely like another bench, too, where I was wont to sit once upon a time, long, long ago of an evening under the free sky. This rest in the dark, this soft air and scent of grass, how clearly it all brings back the evenings of the early summers of my life, in the country near the woods.

Along the road before us people were coming and going, sweeping over the grass; we could scarcely see them, and could not distinguish their dress at all; but we heard them bid us good-night. Vehicles, too, went by, drawn by oxen led by men on foot; at this hour we could not see that these were queer carriages, and foreign beasts with funny, long faces, and brown large-

eyed Hindoos with ear-rings; no, they might have been carts coming home from the fields; or from the vintage or harvest — I was drifting deeper and deeper into a daydream of home as I sat at the foot of this exotic tree which was to me for the time an oak in Saintonge; overhead, through the black tracery of boughs, I saw the sparkle of a crowd of bright specks which were the stars. And of all the memories piled in a chaos in my mind, the most remote were those which at this moment persist in coming uppermost — those of my childhood's summers.

In those days, very surely, the summers in France were not dull and fleeting as they are now; they lasted longer, and above all they had a serene splendor which is gone from them. The June twilight, as I perfectly remember, had mild languor, and the nights a translucency It was like a mysterious radiance pervading darkness — like this very evening! I had forgotten it all, but here it came back to me — recognized it. Only, in France the glow-wor. lie still among the grass, while here they wei

making giddy circles in the air; it was full of the tiny phosphorescent sparks; that was the only difference, everything else was the same. — Who, oh who can have extinguished those sweet summers of old? How is it that in the course of years I had forgotten the sense of enchantment that they used to give me? Hardly, hardly, now and again, do I come upon some dim trace of them almost effaced from my brain. What a difference between the pale short summers nowadays and the first few I passed on earth which were such an ecstasy to me.

We begin now to hear in the distance a sound something like the roll of drums; and soon after a harsh sort of chant — a kind of hurried chorus; till at last, quite suddenly, through the dark screen of trees, one of the avenues which had been invisible seemed to open to its depths, and was lighted up far away by a quantity of flaming brands waved by human arms.

The singing came nearer; there was a crowd

of people. All the vault of the grove was visible, a colonnade of palms lighted from beneath by the red flare of the torches which the men flourished as they marched. "It is a wedding, Sir," said the little fellows. "A *Tiss* wedding of our religion; we can go and see!"

Go and see? No, I do not care to do that. — It had broken my dream and I owed it a grudge.

It came quite close — passed in front of us. There were fans carried at the end of poles, as in the Egyptian paintings; and great umbrellas which were borne open, though it was night, as a mark of honor, over the bride and bridegroom. There were men and women; costumes fitfully seen in the flickering glare of the torches and the blaze of burning boughs; white muslin flung lightly over polished coppery shoulders, and finely-moulded bosoms scarcely veiled; supple figures bending from slender waists; swathing loin-cloths tightly drawn over rounded limbs; draperies of bright hues mingled with true Indian taste. The couples walked hand-in-hand or with

their arms round each other's waists; they seemed intoxicated with passion, with shouting, too, and music. They were singing with frenzied excitement, their heads thrown back, their mouths wide open. As they came near the piercing song was torture.

No; I did not want to go and see. On the contrary, in spite of their beauty, I would far rather not have seen them at all. My dream had been quite rarely and exquisitely delightful; I was really a child again, and had in my very grasp the forgotten, delicious, indescribable emotions that those summer nights of my first years had given me. There was a yawning gulf between that *Me* of my dream and those passers-by.

I would sit still on that seat and recover all that they had swept away. . . .

Impossible! The musky odor of their presence had tainted the air; their noise had borne it all away.

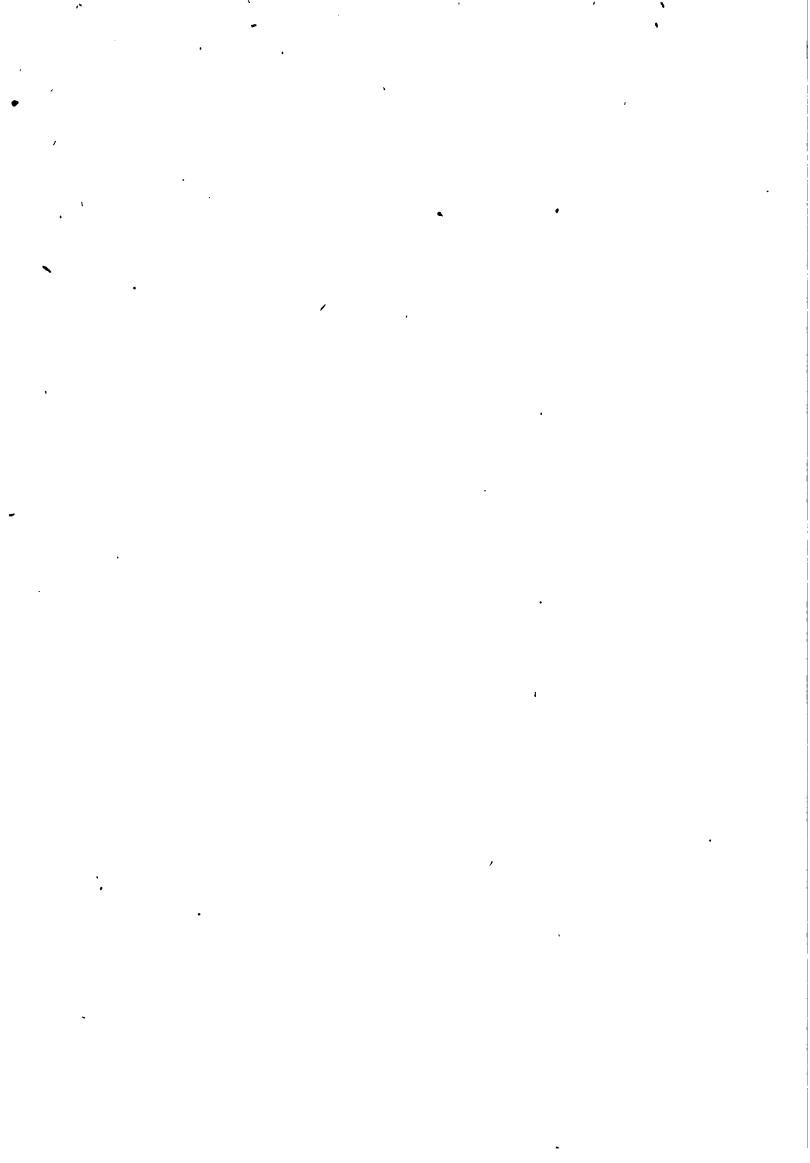
It was flown — that peaceful little dream of home and childhood. What had I been thinking of, indeed? Home was far away; all the fresh

and exquisite joys of the beginnings of life were forever past.

This?—this was India; I was in India—the land of bronze skins and splendid velvety black eyes,—India, hot, lavish, gorgeous!—Well then, I would follow them, I would go and see.

I rose, impatient now to join the procession, which was already out of sight—but we should catch it up, the little boys said, by a path they knew of, a cross-cut, "if we go at once, if we run. . . ."

OBOCK.



OBOCK.

FOR A DAY.

DAY-BREAK in the Gulf of Aden—a region of perpetual heat, and the land of the mirage.

In front of us (arriving from India under an unchanging blue sky) the horizon seemed to be closed in by a heavy curtain of purplish grey, almost black.

To seafaring eyes, accustomed to descry land from afar, there was land beneath it beyond a doubt; without seeing it we knew it was there

from an indescribable opacity and immobility in those clouds. Something more than islands, too; without knowing anything about it beforehand one would suspect it: that which dims the sky by such a stratum of vapor must be massive, wide, immense; — the remote presence, the large outline, the boundless sweep of a continent makes itself felt.

A continent indeed! the most unfathomable and unchangeable of all: Africa.

Nearer and nearer; in the foreground a sort of cliff grew into form and light — level, uniform and monotonous. It was of sand, consolidated and ravined; rose-tinted in the morning sunshine, and bright against the intensely dark background. Beyond, towards the interior, the lowering curtain was still hanging, darker than ever; clouds and mountains mingled there, indistinguishable in the deep gloom; it was a sort of hazy chaos where all the storms of earth might be brewing. My eye was led along the shimmering coast-line which constitutes the principal stratum of the land; it stretched away till lost to

sight, always the same: melancholy, barren, dead; only to note its length made one feel the immensity of this desert continent where space is no object; it gave me a distinct sense of Africa — vast, torrid, and desolate.

Here and there a few clumps of bushes came into view as we approached: shrubs growing like round bunches or little parasols. The verdure was pallid, glaucous — as though the excess of sunlight had faded it, and the foliage looked quite transparent, it was so sparse and light.

The country we had reached was the land of the Dankalis, tributary to the Sultan of Tajoura; and making our way a short distance along shore we were presently to arrive at Obock, a French settlement.

Ere long it was in sight through a luminous mist incessantly quivering with tremulous mirage. First we saw a large, new building with a verandah, like the houses at Aden, visible from afar in white contrast to the sand. Built by the company which supplies coal to the vessels that pass by, it stands unique and startles one by its look

of comfort and security in this accursed land. Then an enclosure within walls of dried earth and in the midst the shabby remains of a tower; these already looked like very ancient ruins — of some demolished mosque perhaps — and they had not been in existence three years! This building was the first home of the French Resident, built in the style of an Arab dungeon. One fine night the year before, it had fallen in under an inundation that suddenly swept down on it from the Abyssinian hills.

Next, a little village, a native hamlet, came in view, of the same rusty-grey color as the sand and soil, baked by the same sun. The hovels, roofed with straw matting and very low, looked like the dens of beasts. We could descry from afar four or five figures like queer dolls, in gaudy costumes, red, orange or white, and with bare, long black arms; and some others quite naked — monkey-like creatures these.

At last, in the distance on a sort of headland, were some very new little houses with red tiled roofs; ten or a dozen in all, symmetrically ar-

ranged, and suggesting a factory or workman's suburb. This was official Obock, the government and garrison of Obock, squalidly out of keeping with the majestic desolation of its surroundings.

We anchored in very calm water in what is known as the harbor of Obock. And it really is a harbor, secure enough from the ocean-swell, but this does not appear at first sight, for the coral barrier which shelters it is level with the waves, and but faintly marked by a green streak on the wide expanse of motionless blue.

We were on one of the hottest spots on earth. It was as yet hardly eight in the morning and our cheeks and temples already smarted with a scorching sensation as though we were too close to a fierce fire, for from the sea and the nearer sands, which were dazzling, there was a terrific reflection of sunshine. But it was a dry heat, almost healthy by comparison with the cauldron-like, simmering damp that we had left behind us in Cochin China and Annam; the winds that blow here, from whatever quarter they come, have passed over the wide waterless deserts of

Africa or Arabia; the atmosphere is pure and, so to speak, refreshing.

A short pull in a boat over a luke-warm sea above a perfect garden of madrepores, and we set foot on land, on a rose-hued soil that burnt us; then, going along a sandy path, we found ourselves on a sort of esplanade overlooking the sea, and in the midst of European Obock.

The Governor's house is in the centre; a flight of terrace-steps of dried mud — a sort of dingy concrete — leads up to it with a view to lending it an imposing aspect, an air of majesty, for the reception of black chiefs. At the top, Government House, with walls of wooden lattice-bars, rises with all the impressive dignity of a hen-coop; every breeze can blow through it. Opposite, four little cannon are ranged — a mere farce of a battery — and the French flag droops from the top of a staff. The other houses, built in the same airy fashion, stand symmetrically on either side of this magnificent residence and shelter the three or four score gunners and marines which constitute the garrison of Obock. A quite

childish stockade forms the defense of this European quarter; it is constructed of the umbrella-shaped shrubs — the only growth of the soil — laid on the ground side by side, just as they are, like a hedge of large thorny bouquets.

Within this enclosure, brisk and stirring soldiers were moving about, busied at the moment in preparing their morning meal. These were no longer the haggard pale faces we had been wont to see in Cochin China and at Tonquin. The men looked in good condition; they all wore white helmets, and little else but a sleeveless vest, and had a look of health under their sunburnt tan; their bare arms were as brown as those of a Bedouin Arab. We saw them cooking, washing real salads, real vegetables — amazing in this land of unvaried drought. It seemed that they had succeeded in making a garden which they kept watered, and where all these things grew. Little mulatto brats were skipping about very happily; little cross-bred monkeys, half Arab or Hindoo, with long eyes, thin lips and pretty profiles. Obock looked almost alive.

A sandy ravine divides this military settlement from the African village which seemed to us to have increased considerably during the past year. But where do these folks come from? By what roads, across what wildernesses had they travelled to gather here, when for so many miles round there is nothing but uninhabitable desert?

It is certain that a microscopic centre of trade is struggling into existence at Obock. It had already what might be called a little street, lying before us for some distance, bathed in light, consumed by sunshine, between a score or so of huts or tents. Nay, at the near end of it there was a little house with real walls of Moorish architecture, and a *bar* for the sale of absinthe, kept for the benefit of our soldiers by the only European settler. The remainder consisted as yet of native hovels, so low that we could reach the top of the roof with our hands. They are constructed on props of gnarled wood looking for all the world like old bones, or deformed and shrivelled legs — these are branches of the same kind of shrub as supplied the Governor's stockade — and covered

with straw mats sewn together like patched rags. The soil was trodden and hard, all mixed with dust-heap fragments which were rotting or desiccating. The air swarmed with legions of flies.

Two young black women came forward to meet us; they had thin lips and a false, evil smile —"*Madames Dankalies*" a little negro told us as he went by, by way of introduction. They were anxious to sell us the freshly flayed-off skin of a panther which one of them carried over her shoulder. They had very singular heads, these "*Madames Dankalies,*" and made savage mocking grimaces at us with their brilliant rolling eyes. Their skin glistened in the sun like ebony rubbed with oil.

