Facing the Flag

by Jules Verne

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which occur also in the french editions, have been made: the replacement of “Sivan” by “Swan” and of “Roandoke” by “Roanoke”. This is a different translation from the one published by Sampson & Low in England entitled For the Flag (1897) translated by Mrs. Cashel Hoey.]

FACING THE FLAG

BY

J U L E S V E R N E

AUTHOR OF "AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS"; "TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA"; "FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON," ETC.

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FACING THE FLAG.

CHAPTER I.

HEALTHFUL HOUSE.

The carte de visite received that day, June 15, 189—, by the director of the

establishment of Healthful House was a very neat one, and simply bore, without escutcheon or coronet, the name:

COUNT D'ARTIGAS.

Below this name, in a corner of the card, the following address was written in lead pencil:

"On board the schooner Ebba, anchored off New-Berne, Pamlico Sound."

The capital of North Carolina—one of the forty-four states of the Union at this epoch—is the rather important town of Raleigh, which is about one hundred and fifty miles in the interior of the province. It is owing to its central position that this city has become the seat of the State legislature, for there are others that equal and even surpass it in industrial and commercial importance, such as Wilmington, Charlotte, Fayetteville, Edenton, Washington, Salisbury, Tarborough, Halifax, and New-Berne. The latter town is situated on estuary of the Neuse River, which empties itself into Pamlico Sound, a sort of vast maritime lake protected by a natural dyke formed by the isles and islets of the Carolina coast.

The director of Healthful House could never have imagined why the card should have been sent to him, had it not been accompanied by a note from the Count d'Artigas soliciting permission to visit the establishment. The personage in question hoped that the director would grant his request, and announced that he would present himself in the afternoon, accompanied by Captain Spade, commander of the schooner Ebba.

This desire to penetrate to the interior of the celebrated sanitarium, then in great request by the wealthy invalids of the United States, was natural enough on the part of a foreigner. Others who did not bear such a high-sounding name as the Count d'Artigas had visited it, and had been unstinting in their compliments to the director. The latter therefore hastened to accord the authorization demanded, and added that he would be honored to open the doors of the establishment to the Count d'Artigas.

Healthful House, which contained a select personnel, and was assured of the co-operation of the most celebrated doctors in the country, was a private enterprise. Independent of hospitals and almshouses, but subjected to the surveillance of the State, it comprised all the conditions of comfort and salubrity essential to establishments of this description designed to receive an opulent clientele.

It would have been difficult to find a more agreeable situation than that of Healthful House. On the landward slope of a hill extended a park of two hundred acres planted with the magnificent vegetation that grows so luxuriantly in that part of North America, which is equal in latitude to the Canary and Madeira Islands. At the furthermost limit of the park lay the wide estuary of the Neuse, swept by the cool breezes of Pamlico Sound and by the winds that blew from the ocean beyond the narrow lido of the coast.

Healthful House, where rich invalids were cared for under such excellent hygienic conditions, was more generally reserved for the treatment of chronic complaints; but the management did not decline to admit patients affected by mental troubles, when the latter were not of an incurable nature.

It thus happened—a circumstance that was bound to attract a good deal of attention to Healthful House, and which perhaps was the motive for the visit of the Count d'Artigas—that a person of world-wide notoriety had for eighteen months been under special observation there.

This person was a Frenchman named Thomas Roch, forty-five years of age. He was, beyond question, suffering from some mental malady, but expert alienists admitted that he had not entirely lost the use of his reasoning faculties. It was only too evident that he had lost all notion of things as far as the ordinary acts of life were concerned; but in regard to subjects demanding the exercise of his genius, his sanity was unimpaired and unassailable—a fact which demonstrates how true is the dictum that genius and madness are often closely allied! Otherwise his condition manifested

itself by complete loss of memory;—the impossibility of concentrating his attention upon anything, lack of judgment, delirium and incoherence. He no longer even possessed the natural animal instinct of self-preservation, and had to be watched like an infant whom one never permits out of one's sight. Therefore a warder was detailed to keep close watch over him by day and by night in Pavilion No. 17, at the end of Healthful House Park, which had been specially set apart for him.

Ordinary insanity, when it is not incurable, can only be cured by moral means. Medicine and therapeutics are powerless, and their inefficacy has long been recognized by specialists. Were these moral means applicable to the case of Thomas Roch? One may be permitted to doubt it, even amid the tranquil and salubrious surroundings of Healthful House. As a matter of fact the very symptoms of uneasiness, changes of temper, irritability, queer traits of character, melancholy, apathy, and a repugnance for serious occupations were distinctly apparent; no treatment seemed capable of curing or even alleviating these symptoms. This was patent to all his medical attendants.

It has been justly remarked that madness is an excess of subjectivity; that is to say, a state in which the mind accords too much to mental labor and not enough to outward impressions. In the case of Thomas Roch this indifference was practically absolute. He lived but within himself, so to speak, a prey to a fixed idea which had brought him to the condition in which we find him. Could any circumstance occur to counteract it—to "exteriorize" him, as it were? The thing was improbable, but it was not impossible.

It is now necessary to explain how this Frenchman came to quit France, what motive attracted him to the United States, why the Federal government had judged it prudent and necessary to intern him in this sanitarium, where every utterance that unconsciously escaped him during his crises were noted and recorded with the minutest care.

Eighteen months previously the Secretary of the Navy at Washington, had received a demand for an audience in regard to a communication that Thomas Roch desired to make to him.

As soon as he glanced at the name, the secretary perfectly understood the nature of the communication and the terms which would accompany it, and an immediate audience was unhesitatingly accorded.

