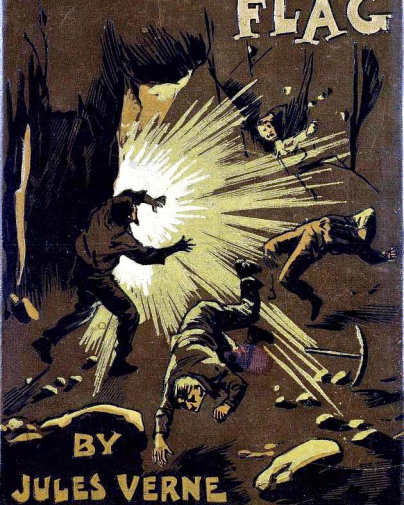


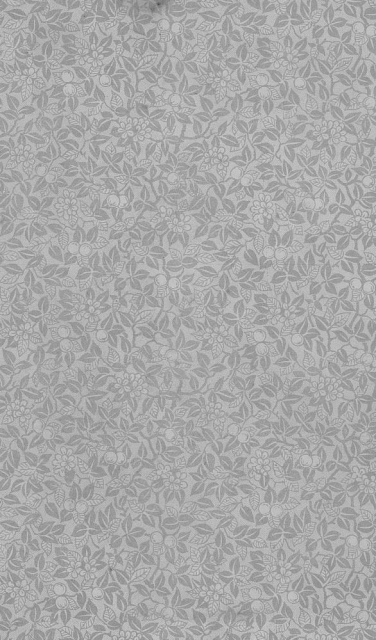
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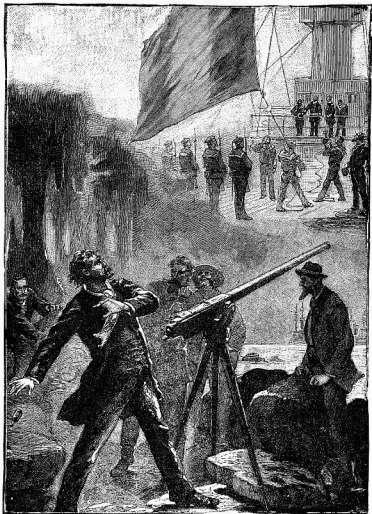
BY  
JULES VERNE







Kathleen Nash  
From Teddie  
It was 1897.



The Victory of the Flag. (P. 304.)

*Frontispiece.*



# FOR THE FLAG

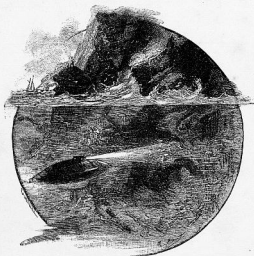
*FROM THE FRENCH*

OF

JULES VERNE

BY

MRS. CASHEL HOEY



ILLUSTRATED

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# CONTENTS.

	CHAPTER I.	
HEALTHFUL HOUSE . . . . .		PAGE I
	CHAPTER II.	
COUNT D'ARTIGAS . . . . .		21
	CHAPTER III.	
A DOUBLE ABDUCTION . . . . .		38
	CHAPTER IV.	
THE SCHOONER "EBBA" . . . . .		56
	CHAPTER V	
"WHERE AM I?" . . . . .		81
	CHAPTER VI.	
ON DECK . . . . .		97
	CHAPTER VII.	
TWO DAYS AT SEA . . . . .		113
	CHAPTER VIII.	
BACKCUP . . . . .		133
	CHAPTER IX.	
INSIDE . . . . .		153

## CHAPTER X.

KER KARRAJE . . . . .	PAGE . 170
-----------------------	---------------

## CHAPTER XI.

FIVE WEEKS . . . . .	. 189
----------------------	-------

## CHAPTER XII.

THE ADVICE OF SERKŌ THE ENGINEER . . . . .	. 205
--	-------

## CHAPTER XIII.

"A DIEU VAT!" . . . . .	. 222
-------------------------	-------

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE "SWORD" IN CONFLICT WITH THE TUG . . . . .	. 235
--	-------

## CHAPTER XV.

EXPECTATION . . . . .	. 257
-----------------------	-------

## CHAPTER XVI.

SOME HOURS LATER . . . . .	. 275
----------------------------	-------

## CHAPTER XVII.

ONE AGAINST FIVE . . . . .	. 291
----------------------------	-------

## CHAPTER XVIII.

ON BOARD THE "TONNANT" . . . . .	. 306
----------------------------------	-------



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

PAGE

The victory of the flag . . . . .	<i>Frontis piece</i>
Heathful House . . . . .	5
An inventor . . . . .	9
The inventor with a craze . . . . .	13
The keeper and his charge . . . . .	19
A private view . . . . .	25
Pavilion 17 . . . . .	31
The landing is effected . . . . .	41
The abduction . . . . .	51
On board the schooner <i>Ebba</i> . . . . .	59
Boarded . . . . .	69
Lifting the buoy . . . . .	73
The submerged cargo . . . . .	77
Gaydon in prison . . . . .	87
The man at the helm . . . . .	101
Under constraint . . . . .	105
Count d'Artigas on his quarter-deck . . . . .	119
Signalling on board the <i>Ebba</i> . . . . .	125
Land in sight . . . . .	129
Backup . . . . .	137
The tug alongside . . . . .	145
The hidden creek . . . . .	149
In the interior of the island . . . . .	159
The pirates' store-houses . . . . .	165

	PAGE
The "hôtel" of Count d'Artigas . . . . .	173
Ker Karraje . . . . .	185
The inventor in a frenzy . . . . .	195
A sperm whale in the lagoon . . . . .	199
A hearer unseen . . . . .	217
An explosion . . . . .	225
Casting news upon the waters . . . . .	229
The <i>Sword</i> . . . . .	245
Under the lagoon . . . . .	249
Captain Spade on the alert . . . . .	253
Cross-examination . . . . .	259
The look-out from the pirates' den . . . . .	267
The squadron is sighted . . . . .	277
Ex-patient and ex-keeper . . . . .	283
The end is at hand . . . . .	293
The inventor's preparation . . . . .	297
For the flag . . . . .	309

# 3 FOR THE FLAG

## CHAPTER I.

### HEALTHFUL HOUSE.

A CARD was handed to the Principal of Healthful House on a certain 15th of June, which bore simply the name, without escutcheon or coronet :

*Count d'Artigas.*

Above this name, on a corner of the card, the following address was written in pencil :

"On board the schooner *Ebba*, at anchor at Newburn, Pamlico Sound."

The capital of North Carolina—one of the forty-four states of the Union at that period—is the rather important town of Raleigh, one hundred and fifty miles from the coast in the interior of the province. On account of its central position that city had become the seat of the legislature; for others—Wilmington, Charlotte, Fayetteville, Edenton, Washington, Salisbury, Tarboro, Halifax, Newburn—equal or surpass it in commerce and manufactures

Newburn is situated at the farther end of the estuary of the Neuse, which flows into Pamlico Sound, a vast salt-water lake protected by a natural breakwater of islands and islets along the Carolina coast.

The Principal of Healthful House would not have guessed the reason of this civility had not the card been accompanied by a note in which the Count asked permission to visit the establishment.

The stranger hoped that the Principal would be kind enough to grant this favour, and he proposed to call during the afternoon with Captain Spade, the commander of the *Ebba*.

A desire to view the famous health resort, then so much frequented by rich invalids in the United States was, of course, natural on the part of a stranger. Others had already visited it who could not boast so great a name as Count d'Artigas, and they had not been sparing of their eulogies. The Principal gladly gave the desired authorization, and replied that he should feel honoured by receiving his noble visitor.

Healthful House, served by an excellent staff, and assured of the co-operation of the leading physicians, was a private institution. Independent of all control or supervision, save that of the State, it afforded the requisite conditions of comfort and salubrity in an establishment destined for the reception of wealthy patients.

It would be difficult to find a more agreeable situation than that of Healthful House. The building, sheltered at the back by a hill, was surrounded by a park of two hundred

acres, planted with timber of those magnificent species which abound in that portion of North America which lies in the same latitudes as the Canaries and Madeira. At the lower edge of the park stretched the wide estuary of the Neuse, perpetually refreshed by the breezes of Pamlico Sound, and the ocean winds coming from afar.

At Healthful House, where the wealthy patients were nursed under excellent hygienic conditions, cures were numerous. But although in general the establishment was reserved for the treatment of chronic illness, the administration did not refuse to admit patients afflicted with mental disorders, when these were not of an incurable kind.

Now, just at that time—a circumstance likely to attract attention to Healthful House, and perhaps the motive of the visit of Count d'Artigas—a personage of great notoriety had been detained there for eighteen months under special observation.

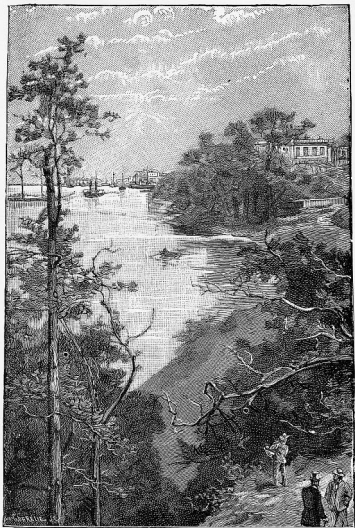
This personage was a Frenchman named Thomas Roch, aged forty years. That he was under the influence of a mental malady could not be doubted, but up to the present the doctors had not pronounced him positively insane. That he was wanting in common sense in the most simple acts of life was only too certain. Still, his reason remained clear, powerful, incontestable, when an appeal was made to his genius—and who does not know that "great wits to madness often are allied"? It is true his affective and sensorial faculties were seriously disordered. When these were called into action, they manifested themselves in delirium and incoherence. Then the man was merely

an unreasoning being, bereft of that natural instinct which is present even in the lower animals—even of self-preservation—and he had to be treated like a child. In Pavilion No. 17, which he occupied in the park of Healthful House, it was his keeper's duty to watch him day and night.

Ordinary madness, when it is not incurable, can only be cured by moral means. Medicine and therapeutics are impotent, and their inefficacy has long been recognized by specialists. Were moral means applicable in the case of Thomas Roch? This was doubtful, even with the peaceful and healthy surroundings of Healthful House. The symptoms—restlessness, varying moods, irritability, eccentricities of character, melancholy, apathy, repugnance to either amusement or serious occupation, were distinctly marked. No doctor could be mistaken, no treatment promised to be efficacious in either removing or reducing them.

It has been justly said that madness is an excess of subjectivity, that is to say, a state in which the mind devotes itself too much to its interior working, and not enough to impressions from the outside. In Roch this indifference was almost absolute. He lived only within himself, a prey to a fixed idea whose obsession had brought him to his present state. Would something happen; a shock which should "exteriorize" him—to employ a sufficiently exact word? It was improbable, but not impossible.

Let it now be related under what circumstances Thomas Roch had left France for the United States, and why the Federal Government had deemed it prudent and necessary



Healthful House.





to confine him in this retreat, where every word that escaped him unconsciously during his paroxysms was noted with the utmost care.

Eighteen months previously the Minister of Marine at Washington had received a request from Thomas Roch for an audience on the subject of a communication which the latter wished to make.

Although he was aware of the nature of the communication and what demands would accompany it, he did not hesitate, and the audience was immediately granted.

In fact, Thomas Roch was so notorious a personage, that the interests in his charge forbade the Minister to hesitate to receive the applicant in order to learn the propositions to be laid before him.

Thomas Roch was an inventor—an inventor of genius. Important discoveries had already brought his name before the world. Thanks to him, problems until then merely theoretic had received a practical application. His name was known in science, he occupied a prominent place in the learned world, and we shall see after what vexations, what mortifications, what insults even, lavished upon him by the shallow jesters of the press, he had been driven into the fit of insanity that led to his detention at Healthful House.

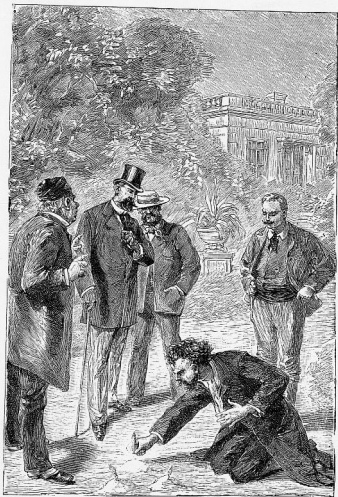
His latest invention in engines of war was called the Roch Fulgurator. This apparatus, if he were to be believed, was so much superior to all others that the State which should secure it would be absolutely sovereign over sea and land.

Everyone knows that inventors have to contend with formidable difficulties, especially when they endeavour to procure the adoption of their devices by ministerial commissions. Many well-known examples of this fact exist, but it is useless to dwell on them, for such transactions present difficulties inexplicable to the outsider. However, in the case of Thomas Roch, it may be admitted that, like those of the majority of his predecessors, his demands were so excessive, and he rated his new engine at so exorbitant a value, that it was almost impossible to treat with him.

This arose, it must be observed, from his having been audaciously imposed upon in the matter of preceding inventions, which had been adopted with most valuable results. His temper had been soured, and his mind embittered, by his failure to obtain the profit legitimately due to him; he became distrustful, determined to treat only on his own terms, however unacceptable to other parties, and in every case he demanded so considerable a sum of money, even previous to any tests, that his requirements seemed inadmissible.

In the first instance Roch, as a Frenchman, offered the Fulgurator to France. He informed the commission nominated to receive his communication of its purpose. It was a sort of auto-propulsive engine of quite special fabrication, charged with an explosive composed of new substances, which produced its effect only under the action of a new deflagrator, also of his own invention.

When this engine, however it might have been pro-



An inventor.



pelled, exploded, not by striking the object aimed at, but at a distance of some hundreds of yards, its action on the atmospheric strata was so great that every structure, either detached fortress or man-of-war, within a space of ten thousand square yards, must be annihilated. The principle was the same as that of the ball projected by the Zaluski pneumatic cannon, which had been already tested at that period, but with results multiplied at least a hundred times. If the invention of M. Roch really possessed this power, then superiority, either offensive or defensive, was secured to his country. Yet might not the inventor have exaggerated, even though he had tested it against other machines of well-established credit? Only experiments could demonstrate it, and Thomas Roch refused to consent to such trials until after payment of the millions at which he valued his Fulgurator.

It is certain that his mind had already lost its balance. He had no longer entire possession of his brain power, but was on the path which would gradually lead to madness. No government could condescend to treat with him under the conditions he imposed.

The French commission had to break off all negotiations, and the newspapers, even those of the Radical opposition, were obliged to admit the difficulty of proceeding with the matter. The proposals of Thomas Roch were rejected, and without any fear that another State would consent to accept them.

With that excess of subjectivity which went on increasing in the shaken mind of the inventor, it is not surprising

that the chord of patriotism, becoming unstrung by degrees, soon ceased to vibrate. For the honour of human nature, it must be repeated that by this time he was no longer accountable. His mind was inert, except on the subject of his invention; in that one particular it retained its power. But in all that concerned the most ordinary details of existence, his mental collapse became more marked daily, and deprived him of complete responsibility for his actions.

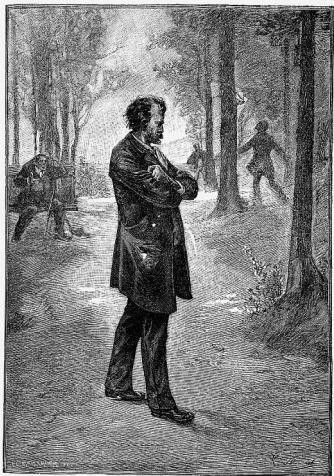
His offer, then, was declined. Perhaps it would have been better to prevent him from taking his invention elsewhere. This was not done, however, which was a mistake.

The inevitable happened. Under his increasing irritability, the sense of patriotism which is the essence of the citizen—who belongs to his country before belonging to himself—became numbed in the mind of the disappointed inventor. He turned his thoughts to other nations; he crossed the frontier, he forgot the never-to-be-forgotten past, and he offered the Roch Fulgurator to Germany.

There, after learning the inventor's exorbitant demands, the Government refused to receive his proposal. Moreover, a new ballistic engine had just been tested in the war, and the authorities thought they might dispense with the French invention.

Then the Frenchman's rage increased to hate—an instinctive hatred against mankind—specially after his approaches to the Admiralty of Great Britain had failed. The English being a practical people, the Admiralty did not repulse him all at once—they dallied, temporized, and circumvented him. Roch would listen to nothing. His





The inventor with a craze.



secret was worth millions; those millions he would have, or no one should obtain his secret. Finally the Admiralty gave him up.

It was under these circumstances, his mental state growing daily worse, that he made a last attempt with America—about eighteen months before the opening of this story.

The Americans, being even more practical than the English, did not haggle about the *Roch Fulgurator*, on which they placed an exceptional value, because of the French chemist's reputation.

They rightly looked upon him as a man of genius, and took measures which were justified by his mental condition, with the intention of making an equitable settlement with him afterwards.

As Thomas Roch gave proofs beyond dispute of mental disturbance, the administration, in the interest even of his invention, considered it expedient to place him under restraint.

As it has already been said, he was not placed in a lunatic asylum. Healthful House offered every guarantee for the treatment of his malady. But although he had received the most assiduous care, the object had not hitherto been attained. However irrational he was in all else—this point must be insisted upon once more—the inventor was completely himself when he was set going on the topic of his discoveries. He became animated, he spoke with the decision of a man sure of himself, and with an authority which impressed his hearers. He eloquently

described the marvellous qualities of his Fulgurator, and the truly extraordinary effects which would result from it. But, upon the nature of the explosive, and of the deflagrator, the elements that composed it and their fabrication, and the manipulation it required, he maintained invincible reserve. Once or twice at the height of a paroxysm it was thought that the secret of his invention was about to escape him, and every precaution was taken. . . . All was in vain; though Thomas Roch no longer possessed the instinct of self-preservation, he took good care to preserve his secret.

Pavilion 17, in the park of Healthful House, stood in a garden surrounded by quickset hedges, where the patient might take exercise under the supervision of his keeper. This attendant lived in the same pavilion with him, slept in the same room, watched him night and day, and never left him for an hour. He watched his least words during the ravings which generally occurred in the intermediary state between waking and sleeping, and he even listened to his muttering in his dreams.

The man's name was Gaydon. Shortly after the inventor's sequestration, having learned that an attendant who spoke French was wanted, he had presented himself at Healthful House and was accepted in the capacity of keeper to the new patient.

In reality the so-called Gaydon was a French engineer, named Simon Hart, who had been for several years in the employ of a firm of manufacturing chemists in New Jersey. He was forty years old, his forehead was large and marked

with the straight line of the observer ; his resolute bearing denoted energy and tenacity combined.

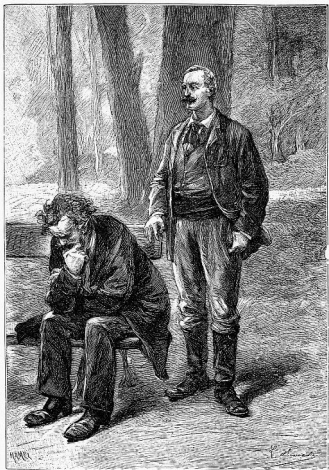
Simon Hart was well versed in the various questions connected with the perfecting of modern armament, and those inventions which might affect its power. He knew thoroughly all that had been done in the matter of explosives—over eleven hundred existed at that time—and he was essentially the man to appreciate Thomas Roch. Believing in the power of the Fulgurator, he was convinced that Thomas Roch was in possession of an engine capable of changing the conditions of war, either offensive or defensive, on land and on sea. Having heard that the man of science had been respected by the malady which had invaded him on all other sides, that in the partly deranged brain still burned a light, a flame, the flame of genius, Hart bethought him that if the secret were to escape Roch in a moment of frenzy, his invention might be used for the benefit of a foreign power. Thereupon he resolved to become the inventor's keeper, by passing himself off as an American who spoke the French tongue fluently. Under pretext of a voyage to Europe he resigned his post, and changed his name. Circumstances were in his favour, the proposal he made to the Principal was accepted, and for fifteen months he had fulfilled all the duties of keeper to Thomas Roch, at Healthful House.

Such resolution denoted rare unselfishness and noble patriotism, for the service to be undertaken necessitated work of a kind repulsive to a man of Simon Hart's class and education. But—this must not be forgotten—the

engineer did not intend to despoil his charge. If indeed his secret escaped him, Thomas Roch should have all the gain when he recovered his reason.

Thus did Simon Hart, or rather Gaydon, live for fifteen months with the lunatic, observing, watching, even questioning, without gaining any information. The more he heard the inventor talk of his discovery, the more was he convinced of its extraordinary importance, and he dreaded above all things that the partial derangement of the faculties of his charge might develop into complete insanity, or that a fatal crisis might carry away his secret with his life.

Such was Simon Hart's situation, such was the mission to which he had sacrificed himself in the interest of his country. However, the patient's physical health did not suffer, thanks to his vigorous constitution. The nervous vitality of his temperament enabled him to resist all these destructive causes. Of medium height, with a massive head, a well-developed forehead, well-shaped skull, grey hair, eyes haggard at times, but bright, fixed, imperious when his dominant thought flashed from them, a thick moustache under a nose with readily-heaving nostrils, a mouth with tight lips as though closed upon a secret, a thoughtful countenance, the attitude of a man who had striven long, and was determined still to strive—such was the inventor, Thomas Roch, confined in one of the buildings of Healthful House, not conscious perhaps of this sequestration, and in the charge of Simon Hart the engineer, known as Gaydon the keeper.



The keeper and his charge.





## CHAPTER II.

### COUNT D'ARTIGAS.

WHO was this Count d'Artigas? A Spaniard, as his name seemed to indicate. Yet the stern of the schooner bore in letters of gold the name *Ebba*, and that was pure Norwegian. Had he been asked the name of the *Ebba's* captain, he would have answered, "Spade," and Effondat the boatswain, and Selim the cook—all singularly dissimilar names, which suggested various nationalities.

It would be difficult to deduce any plausible theory from the appearance of Count d'Artigas. While the colour of his skin, his very black hair, and the grace of his movements, might proclaim a Spanish origin, his general appearance offered none of the racial characteristics of the natives of the Iberian peninsula.

He was of more than medium height, very strongly built, and at most forty years of age. With his calm and haughty bearing he resembled a Hindoo prince in whom was blended the blood of the superb Malayan types. If his were not a cold complexion, the same could not be said of his imperious gesture and abrupt speech. The language which he and his crew spoke was one of those dialects common in the islands of the Indian Ocean and

the surrounding seas. Yet when his voyages landed him on the shores of the old or the new world, he expressed himself with remarkable ease in English, betraying his foreign birth by a slight accent only.

What had been Count d'Artigas' past, the divers incidents in a most mysterious existence? What was his present, from what source did he draw his fortune?—evidently considerable, since it permitted him to live like a gentleman of fine tastes and fastidious habits. Where was his home; at least, what was the schooner's port of destination? No one could say, and no one dared interrogate him on this point, so reticent was he. He did not look like a man who would give himself away in an interview—even for the benefit of American reporters.

All that was known of him was simply what was said in the newspapers when the presence of the *Ebba* was announced in some port, specially in the ports on the east coast of the United States. There, in fact, the schooner came at almost fixed periods to take in all sorts of supplies for a long voyage. Not only did she revictual in provisions, flour, biscuits, preserves, salt meat and fresh, live sheep and oxen, wines, beers, and alcoholic liquors, but also in clothing, tools, luxuries, and necessities, all paid for at a high rate, either in dollars, or guineas, or other coinage of various countries.

Hence, although little or nothing was known of the Count's private life, he himself was well known in the various ports of the American coast from the peninsula of Florida to New England.

It was not therefore surprising that the Principal of Healthful House should feel himself honoured by the Count's request.

This was the first time the schooner *Ebba* had put into the port of Newburn ; and it could be only the owner's whim which led him to the mouth of the Neuse. What had brought Count d'Artigas to this place ? To revictual ? No ; for Pamlico Sound could not offer him the resources he would find in other ports such as Boston, New York, Dover, Savannah, Wilmington in North Carolina, and Charleston in South Carolina. In the estuary of the Neuse, in the insignificant market of Newburn, what merchandise could the Count d'Artigas get in exchange for his piastres and his bank-notes ? This "chief-place" of the County of Craven did not contain more than from five to six thousand inhabitants. Trade meant merely the exportation of grain, pigs, furniture, and naval stores. Besides, some weeks before, during a stay of ten days at Charleston, the schooner had taken in a complete cargo for a destination which, as usual, was unknown.

Had this enigmatic individual, then, come for the sole object of visiting Healthful House ? Perhaps there was nothing very surprising in this, since the establishment enjoyed a very real and very just celebrity.

It might also be that the Count had a fancy for meeting Thomas Roch. The wide-spread fame of the French inventor would certainly justify his curiosity ; for was not Roch a mad genius, whose inventions promised to revolutionize the methods of modern military art !

In the afternoon, as he had arranged by letter, Count d'Artigas presented himself at Healthful House, accompanied by Captain Spade, commander of the *Ebba*.

In accordance with the orders given, they were instantly admitted, and conducted to the presence of the Principal. The latter gave the Count an effusive welcome, placed himself at their service—for he would relegate to no inferior the honour of being their cicerone, and Count d'Artigas accepted the kind offer gratefully. They began by visiting the general sitting-rooms and the private apartments. The Principal dwelt upon the care bestowed on the sufferers—far greater, if he were to be believed, than they could have received in their own homes; truly exceptional treatment, he repeated, and its results had gained well-merited success for Healthful House.

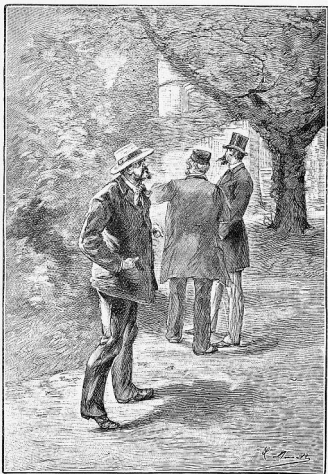
Count d'Artigas listened in his usual phlegmatic way, and appeared interested in the Principal's inexhaustible loquacity, probably the better to disguise the real object of his visit. However, after an hour thus spent, he ventured to ask:

"Have you not a patient who has been greatly discussed of late—who has attracted the attention of the public to Healthful House?"

"I think you are alluding to Thomas Roch, Count," said the Principal.

"Yes; the Frenchman—the inventor whose mind seems to be unhinged."

"Very much so, sir; and perhaps it is just as well it should be so. To my mind, mankind can gain nothing by



A private view.



those inventions which increase the means of destruction which are too numerous already."

"That is well said," remarked the Count, "and I agree with you. True progress does not lie in that direction, and I look upon all such efforts as malevolent. But has this man entirely lost the use of his mental powers?"

"Entirely? No, Count, only as far as the things of ordinary life are concerned. In regard to these he has neither understanding nor responsibility. Yet his inventive genius has remained intact, it has survived the mental collapse, and if his absurd demands had been admitted, I have no doubt he would have produced a new engine of war—of which there is not the least need."

"Certainly not, certainly not," repeated the Count. And Captain Spade looked approval.

"You may judge for yourself, sir. Here we are at the pavilion where M. Roch lives. Though his detention is necessary for the safety of the public, he none the less receives all the attentions due to him, and the care necessary to his condition. Besides, he is out of reach of those who might wish to—"

The Principal finished his sentence by nodding his head significantly. This brought an imperceptible smile to the lips of his guest.

"But," the Count asked, "is M. Roch never alone?"

"Never, sir. He has a keeper, in whom we have complete confidence, in constant attendance. In case he should by some means or other let fall any suggestion relating to his discovery, his words would be immediately



taken down, and it will be seen what use shall be made of them."

At that moment Count d'Artigas glanced quickly at Captain Spade, who answered by a gesture which seemed to say, "I understand."

Anyone who had watched the said Captain Spade during the visit would have remarked that he examined with special minuteness that portion of the park surrounding Pavilion 17, and the various openings that led to it—probably carrying out a plan previously arranged. The garden of the pavilion was bounded by the outer wall of the property. Outside, the wall enclosed the base of the hill whose sides sloped gently down to the right bank of the river.

The building consisted of a ground floor with a terrace after the Italian style. It contained two rooms and a hall, with windows secured by iron bars. Beautiful trees, then in all their summer luxuriance of foliage, surrounded the house on all sides. There were lovely green, velvety lawns, dotted all over with shrubs of various kinds, and richly-tinted flowers in full bloom. The whole space covered about half an acre, and was reserved to the exclusive use of Thomas Roch, who was free to come and go about the garden under the eyes of his keeper.

When Count d'Artigas, Captain Spade, and the Principal reached this enclosure, they caught sight of Gaydon, the keeper, at the door of the pavilion.

The Count instantly fixed his eyes on the attendant, whom he appeared to examine with special interest un-

remarked by the Principal. This was not, however, the first time that strangers had come to visit the occupant of Pavilion 17, for the French inventor was justly considered the most interesting inmate of Healthful House. Nevertheless Gaydon's attention was attracted by the singular appearance of these two, whose nationality he could not ascertain. Although Count d'Artigas' name was not unknown to him, he had never had the opportunity of meeting that rich gentleman during his visits to the eastern ports, and he was not aware that the schooner *Ebba* was at that moment anchored off the bank at the boundary of Healthful House.

"Gaydon," said the director, "where is M. Roch?"

"There," said the keeper, pointing to a man who was walking meditatively under the trees behind the pavilion.

"Count d'Artigas has received permission to visit Healthful House, and he did not wish to leave without having seen our patient who has been so much talked of recently."

"And he would have been still more talked of if the Federal Government had not taken the precaution of shutting him up in this establishment."

"A necessary precaution, Count."

"Certainly, Principal. It is far better for the repose of the world that the secret of this invention should be buried with him."

Gaydon looked at the Count, but did not say a single word, and, preceding the two visitors, he led the way to the group of trees at the end of the enclosure.

A few steps brought the strangers into the presence of Thomas Roch.

The afflicted man had not seen them approach, and when they were within a short distance of him he was evidently not aware of their presence.

In the meantime Captain Spade, without arousing any suspicion, was carefully examining the grounds and the position occupied by Pavilion 17 at the lower end of the park of Healthful House. As he followed the sloping paths he easily distinguished the top of a mast which rose above the outside wall. A momentary glance sufficed to enable him to recognize it as belonging to the *Ebbel*, and to verify that the wall on this side ran along the right bank of the river.

Motionless and mute, Count d'Artigas watched the French inventor. This man was vigorous still; eighteen months' incarceration had done no injury to his health. But his strange attitudes, his incoherent gestures, his haggard eyes, his indifference to everything happening about him, clearly denoted a complete state of abstraction and derangement of mind.

Thomas Roch had just sat down on a seat, and with the end of a cane which he held in his hand he was drawing the outline of a fortification on the path. Then, falling on his knees, he made little mounds of sand, evidently to represent bastions. That done, he broke off some leaves from a bush and planted them on the top of the mounds like so many tiny flags. He did all this quite



Pavilion 17.



seriously and without paying the least attention to the on-lookers.

It was child's play, but a child would not have played with such undisturbed gravity.

"Is he quite mad, then?" the Count asked, and in spite of his usual imperturbability he appeared to feel some disappointment.

"I warned you, sir, that nothing could be got out of him," the Principal replied.

"Will he not take any notice of us?"

"It will be difficult to make him." And then turning towards the attendant, the Principal said, "Speak to him, Gaydon; perhaps your voice will induce him to answer."

"He is sure to answer me," said Gaydon.

Then touching his charge on the shoulder, he pronounced his name in a low tone.

The afflicted man raised his head, and of all those present he saw no one but his keeper, although Count d'Artigas, Captain Spade, who had just rejoined him, and the Principal, stood round him in a circle.

"M. Roch," Gaydon said, speaking in English, "Here are some visitors who wish to see you. . . . They are interested in your health . . . in your work."

This last word caught the inventor's attention.

"My work?" he rejoined in the same language, which he spoke fluently.

Then taking a pebble between his finger and thumb, like

a marble in a small boy's fingers, he aimed it at one of the sand mounds, which it brought down.

He shouted with delight.

"Down! It is down! My explosive has destroyed the whole thing with one blow."

Roch rose with the light of triumph in his eyes.

"You see," said the Principal, addressing Count d'Artigas, "the idea of his invention never leaves him."

"And it will die with him," said the keeper emphatically.

"Could you not induce him, Gaydon, to talk of his invention, of his explosive Fulgurator, as he called it?"

"If you desire me to do so, sir."

"I do, for I think it will interest Count d'Artigas."

"Undoubtedly," replied the Count, and his features kept the secret of his thoughts.

"There is the risk of bringing on a paroxysm," observed the attendant.

"You may stop the conversation when you think fit. Say to M. Roch that a stranger wishes to treat with him for the purchase of his Fulgurator."

"But are you not afraid that his secret may escape him?" interrupted Count d'Artigas.

The words were said with such vivacity that Gaydon could not restrain a glance of distrust, which had no effect upon the impenetrable visitor.

"There is nothing to fear," he answered, "and no promise will tear his secret from M. Roch, so long as the millions he demands are not in his possession."

"I haven't the money about me," was the Count's calm reply.

Gaydon returned to his patient, and again he touched him on the shoulder.

"M. Roch," he said, "here are some strangers who propose to purchase your discovery."

Thomas Roch drew himself up.

"My discovery," he cried, "my explosive, The Roch Fulgurator!"

His increasing excitement indicated the imminence of a paroxysm of the kind which Gaydon had described, and which was always caused by questions of this nature.

"How much will you give me for it? How much?" repeated the Frenchman.

There was no difficulty in promising him a sum, however great.

"How much? How much?" he cried again.

"Ten million dollars," Gaydon replied.

"Ten millions!" repeated Roch. "Ten millions for a Fulgurator which is ten million times superior to any other in existence! Ten millions for an auto-propulsive projectile which can, in exploding, extend its destructive power over thousands of square yards! Ten millions—the only deflagrator capable of causing such an explosion! All the riches of the world are not sufficient to pay for the secret of my engine, and rather than sell it at that price I would bite out my tongue with my teeth! Ten millions, when it is worth a milliard!—a milliard! a milliard!"

Thomas Roch was evidently a man with whom it was



impossible to deal ; one in whose mind no sense of proportion any longer existed ; and even had Gaydon offered him ten thousand millions the madman would have demanded more.