The houses of this street were all little cafés or little shops. Under each of those matting roofs there was something to drink or to barter. And the whole place had a look of impromptu, of a caravansary, or an African fair just beginning: Cafés on the Arab pattern, where coffee was served in tiny cups brought from Aden, while we

smoked into huge copper narghilés of monumental shapes; where pink water-melons and sugar-cane were being eaten: Shops in tiny miniature, all the stock in trade being displayed on one table with divisions — a little rice in one compartment, a little salt in another; a little cinnamon, a little saffron, a little ginger; and little piles of strange-looking seeds and unknown roots. The same merchant sells cotton turbans, Egyptian dresses and Ethiopian loin-cloths.

Buyers and sellers — in all two hundred souls at most — were of every variety of race: Negroes, perfectly black, woolly haired and shining, bare to the waist and splendidly erect; Arabs with large stained eyes, dressed in white, light green or gold color, wild-looking, tall and slender, with throats like cranes', faces like goats', and flowing hair bleached to a rusty white, contrasting with their shoulders like a shaggy sheep-skin on bronze; Dankalis wearing necklaces of shells; and two or three wandering Malabars bringing a reminiscence of not-too-remote India.

Deep within those little straw nests which are

cafés these men sat higgledy-piggledy, to gamble and drink. Some played with dice; others had chosen a simpler game, native to the desert, which consists in tracing certain combinations of lines on the sandy earth. Two perfectly nude negroes, decked with amulets, were playing a game of piquet with extreme vehemence, dashing their trump cards on the table; and they had real cards too, which looked strange in the hands of these savages.

Next to them three others were engaged in a no less singular game of dominoes. These were of the slender, tawny race who bleach their hair; theirs was at the moment coated with the detergent paste which they would remove next day to make themselves handsome; it was like a kind of mortar, forming a thick crust on their heads or it might be lime such as mummies are encased in.

The mats above these gamblers scarcely afford due shade; the sun, the fearful sun, pierced them through a myriad of holes like a sieve, and all round these oven-like dens, as far as the eye

could see, everything was ablaze, fiercely burning all over the immense continent.

We were soon at the end of this village. Then we came on four little cabins, the last of all, somewhat apart from the rest, on a sand-hill; these were the headquarters of the *free-lances* of Obock. Eight or ten of these ladies were visible and handsome enough: Abyssinians, Somalis, or Dankalies, sitting under their matting roofs. Dressed in long red gowns, their wrists and ankles loaded with heavy silver bangles, they keep a look-out with a half-mystical, half-wild expression; very self-important in their black immodesty, regarding their business as a sacred function, and with a fine, tiger-like smile—in response to a silver coin,—for the French soldier, the passing Arab or the Negro with his fetiches.

Beyond this point indeed! — Here began the desert, remote, shimmering, full of mirages, and awful with its smiting sun. There was yet in a hollow of the soil one speck of green: the garden, the famous garden, kept up by the soldiers with infinite care and watering. That and nothing

more. Before us lay the desert — void, marked on some maps as the Plateau of Gazelles.

Over the horizon on the land side the curtain of clouds and hills still formed a limit to the desolate expanse on which we stood. Those were no doubt very high mountains of which the piled masses were outlined in the distance, more murky and less distinguishable from the sky in proportion as they went farther away in that interior region unvisited by white men. And this background, which, all that day, never lost its gloom, enhanced the golden glare of the sand and the dazzling brightness of the foreground.

As we advanced over the Gazelle-plateau, little Obock, with its three houses and red tiles, sank behind us, was effaced, wiped out; the effulgent and desolate plain steadily grew wider around us. The sea, too, was hidden from view; and yet the ground was still strewn with branches of coral and water-worn shells (to be accurate a pink-lipped Strombus); a submarine sea-bottom would seem to have been brought up to the broad sunshine by a tremendous thrust

from below. Here and there where a few tufts of scorched grass or weird-looking plants of a very pale green, as if the sun had extracted all their color. And then at intervals as if dotted about an informal garden, the same sickly-looking umbrella-shaped shrubs with scanty, meagre foliage as we had seen on coming in from the sea: a sort of thorny parasols, leaning to right or left on their slender trunks. These are a kind of melancholy mimosa, the everlasting mimosa of the African wildernesses, the same through all the barren regions of the interior — to the furthest rim, beyond the great deserts, on the sands of Senegal: a mimosa which yields nothing, is of no use, does not even cast a shade.

What men can such a land feed? Evidently such as those fragile, tawny creatures, with a stealthy look and a wild eye, which were pointed out to us just now in the village of Obock as being Dankali natives. They match their country well; they wander about it, a scattered handful, amid sands or thickets, and the constant heat seems to have desiccated them, fined down their

bodies like those of gazelles. We met a few coming down from the interior with light packs on their shoulders. And another party of "*Madames Dankalies*" stopped in front of us like the former pair, with the same treacherous smiles, showing white teeth: these again had a panther skin which they displayed for sale.

At wide intervals over the plain, groups were encamped, squatting on the scorching soil. One must stoop low to crawl like an animal into their huts. There they sat surrounded by their asses, their water-skins, fetiches, swords and vicious-looking knives; motionless, idle, having wandered in the direction of Obock to trade or perhaps only to stare. Their way of receiving us was at once alarmed and alarming, and our interview was marked by amazement and distrust on both sides.

By this time it was eleven o'clock. Everything glistened and quivered with mirage and the lambent reflection from the sand; a blinding glare came up from the ground. We saw at a distance two or three patches of very white ob-

jects, conspicuous against the orange-colored plain. Was it snow that had fallen by some miracle? or chalk or perhaps stones? No — for they moved. — Men there, in burrows? — or beasts — gazelles — horses? They looked like anything you please, white elephants even; for we had lost all accurate sense of distance and proportion; everything a little way off was distorted and changeful. — Sheep; neither more nor less. Queer-looking sheep, exceedingly white with very black heads and broad fan-shaped tails, like Egyptian sheep. Scanty flocks sent out by day to crop I know not what desert herbs, and hastily driven home to Obock at sun-down before the beasts of prey are abroad. These were the last living creatures we saw as we made our way onwards across the vast plain.

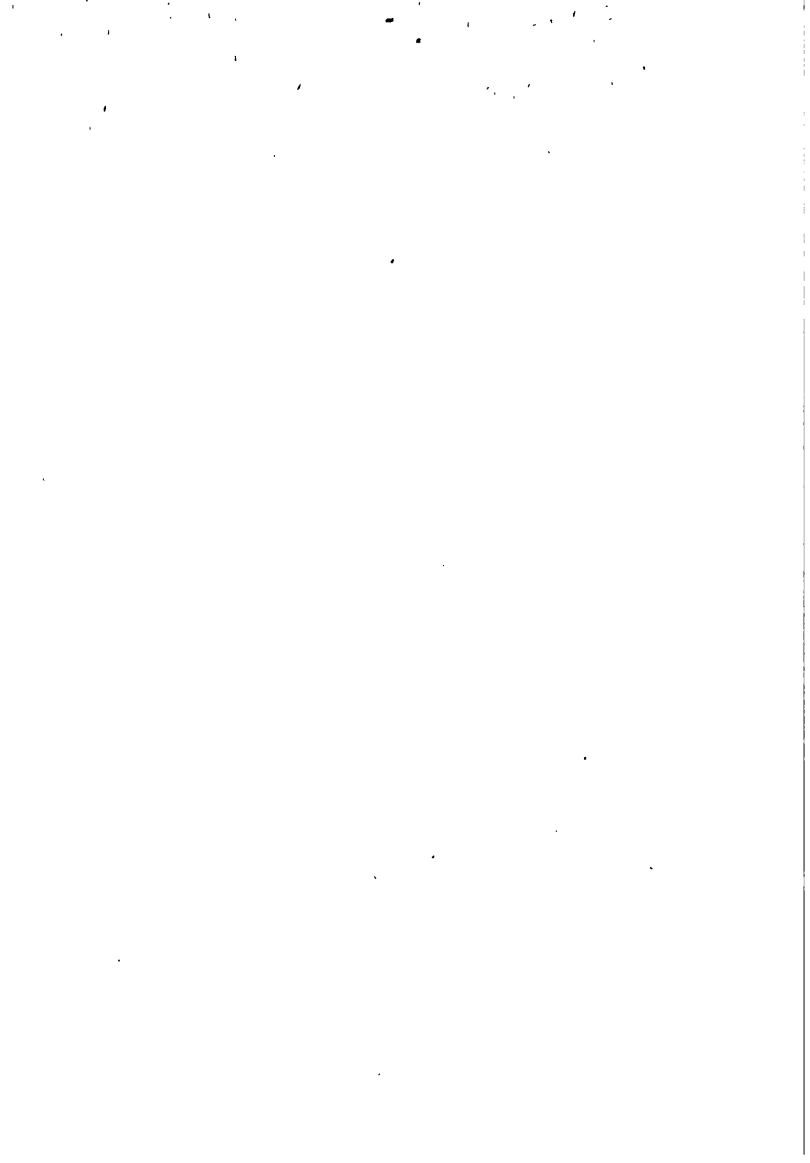
Soon it is noon. At this hour white men never stir out of doors. It needs such rashness as ours, who, having come hither, are bent on seeing. Our shoulders under our white linen clothing sting with a feeling of being actually burnt. As we go we cast no shadow, no more

than a circular spot under our feet: the sun is exactly overhead, and its fierce rays fall vertically to the ground. Not a sign of life; everything is stricken by the heat; not even the music of insect-creatures, which in other parts of the world is an unfailing hum of life during summer noons. But the whole plain palpitates more and more, throbs, oscillates, with an incessant, rapid, fevered motion which is perfectly noiseless, like that of imaginary, visionary objects. Over all the distance lies an indefinable something which looks like swirling water, or a film of gauze swelled by the wind — which has no existence, and is nothing but a mirage. The more distant mimosas assume strange shapes, lengthening, widening, repeated up-side down as though they were reflected in that illusory lake which overflows the sand without a murmur, and is rippled though there is not a breath stirring in the air. And it is all dazzling, shimmering, fatiguing; the imagination is distressed by the melancholy magnificence of the desert.

And still far away the dark hills lie under

lowering clouds. On that side the scene closes in ominous, undefined desolation; the sight loses itself in those black depths; behind that darkness and storm lies the heart of Africa.

THE
DEATH OF ADMIRAL COURBET.



THE DEATH OF ADMIRAL COURBET.

I.

ON BOARD THE *TRIOMPHANTE*,
MA-KUNG ROADS.

Friday, 12th June, 1885.

WHAT I myself saw of this death was little enough; to write of it is almost to slight the disaster by loading it with petty details.

Yesterday at seven in the evening, while we were at table and dining in fairly good spirits, we heard a boat pulling up alongside and the oarsmen explained that they had come from the *Bayard* with a letter for our Captain. For a moment we were impatiently curious, for the matter must

be important: Peace signed? or war broken out again? — Nothing of that kind, but an ominous and unexpected thing: The Admiral was dying, perhaps dead at this very moment. The boat was going round the fleet to carry the news.

It ran like a fired train to the forecastle where the sailors were singing. They were in the very act of rehearsing a grand theatrical performance for Sunday, with music and choruses; in an instant all was silent and the singers slunk away — a sort of leaden silence, which fell on all without any word of command.

People at home can hardly understand these things — neither the consternation caused by this news, nor the influence the Admiral had in the fleet. They will read his praises in the papers, more or less well written; a statue of him will be put up somewhere; forgetful France will talk of him for a week; but no one will in the least understand what we sailors have lost in him. And I am fain to believe that nothing will do him greater honor than that spontaneous hush, and the dejection of his ships' crews.

No, we had never dreamed that his end could be like this.

The boat passed on, from ship to ship, announcing the disaster. Our captain had his launch out at once to go to the *Bayard;* then we waited in the ward-room, speaking in undertones. At eight o'clock I went on watch: a murky night; the awnings secured on account of the fine rain which had been falling since sunset; a moist, stormy, oppressive heat.

The signal lights were run up against the captain's return; I called up the mate of the watch — who happened to be Yves, our fate having thrown us together once more on the same ship — and we began pacing up and down side by side, the hundred monotonous steps of a night-watch. Across the water, through the dark mist, we could see the lights of the fleet mimicking the lamps of a great town — a wandering town, settled down these two months past on this speck in the China seas. Rain fell slowly and steadily without a breath of wind; it was like one of our dismal Breton nights — but for the

heat, of course, the suffocating unhealthy heat which weighed on us like lead. And all through this still evening, in the midst of this stagnant calm, the warrior-sailor was struggling with death in a little ship's cabin — with death noiseless and inglorious.

While he was departing we were talking of him.

His fame has echoed widely through the world — so widely that to speak of it now is hackneyed commonplace. It will I hope outlive him a little while, for it is universally known.

But those who did not know him well cannot know how entirely he was a man of feeling. The lives of all these soldiers and sailors, which during the last two years France — so far away — has seemed to hold so cheap, were very precious to him, the really great leader of men. He deeply grudged French blood. His battles were planned and worked out beforehand with such rare precision that the result, often quite astounding, was achieved with the loss of few, very few of our men; and afterwards, when the action was over

which he had sternly led with uncompromising determination, he was another man at once, very tender, going the round of the wounded with a kind sad smile; he would see every man of them to the very lowest and grasp them by the hand; and they died all the happier, comforted by his visit.

The Captain's launch did not return, and as we kept our eyes on the *Bayard's* lights through the darkness and the drizzle, still we talked of the Admiral.

Not more than five or six days since, he was here, on this very deck, looking on at the launching of some torpedoes; I remember his shaking hands with me — for the last time — with the simplest and most delightful benignity. And that day we were rejoicing to see him so brisk, in such good spirits, so well recovered from his past fatigues. At high noon, in the full sunshine, he had gone off in the little torpedo-boat to steam about the unbroken mirror of the road-

stead heated to white-heat. To be sure we moved so swiftly, cutting through the stagnant air and fanned by our own rapid course, that we breathed easily and it was almost pleasant. — I can see him still, sitting two yards away from me; his stalwart frame relieved against the blue glare; as usual very precisely dressed, with his coat buttoned to the chin — exactly as if he were in France, and doe-skin gloves; watching the long, steel, fish-like creatures which shot hither and thither at his command.