Thomas Roch's notoriety was indeed such that, out of solicitude for the interests confided to his keeping, and which he was bound to safeguard, he could not hesitate to receive the petitioner and listen to the proposals which the latter desired personally to submit to him.

Thomas Roch was an inventor—an inventor of genius. Several important discoveries had brought him prominently to the notice of the world. Thanks to him, problems that had previously remained purely theoretical had received practical application. He occupied a conspicuous place in the front rank of the army of science. It will be seen how worry, deceptions, mortification, and the outrages with which he was overwhelmed by the cynical wits of the press combined to drive him to that degree of madness which necessitated his internment in Healthful House.

His latest invention in war-engines bore the name of Roch's Fulgurator. This apparatus possessed, if he was to be believed, such superiority over all others, that the State which acquired it would become absolute master of earth and ocean.

The deplorable difficulties inventors encounter in connection with their inventions are only too well known, especially when they endeavor to get them adopted by governmental commissions. Several of the most celebrated examples are still fresh in everybody's memory. It is useless to insist upon this point, because there are sometimes circumstances underlying affairs of this kind upon which it is difficult to obtain any light. In regard to Thomas Roch, however, it is only fair to say that, as in the case of the majority of his predecessors, his pretensions were excessive. He

placed such an exorbitant price upon his new engine that it was practicably impossible to treat with him.

This was due to the fact—and it should not be lost sight of—that in respect of previous inventions which had been most fruitful in result, he had been imposed upon with the greatest audacity. Being unable to obtain therefrom the profits which he had a right to expect, his temper had become soured. He became suspicious, would give up nothing without knowing just what he was doing, impose conditions that were perhaps unacceptable, wanted his mere assertions accepted as sufficient guarantee, and in any case asked for such a large sum of money on account before condescending to furnish the test of practical experiment that his overtures could not be entertained.

In the first place he had offered the fulgurator to France, and made known the nature of it to the commission appointed to pass upon his proposition. The fulgurator was a sort of auto-propulsive engine, of peculiar construction, charged with an explosive composed of new substances and which only produced its effect under the action of a deflagrator that was also new.

When this engine, no matter in what way it was launched, exploded, not on striking the object aimed at, but several hundred yards from it, its action upon the atmospheric strata was so terrific that any construction, warship or floating battery, within a zone of twelve thousand square yards, would be blown to atoms. This was the principle of the shell launched by the Zalinski pneumatic gun with which experiments had already been made at that epoch, but its results were multiplied at least a hundred-fold.

If, therefore, Thomas Roch’s invention possessed this power, it assured the offensive and defensive superiority of his native country. But might not the inventor be exaggerating, notwithstanding that the tests of other engines he had conceived had proved incontestably that they were all he had claimed them to be? This, experiment

could alone show, and it was precisely here where the rub came in. Roch would not agree to experiment until the millions at which he valued his fulgurator had first been paid to him.

It is certain that a sort of disequilibrium had then occurred in his mental faculties. It was felt that he was developing a condition of mind that would gradually lead to definite madness. No government could possibly condescend to treat with him under the conditions he imposed.

The French commission was compelled to break off all negotiations with him, and the newspapers, even those of the Radical Opposition, had to admit that it was difficult to follow up the affair.

In view of the excess of subjectivity which was unceasingly augmenting in the profoundly disturbed mind of Thomas Roch, no one will be surprised at the fact that the cord of patriotism gradually relaxed until it ceased to vibrate. For the honor of human nature be it said that Thomas Roch was by this time irresponsible for his actions. He preserved his whole consciousness only in so far as subjects bearing directly upon his invention were concerned. In this particular he had lost nothing of his mental power. But in all that related to the most ordinary details of existence his moral decrepitude increased daily and deprived him of complete responsibility for his acts.

Thomas Roch’s invention having been refused by the commission, steps ought to have been taken to prevent him from offering it elsewhere. Nothing of the kind was done, and there a great mistake was made.

The inevitable was bound to happen, and it did. Under a growing irritability the sentiment of patriotism, which is the very essence of the citizen—who before belonging to himself belongs to his country— became extinct in the soul of the disappointed inventor. His thoughts turned towards other nations. He crossed the frontier, and forgetting the ineffaceable past, offered the fulgurator to Germany.

There, as soon as his exorbitant demands were made known, the government refused to receive his communication. Besides, it so happened that the military authorities were just then absorbed by the construction of a new ballistic engine, and imagined they could afford to ignore that of the French inventor.

As the result of this second rebuff Roch's anger became coupled with hatred—an instinctive hatred of humanity—especially after his pourparlers with the British Admiralty came to naught. The English being practical people, did not at first repulse Thomas Roch. They sounded him and tried to get round him; but Roch would listen to nothing. His secret was worth millions, and these millions he would have, or they would not have his secret. The Admiralty at last declined to have anything more to do with him.

It was in these conditions, when his intellectual trouble was growing daily worse, that he made a last effort by approaching the American Government. That was about eighteen months before this story opens.

The Americans, being even more practical than the English, did not attempt to bargain for Roch's fulgurator, to which, in view of the French chemist's reputation, they attached exceptional importance. They rightly esteemed him a man of genius, and took the measures justified by his condition, prepared to indemnify him equitably later.

As Thomas Roch gave only too visible proofs of mental alienation, the Administration, in the very interest of his invention, judged it prudent to sequestrate him.

As is already known, he was not confined in a lunatic asylum, but was conveyed to Healthful House, which offered every guarantee for the proper treatment of his malady. Yet, though the most careful attention had been devoted to him, no improvement had manifested itself.