Count d'Artigas and Captain Spade had watched him closely from the beginning of this outburst ; the Count still phlegmatic, though with lowering looks ; the Captain shaking his head to express : "Decidedly there is nothing to be done with this unfortunate person."

Roch finally fled, and as he ran across the garden he cried in a voice choked with rage,—

"Thousands of millions ! thousands of millions !"

Gaydon then turned to the Principal, and said curtly :  
"I warned you !"

He set off in pursuit of his charge, and having joined him he took him by the arm without much resistance, and led him into the pavilion, locking the door.

Count d'Artigas remained alone with the Principal, while Captain Spade for the last time traversed the garden inside the wall.

"I exaggerated nothing, Count," declared the Principal. "It is undeniable that M. Roch's malady is increasing daily, and in my opinion it will develop into incurable insanity. If all the money he demands were given to him, nothing could be gained by it."

"That is probable," replied Count d'Artigas ; "and yet, if his demands amount to an absurdity, he has none the less invented a machine whose power is, so to speak, infinite."

"That is the opinion, sir, of persons competent to judge ; but what he has discovered will soon disappear with him in one of these paroxysms, which are becoming more intense and more frequent. Soon even the motive power of interest, the only one that seems to have survived in his mind, will disappear."

"Perhaps there will remain the motive of hate!" murmured the Count as Captain Spade joined him before the chief entrance.

## CHAPTER III.

### A DOUBLE ABDUCTION.

HALF an hour later Count d'Artigas and Captain Spade were walking along the road, bordered with venerable beeches, that separates the right bank of the Neuse from the establishment of Healthful House. They had both taken leave of the Principal, the latter declaring himself much honoured by their visit, and they thanking him for his kind reception. A hundred dollars destined for the staff testified to the Count's generosity. He was a foreigner of the greatest distinction—who could doubt it, if distinction is to be measured by generosity!

Leaving Healthful House by the iron gates, halfway up the hill, the Count and the Captain walked round the outer wall, whose height precluded any attempts to scale it. The former was pensive, and according to custom his companion waited until he was addressed.

Count d'Artigas did not break the silence until the moment when, pausing on the road, he was in a position to measure with his eye the height of the wall in front of Pavilion 17.

"You had time," he said, "to study the premises?"

"Yes, M. le Comte," replied the Captain, accentuating the title which he gave to the stranger.

"Nothing has escaped you?"

"Nothing that is useful to know. On account of its position behind this wall the pavilion is easy to reach, and if you persist in your project—"

"I persist, Spade."

"Notwithstanding his mental state?"

"Notwithstanding that state; and if we succeed in carrying him off—"

"That is my affair. When night comes I undertake to get into the park of Healthful House and up to Pavilion 17 without being seen by anyone."

"By the iron gates?"

"No, from this side."

"But the wall is on this side, and after having got over it how will you clear it again with Roch? If the lunatic shouts, if he offers any resistance, if his keeper raises the alarm—?"

"Don't let that disturb you. We have only to go in and come out by that door."

Captain Spade pointed to a narrow door a few steps off, contrived in the wall for the use of the people of the house when their work brought them to the water's side.

"By that we shall get into the park. We shall not want a ladder," rejoined the Captain.

"But that door is closed."

"It will be opened."

"But are there no bolts on the inside?"

"I drew them back during my walk behind the trees at the foot of the garden, without being observed by the Principal."

Count d'Artigas went up to the door and said, "It is locked."

"Here is the key," replied his companion, and he presented the key which he had taken out of the door after he had freed the bolts from their staple.

"You have done well, Spade," said the Count. "Probably the adventure will not present many difficulties. Let us get back to the schooner. About eight o'clock, when it becomes dark, one of the boats will land you with five men—"

"Yes, five men. They will be enough in case the keeper is troublesome and we may have to get rid of him."

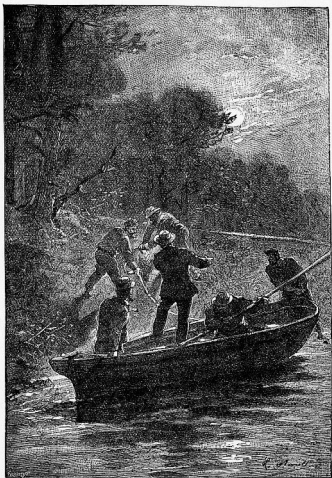
"Get rid of him—" the Count replied. "Very well, if that is absolutely necessary—but it would be better to secure this Gaydon and take him on board the *Ebba*. Who knows whether he has not already got at a part of the secret."

"That is true."

"And then, Roch is accustomed to him; and I do not intend anything to be changed about him."

This reply, Count d'Artigas accompanied with a smile so significant that the Captain could make no mistake about the part to be played by the Healthful House *employé*.

The plan of this double abduction was then decided



The landing is effected.



upon, and it appeared to have every chance of success, unless, during the two hours of daylight that still remained, some one perceived that the key was missing from the door of the park, and that the bolts were drawn. Captain Spade and his men were certain of obtaining access to the grounds.

It must be observed besides, that, with the exception of M. Roch, who was under special supervision, the other residents in the establishment were subject to no measures of that kind. They occupied pavilions or rooms in the principal building situated in the upper part of the park. All this led the conspirators to think that Thomas Roch and his keeper, Gaydon, being separately surprised in Pavilion 17, and unable to offer any serious resistance, or even to call for help, would be easily made victims of this double abduction which Captain Spade was about to attempt for the benefit of Count d'Artigas.

The foreigner and his companion then directed their steps towards a little bay where one of the *Ebba's* boats awaited them. The schooner was moored two cable-lengths away, with its sails enveloped in their yellow covers, and its yards topped according to the custom on board pleasure-yachts. No flag flew above the taffrail. Only at the masthead there appeared a small red pennant which the east breeze, now fallen, scarcely fluttered.

The Count and the Captain entered the boat. In a few moments four oars had pulled them to the schooner, and they had mounted to the deck by the side-ladder.



Count d'Artigas hastened aft to his cabin while Captain Spade went forward to give his last orders.

As he drew near the fore-castle he leant over the star-board side and his eye sought an object floating at some fathoms' distance.

It was a small buoy.

The night was falling slowly. On the left bank of the winding river the uncertain outline of Newburn was beginning to fade. The houses looked black against the horizon still lighted by a ray that edged the clouds in the west. On the other side the sky was dark with thick masses of vapour. But it did not seem like rain, for these masses were hanging high in the sky.

Towards seven o'clock the first lights of Newburn glittered in the windows of the upper floors of the houses, while the glimmer from the ground floors was reflected in long zigzags that scarcely wavered on the waters, for the wind had fallen with the night. The fishing-boats were coming in slowly to gain the coves of the harbour, some striving to catch a last breath in their sails, others pulled by oars, whose strokes, clear and rhythmic, were heard from afar. Two steamers passed, emitting a stream of sparks from their double funnels crowned with black smoke, and beating the water with their powerful paddles.

At eight o'clock the Count reappeared on deck, accompanied by a man about fifty years of age, to whom he said,—

"It is time, Serkø."

"I'll go and tell Spade," replied Serkø.

The Captain joined them.

"Get ready to start," said his employer.

"We are ready."

"Be sure that no one is awakened at Healthful House, and let none suspect that Thomas Roch and his keeper have been brought on board the *Ebba*."

"They would not be found, that is more, if they were looked for," Serkő added, shrugging his shoulders, and laughing good-humouredly.

"Anyway, it would be better not to arouse suspicion," replied Count d'Artigas.

The boat was lowered. Captain Spade and five men took their places. Four of them laid hold of the oars. The fifth, Efferndat, the boatswain, who was to steer the boat, took his place at the tiller near the Captain.

"Good luck, Spade," Serkő cried, smiling, "and be as noiseless as a lover carrying off his lady."

"Yes—unless this Gaydon—"

"We must have Roch and Gaydon," said D'Artigas.

"I understand," answered the Captain.

The boat got clear, and the sailors followed it with their eyes until it was lost in the darkness.

It is to be remarked that while awaiting its return the *Ebba* made no preparations for departure. Undoubtedly she had no intention of quitting her moorings after the abduction. And in truth, how could she gain the open sea? There was not a breath of wind, and in half an hour the tide would be felt for several miles up the river.

Moored at two cables-length from the steep bank, the *Ebba* could easily have put in closer, and still be in fifteen or twenty feet of water; and this would have facilitated the embarkation when the boat would come alongside. But if she had not effected that manœuvre, it was because the Count had his reasons for not giving the order.

The distance was covered in a few moments, the boat having passed without being seen.

The shore was deserted, solitary also was the road outside the beeches of Healthful House park.

The grappling irons being firmly fixed on the bank, Captain Spade and his four men landed, leaving the boatswain behind, and disappeared under the dark canopy of the trees.

When they reached the wall of the park the Captain stopped, and his men drew up on each side of the door. After the precautions he had taken he would have only to put the key in the lock and push the door, provided that none of the servants of the establishment, seeing it not locked as usual, had bolted it on the inside.

In that case the abduction would have been difficult, even admitting the possibility of scaling the wall.

In the first place the Captain put his ear to the key-hole.

There was no noise of footsteps in the grounds, no one going in or out of Pavilion 17. Not a leaf stirred on the branches of the beeches that screened the road. All around was the silence of the open country on a breezeless night.

Spade drew the key from his pocket and slipped it into the lock ; the latch was lifted, and with a gentle push the door opened inwardly. Everything was in the same state as in the afternoon.

Captain Spade entered the garden, after assuring himself that no one was in the vicinity of the pavilion, and his men followed him.

The door was not locked, but merely closed to : this would enable them to escape with all speed on their return.

In this part, shaded by groups of high trees, it was so dark that it would have been hard to distinguish the pavilion were it not that a bright light was shining from one of the windows.

This, no doubt, was the window of the room occupied by Thomas Roch and by his attendant, for Gaydon never left the patient committed to his care, either day or night. Therefore Spade expected to find him in the room.

His four men and he advanced cautiously, taking care that no noise of rolling stone or breaking branch should reveal their presence. In this way they gained the side of the building, and reached the door. The light that shone through the curtains of the window was placed near the door. But if this door were fastened, how were they to get into the madman's room ? Such was the question that Captain Spade was asking himself. As he had no key that would open the room door, would it not be necessary to break one of the window panes, force the fastening of the window in a twinkling, burst into the

room, surprise Gaydon by a sudden attack, and render him incapable of calling for help ?

But such violent measures would be attended by certain risks. Captain Spade was perfectly aware of this, for he was a man given rather to cunning than to violence. However he had no choice. The one thing essential was to carry off the inventor—Gaydon too, if necessary, in accordance with the Count's instructions—and he must succeed, whatever the cost.

The Captain reached the window, raised himself on tiptoe, and through an opening in the curtains he was able to examine the room.

Gaydon was there near his charge, who was still labouring under the attack caused by the recent visit. This attack required special treatment, which the attendant was now giving, under the direction of one of the doctors of the establishment, whom the Principal had immediately sent to No. 17.

Manifestly the doctor's presence could only complicate the situation, and render the abduction more difficult.

Roch was lying on a sofa, quite dressed. At that moment he appeared sufficiently calm. The paroxysm was passing off little by little, and it would be followed by some hours of torpor and drowsiness.

When Spade raised himself up to the window the doctor was about to withdraw, and Spade heard him assure Gaydon that the night would pass without farther alarm, and there would be no necessity for him to return.

Then the physician turned towards the door, which

opened, it will be remembered, near the window where the five men were waiting. If they had not hidden themselves behind the group of trees close to the pavilion, they would have been seen, not only by the doctor, but also by the keeper who accompanied him.

Before either of them appeared on the steps, Captain Spade made a sign, and his companions dispersed, while he crouched under the window.

Fortunately the lamp had been left on the table, so the sailors from the *Ebba* were in no danger of being betrayed by a ray of light.

As he took leave of Gaydon the doctor paused on the first step, and said,—

“This is one of the severest attacks our patient has had! Two or three more equally violent, and he will lose the little reason he yet retains.”

“Well, then,” said Gaydon, “why does not the Principal forbid him to see visitors? It is a certain Count d’Artigas who had heard of his fame, whom our boarder has to thank for being as you found him.”

“I will call the attention of the Principal to it,” replied the doctor.

He then descended the steps, and Gaydon walked with him to the end of the side walk, leaving the hall door ajar.

Before the two men had advanced twenty steps the Captain rose, and his men joined him.

Ought they not to take advantage of this opportunity to enter the room and seize Thomas Roch, who was

already half asleep, and then wait to set upon Gaydon and secure him?

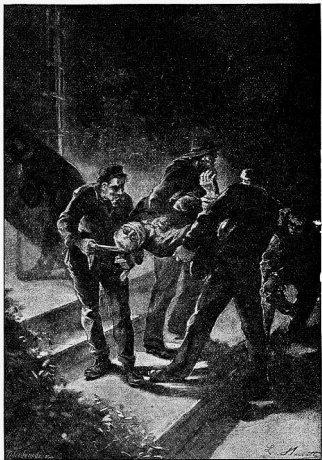
But the keeper would lose no time in returning, and, missing his charge, he would seek him, he would shout, raise an alarm—the doctor would run back immediately; the whole staff of Healthful House would be astir. The trespassers would not have time to reach the lower gate, to get out and lock it after them. . . .

But Spade had no leisure to reflect on the subject. The sound of footsteps on the gravel announced that Gaydon was coming back to the pavilion. It was better to fall upon him, stifle his cries before he could give the alarm, make it impossible for him to defend himself. . . . With four, or even five, he would be overpowered immediately. That done, the Captain would proceed to the capture of the inventor under the most favourable conditions, for the unfortunate man would not know what was happening.

Meanwhile Gaydon appeared from behind the trees, and was advancing towards the steps. But the moment he put his foot on the first step the four men flung themselves upon him, stretched him on the ground without giving him the chance of uttering a cry, gagged him with a handkerchief, covered his eyes with a bandage, and bound his arms and legs so tightly that he was as helpless as a corpse.

Two of the sailors remained at his side while Captain Spade and the others proceeded into the room.

It was just as the Captain conjectured. Roch was in



The abduction.





such a state that the noise had not roused him from his torpor. As he lay on the sofa with his eyes closed, were it not for his heavy breathing he might have been thought dead. It was not necessary either to bind him or to gag him. Two men merely lifted him up, one by the head and the other by the feet, and they started for the boat.

All this was effected instantaneously.

Then Captain Spade left the room last, after he had carefully put out the light and shut the door. By this means there was reason to suppose that the capture would not be discovered before the morrow, or at soonest in the early hours of the morning.

The same manœuvre was repeated for the transport of Gaydon, which was performed without difficulty. The two other men lifted him up, and walking down the garden they reached the outer wall.

That part of the park, always unfrequented, was in profound darkness. They could not even see on the hillside the lights of the buildings and other pavilions of Healthful House.

Having gained the door, Spade had only to open it.

The men carrying Gaydon passed out first. Roch went second in the arms of the other two. Then Captain Spade followed and locked the door with the key, which he intended throwing into the depths of the Neuse so soon as he reached the ship's boat.

There was no one on the road, no one on the bank!

Twenty steps brought them to Effrondat, who awaited them seated against the slope. Roch and Gaydon were

placed in the stern of the boat, and the Captain and his men immediately took their places.

"Let go the grapnel, quick," the Captain cried to the boatswain.

The latter obeyed the order, and slipping down the bank, he entered the boat in his turn.

The four oars struck the water, and the boat shot out towards the schooner. A light at the foremast indicated its moorings, and twenty minutes before she had swung to her anchors at the flow of the tide.

Two minutes later the boat was alongside the *Ebba*. D'Artigas was leaning over the side near the ladder.

"Is it done, Spade?" he asked.

"It is done."

"Both?"

"Both—the keeper and the kept!"

"No one suspects at Healthful House?"

"No one!"

It was not likely that Gaydon, with his eyes and ears tied up, could recognize the voices of Count d'Artigas and Captain Spade.

One thing he might have observed. Neither Roch nor he were hoisted on board the schooner at once. There was some grinding against the side, and half an hour passed before Gaydon, who had never lost his presence of mind, felt himself seized anew, lifted, and then lowered to the bottom of the hold.

The capture being accomplished, the *Ebba* had only to quit her moorings, descend the estuary again, make for

Pamlico Sound, and gain the open sea. Yet there was no sign on board of the preparations usual when a ship is getting under sail.

Was it not dangerous, however, to remain in that place after the double seizure performed in the night? Had the Count so safely hidden his prisoners that they could not be discovered should the *Ebba*, whose proximity to Healthful House was suspicious, receive a visit from the police?

An hour after the boat's return the crew were in their hammocks, except the men of the watch in the prow, Count d'Artigas, Serkö, Captain Spade in their cabins—all slept on board the schooner, which lay motionless on the tranquil waters of the Neuse.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SCHOONER *EBBA*.

It was only the next day, and without any signs of haste, that the *Ebba* began her preparations. From the end of the Newburn pier, the crew might be seen, after the deck was washed, freeing the sails from their coverings under the boatswain's direction, casting off the gaskets, clearing the gear, hauling up the boats, with a view to setting sail.

At eight o'clock in the morning the Count had not yet appeared. His companion Serkő, the engineer—as he was called on board—had not yet left his cabin. As for the Captain, he was busy giving various orders to the sailors which indicated an immediate departure.

The *Ebba* was a yacht admirably adapted for racing, although she had never figured in the North American or British races. The tall masts, surface breadth of canvas, the length of her yards, her draught which gave her great stability even when covered with canvas, her clearly defined water lines, denoted a rapid, seaworthy vessel, capable of contending with the worst weather.

Indeed, the schooner *Ebba* could easily do her twelve miles an hour in a strong breeze close to the wind.

Of course sailing vessels are always dependent on the

variableness of the atmosphere. When a calm comes they must wait, and also, even though they may possess nautical qualities superior to those of the steam yacht, they never have that certainty of progression which steam gives the latter.

All considered, it would seem that superiority belongs to the ship which combines the advantages of sail and screw. But such was evidently not the Count's opinion, since he was satisfied with a schooner for his voyages, even when they extended beyond the limits of the Atlantic.

That morning a gentle breeze came from the west. This was favourable for the *Ebba*, first for getting out of the Neuse, and then for reaching one of the inlets to Pamlico Sound that formed a kind of strait communicating with the open sea.

Two hours later the *Ebba* was still riding at anchor, and her chain was beginning to haul taut with the ebb-tide. The schooner had swung round and its bow was turned to the mouth of the Neuse, the little buoy which the evening before floated on the port side must have been carried away in the night; it was no longer visible.

Suddenly a cannon shot was heard, and smoke rose from the batteries on the coast. It was answered by several shots from the guns that were echeloned on the fringe of islands in the offing.

At that moment the Count and the engineer came up on deck.

The Captain met them.

"A cannon shot," he said.

"We heard it," the engineer answered, slightly shrugging his shoulders.

"That means that our performance at Healthful House has been discovered," the Captain continued.

"Undoubtedly," replied Serkő, "and this booming means the order to close the passes."

"What has that to do with us?" the Count asked in a calm tone.

"Nothing," answered the engineer.

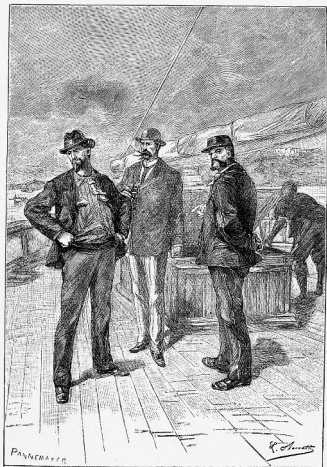
Captain Spade was right in saying that by that time the disappearance of Roch and his keeper was known to the staff of Healthful House.

In the morning when the doctor went to No. 17 to pay his usual visit he found the room empty. So soon as the Principal heard of the catastrophe, he ordered the grounds to be searched. The investigation revealed that although the door at the foot of the hill was locked, the key was not in the lock, and also that the bolts had been drawn from their staples.

There could be no doubt that it was by this door the abduction had been effected, either during the evening or during the night.

Who had done it? No one could offer a supposition. The only thing known was that at half-past seven in the evening one of the resident doctors had visited M. Roch, who was then undergoing a violent paroxysm.

After he had remained for a considerable time with the patient, the doctor left him sleeping, and quitted Pavilion



On board the schooner *Edda*.





17 with Gaydon, who accompanied him to the end of the side walk.

What afterwards occurred no one knew.

The news of the disappearance was telegraphed to Newburn and to Raleigh. In reply, the Governor of North Carolina instantly telegraphed orders that no vessel should be allowed to leave Pamlico Sound until it had been subjected to the closest inspection. A second telegram instructed the cruiser *Falcon*, then stationed there, to put this order into execution. At the same time the most stringent measures were taken for a strict watch on the country ports and provincial towns.

In consequence of this Count d'Artigas could also see the *Falcon* two miles to the east making ready to carry out these instructions. Now, during the time necessary for getting up steam the schooner might easily have escaped without fear of pursuit—for an hour at least.

"Shall we heave the anchor?" asked the Captain.

"Yes, since the wind is favourable, but let there be no sign of haste," said Count d'Artigas.

"That is right," said Serkö, "all the channels of the Sound will be watched now, and no ship will get out without having received a visit from gentlemen as careful as they are curious."

"Let us get under sail all the same," commanded the Count. "When the cruiser's officers or the Customs' agents have examined the *Ebba* the embargo will be taken off, and I shall be very much astonished if they do not give us free passage."

“With many apologies and good wishes for a pleasant voyage and a speedy return!” rejoined Serkø; and his remark ended in a long laugh.

When the news was known at Newburn the authorities asked each other whether it meant flight or abduction. As a flight could not have taken place without Gaydon’s connivance, that idea was abandoned. In the opinion of the Principal and the Committee, the keeper’s conduct was above suspicion.

Then it must have been abduction—and one may imagine the effect of that in the town. What! the French inventor, so strictly guarded, had disappeared! and with him the secret of the Fulgurator which no one had yet been able to acquire? Surely the consequences would be very grave. Was the new discovery completely lost to America? Suppose the deed had been done by another nation, would not that nation, now that Thomas Roch had fallen into its power, make use of what the Federal Government had not been able to obtain, and how could it possibly be believed that the authors of the abduction had acted for a private individual?

So, precautions were extended over the various divisions of North Carolina. An elaborate supervision was exercised on the roads and railways, and around the residences in the towns and country. As for the sea, it was to be closed along the whole length of the coast, from Wilmington to Norfolk. No vessel was to be exempt from search by officers or police agents, and any was to be detained on the slightest suspicious indication. Not only was the

*Falcon* making its preparations, but several steam launches in reserve on the waters of Pamlico Sound were getting ready to scour the sea, with instructions to search down to the depths of the hold, merchantmen, pleasure-boats, fishing craft—including those that were at anchor as well as those setting out to sea.

And all the time the schooner *Ebba* was getting ready to heave her anchor. Upon the whole, it did not seem that the Count experienced the least anxiety about the measures taken by the administration, or the contingencies which would arise if Thomas Roch and his keeper were found on board.

About nine o'clock the last preliminaries were completed, and a few minutes later the *Ebba* turned her head to the east so as to double the left bank of the Neuse.

About fifteen miles from Newburn the river bends suddenly, and winds towards the north-west, growing wider as it advances. After having passed Croatan and Havelock, the *Ebba* reached the bend, and veered towards the north, close to the wind, along the left bank. It was eleven o'clock, when, favoured by the breeze and without having met either cruiser or steam-launch, she rounded the point of the island of Sivan, beyond which Pamlico Sound extended.

This vast expanse of water measures one hundred kilometers from Sivan Island to Roadoke Island. On the ocean side stretches a long line of narrow islands like a natural breakwater, lying north and south from Cape Lookout to Cape Hatteras, and on to Cape Henry, on a

level with the city of Norfolk in the neighbouring State of Virginia.

A great number of lights are placed on the islands and islets in Pamlico Sound in order to make navigation possible during the night. In it there was accommodation for all vessels seeking shelter from the Atlantic swell, and good anchorage was always to be found.

Many passages establish communication between Pamlico Sound and the Atlantic Ocean. A little beyond the Sivan Island lights the Ocracoke Inlet opens, beyond it Hatteras Inlet, and above that three others bearing the names Loggerhead, Newhead, and Oregon.

It is true the *Falcon* guarded that part of the Sound, and inspected all the trading vessels and fishing-boats outward bound. In fact, by this time, in accordance with the common interpretation of the orders received from the Administration, every passage was watched by U.S. ships, to say nothing of the batteries which commanded the channels.

Having passed Ocracoke Inlet, the *Ebba* made no effort either to encounter or to avoid any of the vessels on the water, but kept on its casual course towards Hatteras Inlet, by which channel, for reasons known to himself, the Count d'Artigas intended to get out.

Until then the *Ebba* had not been challenged by the revenue agents or by the cruiser's officers, although she had not avoided them. Besides, how could she escape their vigilance? Were the authorities about to spare D'Artigas the annoyance of a visit as a special privilege?

Did they regard him as too high a personage for his navigation to be interfered with even for an hour? This was unlikely, for while taking him for a foreigner leading the luxurious life of one of fortune's favourites, no one actually knew who he was, whence he came, or whither he was going.

The schooner continued her course, moving gracefully and swiftly over the waters of the Sound. Her flag—a crescent of gold on a red ground—floated majestically in the breeze.

Count d'Artigas was seated in the stern, in one of the cane deck-chairs commonly seen on pleasure-boats. The engineer and the captain were chatting with him.

"The officers of the Federal Marine are in no hurry to touch their hats to us," observed Serkø.

"Let them come when they like," said the Count, in a tone of complete indifference.

"Probably they are waiting until we get into Hatteras Inlet," said the Captain.

"Let them wait," said the rich yachtsman curtly, and then he relapsed into the moody abstraction which was habitual to him.

The Captain's hypothesis was probably correct, for it was evident that the *Ebba* was making for the passage indicated. The *Falcon* had not yet signalled to her to lie-to, but certainly would do so as the schooner neared the entrance to the passage. In that place it would be impossible for the yacht to refuse the prescribed visit before clearing Pamlico Sound to gain the open sea.

It did not seem, however, that the yacht had any desire to avoid the authorities.

Were Roch and Gaydon so well concealed on board that it was impossible for the State agents to find them?

This supposition was admissible, but perhaps Count d'Artigas would have shown less confidence had he known that the *Ebba* was the object of the closest scrutiny on board the cruiser and the custom-house launches.

In fact, the visit of the foreigner to Healthful House had attracted special attention to him. Naturally, the Principal could have had no reason to suspect the motives of his visit. Yet, only a few hours after the Count's departure, Roch and his attendant had been carried off, and since his visit no one had been received at Pavilion 17, and no one had been in communication with Thomas Roch. Suspicions were awakened, and the heads of the house began to ask what part the foreigner had taken in the affair. Supposing the place to have been reconnoitred, and the approaches to the pavilion examined, could not the Count's companion have withdrawn the bolt of the door and taken out the key? To return at nightfall, slip into the park, and proceed with the abduction, would in that case be a comparatively easy matter, since the *Ebba* was anchored only two or three cable-lengths from the grounds.

Now these suspicions, which neither the Principal nor his staff had formulated at the opening of the inquiry, gained strength when the schooner was seen to raise her

anchor, descend the estuary, and manœuvre so as to gain one of the exits of the Sound.

Then the authorities ordered the *Falcon* and the Customs steamers to follow the *Ebba*, to stop her before she entered one of the channels, to subject every part of the vessel to the severest examination. She was not to be granted free pratique until they were convinced that the missing men were not on board.

Surely Count d'Artigas could not be unconscious that he was under suspicion, that his yacht was being specially watched by officers and agents.

But if he had been aware of this, would he, with his superb disdain and haughty bearing, have condescended to care?

About three o'clock in the afternoon the schooner, which was cruising within a mile of the passage, performed the evolutions necessary to keep the middle of the channel.

After having visited some fishing boats then going out to sea, the *Falcon* waited at the mouth of the passage. No mere sailing vessel could have escaped the pursuit of a man-of-war, and if the schooner did not obey the injunction to heave-to, one or two shells would soon have brought her to reason.

At that moment a boat containing two officers and ten sailors left the cruiser and crossed the *Ebba's* course.

Count d'Artigas, from his place in the stern, watched this manœuvre with indifference, while he calmly lighted a cigar.



When the boat was no more than half a cable-length away, one of the men rose and waved a flag.

"Signal to stop," said Serkö.

"Presumably," said the Count.

"Ordered to wait."

"Let us wait."

Captain Spade gave orders to lie-to, and these were instantly carried out. Presently the *Ebba* moved only to the sway of the tide, which bore her towards the channel.

A few strokes brought the *Falcon's* boat alongside the *Ebba*. The ladder was lowered, and presently the two officers, followed by eight men, stood on the deck, two sailors remaining in charge of the boat.

The *Ebba's* crew ranged themselves in a line near the fore-castle.

The superior officer, a ship's lieutenant, advanced towards the owner of the yacht, who had just risen to salute him, and the following questions and answers were exchanged.

"This schooner belongs to Count d'Artigas, whom I have the honour of addressing?"

"Yes."

"Her name?"

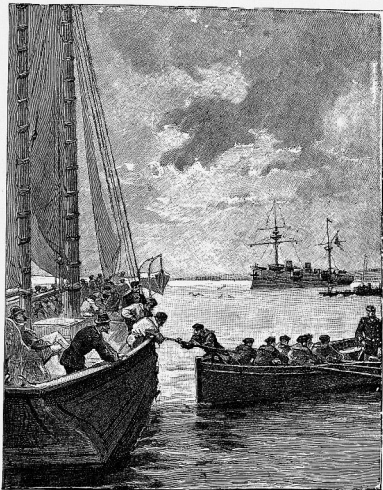
"The *Ebba*."

"Her captain?"

"Captain Spade."

"His nationality?"

"Indo-Malay."



Boarded.



The officer looked at the ship's flag, and Count d'Artigas asked,—

"May I ask for what reason I have the pleasure of seeing you on board my yacht?"

"Orders have been given to visit all vessels at present in Pamlico Sound, either at anchor or under way," replied the officer.

He did not think it necessary to say that the *Ebba* was to be subjected to a special search.

"You have, doubtless, no intention of refusing, M. le Comte?"

"Certainly not, sir. My schooner is at your service from the top of its masts to the bottom of its hold. I would only ask why the vessels in Pamlico Sound are undergoing these formalities to-day?"

"I see no reason why you should be left in ignorance, Count," replied the officer. "The Governor of Carolina has been informed that there has been a case of kidnapping at Healthful House, and the administration wish to be assured that the men have not been shipped off during the night."

"Is it possible?" said the Count, affecting surprise. "And who are the persons who have disappeared from Healthful House?"

"A madman—an inventor—is the victim of this outrage, and his keeper."

"A madman! Can it be the Frenchman, Thomas Roch?"

"The same, sir."

"Thomas Roch, whom I saw yesterday when I visited the institution, whom I questioned in the presence of the Principal! He became violent just as Captain Spade and myself were about to leave the place."

The officer was observing the foreigner with great attention, striving to find something suspicious either in his manner or his words.

"It is not credible!" added the Count. And he said this precisely as though he had now heard of the adventure for the first time.

"I understand the anxiety of the responsible parties," he continued, "considering the inventor's importance, and I quite approve of the measures they have taken. It is needless to observe that neither the inventor nor his keeper is on board the *Ebba*. Of that you can assure yourself by making a thorough search. Captain, be good enough to accompany these gentlemen."

Then with a formal salute to the lieutenant the Count sat down again in his chair, and replaced his cigar between his lips.

The two officers and the eight sailors, conducted by Captain Spade, commenced their investigation. They descended first by the companion to the stern saloon, luxuriously furnished, and fitted with panels of rare, costly woods, superb ornaments, and carpets and hangings of great price. Needless to say, this saloon, the adjoining cabins, and the Count's state-room, were searched with all possible care. Captain Spade also joined in the investiga-



Lifting the buoy.



tion, in order that no suspicion of his employer should remain in the minds of the officers.

After the saloon and the other rooms had been searched, the party proceeded to the dining-saloon, which was richly decorated; they ransacked the pantries, the cuddy, and fore part of the vessel, the cabins of Captain Spade and the boatswain, then the berths of the sailors, without discovering either Thomas Roch or Gaydon.

There remained the hold and its accommodations. These required an elaborate examination; so when the hatches were lifted, the captain lighted two lanterns to facilitate operations.

The hold contained only barrels of water, provisions of all kinds, kegs of spirits, casks of wine and beer, and a stock of coal—an abundance of everything, as though the schooner had been provided for a long voyage. Through the spaces in the cargo the American sailors slipped into the innermost corners, even getting into the narrow spaces between bales and sacks. They had all their trouble for nothing.

Evidently Count d'Artigas had been wrongfully suspected of any part in the capture of the inventor and his keeper.

The investigation, which had lasted about two hours, ended without result.

At half-past five the officers and men of the *Falcon* came on deck again, having conscientiously gone through the search and acquired absolute certainty that neither Thomas Roch nor Gaydon was to be found in the interior



of the *Ebba*. Then they proceeded to inspect the fore-castle and the boats. Their conviction that the *Ebba* had been suspected without reason was established.

The two officers had only to take leave of the Count, and they advanced towards him.

"You will excuse us for having caused you this inconvenience, Count d'Artigas," the lieutenant said.

"You could only obey the orders whose execution were confided to you, gentlemen."

"Besides, it was a mere formality," the officer felt bound to add.

By a slight movement of his head the Count indicated that he was ready to admit that excuse.

"I had informed you, gentlemen, that I had nothing to do with the abduction."

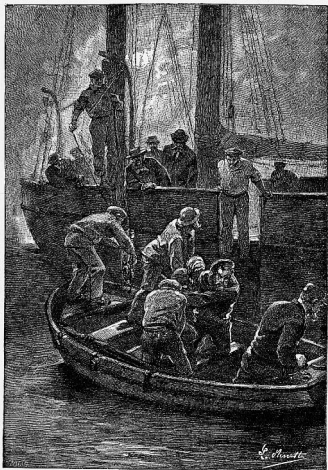
"We no longer doubt it, M. le Comte, and it only remains for us to rejoin our vessel."

"As you please. Has the *Ebba* now free passage?"

"Certainly."

"*Au revoir*, gentlemen, *au revoir*. I am a frequent visitor to these coasts, and I shall soon return. I hope that when I come back you will have discovered the perpetrators of this outrage, and reinstated Thomas Roch at Healthful House. This result is to be desired in the interest of the United States, and, I will add, in the interest of humanity."