I myself, indeed, was enthralled by the Admiral's influence; I felt it less obscurely perhaps than the sailors, but quite as strongly; and like a thousand other no-bodies, I should have followed him no matter where, with absolute devotion. I bowed to this grand incarnation of Duty — unintelligible to our generation of very small men. He was to me the embodiment of all the sublime old words: Honor, heroism, self-devotion, patriotism. But the man who feels worthy to write his funeral eulogy must strive to infuse fresh vitality into these great words of a past age, for

they are made so commonplace now by being applied to all sorts of folks who have never known what it is to risk their lives, that they have lost any adequately lofty meaning when we speak of him.

The Admiral had his own secret of being at once so austere and so much beloved. How did he achieve it? — for he was after all, a stern master, as unsparing of others as of himself, and never showing his exquisite tenderness or deepest feelings but to the dying. Never admitting any discussion of his orders, though perfectly courteous he had a short, imperious manner of his own in giving them: "You understand, my good fellow? — Then go." — A nod, a shake of the hand, — and one *went*, — anywhere, everywhere, at the head of the merest handful of men; went confidently since the plan was his, and came back triumphant even when the enterprise was most terribly difficult and perilous.

The thousands of men who were here to fight had all and each given their life into the Chief's hands, and thought it only natural that he should

dispose of it when he needed it. He was exacting to the last degree; and yet no one grumbled at him — never, never; neither soldiers nor sailors; — not even that motley troop of "Zephyrs," Arabs, and Annamese which was under his orders.

Oh that island of Formosa! Who would dare to tell the story of the epic deeds done there and write the martyrology of those who died? It all took place amid sufferings of every kind: storms, chills and heat; privations, dysentery, fevers. Still these men did not murmur; sometimes they had neither eaten nor slept — after some fearful toil under Chinese fire, and had come in quite worn out, their clothes soaked with the incessant rain of Keelung — and he curtly ordered them out again — for need must. Well! They set their teeth and pulled themselves together to obey him, and went out; then they succumbed — and all for a barren enterprise, while France, fretting over petty election squabbles and domestic matters, scarcely turned her languid eyes to see them die. Who, outside the families of our

seamen, who, I say, in all France lost an hour's sleep or amusement through that hapless and glorious Formosa squadron?

At anxious moments — and they were many — in the midst of actions of which the issue seemed doubtful, as soon as he appeared — he, the Admiral, or only his flag even, at a distance: "Ah, there he is," they would say. "That is all we want; things are sure to end well now he is here!" And in fact things always did end well; ended in the very way which he alone had planned and foreseen — for he kept his schemes very secret.

I do not believe that among all our foes in Europe his match can be found as an admiral in command; nay, not one to be compared with him. Perhaps France would have done well to reserve him with care for some great national struggle, instead of letting him wear himself out and die here.

A sound of oars — a boat is coming up. The men on watch hail her.

"Alongside, Captain!"

A group collects close to the captain's gangway, though it is not strictly regular: officers and sailors, alike anxious to know, to catch the first words the Captain may utter. He tells us that the Admiral still breathes feebly, but that he is certainly dying; his eyes are closed, he has not spoken since six o'clock that afternoon, he lies with his hands folded over his breast and already cold; very calm, probably not in any pain.

What is he dying of? no one quite knows. Of exhaustion and an overworked brain. At first there was a rumor that the nameless epidemic which we hardly dare speak about had clutched him, too,—the sickness which every day snatches away some from among us. But now they say no — it is not that. The two lingering diseases of this Yellow land — dysentery and liver complaint which have hung about him for months have suddenly knocked him over, it would seem. And something else is killing him: over-work, heart-sickness, too, and disappointments of every

kind, in face of the worthless results which his brilliant victories have wrested for France.

Human aid can do no more for him; not even warm his limbs which are growing rigid and bathed in cold sweat in spite of the heat of this stormy night. A boat is to come from the *Bayard*—and must come soon—to tell us when all is over.

As soon as the Captain's boat was hoisted, Yves and I, who were still on watch, again paced the deck. While waiting for the boat from the *Bayard* we went over the list of our friends among those who had fallen in this war; and it was a long one, including the many poor fellows who lived and died inglorious in their blue jackets.

The man we both most deeply regretted was Henri Dehorter, a lieutenant who was mortally wounded at Tamsui, a friend of mine of fifteen years standing, and a protector as well as friend of Yves' whom I had recommended to his good-

will in my own absence. Alas! and what a kind good fellow he was, and so lively, and happy-tempered, and delightful in every way.

When that Chinese bullet lodged in his breast I was in France, and his last letter, so full of high spirits, reached me after his death.

"Another one," said Yves, "whom every one of us loved! I can see him now, with the kind, jolly smile he gave me the very morning of that landing when I had set him on shore with his men in the steam launch, and called out to him: "Good-luck to you, Captain!" — And at two o'clock he was brought back in the boat with a shot through his breast. A little later and our wounded were being brought off in boat-loads. Oh Lord! what a day that was!

"And our Chinese prisoners stood grinning to see them lifted on board. The Captain gave prompt orders to have them secured in the hold or the sailors would have pitched them all overboard.

"Poor Dehorter; they made him up a bed here on deck, between those two stanchions, with

a sail stretched round it to make a little room of it. Next morning, when we were cleaning up I heard him calling me through the canvas: 'Yves.' It was to shake hands with me. — And I remember how burning hot his was.

"He died there, just there, in the smoking cabin where they laid him the last few days.

"They placed his body in a lead coffin on board the steam launch for our return passage to Cochin-China. One rough night the sea nearly washed it overboard."

And I, in my turn, told Yves of the visit I had paid to his newly-made grave as we passed Saïgon, which Yves had not yet seen.

I and some other officers, friends of mine, had agreed to meet at six in the evening at the gate of the cemetery to visit this grave together; it was at some distance from the town, and though my hired carriage went at a good pace I was too late for my appointment — I had been driven to death all day, having but that one for a thousand things. There I was alone in the immense burial ground where I had never been before, at

sunset, seeking the tomb with the vaguest directions.

It is a world in itself that cemetery at Saïgon, more extensive than the graveyard of a French town of a hundred thousand souls; that alone tells a tale of this furthest Eastern land. How many, many crosses stand there, crosses, or merely mounds of earth, grassy and weed-grown. A red soil; very green trees, gilded that evening by the last gleams of sunlight; strange tropical flowers; and numbers of large butterflies, like those on Chinese screens, flitted over this field of the dead. How sad they seemed, these exotic, far-away things!

I feared I might fail to find the tomb. To quit this land on the morrow without having seen it would have distressed me terribly. At last I saw my fellow-officers, standing in a group behind some shrubs, their heads bare and gazing at the ground. It was there: A large slab of granite, very plain but which will endure some little time—his name, *Henri Dehorter*, and that of the battle in which he gloriously met his death.

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Some faded wreaths lay there; and we in our hurry had never thought of bringing him fresh ones.

*   *   *   *

Then we spoke of the Admiral again, whose death-struggle was a presence possessing our minds:

"And," said Yves, "he never took any care of himself; every evening, every evening away to land, into the hospital, at the risk of catching the infection!"

It was true; till these last few days he had faithfully kept up his visits to the sick. Only last week he had left his ship in all haste, to go in a torrent of rain as far as the marine infantry quarters, and take leave of a poor lieutenant who had been wounded at his side at Son-Tay, and who was attacked by the nameless *sickness* and died that night. On Monday, again, he had been seen at nine in the morning, with his head bared to the sun, following the funeral of another officer who had died of the same disease. Bare-

headed, buttoned up, always and every where austerely correct, he had passed along the deserted alleys of Ma-Kung accompanying the little mourning procession to the fields of rice and maize where we had improvised a cemetery.

During the last two months this squalid Ma-Kung had seen many a French funeral threading its way through the streets. At the beginning particularly, when the ruins were still fresh, the Buddhas prone on the open places, the houses freshly gutted and still reeking of fire and dead Chinamen, the *sickness* had made itself at home in the great temple we had turned into a hospital; and day after day the little processions came out: a score or so of men with arms reversed, trampling over the rubbish, the broken china, the tatters of silk, the fragments of lanterns and umbrellas. In a coffin hastily knocked together out of old gilt panelling some obscure soldier was being borne, without priest or prayer, to his sleep in the maize-plot where we had already planted many a little black cross. We, as we watched them go by, only pitied them for having met so

sordid a death,—and now our Admiral, with all his glory, was ending much as they had ended.

The sailors on watch, who could not be so indifferent as to drop asleep again on the deck, were hanging about in twos and threes, and we could hear that they, too, were talking of *him*: "At any rate we have not yet heard that he is *deceased*, (a word they habitually used, thinking it more respectful than dead) and while there is life, don't you know. . . . ?"

They would not believe it; their minds, too, refused to admit the notion that the Admiral could *go out* like this.

At about eleven the second mate came up to walk the deck with us; differences of rank seemed to be effaced that night in our common anticipation of sorrow, and every one talked to every one else without distinction. He, this worthy mate, felt a pressing impulse to refresh his memory and tell the tale of the great fight at Foo-Choo; after repeating the details he had told a hundred times before, he hit upon this image to describe the fearful carnage: "All at once you saw the sea

covered with thousands of floating things, as if some one had emptied out a sack of feathers — only they were dead bodies."

No news having come by the time our watch was over, we had almost begun to hope again from the end being so long delayed. But at a few minutes past midnight, when I had gone down to my own cabin, I heard the splashing of a steam launch coming alongside, and I knew what tidings it brought. I leaned out of my port-hole to hear what was said. A voice — that of the man on the look-out — asked: "Well?" and another from the launch said "He is *deceased.*"

I fell asleep with these words in my ear, and in my dreams I saw the Admiral in a weird medley of battle and strange funerals.

We learned next day how peacefully, almost tenderly, death had come upon him, like a sleep. After six in the evening he had neither stirred nor moaned. Every means having failed to restore a little warmth to his limbs, fast growing cold, they had left him in peace. The officers of

the *Bayard* were standing about him, almost as motionless as himself; two sailors were waving fans over his head. Shortly before ten, hearing him breathe no more, they held his eyeglass, which was still about his neck, to his lips, and then a hand-mirror — no mist on the glass, not a trace of breath. The chief surgeon said in a low voice:

"Gentlemen, the Admiral is dead."

At the first moment no one moved, not a tear was shed; then, after a pause of some minutes, the silence was broken by a sob.

II.

THIS morning, Friday, still overcast, and a fine drizzling rain like that of Brittany. The yards are set apeak, the flags at half-mast, and minute guns are fired at intervals of half an hour. It is strangely like the often gloomy sky and all the ceremonial observed on Good Friday in French sea-ports. This broad roadstead of Pescadores is even somewhat like certain parts of our coast, with a low treeless shore cut out into square fields of rice and maize. Numbers of

sampans with Chinese on board, more or less busied in fishing, are sailing to and fro on the calm waters, prowling round the *Bayard*, already scenting our misfortune. And ere long, beyond a doubt, all China will know that the man before whom she quailed is dead.

At nine o'clock, boats put off from every ship of the squadron, gigs and pinnaces, carrying the captains and superior officers to a private mass to be said on board the *Bayard* on behalf of the Admiral. The weather was still dismal and cloudy, the sea quite calm; the boats ran silently alongside and soon the good ship was crowded with officers. The poor old *Bayard*, once so spick and span, is now shabby and battered, the worse for the wear of a glorious expedition; loaded with cases, bales and barrels — victualling for the troops.

The crowd that came on board was not the crowd of an ordinary mass for the dead; there were no calm but careless faces, nor the flow of whispered conversation, nor the hum of indifference. Among the officers who were gathered

there, many who had been comrades at some former period and who had not met for a long time grasped hands here with hardly a word. Most of the men present stood motionless in their places, still lost in the dull surprise of this death.

The altar for mass was arranged between decks and we had to stand close, in a sort of narrow passage under the iron deck, which made it terrifically hot. Behind the officers the ship's crew crowded in, without a sound, in equal consternation, and equally speechless; a few Chinese heads here and there — prisoners or interpreters — reminding us how far we were from home.

Mass was said in low tones amid perfect stillness. When it was over every one went round behind the altar — as in a graveyard to condole with the survivors — to pay his respects to the Captain in command and the chief staff-officer. Both were in tears.

There was no ceremonial, no oration, no music; only men who came and passed, stricken, finding no words. So far as external things went there was nothing even to suggest the presence of

death. Only two wreaths lay at the foot of the poop, whatever was to be found greenest in this barren land: some bamboo and tamarind leaves, with sprays from the scarce pagoda-trees, and among them a few blossoms of the pink cape-periwinkle, the only flower of Ma-Kung.

We all would fain have seen his face once more; but it was impossible to lay him out then; in that climate death is too immediately followed by terrible changes, against which precautions must instantly be taken. The body of our Chief was at that moment below, in the hands of the surgeons who were occupied in their melancholy task. So all was over; we took leave; one by one the boats came alongside and disappeared.

At noon the *Duguay-Trouin* set sail to carry the news to Hong-Kong whence it will have been telegraphed to France.

At three in the afternoon, the doctors having finished their work, the Captains and officers returned to the *Bayard* and were admitted to gaze for the last time on the Admiral.

They had laid him on the floor in his state-

room, wrapped in a shroud—a long white streak on the crimson carpet. We stepped in on tip-toe to look for a moment at the pale calm features, hardly changed; the high brow under which so many ideas, so many wonderful schemes carefully thought out, planned and classified, were now for ever extinct. When the officers withdrew there was another group waiting at the door, begging to be admitted; the warrant officers who were anxious to see him.

And after them a larger crowd besieged the door: the seamen, waiting their turn and regarding it as their right.

All the crew had to be admitted in single file to march through the room. Slowly they came on, hundreds of youthful faces with a look of consternation, each one saluting the noble dead with awe-stricken reverence.

Then they placed him in his leaden coffin with its camphor-wood casing bound with iron.

III.

ON Saturday, June 13th, was the "*mise en Chapelle*" (the preliminary consecration of the body) with military honors.

The first idea was to convey the Admiral's body to Ma-Kung, and place it in one of the great temples where there would be more room for the troops; but on second thought it seemed better that he should not rest, even for a few hours, on Chinese soil, still less in a Buddhist temple; so they left him on board his ship, which is French ground.