Thomas Roch, let it be again remarked—this point cannot be too often insisted

upon—incapable though he was of comprehending and performing the ordinary acts and duties of life, recovered all his powers when the field of his discoveries was touched upon. He became animated, and spoke with the assurance of a man who knows whereof he is descanting, and an authority that carried conviction with it. In the heat of his eloquence he would describe the marvellous qualities of his fulgurator and the truly extraordinary effects it caused. As to the nature of the explosive and of the deflagrator, the elements of which the latter was composed, their manufacture, and the way in which they were employed, he preserved complete silence, and all attempts to worm the secret out of him remained ineffectual. Once or twice, during the height of the paroxysms to which he was occasionally subject, there had been reason to believe that his secret would escape him, and every precaution had been taken to note his slightest utterance. But Thomas Roch had each time disappointed his watchers. If he no longer preserved the sentiment of self-preservation, he at least knew how to preserve the secret of his discovery.

Pavilion No. 17 was situated in the middle of a garden that was surrounded by hedges, and here Roch was accustomed to take exercise under the surveillance of his guardian. This guardian lived in the same pavilion, slept in the same room with him, and kept constant watch upon him, never leaving him for an hour. He hung upon the lightest words uttered by the patient in the course of his hallucinations, which generally occurred in the intermediary state between sleeping and waking—watched and listened while he dreamed.

This guardian was known as Gaydon. Shortly after the sequestration of Thomas Roch, having learned that an attendant speaking French fluently was wanted, he had applied at Healthful House for the place, and had been engaged to look after the new inmate.

In reality the alleged Gaydon was a French engineer named Simon Hart, who for several years past had been connected with a manufactory of chemical products in

New Jersey. Simon Hart was forty years of age. His high forehead was furrowed with the wrinkle that denoted the thinker, and his resolute bearing denoted energy combined with tenacity. Extremely well versed in the various questions relating to the perfecting of modern armaments, Hart knew everything that had been invented in the shape of explosives, of which there were over eleven hundred at that time, and was fully able to appreciate such a man as Thomas Roch. He firmly believed in the power of the latter's fulgurator, and had no doubt whatever that the inventor had conceived an engine that was capable of revolutionizing the condition of both offensive and defensive warfare on land and sea. He was aware that the demon of insanity had respected the man of science, and that in Roch's partially diseased brain the flame of genius still burned brightly. Then it occurred to him that if, during Roch's crises, his secret was revealed, this invention of a Frenchman would be seized upon by some other country to the detriment of France. Impelled by a spirit of patriotism, he made up his mind to offer himself as Thomas Roch's guardian, by passing himself off as an American thoroughly conversant with the French language, in order that if the inventor did at any time disclose his secret, France alone should benefit thereby. On pretext of returning to Europe, he resigned his position at the New Jersey manufactory, and changed his name so that none should know what had become of him.

Thus it came to pass that Simon Hart, alias Gaydon, had been an attendant at Healthful House for fifteen months. It required no little courage on the part of a man of his position and education to perform the menial and exacting duties of an insane man's attendant; but, as has been before remarked, he was actuated by a spirit of the purest and noblest patriotism. The idea of depriving Roch of the legitimate benefits due to the inventor, if he succeeded in learning his secret, never for an instant entered his mind.

He had kept the patient under the closest possible observation for fifteen months yet had not been able to learn anything from him, or worm out of him a single reply to

his questions that was of the slightest value. But he had become more convinced than ever of the importance of Thomas Roch's discovery, and was extremely apprehensive lest the partial madness of the inventor should become general, or lest he should die during one of his paroxysms and carry his secret with him to the grave.

This was Simon Hart's position, and this the mission to which he had wholly devoted himself in the interest of his native country.

However, notwithstanding his deceptions and troubles, Thomas Roch's physical health, thanks to his vigorous constitution, was not particularly affected. A man of medium height, with a large head, high, wide forehead, strongly-cut features, iron-gray hair and moustache, eyes generally haggard, but which became piercing and imperious when illuminated by his dominant idea, thin lips closely compressed, as though to prevent the escape of a word that could betray his secret—such was the inventor confined in one of the pavilions of Healthful House, probably unconscious of his sequestration, and confided to the surveillance of Simon Hart the engineer, become Gaydon the warder.

CHAPTER II.

COUNT D'ARTIGAS.

Just who was this Count d'Artigas? A Spaniard? So his name would appear to indicate. Yet on the stern of his schooner, in letters of gold, was the name Ebba, which is of pure Norwegian origin. And had you asked him the name of the captain of the Ebba, he would have replied, Spade, and would doubtless have added that that of the boatswain was Effrondat, and that of the ship's cook, Helim—all singularly dissimilar and indicating very different nationalities.

Could any plausible hypothesis be deducted from the type presented by Count d'Artigas? Not easily. If the color of his skin, his black hair, and the easy grace of his attitude denoted a Spanish origin, the ensemble of his person showed none of the

racial characteristics peculiar to the natives of the Iberian peninsula.

He was a man of about forty-five years of age, about the average height, and robustly constituted. With his calm and haughty demeanor he resembled an Hindoo lord in whose blood might mingle that of some superb type of Malay. If he was not naturally of a cold temperament, he at least, with his imperious gestures and brevity of speech, endeavored to make it appear that he was. As to the language usually spoken by him and his crew, it was one of those idioms current in the islands of the Indian Ocean and the adjacent seas. Yet when his maritime excursions brought him to the coasts of the old or new world he spoke English with remarkable facility, and with so slight an accent as to scarcely betray his foreign origin.