When these words were said the officers courteously saluted the Count, who responded by a slight inclination of the head. Captain Spade accompanied them to the side,



The submerged cargo.



and followed by their sailors they set off to join the cruiser. At a sign from the Count, Captain Spade ordered the sails to be set again as they were before the schooner had lain to. The breeze had freshened and the yacht sailed briskly towards the Strait of Hatteras. Half an hour after, the Strait had been passed, and the *Ebba* was on the high seas. For an hour the schooner's head was kept east-nor'-east. But as usually happens, the breeze which came from the land died down a few miles off the coast. The *Ebba* was becalmed, its sails flapped against the masts, its helm no longer acted, but remained stationary on a sea whose bosom was unruffled by a single breath. It would seem impossible for the schooner to continue its passage during the night.

Captain Spade had remained on the look-out in the bows. Since leaving the Strait his gaze had turned first to port, then to starboard, as though he were trying to see some object floating on either side. At that moment he shouted,—

“Brail up!”

In execution of this order the sailors hastened to loosen the halyards, and the empty sails were furled to the yards, but without being enveloped in their covers.

Was it the Count's intention to wait for the dawn as well as for the morning breeze? But it is usual in such circumstances to wait with sails spread to catch the first puffs of wind.

The boat was lowered, and the Captain got into it accompanied by a sailor who sculled towards an object

which floated on the surface of the water a few yards ahead of the schooner.

That object was a small buoy exactly like the one that had bobbed on the waters of the Neuse when the *Ebba* lay some cables' length from the bank near Healthful House.

The buoy was taken up, as well as a cable which was attached to it, and the boat transported both to the bows of the schooner.

At the command of the boatswain a tow-line thrown from the deck was attached to the first cable. Then Captain Spade and the sailor returned to the deck of the schooner again, and the boat was hoisted to the davits.

Almost immediately the tow-line tightened and the *Ebba*, bare of sail, turned towards the east at a rate which could not be less than ten miles an hour.

Night closed in, and the lights on the American coast disappeared quickly in the fog on the horizon.

## CHAPTER V.

"WHERE AM I?"

*(Notes by Simon Hart, the engineer.)*

WHERE am I? What has happened since that sudden attack on me within a few steps of the pavilion?

I had just left the doctor, I was about to go up the steps into the room to close the door and resume my post beside M. Roch, when several men fell upon me and knocked me down. Who are they? I could not recognize them with my eyes bandaged. I could not call for help with a gag in my mouth. I could offer no resistance because they had bound my arms and my legs. And in that condition I felt myself lifted and carried for about a hundred paces—then I was raised up—then lowered, and placed—

Where?—where?

What has become of Roch? Is it not he rather than I they wanted to harm? To everybody I am only Gaydon the keeper, and not Simon Hart the engineer, whose real character or nationality has never been suspected: and why should they wish to seize a humble hospital attendant?

The French inventor has been carried off; of that I

have not the least doubt. If he has been taken from Healthful House, it is solely with the hope of extracting his secrets from him!

But I am reasoning on the supposition that Roch has disappeared with me. . . . Was that so? . . . Yes, it must be—it is! I could have no doubt on that point! I am not in the hands of malefactors whose only object is to steal. They would not have acted in this manner. After having rendered me incapable of calling for help, thrown me into a corner of the garden among the trees, while they carried off Roch, they would not have shut me up—where I now am.

Where? That is the question which I have been trying for several hours to solve. Here I am engaged in an extraordinary adventure which will end—in what way? I do not know—I dare not even anticipate the conclusion. In any case it is my intention to fix the smallest circumstances in my memory, minute by minute, and if it be possible, to write down my impressions daily. Who knows what the future may have in store—and perhaps in my new surroundings I may end by discovering the secret of the Roch Fulgurator?

If I should be set free some day, that secret must be known, and also who is the author or who are the authors of the criminal outrage which may have consequences so grave.

I return again and again to the question, hoping that some incident may supply the answer.

Where am I?

Let me go over everything from the beginning.

After having been carried on men's arms outside of Healthful House, I felt myself placed, not roughly, on a bench in some craft which rocked. It must have been of small dimensions—a ship's boat, I think.

The first rocking was followed almost immediately by another—this I attribute to a second person having been placed in the boat. Could I have any doubt that it was Thomas Roch? They would not have had to gag him, cover his eyes, or bind his feet and hands. He would still have been in a state of prostration which would render him incapable of offering any resistance, or even being conscious of what had been done to him. The proof that I am not mistaken is that I perceived an odour of ether, in spite of my gag. Now, yesterday, before he left the pavilion, the doctor had administered a few drops of ether to his patient, and I remember that a little of the volatile liquid fell on his clothes when he was struggling in his frenzy. Thus it was not surprising that the odour remained, or that I detected it. Yes—Thomas Roch was there in the boat, lying near me. If I had delayed a few minutes longer in returning to the pavilion, I should not have found him there.

I am thinking—Why did that Count d'Artigas take it into his head to visit Healthful House? If my charge had not encountered him, none of this would have happened. Talking of his inventions brought on that exceptionally violent attack. The Principal is to blame, he did not pay attention to my warning. He should have listened to



me, then the doctor would not have been called in, the door of the pavilion would have been closed, and the attempt would have failed.

As for the interest to be served by the abduction of Roch, whether by a private individual or a European State, that needs no discussion. But on this point I may rest fully assured, no one can succeed where I have failed for fifteen long months. In the present state of his intellect every effort to wring his secret from him will fail. In truth, his condition can only grow worse, his madness can only become complete, even on points which until now have remained clear to him.

However, let me leave Thomas Roch for the present and return to myself, and what I can plainly state.

After many rockings the boat was set in motion by the action of oars. The passage scarcely lasted a minute. Then a slight shock was felt; the boat was alongside of a ship. There was noise and excitement—talking, ordering, and working. Under my muffling, and without understanding anything, I could hear a confused murmuring of voices, which lasted for five or six minutes.

The only thought in my mind was that I was about to be transhipped from the boat to the vessel to which it belonged, and that I should be shut down in the hold until the said vessel got out to sea. While she was in Pamlico Sound, it is evident that neither the patient nor his attendant could be allowed to appear on deck.

Then, still gagged, I was seized by the shoulders and legs. My impression was, not that the arms lifted me

over the side of a ship, but that, on the contrary, they slid me down. Was it to let me go—to drown me, so as to rid themselves of a troublesome witness? That idea crossed my mind, and an agonized shudder passed over me from head to foot. Instinctively I took a long breath, and my chest expanded with air that was soon to fail me.

No! They lowered me carefully to a solid flooring, which gave me a sensation of metallic cold. I was stretched at full length, and to my extreme surprise, I found that my bonds had been loosed. The movement of feet about me ceased, and a moment later I heard the noise of a door shutting.

Here I am! Where?—and first, am I alone? I tear the gag from my mouth and the bandage from my eyes.

All was dark, profoundly dark. Not the smallest ray of light, not even that faint impression which the pupil of the eye preserves in hermetically closed chambers.

I call—I call several times. No answer. My voice is muffled, as though it passed through a medium unsuited to the transmission of sound.

In addition, the air I breathe is hot, heavy, thick, and the action of my lungs will soon become difficult, impossible, if that air be not renewed.

I stretch out my hands and make some discoveries by my sense of touch.

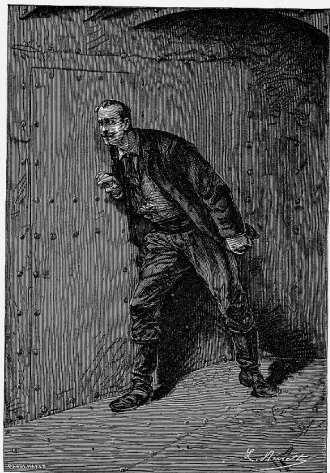
I occupy a chamber with walls of sheet iron. When I pass my hand along the plates, I ascertain that they are

fixed with bolts like the water-tight compartments of a vessel.

As for an opening, it seems to me that there is something on one of the sides—the frame of a door whose hinges extend a little beyond the wall. That door would open inwardly, and, no doubt, it is through it that I have been conveyed into the interior of this narrow receptacle.

With my ear pressed against the door, I hear nothing. The silence is as complete as the darkness—a strange silence only broken by the sound of the metallic floor when I move. None of those rumbling noises that usually prevail on board vessels, nor any of the vague wash of water along the hull and rippling of the sea that licks its keel. None either of the rocking and rolling which should be felt, for in the mouth of the Neuse the tide always causes a very perceptible undulation.

But, does this compartment in which I am imprisoned really belong to a ship? Can I be sure that it is floating on the surface of the Neuse, though a boat had taken only one minute to bring me here? In fact, why may not the boat, instead of rejoining whatever vessel awaited it at the foot of Healthful House, have made for another point of the bank? And in that case, I am possibly on dry land at the bottom of a cellar. That would account for the immobility of my prison-house. Of course there are the iron walls, the bolted plates, and the faint salt smell about me. That smell, *sui generis*, with which the air in the interior of ships is generally impregnated, and which is unmistakable.



Gaydon in prison.



An interval, which I calculate at a quarter of an hour, has elapsed since my incarceration. It must, therefore, be nearly midnight. Am I to remain here until morning? It is fortunate I dined at six o'clock, according to the rules of Healthful House. I am not hungry, but I am becoming very drowsy. However, I hope to resist the inclination to sleep. I must not let myself give way to it. I must think about something else. Of what? Neither sound nor light penetrates this iron box. But stay! Perhaps some sound, however faint, may reach my ear? So all my powers are concentrated in my sense of hearing. Then I wait—in case I am not on land a movement, an oscillation, must in time be felt. Admitting that the vessel is still at anchor, it cannot delay in setting sail; or, then, I should be at a loss to understand why we had been carried off.

Soon—this is no illusion—a slight roll rocks me, and makes me certain I am not on land. However, it is scarcely apparent, without shock, without jerk, a kind of gliding on the surface of the waters.

I reflect calmly. I am on one of the ships moored at the mouth of the Neuse, and waiting, under sail or under steam, the result of the abduction. The boat that brought me—but I must repeat, I had not felt the sensation of being lifted over the vessel's side. Had I been passed through a gun hole in the hull? It mattered little after all! Whether I had or had not been lowered into a hold, I certainly was lying on some substance that moved and floated.

Without doubt I shall soon be given my liberty, and so will Thomas Roch, provided he has been shut up with the same care. By liberty, I mean permission to come and go on deck at my pleasure. But this will not be until after some hours, for we must not be seen. We shall not breathe the outside air until the vessel has reached the open sea. If it be a sailing vessel, we shall have to wait until the breeze starts up—the land breeze at daybreak—which is favourable to navigation on Pamlico Sound. Were it a steamboat—

No! On board a steamer there are always those whiffs of oil, and grease, those smells from the engine-room, that would have reached me. Then the motion of the screw or the paddles, the tremor of the machinery, the jerks of the pistons—I must have felt them.

After all I must be patient. I shall be extricated from this hole to-morrow. At least if they do not give me my liberty they will bring me some food, for nothing indicates that they mean me to die of hunger; it would have been easier in that case to drop me into the river. Once at sea, what have they to fear from me? My voice would not be heard. As for my complaints or recriminations, how useless they would be!

Besides, what am I to the knowledge of the authors of this crime? One Gaydon, a mere hospital attendant, without any importance. It is in Roch they are interested. I was included in the abduction only because I returned to the pavilion at that moment.

In any case, whatever happens, and whoever the people

who are conducting this affair may be, no matter where they may take me, I will continue to play my part as keeper. No, no one shall suspect that under the cloak of Gaydon is hidden Simon Hart, the engineer. In this there are two advantages; first, they cannot mistrust a poor wretch of a keeper, and in the second place, perhaps I shall fathom the mystery of the new contrivance and make use of it should I succeed in escaping.

But my thoughts wander. Before I take to flight I must reach my destination. It will be time to think of escaping when an opportunity presents itself. Until then the chief thing is that no one knows who I am—this they shall not know.

Now I am quite certain on one point; we are moving rapidly. I return, however, to my first idea. No! the vessel that is carrying us, if it be not a steamer, is certainly not a sailing ship. It is undoubtedly propelled by a powerful engine of locomotion. That I hear none of the sounds peculiar to machinery when the screws or wheels are working, that the vessel is not shaken by the movement of pistons in cylinders, I am forced to admit. It is, rather than a continuous and regular movement, a kind of direct rotation that communicates itself to the propeller, whatever it may be. There can be no mistake: the vessel is moved by a special mechanism. What?

Is it by one of those turbines of which we have been hearing, worked from the inside by an immersed tube, and destined to become a substitute for the screw, because they



utilize the resistance of water more effectively and give greater speed ?

A few hours yet, and I shall know what to think of this kind of navigation.

Besides—an effect not less extraordinary—there was no rolling or pitching. Now, how was it that Pamlico Sound was in such a state of tranquility ? The currents of the flood and ebb tides ordinarily suffice to agitate its surface.

These are some of the wearisome thoughts that beset me ! In spite of an overpowering inclination to sleep, notwithstanding the torpor which is coming over me in this suffocating atmosphere, I have resolved that I will not give way to slumber. I will keep awake until day : still it will not be day for me until the moment when this queer chamber shall receive light from the outside. And perhaps it will not be enough for the door to open : perhaps I shall have to be lifted out of this hole, to be carried on deck !

I lean against one of the angles of the wall, for I have not even a bench to sit on. But as my eyelids are heavy, and I feel myself giving way to a sort of slumber, I rise. Rage takes possession of me ; I hit the walls with my clenched fist, I shout. In vain. I do but bruise my hands against the bolts on the plates, and my cries bring no one.

Yes ! that is unworthy of me. I had determined to restrain myself, and there, I begin by losing my self-possession and behave like a child.

The absence of pitching and rolling proves with certainty

that the ship has not yet reached the open sea. Can it be that instead of crossing the Sound it has reascended the course of the Neuse? No! If Roch has been taken forcibly from Healthful House, it means that his captors intend to hurry him away from the United States—probably to some distant island in the Atlantic, or to some point on the continent of Europe. So then it is not the Neuse, whose course is of no great length, that our marine apparatus is ascending. We are on the waters of the Sound in a dead calm.

But when the vessel reaches the open sea it cannot escape the motion of the swell, which, even if there be no wind, is always felt by ships of average size. Short of my being on board a cruiser or an ironclad!—and that is not the case, I imagine.

At this moment it seems to me—indeed I cannot be deceived—a sound comes from the inside, a sound of footsteps. The steps approach the iron wall in which is the door. These are some of the crew. Is the door going to open at last? I listen. People are speaking, and I hear their voices, but I cannot understand them. They speak a language unknown to me. I call, I shout—no answer!

There is nothing then but to wait—wait—wait. Oh that word, I repeat it and it sounds in my head like the clapper of a bell!

Let me try to calculate the time that has passed. It cannot be less than four or five hours since the vessel had begun to move. According to this estimate it is past

midnight. Unfortunately, my watch is useless to me in the midst of such darkness.

Now if we have been sailing for five hours the ship must have got beyond Pamlico Sound, whether it had come out by Ocracoke Inlet or by Hatteras Inlet. I conclude we are out at sea, a good mile at least from the coast, and yet I do not feel the ocean swell. This is incomprehensible. Let me see—can I be mistaken? Am I under a delusion? Am I not shut up in the depths of the hold of a ship in motion?

Another hour passes, and suddenly the tremor of the machinery ceases. I am aware that the vessel has ceased to move. Has it reached its destination? In that case it can only be in one of the ports of the coast north or south of Pamlico Sound. But why should Thomas Roch, being taken forcibly away from Healthful House, be brought back to land? The abduction must have become known outside, and its authors' delay would expose themselves to the danger of discovery by the authorities of the Union.

And then, if the vessel is actually at anchor, I shall presently hear the noise of the chain through the hawse-hole, and when she swings to her anchor there will be a shock—a shock which I wait for and shall feel. It must come in a few minutes.

I wait! I listen!

Nothing; a dismal and alarming silence reigned on board. I ask myself, am I the only living being in this vessel?

A kind of stupor comes over me; the atmosphere is

vitiated—my breathing becomes difficult—my chest feels crushed by a weight from which I cannot free myself.

I want to resist; it is impossible. I am obliged to stretch myself in a corner and to remove some of my clothes, so hot has the place become. My eyelids grow heavy, they close, and I fall into a state of prostration, which is followed by a deep sleep.

How long have I slept? I don't know. Is it day, or is it night? I am unable to guess; but I notice in the first place that my breathing is easier. My lungs are full of air which is not poisoned with carbonic acid.

Had the air been renewed while I slept? Had the compartment been opened? Had someone entered the narrow retreat?

Yes; and I have the proof of this. My hand, by chance, has touched an object, a receptacle full of some liquid that smells invitingly. I raise it to my lips which are burning, for I am tormented by thirst, and at this moment would have been thankful for brackish water!

It is ale—excellent ale—which refreshes me, cheers me. I drink a whole pint of it.

But since I am clearly not condemned to die of thirst, I suppose I am not condemned to die of hunger.

No; in one of the corners a basket has been placed, and in it I find a hunch of bread and a slice of cold meat.

I eat—I eat eagerly—and my strength comes back by degrees.

Decidedly I am not so forsaken as I might have been. Some one has entered this dark hole, and a little of the

oxygen from outside, without which I should have been asphyxiated, has come in through the door. Then sufficient nourishment was placed at my disposal to appease my hunger and thirst until the time of my release.

How much longer is this imprisonment to last? Hours—days?

It is impossible for me to calculate what time has passed during my sleep or to know what o'clock it is now. I had been careful to wind my watch, but it was not a repeater. Perhaps by feeling the hands—? Yes; it seems to me that the small hand points to eight—in the morning, of course!

I am certain the vessel is no longer in motion. There is not the slightest quiver on board—this shows that the propeller is at rest.

Still the hours are passing, interminable hours, and I wonder whether these men are waiting for the night before they come again to my den as they had already done while I slept, and to bring me meat and drink. Yes, they want to avail themselves of my sleep.

This time I am determined—I will resist. I will pretend to sleep—and I shall force any one who enters to answer me!

## CHAPTER VI.

### ON DECK.

I AM in the open air and breathing with all the strength of my lungs. I am at last released from that suffocating box, and I stand on a ship's deck. I scan the horizon instantly, but no land is to be seen. Nothing but the circular line that divides the sea from the sky.

No, there was not even a sign of the mainland on the west, on that side where the coast of North America extends for thousands of miles !

The sun is sinking, and casts its slanting rays on the surface of the ocean. It must be about six o'clock. I consult my watch. Yes, it is half-past six.

This is what happened during that night, the 16th of June.

I waited, as I said, for the door to open, firmly resolved not to yield to sleep. I had no doubt that it was then light, and the day advancing, while no one came. Of the food that had been supplied to me nothing remained, and I began to be hungry, but not thirsty, for I still had a little of the ale.

After I awoke, certain quiverings of the hull convinced

me that the vessel, after remaining stationary from the night before, was again in motion—probably in some deserted creek on the coast, since I had not felt the shocks that accompany the operation of anchoring.

It was then six o'clock, when I heard steps behind the iron partition. Was somebody coming in? Yes; I heard the grating of the lock, and the door opened. The light of a lantern dispelled the profound darkness in which I had been plunged since my arrival on board. Two men appeared, but I had no time to observe their faces. They seized me by the arms and covered my head with a thick wrapper, so that it was impossible for me to see anything.

What was the meaning of this precaution? What were they going to do with me? I tried to struggle, but they held me firmly. I asked questions, but I could get no answer. The men exchanged some words in a language I did not understand.

They showed me very little consideration. But why should they trouble themselves about so inferior a person as a keeper in a lunatic asylum? Still, I am not quite sure that Simon Hart the engineer would have fared better at their hands.

This time, however, they did not gag me. They contented themselves with holding me tightly, and I could not escape.

An instant afterwards I was dragged out of the iron den, and pushed through a narrow passage. Under my feet I felt the steps of a metal ladder. Then a keen air struck my face, and behind the wrapper I breathed eagerly.

I was lifted under the arms, and placed on a floor not made of metal plates, but evidently the deck of a ship.

Then I was released from the grasp of the two men. I was free to move, and I instantly tore the cloth from my head and looked around me.

I was on board a schooner in full sail, whose track left a long white streak on the waters.

I had to hold on by one of the back stays to prevent myself from falling, for my eyes were dazzled by the daylight after my forty-eight hours' imprisonment in utter darkness.

On the deck rough-looking men were passing to and fro—men of types so different that I could not assign an origin to them. They hardly took any notice of me.

At the stern of the vessel, a schooner of three hundred tons, a man with a swarthy face was at the helm. His grasp on the handles of the wheel steadied the ship against the constant and violent lurches.

I would have liked to read the name of the vessel; it looked like a sporting yacht. Was it written on the boards in the stern or on the boards in the bow?

I advanced towards one of the sailors and asked,—

“What is the name of this vessel?”

No answer. I have reason to think the man did not understand me.

“Where is the captain?” I added.

The sailor treated the second question as he had treated the first.

I went towards the bows.



There above the uprights of the windlass hung a bell. On the bronze of that bell, perhaps, the name might be engraved.

There was no name !

I went back to the stern, and addressing the man at the wheel, I renewed my question.

He gave me a surly look, shrugged his shoulders, and, without a word, steadied himself to bring up the schooner, which had been thrown to larboard by a heavy sea.

I thought of Thomas Roch. I looked for him. He was not to be seen. Was he not on the ship? That would be incomprehensible. Why should they only carry off Gaydon the keeper from Healthful House? No one could have suspected that I was Simon Hart, the engineer, and even if the fact were known, whose interest could it be to carry me off, and what was to be expected of me? So then, seeing that the inventor is not on the deck, I fall to thinking that he must be shut up in one of the cabins, and perhaps receiving more attention than his ex-keeper !

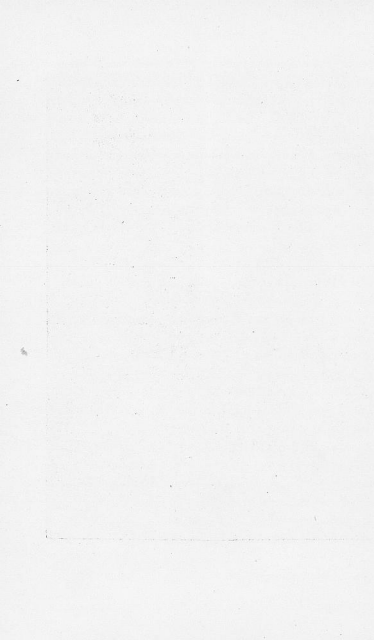
Let me observe the trim of the schooner.

Why did it not strike me at first that the sails are furled, not an inch of canvas is spread, the wind has fallen, the occasional puffs that come from the east are contrary, as her head was pointing in that direction. Yet, nevertheless, the schooner is skimming rapidly, her bows cutting the water while her stem ploughs the sea, and the foam rushes along the sides.

Is this vessel a steam yacht? No ! No funnel rises



The man at the helm.



between its main and fore masts? Is it a boat worked by electricity, with either a battery of accumulators or coils of considerable power, which work its screw and give it such speed?

In fact, I cannot account for this navigation in any other way. In any case, since the propeller can only be a screw, I shall see it working by leaning over the taffrail, and I shall then have only to recognize the mechanical source of the movement.

The man at the wheel glances at me scornfully, but allows me to approach.

I lean over and I see—

Not a trace of the boiling and whirling which the rotation of the screw produces. Nothing but a smooth track extending for three or four cable-lengths, such as a ship in full sail leaves behind her. But what is the motor that drives the schooner with such marvellous speed? I have said that the wind is unfavourable, and the sea rolling in long, unbroken undulations.

I will know, however, and, as the crew take no notice of me, I again turn towards the bows.

As I reached the companion I found myself in the presence of a man whose face was not unknown to me. With his arms resting on the edge of the skylight, he watched me as I draw near.

He seems waiting for me to speak.

My memory comes back again. This is the man who accompanied Count d'Artigas on his visit to Healthful House. Yes! there is no mistake.

So, it is this rich foreigner who has kidnapped Thomas Roch, and I am on board his yacht, the *Ebba*, so well known in the East American latitudes. Be it so! The man before me shall tell me all I have the right to know. I remember that he and the Count spoke English. He will understand me, and he cannot refuse to answer my questions.

I conclude that the man is the captain of the *Ebba*, and address him thus,—

“Captain, it was you I saw at Healthful House in the French inventor’s pavilion. Do you recognize me?”

He merely stares at me, but makes no answer.

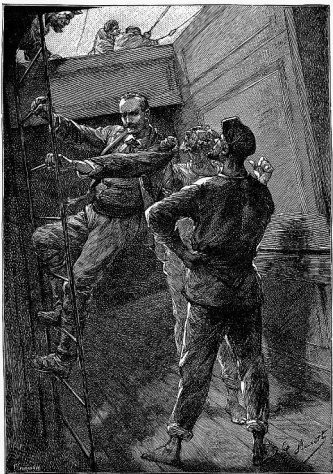
“I am Gaydon, the keeper,” I continued, “the attendant of M. Roch, and I wish to know why you have carried me off and put me on board this schooner?”

The Captain interrupts me by a sign; and the sign was not even addressed to me, but to some sailors posted near the fore-castle.

They came up, took me by the arm, and without troubling themselves about the anger which I could not disguise, they forced me to go down the ladder which was composed of perpendicular iron bars. On the passage on each side a door opened.

Were they going to plunge me once more into the black hole which I had already occupied, at the bottom of the hold?

I turn to the left, and the men push me into a cabin lighted by one of the small port-holes in the side hull, which is open. The furniture consists of a bunk with its



Under constraint.



bedding, a table, an armchair, a dressing-table, a cupboard—everything very clean.

The table is laid for a meal. I have only to sit down, and as the cook's assistant is about to retire after placing the dishes, I speak to him.

The boy, a negro, is also mute; perhaps he does not understand my language.

The door closes upon him, I eat with appetite, postponing until later those questions which cannot be left unanswered for ever. I am still a prisoner—this time under infinitely more comfortable conditions, which will, I think, continue until we reach our destination.

After this, I applied myself to thinking, and my chief point was that Count d'Artigas had planned the abduction. He is, I said to myself, the kidnapper of Thomas Roch, and no doubt the French inventor is installed in an equally comfortable cabin on board the *Ebba*.

Now, who is this personage? Where does he come from? He has carried off Thomas Roch, because he is resolved, at any price, to find out the secret of the Fulgurator. He can have no other motive. I must take care not to betray my identity, for all chance of regaining my liberty would be lost, were they to learn the truth about me.

But there are mysteries to solve, and there is the inexplicable to explain—who D'Artigas is, what are his future intentions, the course that the schooner is following, the port she belongs to, and also her navigation, without sail or screw, at a rate of ten miles an hour!



With the evening a fresher breeze blew in through the port-hole of my cabin. I shut it, and since my door was barred on the outside, the only thing I could do was to lie down and sleep on the bosom of the Atlantic, to the gentle oscillations of the *Ebba*.

The next day I rose at dawn, proceeded to make my toilet, and when dressed I waited.

Suddenly I bethought me of ascertaining whether the door of my cabin was fastened.

No! It was not. I pushed it open; I climbed up the ladder and reached the deck.

In the stern, while the sailors were washing the deck, two men, one of whom was the captain, were chatting.

The latter showed no surprise on seeing me, and pointed me out by a nod to his companion.

The other, whom I had never seen, was an individual of fifty; hair and beard black, with threads of silver; a shrewd, ironical face, a quick eye, and an intelligent countenance. He resembled the Greek type, and I had no longer doubt that he was of Hellenic origin when I heard him called Serkō—Serkō, the engineer—by the *Ebba's* captain, whose name is Spade. This name is probably derived from the Italian Spada. So we have a Greek, an Italian, a crew composed of men recruited from every corner of the globe, embarked on a schooner with a Norwegian name. This seems to me suspicious.

And Count d'Artigas, with his Spanish name and his Asiatic type—where does he come from?

The captain and the engineer conversed in low tones.

The former was closely observing the man at the wheel, who apparently had not to trouble himself about the compass before his eyes. He seemed rather to obey the signs of one of the sailors in the prow, who indicated to him how he was to steer.

M. Roch was standing near the capstan, looking out upon the wide, lonely sea, with no land upon its horizon. Two sailors stood near, keeping him in sight. Anything might happen to the madman. He might even throw himself overboard.

I did not know whether I should be permitted to communicate with my former patient.

As I advanced towards him Spade and Serkő observed me, but they did not interfere with me.

I joined Thomas Roch, who did not see me coming, and I stood by his side.

He did not seem to recognize me, for he made not the slightest movement. His eyes shone with a feverish light as he scanned the horizon. He was evidently glad to breathe this life-giving atmosphere charged with ozone; his chest expanded as he breathed. Brilliant sunshine flooded the cloudless sky. Was he aware of the change in his situation? Had he already forgotten Healthful House, the pavilion where he was a prisoner, and Gaydon his keeper? It seemed so; his appearance and attitude implied that the past was gone from his memory, and that he lived in the present only. But even on the deck of the *Ebba*, in the midst of the open sea, he was still the irresponsible being whom I had watched and tended for eighteen months.

His mental state had not changed, his reason would not return until his discoveries were mentioned to him. Count d'Artigas was aware of his state of mind, and was evidently relying upon it to enable him to detect the inventor's secret sooner or later.

But what could he do with it?

I addressed him,—

"M. Roch."

My voice made an impression on him, and after fixing his eyes on me for a moment, he turned them away quickly.

I took his hand and pressed it; but he withdrew it hurriedly, moved off without having recognized me—and walked towards the stern where the engineer and the captain stood.

Was he about to address one of the two men? and if they spoke to him, would he answer?

Just then a gleam of intelligence came into his face, and his attention was attracted—I did not doubt—by the extraordinary sailing of the schooner.

His eyes ran over the masts with their furled sails as the *Ebba* glided rapidly over the surface of these smooth waters. He then stepped back, turned, and went to the place where the funnel, had the *Ebba* been a steam yacht, should have been; a funnel emitting clouds of black smoke.

The fact that had appeared so strange to me struck M. Roch also. He could not understand what I had found inexplicable, and as I had done, he went to the stern to see the working of the screw.

On each side of the schooner a "school" of porpoises gambolled. Fast though the *Ebba* was going, these nimble creatures passed her without difficulty, tumbling and turning somersaults in their native element with marvellous agility.

But Roch did not even glance at them as he leant over the netting. Serkő and Spade hurried to him, and fearing lest he should fall overboard, they held him firmly and brought him back to the deck.

I noticed besides—for I knew the symptoms well—that the inventor was strongly excited. He turned round and round, he gesticulated and uttered incoherent words, addressed to nobody.

It was only too evident that a crisis was coming—an attack similar to the one he had suffered from on his last night at Healthful House, and which had had such fatal consequences. It would be necessary to take him down to his cabin, and perhaps I might be summoned to administer the special remedies to which he was accustomed.

In the meantime Serkő and the captain did not lose sight of him, but it was evidently their intention to let him alone, and see what he would do.

He advanced to the mainmast, and after looking in vain for its sails, he went up to it, threw his arms round it, and shook it as though he wanted to pull it down.

His excitement was increasing momentarily, inarticulate cries had succeeded to vague words.

At a word from the captain, two sailors ran to him, and took him round the body. The schooner's men were big,

strong fellows—and they quickly got the better of the unfortunate lunatic. He was laid on the deck, and the two men held him down in spite of his extraordinary resistance.

Nothing remained but to carry him to his cabin and let him sleep until the crisis had passed over. This was about to be done by the order of another person, whose voice caught my ear.

I turned round and recognized him.

It was Count d'Artigas; his face was gloomy, and his attitude was imperious, such as I had noted them at Healthful House.

I went up to him immediately, for I was resolved to have the explanation which was due to me.

"By what right, sir—?" I demanded.

"The right of the stronger," the Count answered, interrupting me.

And he walked aft, while the sailors carried M. Roch to his cabin.

## CHAPTER VII.

### TWO DAYS AT SEA.

PERHAPS—if circumstances require it—I shall tell Count d'Artigas that my name is Simon Hart. Of course, I may not receive more attention than as Gaydon the keeper. But this idea needs reflection. I am always possessed by the thought that as the owner of the *Ebba* has carried off the French inventor, it is with the object of appropriating his discovery, of becoming the sole possessor of the Roch Fulgurator, for which neither the old nor the new world would give the excessive, the ridiculous price demanded. Well! if Thomas Roch should betray himself, is it not better I should be with him, that I should keep my post, and perform the duties necessitated by his state? Yes, I must secure the possibility of seeing everything, of hearing everything, and—who knows?—of learning what I failed to learn at Healthful House.

For the present, where is the *Ebba* going? That is the first question.

Who is Count d'Artigas? That is the second question.

The first will doubtless be answered in a few days, considering the rapidity with which this mysterious yacht

advances, under the action of a propeller whose working I intend to discover.

As for the second question, it is less certain that I shall ever elucidate it.

In my opinion, this mysterious personage must have a special reason for concealment, and I am afraid I shall get no hint of his nationality. Although the Count speaks English fluently—I had been able to assure myself of that on his visit to Pavilion 17—he does so with a rough vibrating accent not to be found among northern peoples. It reminds me of nothing I have heard in the course of my travels in both hemispheres—except, perhaps, that hardness characteristic of the idioms of the Malay speech; indeed, with his dark colour, olive bordering on copper, his crisp hair, black as ebony, the glance of his deep-set eyes, that shoots like a dart from motionless pupils, his tall figure, the squareness of his shoulders, his remarkable muscular development, denoting great physical strength, it is not impossible that he may belong to one of the races of the Far East.

In my opinion D'Artigas is an assumed name: and so must be this title of Count. The schooner bears a Norwegian name, but he certainly is not of Scandinavian descent. He has nothing in common with Northern Europeans—neither their calm physiognomy, nor their fair hair, nor the mild expression of their pale blue eyes.

Still, whoever he is, this man has carried off Thomas Roch—and me—and he must have some evil design.

Now, is he acting for a foreign power or in his own

interest? Does he only desire to profit by the invention? That is a third question which I cannot yet answer. By watching closely and listening attentively, I may resolve it before I am able to escape; that is, if escape be possible.

The *Ebba* continues to progress in the same unaccountable way. I am free to move backwards and forwards on the main deck, but I am never allowed to approach the fore part of the ship.