At Ma-Kung a little before seven in the morning, the dwindled remnant of our little corps of occupation were drawn up under the forts facing the sea, their guns loaded ready to fire a musketry salute. The weather was just like that of the previous day, grey and lowering; the launches and long boats brought the officers of the fleet on board the *Bayard*, but in full uniform and wearing their swords. Officers of artillery and infantry arrived, too, and detachments of men from every ship in the roads and from every regiment of the army on service at Ma-Kung.

On board the *Bayard* the crowd was closely packed, but in perfect silence. There, on the deck, lay the Admiral's coffin, waiting under its black pall at the entrance of the *chapel* into which it was to be escorted by the priest.

We pressed as close as possible in the narrow ways amidships, under that oppressive iron casing. In such ominously gloomy weather everything one touches, whether of wood or iron, is hot and moist — dewy, as though even inanimate things were sweating; and this stewing vapor,

itself difficult to breathe, was full of the fragrance of such things as are used for the dead.

The *chapel* was to the last degree simple: two Admiral's flags (tricolor flags with three white stars) formed a sort of tent under the poop; there were two ranks of sailors under arms, two rows of tapers — nothing more. They had even hung a sort of shroud over the motto of *Bayard*, which *he* might so well have taken for his own: "*Sans reproche, sans peur.*" As it happened an ebony monster — the spoil of some pagoda — which had been placed on the rail of the poop, was exactly over the head of the coffin above this impromptu *chapel*, sitting up like a great black dog. It looked as though it were laughing us to scorn with that intensity of vicious malignity which is the inimitable secret of Chinese art. They might have thought of covering this up rather than the motto, — though it was a striking enough image of China looking on at these obsequies.

The religious ceremony was brief and the priest's voice low. At intervals of a minute came

the rattle, more or less distant, of platoon firing from the ships or from the forts; first on one side then on the other — a sharp sound like the rending of something. And between whiles, through the stillness, a tiny bird was heard singing persistently, perched on one of the halyards. The sailors made apologies for its presence: It had been there since the day before; it was in vain that they had driven it away and shaken the rope, it had come back again and again.

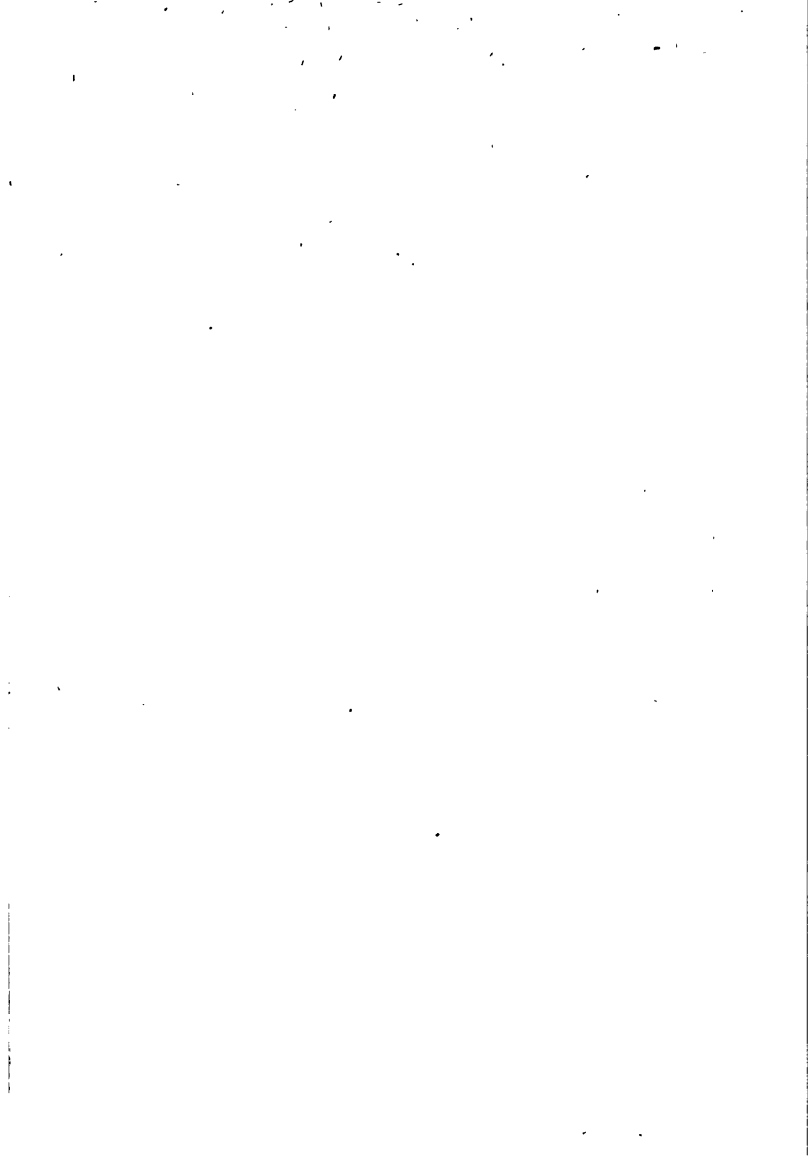
Close at hand the *Bayard's* cannon fired the last salute in sullen thunder, and then Admiral Lespès, who had taken the command of the fleet the day before, came to speak a few words of farewell over our dead Chief. He did it with such painful tremor, and such an evident disposition to weep, that the tears rose to our eyes only to hear him. Even those who set themselves with the most strenuous effort to seem unmoved, broke down completely.

After this all was over but the march past of

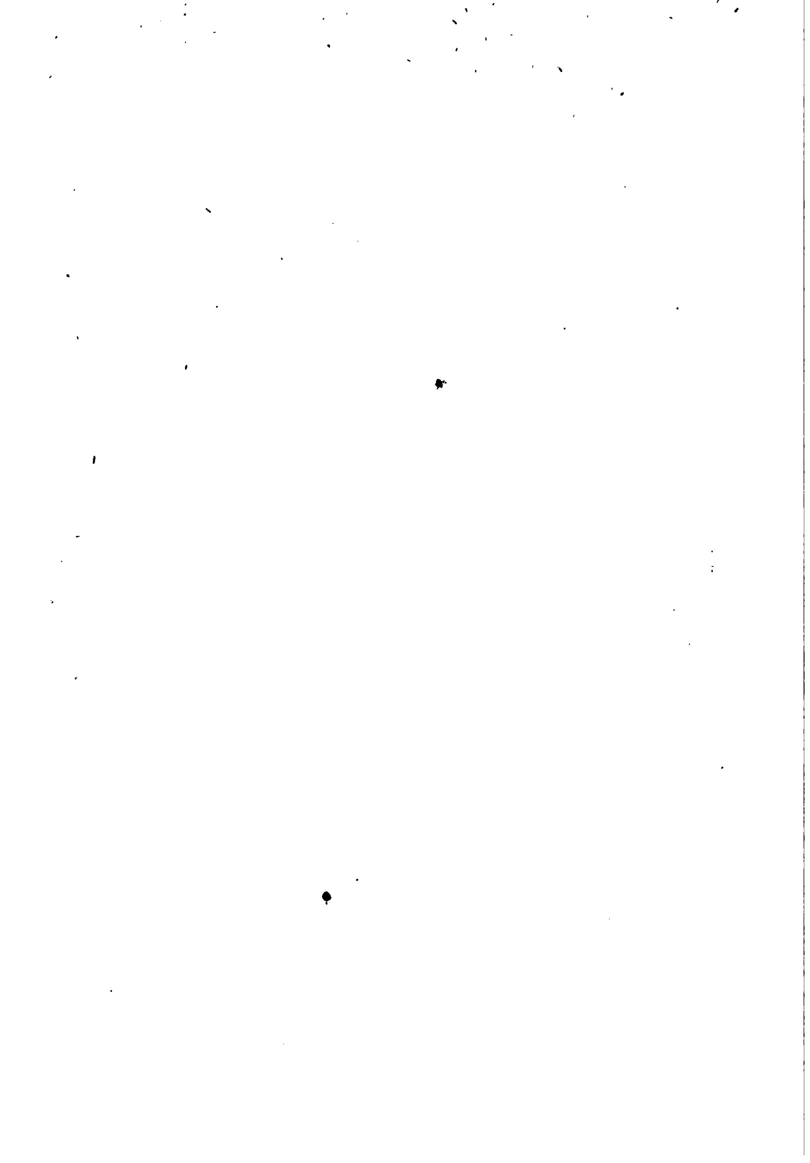
the soldiers, and that was the end of all: every one came away and dispersed in the various boats; the yards were squared and the flags all run up again. Things fell into their places; everything looked the same as usual: even the sun came out again. Mourning was over; oblivion had almost begun.

I had never before seen sailors weep when under arms, — and they all had tears on their faces as they stood there forming a guard of honor.

It was a very humble affair, that little chapel; very humble, too, was the little black pall; and when the Admiral's body reaches France it will be treated with far more splendid pomp, beyond a doubt, than here in this Bay of Exile. But what can they do, what can be devised in his honor, that will be finer or rarer than those tears?



SUBTERRANEAN TEMPLES.



SUBTERRANEAN TEMPLES.

As I write I see in my mind's eye a large gloomy lagoon — yonder in Annam. I remember sailing about there all day once in a Mandarin's junk. The heat was oppressive, the weather very overcast. The low shores were covered with the fresh growth of April; they spread their broad undulating stretches of velvety green down to the very edge of the stagnant waters, a feeding ground for buffaloes.

Said Lee-Loo: "We must drink, drink more *sam-chou*;" and he poured out the rice-brandy

into our tiny cups of painted china. We lay at full length at the bottom of the junk which was covered with mats, our heads resting on the sort of very hard drums which the Chinese use as pillows. A kind of wagon roof, much too low, was stretched above us in a curve like a fish's back over a skeleton-like back bone, making us feel as if we were shut up inside a sea-monster. Through the little round port-holes we watched the melancholy landscape glide by. Where on earth were we going? For hours we had been floating on, crouched under this rattan carapace, in curious expectation of something extraordinary which Lee-Loo was taking us to see.

A long journey; a long siesta, a long sleep. The chant of the oars-women rose now and then like a Chinese lament, a soft wail, on notes pitched too high.

"Drink, you must drink more *sam-chou.*"

Where on earth are we going — Lee-Loo in green and orange; Shang Tee in sky-blue; I in white?

Stiff with lying still like three mummies in

one case we remained stretched flat under our cover. They had taken particular care in lying down not to have their long silky tails under them; they had curled them up on their chests. The awning, the rice-spirit, and the heat were crushing.

On and on, and still nothing to be seen through the little holes but the green and velvet banks and the buffaloes: enormous brutes wallowing in the grass and the mud, shapes like hippopotamuses, antediluvian beasts, stretching out their fierce stupid heads to sniff as we passed.

There was the acrid odor peculiar to junks, where the sailors cook their messes of shell-fish; and there was the smell of moist bamboos and rice-fields in bloom. And then Lee-Loo was scented like a dandy, with a perfume compounded of musk and pepper. . . .

My recollections grow more and more distinct — revived by I know not what association. I can see the junk cabin down to the minutest details: the complicated lattice of our rattan awning, the flowers on Lee-Loo's robe. The nets and fish-

ing-lines, too, hung up on the cane ribs, the knife for opening the fish, and the patron fetish of fishing. We started from Fai-Fo in the morning, and the wonderful thing we are going to see is the Temple of the Marble-Mountain which Lee-Loo says is well worth seeing.

Suddenly Lee-Loo himself rises up before me "in his habit as he lived," as lean as a skeleton, wrapped in flowing robes like some grotesque china image with his shaven pate and long tail tied with ribbon. A flat, yellow, bloodless face, but not without some charm of youth, and a very refined and distinguished look. His eyebrows, which had a natural tendency to grow together, were carefully divided and narrowed by the razor, making two curves above his bright eyes, as clean as if drawn with a pen.

Our rowers were four young girls. They stood up to pull, alternately throwing themselves back and bending to their long pliant oars. We, lying down, saw them above us through the openings in our sarcophagus; they leaned down from time to time to look at us; there was a sort

of animal sweetness in the smile which parted their lips with startling effect over their varnished and blackened teeth. All the strength of the stroke was given by their supple loins, of which every muscle was visible under their clinging skirts, and at every jerk forward of the junk I had an uneasy sense that my own body was the fulcrum of the thrust.

On every side there was nothing to be seen but the endless green level through which the lagoon winds its lengthy way, and over us the sinister gloom of motionless cloud. However, we were making good way, helped on by an undertow of which the calm surface bore no trace; a sort of latent drift which often exists in such sluggish waters. We were getting nearer to the Marble Mountain; at each reach of the lagoon we were a little closer; it rises from the wide plain like a rock from the middle of the sea, its jagged and monstrous peaks standing out against the sky. It is singularly perpendicular — overhanging; it might be itself a gigantic temple in the flatness of a desert.

We disembarked on the low shore, in the mud, among the tall grasses. We had to pass through the herd of buffaloes who had gathered there and stood motionless, every neck stretched out on watch, every dripping muzzle, with dilated nostrils to scent the European new-comer. I was alarmed by all those great eyes glaring at me and all those great horns. — "Keep back," said Lee-Loo. They — the Asiatics who had nothing to fear — called the laborers who were working in the rice-fields. All these natives, beloved of buffaloes, formed two lines and I passed between them.

Beyond the grass belt lay barren sand, a plain of desolation, blue-green aloes and an atmosphere of Sahara.

We were getting close to the Marble Mountain now; from afar it was of a bishop's-purple hue; now it was dull grey; strangely jagged in outline — quite a Chinese mountain, with all sorts of strange greenery clinging to it in tangled hanging wreaths; all round it nothing but a wilderness of sand.

Still there was a sense of sanctity about the place as we approached it: here and there tombs were to be seen, ancient and grotesque, marking the spot where bonzes and mandarins had crumbled into dust. Natural spires of grey marble rise from the even plain of sand like church-spires, and the Marble Mountain itself, now close before us, towering above us, is no more than a delirious medley of such spires — disjointed, tilted over, and in wild confusion; what is astonishing is their boldness and height, how they hold together, and how such quantities of lovely flowering plants grow there.