None could have told anything about his past, nor even about his present life, nor from what source he derived his fortune,—obviously a large one, inasmuch as he was able to gratify his every whim and lived in the greatest luxury whenever he visited America,—nor where he resided when at home, nor where was the port from which his schooner hailed, and none would have ventured to question him upon any of these points so little disposed was he to be communicative. He was not the kind of man to give anything away or compromise himself in the slightest degree, even when interviewed by American reporters.

All that was known about him was what was published in the papers when the arrival of the Ebba was reported in some port, and particularly in the ports of the east coast of the United States, where the schooner was accustomed to put in at regular periods to lay in provisions and stores for a lengthy voyage. She would take on board not only flour, biscuits, preserves, fresh and dried meat, live stock, wines, beers, and spirits, but also clothing, household utensils, and objects of luxury—all of the finest quality and highest price, and which were paid for either in dollars, guineas, or other coins of various countries and denominations.

Consequently, if no one knew anything about the private life of Count d’Artigas, he

was nevertheless very well known in the various ports of the United States from the Florida peninsula to New England.

It is therefore in no way surprising that the director of Healthful House should have felt greatly flattered by the Count's visit, and have received him with every mark of honor and respect.

It was the first time that the schooner Ebba had dropped anchor in the port of New-Berne, and no doubt a mere whim of her owner had brought him to the mouth of the Neuse. Otherwise why should he have come to such a place? Certainly not to lay in stores, for Pamlico Sound offered neither the resources nor facilities to be found in such ports as Boston, New York, Dover, Savannah, Wilmington in North Carolina, and Charleston in South Carolina. What could he have procured with his piastres and bank-notes in the small markets of New-Berne? This chief town of Craven County contained barely six thousand inhabitants. Its commerce consisted principally in the exportation of grain, pigs, furniture, and naval munitions. Besides, a few weeks previously, the schooner had loaded up for some destination which, as usual, was unknown.

Had this enigmatical personage then come solely for the purpose of visiting Healthful House? Very likely. There would have been nothing surprising in the fact, seeing that the establishment enjoyed a high and well-merited reputation.

Or perhaps the Count had been inspired by curiosity to meet Thomas Roch? This curiosity would have been legitimate and natural enough in view of the universal renown of the French inventor. Fancy—a mad genius who claimed that his discoveries were destined to revolutionize the methods of modern military art!

As he had notified the director he would do, the Count d'Artigas presented himself in the afternoon at the door of Healthful House, accompanied by Captain Spade, the commander of the Ebba.

In conformity with orders given, both were admitted and conducted to the office of

the director. The latter received his distinguished visitor with empressement, placed himself at his disposal, and intimated his intention of personally conducting him over the establishment, not being willing to concede to anybody else the honor of being his cicerone. The Count on his part was profuse in the expression of his thanks for the considerations extended to him.

They went over the common rooms and private habitations of the establishment, the director prattling unceasingly about the care with which the patients were tended—much better care, if he was to be believed, than they could possibly have had in the bosoms of their families—and priding himself upon the results achieved, and which had earned for the place its well-merited success.

The Count d'Artigas listened to his ceaseless chatter with apparent interest, probably in order the better to dissemble the real motive of his visit. However, after going the rounds for an hour he ventured to remark:

"Have you not among your patients, sir, one anent whom there was a great deal of talk some time ago, and whose presence here contributed in no small measure to attract public attention to Healthful House?"

"You refer to Thomas Roch, I presume, Count?" queried the director.

"Precisely—that Frenchman—that inventor—whose mental condition is said to be very precarious."

"Very precarious, Count, and happily so, perhaps! In my opinion humanity has nothing to gain by his discoveries, the application of which would increase the already too numerous means of destruction."

"You speak wisely, sir, and I entirely agree with you. Real progress does not lie in that direction, and I regard as inimical to society all those who seek to follow it. But has this inventor entirely lost the use of his intellectual faculties?"

"Entirely, no; save as regards the ordinary things of life. In this respect he no longer possesses either comprehension or responsibility. His genius as an inventor,

however, remains intact; it has survived his moral degeneracy, and, had his insensate demands been complied with, I have no doubt he would have produced a new war engine—which the world can get along very well without."

"Very well without, as you say, sir," re-echoed the Count d'Artigas, and Captain Spade nodded approval.

"But you will be able to judge for yourself, Count, for here is the pavilion occupied by Thomas Roch. If his confinement is well justified from the point of view of public security he is none the less treated with all the consideration due to him and the attention which his condition necessitates. Besides, Healthful House is beyond the reach of indiscreet persons who might...."

The director completed the phrase with a significant motion of his head—which brought an imperceptible smile to the lips of the stranger.

"But," asked the Count, "is Thomas Roch never left alone?"

"Never, Count, never. He has a permanent attendant in whom we have implicit confidence, who speaks his language and keeps the closest possible watch upon him. If in some way or other some indication relative to his discovery were to escape him, it would be immediately noted down and its value would be passed upon by those competent to judge."

Here the Count d'Artigas stole a rapid and meaning glance at Captain Spade, who responded with a gesture which said plainly enough: "I understand." And had any one observed the captain during the visit, they could not have failed to remark that he examined with the greatest minuteness that portion of the park surrounding Pavilion No. 17, and the different paths leading to the latter—probably in view of some prearranged scheme.

The garden of the pavilion was near the high wall surrounding the property, from the foot of which on the other side the hill sloped gently to the right bank of the Neuse.

The pavilion itself was a one-story building surmounted by a terrace in the Italian

style. It contained two rooms and an ante-room with strongly-barred windows. On each side and in rear of the habitation were clusters of fine trees, which were then in full leaf. In front was a cool, green velvety lawn, ornamented with shrubs and brilliantly tinted flowers. The whole garden extended over about half an acre, and was reserved exclusively for the use of Thomas Roch, who was free to wander about it at pleasure under the surveillance of his guardian.