In fact, once or twice I wanted to reach the step of the bowsprit, where, by leaning forward, I might have seen the stem of the schooner cleave the water. But, evidently in consequence of orders already given, the sailors of the watch opposed my passage, and one of them said roughly in English,—

“Back! back! You hinder the machine!”

What machine? There is none. Did they know I wanted to find out what kind of propeller the schooner had? Captain Spade, who was a witness of this scene, must surely guess that I want to discover his method of navigation.

Even a hospital attendant could not help being much astonished that a ship without sails or screw should go at such a rate. However, for some reason or other the fore part of the deck was forbidden me.

Towards ten o'clock the wind rose—a favourable breeze from the north-west—and the captain gave his instructions to the boatswain Effrondat.

Then the latter, with the whistle to his lips, made the crew haul up the spanker, the foresail and the jibs.



This could not have been done with greater smartness and discipline on board a man-of-war.

The *Ebba* perceptibly increased her speed. Still the motor had not ceased to work, for the sails were not as full as they would have been were the schooner driven by them alone.

The sky was clear, the faint clouds rising in the west melted away as they reached the zenith, and the sea shone in the sunlight.

My chief concern is to ascertain as nearly as possible the course we are taking. I have travelled enough by sea to be able to calculate the speed of a vessel, and I estimate that the *Ebba's* rate must be between ten and eleven miles. As to her steering direction, it is always the same, and it is easy to ascertain it by looking at the binnacle, which stands before the man at the helm. If Gaydon the keeper is forbidden the fore part of the *Ebba*, he is not banished the aft. Often I have been able to glance at the compass, and its needle invariably points to the east, or to be more exact, east-south-east. We are, then, crossing that portion of the Atlantic which is bounded on the west by the coast of the United States.

I have been racking my memory to recall what islands or groups lie in this direction between us and the continent of Europe.

North Carolina, which the schooner left forty-eight hours ago, is crossed by the thirty-fifth parallel of latitude, and that prolonged towards the east should, if I am not mistaken, cross the African coast somewhere near

Morocco. But, on its passage lies the Azores, about three thousand miles from America. Does the *Ebba* intend to make for this archipelago? is its destination one of the islands which form the insular possessions of Portugal? I cannot admit that hypothesis.

Besides, nearer than the Azores, on the line of the thirty-fifth parallel, at a distance of twelve hundred kilometers only, the Bermudas are situated. They belong to England, and it seems to me less improbable that if the Count is in the pay of a European power, that power should be the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Of course there is always the possibility that this mysterious individual is acting in his own interests only.

Several times during the day the Count came and stood in the stern. From thence he closely examined the different points of the horizon. When a sail or smoke appeared in the distance, he watched it for a long time through a powerful sea glass. I may add that he did not even deign to notice my presence on the deck. From time to time Captain Spade joined him, and they exchanged some words in a language I neither understood nor recognized.

It is with Serkø, the engineer, who seems to be in his confidence, that the owner of the *Ebba* converses most readily. He is rather loquacious, less repellent, less reserved, than his companions on board. How does Serkø come to be on the schooner? Is he a special friend of Count d'Artigas? Does he travel about with him, sharing the enviable existence of a rich yachtsman?

Serkö, too, is the only one who manifests, if not a little sympathy, at least a faint interest in me.

As for the inventor, I did not see him all the morning, and he must be in his cabin still suffering from yesterday's paroxysm.

I was certain of this when towards three o'clock in the afternoon the Count, as he was about to go down below, signed to me to approach him.

I did not know what he wanted, but I knew what I was going to say to him.

"Do those paroxysms which M. Roch suffers from last long?" he asked.

"Sometimes forty-eight hours," I answered.

"What has to be done?"

"Nothing but to leave him quiet until he sleeps. After a night's rest the attack is over and then he falls into his usual callous state."

"Well, Keeper Gaydon, you will continue your attendance on him as at Healthful House, if necessary."

"My attendance?"

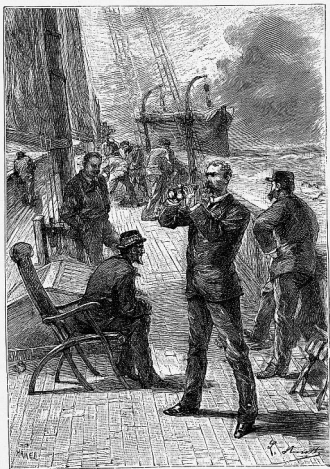
"Yes—on board the schooner—until we have landed."

"Where?"

"Where we shall be to-morrow afternoon," Count d'Artigas contented himself with saying.

To-morrow, I thought; then he is not making for the coast of Africa, nor even for the Azores! But there still remained the Bermudas.

The Count had put his foot on the first step of the companion, when I challenged him in turn.



Count d'Artigas on his quarter-deck.



"Sir, I wish to know—I have the right to know—where I am going—and—"

"Here, Keeper Gaydon, you have no rights, and your only duty is to speak when you are spoken to."

"I protest."

"Protest, then!" replied the imperious and haughty individual, and he threw me an evil look.

As he descended the companion I found myself in the presence of Serkö.

"If I were in your place, Keeper Gaydon, I would resign myself," he said smiling. "When a man is caught in a trap—"

"He may cry out, I suppose."

"What is the use—when no one is within hearing."

"They will hear by-and-by, sir!"

"By-and-by means waiting! However, cry out as much as you please!"

With this sarcastic advice the engineer left me to my reflections.

At four o'clock a large vessel was sighted six miles to the eastward, on a contrary tack to ours. Her speed was rapid, and it increased as we watched her. Great swirls of black smoke rushed from her two chimneys. The vessel was a man-of-war, for a narrow pennant flew from the masthead, and even although no flag waved from the gaff, I thought I recognized an American cruiser.

I wondered whether the *Ebba* would make the usual salute when the big ship crossed her course.

She did not, and at that moment the schooner began to draw off with the evident intention of getting away.

These manners did not astonish me on the part of so suspicious a yacht; but what I did observe with the greatest surprise was the behaviour of Captain Spade.

After going to the bows near the windlass, he stopped before a little signalling apparatus similar to those used for conveying orders to the engine-room of a steamer. Immediately on his pressing one of the buttons of this apparatus, the *Ebba* fetched a point towards the south-east and at the same time the sheets were slackened slowly by the crew.

Evidently an order of some kind had been transmitted to the engine-man of the machine which gives the schooner the inexplicable impetus, under the action of some kind of motor whose principle still escapes me.

The result of this manoeuvre was that the *Ebba* bore off obliquely from the cruiser, whose course had not been changed. Why should a man-of-war have sought to turn a pleasure yacht, which could excite no suspicion, from its course?

But the *Ebba* behaved in quite a different fashion when about six o'clock at night a second ship appeared on the port side. This time, instead of avoiding it, Captain Spade sent another order by means of the apparatus, and we turned again to the east—which would bring us into the vicinity of the vessel.

An hour later the two ships were abreast of each other at a distance of three or four miles.

The wind had then fallen. The ship, which was a three-masted merchant vessel, was engaged in furling her top-sails. It was useless to expect a breeze before morning, and on the morrow the three-master would necessarily be in the same place. The *Ebba*, worked by her mysterious propeller, continued to approach the stranger.

When night began to fall the two vessels were not more than a mile and a half apart.

Our captain then came to where I was standing, and without any ceremony ordered me to go to my cabin.

I could only obey. However, before leaving the deck I observed that the boatswain had not ordered the position lights to be shown, though the three-master was already showing hers—a green light on the port, a red light on the starboard side.

I had no doubt the yacht intended to slip past the stranger unperceived. Her speed had been lessened, but her course was not altered. I calculated that the *Ebba* had made two hundred miles to the eastward since the night before. I entered my cabin with a vague feeling of apprehension. My supper was on the table, but I was uneasy, I knew not why, and scarcely touched it. I went to bed and waited for the sleep that would not come.

This state of disquiet lasted for two hours. The silence was broken only by the quivering of the schooner, the murmur of the water as it lapped against the hull, and the slight motion as we passed over the surface of that peaceful sea.



My mind, haunted by the remembrance of all that had happened during the last two days, could find no rest. To-morrow afternoon we should be "there." To-morrow, when my attendance on M. Roch was to begin again "if necessary," as my captor had said.

After some time, about ten o'clock I think, I felt that the schooner had stopped.

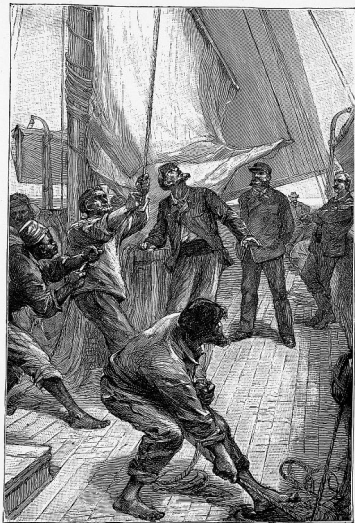
Why? When Captain Spade ordered me to leave the deck there was no land in view.

The charts showed only the Bermudas in that direction, and at nightfall we were fifty or sixty miles short of the distance at which the look-out man could sight them.

Besides, not only was our progress suspended, but the *Ebba* was almost motionless. Scarcely the faintest roll from side to side was to be felt. The swell was imperceptible, and not a puff of wind passed over the sea.

My mind reverted to the trading vessel, a mile away when I entered my cabin. If the schooner continued to bear down upon her she must have reached her, and now there ought only to be one or two cable lengths between the two ships, for the merchant vessel, which had been becalmed before sunset, could not change her position. She must be there, and if the night were clear I should see her through the port-hole.

It occurred to me that I might avail myself of this opportunity. Why should I not try to escape since all hope of recovering my liberty was denied me? I cannot swim, it is true; but after jumping into the sea with one of the buoys on board, would it be impossible for



Signalling on board the *Elba*.



me to reach the merchantman, provided I escape the vigilance of the watch?

In the first place I had to get out of my cabin, and to climb up the ladder. I heard no noise in the men's quarters nor from the deck. The men should be asleep by this time. I would try!

But when I tried to open the door of my cabin I discovered that it was fastened on the outside, as I might have foreseen.

I had to renounce a project which, indeed, had against it many chances of failure. The best thing to do was to sleep, for I was very tired in mind if not in body, suffering as I was from incessant anxiety and associations of contradictory ideas.

I must have fallen asleep, for I was aroused by a noise such as I had never heard before on board the schooner.

The dawn was beginning to come in through the glass in my port-hole, which faced the east. I consulted my watch. It was half-past four.

My first question was whether the *Ebba* was under way.

No, certainly; neither with her sails nor her propeller. I must have been conscious of any movement. Besides, the sea appeared as tranquil at sunrise as it had been the night before at sunset. If the *Ebba* had advanced while I slept, she was certainly motionless now.

The noise which I alluded to was of rapid comings and goings on deck, the footsteps of men carrying loads. At the same time it seemed to me a like commotion filled the hold under the floor of my cabin, to which the great

hatches behind the foremast gave access. I could also make out that something was grazing against the side of the yacht, against the part of her hull that is above the water. Could it be that there were boats alongside? Were the men engaged in loading or unloading merchandise?

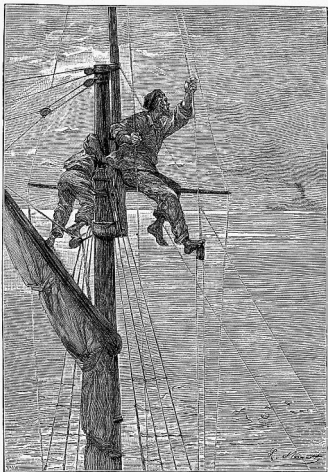
And yet, it was not possible that we had reached our destination. Count d'Artigas said the *Ebba* would be "there" in twenty-four hours; and, I repeat, the night before we were fifty or sixty miles from the nearest land, the Bermudas. That we had turned back towards the west and were now close to the American coast was inadmissible, even allowing for the distance. Then I have reason to believe the schooner had remained stationary all night. Before going to sleep I noted that she had just stopped, and I remarked at this moment that she had not moved again.

Was I to be permitted to go on deck? I did not think it probable that I should be prevented from going out when daylight came.

An hour passed. My cabin was now lighted by the morning sun. I looked out—a slight haze covered the sea; but it was fast fading away under the first warmth of day.

As my view extended for a range of half a mile, if the three-master was not visible that would mean that she lay on the port side of the *Ebba*, where I could not see her.

Then I heard a grating sound, and the key turned in the lock. I pushed the door open, I climbed up the iron



Land in sight.



ladder, and I put my foot on the deck at the moment the men were closing the hatches.

I looked round for the Count. He was not there ; he had not left his cabin.

Captain Spade and Serkő, the engineer, were superintending the stowage away aft of some bales, which had doubtless just been taken out of the hold. This would explain the noise I heard on awakening. It was evident that the crew had begun to bring up the cargo, so our arrival must be near at hand.

We were then not far from the port, and the schooner would anchor there in a few hours.

And the sailing vessel that was on our port quarter—it should be there still, for the wind had not risen since the night before.

I turned my eyes in that direction.

The merchantman had disappeared. Not a ship was in sight, not even a sail on the horizon, either to the north or to the south.

On reflection the only explanation I could find, and that was to be accepted with reserve, was that, unknown to me, the *Ebba* had continued her course while I slept, leaving the three-master behind, since she was becalmed.

I shall beware of questioning either Captain Spade or Serkő on the subject ; they would not deign to favour me with an answer.

Besides, at that moment the Captain approached the signal apparatus, and pressed one of the buttons on the upper side. Almost immediately the *Ebba* received a



perceptible shock in the bows, and with her sails still furled she renewed her mysterious progress eastwards.

Two hours later Count d'Artigas appeared at the top of the companion and took his usual place near the taffrail.

Spade and Serkø went to him immediately, and they exchanged some words.

All three levelled their glasses and examined the horizon from the south-east to the north-east.

I, too, turned my eyes in that direction ; but having no glasses in my possession I could see nothing.

The midday meal being ended, we returned to the deck—all, with the exception of M. Roch, who had not left his cabin.

Towards half-past one, land was sighted by the lookout. As the *Ebba* raced at full speed I soon descried the first outline of the coast. Two hours afterwards a faint outline appeared at less than eight miles distance, and became more clearly defined as we approached. It was the outline of a mountain. From its summit a wreath of smoke escaped and floated towards the zenith.

A volcano in these latitudes?

What can this mean?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BACKCUP.

IN my opinion the *Ebba* could come upon no other group than the Bermudas in this part of the Atlantic, both because of the distance from the American coast, and of the direction followed since leaving Pamlico Sound. We have steered steadily to the south-east, and the distance travelled may be put down approximately at nine hundred kilometers.

However, the schooner did not slacken her speed. Count d'Artigas and Serkő stood in the stern close to the steersman. The Captain had taken up his position in the bow.

Were we going to pass this island which appeared isolated, and leave it to the westward?

That was not likely, since it was the day and the hour mentioned for our arrival at our destination.

At this moment all the sailors were drawn up on the deck ready to work, and Effrondat made his arrangements for immediate anchorage.

"In two hours time," I said to myself, "I shall know what to think, and then the first of those questions which

have absorbed my mind ever since the *Ebba* put out to sea will be solved."

Yet that the yacht's port of discharge is really situated in one of the Bermudas in the midst of an English archipelago is improbable—unless the Count had carried off Thomas Roch for the benefit of Great Britain—an almost inadmissible theory.

One thing was certain; that eccentric individual was watching me with a persistence which was, to say the least, singular. Although he could not suspect that I am Simon Hart, the engineer, he must wonder what I think of this adventure. Gaydon the keeper may be an utterly insignificant person, but he will be as anxious about his fate as any gentleman—were he even the proprietor of this fantastic pleasure yacht. Still I was a little surprised, not to say disconcerted, by the persistence of that inquisitorial gaze.

If Count d'Artigas could have guessed the light which had just burst upon my mind, I am not at all sure that he would have hesitated to have had me thrown overboard.

Prudence required me to be more circumspect than ever.

In fact, although I had not laid myself open to the least suspicion—even in the mind of Serkō, quick and cunning as he is—a corner of the mysterious veil had been lifted. The future was illumined by a faint glimmer.

As the *Ebba* approached, the shape of this island, or rather islet, was distinctly outlined against the clear background of the sky. The sun, which had passed its

meridian, bathed its western side. The islet is solitary, or at least neither in the north nor in the south did I see any group to which it would belong. As the distance lessened, the angle at which it was seen widened, while the horizon sank behind it.

This oddly-shaped islet resembled an up-turned cup, and from the bottom gushed a stream of fuliginous vapour. Its summit—the bottom of the cup, if you like—was more than three hundred feet above the level of the sea, and its steep sides were as bare as the surf-beaten rocks at the foot.

One natural feature renders this island recognizable by navigators who sight it from the west; it is a rock, forming a natural arch, which seems to supply the handle to the cup, and gives passage to the whirling spray of the waves, as it does to the rays of the sun when its disc rises above the eastern horizon. When seen under these conditions the islet quite justifies its name of Backcup.

Well, I knew the island, and I recognized it. It is situated in the Bermudas. It is the "up-turned cup" that I had had occasion to visit some years ago. No, I am not mistaken! At that time my feet trod those rocks and wound their way around its eastern base. Yes, it is Backcup.

Had I possessed less self-control I should have given way to an exclamation of surprise and of satisfaction which would have made the Count uneasy, with good reason.

I will mention here the circumstances under which I

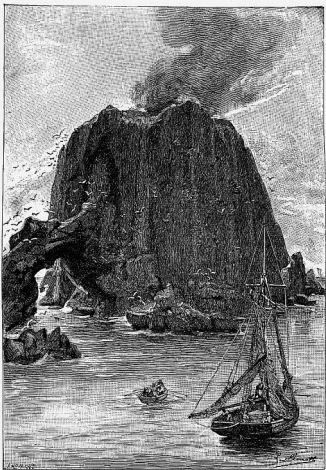
was led to explore the island of Backup at the time when I visited the Bermudas.

This group, situated about six hundred miles from North Carolina, consists of some two hundred isles and islets. Since the wreck of *Summers*, the Englishman who was cast ashore there in 1609, the Bermudas have belonged to England, and in consequence the colonial population has increased to 10,000 inhabitants. It was not for its products of cotton, coffee, indigo, and arrowroot that Great Britain annexed these islands; but because it offered unique advantages as a naval station in proximity to the United States. The taking possession was accomplished without an objection being raised by the other powers. And now its affairs are administered by a British Governor with the assistance of a Council and a General Assembly.

The principal islands of the group are called St. David, Somerset, Hamilton, and St. George. The latter possesses a free port, and the town called by the same name is also the capital of the group.

The largest island is not more than twelve and a half miles long by two and a half miles broad; and, with the exception of those already enumerated, the remainder form an agglomeration of islets and reefs scattered over an area of thirty square miles.

Though the climate of the Bermudas is very mild and salubrious, the frightful storms of the Atlantic sweep over the islands in winter, and render the approaches difficult for ships. The greatest defect in the Bermudas is the absence of rivers and streams. Still, since rain falls in



Backup.



abundance the inhabitants have remedied the want by collecting water for the requirements of the people and the exigencies of cultivation. This has necessitated the construction of immense reservoirs, which the rain fills to overflowing with inexhaustible generosity. These works deserve great admiration and do honour to the genius of man.

It was precisely the formation of these reservoirs, and also my curiosity to see this fine work, that occasioned my previous voyage.

I obtained some weeks' leave from the company for whom I acted as engineer in New Jersey, and I set sail from New York for the Bermudas.

During my stay at Hamilton Island, a phenomenon of geological interest occurred in the vast port of Southampton.

One day a whole flotilla freighted with fisher-people, men, women, and children, appeared in Southampton Harbour.

For fifty years these families had lived on that part of the coast of Backcup which faced the east, where they had built wooden huts and stone houses. The inhabitants had every facility for gaining their livelihood in these fish-abounding waters, and the sperm whales which frequented the Bermudan latitudes during the months of March and April were a chief source of sustenance.

Nothing until then had disturbed either the tranquility or the industry of the fishermen. They did not complain of the hardship of their lives, which was alleviated by



the facility of communication with Hamilton and St. George. Their strong boats, rigged like cutters, exported the fish, and imported in exchange various commodities needed for their support.

Why, then, had they abandoned the islet, and without any intention of ever returning? Were they no longer in security?

Two months before, the fisher folk had been at first surprised and afterwards alarmed by hollow rumblings which came from the interior of Backcup. At the same time smoke and flames issued from the top of the island—the bottom of the up-turned cup. Now no one had suspected that the island was of volcanic origin, or that its summit former a crater, because its sides were so steep it was impossible to scale them. But it could no longer be doubted that Backcup was an old volcano, and now threatened the village with an immediate eruption.

During those two months the internal noises increased, the rocky foundation of the island trembled perceptibly, long jets of flame issued from the crater—generally at night—and sometimes there were formidable explosions. Such symptoms were the unmistakable preface to a violent disturbance.

The families exposed to this imminent catastrophe, on a sea-beach which offered no shelter from the streams of lava, and fearing the complete destruction of Backcup, lost no time in making their escape.

They placed all their possessions on the fishing sloops

and setting sail they sought refuge in Southampton Harbour.

Throughout the Bermudas there was consternation at the news of a volcano, dormant for centuries, and now about to become active at the western extremity of the group. But, at the same time as the terror of some became manifest the curiosity of others was aroused. I was one of the latter. It was important, also, to study the phenomenon in order to ascertain whether the fishermen had not exaggerated the consequences.

Backcup, which rose abruptly at the west of the Bermudas, was connected with them by a string of tiny islands and reefs, inaccessible from the east. It could not be seen from either Hamilton or St. George, as its summit did not exceed three hundred feet in height.

A cutter from Southampton Harbour conveyed us—some explorers, and myself—to its shore, where the cabins, deserted by the fisher folk, stood. The internal thunder was still to be heard, and a cloud of smoke escaped from the top.

We had no doubt in our minds: the extinct volcano of Backcup was rekindled under the action of subterranean fire. An eruption might happen any day.

We tried in vain to reach the orifice of the volcano. But ascent was impossible on those declivities, abrupt, smooth, and slippery, offering no hold for foot or hand, and profiling at an angle of seventy-five or eighty degrees. I never saw anything more barren than that carapace of rock,

on which only an occasional tuft of wild lucerne grew in parts that were slightly damp.

After many fruitless efforts we tried to make the tour of the island. But except where the fishermen had built their village the base was impassable on account of the fallen rock on the north, south and east.

Our reconnoitring of the island was then reduced to that very inadequate survey. On seeing the smoke and flame escape from the crater, while the rumblings and occasional explosions shook the interior, we could only praise the foresight of the fishers who had abandoned the island while there was time.

Under these circumstances was I led to visit Backcup, and no one will be surprised that I was able to identify the islet the moment the extraordinary structure offered itself to my gaze.

I am sure it would not have pleased Count d'Artigas had Gaydon the keeper recognized the island, supposing the *Ebba* was going to put in there, which, for want of a port, seemed very probable.

Backcup, whither no Bermudan had returned, was absolutely deserted, and I could not imagine why the *Ebba* was putting into port here.

Perhaps, after all, the Count and his companions had no intention of landing. Even in case the schooner did find temporary shelter among the rocks in a narrow creek, was it likely that a rich yachtsman would set up his residence on this arid zone, exposed to the awful tempests of the West Atlantic? To live in that place would be well

enough for rude fishermen, but not for Count d'Artigas, Serkö the engineer, Captain Spade and his crew.

Backcup was only half a mile away. Its aspect bears no resemblance to the other islands of the group under the dark verdure of their hills. Only rarely in some cleft or hollow a juniper tree appears, or some stunted specimens of those cedars which constitute the wealth of the Bermudas. The rocks at the base were covered with thick layers of sea-wrack and seaweed continually renewed by the deposit of the waves; there were also enormous quantities of the string-like seaweeds and others brought from the sea of Sargasso and the currents between the Canaries and the Cape Verde Islands. The only inhabitants of this desolate isle were birds, bull-finches, and "*Mota cyllas cyalis*" of blueish plumage, while myriads of gulls passed on rapid wing through the whirling vapours of the crater.

When she was within two cables' length the schooner was slowed and stopped at the entrance of a passage between rocks on a level with the water.

I wondered whether the *Ebba* were going to attempt to navigate that tortuous passage.

No, it was the most probable supposition that after a wait of some hours—for what reason I did not guess—she would again resume her course to the east.

No preparations were being made for anchorage. The anchor remained at the cathead, the chains were in their places, the crew was not getting ready to lower the boats.

At that moment Count d'Artigas, Serkö, and the Captain

walked up to the bows, and then something happened which was inexplicable to me.

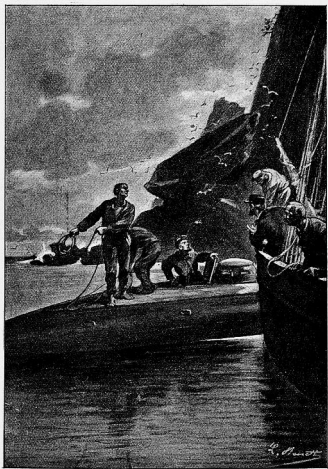
Observing their movements, my eyes fell on a small floating buoy which one of the sailors was hauling on to the bow.

Almost immediately the water, which was very clear in that spot, darkened, and a sort of black mass arose from the bottom. Was it an enormous whale coming to breathe at the surface, and was the *Ebba* in danger of a stroke from its mighty tail?

Then I understood all! Then I knew to what engine the schooner owed her remarkable speed without screw or sails. This was her indefatigable propeller emerging from the depths after having dragged us from the American coast to the Bermudas! There it was, floating at our side, a submarine boat, an under-water tug driven by a screw under the action of the current, either of a battery, of accumulators, or of those powerful coils now in use.

On the upper part of this tug—a long iron cylinder—a platform extended, and an opening in its centre established communication with the interior. From the front of this platform projected a periscope, a look-out, a kind of binnacle whose walls, pierced with port-holes with lenticular glasses, enabled electric light to be shed into the deep.

Now, relieved, lightened of its salt-water ballast, the tug had come to the surface. The principal hatch was going to be opened and fresh air would penetrate the whole vessel. And even supposing it is submerged all day,



The tug alongside.



perhaps it rises at night and tows the *Ebba* on the surface of the ocean.

There is one question, however. If the mechanical force of the tug is produced by electricity there must be a storage of force, whatever its origin. Now where is this storage? It cannot be on Backcup, surely? Besides, why does the schooner make use of a tug that moves under water? Why has she not her motor power within herself, like so many other yachts?

But I had no leisure at that moment to devote to my reflections, or rather to seek the explanation of so many incomprehensible things.

The tug was alongside. The hatch had just been opened. Several men appeared on the platform—the crew of the submarine boat with whom Captain Spade communicates by means of the electric signals placed in the bow of the schooner, and connected with the tug by a wire. So it was from the *Ebba* that orders were issued.

Serkö, the engineer, then came to me and said simply,—

“Let us embark!”

“Embark?” I repeated.

“Yes! in the tug—quick!”

As usual, I could do nothing but obey an imperative order, and I stepped over the side.

At that instant Thomas Roch came on deck accompanied by one of the men. He appeared to me very calm, also very indifferent, and offered no objection to



boarding the tug. When he had reached me at the hatch, Count d'Artigas and Serkö joined us.

Captain Spade and the crew, with the exception of four men who had entered a small boat which had just been lowered, remained on the schooner. These men carried with them a long hawser, probably intended to tow the *Ebba* through the reefs. Was there a creek among those rocks where Count d'Artigas finds a safe shelter from the surf? Is this his port of destination?

The *Ebba* being separated from the tug, the hawser connecting it with the boat tightened, and half a cable's length farther the sailors made it fast to the iron rings fixed in the rocks. Then the crew, hauling it, slowly towed the schooner.

In a few minutes the *Ebba* had disappeared behind the rocks and from the sea, not even the top of her masts could be seen.

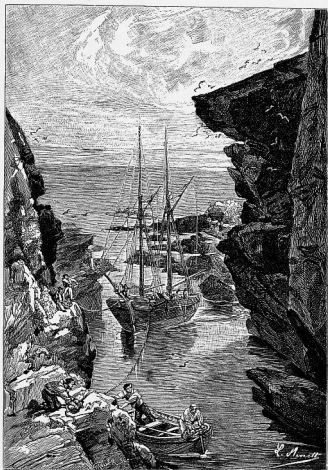
Who in the Bermudas would imagine that a ship was in the habit of putting into port in that hidden creek?

Who in America could imagine that the rich yachtsman, so well known in the western ports, is also a dweller in the solitudes of Backcup?

Twenty minutes later the boat came back towards the tug, bringing the four sailors.

It was clear that the submarine vessel was waiting for them in order to set out again—whither?

The whole crew were now on the platform, the boat was in tow at the stern, we began to move, the screw worked at half turns, and the tug, on the surface of the



The hidden creek.



water, standing in towards Backcup, rounded the reefs to the south.

After a few cable-lengths another passage was discerned running into the island, and the tug followed its windings. When we had nearly reached the base of the rocky islet, the tug stopped.

The order was then given to two men to draw up the boat upon a narrow strand, where neither the waves nor the surf could reach it.

That done, the two sailors clambered on board, and then Serkø made me a sign to go below.

Some iron steps led to a central room where several boxes and bales were piled up; these, I suppose, could find no place in the already encumbered hold. I was pushed towards a side cabin, the door was shut upon me, and I was once more plunged into profound darkness.

I recognized that cabin the instant I entered it. It was the place in which I had passed those long hours after the abduction from Healthful House, and which I only left when the *Ebba* was in Pamlico Sound.

Evidently M. Roch was treated in the same way, and now shut up in another compartment.

I heard a hollow noise. It was the closing of the hatch, and the apparatus was immediately submerged.

Indeed, I soon felt a descending movement, due to the introduction of water into the compartments of the tug.

This movement was followed by another—a movement of propulsion that drove the submarine vessel through the waters.

Three minutes later it stopped, and I knew that we were rising to the surface.

The noise at the hatch was again audible. It was opening this time.

The door of my cabin yielded to me, and in a few bounds I was on the platform.

I looked. . . .

The tug had penetrated into the very interior of Backcup. Here is the mysterious retreat where Count d'Artigas lives with his companions, outside—so to speak—of humanity !

## CHAPTER IX.

### INSIDE.

THE next day, as no one interfered with my proceedings, I was able to make a first exploration in the vast cavern of Backcup.

What a night I passed, a prey to strange dreams, and how ardently I longed for the day!

I had been conducted into a grotto about a hundred steps from the water's edge where the tug lay.

This grotto, six feet by twelve, lit by an incandescent lamp, is reached by a door which was fastened behind me.

I need not be astonished that electricity is the agent employed for lighting the interior of this cavern, since it supplies the impetus to the submarine tug. But how is it produced? Where does it come from? Can it be that there are electric works in the interior of this enormous crypt with all the machinery, dynamos, and accumulators?

My cell is furnished with a table on which my food is served, a bedstead and bedding, a wicker armchair, a press containing linen and several changes of clothes. The drawer of the table contains paper, ink, and pens. In a

corner on the right is a toilet table with the usual accessories. Everything is very clean.

Fresh fish, preserved meat, good bread, ale and whisky, such was the menu of the first meal. I could scarcely eat. I was quite unnerved.

It is necessary, however, that I should regain complete control of myself, that I should be calm in mind and soul, with all my mental faculties on the alert; for I want to discover the secret of this handful of men entombed in the bowels of a mountain—and I will discover it.

So it is under the carapace of Backcup that Count d'Artigas resides. This cavity, whose existence no one suspects, is his home when the *Ebba* is not bearing him along the coast of the New World, or, perhaps, as far as the shores of the Old World! This is the unknown retreat which he has discovered, and it is reached by a submarine entrance, a water-door that opens twenty or thirty feet below the ocean surface.

Why has he separated himself from the world? What is there in this man's past? If the name D'Artigas, his title of Count, are only assumed, as I imagine, what is his motive for hiding his identity? Is he an outlaw, an exile, who prefers this place of banishment to any other? Am I not rather in the company of a malefactor, anxious to secure impunity for his crimes? I can do nothing but suppose; concerning this suspicious stranger I suppose everything.

Then returned to my mind that question which I have not yet answered satisfactorily. Why was Thomas Roch

carried off from Healthful House under the circumstances already related? Does Count d'Artigas hope to acquire the secret of the Fulgurator, and to use it for the defence of Backcup in case some chance betrays his hiding-place?

But if that happened, the island of Backcup could easily be starved out, as the tug would not suffice to revictual it. Besides, the schooner would have no chance of breaking through a line of investment, and she would be watched for at every port. Thenceforth, of what use would the invention of Roch be in the Count's hands?

About seven o'clock in the morning I jumped out of bed. Although I am imprisoned between the walls of the cavern, at least I am not confined to my cell. There was nothing to prevent me going out—so I went.

Twenty yards in front, a rocky slab, forming a kind of quay, projected, extending right and left.

Several of the *Ebba's* sailors were busy unloading the bales and emptying the hold of the tug, which lay level with the water against a little stone jetty.

My eyes were growing accustomed to the half-light of the cavern, which is open in the middle of the roof.

"It is by that opening," I said to myself, "the vapours escape, or rather it is that smoke which indicated the island to us at three or four miles distance."

In a moment the following series of reflections passed through my mind:

"Backcup is not a volcano, as everyone thought—as I thought myself. The vapours and flames which were



seen some years ago were only artificial. . . . The noises that terrified the fisher folk were not caused by the warring of subterranean powers. . . . The various phenomena were fictitious. . . . They became manifest at the will of the master of the islet, the man who wanted to drive away the inhabitants from its coast . . . and Count d'Artigas succeeded. . . . He remains the sole master of Backcup. . . . By merely burning gunpowder and by sending the smoke of the seaweeds brought to him by the currents through his sham crater, he has established a belief in the existence of a volcano that has suddenly become active without warning, and in the imminence of an eruption that can never take place ! ”

This is what must have happened, and, indeed, ever since the departure of the Bermuda fishermen Backcup has constantly displayed thick wreaths of smoke at its summit.

Meanwhile the interior light was increasing ; daylight was penetrating through the sham crater as the sun mounted the horizon. I can therefore calculate the dimensions of the cavern with tolerable exactness. Here are my figures :

The islet of Backcup, which is almost circular in shape, measures twelve hundred yards in circumference and presents an internal area of about fifty thousand square yards. At their base the walls vary in thickness from thirty to a hundred yards.