There are crowds of people up there! They hurry up, squat on the peaks, and push between the boughs to see who is coming. What ugly faces! — and long tails! — Oh! monkeys; whole families of monkeys, tawny-colored orangs. A gun is fired into the air, and not a creature is to be seen: all have vanished and hidden.

The Marble Mountain is precipitous on every side.

"Lee-Loo, where is the great pagoda?"

"You shall see," says Lee-Loo with a smile. But I can discover nothing but the wild mountain, marble peaks, and hanging verdure.

Lee-Loo, green and orange, says we must climb, and leads the way. There is in fact a wide flight of marble steps hewn in the living rock; the entrance hidden by fallen blocks and sand. Up we go; it is like an enchanted garden. Presently it dawns upon me that the mountain itself is the temple, the most wonderful of all the pagodas of Annam. In every crevice, in every cranny in the marble, there are frail ferns, rare palms, pandanus trees, fragile and exquisite hothouse plants. And as for flowers! — white orchids; crimson and orange amaryllis; and a profusion — a close carpet of the Cape periwinkle of lovely rose-color with a heart of peach blossom-red.

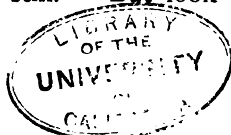
Steps, steps, and yet more steps; the marble stair, with a hand-rail and balustrade, goes up, up through the fairy garden. It all seems to cling on by magic, hanging over nothingness.

Every now and then I looked down through

a giddy vista, or else I saw huge splints of marble all aslope above the plain, leaning away from the rest as if they were about to fall. We sometimes passed under very ancient gate-ways of an old-world Chinese type; the monsters that perched above them had grown grey to match the rock.

On all the steps the pink Cape periwinkle trailed its straggling rose-colored garlands. Half-way up we came on a great temple; the creepers and rocks had hidden it from view. It was at the further end of a silent courtyard, in a sort of uncanny little ravine. The pink periwinkles had here invaded the flags of the pavement. The pagoda bristled with horns and claws and hideous growths — nameless and portentous shapes. Ages have past over it; it looked like a sepulchre, or an enchanted castle built there by Genii.

I asked Lee-Loo, the green and orange one: "Is this the pagoda we have come to see?" But Lee-Loo smiled: "No, higher still. — But look in here, through this hole."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Inside the sanctuary is still peopled by idols; there they sat at the end, in the gloom, covered with glittering gold.

Said Lee-Loo: "First we must go to the house of the great Bonze; it is close by, on this side."

So the mountain, it would seem, was inhabited by hermit Bonzes. This was a surprise; I had fancied that the big monkeys had it to themselves. In fact we found this high-priest's dwelling in another mysterious little rift opening on one side. It was very old, and had a Hindoo character with its heavy red wooden columns. In the courtyard, paved with marble, peacocks were strutting and spreading their magnificent tails; two white cats lay sleeping there. The old Bonze came out to meet us, robed in white, with a white cowl over his yellow head: an Asiatic ascetic grown lean through weird meditation; and Bonze children followed at his heels, likewise dressed in white. Rough-haired dogs ran out to snap at us; the peacocks rose heavily and flew up to the roofs.

The scene was the funereal-looking courtyard; marble spires towered up round it on every side; it was as deep as a well; it might have been the entrance to the realms of Death. Inside the Bonzes' house it was very dark: the massive beams, vaguely distinguishable, are shadowy shapes of vampires and writhing monsters. Everything is time-eaten, dust-eaten; but the resplendent idols, overlaid with pure gold, gleam in the distance where they sit with downcast eyes and mystic smiles. One very large, very pallid fresco, a mural Buddha, suggested a strange likeness: the gigantic image is seated, with a glory like a Byzantine saint, and one finger pointing heavenwards; it wears a gentle smile which we have known elsewhere — a startling reminder of another God, — the Saviour of Christians.

Below the golden images, lying in the dust, there were gongs, silver-toned bells to hail the spirits, instruments of music and instruments of torture. The Bonzes are mendicant — recluses, the guardians of these precious things, living in misery on the charity of pilgrims. Squatting in

front of their gorgeous idols they were eating roots and rice out of earthen bowls.

Up we went again by the marble stair. Here and there we had a glimpse of the endless, melancholy plain, receding far below our feet, a land of arid sand or green reed-grass with pasturing herds of buffaloes. Away to the west we could see as far as Hué, and the mountains of Annam half-hidden in the clouds. To the East lay the sea; its hollow roar came up to us in the silence —the Sea of China, for ever surging; spread out under the sunless day like a sheet of quivering silver.

A gateway rose before us through which the path led; it was of the night-mare order of architecture, with horns and talons: the tangible embodiment of a mystery. So many centuries had passed it by that it had become as one with the mountain; all those peaks rising on either hand were of the same marble—of the same age; it was the gate of unknown regions which refuse to be visited.

"Lee-Loo, is this at last the gate of the

pagoda we came to see?" And Lee-Loo smiled:

"Yes. The mountain is the pagoda. The mountain belongs to the Spirits; the mountain is enchanted. You must drink. Drink more *sam-chou.*"

And once more he poured the rice-spirit into our little painted cups which a yellow servant was carrying.

Once past this entrance two paths opened before us. One went down, the other led up; each vanished at a mysterious turning-point in the grey rock. Both were cut in the living marble, which towered above them and shut them in; both were overgrown by a rare and splendid vegetation; both tinted with the same hues of grey, and the rock-steps carpeted with the rose-colored *vinca.*

Lee-Loo, the green and orange one, seems to hesitate—then he turns to the right, down the descending stair. Now we have entered the realm of underground enchantment.

The mountain, in fact, is the pagoda. The

caverns are peopled with idols; the entrails of the rocks are haunted; spells are sleeping in these deep recesses. Every incarnation of Buddha is here—and other, older images, of which the Bonzes no longer know the meaning. The gods are of the size of life; some standing up resplendent with gold, their eyes staring and fierce; others crouched and asleep, with half-closed eyes and a sempiternal smile. Some dwell alone, unexpected and startling apparitions in dark corners; others—a numerous company—sit in a circle under a marble canopy in the green, dim light of a cavern; their attitudes and faces make one's flesh creep; they seem to be holding council. And each one has a red silk cowl over his head—in some pulled low over the eyes to hide their faces, all but the smile; one has to lift it to see them.

The gilding and Chinese gaudiness of their costumes have preserved a sort of vividness that is still gorgeous; nevertheless they are very old; their silken hoods are all worm-eaten; they are a sort of wonderfully preserved mummies. The

walls of the temple are of the primeval marble rock, hung with stalactites, and worn and grooved in every direction by the trickling oozing from the hill above. And lower down, quite at the bottom, in the nethermost caverns, dwell other gods who have lost every trace of color, whose names are forgotten, who have stalactites in their beards and masks of saltpetre. These are as old — as old as the world; they were living gods when our western lands were still frozen, virgin forests, the home of the cave-bear and the giant elk. The inscriptions that surround them are not Chinese; they were traced by primeval man before any known era; these bas-reliefs seem earlier than the dark ages of Angcor. They are antediluvian gods, surrounded by inscrutable things. The Bonzes still venerate them and their cavern smells of incense.

The great and solemn mystery of this mountain lies in its having been sacred to the gods and full of worships ever since thinking beings have peopled the earth. — Who were they who made those idols of the lowest caverns? Were they

even men fashioned as we are? Did they live in more utter darkness than ours, those first men who saw the world so young? — Or did they not rather see God more clearly and less from afar than we with our dimmed eyes? — They, at that time newly emanated from the Divinity, had perhaps some reason for choosing this place to worship in; and perhaps, too, they knew what they were about when they gave him all those arms; gave him that sensual shape, bursting as it were with the vital juices; and those mystifying faces — Him: the Incomprehensible — who, ten thousand years before a paler and milder light shone on our Christian West, engendered the amazing beginnings of Asia and made her what she has been: exuberant, obscene, colossal, monstrous.

We came up from the subterranean regions, and when we reach the great gate once more I say to Lee-Loo: "Your great pagoda is very fine."

Lee-Loo smiles: "The great pagoda!—you have not seen it."

And then he turns to the left, up the ascending flight of steps. Marble steps, as before, carpeted with the pink periwinkle, overhung by lilies, drooping palms, and luxuriant rare ferns. The rocks close in on it more and more; the pink creepers grow paler and the plants more slender in the cooler shade. Tawny orangs are perched on every point of the spires that tower above us, watching with excited curiosity and mowing like old men.

Another gate-way in a new style rises before us and we stop to look. It is not like the one we have left below; it is differently strange. This one is very simple, and it is impossible to explain what there is of unknown and unseen in this very simplicity; it is the quintessence of finality. That gate-way strikes us at once as the gate-way to *Beyond;* and that Beyond is *Nirvana*, the peace of the eternal void. There is a decoration of vague scroll work, shapes that twine and cling in mystical embrace without beginning or end—

a painless, joyless eternity, the eternity of the Buddhist — simply annihilation and rest in extinction.

We pass this gate-way, and the walls, closing in by degrees, at last meet over our heads. The orangs have all vanished together, hurrying away as if they knew where we are going now and intend to go there, too, by a way known to them alone, and to be there before us. Our steps ring on the marble blocks with the sonorous echo peculiar to underground passages. We make our way under a low vault which penetrates the heart of the mountain in the blackness of darkness.

Total night, — and then a strange light dawns before us which is not daylight: a green glimmer, as green as green fire.

"The pagoda!" says Lee-Loo.

A door-way of irregular shape, all fringed with stalactites, stands open before us, rising to about half the height of the great sanctuary within. It is the very heart of the mountain, a deep and lofty cavern with green marble walls. The distance is drowned, as it were, in a trans-

parent twilight looking like sea-water; and from above, through a shaft down which the great monkeys are peeping at us, comes a dazzling beam of light of indescribable tint: it is as if we were walking into a huge emerald pierced by a moonbeam. And the shrines, the gods, the monsters in this subterranean haze, this mysterious and resplendent green halo of glory, have a vivid and supernatural splendor of hue.

Slowly we go down the steps of a stair guarded by four horrible idols riding on nightmare creatures. Just facing us stand two little temples, all striped with sky blue and pink; their base is lost in shadow and they look like the enchanted dwellings of earth gnomes. In a fissure in the rock a colossal god wearing a gold mitre squats smiling. And high above the shrines and images, the marble vault shuts it all in, like a stupendous and crushing curtain in a thousand green folds.

The guardian gods of the stairs glare at us with a leer in their great perfidious, greedy eyes, grinning from ear to ear with bogie laughter.

They look as if they were shrinking closer to the wall to make way for us, holding in their steeds which set their teeth like tigers. And far up, perched on the great dome round the opening through which the green rays fall, the orangs are sitting, their legs and tails hanging over among the garlands of creepers, watching to see if we shall venture in.

Down we go — doubtfully, with involuntary slowness, under the influence of an unfamiliar and indescribable religious awe. As we reach the lowest steps there is a subterranean chill; we speak and rouse hollow echoes that transform our voices.

The floor of the cave is of very fine sand, covered with the dung of bats, filling the air with a strange musky smell; it is dented all over with the print left by monkeys, like that of little hands. Here and there stand ancient marble vases, and altars for Buddhist rites.

Then there are numbers of what look like very long, very enormous, brown snakes hanging from the top of the vault down to the floor — or

they may be cables, huge cables shining like bronze, stretched from top to bottom of this nave. — They are the roots of creepers, thousands of years old perhaps, larger than any known growth. The orangs, growing bolder, seem to be about to descend by these to inspect us more closely, for they are the familiars of the sanctuary.

Presently we see a group of four Bonzes in violet robes who have followed us and are now standing on the top steps of the gap by which we came. They pause at the entrance of the underground passage in the sea-green twilight, looking tiny among the gods and monsters. And then, coming towards us, they slowly descend — down, down, into the greener radiance.

It was like a scene of another world, a ritual of admission of departed spirits into the Buddhist heaven.

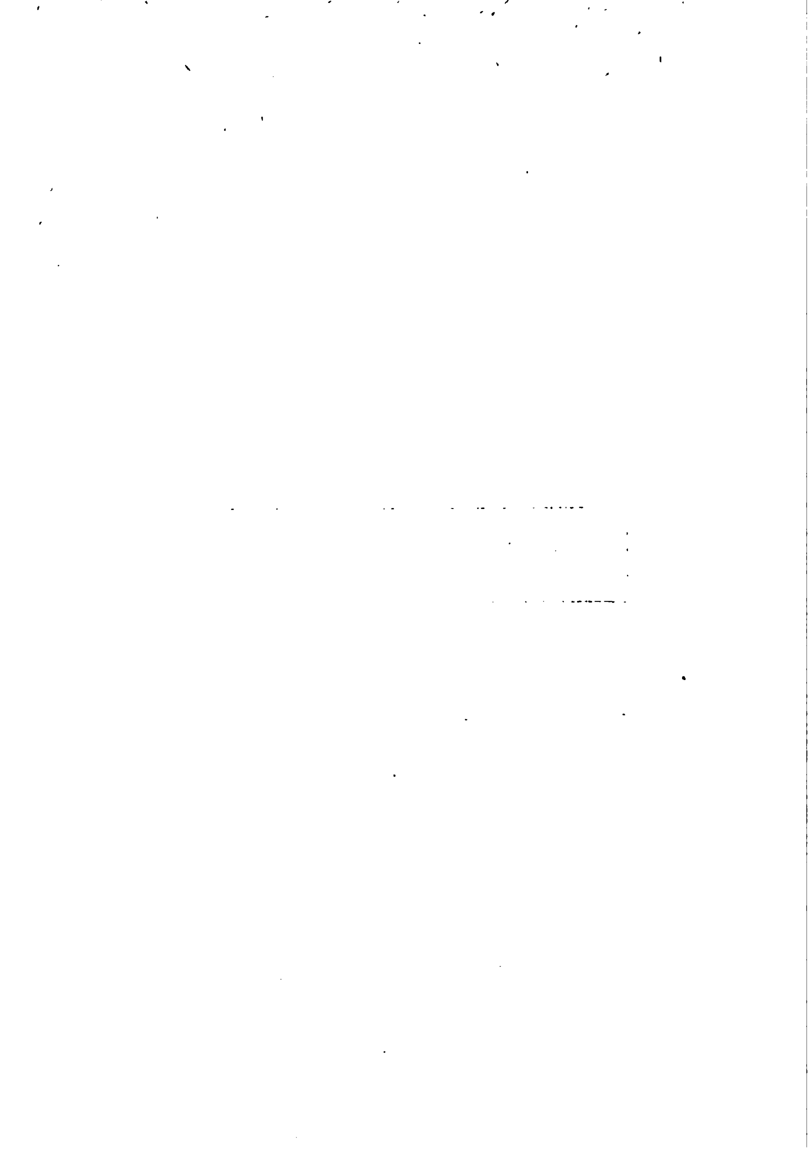
"You must drink, drink more *sam-chou*" — till this Chinese spirit, which Lee-Loo declared was essential in visiting the gods and very favor-

able to spiritual intercourse, at last sent us to sleep.