When the Count d'Artigas, Captain Spade, and the director entered the garden, the first person they saw was the warder Gaydon, standing at the door of the pavilion. Unnoticed by the director the Count d'Artigas eyed the attendant with singular persistence.

It was not the first time that strangers had come to see the occupant of Pavilion No. 17, for the French inventor was justly regarded as the most interesting inmate of Healthful House. Nevertheless, Gaydon's attention was attracted by the originality of the type presented by the two visitors, of whose nationality he was ignorant. If the name of the Count d'Artigas was not unfamiliar to him, he had never had occasion to meet that wealthy gentleman during the latter's sojourn in the eastern ports. He therefore had no idea as to who the Count was. Neither was he aware that the schooner Ebba was then anchored at the entrance to the Neuse, at the foot of the hill upon which Healthful House was situated.

"Gaydon," demanded the director, "where is Thomas Roch?"

"Yonder," replied the warder, pointing to a man who was walking meditatively under the trees in rear of the pavilion.

"The Count d'Artigas has been authorized to visit Healthful House," the director explained; "and does not wish to go away without having seen Thomas Roch, who was lately the subject of a good deal too much discussion."

"And who would be talked about a great deal more," added the Count, "had the Federal Government not taken the precaution to confine him in this establishment."

“A necessary precaution, Count.”

“Necessary, as you observe, Mr. Director. It is better for the peace of the world that his secret should die with him.”

After having glanced at the Count d’Artigas, Gaydon had not uttered a word; but preceding the two strangers he walked towards the clump of trees where the inventor was pacing back and forth.

Thomas Roch paid no attention to them. He appeared to be oblivious of their presence.

Meanwhile, Captain Spade, while being careful not to excite suspicion, had been minutely examining the immediate surroundings of the pavilion and the end of the park in which it was situated. From the top of the sloping alleys he could easily distinguish the peak of a mast which showed above the wall of the park. He recognized the peak at a glance as being that of the Ebba, and knew therefore that the wall at this part skirted the right bank of the Neuse.

The Count d’Artigas’ whole attention was concentrated upon the French inventor. The latter’s health appeared to have suffered in no way from his eighteen months’ confinement; but his queer attitude, his incoherent gestures, his haggard eye, and his indifference to what was passing around him testified only too plainly to the degeneration of his mental faculties.

At length Thomas Roch dropped into a seat and with the end of a switch traced in the sand of the alley the outline of a fortification. Then kneeling down he made a number of little mounds that were evidently intended to represent bastions. He next plucked some leaves from a neighboring tree and stuck them in the mounds like so many tiny flags. All this was done with the utmost seriousness and without any attention whatever being paid to the onlookers.

It was the amusement of a child, but a child would have lacked this characteristic gravity.

“Is he then absolutely mad?” demanded the Count d’Artigas, who in spite of his habitual impassibility appeared to be somewhat disappointed.

“I warned you, Count, that nothing could be obtained from him.”

“Couldn’t he at least pay some attention to us?”

“It would perhaps be difficult to induce him to do so.”

Then turning to the attendant:

“Speak to him, Gaydon. Perhaps he will answer you.”

“Oh! he’ll answer me right enough, sir, never fear,” replied Gaydon.

He went up to the inventor and touching him on the shoulder, said gently: “Thomas Roch!”

The latter raised his head, and of the persons present he doubtless saw but his keeper, though Captain Spade had come up and all formed a circle about him.

“Thomas Roch,” continued Gaydon, speaking in English, “here are some visitors to see you. They are interested in your health—in your work.”

The last word alone seemed to rouse him from his indifference.

“My work?” he replied, also in English, which he spoke like a native.

Then taking a pebble between his index finger and bent thumb, as a boy plays at marbles, he projected it against one of the little sand-heaps. It scattered, and he jumped for joy.

“Blown to pieces! The bastion is blown to pieces! My explosive has destroyed everything at one blow!” he shouted, the light of triumph flashing in his eyes.

“You see,” said the director, addressing the Count d’Artigas. “The idea of his invention never leaves him.”

“And it will die with him,” affirmed the attendant.

“Couldn’t you, Gaydon, get him to talk about his fulgurator?” asked his chief.

“I will try, if you order me to do so, sir.”

“Well, I do order you, for I think it might interest the Count d’Artigas.”

“Certainly,” assented the Count, whose physiognomy betrayed no sign of the sentiments which were agitating him.

“I ought to warn you that I risk bringing on another fit,” observed Gaydon.

“You can drop the conversation when you consider it prudent. Tell Thomas Roch that a foreigner wishes to negotiate with him for the purchase of his fulgurator.”

“But are you not afraid he may give his secret away?” questioned the Count.

He spoke with such vivacity that Gaydon could not restrain a glance of distrust, which, however, did not appear to disturb the equanimity of that impenetrable nobleman.

“No fear of that,” said the warder. “No promise would induce him to divulge his secret. Until the millions he demands are counted into his hand he will remain as mute as a stone.”

“I don’t happen to be carrying those millions about me,” remarked the Count quietly.

Gaydon again touched Roch on the shoulder and repeated:

“Thomas Roch, here are some foreigners who are anxious to acquire your invention.”

The madman started.

“My invention?” he cried. “My deflagrator?”

And his growing animation plainly indicated the imminence of the fit that Gaydon had been apprehensive about, and which questions of this character invariably brought on.