It follows that, minus the thickness of the walls, the excavation occupies the whole mass of Backcup which

risers above the water. As to the length of the submarine tunnel that puts the inside in communication with the outside, and through which the tug passes, I calculate that it must be about forty yards.

These figures give some idea of the size of the cavern. But vast as it is, I am aware that the Old and the New Worlds possess others considerably larger which have been carefully surveyed.

It is important, however, to make a distinction between Backcup and all the famous caverns of the world. It is this: the majority of these caves are easily accessible, and must consequently have been discovered one day or another. Now here that is not so. Indicated on the maps of these latitudes as an island of the Bermuda group, how could it be imagined that an enormous cavern yawned in its interior? To know it one must enter it; and to enter it a submarine boat analogous to the tug belonging to Count d'Artigas is requisite.

I feel sure it was only by chance that the strange yachtsman was led to discover this tunnel, by which he has been enabled to found this queer colony at Backcup.

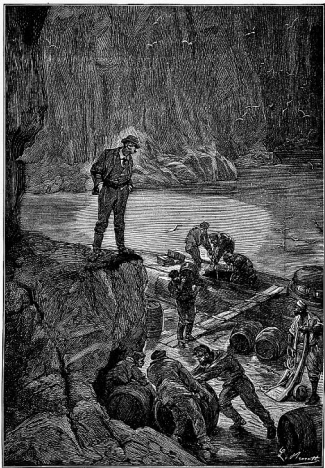
On devoting myself to the examination of the sheet of water enclosed within the walls of the cavern, I ascertained that it measures three hundred to three hundred and fifty yards in circumference. It is in reality only a lagoon framed in perpendicular rocks, but quite sufficient for the tug's manœuvres, for its depth, so far as I can discover, is not less than forty yards.

It goes without saying that this crypt, on account of its

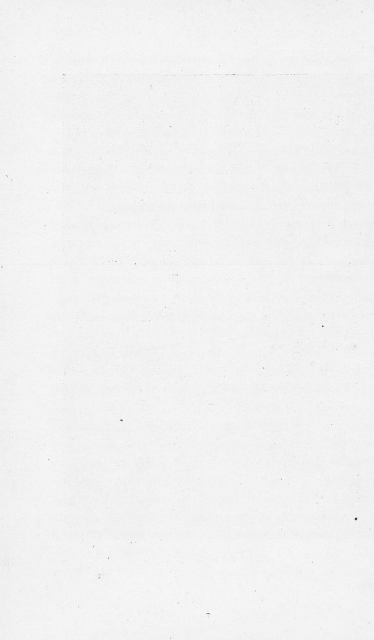
situation and structure, belongs to the category of those formed by the action of the sea. It is of both Neptunian and Plutonic origin, like the grottoes of Crozon and Morgate in the Bay of Douarneau in France, of Bonifacio on the Corsican coast; Thorgatten on the coast of Norway, whose height is estimated at five hundred yards; the grottoes of Gibraltar in Spain, and Touranne in Cochin China. In short, the nature of their dome-like shells shows that they are the product of this double geological travail.

The island of Backcup is largely formed of calcareous rocks. From the steep banks of the lagoon these rocks rise towards the walls in shelving slopes, leaving between them a carpet of very fine sand, ornamented here and there with tough yellowish clusters of samphire. From great masses of seaweed and sargassum, the former very dry, the latter wet, the acrid sea scent is exhaled, as the tide, after having forced them through the tunnel, casts them on the shores of the lagoon. But that is not the only combustible employed in the multitudinous requirements of Backcup, for I noticed an enormous stock of coal, which must have been brought from the schooner by the tug. But, I repeat, it is the burning of these masses of marine matter, previously dried, that provides the fumes vomited by the crater.

Continuing my walk on the western side of the lagoon, I discerned the habitations of this colony of troglodytes—as I may surely call them? That part of the cave called the Beehive fully justifies its name. There several rows



In the interior of the island.



of cells have been hollowed out by the hand of man in the solid limestone, and in those cells these human beings live.

Towards the east the arrangement of the cavern is different. On that side hundreds of natural pillars, sloping, perpendicular, and twisted, support the roof, like a forest of stone trees spread out to the extreme limits of the cave. Through these columns winding paths cross one another, rendering the remotest part of Backcup accessible.

Judging by the cells of the Beehive, the companions of Count d'Artigas must number from eighty to one hundred. Before one of these cells, isolated from the rest, the Count was standing. He had just been joined by the Captain and Serkø, and after some conversation, all three descended towards the bank and approached the jetty where the tug lay.

At that hour a dozen men, who had unloaded the merchandise, were transporting it by boat to the other shore, where large hollows, scooped out of the rock, formed the warehouses of Backcup.

As for the orifice of the tunnel under the lagoon waters, it was not visible. I observed, indeed, that the tug was obliged to sink down some yards below the surface of the sea, in order to enter it when coming in. The Backcup grotto is not like the grottoes of Staffa or Morgate, where the entrance is always open, even at high water. Is there another passage communicating with the littoral, a natural or artificial corridor? I shall look, for it is important that I should be certain on this subject.

Backcup Island merits its name. It is truly an enormous cup up-turned. Not only has it the exterior shape, but—and this no one knows—it has reproduced the interior form also.

I have said that the Beehive occupied that part of the cavern lying on the north of the lagoon, that is to say, the left on entering by the tunnel; while on the opposite side are magazines where supplies of all sorts are stored, bales of merchandise, puncheons of wine and brandy, barrels of beer, cases of preserves, numerous boxes bearing the brands of various commodities. It seems as if the cargoes of twenty ships had been unloaded here. A little farther on rose an important-looking structure, surrounded by an enclosure. It was easy to recognize its function. From a post which rose about it there sprang thick copper wires whose currents fed the powerful electric lamps suspended under the roof, besides the incandescent light used in every cell in the hive. There was also a number of these same apparatus fixed between the columns of the cave, which illuminated it to its furthest extremity.

Shall I be allowed to wander at will in the interior of Backcup? That is the question. I hope so. Why should Count d'Artigas shackle my liberty by forbidding me to ramble about his mysterious domain? Am I not imprisoned within the walls of the island? Is it possible to get out of it otherwise than by the tunnel? Now, how to pass that water-gate which is always closed?

Then, admitting that I could get through the tunnel, would not my disappearance be immediately discovered?

The tug would soon land a dozen men on the shore, where every crevice would be searched thoroughly. I should be captured without a doubt, brought back to the Beehive and deprived of my liberty.

I must, then, give up all idea of flight, unless I can see some chance of success. But if a favourable opportunity occurs, I shall certainly not let it escape.

While perambulating the rows of cells I was able to study some of the inmates who have accepted this monotonous existence in the depths of Backcup. As I said before, their number may be put down as a hundred, in accordance with the cells of the Beehive.

These people take no notice of me when I pass. On close examination they appear to me to be recruited from all parts. In them I can distinguish no common stock—not even that bond which will be found between North Americans, or Europeans, or Asiatics. The colour of their skin varies—white, copper, and black, and it is the black of the Australian rather than the African. Generally speaking, they seem for the most part to belong to the East Indian races; in fact, this type is even very apparent in the greater number. I may add that Count d'Artigas certainly belongs to that special race found in the lower islands of the West Pacific; Serkō comes from the Levant, and Spade from Spain or Spanish America.

But if the inhabitants of Backcup are not connected by the ties of race, they certainly are by those of instinct and appetite. Such evil countenances, such fierce faces, such fundamentally savage types! They are violent



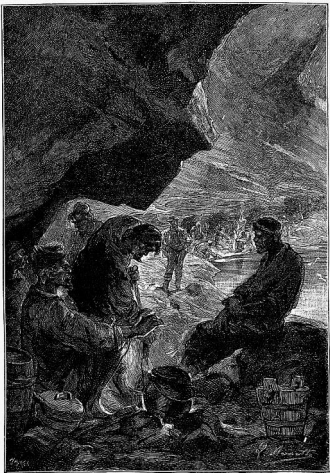
natures, one can see, who have restrained no passion and refrained from no debauch. An idea has struck me—may it not be, that after a long series of crime, robbery, fire, murder, outrage of every kind committed in company, this band of brothers has taken refuge in this cave, where they may well believe themselves absolutely secure?

Count d'Artigas would then be no more than the leader of a gang of miscreants, Spade and Serkø his lieutenants, and Backcup a pirates' den.

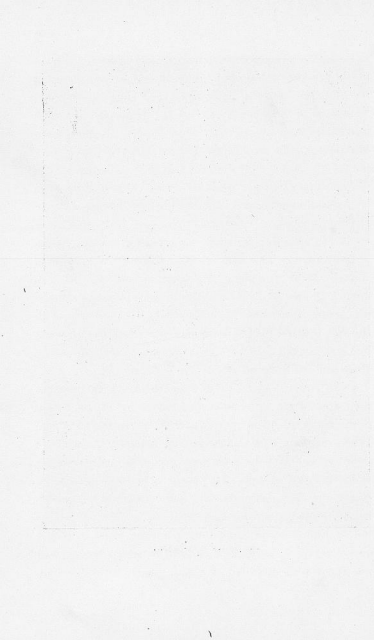
Such is the thought which has become riveted in my brain. I shall be much surprised if the future proves that I am mistaken. Besides, everything I have noticed in my first exploration only confirms my opinion, and justifies the gravest conclusions.

In any case, whomsoever they are, and whatever the circumstances that brought them to this place, the Count's companions seem to have accepted his all-powerful rule without reserve. But on the other hand, if a rigorous discipline is maintained under his iron hand, there are probably certain advantages which compensate the men for the kind of servitude they have undertaken. What are those compensations?

After walking round that part of the rock under which the tunnel passes, I arrived on the opposite side of the lagoon. As I had already perceived, the depôts on this shore are for the merchandise brought by the schooner every voyage: these are great hollows hewn out of the rock which could contain and did contain an immense number of bales.



The pirates' store-houses.



Beyond lay the electricity works. As I passed in front of the windows, I caught sight of certain apparatus of recent invention, not bulky but very complete. There were none of those machines worked by steam and which necessitate the use of coal and require a complicated mechanism. As I anticipated, the current of the cavern's lamps, like the dynamos of the tug, is supplied by coils of extraordinary power. Doubtless this current serves also for many domestic uses, for heating the Beehive, and for cooking purposes. I have discovered, too, that it is applied in an adjacent cavity to stills for the production of fresh water. The Backcup colonists are not reduced to collecting the abundant rains that fall on the coast to quench their thirst. At a short distance from the factory was a reservoir, which I may compare, in proportion, with those I visited at the Bermudas. It would supply the needs of a population of ten thousand inhabitants—here there are one hundred.

I still do not know how to style them. That they and their chief have serious reasons for living in the bosom of the earth is obvious, but what are those reasons? . . . When religious shut themselves up between the walls of their convent with the intention of separating themselves from the rest of humanity, their action is understood. But truly these subjects of Count d'Artigas resemble neither Benedictines nor Carthusians!

I continued my promenade through the forest of pillars until I reached the extreme end of the cave. No one had interfered with me. No one had spoken to me. None

even appeared to trouble themselves about my existence. That portion of Backcup is extremely curious, it might rank with the marvellous grottoes of Kentucky or the Balearic Isles. It is needless to say the work of man is nowhere to be seen. The work of nature appears alone, and it was not without a certain astonishment, mixed with fear, that I thought of forces capable of raising such prodigious structures. The part situated beyond the lagoon received only the very slanting rays of light from the central opening. At night, when lit by electricity, this must be fairy-like. In no corner, in spite of my search, can I find any communication with the outside.

I note that the island offers shelter to innumerable gulls. Here, it appears, they are never molested ; they are left to multiply at leisure, and the vicinity of man causes them no alarm.

Backcup possesses other life than that of the sea-birds. The enclosures for cattle, pigs, sheep, poultry, are close to the Beehive. The food supplies are thus as varied as they are certain, thanks also to the products of the sea either from the outside reefs, or from the waters of the lagoon, where fish of every variety abound. In short, to convince oneself that the dwellers in Backcup need want for nothing, it was only necessary to look at them. They are all vigorous men, robust types of seamen, baked and burnt under the heat of tropical suns, full-blooded, and ever inhaling oxygen through the winds of the ocean. There

are neither boys nor old men—none but men between thirty and fifty years of age.

But why have they submitted to this kind of existence? Besides, do they never leave this strange retirement?

Perhaps I shall know ere long.

## CHAPTER X.

KER KARRAJE.

THE cell which I occupy is situated about a hundred paces from the abode of Count d'Artigas; it is one of the last of the Beehive row. Though I may not have to share it with Thomas Roch, I thought at least that I should be near him. So that the keeper might continue his attendance on the patient, the two cells ought to be contiguous. But this point, I suppose, will soon be settled.

Captain Spade and Serkő the engineer live separately, close to the hôtel of Count d'Artigas.

His hôtel? . . . Yes. Why not give it its name, since the residence has been carefully and artistically arranged? Skilful hands have carved the rock into an ornamental façade. A wide door gives access to it. Light enters by several windows cut in the limestone and fitted with sashes filled with coloured panes. The interior consists of a number of rooms, the dining-room and drawing-room are lighted by a large window. The whole is perfectly ventilated. The furniture is of various origin and very fanciful shapes, and it is of French, English, and American manu-

facture. The offices and kitchen are situated in adjoining cells behind the Beehive.

In the afternoon, as I was going out with the firm intention of "obtaining an audience" of Count d'Artigas, I espied that gentleman walking up the bank of the lagoon towards the "hive." Either he had not seen me or he wished to avoid me, for he hastened on and I could not join him.

"Nevertheless I will make him receive me," I said to myself.

I also hurried on and stopped before his door just as it was being shut.

A big fellow, evidently of Malay extraction, very dark in colour, immediately appeared on the threshold. In a rough voice he signified that I was to go away.

I did not obey the injunction ; but insisted, repeating this sentence twice in good English,—

"Inform Count d'Artigas that I wish to be received instantly."

I might as well have spoken to the rocks of Backcup.

The savage evidently did not understand a word of English, and he answered only by a shout which conveyed a threat.

It then occurred to me to force my way in, and to call so that Count d'Artigas must hear. But in all probability the only result would have been to provoke the anger of the Malay, and his strength was herculean.

I postponed for the time the explanation due to me—but I meant to have it sooner or later.



As I went along the line of the Beehive in an easterly direction, my thoughts turned to Thomas Roch. I was very much surprised not to see him during that first day. Can it be that he is suffering from an attack? But that is hardly possible, for Count d'Artigas, according to his own words, would have called Gaydon the keeper to attend the inventor.

I had scarcely gone a hundred steps when I met Serkö.

With his usual good-humour, and engaging manners, that scoffer smiled when he saw me and did not attempt to escape. Had he known that I was a confrère—admitting that he is an engineer—he could not have given me a warmer welcome. But I shall take good care to conceal my name and accomplishments from him.

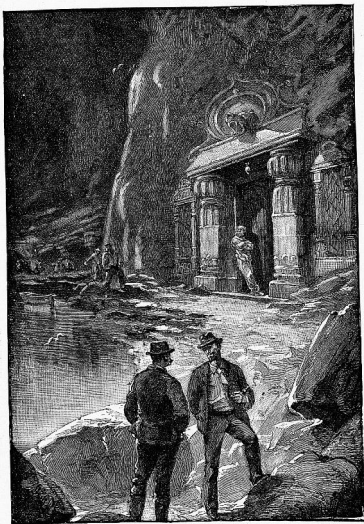
Serkö stopped, with laughing eyes and mocking mouth, and the good-day he wished me was accompanied by a most friendly gesture.

I replied coldly to his politeness; but this he did not pretend to notice.

"May Saint Jonathan protect you, Mr. Gaydon!" he said, in his clear, rich voice. "You do not grieve, I hope, at the happy circumstance which has enabled you to visit this cave, marvellous above all others; indeed, one of the most beautiful, and yet the least known of our spheroid."

That word from the vocabulary of science in the course of a conversation with a mere keeper surprised me, I must say, and I contented myself with replying,—

"I should have no reason to grieve, M. Serkö, if after



The "hôtel" of Count d'Artigas.



having had the pleasure of visiting this cavern I was at liberty to leave it."

"What! would you dream of leaving us, Mr. Gaydon—of returning to your stupid pavilion at Healthful House? You have scarcely explored our magnificent domain, nor had time to admire its incomparable beauties, all due to nature alone."

"What I have seen is enough for me," I replied, "and in case you speak to me seriously, I answer you seriously that I don't want to see any more."

"Come, come, Mr. Gaydon, permit me to observe that you are not yet able to appreciate the advantages of existence under such unrivalled conditions! A calm and tranquil life, free from all care, the future assured, material surroundings such as are not to be met elsewhere, an equable climate, nothing to fear from the tempests that sweep the Atlantic, neither frosts in winter nor heat in summer! The changes of season scarcely make themselves felt in this mild and health-giving atmosphere. Here we have to dread neither Neptune nor Pluto."

This evocation of mythological names was, it seemed to me, out of place. Serkō was evidently making fun of me. Gaydon could hardly have heard of either Pluto or Neptune.

"Sir," I said, "possibly this climate suits you, and you appreciate as they deserve the advantages of living at the bottom of this cavern of—"

I was on the point of saying Backcup—I stopped myself

just in time. What would happen if they suspected that I knew the name of the island, and consequently its position at the western extremity of the Bermudas?

So I went on to say,—

“But as this climate does not suit me I have a right to change it, it seems to me.”

“*The right*, no doubt.”

“And I understand that I shall be permitted to leave the island, and that I shall be furnished with the means of returning to America.”

“I have no good reason to oppose to you, Mr. Gaydon,” replied Serkō. “Your claim is even well founded. Remark, however, that we live here in a noble and proud independence; that we are not subject to any foreign power; that we are free from all external authority; that we are not colonists of any State of either the Old or the New World. All this deserves consideration by a proud soul and a lofty mind. . . . Then what memories these grottoes invoke in a cultivated mind. They seem to have been excavated by the hands of the gods when, in olden time, they pronounced their oracles by the mouth of Trophonius.”

Decidedly the engineer delighted in quoting mythology. Trophonius, after Pluto and Neptune! Now, does he imagine that a hospital attendant knows Trophonius? It was evident that this joker was still joking, and I had to place a great restraint upon myself in order to answer him in the same strain.

“A moment ago,” I said, abruptly, “I wanted to enter

that residence, which is, if I am not mistaken, Count d'Artigas', and I was prevented."

"By whom, Mr. Gaydon?"

"By a man in the Count's service."

"Very probably the man has received special orders with regard to you."

"Why?"

"Because there is no Count d'Artigas here."

"You are joking, I think—I have just seen him."

"That is not Count d'Artigas whom you have just seen, Mr. Gaydon."

"And who is he, then, if you please?"

"The pirate, Ker Karraje!"

This name was flung at me in a loud voice, and Serkō left me before I could stop him.

"Ker Karraje, the pirate!"

That name, I know it, and what terrible memories it awakens! It explains, in itself, all that was inexplicable! It tells me the kind of man into whose hands I have fallen!

With what I knew before, and with what I have learned since my arrival at Backcup, even from the mouth of Serkō, this is all that is lawful for me to tell of the past and the present of Ker Karraje. Eight or nine years ago the waters of the Western Pacific were infested by pirates of extraordinary daring. These were a band of desperadoes of all kinds, deserters from adjacent colonies, escaped prisoners, and runaway sailors, under the command of a formidable chief. The nucleus of the band had been first

formed of those men, the scum of the European and American populations, who had been attracted to New South Wales by the discovery of gold. Among these gold-seekers were Captain Spade and Serkô the engineer, two ne'er-do-weels whom a certain community of ideas and character soon made intimate.

These two, well-informed and resolute men, would certainly have succeeded in any career, if only by their intelligence. But with neither conscience nor scruples, determined to acquire riches by no matter what means, seeking from speculation and gambling what they might have gained by patient and regular work, they rushed into the most foolhardy adventures; were rich one day, ruined the next, like the majority of the vagabond crowd who had gone to seek their fortune at the goldfields.

There was then in the mining districts of New South Wales a man of incomparable pluck, one of those dare-devils who shrink from nothing—not even from crime—and whose influence over violent and evil natures is irresistible.

This man called himself Ker Karraje.

What was the origin and nationality of the pirate had never been discovered, though every inquiry was made on the subject. But while he succeeded in evading all pursuit, his name—at least the name he had given himself—became known throughout the world. It was breathed with horror and terror like that of a legendary being—invisible, intangible.

I now have reason to believe that Ker Karraje is of

East Indian race. It matters little, however. What is certain is that he is rightly regarded as the author of the innumerable outrages committed in those distant seas.

After having passed some years on the diggings in Australia, where he made acquaintance with Spade and Serkő, Ker Karraje succeeded in getting hold of a vessel in the port of Melbourne in the colony of Victoria. Thirty rascals, whose number was soon to be tripled, became his companions. In that part of the Pacific where piracy is still so easy and, it is said, so profitable—how many ships were plundered, how many crews massacred, how many raids organized in certain western islands where the settlers were not strong enough to defend themselves? Although Ker Karraje's ship had often been sighted, no one had ever been able to overtake it. It seemed to have the faculty of disappearing at will in those island mazes where Captain Spade knew every creek and channel.

Dismay then reigned in those latitudes. The English, French, Germans, Russians, Americans, in vain sent their vessels to pursue this phantom ship, which came no one knew whence, and hid itself no one knew where, after pillages and massacres it was impossible either to arrest or to punish.

One day these crimes came to an end. Nothing more was heard of Ker Karraje. Had he abandoned the Pacific for other seas? Was piracy going to break out elsewhere? As it did not recommence for some time, the impression spread that notwithstanding all that had been spent in orgies and debauch, sufficient profit remained from these



long-continued robberies to constitute a treasure of enormous value, which Ker Karraje and his followers were doubtless now enjoying, after having placed it in safety in some retreat known only to themselves.

Where had the band taken refuge after their disappearance? All search was fruitless. Alarm having ceased with danger, those horrors of which the Western Pacific had been the scene were in a short time forgotten. All this was common knowledge.

Now for that which will never be known if I do not succeed in escaping from Backup.

Yes, these evildoers were indeed the possessors of considerable wealth at the time when they abandoned the waters of the West Pacific. After having destroyed their ship they dispersed in different directions, having arranged to meet on the American Continent.

At that time Serkø the engineer, deeply learned in his profession, a skilful mechanician, who had made a special study of submarine boats, proposed to Ker Karraje to build one of these destroyers in order to begin their predatory life again under more secret and more terrible conditions.

Ker Karraje instantly saw the value of the idea of his accomplice, and as there was no lack of money he had only to set to work.

While the self-styled Count d'Artigas was ordering the schooner *Ebba* at the Gottenburg dockyards in Sweden, Serkø gave the plans for a submarine boat to the Cramps shipyards in Philadelphia, and its construction

caused no suspicion. Besides it soon after sank with all hands.

On Serkö's model, and under his special supervision, the vessel was built, and he made use of all the latest developments of nautical science in its construction, and also electric science and invention.

Needless to say, no one recognized in Count d'Artigas, Ker Karraje the former pirate of the Pacific, or in Serkö the engineer, the most active and resolute of his accomplices. They only knew him as a foreigner of high birth and large fortune who for a year had frequented the ports of the United States in his yacht, for the *Ebba* was launched long before the building of the tug was complete.

This work occupied quite eighteen months. When it was finished the new vessel excited the admiration of all who were interested in engines of submarine navigation. By its exterior form, its interior appropriateness, its system of ventilation, its stability, its instant immersion, the ease with which it could be handled and steered, its facility of evolution, and its extraordinary rapidity, it far surpassed the successors of the *Goubet*, the *Gymnote*, the *Zédé*, and other specimens already brought to such perfection at that time.

After several successful experiments, a public trial took place in the open sea four miles beyond Charleston, in the presence of numerous men-of-war, merchant-vessels, and pleasure boats, American and foreign, which assembled for the purpose.

Of course the *Ebba* was among the number of these

vessels, having on board Count d'Artigas, Serkő, Captain Spade and his crew—with the exception of half a dozen men occupied in the navigation of the submarine boat, which was under the control of a mechanician named Gibson, a very clever and adventurous Englishman.

The program of this performance consisted of various evolutions on the surface of the ocean, followed by an immersion of several hours' duration, after which the apparatus had orders to reappear when it reached a buoy several miles out to sea.

The moment having come, and the upper hatchway being closed, the boat manœuvred at first on the sea, and its speed and steering obtained the well-merited admiration of all the spectators.

Then at a signal from the *Ebba* the machine sank slowly, and disappeared from sight.

A few of the ships made for the spot at which its reappearance was to take place.

Three hours passed—the boat had not yet risen to the surface.

But none could have guessed that by a concerted plan between Count d'Artigas and the engineer, this submarine vessel, in reality the schooner's secret tug, was to emerge several miles beyond that point. With the exception of those in the secret, there was no doubt in any mind that it had been destroyed by an accident either to its hull or to its machines. On board the *Ebba* consternation was well acted ; on board the other ships it was more real.

The waters were sounded; divers were sent along the supposed track of the boat, but the search was in vain, and it became only too certain that the new invention had been engulfed in the depths of the Atlantic.

Two days later Count d'Artigas put out again to sea, and after forty-eight hours he came upon the tug at the place appointed.

In this way Ker Karraje became the possessor of an admirable machine constructed for the double purpose of towing the schooner and attacking ships. With this terrible instrument of destruction whose existence was unsuspected, Count d'Artigas was about to resume a career of piracy under the most favourable conditions of security and impunity.

These details I heard from Serkô, who was very proud of his work, and absolutely certain that the prisoner of Backup could never reveal the secret.

It is easy to realize the immense destructive power at Ker Karraje's disposal. During the night the tug attacked ships which could not suspect a pleasure yacht. When it had disabled them, the schooner came alongside, and the men massacred the crews and plundered the cargoes. Thus numbers of ships appeared no more in the shipping news, save under that hopeless heading: "Lost with all hands."

For a year after the ghastly comedy in Charleston Bay, Ker Karraje ravaged the Atlantic waters beyond the United States. His wealth increased enormously. Merchandise for which he had no use was sold in distant markets, and

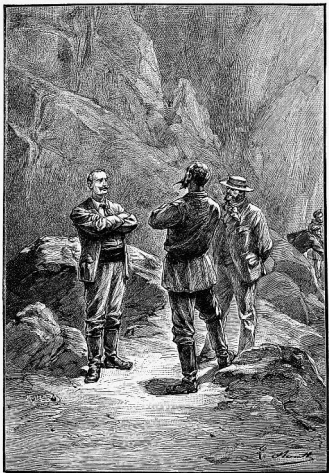
the product of the pillage reconverted into gold and silver. But the pirates still lacked a secret place where they might store these treasures until the day of their distribution.

Chance came to their aid. When they were exploring the submarine depths of the approaches to the Bermudas, Serkő and Gibson discovered the tunnel which gave access to the interior of Backcup, at the base of the island. Nowhere could Ker Karraje have hoped to find a refuge so completely beyond all danger of discovery!

Thus did one of the Bermudas, that group which had in former times been the resort of pirates, become the haunt of a band far more formidable.

This hiding-place being adopted, the new life of Count d'Artigas and his companions was organized under its vast roof. Serkő the engineer set up electricity works without having recourse to machines whose construction in foreign lands might attract attention, and with nothing but coils, which were easily arranged and required only the use of metal plates and chemicals which the *Ebba* conveyed from the United States.

There is now no difficulty in understanding what had happened in the night of the 19th-20th. The three-master, which could make no way for want of wind, was not in sight at daybreak because it had been disabled by the tug, then boarded by the crew of the *Ebba*, plundered and sunk, and it was a portion of its cargo that I found on board the *Ebba* after it had disappeared into the abysses of the Atlantic!



Ker Karraje



Into what hands have I fallen! How will this deplorable adventure end? Can I never escape from my prison, to denounce this spurious Count d'Artigas and rid the seas of Ker Karraje's pirates?

Terrible as he now is, will not Ker Karraje be a hundred times more formidable should he become the possessor of the *Roch Fulgurator*? If he makes use of these new engines of destruction, no trading ship will be able to resist him; no warship will escape total destruction.

I remained for a long time absorbed in these reflections, suggested by the revelation of Ker Karraje's name. All that I had ever known of the notorious pirate came back to my mind—his life when he scoured the Pacific, the expeditions undertaken by the maritime powers against his ship, and the failure of their efforts. To him must be attributed the unaccountable disappearance of ships off the American coast for years past. He had only changed the scene of his crimes. The world believed itself rid of him, but he was continuing his piracies on the much-frequented waters of the Atlantic, with the aid of the tug which was supposed to be lying at the bottom of Charleston Bay.

"Now," I said to myself, "I know his real name and his real hiding-place—Ker Karraje and Backcup! But since Serkø would not have told me his name, had he not been authorized, he desires to make me understand that I must renounce the hope of ever recovering my liberty."

Serkø had evidently observed the effect his revelation produced on me. When he left me, I remember, he went



towards Ker Karraje's abode with the intention, no doubt, of telling him what had passed.

After a long walk on the edge of the lagoon, I was about to return to my cell when I heard footsteps behind me. I turned, and saw Count d'Artigas accompanied by Captain Spade. He glanced at me inquisitively, and these words escaped me involuntarily :

" You are keeping me here, sir, against all law ! If it was to tend M. Roch that you carried me off from Healthful House I refuse to attend him, and I call upon you to send me back."

The pirate chief neither moved nor spoke.

Then my rage broke all bounds.

" Answer, Count d'Artigas—or rather—for I know who you are—answer, Ker Karraje !"

He answered,—

" Count d'Artigas is Ker Karraje—as Gaydon the keeper is Simon Hart the engineer, and Ker Karraje will never set at liberty Simon Hart the engineer, who knows his secrets."

## CHAPTER XI.

### FIVE WEEKS.

THE situation is clear. Ker Karraje knows who I am. He knew me when he set about the double abduction of Thomas Roch and his keeper.

How did this man find out what I had successfully hidden from the whole staff of Healthful House? How did he know that a French engineer was acting as keeper to Thomas Roch? I cannot tell, but so it was.

Evidently the Count possessed means of information which must have cost him dear, but have brought him great profit. Besides, an individual of his stamp does not consider expense when it is a question of attaining his end.

Henceforth it is this Ker Karraje, or rather, his accomplice the engineer Serkö, who is to replace me as the inventor's keeper. Will their efforts be more successful than mine? God grant that it may not be so, and that a great misfortune may be spared to the civilized world!

I did not reply to Ker Karraje's last sentence, which struck me like a bullet fired point blank. I did not fall,

however, as the so-called Count d'Artigas had perhaps expected.

I looked straight into his eyes, which were flashing, and he did not wince. I had crossed my arms, following his example. Yet he was master of my life. It needed only a sign from him, and a pistol shot would stretch me at his feet. Then my body, thrown into the lagoon, would be carried through the tunnel far away to sea.

After that scene I was left free as before. No measure was taken against me. I may walk about among the pillars to the farthest extremities of the cavern, which, it is only too evident, possesses no other exit but the tunnel.

When I had regained my cell at the end of the Beehive, a prey to the reflections suggested by this new situation, I said to myself,—

“Ker Karraje may know that I am Simon Hart, but, at least, he shall never find out that I am aware of the exact position of the island of Backcup.”

As for the project of confiding Roch to my care, I think Count d'Artigas never contemplated it seriously, seeing that my identity was known to him. I regret this, in a certain sense, for it is inevitable that great pressure will be brought to bear on the inventor. Serkö will employ every possible means to ascertain the composition of the explosive and the deflagrator of which he will make such an appalling use in his future piracies.

During the fortnight that followed I never once saw my old patient. No one, as I have said, interfered with me in my daily walks. With the material side of existence I had

not to trouble myself. My meals come punctually, according to the regulations of Count d'Artigas' kitchen—I cannot break myself of the habit of using that title. On the question of diet I am not hard to please, I grant, but it would be unjust to make the least complaint on that subject. The food supplied to me leaves nothing to be desired, thanks to the supplies brought by the *Ebba*.

It is fortunate that the possibility of writing has never failed me during these long hours of idleness. I have thus been able to enter the most insignificant occurrences in my note-book, and I have made my entries day by day. I will continue this work so long as the pen is not torn from my hands. Perhaps it will serve hereafter to reveal the mysteries of Backcup.

*From the 5th to the 25th July.*—Two weeks have passed, and all my attempts to get near M. Roch have been unsuccessful. It is evident that measures are taken to withhold him from my influence, inefficacious as that has been hitherto. My only hope is that Count d'Artigas, Serkö, and Captain Spade will waste both their time and trouble in endeavouring to appropriate the inventor's secrets.

Three or four times—to my knowledge at least—Roch and Serkö have been walking together round the lagoon. So far as I can judge, the former seemed to listen with a certain amount of attention to what his companion said to him. The latter made him visit the whole cavern, conducted him over the electrical works, showed him in detail

the machinery of the tug. . . . My charge's mental state is visibly better since he left Newburn.

The inventor occupies a separate room in Ker Karraje's residence. I do not doubt he is constantly talked to, especially by Serkö. When they offer to pay him the exorbitant price he demands for his machine—will he have the strength to resist? These wretches can dazzle him with the sight of heaps of money amassed during all these years of rapine! . . . In his present state of mind may he not communicate the composition of his Fulgurator? It would then be necessary only to bring the required ingredients to Backcup, and Thomas Roch will have plenty of leisure to devote himself to his chemicals. As for the shells, what is easier than to have a certain number made in some American works, or to order each piece separately so as not to awaken suspicion? And it is frightful to think of what such a destructive agent may become in the hands of these pirates.

My intolerable apprehensions do not leave me an hour's peace. They are wearing me out and my health is failing. Although there is fine fresh air in the interior of Backcup, I sometimes feel I am suffocating. It seems to me these thick walls are crushing me with their weight. Then I am separated from the rest of the world—as if in another sphere—knowing nothing of what is passing! Ah! if it were possible to get out by that opening in the roof which yawns above the lagoon, to escape by the top of the island, and climb down to its base!

On the morning of the 25th July I at last encountered

my fellow-captive. He was alone on the opposite side, and I wondered, as I had not seen them since the night before, whether Ker Karraje, Serkö and Spade had gone on some expedition beyond Backcup.