After the heat of the day and the cramp of the junk, as we now lay stretched on this netherworld sand, we had sensations like a numbness in water — like resting in something cold; the scene grew dim around us, we only saw a floating green transparency; vague memories were all that remained to us of the pink and blue images, though still their goggle eyes seemed to glare at us; — then, as we lay more completely still, a sense stole over us of noiseless bustle, of a commotion of not quite human creatures; — silently slipping like shadows down the hanging ropes — the big monkeys!

And then sleep, deep and dreamless.

AN OLD SALT.



AN OLD SALT.

> Feeble shalt thou wander from door to door, and tell the tale of thy youth to little children and the hawkers of brine.
>
> *Salammbo* (Flaubert.)

I.

HE lived in a very old, very small house, half-way up the cliff on the road from Brest to the light-house at Le Portzic. All along the road, and in just such houses, numbers of naval pensioners dwell and end their days.

His, which was backed up by buttresses of granite on which furze grew in patches, looked down from some height on the deep, steely waters of the roadstead, on the headland of La

Cormorandière, and on the Goulet, the channel to the open sea where the ships come in.

A scrap of garden with a low wall divided it from the high-road; between the shrubs — sapless and ancient of days — the house was visible in its nook, crouching against the rock and looking gloomy enough. It was incessantly beaten by the westerly wind, the ugly rough weather, the equinoctial squalls and the heavy winter rains.

When the day was at all fine, the man who dwelt there all alone would sit out in front of his door. His silvery grey beard made a light ruff round his tanned face which looked as if it had been rough hewn out of a log of dead wood. He wore ear-rings and stood very upright. He was worn out, that was plain, worn to the very marrow; but it was a peculiar type of wear, an old age not like every one else's; it was impossible to guess his age from his appearance. He never raised his head to look at the few passers-by, or the workmen who came home from Brest of an evening after work was done; but if a blue jacket, a sailor's figure, went past, he seemed

interested in that: he would go to the garden wall to look, and follow the rolling, easy-paced stranger with his eye as he went along — a black object against the grey background of sea.

The road led up-hill both ways, towards Brest and towards Le Portzic, and seemed to come to a sudden end against the hazy void of cloud and water; the figures rose up from one end, passed, and disappeared at the other as if swallowed by the earth. All round were blocks of granite, bracken and brambles; and here, at the very gates of the busy town, the country had the peculiar ungenial and melancholy character of the Breton coast.

In summer-time, when the weather was really fine, he used to bring into the garden a parrot from the Gaboon — a grey parrot with a red tail, on a perch made of some Indian wood; its feeding cups were two halves of a coco-nut. He took the greatest care of this ancient bird which sat silent on its bar in a senile attitude. When by good luck it was really hot they both revived. The parrot would speak; without moving he

would repeat over and over again a series of seamen's oaths in a voice like a ventriloquist's. The man would put some water to cool in a clay jar from Aden, as though the heat were tropical; would dress in a nankeen jacket of Chinese cut, and fan himself with a palm-leaf screen.

When the windows were open the interior was visible through the branches of a shrubby Veronica, — just a corner of this hermit's cell, as clean and as neat as a careful woman could have kept it; on the chimney shelf stood two china jars, two mandarins, some shells and other foreign treasures. And in June and July the pale low sun would slip in stealthily in the evening, and seem to linger there finding these old friends. But then, after these depressed, brief summers, the dank fogs came up again, shrouding and darkening everything through weary months.

Folks who were old inhabitants thereabouts remembered having seen the old man arrive there about ten years before. He was then already past work, though his eyes were a little less dim and his ruff a little less white. He had settled

himself there unaided, arranging everything with selfish care as if he meant to live a long time yet.

But he had failed more and more, year by year, month by month. His sad gaze was almost alarming so completely had it lost all living expression. He still had the erect gait which gave him a ghostlike dignity, and he moved slowly and stiffly, all of a piece, like a tall mummy.

II.

HE remembered having been young.

Yes, there really had been such a time; and confused visions of that time sometimes rose before him and made his dim eyes open wide.

But in the tension of the effort to grasp them they eluded his mind, and were extinct; and the struggles of his feeble memory left a feeling as of physical pain in his now vacant brain. It was as when, on waking, we are amazed by the persistency of some image left from a dream of the night; we try to seize it, to commit it with

others, and reconstruct the whole which must have had some wonderful charm. But, on the contrary, it only fades all the more quickly; it is intangible and leaves a vacancy, a sort of mysterious black gap in our mind.

He remembered having been handsome, active and powerful.

Ah! who would now give him back his strength! His sailor's arms: hard arms, which, when he bent them, swelled into rigid knots like marble, which were strong enough to break anything; which could keep their grip on the swaying, jibing yards like an iron vice! Now-a-days they ached and trembled if he only lifted a chair; they hung limp on each side of the great hollow trunk of his body, and instead of the vanished muscles, the veins crossed and stood out like long blue worms on dead limbs.

When the vessels belonging to the seamen's training school were tacking about the roadstead, all their sails spread to the westerly breeze, he

would stand at the window-pane to see them pass. Those children of the sea in their coarse canvas jackets were dotted about among the rigging — little white specks; they ran at the sound of the boatswain's silver whistle, ran along the slender threads in mid-air — ran with hand and foot, like little monkeys. He, who looked down at them, could no longer enter into their fresh young life, and that intoxication of motion which made them run so fast. No. — And yet his own childhood had been spent on that very water, in learning that healthy hard work; so he would gaze at them for a long long time, watching them with melancholy feelings — feelings that had scarcely any meaning so pale and remote were they.

He remembered having had sweethearts.

That was a long time ago when his eyes were keen under their black lashes and sent manly glances to right and left, a youthful, masterful flash.

Women had waited for him, courted him, entreated him on their knees; had sighed with rapture under his kisses. Now his lips were shrivelled with scurvy and the briny moisture; his splendid white teeth, which the girls would kiss, were now yellow bones fallen askew, with a round gap on one side that his clay pipe had made.

Women — oh yes! Bronze, black, white with fair hair; — now and then, in the depths of his memory he came upon the face of one, the voice of another, her words of love, her soft skin — they glided past like spectral images, dim, out of focus, reflected from a too distant glass. He had no regrets even; he only wondered that he could ever have spared them so much of the life he now cherished so grudgingly.

Love, longing eyes that capture a man; lips put up for kissing; the perennial charm that leads all created beings to seek and claim each other — it was all over, all dead! Nay, he could not conceive of it. Something was wanting in him now to enable him to understand it; he had

for ever lost the key to the delicious mystery. And then he would think of what he would eat that evening — of the little supper which he must make ready, all alone, by the light of his little lamp, before stretching himself, quite early, on his cold, cold bed.

He remembered having had a wife.

That had lasted just one spring-tide: happy kisses in April evenings in the respectable peace of a married home.

He was almost old then for a sailor — one and thirty — when he had married this young girl at Port-Louis. There had been a wedding procession, fiddles, and "the day after the wedding" at Lorient. At first he had enjoyed the mere novelty of having her, all his own; he had liked to be able to say: "My wife," to walk out with her arm-in-arm in broad daylight, to go back in the evening to the little home he had furnished with the savings of his pay. Two or three of his former comrades had done the same that spring,

and found it amusing to be family men between two distant voyages. And they nodded gravely when they met out walking, where the way-side was already green.

Then, quite soon, something deeper had come into his soul; he had centred in her all his craving for affection, all the impulses of tenderness that lay dormant in his lonely heart; giving her chaster caresses and new attentions; becoming almost as gentle and timid as a child again.

* * * *

One fine day the order came to join the Pomona: three years wandering in the Pacific seas.

And when he came back she was living with a rich old man in the town, and wearing a gown with flounces.

III.

AND he remembered having had a child — a daughter.

A sailor had taken her from him on a certain evening in May, one year when the spring was fine in Brittany, and the nights mild. This memory still touched his feelings; but it was the only one that did. It would come over him when his eyes fell on a little frame made of shells, containing her portrait dressed for her first communion with a taper in her hand. Then his features would suddenly pucker up into a grimace of

heart-rending comicality, and the tears would come: only two tears, which trickled down the wrinkles in his withered old cheeks — and that was all.

His wife, when he had cast her off, had left him this fragile little creature of two. She was his child very certainly; she had his brow, his look, his blood; and he still could see the childish face which was just his own but refined and renewed in its candor and infancy — recast, as it were, in virgin wax. — Yes, and for sixteen years of sea-faring life he had kept himself short of many comforts; he had patched his own clothes, and washed his own linen, to have more money to take home — saving it all for the little one. She was so delicate and fair, with quite the look of a young lady, of a nobleman's child; and he, so rough as he was, loved her all the better for it. An old woman he had felt he could trust — he paid her regularly — had the care of her at Pontanezen; each time he came home he found her grown — almost a different creature; he brought her home foreign things which he had bought for

her: Chinese curiosities, birds from Brazil, a cockatoo. The wages he had not drawn, he had put out at interest, and that was for her, too, by and bye. During his short visits to Brest he would always have her well dressed and happy. At last she was a fine young girl, slightly built with something above her rank in her rather deliberate demeanor; she took his arm as they walked about the streets. He still preserved his fairly youthful looks and upright carriage in his second mate's uniform, and it amused him to hear the others, next day, observe to each other: "Kervella has picked up a sweetheart," and say to him "We saw you, Kervella, with your young woman — quite a beauty!" And he in reply, with a hearty laugh: "My young woman you call her? — Why she is my daughter."

And a sailor carried her off from him on a certain May evening, one year when the spring evenings were still and mild. He was a top-man, twenty-three years old. She had met him at the first ball she was taken to — a wedding feast.

He had set to work to make love to her, and one evening the guileless old woman who had the care of her had allowed them to go out together. She went off in high spirits in his company — she had always been so lonely, living with strangers who chilled her heart or shut up with ugly old women, busy over her needle-work and never loved or petted by any one but that far-away father who was never at home. And now, by degrees, an unknown languor stole over her as she rambled across the fields, leaning on that strong arm; she could feel the play of the iron muscles through the blue woollen jersey. He said all sorts of childish, sweet things to her, with such an air of candor and respect! He had an honest hearty laugh, throwing back his bronzed neck, which is the way an open-hearted man laughs, and showing his white teeth all even and sound to the very back. — And then they were sitting together on a way-side bank, where no one came past, on the deep fresh cushion of spring growth. The air was mild and enervating, full of the scent of hawthorn. The motionless

bay, steely grey with streaks of misty light, spread before them under the evening sky.

Poor, lonely little girl! The sailor, too, began to be aware of the languid influence — but it was not new to him. Without premeditation, without wishing it even, he had lost his head as he listened in the silence to the soft unformed tones of her voice — the voice of a very young girl, — as he felt at his side the movements of her supple body — as clinging as a climbing plant and as smooth to the touch as ivory. There came a moment when he began saying all sorts of foolish things without any connection or sense, — she saw close to her, quite close, bending over her, the band of his sailor's bonnet on which the word "Flora," the name of his ship, was still legible in gold letters; she had felt the sailor's smile almost touching her lips, felt the warmth of his cheek and the light touch of his black beard. He was shivering as though it were very cold. And she, overwhelmed and trembling, too, from head to foot, had longed to lose herself in him; had understood, with the small understanding she

had of such things, that she was lost — if indeed it were to be lost to give herself up to one so kind and so handsome. Instead of flying, she threw her arms round his brown throat, intoxicated by his embrace, and the night came down and covered them.

One wintry day, about ten months later, Jean Kervella came back to Brest from his fourth voyage to China. He was the first to get off the ship, the first to leap on to Breton soil, and he hurried off to Pontanezen, carrying his presents for his daughter in his "sack" which hung over his shoulder, and which displayed a painting representing a ship in full sail.

But up there, in front of the house he was about to enter so gleefully, his child's old duenna froze him to the spot by her ominous looks; she stammered in her alarm at seeing him — clung to him to detain him.

Why! — what was the matter? Was she dead? — His child? A sudden and agonizing blow had struck to his heart. — No, not that.— Very ill then? — Perhaps — well, yes; but not

that, not only that. — What then? He commanded her to speak at once, shaking her by the arm, while she still stopped his way, standing stupefied in the door-way. — Where was she? Come, out with it. Upstairs, in her little room? What had they done with her? . . . .

Then some other women came down-stairs, motherly souls, sighing pitifully as they saw him, with mysterious gossips' fuss. Ah! He understood now; it flashed upon him, an intuition of his misfortune, and he spoke the brutal word.—Yes, that was it.

Then he went up, hurried up but with trembling knees; his face tingling with shame, full of acutely painful fury, which at every step grew more frantic in his Breton brain.

But when he saw her, so white in her poor little bed, her nostrils already drawn by coming death, he could find nothing to say; face to face with the terrified and imploring eyes she turned on him, he simply cried.

In a low voice, in words of decent purport, he made enquiries of the women who were about

her. By degrees his rage cooled: It was one of the *Flora's* men; he had promised to marry her; his name was Pierre Daniel, and he was a top-man.

He had feared at first that it had been some puppy of the town, — and for money. A top-man he did not so much mind; they could be married when the *Flora* returned. And after all he was a good fellow, that Pierre Daniel; certainly if he had known, if he had suspected, he would have come back to marry his little girl, rather than hurt her — and her father, a second mate, and a good seaman like himself. — But the *Flora* was a long way off; there was no one to tell him all this, poor fellow. And one pay-day on the coast of Peru, he deserted.