“How much will you give me for it—how much?” continued Roch. “How much—how much?”

“Ten million dollars,” replied Gaydon.

“Ten millions! Ten millions! A fulgurator ten million times more powerful than anything hitherto invented! Ten millions for an autopropulsive projectile which, when it explodes, destroys everything in sight within a radius of over twelve thousand square yards! Ten millions for the only deflagrator that can provoke its explosion! Why, all the wealth of the world wouldn’t suffice to purchase the secret of my engine, and rather than sell it at such a price I would cut my tongue in half with my teeth. Ten millions, when it is worth a billion—a billion—a billion!”

It was clear that Roch had lost all notion of things, and had Gaydon offered him ten billions the madman would have replied in exactly the same manner.

The Count d’Artigas and Captain Spade had not taken their eyes off him. The Count was impassible as usual, though his brow had darkened, but the captain shook his head in a manner that implied plainly: “Decidedly there is nothing to hope from this poor devil!”

After his outburst Roch fled across the garden crying hoarsely:

“Billions! Billions!”

Gaydon turned to the director and remarked:

“I told you how it would be.”

Then he rushed after his patient, caught him by the arm, and led him, without any attempt at resistance, into the pavilion and closed the door.

The Count d’Artigas remained alone with the director, Captain Spade having strolled off again in the direction of the wall at the bottom of the park.

“You see I was not guilty of exaggeration, Count,” said the director. “It is obvious to every one that Thomas Roch is becoming daily worse. In my opinion his case is a hopeless one. If all the money he asks for were offered to him, nothing could be got from him.”

“Very likely,” replied the Count, “still, if his pecuniary demands are supremely absurd, he has none the less invented an engine the power of which is infinite, one might say.”

“That is the opinion expressed by competent persons, Count. But what he has discovered will ere long be lost with himself in one of these fits which are becoming more frequent and intense. Very soon even the motive of interest, the only sentiment that appears to have survived in his mind, will become extinct.”

“Mayhap the sentiment of hatred will remain, though,” muttered the Count, as Spade joined them at the garden gate.

CHAPTER III.

KIDNAPPED.

Half an hour later the Count d’Artigas and Captain Spade were following the beech-lined road that separated the Healthful House estate from the right bank of the Neuse. Both had taken leave of the director, the latter declaring himself greatly honored by their visit, and the former thanking him warmly for his courteous reception. A hundred-dollar bill left as a tip for the staff of the establishment had certainly not belied the Count’s reputation for generosity. He was—there could be no doubt about it—a foreigner of the highest distinction, if distinction be measured by generosity.

Issuing by the gate at the main entrance to Healthful House, they had skirted the wall that surrounded the property, and which was high enough to preclude the possibility of climbing it. Not a word passed between them for some time; the Count was deep in thought and Captain Spade was not in the habit of addressing him without being first spoken to.

At last when they stood beneath the rear wall behind which, though it was not visible, the Count knew Pavilion No. 17 was situated, he said:

“You managed, I presume, to thoroughly explore the place, and are acquainted with

every detail of it?”

“Certainly, Count” replied Captain Spade, emphasizing the title.

“You are perfectly sure about it?”

“Perfectly. I could go through the park with my eyes shut. If you still persist in carrying out your scheme the pavilion can be easily reached.”

“I do persist, Spade.”

“Notwithstanding Thomas Roch’s mental condition?”

“Notwithstanding his condition; and if we succeed in carrying him off——”

“That is my affair. When night comes on I undertake to enter the park of Healthful House, and then the pavilion garden without being seen by anybody.”

“By the entrance gate?”

“No, on this side.”

“Yes, but on this side there is the wall, and if you succeed in climbing it, how are you going to get over it again with Thomas Roch? What if the madman cries out—what if he should resist—what if his keeper gives the alarm?”

“Don’t worry yourself in the least about that. We have only got to go in and come out by this door.”

Captain Spade pointed to a narrow door let into the wall a few paces distant, and which was doubtless used by the staff of the establishment when they had occasion to go out by the river.

“That is the way I propose to go in. It’s much easier than scaling the wall with a ladder.”

“But the door is closed.”

“It will open.”

“Has it no bolts?”

“Yes, but I shot them back while we were strolling about, and the director didn’t notice what I had done.”

“How are you going to open it?” queried the Count, going to the door.

“Here is the key,” replied Spade, producing it.

He had withdrawn it from the lock, where it happened to be, when he had unbolted the door.

“Capital!” exclaimed the Count. “It couldn’t be better. The business will be easier than I expected. Let us get back to the schooner. At eight o’clock one of the boats will put you ashore with five men.”

“Yes, five men will do,” said Captain Spade. “There will be enough of them to effect our object even if the keeper is aroused and it becomes necessary to put him out of the way.”

“Put him out of the way—well, if it becomes absolutely necessary of course you must, but it would be better to seize him too and bring him aboard the Ebba Who knows but what he has already learned a part of Roch’s secret?”

“True.”

“Besides, Thomas Roch is used to him, and I don’t propose to make him change his habitudes in any way.”

This observation was accompanied by such a significant smile that Captain Spade could entertain no doubt as to the rôle reserved for the warder of Healthful House.

The plan to kidnap them both was thus settled, and appeared to have every chance of being successful; unless during the couple of hours of daylight that yet remained it was noticed that the key of the door had been stolen and the bolts drawn back, Captain Spade and his men could at least count upon being able to enter the park, and the rest, the captain affirmed, would be easy enough.

Thomas Roch was the only patient in the establishment isolated and kept under

special surveillance. All the other invalids lived in the main building, or occupied pavilions in the front of the park. The plan was to try and seize Roch and Gaydon separately and bind and gag them before they could cry out.