I advanced towards the inventor, and before he became aware of my presence, I examined him attentively.

His countenance was serious and thoughtful; no longer that of a madman. He was walking slowly, with down-cast eyes, not looking about him, and he carried under his arm a little board with a sheet of paper stretched upon it, on which diagrams were drawn.

Suddenly, he lifted his head, took a step forward, and recognized me.

"Ah! you, Gaydon!" he cried, "I have escaped you now! I am free."

He might indeed think himself free, more free at Backcup than at Healthful House. But my presence would naturally recall unpleasant recollections, and might perhaps bring on a paroxysm, for he challenged me with extraordinary excitement.

"Yes. You, Gaydon! don't come near me! don't come near me! You want to catch me again, and bring me back to prison. Never! Here I have friends to defend me! They are powerful, they are rich! Count d'Artigas has commissioned me. Serkö the engineer is my partner. We are going to bring out my invention. . . . We shall make the Roch Fulgurator in this place! Be off! Be off!"

Roch was in a frenzy. While he raised his voice, he also waved his arms and drew packets of dollar-papers

and bank-notes from his pockets. Then gold coins—English, French, American and German—escaped through his fingers. Where did all this money come from, if not from Ker Karraje, and as the price of the secret he had sold?

However, at the sound of his angry voice some men ran up who had been watching us from a short distance. They seized my charge and dragged him off. But as soon as I was out of his sight he quieted down, and became calm in body and mind.

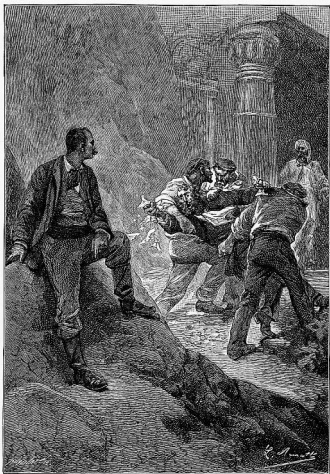
*July 27th.*—I descended the rocks at an early hour this morning, and advanced to the very end of the stone pier.

The tug was not at its usual moorings against the rocks, and it was not to be seen anywhere else in the lagoon. But Ker Karraje and Serkō had not gone away last evening, for I saw them.

However, to-day there is every reason to think that they have set out in the tug with Captain Spade and his crew; that they joined the schooner in the creek, and that at this moment the *Ebba* is at sea.

Possibly they have some piratical expedition on hand; still, it is equally possible that Ker Karraje, who is Count d'Artigas on board his yacht, wants to reach some point of the coast with the object of procuring the ingredients necessary for the manufacture of the Roch Fulgurator.

If I had only had an opportunity of hiding myself on board the tug, I might have slipped into the hold of the *Ebba*, and remained hidden there until a port was reached!



The inventor in a frenzy.





Then, perhaps, I might have been able to escape, and deliver the world from this band of pirates !

Such are the thoughts which continually occur to me—to fly—to fly, at any price, from this den ! But flight is only possible through the tunnel with the submarine boat ! It is folly to think of that ? Yes—folly. Yet what other means is there of making my escape ?

While I was lost in these reflections the waters of the lagoon were stirred twenty yards from the jetty, and the tug appeared. Almost immediately the hatch fell back and Gibson and his men came up on the platform. Others scrambled on the rocks in order to secure a rope. They caught it, and hauled in the boat to its moorings.

This time, then, the schooner is sailing without the aid of its tug, which had only gone to put Ker Karraje and his companions on board the *Ebba*, and to take her in tow through the channels of the island.

This confirms my idea that the voyage has no other object than to gain one of the American ports, where the Count will be able to procure the materials for the explosive, and order the shells at some works. Then, a day being fixed for his return, the tug will again pass through the tunnel, rejoin the schooner, and Ker Karraje will come back to Backcup.

Undoubtedly this malefactor's designs are being put into execution, and things are advancing more quickly than I suppose.

*August 3rd.*—To-day an incident occurred in the

lagoon—an extraordinary occurrence which must be extremely rare.

Towards three o'clock in the afternoon there was a sudden upheaval of the waters for about a minute, then a subsidence for two or three, and again an upheaval in the middle of the lagoon.

Some fifteen of the pirates, whose attention was attracted by this mysterious phenomenon, went down to the edge, not without signs of astonishment mixed with fear—as I thought.

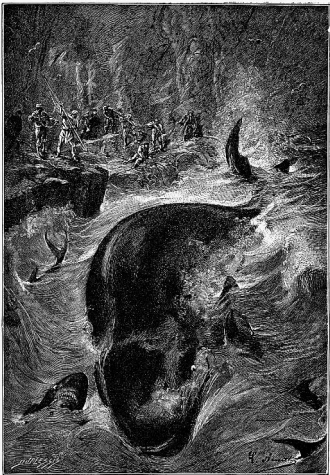
It was not the tug which caused this action of the water, because it was made fast against the pier, and the idea of another submarine boat having succeeded in finding its way through the tunnel was, to say the least, unlikely.

Almost immediately shouts rang out from the opposite side. Other men addressed the first in an unknown language, and after exchanging a few rough sentences, these returned in great haste to the Beehive side.

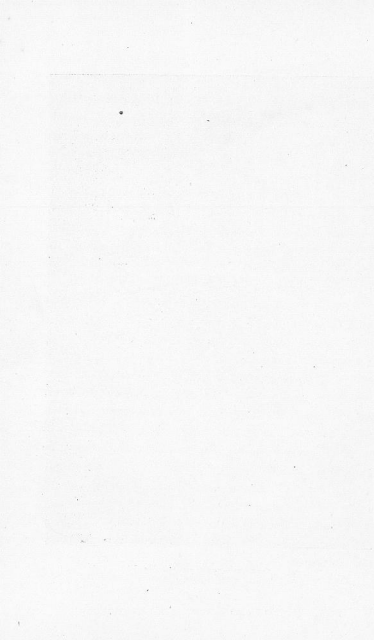
Had they then caught sight of some marine monster under the water? Had they gone to fetch arms to attack it, implements for its capture?

I had guessed aright, and a moment later I saw them return to the rocky banks armed with guns charged with explosive bullets, and harpoons with long lines attached.

It was a whale—one of those sperm whales so plentiful about the Bermudas—which, having come through the tunnel, was floundering now in the depths of the lagoon. Since the animal was constrained to seek refuge in the



A sperm whale in the lagoon.



interior of Backcup, I concluded that it was pursued, that whalers were giving chase.

Some minutes passed before the whale rose again to the surface. Its enormous body could be seen, green and slimy, as if fighting with a formidable enemy. When it reappeared two columns of water spouted with a great noise from its blow-holes.

"If it is in order to escape the whalers that the whale has rushed through the tunnel," I said to myself, "there must be a ship close to Backcup—perhaps only a few cable-lengths from the shore. . . . Its boats have come up the western channel to the foot of the island, and I cannot communicate with them!"

If that is so, might it be possible for me to reach them through the stone walls of Backcup?

However, I was not left long in suspense as to the cause of the whale's appearance. Not whale-fishers were in hot pursuit, but a crowd of the sharks that infest these latitudes. I could easily make them out under the water. They numbered five or six, and as they turned over on their sides they opened their enormous jaws bristling with teeth like a curry-comb. They flung themselves upon the whale, which could only defend itself by thrashing with its tail. It had already been badly wounded, and the water was stained with blood as it plunged, rose, and sank, in vain efforts to elude the teeth of the sharks.

Nevertheless, those voracious animals were not to be the conquerors in the strife. Their prey was about to escape them, for man with his implements is more power-

ful than they. On the bank were a number of Ker Karraje's followers, little more than sharks themselves, for pirates or sea-tigers are all one! They were going to try to capture the monster, and the animal would be a good haul for the Backcup people!

At that moment the whale approached the jetty where Count d'Artigas' Malay was posted with several other stalwart pirates. The Malay was armed with a harpoon to which a long rope was attached, and brandishing it with a strong arm, he hurled it with great strength and skill. The whale, hard hit under its left fin, plunged with a sudden rush, followed by the sharks in its wake. The harpoon line ran out fifty or sixty yards. Then there was nothing to do but to haul in the animal, now about to rise to the surface to breathe its last.

This was done by the Malay and his comrades very leisurely, so as not to loosen the harpoon from the side of the whale, which presently reappeared close to the rocks above the orifice of the tunnel.

Mortally wounded, the enormous mammifer struggled in its death agony, blowing out clouds of vapour and columns of air and water mixed with a jet of blood, and with a terrible stroke it flung one of the sharks expiring on the rocks.

This effort dislodged the harpoon from its side, and the whale disappeared once more. But when it came up for the last time it was to thrash with its tail with such force that it made a depression in the water sufficient to reveal part of the entrance to the tunnel.

The sharks again rushed upon their prey, but a shower of bullets struck some and put the others to flight.

The sharks will probably be able to find the entrance again and so get out of Backcup and reach the open sea ; nevertheless, for some days it would be more prudent not to bathe in the lagoon. As for the whale, two men set out in a boat to secure it. When it was dragged to the jetty it was cut up by the Malay, who seemed no novice at this kind of work.

At last I know for certain the exact spot where the tunnel opens through the western wall. The orifice is only three or four yards below the water's edge. This knowledge is, however, of little use to me.

*August 7th.*—It is now twelve days since Count d'Artigas Serkô, and Spade went to sea. There is still no indication that the return of the schooner is near at hand. Yet I have noticed that the tug holds itself ready to set out, as a steamer gets up steam, and its coils are always kept in tension by Gibson. Although the *Ebba* fearlessly makes the ports of the United States in open day, it is probable she will choose the night in preference for entering the Backcup Channel. Therefore I think Ker Karraje and his companions will return at night.

*August 10th.*—Last night at about eight o'clock, as I had foreseen, the tug sank and crossed the tunnel in time to tow the *Ebba* through the passage, and it brought back the passengers and crew.

Coming out this morning I caught sight of Roch and Serkô conversing as they went down to the lagoon. What



the subject of conversation was I can guess. I took up my position about twenty paces away; this enabled me to study my ex-patient.

His eyes were shining, his face was bright, his features were transformed as the engineer answered his questions. Presently he hurried to the jetty in order to reach the tug.

Serkö followed him, and they both stopped on the brink.

The crew, who were busy in unloading the cargo, had just placed ten fair-sized cases on the rocks.

The covers of these cases bore a special brand in red letters. Roch examined these with the minutest attention.

Serkö then gave orders for the cases to be carried over to the storehouse on the left bank. The transport was immediately effected by a boat.

I believe these chests to contain the substances which produce, on being mixed, both the explosive and the deflagrator. As for the shells, they doubtless have been ordered at some works in America. When they are finished, the schooner will go and fetch them.

So for once the *Ebba* has not returned with stolen goods; this time she is not guilty of fresh acts of piracy. But Ker Karraje is going to be armed with terrible power for the offensive and defensive at sea!

If the inventor is to be believed, his *Fulgurator* is capable of destroying the terrestrial spheroid by one explosion. Who knows whether he may not attempt it some day?

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE ADVICE OF SERKÖ THE ENGINEER.

THOMAS ROCH, who has set to work, spends long hours in a shed on the left bank, which he uses as a laboratory. No one enters it but himself. Does he mean to work at his preparations alone, without revealing his methods? That is likely enough. I have reason to think that the fabrication of the Fulgurator is a very simple matter. In fact, this style of projectile needs neither cannon, nor mortar, nor discharging tube, like the Zalinski ball. Inasmuch as it is auto-propulsive it carries in itself its propulsive force, and every vessel passing within a certain zone will run the risk of being destroyed by the frightful disturbance of the atmospheric strata. What could be done against Ker Karraje if he ever sets up such an instrument of destruction?

*August 11th to 17th.*—During this week M. Roch has continued to work without interruption. Every morning the inventor goes into his laboratory, and he does not leave it until nightfall. I do not even attempt to join him or talk to him. Although he is still indifferent to everything that does not touch his work, he appears to be in

complete possession of his senses. And why should he not enjoy his full brain power? Has he not attained the complete aim and end of his genius? Are not his plans, conceived so long ago, in course of execution?

*August 17th to 18th.*—At one o'clock this morning the noise of cannon coming from the exterior made me start up out of my sleep.

"Is it an attack on Backcup?" I asked myself. "Are the movements of Count d'Artigas' schooner suspected? and has she been pursued to the entrance of the channels? Are they trying to destroy the island with cannon? Is justice going to be done to these desperadoes, before Roch can finish the making of his explosive, before the receptacles can be brought to Backcup?"

Several times these detonations occurred at almost regular intervals. Presently it occurred to me, if the *Ebba* is destroyed, all communication with the mainland will be impossible, the provisioning of the island can no longer be effected.

It is true the tug would convey Count d'Artigas to some point on the American Coast, and there would be plenty of money for the purchase of a new pleasure boat. But no matter—Heaven be praised if Backcup is destroyed before Ker Karraje secures the Roch Fulgurator!

In the morning as soon as it was light I rushed out of my cell.

There was nothing new about the Beehive. The men were attending to their usual work. The tug was at its moorings. I saw M. Roch entering his

laboratory. Ker Karraje and Serkö were quietly surveying the edge of the lagoon. The island had not been attacked during the night. . . . Still the noise of cannonading at close quarters had disturbed my rest.

At that moment Ker Karraje went back to his apartments and the engineer joined me, with his laughing air and mocking face, the same as ever.

"Well, Mr. Simon Hart," he said, "are you growing accustomed to life in this quiet spot? Are you appreciating the advantages of our enchanted grotto as they deserve? Have you renounced the hope of regaining your liberty some day or other—of flying from this delightful spot, and of leaving,—

*"Ces lieux charmants  
Où mon âme ravie,  
Aimait à contempler Sylvie"?*

What was the good of getting into a rage with this scoffer? I answered him calmly,—

"No, I have not renounced it, and I always count on regaining my liberty."

"What, Mr. Hart, deprive us of a man we all esteem—and me of a confrère who has perhaps detected a portion of M. Roch's secrets in the midst of his ramblings? You are not serious."

Ah, it is for that reason they persist in keeping me in their prison of Backcup? They suppose that the invention is partly known to me. They hope to make me speak if M. Roch refuses to do so. That is why I was carried off with him, and have not been sent to the

bottom of the lagoon, with a stone tied to my neck! It is well to know! Then in answer to Serko's last words I said,—

"Quite serious, I assure you."

"Ah, well," continued my interlocutor, "if I had the honour to be Simon Hart, I would argue to myself thus: granting, on one side, Ker Karraje's personality, the reasons which have induced him to choose so mysterious a hiding-place as this cavern, the necessity that the said cavern should baffle all attempts at discovery, not only in the interests of Count D'Artigas, but also of his companions—"

"Of his accomplices, if you will allow me."

"Of his accomplices, be it so!—and on the other hand, granting that you know Count D'Artigas' real name and the mysterious strong box where our riches are stored—"

"Ill-gotten gain, and soiled with blood, M. Serkö."

"So be it, again! You must understand that this question of liberty can never be solved to your liking."

Discussion was useless under these conditions. So I shifted the conversation to another line.

"Might I know," I asked, "how you have learned that Gaydon the keeper is Simon Hart the engineer?"

"There is no reason why I should not tell you, my dear colleague. It was rather by chance. We had some business with the works to which you were attached, and which you left one day, under circumstances sufficiently singular. Now during a visit I paid to Healthful House,

some months before Count D'Artigas', I saw you—recognized you."

"You?"

"I, and from that moment I promised myself that I would have you as a travelling companion on board the *Ebba*."

I could not recall ever having come across this Serkő at Healthful House, but it is very likely that he spoke the truth.

"And I hope," I thought, "that this fancy will one day or other cost you dear."

Then I said abruptly,—

"If I am not mistaken, you have induced M. Roch to surrender the secret of his Fulgurator to you?"

"Yes, Mr. Hart, for some millions. Oh, the millions cost us only the trouble of taking them! So we have crammed his pockets with them."

"And of what use will they be to him, if he is not free to take them away, and enjoy them outside?"

"The question does not occur to him, Mr. Hart! That man of genius does not worry himself about the future. He lives in the present. While yonder, in America, the shells are being made according to his designs, he is occupied here in manipulating the chemicals with which he is abundantly provided. Ah, well! it is a wonderful auto-propulsive engine, which regulates its own speed, and increases until it arrives at its goal, thanks to the properties of a certain powder of progressive combustion!

It is an invention which will lead to a radical change in the art of war."

"Defensive, M. Serkő?"

"And offensive, Mr. Hart."

"Naturally," I replied.

Then, pressing the engineer, I added,—

"So—what no one has yet succeeded in obtaining from Thomas Roch—"

"We have obtained it without great difficulty."

"By paying him—"

"An unheard of price; and, in addition, by striking a chord which is very sensitive in this man."

"What chord?"

"That of vengeance."

"Vengeance—against whom?"

"Against all those who have made themselves his enemies by discouraging him, by repulsing him, by expelling him, by constraining him to beg the price of an invention of such incontestable superiority from country to country! Now all idea of patriotism is extinguished in his mind! He has but one thought, one fierce desire: revenge on those who have slighted him . . . even on all mankind! Truly, your governments of Europe and America, Mr. Hart, are injudicious in having failed to purchase the Roch Fulgurator at its worth."

My informant then described, enthusiastically, the many advantages of the new explosive, incontestably superior, he told me, to the very latest then talked of.

"And so destructive!" he added. "Its effect is similar

to the Zalinski shell, but a hundred times greater, and requires no projecting apparatus, since it flies, so to speak, on its own wings through space."

I listened, in the hope of detecting a portion of the secret, but Serkő said no more than he intended to say.

"Has M. Roch," I asked, "made known to you the composition of his explosive?"

"Yes, Mr. Hart—with your leave—and we shall soon possess large quantities of it, which will be stored in a safe place."

"And is there not danger—perpetual danger in reserving so much of this substance? If there were an accident, the explosion would destroy the island of—"

Once more the name of Backup was on the point of escaping me. Aware at once of the identity of Ker Karraje, and the situation of the cavern, Simon Hart would be considered decidedly better informed than was convenient.

Happily the engineer had not observed my pause, and he answered,—

"We have nothing to fear. Roch's explosive can only be ignited by means of a special deflagrator. Neither shock nor fire will make it explode."

"Has Thomas Roch also sold you the secret of this deflagrator?"

"Yes, Mr. Hart," replied the engineer, although I noticed a certain hesitation in his response. "But I repeat there is no danger, and you may sleep with perfect ease! We have no wish to be blown up with our cavern



and our treasures ! A few more successful years and we shall divide the profits, which will be sufficiently large to make each one's portion a decent fortune, to be enjoyed according to his fancy—after the liquidation of the firm Ker Karraje and Co. ! I may add that not only are we safe from an explosion, but we do not dread a denunciation—which you alone would be in a position to make, my dear Mr. Hart ! So I counsel you to resign yourself as a sensible man, to wait patiently until the liquidation of the society. When that day comes we shall decide how we are to secure ourselves against you."

It must be admitted these words were anything but reassuring.

However, between this and then we shall see. I surmised from this conversation that though M. Roch may have sold his explosive to Ker Karraje and Co., he has kept the secret of his deflagrator, without which the explosive is of no more value than the dust on the high road.

Nevertheless, before closing the interview, I thought I might make an observation to Serkő which was very natural after all,—

"You now know the composition of this explosive. Well, on the whole, has it really that destructive power which its inventor attributes to it ? Has it ever been tried ? How do you know that you have not bought a compound as harmless as a pinch of snuff ?"

"Perhaps you are more certain on this point than you wish to appear, Mr. Hart. But I thank you, nevertheless,

for the interest you take in our business. You may rest entirely assured! The other night we made a series of decisive experiments. With one ounce avoirdupois of this substance, enormous pieces of rock on the shore were reduced to the finest dust."

This explained the cannonading I had heard.

"So, my dear colleague," continued the engineer, "I can positively assure you we are running no risk. The effects of the explosive surpass anything that you can imagine. It would be sufficiently powerful, with a charge of several thousand tons, to demolish our spheroid and to scatter its fragments through space, like those of the burst-up planet between Mars and Jupiter. Therefore, you may take it for granted that it is capable of annihilating any ship at a distance that defies the longest trajectory of the present projectiles, and over a danger-zone of a good mile. The weak point of the invention, so far, lies in the regulation of the aim; that requires some time for its modification."

He stopped, like a man who does not want to say more, and he added,—

"So, I end as I began, Mr. Hart. Resign yourself! Accept this new existence without reservation! Embrace the quiet pleasures of our subterranean life! Here health is preserved when it is good, it is recovered when it is failing! That is what has happened to your compatriot. Resign yourself to your fate. It is the wisest thing you can do."

Thereupon this giver of good counsels left me, after having saluted me in the friendly manner of a man whose

kind intentions merited appreciation. But what irony there was in his words, his looks, his attitude! Shall I never be permitted to punish him for his insults?

In any case, I have learned from his conversation that the regulating of the aim is complicated. It is probable that this mile zone wherein the effects of the Roch Fulgurator are terrible is not easily altered, and that inside as well as outside this circle a vessel may be safe. If I could only inform those who are interested!

*August 20th.*—For two days there has been no incident to record. I have extended my daily promenade to the extreme limits of Backcup. At night, when the electric lamps light up the long perspective of arches, I cannot avoid a quasi-religious feeling in contemplating the natural wonders of this cavern, my prison. Besides, I have not lost hope of discovering some fissure in the wall unknown to the pirates, by which I may escape! Then, after? . . . Once outside, I should have to wait until a ship passed within sight. My escape would be quickly known at the Beehive, and they would speedily overtake me—unless, indeed, the boat—the *Ebba's* boat, which is secured at the bottom of the creek. . . . If I could but get possession of it, pass through the channels, and make for St. George or Hamilton.”

During the evening—it was about nine o'clock—I stretched myself on a carpet of sand at the foot of one of the pillars, about a hundred yards to the east of the lagoon. A few minutes afterwards, steps at first, and then voices, became audible at a short distance. Crouching as best I

could behind the rocky base of the pillar, I listened attentively.

I recognized the voices. They were those of Ker Karraje and Serkö. The two men had stopped, and were talking in English—the language generally used in Backup. So I was able to understand all they said.

They were discussing Thomas Roch, or rather his Fulgurator.

"In eight days," said Ker Karraje, "I count on setting out in the *Ebba*, and I shall bring back the various pieces which should be completed in the Virginia works."

"And when they are in our possession," replied the engineer, "I shall attend to the business operations of putting them together, and the setting up of the discharging slides. But first, we must proceed with a work which seems to me indispensable."

"What is that?" Ker Karraje asked.

"To tunnel the wall of our island."

"To tunnel it?"

"Oh, only to make an outlet so narrow as to give passage to one man at a time, a sort of tube easy to stop up, with its outside entrance concealed among the rocks."

"What would be the use of it, Serkö?"

"I have often thought of the advantage of having a communication with the outside other than the submarine tunnel. One never knows what may happen in the future."

"But these dividing walls are so thick and so hard," Ker Karraje remarked.

"With a few grains of the Roch explosive," replied the other, "I undertake to reduce the rock to a dust so fine you will only have to blow it away."

It is easy to understand the interest this conversation had for me. Here was a question of opening a communication, other than the tunnel, between the interior and exterior of Backup. Who knows if I might not then find an opportunity?

As I was making this reflection Ker Karraje replied,—

"Very well, that is settled; and if we are required one day to defend Backup, to prevent any vessel from approaching, were our retreat revealed, either by chance or intimation."

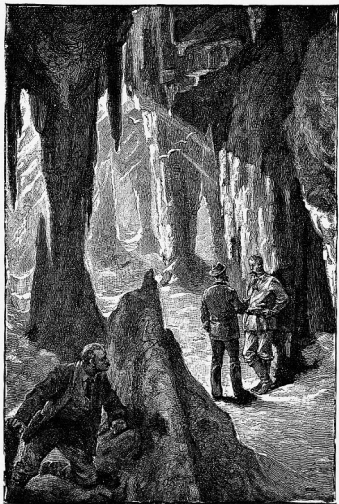
"There is no fear of either chance or intimation," replied Serkō.

"Not on the part of one of our companions, certainly, but by this Simon Hart."

"He!" cried the engineer. "He must escape first. And no one escapes from Backup! Besides, I declare, that good fellow interests me. He is a colleague, after all, and I always suspect that he knows more than he admits about this invention. I shall talk to him in such a way, that we shall end by understanding one another. I will chat to him about physics, mechanics, ballistics, like two chums."

"It does not matter," replied the generous and tender Count d'Artigas. "When we are in the possession of the whole secret, we might as well rid ourselves of—"

"We have plenty of time, Ker Karraje."



A hearer unseen.



"If God grants it to you, you wretches!" I thought, as I pressed my hand upon my heart, which was beating violently. Yet, except by an immediate intervention of Providence, what can I hope for?

They changed the subject, and Ker Karraje remarked,—

"Now that we know the composition of the explosive, Serkő, Roch must be made to reveal the composition of the deflagrator, at any price."

"That is absolutely necessary," the engineer replied, "and I am doing my best to induce him. Unfortunately, he refuses to discuss it. However, he has already produced some drops of this deflagrator, which served to test the explosive; and he will supply us with more when we want to begin the excavation."

"But—for the expeditions at sea?" Ker Karraje asked.

"Have patience—we shall end by having his Fulgurator all complete in our hands."

"Are you sure, Serkő?"

"Sure?—by paying the price, Ker Karraje."

The interview ended with these words, and the two men went on without having seen me—fortunately. Serkő had to a certain extent undertaken my defence, but Count d'Artigas appeared to be animated with less benevolent intentions towards me. On the least suspicion I shall be flung into the lagoon, and if I get through the tunnel it will only be as a corpse carried out by the running tide.

*August 21st.*—The next day Serkő came to reconnoitre the spot most suitable for opening the passage, so that its



existence should not be suspected from the outside. After a minute examination, he decided that it must be effected in the north wall ten yards in front of the first cells of the Beehive.

I am eager for this corridor to be complete. Who knows? it may serve for my escape! If I had been a swimmer, perhaps I would already have been tempted to get away through the tunnel, as I know exactly where the mouth is situated. At the time of that fight in the lagoon, when the water was flattened under the last stroke of the whale's tail, the upper part of the orifice was for a moment free. Well, surely it is uncovered in the spring tides? I must ascertain this. At the time of the full and new moon, when the sea reaches its maximum of depression below the ordinary level, it is possible that—

*August 29th.*—This morning I was present at the departure of the tug—no doubt for one of the American ports in order to embark some of the shells which are being constructed.

Count D'Artigas conversed for a few minutes with Serkö, who, it appeared, was not to accompany him, and he seemed to be giving him some instructions, possibly with reference to me. Then, after having stepped on the platform, he descended into the interior of the boat, followed by Captain Spade and the crew of the *Ebba*. As soon as the hatchway was closed the tug sank under the water and a slight bubbling troubled the surface for an instant.

Hours have passed, and the day is drawing to a close.

As the tug has not returned to its post I conclude that it is going to tow the schooner, this voyage—perhaps also to destroy the vessels that cross its path.

However, it is probable that the absence of the *Ebba* will be of short duration, and that a week will be enough for the voyage out and back.

Nevertheless, the *Ebba* has the luck of good weather if I may judge by the atmospheric calm which reigns in the interior of the cavern. Besides, this is the time for fine weather in the Bermuda latitudes. Ah, if I could find a breach in the walls of my prison!

## CHAPTER XIII.

"A DIEU VAT!"

*August 29th to September 10th.*—Thirteen days have passed, and the *Ebba* has not returned. Can it be that she has not gone direct to the American coast, or is she delayed by some piracies off Backcup? I think, however, that Ker Karraje would devote himself to the procuring of the shells. Of course the works in Virginia may not have finished them.

Any way, Serkö shows no signs of impatience. He always welcomes me as usual with his air of good-fellowship, which I do not trust, and with reason. He affects to inquire after the state of my health, urges me to complete resignation, calls me Ali Baba, assures me there does not exist in the whole world a more enchanting spot than this cave of the Thousand and One Nights; that here I am fed, warmed, lodged, clothed, without having to pay either duty or tax, and that even at Monaco the inhabitants of that happy principality do not enjoy an existence more free from care.

Sometimes this satirical chatter makes the colour mount to my face, and I am seized with a temptation to rush at

the throat of the pitiless scoffer and strangle him by main force. They would kill me then . . . what matter! Would it not be better to end in this way than to be condemned to live for years and years in the infamous surroundings of Backcup?

Then reason reasserts itself, and I merely shrug my shoulders.

As for Thomas Roch, I scarcely saw him during the first days after following the departure of the *Ebba*. He was shut up in his laboratory, where he worked unceasingly. Suppose he utilized all the ingredients placed at his disposal, he would have enough to blow up Backcup and the whole of the Bermudas!

I cling to the hope that he will never consent to reveal the composition of the deflagrator, and that all Serkô's efforts will fail to drag this last secret from him.

Will this hope be frustrated?

*September 13th.*—To-day with my own eyes I was able to attest the power of the explosive, and to observe, at the same time, the way in which the deflagrator is used.

In the morning the men commenced the tunnelling of the wall at the spot previously selected.

Under the engineer's direction the workmen began operations at the foot of the wall, where the limestone is so extremely hard, that it might be compared to granite.

It was with the pick, wielded by vigorous arms, that the first attack was made; but were that implement alone to be employed, the work would be very slow and very laborious, since the rock is from twenty to twenty-five

yards in thickness in that part of the basement of Backcup. But, thanks to the Roch Fulgurator, the work will be completed with very little delay.

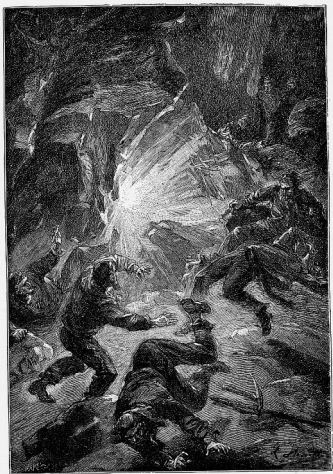
What I saw was enough to astonish me. The disruption of the rock by the explosive was performed with extraordinary ease.

A very small quantity of the explosive sufficed to reduce the mass of rock to an almost impalpable dust, which the lightest breath would blow away like smoke.

The first time this explosive was used, even though so small a quantity was employed, several men who had drawn too near the rock were thrown down. Two were picked up seriously injured, and Serkő himself, who had been carried some yards away, received some severe bruises.

The new substance acted in the following manner, and its shattering force surpasses everything that has hitherto been invented.

A hole two inches long and one-third of an inch wide was first made obliquely in the rock. Into this the substance was introduced in very small quantity, and it was not even necessary to plug the hole by means of a wad. Then Thomas Roch came forward. In his hand was a little glass tube containing a blueish liquid of oily appearance, and very quick to coagulate when in contact with the air. He poured a few drops into the mouth of the hole, and then retired without any haste. It requires, in fact, a little time—about thirty-five seconds—for the combination of the deflagrator and the explosive to be effected. When that happens, the force of disruption is such that



An explosion.



it may almost be called unlimited; and in any case it is thousands of times superior to the innumerable explosives now known.

Under these conditions, it is plain that the tunnelling, although the rock is so hard and thick, will be finished in about a week.

*September 19th.*—For some time I have observed that the phenomenon of the tide, which may be observed very accurately through the submarine tunnel, produces currents in a contrary direction twice in the twenty-four hours. It is therefore not to be doubted that a floating object thrown on the surface of the lagoon would be carried out by the ebb tide, if the upper part of the aperture were disclosed.

Now, does not this disclosure take place during the lowest stage of the equinoctial tides? I shall soon be able to ascertain, as we are precisely at that period. The day after to-morrow will be the 21st of September, and to-day is the 19th. I could distinguish the upper part of the aperture beneath the water at low tide.

Well, although I cannot myself attempt to get through the tunnel, why could not a bottle thrown upon the water have the luck to do so during the last few minutes of the ebb tide? And why should not an accident—ultra-providential, I admit—cause the bottle to be picked up by some ship passing Backcup? The currents even might cast it on one of the Bermuda coasts. And if that bottle were to contain a statement—

This idea engrosses my mind; but there are objections



to its execution. A bottle will run the risk of being broken either in going through the tunnel or in striking against the reefs outside before it reaches the open sea. But if instead of a bottle a barrel hermetically sealed were used, a small cask like those which float the fishing nets, it would not be exposed to the same chances of breaking, and might reach the ocean.

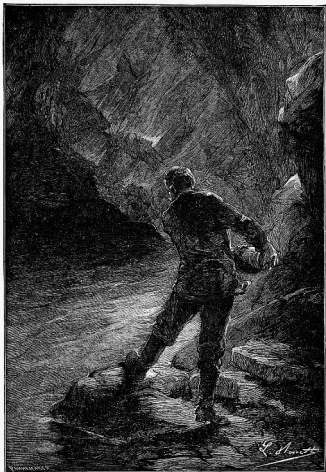
*September 20th.*—To-night, unseen, I went into one of the storehouses, and readily found a little keg very suitable for my purpose.

I hid it under my cloak, and returned to the Beehive, where I lost no time in setting to work in my cell.

Paper, ink, and pens—I want for nothing. Have I not for three months daily taken the notes from which I furnish this narrative?

I wrote on a sheet of paper the following lines:—

“After a double abduction, effected on the 15th of June, Thomas Roch and his keeper, Gaydon, or rather the French engineer, Simon Hart, who occupied Pavilion 17 at Healthful House, near Newburn, North Carolina, in the United States of America, were, on the 19th of the same month, conducted on board the *Ebba*, a schooner belonging to Count d’Artigas. Both are now shut up in the interior of a cavern that serves as hiding-place for the aforesaid Count d’Artigas, whose real name is Ker Karraje, the pirate, formerly notorious on the West Pacific, and about a hundred men forming the gang of that formidable outlaw.



Casting news upon the waters.



"When he has in his possession the Roch Fulgurator, which is of almost unlimited power, Ker Karraje will be enabled to continue his piracies under conditions of still more secure impunity.

"Thus it is urgent that the States interested should destroy his haunt with as little delay as possible. The cavern in which Ker Karraje has taken refuge, exists in the interior of the island of Backcup, which is erroneously believed to be an active volcano. Situated at the extreme west of the Bermudas, it is protected by reefs on the east, but open on south, west, and north.

"Access to the inside is as yet only possible by a tunnel, which opens some yards below the mean surface of the water at the end of a narrow channel to the west. In order to penetrate to the interior of Backcup, a submarine boat is necessary—at least so long as the outlet is not finished. The pirates are at present occupied in blasting through the north-west side.