She died that evening, giving birth to the sailor's son, who, for his part, was ready enough to live.

Jean Kervella paid a woman very dear to nurse him, and she soon let the tiny innocent die, too, grudging him her tainted drunkard's milk.

The presents remained in his bag, and with

them all the joy of the meeting he had looked for and dreamed of for thirty months.

That day, that dreadful day, had been like the sweep of a sabre across his life, dividing everything that happened before from all that came after. For a long time, a very long time, the scene dwelt in his mind, vivid and torturing, haunted his dreams and his miserable waking.

Now it was forgotten with everything else. So many years had overlaid it, like layers of earth slowly deposited on a tombstone.

The portrait of the little communicant was turning yellow by degrees in its shell frame, and the shells were dropping off, unglued by the damp of many winters. It was a specimen of photography in its infancy; she had been very pretty, and this might have been a poor little monkey, with a hang-dog look, holding the taper in terror of being beaten. He had had several copies made of it, and had taken them with him on board many ships; this one was the last and

the least faded. And it was like her still; the queer little figure, dimmer now than the merest sketch, with two yellow spots to represent the eyes, had still a mysterious, indelible something of her about it — all that was left on earth of the dead girl.

For nearly twenty years now she had been lying in the cemetery, and her memory, which had dwelt only in this old man's brain, was beginning to fade even there. He looked much less often at the portrait which for so long had been a sacred relic. He was much more concerned about something which troubled him on certain days; a swelling of his lean legs — like the puffing up of a drowned body.

IV.

ALMOST as soon as he had laid her in the earth he had to be off again, to quit the shore of Brittany for some years, and the soil where she had but just gone to sleep under her little cross. Then he had become one of those tough men who drift about the seas without any aim in life or any wish to return to one spot rather than another. His word of command and his piping whistle had acquired a new tone: brief and morose. Night and day he thought of nothing but sails or tackle, and he led his men a hard life, without a word of

approbation when they had done well. He never sang of an evening, and he was always on the alert, without flagging. He wrote once from Hong-Kong, sending a considerable sum of money to the woman who formerly had had the care of his girl: this was to purchase the little spot of Breton soil where they had laid her, and to place on it a stone slab faced with marble. His letter gave her complicated instructions which he had slowly elaborated during his watches at sea. When he got back to Brest the woman had grown old and drivelling and could not remember ever having received the money; she had suddenly taken to drinking and had spent it all in the taverns with friends. — And he, all through five years of wandering and adventure under the devouring sun, had fed his soul on one thought only during his sleepless night: that of preserving from desecration that maiden grave, at home, under the hazy heaven of Brittany.

He hurried off to see the little mound; the earth was freshly dug and a cross had been set

there bearing the name of some old man he had never known. On the steps of the common vault, among many another piteous relic of vases and flowers, he saw the last offering he had brought to his dead child: a bead chaplet with a text in the middle and a pansy.

Well, well; it was done and ended; her bones lay mixed with the others. — So at nightfall he came away, a lonely soul.

V.

YEARS and yet more years had passed over all this. His cruises, his fatigues, his sleepless nights of pleasure or of grief had piled themselves up under every climate on earth. He had had sunstroke on the Gaboon, yellow fever in Senegal, dysentery in Cochin-China; close shaves and wrecks; wounds, scars and fevers. An admiral who often reappeared in his waning memory had taken a fancy to him, and then he had grown ambitious. During an expedition to Africa he had won a cross for a bullet he had

voluntarily received in his chest, throwing himself with an impulse of splendid loyalty in front of an officer to protect him with his body. Finally he had been appointed first mate, an honorable rank and fairly well paid; the highest to which a blue-jacket can rise. And who could know what it had cost him to attain it in time, strength, vigilance, energy, in voice and muscles, in breath to blow his silver whistle!

Nor was he yet beneath the notice of women; he still kept his fine figure and his determined air. As time went on he recovered his biting seaman's wit; by degrees he had gained the frame of mind peculiar to great rovers, who, from being used to critical predicaments, meet them with astounding composure. Nothing ever took him by surprise, and he settled every question with a short retort in which he would employ strange figures of speech borrowed from seafaring life. The women would still notice him, though he was indeed worn out — as they say in the navy of men as well as of ships: The wear and tear of a sailor's life, stealthy but deep, not

to be arrested by any means. All the winds and suns drain him without making any mark, and one fine day he drops. Then he pays for it all; for the excessive changes of climate, the waste of sap and vitality, the alternations of long periods of abstinence at sea, and bouts of pleasure when he abandons himself heart and blood to women of any race, hatched out in the sunshine. And the long night-watches in fogs and rain, and the strain of mind and responsibility in foul weather, and hours of pressing danger.

All these things had eaten into Jean Kervella's soul when he settled down at Brest to await his pension, though he was still elastic and trim in his mate's uniform and with the red ribbon in his button-hole. It was then that he bought the little house on the Portzic road, to end his days where he could look out on the roadstead and see ships.

The day when he retired on his pension was a day like any other. Neither men nor things seemed to trouble themselves much about this veteran who was going for good. At the usual

hour for turning out, long before daylight, in the barrack-like rooms of the headquarters of the district — which have a flavor, too, of on board ship — the sailors sprang naked out of their hammocks, which are slung in rows to iron bars. He alone awoke with an uneasy feeling, an undefined sense of its being "the last day." Then the bustle and stir, and the morning's cleaning, and all the noises of this daily life beginning before it was really day, followed each other in due succession to the sound of drums and bugles. Those who had had, or had taken leave to remain out for the night came in one after another, with an excited gait and the taste of past enjoyment on their lips. And then the sun — a dim autumn sun, — had risen, too, at his due-hour.

Before the noon-day dinner, Kervella had inspected his men — in his newest uniform which he wore for this last time out of simple vanity. Some other mates spoke to him, congratulating him: he had lived to the consummation which few sailors are so happy as to reach; he was going to rest, to have a little garden and live on

his income, as they said. Some others on the contrary, knowing that he was the worse for wear, called him: "Poor Kervella," with the compassionate manner we put on for those who are going to die. Then came leave-takings and shaking of hands. He believed that he was very happy and tried to find cheerful things to say.

All about him the familiar work-a-day life of the great barrack was going forward; it is in fact the headquarters, the *alma mater* of the French navy.

It came to the hour of recreation. The sailors were walking about in twos and threes, fine figures in their loose garments, with the desultory or restless gait of boys kept in bounds, shut in as they were by those high smooth walls, impossible to climb. Those who had been to sea, the real sailors, inured to their work and tanned almost black by a tropical sun, were telling tales of service as they smoked, or exchanging confidences as to their love affairs with the girls of the neighborhood, or working off their superfluous energy on the iron bars of the gym-

nasium. And the fresh-ones, the chubby-faced youngsters, raw sailor-lads just come in from the fishing barques or the villages on the Breton coast, lounged staring about with scared innocent eyes, eagerly awaiting the blue collared shirt and cap with a tuft which was to be given to them; they, in their turn, were stared at by the elders, who made comments on them, and now and then, among roughly expressed criticisms, passed the supremely flattering verdict: "He wants licking into shape, but there is good stuff in him."

So all day, in his best uniform, he went aimlessly to and fro among these knots of men; and then up and down all the stair-cases where the agile young fellows were leaping the steps four at a time and making a noise like horses turned loose; and about the spacious rooms, open to all the winds of heaven and smelling of scrubbed boards and tar.

Here in every corner there were memories of every period of his life. In the course of forty years' service a man returns again and again to

these sailors' barracks at Brest; often has he come back thither from a cruise in high spirits and with a pocketfull of money; often has he left it, marching down the granite stairs which lead to the harbor, his canvas bags over his shoulder — in high spirits still perhaps, but perhaps heart-broken — left it for a distant and unknown shore. Now the old man wanted to see every nook and corner once more. He had business, too, to transact in the offices where quarter-masters preside, papers to fill up, signatures to wait for — just as if he were starting on a long voyage. Above all he felt that he must be doing, stirring; and in spite of his being so certainly glad he must keep his mind occupied.

In the evening, up in his barrack room, he took off his mate's uniform — and it cost him a pang, — clothed his powerful and tattooed limbs, which had been splendid in their day, in a black suit of which the very cut made him look years older at once, and having settled his reckoning with the State, who had paid him very well for his life, he quitted the sailor's barracks.

As he went out, a party of youngsters who were coming in drunk, and ruthless in their boisterous jollity, hustled this *civilian* whom they did not recognize. But some friends, seeing him depart, joined him out of kindness, to see him off; they went into a wine-shop together and drank the health of the lucky "independent gentleman," with three times three. He still believed he was very happy and said so repeatedly. In the street the youngsters were hurrying about: the barrack gates had just been thrown open; it was the hour when the sailors are let out on leave for the night; and as they went along to keep appointments with their "girls," they sang at the top of their voices:

> "Enfants, cueillez tour à tour
> Des jours de folie
> Et des nuits d'amour." *

It was a popular song among the sailors that

* Lads, by night and day be jolly —
Nights of love and days of folly.

year; and they flung it from one party to another, without knowing each other, and took it up in chorus. It was even caught up by the young girls of the neighborhood as they leaned out, over the granite sills of the old windows, to see the men pass: they piped it out, with their childish faces, some pale, some rosy, and eyes twinkling with the flame of a budding passion; they stole out in the dusk to stand on the door-step watching for their blue-jacket lovers, and every evening the air was sung like a hymn to pleasure, echoing down those dingy streets.

And he, leaving them for ever, and pursued by the jolly song tune had begun to sing, too, in sheer bravado

> "Des jours de folie
> Et des nuits d'amour."

"Did you see him, that old fellow, singing, too?" asked a saucy little minx, waiting behind a door for her sailor.

Darkness was falling by the time he was

alone, outside the town-walls, on the Portzic road. The west wind, lashing his face, brought up the smell of sea-weed from the strand.

It was quite night when he opened the gate of his little garden and went into the solitary home where he was to sleep for the first time.

He hung up his whistle, once for all, in a place of honor over the chimney shelf. It was very strange what a melancholy feeling had come over him, as if this evening had been the end of all things. His room was very neat and he had been very particular about making it pretty. Many of the things which decorated this old vagabond's dwelling had been picked up in all the four quarters of the earth; were the trophies of some adventure or loot, and cut a strange figure there, recalling distant lands. And near the bed the portrait of his lost child — less faded then — looked vaguely out of the frame, with the taper in her hand.

He took the shell affair in his two hands, and, his heart melting in spite of himself, this happy evening, one tear rolled down to his beard —

which was already white. His was the blood of the genuine Breton sailor, and these men, though they seem so rough, have always in one corner of their heart the indelible memory of some village nook, or of some sweet little face that they have loved.

The westerly wind whistled under the door and got lost behind the lonely little house, in the damp yard shut in by the towering granite cliff and overhanging furze. — Out there, in the offing, it must be dirty weather, and the night would be stormy. But he had done with all that for ever: with the toil and the black appalling night, with the roar of raving waters, with all the terrors of the deep which make a man shiver with cold and fear. It might blow as it would now, rage outside — it would never, never matter to him any more. How happy he would be! No more dangers, or labor, or suffering; every evening he might go to bed, to a real bed, for the whole night; tend his little garden — a quite new experience, which he had always longed for — and take care of himself. With all the rest

and care he meant to take he could not fail to enjoy life for some years yet—nay to grow young again.

And yet his tears were still falling fast; those tears, which at first had come as slowly as moisture oozing from a rock, were now flowing rapidly one after another like dull rain.

What was it, then, that ailed him? It was no longer mere regret for his dead child; it was a deeper and nearer distress; the gladness he had felt all day had melted, as it were, into agonizing sobs and a longing to die at once and have done with it.

VI.

THE day after this he woke very early in the morning, smitten by the silence, startled at finding himself alone and at home, understanding for the first time that he was nothing but an old man.

And now came the beginning of the end, of a life which week after week seemed to acquire more and more a horrible taste of death. He grew weaker in spite of care and rest. Thrown back upon himself in the sudden stillness of a pensioner's life, he became aware of the weary

weight of his forty years of sea-toil, and now, too late, knew that he was worn out.

At the end of five years of this easy existence, ruin had made such rapid progress that if he happened to meet any old friends he was almost obliged to tell them his name in order to be recognized. The nights especially told upon him. Till morning dawned he lay in heavy sweat and bad dreams. He felt as if his head were slowly emptying through this mysterious travail and the visions of sleep. On waking he had pains in his arms and legs; he was dead beat, as he used to be as a boy after the tremendous exertions of strength which had given him his mighty muscles. But now the contrary process was taking place in all his limbs; they were shrinking, shrinking, during those night-sweats, and the bony framework began to stand out under the flaccid flesh.

The same scenes came before him again and again in all his dreams: He was on board, in his berth, gasping for air, in heavy weather, down, down between decks with closed hatches. Then

some one came to call him, to remind him that it was his turn on watch and that they were working the ship hard, up aloft. He wanted to dress in all haste, to run up, vexed at failing in his duty and possessed by dreadful anxiety as to what might happen in the rigging. But he could not find his clothes, and there was no way up, and he did not know where he was. — Or perhaps he got up on deck and saw what was to be done, and then his pipe would not sound, his arms were powerless and he was wrestling in vain against that strange impotency — an exhausting struggle. At last he would wake, bathed in sweat, to hear nothing but the familiar whistle of the west wind under his door, or the winter's rain pattering on the roof; and by degrees it grew clear to him that the sea and its toil were done with for ever — and that he himself was a very old man, near his end. . . . And that was a misery darker even than the dream.

He had plenty to live on with his pension and the allowance with his cross, and the interest on his savings.

All the trifles of life were regulated from day to day with great punctuality: old sailors acquire the habit of order on board ship. He cooked his meals himself, made his bed, did his room, and washed his linen on certain days of the week, in the little back-yard.

An old woman from Portzic, a certain *Mère le Gall,* who passed his door every morning, did his marketing for him. There were plenty more such as he, naval pensioners like himself, whose wandering life had left them without a tie; old adventurers with seamed faces, or veteran worthies of respectable aspect, with red or yellow ribbons in their button-holes — there were plenty of these who went to Recouvrance as a matter of course, with a basket on one arm to buy their own solitary meals. It was no degradation, to be sure; but he hated it: the basket, the squabbling and the bargaining.