The Count d'Artigas and his companion wended their way to a creek where one of the Ebba's boats awaited them. The schooner was anchored two cable lengths from the shore, her sails neatly rolled upon her yards, which were squared as neatly as those of a pleasure yacht or of a man-of-war. At the peak of the mainmast a narrow red pennant was gently swayed by the wind, which came in fitful puffs from the east.

The Count and the captain jumped into the boat and a few strokes of the four oars brought them alongside of the schooner. They climbed on deck and going forward to the jib-boom, leaned over the starboard bulwark and gazed at an object that floated on the water a few strokes ahead of the vessel. It was a small buoy that was rocked by the ripple of the ebbing tide.

Twilight gradually set in, and the outline of New-Berne on the left bank of the sinuous Neuse became more and more indistinct until it disappeared in the deepening shades of night. A mist set in from the sea, but though it obscured the moon it brought no sign of rain. The lights gleamed out one by one in the houses of the town. The fishing smacks came slowly up the river to their anchorage, impelled by the oars of their crews which struck the water with sharp, rhythmical strokes, and with their sails distended on the chance of catching an occasional puff of the dropping wind to help them along. A couple of steamers passed, sending up volumes of black smoke and myriads of sparks from their double stacks, and lashing the water into foam with their powerful paddles.

At eight o'clock the Count d'Artigas appeared on the schooner's deck accompanied by a man about fifty years of age, to whom he remarked:

"It is time to go, Serko."

“Very well, I will tell Spade,” replied Serko.

At that moment the captain joined them.

“You had better get ready to go,” said the Count.

“All is ready.”

“Be careful to prevent any alarm being given, and arrange matters so that no one will for a minute suspect that Thomas Roch and his keeper have been brought on board the Ebba.”

“They wouldn’t find them if they came to look for them,” observed Serko, shrugging his shoulders and laughing heartily as though he had perpetrated a huge joke.

“Nevertheless, it is better not to arouse their suspicion,” said d’Artigas.

The boat was lowered, and Captain Spade and five sailors took their places in it. Four of the latter got out the oars. The boatswain, Effrondat, who was to remain in charge of the boat, went to the stern beside Captain Spade and took the tiller.

“Good luck, Spade,” said Serko with a smile, “and don’t make more noise about it than if you were a gallant carrying off his lady-love.”

“I won’t—unless that Gaydon chap—”

“We must have both Roch and Gaydon,” insisted the Count d’Artigas.

“That is understood,” replied Spade.

The boat pushed off, and the sailors on the deck of the schooner watched it till it was lost to sight in the darkness.

Pending its return, no preparations for the Ebba’s departure were made. Perhaps there was no intention of quitting the port after the men had been kidnapped. Besides, how could the vessel have reached the open sea? Not a breath of air was now stirring, and in half an hour the tide would be setting in again, and rising strongly and rapidly for several miles above New-Berne.

Anchored, as has already been said, a couple of cable-lengths from the shore, the Ebba might have been brought much nearer to it, for the water was deep enough, and this would have facilitated the task of the kidnappers when they returned from their expedition. If, however, the Count d'Artigas preferred to let the vessel stay where she was, he probably had his reasons.

Not a soul was in sight on the bank, and the road, with its borders of beech trees that skirted the wall of Healthful House estate, was equally deserted. The boat was made fast to the shore. Then Captain Spade and his four sailors landed, leaving the boatswain in charge, and disappeared amid the trees.

When they reached the wall Captain Spade stopped and the sailors drew up on each side of the doorway. The captain had only to turn the key in the lock and push the door, unless one of the servants, noticing that the door was not secured as usual, had bolted it. In this event their task would be an extremely difficult one, even if they succeeded in scaling the high wall.

The captain put his ear to the key-hole and listened.

Not a sound was to be heard in the park. Not even a leaf was rustling in the branches of the beeches under which they were standing. The surrounding country was wrapt in the profoundest silence.

Captain Spade drew the key from his pocket, inserted it in the lock and turned it noiselessly. Then he cautiously pushed the door, which opened inward.

Things were, then, just as he had left them, and no one had noticed the theft of the key.

After assuring himself that nobody happened to be in the neighborhood of the pavilion the captain entered, followed by his men. The door was left wide open, so that they could beat a hurried and uninterrupted retreat in case of necessity. The trees and bushes in this shady part of the park were very thick, and it was so dark that it would not have been easy to distinguish the pavilion had not a light shone

brightly in one of the windows.

No doubt this was the window of the room occupied by Roch and his guardian, Gaydon, seeing that the latter never left the patient placed in his charge either by night or day. Captain Spade had expected to find him there.

The party approached cautiously, taking the utmost precaution to avoid kicking a pebble or stepping on a twig, the noise of which might have revealed their presence. In this way they reached the door of the pavilion near which was the curtained window of the room in which the light was burning.

But if the door was locked, how were they going to get in? Captain Spade must have asked himself. He had no key, and to attempt to effect an entrance through the window would be hazardous, for, unless Gaydon could be prevented from giving the alarm, he would rouse the whole establishment.

There was no help for it, however. The essential was to get possession of Roch. If they could kidnap Gaydon, too, in conformity with the intentions of the Count d'Artigas, so much the better. If not—

Captain Spade crept stealthily to the window, and standing on tiptoe, looked in. Through an aperture in the curtain he could see all over the room.

Gaydon was standing beside Thomas Roch, who had not yet recovered from the fit with which he had been attacked during the Count d'Artigas' visit. His condition necessitated special attention, and the warder was ministering to the patient under the direction of a third person.