"The pirate Ker Karraje possesses a vessel of this kind, the very one Count d'Artigas had built and which is supposed to have been lost during its trial performance in Charleston Bay. This tug is employed not only for entry and exit through the tunnel, but also to tow the schooner and to attack the merchant ships which frequent these latitudes.

"This schooner, the *Ebba*, well known along the western coast of America, has for its sole port of destination a little creek hidden behind a mass of rock, invisible from the ocean and situated to the west of the island.

"Before a landing on Backcup—on the western side for preference, where the Bermudan fishermen lived at one time—is effected, an attempt should be made to open a breach in the rock with the most powerful melinite projectiles.

"After the landing, perhaps such a breach would enable the crew to reach the interior of Backcup through this opening.

"The possibility of the Roch Fulgurator being brought into requisition must also be foreseen. It is possible that Ker Karraje, being taken by surprise, will employ it to defend Backcup. Let it therefore be borne in mind that, although its destructive power surpasses everything that has been imagined until the present time, it extends only over a circle of sixteen or seventeen hundred yards. The distance of this danger-zone is variable, but the range once regulated takes a long time to alter, and a vessel having passed the zone above-named, might approach the island with impunity.

"This document is written on the 20th of September at 8 p.m., and signed with my name,

"SIMON HART, Engineer."

Such is the draft of the document which I have just drawn up. It tells all that is to be told about the island, whose position is indicated on modern maps; also the defence of Backcup which Ker Karraje is likely to organize, and the importance of immediate action. I appended to this a plan of the cavern, showing its internal arrangement,

the position of the lagoon, the Beehive, Ker Karraje's residence, my cell, and the laboratory used by Thomas Roch.

But this document must reach someone, somewhere—and will it ever be found?

Having enclosed my missive in a strong piece of tarred linen, I placed it in the little keg, which had an iron hoop, and measured about six inches long by three inches wide. This was perfectly watertight, for I satisfied myself on that point, and capable of resisting rough usage, either in going through the tunnel or against the rocks outside.

It may, however, fail to reach trustworthy hands, and be flung instead on the rocks of this island by the returning tide and found by the crew of the *Ebba* when the yacht returns to the creek. If this document comes into Ker Karraje's possession, signed with my name and revealing his, I need no longer trouble myself about methods of escape, my fate will be quickly decided!

It may be imagined with what feverish impatience I waited for night. According to my calculations, based on previous observation, it would be low water at a quarter to nine, and at that moment about twenty inches of the upper part of the aperture would be uncovered. The space between the surface of the water and the roof of the tunnel would be more than sufficient for the passage of the little keg. I meant to launch it half an hour before the slack, in order that the ebb, which would still be running out, might carry it away.

Towards eight o'clock, in the dusk, I left my cell. No

one was to be seen on the banks. I walked towards the rock where the tunnel lay. By the light of the last electric lamp on that side, I saw the orifice rounding its arch above the water, and the current was in that direction.

Then I ascended the rock to the water's level, and I launched the little keg containing my precious communication, and with it my only hope.

"A Dieu vat!" I repeated. "A Dieu vat!" as our French sailors say.

The tiny barrel, at first stationary, returned towards the bank in an eddy. I had to push it off strongly so that the reflux might seize it.

It was done! In less than twenty seconds it disappeared into the tunnel. Yes! "A Dieu vat!" May Heaven guide you, my little keg! May God protect all those whom Ker Karraje menaces, and grant that this pirate horde may not escape the award of man's justice!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE *SWORD* IN CONFLICT WITH THE TUG.

DURING a sleepless night my thoughts followed the keg. Many times I seemed to see it striking against the rocks, turning up the creek or caught in some crevice. A cold sweat bedewed my body from head to foot. At last the tunnel is passed, the little cask is getting through the channel—the tide is carrying it out to sea. Heavens! if the flood were to bring it back to the entrance and into the interior of Backcup! if when daylight came I should see it! . . .

At the first glimmer of dawn I rose and made my way to the strand.

I looked around, slowly, closely, tremblingly!—nothing was to be seen on the tranquil water.

During the following days the work of piercing the rock went on under the same conditions. Serkø blasted the last rock at four o'clock this afternoon (the 23rd September). The communication is established—it is nothing but a small rift through which one must scramble, but it is enough. Outside, the opening is hidden among the



*débris* of the coast, and it will be easy to fill it up if that precaution becomes necessary.

Needless to say this outlet will be strictly guarded. No one can pass through it either to enter or to leave the cavern without permission. Therefore escape is impossible that way.

*September 25th.*—This morning the tug appeared out of the depths of the lagoon. Count d'Artigas, Captain Spade, and the yacht's crew appeared on the jetty, and the unloading of the goods brought by the *Ebba* began. I observed several bales for the provisioning of Backcup, cases of meats and preserves, casks of wine and brandy—besides a number of chests for M. Roch. At the same time the men brought ashore the various pieces of the bombs destined for the inventor's use.

M. Roch was present at the landing of these goods. His eyes were extraordinarily bright. He seized one of the pieces, examined it, and nodded his head, as a sign of satisfaction. I noticed that his delight did not display itself in any incoherence; there remained nothing of the late resident of Healthful House. I wondered whether if that partial madness which had been thought incurable was not radically cured.

Then my fellow captive entered the boat used for crossing the lagoon, and Serkō accompanied him to his laboratory. In an hour, the whole of the tug's cargo was transported to the other side.

Ker Karraje had only exchanged a few words with Serkō, but later in the afternoon they met, and conversed

for a long time, walking up and down in front of the Beehive.

When the interview was ended, they went to the newly made outlet, and entered it, followed by Captain Spade. Why could I not slip in after them? Why may I not breathe, if it were only for an instant, the refreshing breeze of the Atlantic, of which Backcup gets, so to speak, only the used-up breath?

*From the 26th September to the 10th October.*—A fortnight has passed. Under the direction of Serkő and Roch the bombs have been put together. Then came the mounting of the discharging carriages. These are merely a sort of easel with grooves at different inclinations, and they will be easy to set up on board the *Ebba*, or even on the platform of the tug when on a level with the water.

So, then, Ker Karraje is about to become lord of the seas, with his schooner for his whole fleet! No warship will be able to pass that danger-zone which will keep the *Ebba* beyond the range of its guns! Ah! if only my warning had been picked up. If this pirates' lair of Backcup were but known! It would be easy, if not to destroy, at least starve it out.

*October 20th.*—To my extreme surprise, this morning, the tug was not at its usual place. I remember that last night the elements of its battery were renewed, but I thought that was merely to put them in readiness. Its departure, now that the passage is open, means that some expedition is projected. Certainly M. Roch has not run short of any of his requisites. Yet we are now in the

season of the equinox, and the sea about the Bermudas is swept by frequent storms. That squalls arise with terrible turbulence, we know by the tremendous gusts of wind which rush into the crater; rain fills the cave, and the waters of the lagoon rise, and sweep the rocks on the banks with spray.

But is it certain that the schooner has left the creek? Is she not too fragile—even with the aid of her tug—to face such rough seas?

On the other hand, can it be that the tug, as it has nothing to fear from the waves, since it can always enjoy calm seas below the surface, has undertaken a voyage without the schooner?

I know not to what cause to attribute the departure of the submarine machine, which has not returned.

This time Serkő has remained at Backup. Only Ker Karraje, Captain Spade, and the crew have left the island.

Life goes on with its usual enervating monotony among the immured colonists. I pass whole hours in the depth of my cell, meditating, hoping, despairing, clinging with a weakening hold each day, to that little cask cast on the caprice of the currents, and writing out my notes, which will perish with me in all likelihood.

Thomas Roch is occupied all day in his laboratory—making his deflagrator, I think. I am still sure that he will not sell the secret of the composition of this liquid at any price. But I also know that he will not hesitate to place his invention at Ker Karraje's service.

I often meet Serkő when my walks take me to the

vicinity of the Beehive. He always shows himself disposed to converse with me in an impertinent, flippant way.

We talk of one thing and another—rarely of my situation, about that it is useless to argue. I should only bring fresh sarcasm upon myself.

*October 22nd.*—To-day I thought I might ask the engineer whether the schooner had gone with the tug.

"Yes, Mr. Simon Hart," he replied, "and though the weather is detestable, regular dogs' or wolves' weather in fact, you need have no fear for our dear *Ebba*!"

"Is she to be long away?"

"We expect her back within forty-eight hours. This is Count d'Artigas' last voyage before the winter storms render these waters absolutely impracticable."

"A voyage of pleasure—or business?" I inquired.

Serkö answered me, smiling,—

"Business, Mr. Hart, business! At the present time our bombs are completed, and when the fine weather comes we have only to resume the offensive."

"Against unfortunate ships."

"Equally unfortunate—and richly laden!"

"Acts of piracy, which you will not always practise with impunity, I hope!" I exclaimed.

"Calm yourself, my dear colleague, calm yourself. You know quite well no one will ever discover our retreat, no one can ever reveal the secret! Besides, with these bombs, so easily managed, and of such awful force, it will be easy for us to destroy any ship which passes within a certain distance of the island."

"On the condition," I said, "that M. Roch sells you the composition of his deflagrator as he has sold you that of the Fulgurator."

"That is done, Mr. Hart, so I can relieve you of any anxiety on the point."

This explicit answer would have forced me to conclude that the latter misfortune was an accomplished fact, if the hesitating tone of his voice had not made me feel that implicit faith was not to be placed in Serkø.

*October 25th.*—I have just had a terrible adventure. I cannot think how I have escaped with my life! It is a miracle that I am able to-day to continue my notes after forty-eight hours' interruption! With a very little more luck I should have been delivered! I should now be in one of the Bermuda ports, St. George or Hamilton. The mysteries of Backcup would be revealed. With all nations on the watch the schooner could not show itself in any port, and the victualling of Backcup would thus become impossible! Ker Karraje's bandits would be doomed to die of hunger!

This is what happened.

On the night of the 23rd, about eight o'clock, I had left my cell in an indescribable state of nervousness, as though I had a presentiment that something serious was about to happen. In vain had I sought peace in slumber, and, despairing of sleep, I went out.

Outside the island, on the high sea, the weather must have been bad. The wind was swirling through the crater, and the waters of the lagoon were surging.

I walked towards the bank on the Beehive side. It was deserted at that hour. The temperature was low, and the atmosphere was damp. All the hornets in the "hive" were hidden in their cells.

A man was on guard at the entrance to the passage, although it was obstructed at the other end. From the place at which he stood he could not see the banks. Besides, I saw there were only two lamps lighted, over the right and left shores of the lagoon, so that profound darkness reigned in the forest of pillars.

As I stood thus in the shadow someone passed close to me.

I recognized Thomas Roch.

He had not noticed me. He was walking slowly, absorbed in his reflections as usual ; his imagination always strained, his mind always at work.

It struck me that this might be a favourable opportunity of talking to him, of telling him what he evidently does not know. . . . He is ignorant, he cannot know into whose hands he has fallen. He does not imagine that Count d'Artigas is no other than Ker Karraje the pirate. He has no suspicion that he has yielded a part of his invention to such a ruffian. . . . He must be told that he can never enjoy the millions he has been paid. He will never be at liberty to leave this prison any more than I. . . . Yes ! I shall appeal to his sentiments of humanity, to the misery for which he will be responsible, if he does not keep his last secret. . . . I had reached this point in my reflections when I was roughly seized from behind.

Two men held my arms, and a third stood in front of me. I tried to cry out.

"Hush! Hush!" said the third man in English. "Are you not Simon Hart?"

"How do you know?"

"I saw you leave your cell."

"Then who are you?"

"Lieutenant Davon of the British navy, officer on board the *Standard*, stationed at the Bermudas."

I could not speak, I was so overcome with emotion.

"We have come to rescue you from the hands of Ker Karraje, and to carry off Thomas Roch, the French inventor, with you," added the lieutenant.

"Thomas Roch?" I stammered.

"Yes; the document signed by your name was picked up on the strand at St. George."

"In a keg, Lieutenant Davon; a keg that I threw into the lagoon?"

"Containing," the Englishman continued, "a statement by which we have learned that this island serves as a refuge for Ker Karraje and his gang—Ker Karraje, the fictitious Count d'Artigas, perpetrator of the double abduction from Healthful House."

"Now there's not a moment to lose. We must avail ourselves of the darkness."

"One word, Lieutenant. How did you get here?"

"By means of our submarine boat, the *Sword*, which for six months has been experimenting at St. George."

"A submarine boat?"

"Yes ; it is waiting for us at the foot of these rocks. Mr. Hart, where is Ker Karraje's tug ?"

"Gone, three weeks ago."

"Ker Karraje is not at Backcup ?"

"Not at present, but he is expected at any moment."

"It does not matter," replied the lieutenant. "It is not Ker Karraje we want, it is Thomas Roch, whom we have orders to carry off—with you, Mr. Hart. The *Sword* will not leave the lagoon until you are both on board. If it does not return to St. George it will be known that I have failed, and the attempt will be repeated."

"Where is the *Sword* ?"

"On this side, under the shadow of the rocks where it cannot be seen. Thanks to your instructions my crew and I recognized the entrance to the submarine tunnel. The *Sword* passed through it safely. Ten minutes ago it rose to the surface of the lagoon. Two of my men came ashore with me. I saw you leave the cell indicated on your plan. Do you know where M. Roch is now ?"

"A few steps from here. He has just passed me on his way to the laboratory."

"Thank God !"

"Yes ; thank God !"

The lieutenant, the two men, and myself took the path skirting the lagoon. We had hardly walked ten yards when I saw the object of our search. To fall upon him, gag him before he could utter a cry, bind him before he could make a movement, carry him to the foot of the rock where the *Sword* lay, was the work of hardly more than a minute.



The *Sword* was a submarine boat of a dozen tons only, consequently in dimensions and strength very inferior to the tug. Two dynamos, worked by accumulators which had been charged twelve hours before in the port of St. George, gave the motion to its screw. But whatever it was, this *Sword* would suffice to take us out of prison and give us our liberty—that liberty in which I no longer believed! At last Thomas Roch is about to escape from the clutches of Ker Karraje and Serkö. Those scoundrels cannot use his invention, and nothing can prevent ships from approaching the island, effecting a landing, forcing an entrance through the passage, and seizing the criminals.

We met no one while the two men carried the inventor to the spot where the *Sword* awaited us. We descended into the interior. The hatch was closed, the compartments were filled, the vessel was submerged. We were saved!

The *Sword*, which was divided into three sections by watertight bulkheads, was planned thus :—

The first section, containing the accumulators and the machinery, extended from the midship-beam to the stern.

The second, that of the pilot, occupied the middle of the vessel, and was surmounted by a periscope with lenticular glasses, through which the light from an electric lantern enabled it to be steered under the water.

The third occupied the bow, and there M. Roch and I were both shut up.

I need not say that my companion, though he had been



*The Sword.*



relieved of the gag, was not released from his bonds, and I doubt whether he was conscious of what was happening.

But we were in haste to get away, with the hope of reaching St. George that same night if no obstacle should intervene.

I pushed open the door of the compartment, and shutting it after me I joined Lieutenant Davon near the man at the wheel.

In the stern compartment three men, including the mechanician, awaited orders from the officer to put the propeller in motion.

"Lieutenant," I then said, "I thought there was no harm in leaving M. Roch alone. Perhaps I may be useful to you in gaining the mouth of the tunnel."

"Yes; stand near me, Mr. Hart."

It was then thirty-seven minutes past eight exactly. The electric flame projected through the periscope, lighting the surrounding waters with a faint glow. Leaving the bank near which the *Sword* was stationed, we had to traverse the whole length of the lagoon. To find the tunnel would certainly be a difficulty, but not insurmountable. If we hugged the banks it was impossible not to find it, even in a comparatively short time. Then through the tunnel slowly, to escape injury against its walls, and the *Sword* would rise to the surface of the sea and make for St. George.

"At what depth are we?" I asked the lieutenant.

"Four fathoms."

"You need sink no lower," I said. "According to my

observations, made during the high equinoctial tide, we should be in the axis of the tunnel."

"All right!" replied the officer.

All right! It seemed to me that Providence had pronounced those words by the mouth of my deliverer. In truth, a better agent of the Divine Will could not have been found. I looked at the lieutenant by the light of the lantern. He was a man of thirty years—cold, phlegmatic, with a resolute face. The English officer in all his native impassibility, as unmoved as though he had been on board the *Standard*, and acting with extraordinary coolness, I might even say with the precision of a machine.

"Coming through the tunnel I estimated its length at forty yards," he said to me.

"Yes; from one extremity to the other, Lieutenant, about forty yards."

In fact this figure must have been quite accurate, since the passage tunnelled on a level with the shore measures only about thirty yards.

The order was given to the mechanician to set the screw in motion, and the *Sword* advanced very slowly for fear of colliding with the bank.

Occasionally we went so near to the side that a black mass darkened the end of the shaft of light cast by the lantern. A turn of the wheel altered the steering. But if the management of a submarine boat is difficult in the open sea, how much more difficult is it under the lagoon!

After five minutes' progress, the *Sword*, which had been kept at four fathoms, had not yet reached the opening.



Under the lagoon.



In a moment I said,—

"Perhaps, Lieutenant, it would be wise to return to the surface; we shall be better able to find the mass of rock in which the opening is."

"I think so too, if you can point out exactly where it lies."

"I can."

"Very well."

As a precaution, the current of the lantern was disconnected and the liquid medium became dark. On receiving the order, the mechanic set the pumps working, and the vessel, lightened of the water in its reservoirs, rose slowly to the surface of the lagoon.

I remained in my place in order to take the bearings through the lens of the periscope.

Then the ascending movement ceased, and the *Sword* emerged a foot at most above the water.

On that side I recognized the wall of the Beehive by the lamp on the bank.

"What do you say?" asked Davon.

"We are too much to the north. The tunnel lies to the west of the cavern."

"Is there anyone on the banks?"

"No one."

"That is well. We may remain level with the water. Then when the *Sword* is, in your opinion, facing the tunnel, we shall sink."

That was the best thing to do, and the steersman put the boat in the very eye of the tunnel, after having drawn



off the edge, to which he had gone too near. The helm was righted slightly, and impelled by the screw, we advanced in the right direction.

When we had gone no more than ten yards I said "Stop." So soon as the current was interrupted the *Sword* stopped, opened her valve, filled her compartments, and sank slowly.

The lantern of the periscope was again lighted; a sort of black circle, which did not reflect the light, showed itself in the dark part of the wall.

"There! There! The tunnel!" I cried.

Was it not the door through which I was going to escape my prison? Was not Liberty awaiting me outside?

The *Sword* moved slowly towards the orifice.

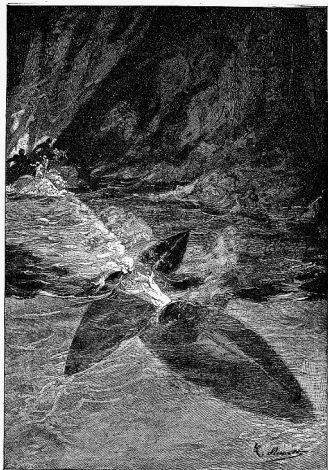
A vague light appeared through the depths of the tunnel, less than twenty yards in front. It was bearing down upon us; it could only be the light projected by the look-out of Ker Karraje's boat.

"The tug!" I cried. "Lieutenant, there is the tug!"

"Back her!" he shouted.

And the *Sword* backed at the moment it was about to enter the tunnel.

There was still a chance of escape. With a rapid movement the officer extinguished our lantern, and it was just possible that neither Captain Spade nor any of his companions had perceived us. Perhaps by our turning aside the tug might pass us by. Perhaps our dark mass might be lost in the lowest depths of the lagoon. Perhaps the



Captain Spade on the alert.



tug would not see us, and when it had reached its moorings the *Sword* would start again and get into the tunnel.

Our screw was reversed, and we turned up towards the bank on the south side. After a few seconds we came to a standstill.

No! the *Sword* had been seen! Captain Spade had become aware of the presence of a submarine boat about to enter the tunnel. He prepared to give chase under the water; and what could our frail boat do against Ker Karraje's powerful apparatus?

Lieutenant Davon then said to me,—

"Go back to the compartment where M. Roch is. Shut the door, while I go and shut that of the stern compartment. If they run into us it is possible, with our bulkheads, that we may hold out under water!"

His composure was not ruffled by this new danger. After pressing his hand, I went forward to join M. Roch. I shut the door and waited in complete darkness.

I perceived, or rather I became conscious of, the manœuvres of the *Sword* in her endeavours to escape the tug—her heaving, her setting, her gyrations; how she was performing a sudden evolution to escape a collision, now rising to the surface, again sinking to the very bottom.

Picture to yourself this contest between two destroyers under those troubled waters, like two marine monsters of unequal strength.

Some minutes passed. I was wondering whether the

pursuit had been suspended, and whether the *Sword* would be able to rush through the tunnel.

Then there was a collision. The shock did not seem to be very violent. But I could not be mistaken. The *Sword* had been run into on her starboard quarter. Perhaps, however, the iron plates of her hull would resist the shock, or even, in the contrary case, perhaps the water might not enter farther than the compartments.

Almost immediately a second blow struck the *Sword*, this time with terrible violence. It was as though the boat were lifted up by the ram of the tug, against which it sawed, so to speak, as it turned away. Then I felt that we stood upright, bow up, and sank perpendicularly by the weight of the water which filled the stern compartment.

Suddenly my companion and I, being unable to cling to the partition, were flung head over heels on top of one another. Then, after a last blow, the *Sword* grated upon the sea floor with a sound of ripping plates and became motionless.

From that moment I do not know what happened, for I lost consciousness.

I have just learned that hours—many hours—have since passed. The only thing I can remember is my last thought :

If I die, at least Thomas Roch and his secret die with me . . . and the pirates of Backcup will not escape the punishment of their crimes !

## CHAPTER XV.

### EXPECTATION.

WHEN I came to my senses I was lying on my bed in my cell, where, it appears, I had been asleep for thirty hours.

I was not alone. Serkō was with me. He had given me all the necessary care; he had nursed me himself—not as a friend, I think, but as the man from whom they expected important explanations, but of whom they were ready to rid themselves instantly if the common interest required it.

I was still incapable of walking a step; a little more, and I should have been asphyxiated in the narrow compartment of the *Sword* as it lay at the bottom of the lagoon. I was now in a state to answer the questions that Serkō was burning to ask me relative to that strange adventure; but I intended to be very reserved.

First of all I wondered: Where was Lieutenant Davon and the crew of the *Sword*? Had those brave Englishmen perished in the collision? Were they safe and sound as we were—for I concluded that, like myself, Roch had survived the double collision of the tug with the *Sword*.

The first thing Serkō said was,—

"Explain to me what happened, Mr. Hart."

Instead of answering, I thought I would put questions.

"How is Roch?" I asked.

"In good health, Mr. Hart. What happened?" he repeated, imperatively.

"First tell me," I said, "what has become of—the others."

"What others?" replied the engineer; and he was beginning to look angry.

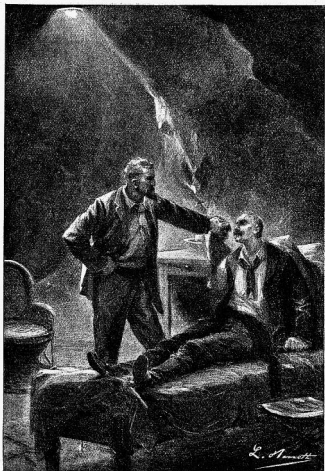
"The men who flung themselves upon me and upon M. Roch; the men who gagged us, bore us away, shut us up, I don't even know where!"

I thought, upon reflection, it would be best to pretend that I had been surprised that night by a sudden attack, during which I had no time either to collect myself or to recognize my assailants.

"You will know soon enough what happened to them," replied my interlocutor, "but now I want to know how all this came to pass."

His voice took a threatening tone as he repeated his question for the third time, and I knew he suspected me. Yet, for him to be in a condition to accuse me of having intercourse with the outside the keg must have fallen into Ker Kerraje's hands. But that had not happened, for it had been received by the Bermuda authorities, and was in their hands. Such an accusation could not, therefore, be founded on anything serious.

I contented myself then with relating how, about eight o'clock, the night before, I was walking on the banks,



Cross-examination.





after having seen the inventor make for his laboratory, when three men seized me from behind. With a gag in my mouth and my eyes bandaged, I felt myself dragged, then lowered into a kind of hole with another person, whom I thought I recognized by his moans as my ex-patient. I felt I was on some floating object, and knew that it must be the tug which had returned. Then it seemed to me that the vessel sank under the waters; a collision hurled me to the bottom of this hole, the air soon became exhausted, and finally I lost consciousness. I knew no more.

Serkö listened to me with profound attention, his eyes were hard, his forehead was wrinkled, and yet he had no reason to think that I did not speak the truth.

"You maintain that three men fell upon you?" he asked.

"Yes, I thought they were some of your people. But I did not see them coming. Who were they?"

"Strangers whom you must have recognized by their language."

"They did not speak."

"You have no idea of their nationality?"

"Not the least."

"You do not know their reason for entering the cavern?"

"I don't know it."

"And what do you think about it all?"

"What do I think, M. Serkö? I tell you I thought that some of your pirates had been ordered to fling me

into the lagoon by command of Count d'Artigas, and that they were going to do the same with your other prisoner, because as you were in possession of all his secrets—as you have told me—you no longer wanted to be encumbered by either him or me.”

“Really, Mr. Hart! has that thought actually entered your brain?” exclaimed Serkō, but nevertheless he did not assume his usual tone of raillery.

“Yes! it did not remain there long, I must say, for having removed the bandage from my eyes, I saw that they had lowered me into one of the compartments of the tug.”

“That was not the tug; it was a boat of the same sort that had entered by the tunnel.”

“A submarine boat?” I cried.

“Yes! Manned by men with orders to carry off you and M. Roch.”

“To carry us off!” I exclaimed, still feigning surprise.

“And,” added my tormentor, “I ask you what you think of the business?”

“What I think of it? But it seems to me there can be only one plausible explanation. If the secret of your retreat has not been betrayed—and I do not see how such treason could have been committed, nor of what imprudence you and the others could have been guilty—my opinion is that this submarine boat came upon the mouth of the tunnel by chance, that after getting through, it rose to the surface of the lagoon, and that its crew, astonished to find themselves in a cave containing inhabi-

tants, seized the first they met—M. Roch—me—other perhaps—for of course I don't know."

The engineer had again become very serious. Did he feel the inanity of the theory I was trying to propound? Was he thinking that I knew more than I wished to tell? Be that as it may, he appeared to accept my answer, and he added,—

"Probably, Mr. Hart, things did happen in that way, and as the strange boat tried to pass into the tunnel at the moment that the tug was leaving it, there was a collision—a collision in which it came to grief. But we are not people to let our fellow-creatures perish. Besides, your disappearance and that of M. Roch was almost immediately reported. Two such precious lives had to be saved at any cost. Everyone set to work. We have some clever divers among our men. They went down into the depths of the lagoon—they passed ropes under the hull of the *Sword*—"

"The *Sword*?" I queried.

"That is the name we read on the bow of the boat when it was brought to the surface. We were very much pleased to find you again—unconscious, it is true, but still breathing—and our relief was great when we brought you back to life. Unfortunately, with regard to the officer who commanded the *Sword* and its crew, our efforts were futile. The impact had burst the compartment where they stood, and they paid for their ill-luck with their lives, owing to the mere accident, as you say, of their having invaded our mysterious retreat."

The news of the death of the lieutenant and his men wrung my heart. But in order to act my part, as if they were men I did not know—that I was supposed not to know—I had to control myself. It was essential that I should give rise to no suspicion of connivance between the officer and me. I wonder whether Serkō does really attribute that visit to “mere accident”: he may have his reasons for admitting, provisionally at least, the explanation I invented.

And thus that unexpected opportunity of gaining my liberty is lost. And what will be the result? In any case everything will be known about Ker Karraje the pirate, for my declaration is in the hands of the English authorities. When the *Sword* does not return to the Bermudas, no doubt new measures will be taken against Backup, where, but for the unfortunate coincidence—the entry of the tug at the moment of the *Sword's* departure—I should be a prisoner no longer.

I have resumed my ordinary existence, and having inspired no suspicion I am allowed perfect freedom in the cavern.

This last adventure has had no effect whatever upon my compatriot. Careful treatment saved him, as it saved me. In the full plenitude of his intellectual faculties he has taken up his work again, and he passes whole days in his laboratory.

The *Ebba* returned from her last voyage laden with bales, cases, and quantities of various provisions, so I conclude that several piracies had been committed.

The work of setting up the carriages has advanced rapidly. The number of missiles is now fifty. If Ker Karraje finds it necessary to defend Backup, three or four will be sufficient to secure the island against approach, provided that they cover the zone on which no ship can enter without being destroyed.

I think the pirates will put Backup in a state of defence when they have thought out the situation in this way :—

“If the appearance of the *Sword* in the lagoon was only the result of chance, our situation is unchanged, and no power, not even England, will think of looking for the missing boat underneath this island. If, on the other hand, they have learnt, through some unaccountable discovery that Backup has become Ker Karraje’s hiding-place, and if the sending of the *Sword* was a first attempt against the island, a second, under different conditions, must be expected—either a bombardment or an attempt to land. Then before we leave Backup and carry away our wealth, the Roch Fulgurator must be employed in the defence.”

In my opinion, this reasoning may even be carried farther, and the scoundrels will say to themselves :—

Is there any connection between this discovery, however it has been made, and the double abduction from Healthful House? Do they know that Roch and his keeper are confined in Backup? Is it known that the seizure was effected by Ker Karraje? Have the Americans, English, French, Germans, Russians, any idea that every attack on the island is doomed to failure?

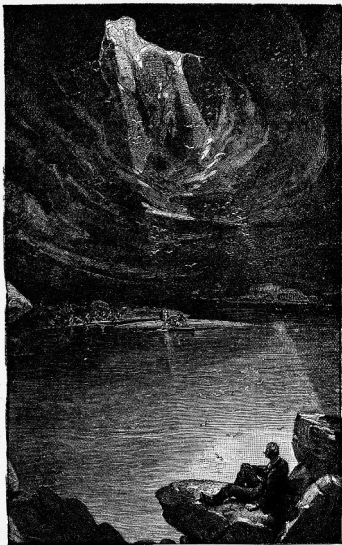
However, supposing all that is known, no matter how

great the danger, even Ker Karraje must realize that they will not hesitate. Interest of the first order, duty to public safety and humanity, requires the destruction of his lair. After having scoured the waters of the West Pacific in former years, the pirate and his accomplices are now infesting the Western Atlantic. They must be exterminated at no matter what cost !

In any case, while there is any doubt that Backcup is looked upon as a pirates' den, a look-out must be kept by those in occupation. So, beginning from to-day, this is organized under the strictest conditions. By means of the corridor, and without passing through the tunnel, the pirates are incessantly watching outside. Hidden behind the rocks on the shore, they observe the different points of the horizon night and day, relieving each other in squads of twelve men, morning and evening. The faintest sign of a ship, or an approach of any kind, would be instantly signalled.

Nothing new happened during several following days, which succeeded each other in hopeless monotony. In reality, everyone feels that Backcup no longer enjoys its former security. There exists a vague and disheartening uneasiness. Every moment the pirates dread the cry, "Danger !" from the watchers on the shore. Things are not the same as before the arrival of the *Sword*. Brave Davon and his plucky crew ! May England, may the whole civilized world, never forget that they have sacrificed their lives in the cause of humanity !

It is evident now, and in spite of their powerful means of



The look-out from the pirates' den.





defence, that Ker Karraje, Serkō, and Spade are enduring anxiety they strive in vain to hide. They hold frequent consultations together. Perhaps they are discussing the advisability of abandoning Backcup and of carrying off their spoil; for if the haunt is known, it can easily be reduced by famine.

I do not know what to think on this point, but the one thing certain is that I have never been suspected of having launched that keg so providentially picked up on the Bermudas. Never—I am convinced. Serkō has not given the slightest hint on this subject. No, I am not suspected. If it had been otherwise, I am sufficiently acquainted with Ker Karraje's character to know that I should have joined Lieutenant Davon and the *Sword's* crew at the bottom ere now.

These islands are being daily visited by fearful hurricanes, and the wind howls through the crater. Whirlwinds rush through the forest of pillars, producing marvellous sounds, as if the cavern were some gigantic musical instrument, and this noise is so great sometimes that it would drown the guns of a whole squadron. A number of marine birds come into the interior to avoid the storm, and during the rare lulls we are deafened by their shrill screaming.

It is presumable that in such bad weather the schooner could not live at sea. But there is no question of this, for Backcup has more than enough provisions for the whole season. I imagine, too, that for the future Count d'Artigas will be less anxious to cruise along the American coast, where he might no longer receive the

attentions due to a rich yachtsman, but the welcome merited by the pirate!

However, if the appearance of the *Sword* was really the forerunner of a combined attack upon the island, one question presents itself—a question of the gravest importance to the future of Backup.

So one day—very cautiously, not wishing to excite any suspicion—I tried to sound Serkő on this subject.

We were in the vicinity of the laboratory. The conversation had lasted some minutes, when my colleague began to speak of the extraordinary advent of a submarine boat of English nationality in the lagoon. This time he appeared inclined to think an attempt against Ker Karraje's band had been intended.

"That is not my opinion," I replied, so as to get to the question I wanted to put to him.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because, if your retreat were known, a fresh effort would have already been made, if not to enter the cave, at least to destroy Backup."

"To destroy it!" cried the engineer, "to destroy it! That would be, to say the least, very dangerous, with the means of defence now at our disposal."

"They don't know that, M. Serkő. No one in either the New or the Old World knows that M. Roch was carried off by you—that you are treating with him for his invention."

He made no answer to this observation. It was unanswerable.

I continued,—

“Then, a fleet sent by the maritime powers interested in the destruction of the island would not hesitate to draw near—to bombard it. Now, since that has not been done, it means that it is not going to be done, that they know nothing about Ker Karraje. You ought to be convinced of this, it is the pleasantest theory for you.”

“That may be,” replied Serkō, “but what is, is. Whether it be known or not, if the warships come within four or five miles of the island, they will be sunk before they can open fire!”

“That may be,” I said in turn; “and after that?”

“After? . . . The probability is that others will not try.”