Still, like all seamen, he was accustomed to many kinds of work which landsmen leave to the women; he might be seen — a tall old figure with still handsome features — mending his

clothes, taking off the buttons and facings of his sailor garments to turn them into *civilian* suits; and sewing neatly, too, with his rough tattooed hands, which once on a time had done such marvels of strength.

Flowers did well in his little plot, and this was the last, sole pleasure which had not disappointed his expectations.

The home-coming of ships, and the tumult which sailors make in the streets after dark, and their singing in the distance, all these revels of youth — which indeed he had had no share in for many a year — now struck him as a sort of painful reminder which made him lie tossing on his bed through long, sleepless nights. He would even get up and open his window to listen eagerly to the midnight breeze which brought up the turmoil of Recouvrance across the furze and heath.

At first the spring-time distressed him a little; but that was a vague melancholy: the pain of failing to remember. The first mild days of May made him think of furthest Asia, the part

of the world where he had most lived, and most lived for woman. And during those dewy nights, when birds were singing, the tawny creatures would sometimes come to him in dreams; faintly visible, they paraded past him in their clinging skirts, toddling just as they did in their own country with a mincing Chinese gait; they glanced at him with smiles like saucy kittens, wriggling and twisting under their flat closely-pleated parasols that looked like the tops of mushrooms. These women he had certainly known before somewhere — that he could remember; but what did they want of him? — Then they vanished and he would not trouble himself to follow them.

One evening, however, he took it into his head to dress in a great hurry at about nine o'clock, and set out for Brest, a thick cane in his hand; he walked fast, with his head bent, like a man who is going to pay an unconfessed visit. And there, at the bottom of the rue Saint-Yves, he had seen some fair beings who were not tawny, who had no mushroom-parasols, and did

not wear China crape dresses embroidered with dragons, but who said foul things in thick debauched voices. So he came home again, tired and ashamed; and from that time he had never again insulted the modesty and dignity of his old age.

In summer he trained climbing plants to grow over his low cottage, and they reminded him of the tropical creepers; he made a little arbor over his door to look like a verandah. And one of his great joys was when for two or three days in the year it was hot enough for him to wear the nankeen coat and use the palm-leaf fan — as he had done in those exotic regions which his eyes might never see more.

Every year in the middle of July there is a *grand pardon*—a saint's-day fair — at the village of Sainte-Anne, beyond Portzic, and on that day smart crowds went past his house from morning till night, like a fragmentary procession, the greater number being sailors. He used to think of this fair a long time beforehand; it was to him the crown of the summer. From early morning,

after bringing out the parrot, he would sit outside his door in his best clothes, his fan in his hand, to see and be seen. And every passer-by looked round at the old man, with the gold ear-rings. There was nothing in him as yet to raise a smile; his look was fixed and hard; his eyes, which formerly transfigured his expression because they could be very sweet, now had lost their language; the lids drooped over them as over extinct and now useless lights; the lines alone remained of his face, still finely cut, but set and exaggerated by age; he looked like the dried mummy of a pirate.

In the evening, when this high-day was over, when the last groups had gone by and he remained alone in the silence, a more despairing dejection would come over him. Another summer gone! And winter would soon begin again with its rain, and its long nights and its sufferings. Another summer vanished, lost with so many others in the bottomless abyss!

He had no wish at all to die now—oh no! He was too old for that. He took more care of

himself than ever, clutching with convulsive grip at the small remnants of his life.

And yet time, which he longed to check, had never slipped away so fast. It seemed to him that its periods had ceased to exist. Days, weeks, months, seasons flew, fled without respite, with the terrific swiftness and noiselessness of things which drop into the void.

One year he had a warning which frightened him terribly.

In a dream one night, he was sailing over one of those deep seas where no one ever expects to see anything; it was so calm that it might have been a level of grey marble, as vast as a desert. It was twilight, and he was on watch in the fore part of the ship. At his feet a woman lay sleeping, an Asiatic — he knew her name: Nam-Theu, and remembered having known her a long time ago and elsewhere. They were gliding on easily and silently; but suddenly, quite close at hand, the sea was dotted with beacons,

signals to warn mariners of invisible dangers under water.

Once, thirty years since, he had had just such a startling experience in real life, and in broad daylight. He was piloting a junk down one of those rivers in Cochin-China which meander for miles and miles through a level country covered with green shrubs — a mud soil, uninhabited, and uninhabitable, more lifeless and deadly than a sea without a sail. On every side the poisonous vegetation of the equatorial lowlands lay rank and broadcast in treacherous splendor, shrouding the desolation of those endless swamps. The air was heavy, the noon a dead weight, irresistible; he had allowed himself to succumb and was almost asleep with his eyes still open to the fearful and dazzling light. Near him slept a woman of Cambodia — Nam-Theu — his wife for the time. Suddenly, at a reach of the narrow river, the danger signals had sprung up as it were: three together; three red triangles on the top of high poles, tall, erect, as if to say: Beware, there is danger under this smooth water.

The coral reef! This was the spot on which, by some mysterious principle of selection, colonies of madrepores had chosen to settle, and there, for ages past, they had built up their myriads of stone cells. He had been warned of this reef, the only one in the whole of his course, but he had not expected to come so close upon it, and it had frightened him.

How far away these memories were, far both in time and space, lost in the depths of a dead past. Memories of sunshine and life, what was it that had fanned their dull flame on a rainy winter's night among the ashes of an empty old skull to show this last vision of them, senile and decrepit as it was?

The beacons which had suddenly appeared in the midst of the grey ocean of his dream were very many, crowded together as though to notify some supernatural and unspeakable peril. They were of strange and unfamiliar shapes; high up, on immensely tall poles, they seemed to have arms, to be making signals, waving about with the helpless despair of dumb things which would

fain cry out, and tracing magic symbols against the pale sky.

Thus he woke, seized with an anguish of terror, as though at the approach of some fatality which could not be averted. It must be a fearful reef indeed that was marked in such a manner. — He thought it was a warning of death.

However, the year passed away and nothing particular happened. Still, a change was noticeable in his habits. He had grown very greedy, and constantly complained that *Mère le Gall*, his housekeeper, chose things badly at market and did not buy him anything nice enough; so much so that one day he made up his mind to take the basket himself; and from that time he was to be seen every morning at Recouvrance, pottering about the market-stalls, and bargaining like a house-wife.

Very trim and well brushed up in his old navy pilot coat — that coat of hard-wearing frieze which a pensioner is always to be seen in till he dies — he still stepped out at a brisk pace with a certain air and style; but he panted a good deal

on the way home again. One morning, having accepted a drink with another old fellow like himself, he came home a little unsteady on his legs; then, for the first time in his life, he was scolded to his shame by a woman — by *Mère le Gall*, who, for her part, never set her cap on awry excepting on Sunday evening, and that not every week.

Now, too — and this was a symptom of the end — he would associate with those pensioners who gathered together in mild weather near the fortifications by the Recouvrance gate. All the old, old navy pilot-coats would turn out there, brushed and rebrushed, turned and thread-bare, hanging on shrunken shoulders and dying carcasses. There they played at quoits and other games, as they once had done on board ship, for they had preserved the simplicity and childishness of sailors — dreary enough in these old men.

Or else, sitting in pathetic little knots, they told the stories of their lives:

"When I was on board the *Melpomene*. . . ."

"And when I was on the *Semiramis* one

evening, when we were taking in a reef, the Admiral said to me: 'Now Jézéquel!' . . ."

They all spoke at once, each man for himself. And the ships they talked about were no more; and the commanders who figured in their stories, like legendary personages, had been dead for years, or, if not dead, had faded into melancholy ghosts — those sad phantoms who, after ending a splendid career of courage, patriotism and honor, wander about the streets in black with a red rosette at their button-hole; or on sunny days the old fellows were trundled about in chairs.

Not far from the Recouvrance gate there are paths diverging in various directions and lost in the uninhabited parts of the suburbs, along the granite ramparts dotted with weeds and lichen — green paths, very proper for lovers, and a favorite resort for sailors, who loiter there of evenings with the girls of that part of the town. And it was the spot where all these paths met that the veterans had chosen as their meeting-place — a sort of ante-chamber to the graveyard. They converged there by habit, a pitiable crowd; some

still clean and respectable, neatly buttoned up in their imperishable pilot-coats; others squalid, maudlin with spirits, painful to behold.

Once these men had been able-bodied and strong; they had broken down in the service of their country which doled them out just enough to keep them from dying. And among them there were some so good and so noble that, in spite of everything, these relics of them were still venerable, almost sacred.

The young sailors went past these ruins of brave veterans, walking lightly in their blue shirts open at the throat, with their lasses on their arm, hurrying on to vanish down the grassy paths under the elms on the ramparts.

They had life and the ocean before them, wide spread and tempting them by endless mirages. They felt their jolly, sailor's youth, a more vigorous youth than that of other men; and never dreaming that it would be sooner worn out, too, never glancing at those spectres who once had been their counterpart, they went gladly on their way, like children full of heady health and

strength, — passed them by, in the evenings, when they were tottering homewards with the help of sticks, shaking their palsied old heads.

VII

ONE winter this senile trembling seized him completely. He knocked down whatever he touched and broke a great many things in his little house. Then, too, he had a return of moon-blindness, which had attacked him once before, on the equator. Hemeralopia, the ships' doctors call it, and sailors are liable to it from sleeping in the open air, with their faces to the sky, in hot climates. As soon as the sun had set he could see nothing and dared not move but by feeling about, like a blind man.

He was dying out; misty shrouds were closing in on him veiling everything. His head always felt so heavy — and yet it was almost void of thought. Sometimes, at night, the phantom of a Chinaman would come and make faces by the side of his bed; then he would fly into a rage and abuse him, struggling violently — fancying he was out there to fight them.

He never looked now at the portrait of his little daughter, who still held her taper, but grew paler every winter — and meanwhile the remains of the dead girl, stowed away in the common grave, were mouldering in the heap of bones.

He spent a good deal of money in buying good wine and strengthening food; but now he had wounds in his legs, and as he was bent on being clean he himself washed out the linen rags he dressed them with, every morning in his little back yard. His body had grown mis-shapen; he was not nearly so tall as he used to be; and his shoulder blades stuck out.

His eyes were dead-looking all day, and he thought of nothing but taking care of himself,

and eating; in the morning only, when he first awoke, his intellect was for a while terribly clear, — when he awoke, all alone, after the dull rest which the last hours of the night would bring him. Then he would lie motionless and sinistrous, with a fixed gaze — eyes which understood and remembered.

Hapless wreck — waif rejected by the sea — lonely old man, whose tears none cared to pity! Why had he not died long ago in his splendid youth? The free beasts of the field do not linger thus; they preserve their nature, their functional power to the end; they have their loves and multiply their kind. Long old age, that mockery of life, is given to man alone.

The Spring found him yet more tremulous, more feeble, sitting in his little garden.

However, his slumbers no longer brought him troubled dreams. They were merely memories now of space and sunshine; the wide blue dis-

tance spread before him, or a changeful expanse like the remote horizon of the sea; and in the immediate foreground some details of rigging or tackle stood out sharp and near, a yard, or a sail, or shrouds. Such images as these survived in the depths of his waning brain, the last records of his youth in the tops; or perhaps they had come down to him by some mysterious transmission from further back yet: from his forefathers, seamen like himself. But it was all over; never, never more would he see that blue glory—the glory and infinitude of the sea; neither he nor any son of his race, he was an exhausted stock, and nothing of him would survive him.

Every evening, as night closed in, he had a terror lest he should at last die alone; but *Mère le Gall*, who stayed with him all day now for wages, refused to sleep in the house, declaring it would make folks talk.

The wounds on his legs had spread a great deal and he still washed the rags himself with extreme care, being determined to keep clean; but he would often make a mistake and rinse them

again and again in the same water and make a great mess of it, out of sheer childishness.

When May came he tried to garden once more, worrying himself very much over the two little borders which had a neglected look, and where tall grasses flourished like the weeds about tombs. May came in very fine; some swallows who had built under his eaves piped their love-song from early morning; fresh verdure and opening flowers were strewn thickly over the land. For others there was gladness — for all who were young; for him it was bitter irony, more ominous than the chuckle of Death.

Still he came and went, stooping with difficulty to pull up the weeds. An old fuchsia bush, which had grown to a tree in the mild climate of Brittany, choked the little walk with its drooping branches; it was almost dead at the top, but the lower shoots had blossomed as profusely as a young plant, and when the old man went by the coral flowers, brushing against his threadbare pilot-coat, shed their superabundant pollen in light yellow dust. And he, too, once on a time,

had scattered broadcast the bloom of his exuberant vitality, — but men do not blossom again in old age, as plants do, and their end is a dissolution horrible to see.

The summer, too, came and went; the warmth revived him a little. Again, for the last time, he put on the nankeen jacket and fanned himself with the palm-leaf fan. But in the winter he had a more malignant swelling which seemed to be full of water. And he nursed himself with the greatest care, stultified with the one idea of cherishing his life. Who could tell? perhaps, with great care he might see another spring.

No. One March night Death, passing on his way to Brest to kill off some consumptive creatures, paused to give him a wrench. He pulled the old man's mouth askew, extinguished his eyes, clenched his fingers and left him stark on his bed, rigid in the attitude he was to remain in till he crumbled to dust in final decay.

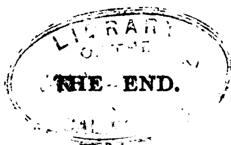
When *Mère le Gall* came in next morning she found him thus.

"*Ma Doué,** *ma Doué Jésus!* My old man is gone!"

He was borne to the grave by sailors; that had always been his wish, as it is of almost every old seaman; and in honor of his cross he had an escort of armed men.

This was quite right and decent.

For a long time after, the nankeen jacket was still to be seen in the window of an old clothes' shop in the low quarter of Brest, and the palm-leaf fan, and the portrait of the little girl in its shell-work frame.



THE END.

* *Doué. Dieu* — God.

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