“That may be, again! But these ships may form a line of investment outside the danger-zone; and on the other hand, the *Ebba* could no longer enter the ports she formerly frequented with Count d’Artigas! How, then, will you secure the provisioning of the island?”

The engineer remained silent.

The question must have already suggested itself, so it was clear that he could not answer it. I am sure the pirates intend to abandon Backup.

However, not wishing to appear that he had been driven into a corner by my remark, Serkō spoke.

“We have the tug,” he said. “And what the *Ebba* can no longer do, it will do.”

“The tug,” I exclaimed. “If Ker Karraje’s secrets are

known, the existence of Count d'Artigas' destroyer must be known."

He glanced at me suspiciously.

"Mr. Simon Hart," he said, "you appear to me to push your deductions rather far."

"I, M. Serkø?"

"Yes. And it seems to me that you speak of all this like a man who knows more than he ought to know."

That speech cut me short. It is evident that my arguments are liable to give rise to the idea that I may have a share in the late events. Serkø's eyes were fixed angrily on me; they pierced my cranium, they searched my brain.

Still, I did not lose my presence of mind, and I answered in a quiet tone,—

"M. Serkø, by profession and by inclination, I am in the habit of reasoning about everything. That is why I have given you the result of my inferences, which you may or may not take into consideration as it suits you."

Thereupon we separated. But, for want of caution, I have perhaps raised suspicions which it will not be easy to overcome.

On reviewing over this interview, I found I had acquired one piece of information: the danger-zone is fixed between four and five miles. Perhaps at the second equinoctial tide—a second floating message might be sent. But there will be months to wait until the orifice is revealed at low water; and then there is the chance that the second revelation might not reach its destination like the first,

The bad weather continues, and the wind is more boisterous than ever—this is usual during the winter at the Bermudas. Is it the state of the sea which prevents a second expedition against Backcup? Yet Lieutenant Davon had declared that if his undertaking failed, if the *Sword* did not return to St. George, they would make another and a different attempt to get rid of this pirate-den. The work of justice must be performed sooner or later, and Backcup must be blown up—even though I should not survive that act of destruction!

Could I but breathe, if only for a moment, the ozone on the shore! Why cannot I cast just one glance at the distant horizon of the Bermudas! My whole soul is concentrated on my desire to get through the corridor, reach the shore, and hide among the rocks. Perhaps I should be the first to perceive the smoke of a squadron bearing down upon the island.

Unfortunately I cannot realize this desire, for a sentry is posted day and night at both ends of the corridor. No one can enter it without Serkō's authorization. To attempt it would be to place my liberty in jeopardy—and even worse.

In fact, since our last conversation it seems to me that Serkō's manner has changed. His glance, mocking until then, has become suspicious, inquisitive, and as cold as Ker Karraje's!

*November 17th.*—This afternoon there was a great commotion in the Beehive. Everyone rushed out of their cells, and shouts were heard on all sides.

I jumped up and hurried out.

The pirates were running in the direction of the corridor. At the entrance stood Ker Karraje, Serkö, Spade, Gibson, Effrondat, and Count d'Artigas' Malay.

I soon learned the cause of the excitement. The watchers had just come in and raised the alarm.

Several ships—men-of-war—were to be seen towards the north-west, coming at full steam towards Backcup.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SOME HOURS LATER.

THE effect of this news upon me may be imagined! Unspeakable emotion filled my soul. I felt that the climax of the situation was near. May it be such as civilization and humanity demand!

Until now I have made my notes from day to day. Henceforth I must post them up hour by hour, nay, every minute. Who knows whether the last secret of Thomas Roch may not be revealed, and what if I have not time to record it! If I am killed during the attack, God grant that this record of the last five months may be found upon my body!

Ker Karraje, Serkö, Spade, and several others have gone to take their posts on the coast outside. What would I not give to follow them, and cower among the rocks to watch the ships.

An hour later, they have all come back to the Beehive, leaving twenty men to watch. As the days at this season are still rather short, there is nothing to fear before to-morrow. There is no question of a landing, and with



the knowledge of the defence of Backcup the assailants must possess, they cannot possibly contemplate an attack by night.

Until evening the work of preparation at various points on the coast continued. There are six sets of apparatus which have been conveyed through the corridor to positions previously chosen.

When this was done Serkō joined M. Roch in his laboratory. Is he about to inform him that a fleet is in sight of Backcup—to tell him that his Fulgurator is going to be used to defend the island?

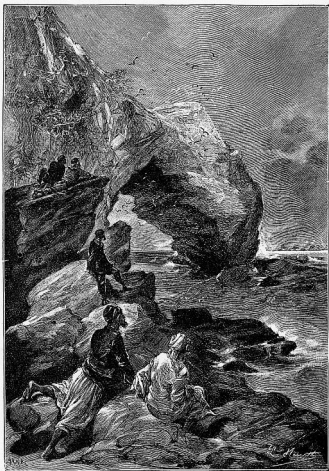
There are about fifty shells, each charged with many pounds of the explosive, with the fuse which assures them a greater trajectory than any other projectile, ready to do their work of destruction.

M. Roch has prepared several tubes of the deflagrator liquid, and—I know it, alas! only too well—he will not refuse to co-operate with the pirates!

Night fell during these preparations. Semi-darkness reigned in the interior, for only the Beehive lamps were burning.

I returned to my cell, as I was anxious to show myself as little as possible. The suspicions which I had inspired in Serkō might so easily be revived now that the squadron is approaching Backcup.

But will the ships sighted keep their course? They may hold off from the Bermudas and disappear below the horizon. For a moment this fear troubled me, but—no, no—besides, according to Captain Spade's account



The squadron is sighted.



—I have just heard him talking to himself—the vessels are still in sight of the island.

Of what nationality are they? Have the English undertaken this expedition alone, to avenge the destruction of the *Sword*? or are there cruisers of other nations with them? I do not know; it is impossible for me to learn—and what does it matter? The one important thing is that this den should be destroyed: have I the courage to be buried beneath its ruins? dare I perish like the hero Lieutenant Davon and his brave crew?

The preparations for defence are going on with deliberation and method under Serkö's supervision. It is evident that the pirates feel certain of destroying their assailants so soon as the danger-zone is crossed. Their confidence in the *Roch Fulgurator* is absolute. With the conviction that the ships can do nothing to hurt them, they give no thought to either difficulties or dangers in the future.

According to my supposition, the apparatus must now be erected on the north-west side of the coast, the slides placed so that the bombs may be projected north, west, and south. The east of the island, as I have noted before, is protected by reefs which form a connecting chain between Backup and other islands.

Towards nine o'clock I made up my mind to leave my cell. No one would pay any attention to me, and perhaps I might pass unperceived under cover of the darkness. Ah! if I could only get into the passage, gain the shore and hide behind a rock! Why should I not be there at

daybreak! now that Ker Karraje, Serkö, Spade, and the pirates have taken up their position outside?

The edge of the lagoon was then deserted, but the corridor was guarded by the Malay. Without any fixed plan I strolled towards the laboratory. My thoughts were concentrated on my compatriot. Upon reflection I have come to think that he is not aware of the presence of a fleet in these waters. Only at the last moment will Serkö suddenly place him face to face with the opportunity of accomplishing his vengeance.

Then the idea struck me that I myself would bring Roch to recognize the responsibility of his actions, and reveal to him, at this, perhaps our last hour, what manner of men they are who would make him participate in their nefarious schemes.

At least I would try, and perhaps I might rekindle the spark of patriotism in the depths of that soul in rebellion against human injustice.

The inventor was in his laboratory, and in all probability alone, for no one was ever admitted while he was preparing the substances for the deflagrator.

I made my way there, and in passing close to the water I remarked that the tug was still moored alongside the little jetty.

As I drew near I thought it prudent to slip in among the pillars so as to reach the laboratory from the side; this would enable me to ascertain that no one was with Roch.

So soon as I entered the shadowy arches I saw a bright

light which penetrated to the other side of the lagoon. This light was from the laboratory lamp, and came through the narrow window in the front.

Save at that point, the southern bank was dark, while on the opposite side the Beehive was partially lighted so far as the north wall. Through the great vent in the roof above the dark lagoon some twinkling stars were visible. The sky was clear, the storm had abated, and the swirling wind no longer eddied in the cave.

When I came near the laboratory I crept along the rock, and having raised myself up to the window-pane I could plainly discern M. Roch.

He was alone. His head, in strong light, was to be seen in three-quarter view. His features were drawn and the line in his forehead was deeper than before, but his face expressed perfect tranquility, and full possession of his senses. He was no longer the patient of Pavilion 17, the Healthful House madman, and I wondered was he really completely cured or whether there was reason to dread that his mind would again give way under a great shock.

My fellow-captive had placed two glass tubes on a work-bench; he held a third in his hand, and as he raised it up to the light I noticed the clearness of the liquid it contained.

For a moment I felt a mad desire to rush into the laboratory, seize the tubes and break them. But would he not have time to make more of the liquid?

It would be better to keep to my first plan.

I pushed open the door and entered.

"M. Roch," I said.

He neither saw nor heard me.

"M. Roch," I repeated.

He raised his head first, then turned round and looked at me.

"Ah! it is you, Hart!" he spoke calmly, almost indifferently.

He knows my name. Serkô had informed him that it was not Gaydon the keeper, but Simon Hart who had attended him at Healthful House.

"Do you know?" I began.

"I know for what purpose you attended me! Yes! you hoped to find out a secret that no one wanted to pay for!"

Roch knew everything, and perhaps it was better so, considering what I had to tell him.

"Well, you have not succeeded, Mr. Hart, and so far as this is concerned," he continued, as he shook the glass tube, "no one has succeeded yet—and no one will succeed."

It is as I hoped; he has not made known the composition of his deflagrator.

I looked him straight in the face and said,—

"You know who I am, but do you know where you are?"

"I am at home," he replied.

That is what Ker Karraje has induced him to believe. At Backup the inventor thinks himself in his own



Ex-patient and ex-keeper.





home. The wealth accumulated in the cave belongs to him. If Backcup is attacked, it is with intent to steal his possessions; he will defend them, and he has every right to defend them!

"M. Roch," I began again, "listen to me."

"What have you to say to me?"

"This cavern into which we have both been dragged belongs to a band of pirates."

My hearer would not let me proceed, I do not know whether he even understood me. He exclaimed angrily,—

"I tell you that all the treasures stored here are the price of my invention. They belong to me. I have been paid what I asked for the Fulgurator, what I was refused everywhere else, even by my own country, which is yours, and I shall not allow myself to be robbed of it!"

What could I answer to these wild assertions? I continued, however,—

"Do you remember Healthful House?"

"Healthful House! where I was shut up, where Gaydon the keeper was commissioned to play the spy, to steal my secret from me."

"I should never have deprived you of the profit of that secret. I would not have accepted such a mission. But you were ill, your mind was affected. It was important that your invention should not be lost. Yes, if you had revealed it in one of your paroxysms, all the profit and all the honour should have been yours!"

"Really, Mr. Hart!" replied Roch, scornfully. "Honour

and profit! You speak of these rather late! You forget they had thrown me into a cell, under pretext of madness—yes! pretext, for my reason never deserted me, not even for an hour, as you may see by all I have done since I have been free.”

“Free! you think yourself free? Within the walls of this cavern are you not shut up as closely as you were between the walls of Healthful House?”

“The man who is at home,” replied Roch, in a voice rising with anger, “goes out as he pleases and when he pleases! I have only to say the word and all the doors open before me! This abode is mine! Count d’Artigas has given me the property and all it contains! Woe to those who come to attack it! I have something here that will annihilate them!”

While speaking thus, the inventor shook the glass tube in his hand excitedly. Then I exclaimed,—

“Count d’Artigas has deceived you as he has deceived so many others. Under that name one of the most terrible pirates who has ravaged the waters of both the Pacific and the Atlantic masquerades. He is an outlaw steeped in crime. He is the vile Ker Karraje.”

“Ker Karraje!” repeated Roch.

I wondered whether the name would make any impression, whether his mind did not recall what the man had done who bore it. In any case, I noticed that any impression that was made passed almost instantaneously.

“I do not know this Ker Karraje,” he said, extending his arm towards the door to command me to leave him.

“I only know Count d’Artigas.”

"M. Roch," I said, making a last effort, "Count d'Artigas and Ker Karraje are one and the same man! If that man has bought your secret it is with the object of securing the impunity of his crimes, and of committing fresh ones, he, the chief of the pirates."

"The pirates," cried Roch, whose irritation increased according as he felt I was gaining the advantage, "the pirates were they who dared to menace me even in this retreat, who made an attempt with the *Sword*—for Serkô has told me all—who wanted to steal from my home what belongs to me, the fair price of my discovery."

"No, the pirates are the men who have imprisoned you in this cave, who are going to employ your genius to protect them, and who only show you deference until they acquire the entire possession of your secrets!"

He interrupted me at these words. He did not seem to hear anything I said. It was his own idea he was pursuing, not mine, that perpetual idea of vengeance, so skilfully worked by Serkô, and which is the concentration of his hate.

"The scoundrels," he said, "are the men who repulsed me without giving me a hearing, who overwhelmed me with rebuffs and scorn, who drove me from country to country when I brought them superiority, invincibility, omnipotence."

The eternal story of the inventor: that no one will listen, that the indifferent or the envious refuse the means of testing new inventions, and decline to buy them at his valuation. I know it; and I know all the exaggerated things that have been written on the subject. This, how-

ever, is not the moment for discussion. I know that my arguments will take no hold on that unhinged mind; nothing I can say can have any effect upon the unfortunate dupe who had been so embittered by disappointment. By revealing to him the real name of Count d'Artigas, and denouncing the gang and its chief, I hoped to withdraw him from their influence, to show him the vile end they had in view. I was mistaken. He does not believe me! and then, even if Count d'Artigas is Ker Karraje, what does it matter? Is not he, Thomas Roch, master of Backup? Is he not the possessor of all the wealth that has been gained by twenty years of murder and rapine?

Disarmed before such moral degeneration, not knowing where to touch that perverted nature, that irresponsible soul, I drew back by degrees to the door of the laboratory. There was nothing for me but to retire. What will happen must happen, since it is not in my power to prevent the awful catastrophe that is almost upon us.

Besides, Roch did not even see me. He appeared to have forgotten that I was there, as he had forgotten all that had passed between us. He had set to work again without noticing that he was not alone.

There was only one way to prevent the imminent disaster. To seize Roch, to render him incapable of doing harm, to strike him. Yes! kill him! It is my right. It is my duty.

I had no weapon, but on the bench I saw a chisel and a hammer. What hinders me from knocking the inventor on the head? Were he dead, I would break the tubes,

and his invention would die with him ! The vessels might approach, land their men on Backcup, and demolish the island with cannon. Ker Karraje and all his horde would be destroyed : at the one murder that would lead to the punishment of so many crimes, ought I hesitate ?

I advanced towards the table. A steel chisel was there. I stretched out my hand to take it. Roch turned round.

It was too late to strike him. A struggle would ensue ; a struggle meant noise. His cries would be heard. There were still some pirates on that side. I could even hear footsteps crunching the sand on the banks. I had barely time to escape if I would avoid being found here.

Yet once more I tried to awaken some feeling of patriotism in the inventor, by saying,—

“ There are vessels in sight. They are coming to destroy this den ! Perhaps one of them bears the French flag ! ”

He looked at me. He did not know that Backcup was about to be attacked, and I had just told him. The lines on his forehead deepened. His eyes kindled.

“ Thomas Roch, will you dare to fire on the tricolor, the flag of your country ? ”

Roch raised his head, shook it nervously, then made a gesture of disdain.

“ What, your own country ? ”

“ I have no longer a country,” he cried. “ The rejected inventor has no country ! Where he has found a haven, there is his country ! They want to lay hold of what is

mine. I am going to defend myself. And woe, woe to them who venture to attack me!"

Then rushing to the door, he flung it open.

"Begone! Begone!" he repeated, in so loud a voice that it must have been heard on the Beehive bank.

I had not a second to lose. I fled.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### ONE AGAINST FIVE.

FOR an hour I have wandered under the gloomy arcades of Backcup, in and out of the stone trees to the farthest limits of the cavern. It is on that side I have so often sought some issue, or cleft, or crack in the rock through which I might scramble out to the shore without being seen.

My search had always been fruitless. Now, in my present state, a prey to wild fancies, it seemed to me that these walls of rock were growing still thicker, that my prison was closing in on me little by little, and presently must crush me.

I cannot say how long this mental anguish lasted.

After some time I again found myself on the Beehive side, in front of that cell wherein I could hope for neither sleep nor rest. Sleep! when my mind was in such a whirl! Sleep, when I am drawing near the last act in a tragedy which but yesterday threatened to last for years!

But how will the climax affect me? What am I to expect from the attack upon Backcup? I have been



unable to render Roch incapable of harm. His shells are ready to be thrown the moment the vessels enter upon the danger zone, and then, even without being struck, they will be destroyed.

These last hours of the night I am condemned to pass in my cell. The moment has come to re-enter it. How do I know that during the night the Roch Fulgurator may not blow up the ships before their guns can be directed against the island?

At that moment I cast a last glance around me. On the opposite side burned a bright light—only one—that of the laboratory, and its reflection quivered on the waters of the lagoon. The banks are deserted, so is the jetty. I thought the Beehive must be empty, and that the pirates had gone to their fighting places.

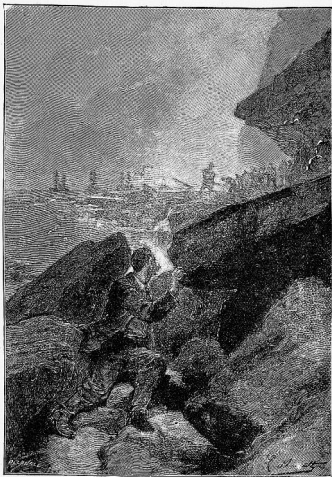
Then an irresistible instinct urged me, instead of entering my cell, to creep along by the rock walls, listening, watching, ready to slip into some crevice on hearing footsteps or voices. Thus I reached the entrance to the corridor. There was no one on guard! The passage was free!

Without giving myself time to think I advanced into the dark tunnel, and groped along its sides. Soon a fresh breeze cooled my face—salt air, sea air, that I had not felt for five long months. I inhaled it eagerly.

I could see the sky sprinkled with stars at the far end of the passage. No shadow obstructed the way.

Was I about to get out of Backup?

Throwing myself flat on my face, I crept slowly along,



The end is at hand.



noiselessly. When near the surface, I put my head out and looked.

No one! No one!

I skirted the base of the island towards the west, on the side where the reefs make it inaccessible and no look-out is necessary. I reached a narrow excavation, exactly at the foot of the natural arch which formed the handle of the overturned cup.

So I am out of this cavern, not yet free, but on the threshold of liberty!

From this spot I can see one of the points, on the west, projects into the sea. I can distinguish the figures of sentinels outlined against the sky.

The firmament is clear, and the constellations shine with the intense brightness which we observe on cold winter nights.

On the horizon, towards the north-west, like a luminous line, the lights of the warships show. There are some faint gleams in the east, and I calculate it must be about five o'clock in the morning.

*November 18th.*—Already the light is sufficient and I shall be able to complete my notes—the last lines perhaps that my hand is ever to trace. I have begun to write, and as each incident occurs during the attack it shall find a place in my notebook. The light damp vapour that lies upon the sea is being dispersed quickly by the breeze. I can at length distinguish the five ships drawn up in line at a distance of between five and six miles at least—consequently beyond the range of the Roch missiles.

One of my fears is dispelled ; the fear that these vessels, after passing within sight of the Bermudas, would continue their course towards the West Indies and Mexico. They are there, motionless, waiting for broad daylight to attack Backup.

At this instant there is a movement on the shore.

Three or four pirates emerge from the rocks. The watchers on the point are coming to the back. The whole band is there complete.

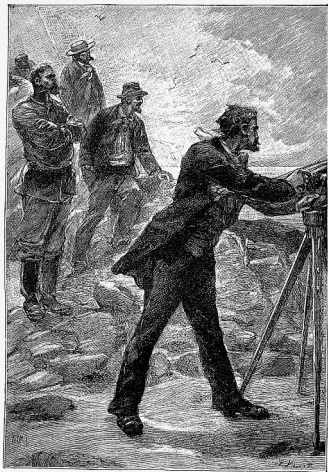
They have not sought shelter in the interior of the cavern, knowing well that the ships cannot approach near enough for the guns to shell the island.

In the cleft where I am concealed up to my head there is no risk of my being seen, and it is not to be presumed that any one will come from this side. The mischance might indeed occur. Serkō or someone else might wish to make sure that I am in my cell, and at need to shut me up there.

But what have they to fear from me ?

At twenty-five minutes past seven, Ker Karraje, Serkō, and Captain Spade go to the extremity of the point and scrutinize the horizon on the north-west. Behind them is the Roch apparatus with the autopropulsive shells, all in readiness. After being ignited by the deflagrator, they will start from there, describing a long trajectory to the zone, where their explosion will rend the surrounding atmosphere.

7.35 a.m.—Some smoke is floating above the ships, which are getting ready to come within range of the Back-



The inventor's preparation.



cup shells. Yells of delight, a burst of cheers, are uttered by the horde of villains.

Now Serkő leaves Ker Karraje, with whom Captain Spade remains, on the point, and makes his way to the entrance of the passage in order to reach the cavern, whither he has gone to fetch Roch.

On receiving Ker Karraje's orders to fire upon the vessels, will Roch remember what I have just said to him? Will not his crime appear to him in all its horror? Will he not refuse to obey?

No, I am only too certain! Why should I deceive myself in this matter? Is not the inventor at home here? He said so; he believes it. They come to attack him. He defends himself!

Meanwhile the five ships are advancing slowly, heading for the point of the island. Perhaps, on board, they think Roch has not yet yielded up his last secret to the pirates—and in fact, he had still preserved it on the day I threw the little cask upon the lagoon. If the commanders intend to effect a landing on the island, if their ships enter the zone within a mile, there will soon be nothing but shapeless wreckage on the surface of the sea!

Here comes Roch, accompanied by Serkő. They walk forward to the apparatus which is pointed towards the leading ship.

Ker Karraje and Captain Spade are waiting for them at that place.

So far as I can judge, Roch is calm and thoughtful. He



knows what he has to do. No hesitation will disturb the mind of this unfortunate man, perverted by hate!

In his fingers shines one of the glass tubes containing the liquid of the deflagrator.

He has turned his eyes towards the nearest vessel which is between five and six miles off.

It is a middle-sized cruiser—two thousand five hundred tons at most.

The flag has not been hoisted, but from the build of the ship I think it is of a nationality not very sympathetic to a Frenchman.

The four other ships remain behind. It is this cruiser's business to lead the attack upon the island.

Let it fire its guns, then, since the pirates are allowing it to approach, and the moment it is within range, may its first shell hit Thomas Roch.

While Serkő was carefully calculating the progress of the cruiser, Roch placed himself before the apparatus.

The moment had come.

"M. Roch!" cried Serkő, as he pointed to the cruiser making for the north-west point of the island, and now between four and five miles away.

Roch made a sign in the affirmative, and indicated by a movement that he wished to be alone.

Ker Karraje, Captain Spade and the others drew back about fifty paces from the apparatus.

Then Roch removed the stopper from the glass tube, and poured through an opening into the three shells a few drops of the liquid which mixed with the fusing matter.

Forty-five seconds pass—the time required to produce this combination—and during those seconds it seemed as though my heart had ceased to beat.

A terrible whistling sound rent the air. The three shells, describing a very long curve, rose a hundred yards in the air, and went beyond the cruiser.

Have they missed, then? Miscarried? No! The bombs, came back on themselves like an Australian boomerang.

Almost instantly space was shaken, with violence comparable only to the explosion of a whole magazine of dynamite or melinite.

Backcup is shaken to its base.

The cruiser has disappeared, rent to pieces, sunk to the bottom—the Zalinski ball produces the same effect, but the Roch Fulgurator multiplies it a hundredfold.

How the terrified pirates yell! They rush to the extremity of the point, and Ker Karraje, Serkö, and Spade stand still, scarcely able to believe the evidence of their senses!

As for Roch, he is there, his arms crossed, his eyes sparkling, his face radiant. I comprehend with horror the inventor's triumph in his double vengeance!

If the other vessels approach, the same fate as the cruiser's awaits them—inevitable destruction, under the same circumstances, and they cannot prevent it!

Well! although my last hope must disappear with them, let them fly, gain the ocean and abandon a useless attack! The nations will agree upon some other means of destroying the island.

They may surround Backup with a girdle of ships which the pirates cannot break through, and they will die of hunger in their cavern like wild beasts in their lair!

But, do I not know it well? ships of war will never retreat although they are going to certain destruction. These ships of war will advance, one after the other, even though it be only to be swallowed up in the depths of the ocean.

Now several signals are being exchanged between them. Almost immediately the horizon is darkened by thick smoke which is carried by the wind from the north-west, and the four vessels advance.

One is leaving the others behind, being in haste to get within range so as to bring her big guns into action. At all risks I come out of my hole, to await a second catastrophe, without hope of preventing it.

This ship which grows on my vision is a cruiser of about the same tonnage as the preceding vessel. It displays no flag, and I cannot tell to what nation it belongs. It is increasing its speed in order to invade the danger zone before the new shells are discharged. But how is the ship to escape their destructive power, since they can strike her by a reverse movement?

Serkö has drawn near Roch, he is in front of the second apparatus at the moment when the ship passes over the spot where the first cruiser lies engulfed, where it is about to be swallowed up in its turn.

Nothing troubled the profound silence of space, though some puffs of wind were coming from the sea.

Suddenly the drums beat on board the cruiser, the trumpets sound, their copper voices reach me.

I recognize that drum-beat—it is the French. Great Heaven! It is a ship belonging to my own country, and a Frenchman is about to destroy it.

No! that shall not be! I will spring upon Roch, I will shout to him that it is a French ship. He has not recognized it. He shall recognize it!

At this moment, at a sign from Serkö, the inventor raises his hand, the hand that holds the tube. Then the drum-beat becomes louder. It is the salute to the flag. An ensign floats wide in the breeze. The tricolour, the red, white, and blue stands out clear against the sky.

What is happening? Oh, I understand. At sight of his national flag, Roch is like one fascinated! His arm falls slowly as the flag rises gradually in the air. Then he draws back. He covers his eyes with his hand. He cannot endure the sight of the tricolour.

The virtue of patriotism is not then dead within him, since his heart beats fast at the sight of the flag of France!

My emotion is as keen as his! At the risk of being seen—after all, what does it matter?—I scramble along the rocks. I must be there to support him, to keep him from wavering. Were I to pay for it with my life I will adjure him for the last time in the name of his country. I will say to him:

“Frenchman, it is the tricolour that is hoisted on that ship, it is a bit of France itself that is coming! French-

man, will you commit the crime of striking a blow at France?"

But my intervention will not be necessary. Roch is no longer in the grip of his mental malady; he is in full possession of his senses, and master of himself. When he finds himself facing the flag, *he knows*. Fully comprehending the whole situation, he steps back from his standpoint.

Some of the pirates approach, to force him up to the apparatus once more. He repulses them—struggles with them.

Ker Karraje and Serkö hasten to the spot. They point to the rapidly advancing ship, and command him to discharge his shells. All in vain.

Captain Spade and the others, roused to the utmost fury, threaten him—swear at him—strike him—endeavour to tear the tube from him, they can use its contents as effectively as he.

Roch frees himself with a sudden bound, flings the tube on the ground, and smashes it under his heel.

Then what deadly terror seizes upon these wretches! The cruiser is approaching the rock-island. They can neither destroy it nor return the fire which was now opened briskly; shells fall upon the island, and the rocks are split in all directions.

But where is Roch? Has he been struck by a shell or a splinter? No, I catch a last glimpse of him as he rushes across the passage.

Ker Karraje, Serkö, and the others follow him

as fast as they can, to gain shelter in the interior of Backup.

I would not enter that cavern again for any consideration under heaven, were I to be killed here where I stand—and I take my last notes. When the French sailors land on the point, I shall go.

THE END OF THE NOTES OF SIMON HART,  
ENGINEER.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### ON BOARD THE "TONNANT."

AFTER the attempt made by Lieutenant Davon, who had received orders to penetrate to the interior of Backup with the *Sword*, the English authorities were obliged to conclude that he and his brave crew had perished. The *Sword* had not reappeared at the Bermudas. Had it been dashed to pieces against the submarine reefs while seeking the entrance to the tunnel? Had it been destroyed by Ker Karraje's pirates? There were no means of knowing, general grief and anger prevailed. The object of the expedition, in conformity with the instructions contained in the document which had been found on the shore of St. George, was to carry off Thomas Roch before the manufacture of his terrible engine of destruction was complete. The French engineer being secured—and Simon Hart also—he was to be placed in the hands of the authorities at Bermudas. That done, there would be nothing more to fear from the Roch Fulgurator, and any warship would do to destroy Backup.

But several days had passed and the *Sword* being

missing was regarded as lost. The authorities then decided that a second expedition should be made under other conditions of offensive action.

Nearly eight weeks had elapsed since Simon Hart's strange missive had been launched. Ker Karraje might be already in possession of the secret of M. Roch.

An agreement was come to between the maritime powers that five war ships should be sent into the Bermuda waters. Since a great cavern existed in the interior of the bulk of Backup, an attempt was to be made to bring down its rocky side like the walls of a bastion, under the fire of powerful modern artillery.

The squadron assembled at the entrance of the Chesapeake in Virginia, and directed its course towards the group, which it sighted in the evening of November 17th.

The next day the squadron attacked in the morning.

The ship that was to lead proceeded on her way, and was yet within four and a half miles of the base of the rock-islet, when three shells, after having passed beyond her, curved back upon themselves and burst, at fifty yards' distance from her hull. She sank in a few seconds, carrying hundreds of victims into the depths of the Atlantic.

The effect of this explosion, due to a terrible disturbance of the atmospheric layers which produced a concussion greater than any previously obtained from the new explosives, was instantaneous.

The four ships, which were far behind, felt the terrible repercussion even at their distance.



Two consequences were to be deduced from this sudden and extraordinary catastrophe :

First, Ker Karraje, the pirate, was now the possessor of the *Roch Fulgurator* ;

Second, the new exterminator really possessed the destructive power attributed to it by its inventor.

After the disappearance of the leading cruiser the other ships lowered their boats to pick up the survivors of the disaster. There was only some wreckage.

Then it was that officers and crews, thirsting for vengeance, signalled to each other and urged their ships towards Backup.

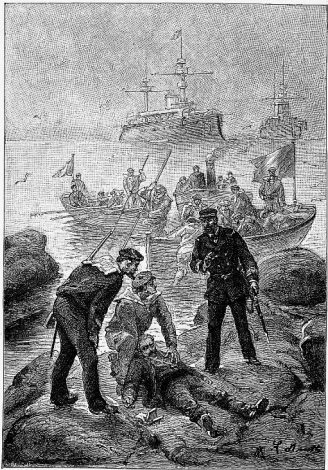
The fastest of the four, the *Tonnant*—a French man-of-war—took the lead at full steam, while the other ships put on full steam in order to rejoin it.

The *Tonnant* advanced half a mile within the danger zone which had just been the scene of the explosion, at the risk of being destroyed by other missiles. At the moment when her big guns were being brought to bear on the island, she hoisted the tricolour.

From the bridges the officers could see Ker Karraje's band scattered over the rocks.

This offered a favourable opportunity for destroying some of the desperadoes, even before their lair could be gutted by cannon balls. Then the *Tonnant* fired her first guns, and a precipitate flight of the pirates into the interior of Backup took place.

Some minutes later space itself was shaken by a shock so great that the roof of the sky seemed to fall into the abyss of the Atlantic.



For the flag



In the place where the rock-island had been there was nothing more than a mass of smoking rocks, rolling one over the other like the stones of an avalanche. In the place of the "upturned" cup, a broken cup!—in the place of Backup, a vast heap of reefs, on which the sea, which the explosion had turned into a whirlpool, rushed foaming.

What had been the cause of that explosion? Had it been voluntarily effected by the pirates, because they were incapable of defending themselves?

The *Tonnant* had been only slightly damaged by the fragments of the island. Her commander ordered her boats to be lowered, and headed for what remained of Backup.

After having landed under the orders of their officers the men explored the ruins, which now mingled with the chain of reefs in the direction of the Bermudas.

Here and there frightfully mutilated corpses were picked up, scattered limbs, mere shreds and nameless remnants of human beings; but of the cavern nothing could be seen. All was buried beneath its ruins.

A solitary body was found intact on the north-eastern side of the reef.

The faintest breath still animated it, and it was hoped the man might be brought back to life. He lay on his right side, in his clenched hand was a note-book, the last line of the entries was unfinished.

It was the body of Simon Hart, the engineer, who was carried on board the *Tonnant*, but every effort failed to bring him back to consciousness.

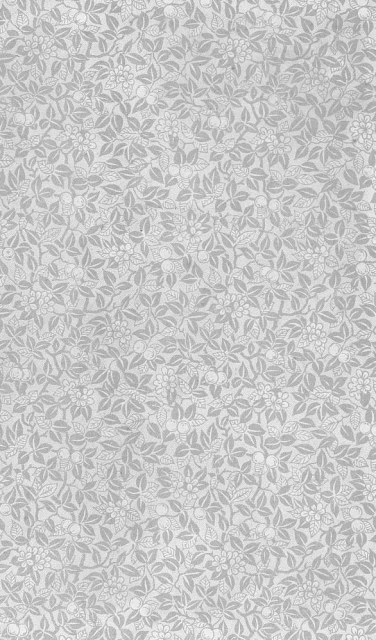
However, by the reading of his notes, made up to the moment of the explosion inside the cavern, it became possible to reconstruct a portion of what had occurred during the last hours of Backup.

And yet, in spite of appearances, Simon Hart did survive that catastrophe—he alone of all those who were only too justly its victims. So soon as he was in a condition to answer questions he gave the following probable, and indeed true explanation of the catastrophe. Being moved to the depths of his soul by the sight of the French flag, and becoming conscious at last of the crime of treason to his country that he was about to commit, Roch rushed through the passage. Having reached the cavern he made for the magazine, where considerable quantities of his explosive was stored, and before Ker Karraje, Serkö and the others could prevent him he had caused the explosion of Backup.

And now that islet of the Bermudas has disappeared. With it have vanished Ker Karraje and his horde of pirates, and with them the secret of Thomas Roch!

THE END.

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