The latter was one of the doctors attached to Healthful House, and had been at once sent to the pavilion by the director when Roch's paroxysm came on. His presence of course rendered the situation more complicated and the work of the kidnappers more difficult.

Roch, fully dressed, was extended upon a sofa. He was now fairly calm. The paroxysm, which was abating, would be followed by several hours of torpor and

exhaustion.

Just as Captain Spade peeped through the window the doctor was making preparations to leave. The Captain heard him say to Gaydon that his (the doctor's) presence was not likely to be required any more that night, and that there was nothing to be done beyond following the instructions he had given.

The doctor then walked towards the door, which, it will be remembered, was close to the window in front of which Spade and his men were standing. If they remained where they were they could not fail to be seen, not only by the doctor, but by the warder, who was accompanying him to the door.

Before they made their appearance, however, the sailors, at a sign from their chief, had dispersed and hidden themselves behind the bushes, while Spade himself crouched in the shadow beneath the window. Luckily Gaydon had not brought the lamp with him, so that the captain was in no danger of being seen.

As he was about to take leave of Gaydon, the doctor stopped on the step and remarked:

"This is one of the worst attacks our patient has had. One or two more like that and he will lose the little reason he still possesses."

"Just so," said Gaydon. "I wonder that the director doesn't prohibit all visitors from entering the pavilion. Roch owes his present attack to a Count d'Artigas, for whose amusement harmful questions were put to him."

"I will call the director's attention to the matter," responded the doctor.

He then descended the steps and Gaydon, leaving the door of the pavilion ajar, accompanied him to the end of the path.

When they had gone Captain Spade stood up, and his men rejoined him.

Had they not better profit by the chance thus unexpectedly afforded them to enter the room and secure Roch, who was in a semi-comatose condition, and then await

Gaydon's return, and seize the warder as he entered?

This would have involved considerable risk. Gaydon, at a glance, would perceive that his patient was missing and raise an alarm; the doctor would come running back; the whole staff of Healthful House would turn out, and Spade would not have time to escape with his precious prisoner and lock the door in the wall after him.

He did not have much chance to deliberate about it, for the warder was heard returning along the gravel path. Spade decided that the best thing to be done was to spring upon him as he passed and stifle his cries and overpower him before he could attempt to offer any resistance. The carrying off of the mad inventor would be easy enough, inasmuch as he was unconscious, and could not raise a finger to help himself.

Gaydon came round a clump of bushes and approached the entrance to the pavilion. As he raised his foot to mount the steps the four sailors sprang upon him, bore him backwards to the ground, and had gagged him, securely bound him hand and foot, and bandaged his eyes before he began to realize what had happened.

Two of the men then kept guard over him, while Captain Spade and the others entered the house.

As the captain had surmised, Thomas Roch had sunk into such a torpor that he could have heard nothing of what had been going on outside. Reclining at full length, with his eyes closed, he might have been taken for a dead man but for his heavy breathing. There was no need either to bind or gag him. One man took him by the head and another by the feet and started off with him to the schooner.

Captain Spade was the last to quit the house after extinguishing the lamp and closing the door behind him. In this way there was no reason to suppose that the inmates would be missed before morning.

Gaydon was carried off in the same way as Thomas Roch had been. The two remaining sailors lifted him and bore him quietly but rapidly down the path to the

door in the wall. The park was pitch dark. Not even a glimmer of the lights in the windows of Healthful House could be seen through the thick foliage.

Arrived at the wall, Spade, who had led the way, stepped aside to allow the sailors with their burdens to pass through, then followed and closed and locked the door. He put the key in his pocket, intending to throw it into the Neuse as soon as they were safely on board the schooner.

There was no one on the road, nor on the bank of the river.

The party made for the boat, and found that Effrondat, the boatswain, had made all ready to receive them.

Thomas Roch and Gaydon were laid in the bottom of the boat, and the sailors again took their places at the oars.

“Hurry up, Effrondat, and cast off the painter,” ordered the captain.

The boatswain obeyed, and pushed the boat off with his foot as he scrambled in.

The men bent to their oars and rowed rapidly to the schooner, which was easily distinguishable, having hung out a light at her mizzenmast head.

In two minutes they were alongside.

The Count d’Artigas was leaning on the bulwarks by the gangway.

“All right, Spade?” he questioned.

“Yes, sir, all right!”

“Both of them?”

“Both the madman and his keeper.”

“Doesn’t anybody know about it up at Healthful House?

“Not a soul.”

It was not likely that Gaydon, whose eyes and ears were bandaged, but who preserved all his sang-froid, could have recognized the voices of the Count d’Artigas

and Captain Spade. Nor did he have the chance to. No attempt was immediately made to hoist him on board. He had been lying in the bottom of the boat alongside the schooner for fully half an hour, he calculated, before he felt himself lifted, and then lowered, doubtless to the bottom of the hold.

The kidnapping having been accomplished it would seem that it only remained for the Ebba to weigh anchor, descend the estuary and make her way out to sea through Pamlico Sound. Yet no preparations for departure were made.

Was it not dangerous to stay where they were after their daring raid? Had the Count d'Artigas hidden his prisoners so securely as to preclude the possibility of their being discovered if the Ebba, whose presence in proximity to Healthful House could not fail to excite suspicion, received a visit from the New-Berne police?

However this might have been, an hour after the return of the expedition, every soul on board save the watch—the Count d'Artigas, Serko, and Captain Spade in their respective cabins, and the crew in the fore-castle, were sound asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCHOONER EBBA.

It was not till the next morning, and then very leisurely, that the Ebba began to make preparations for her departure. From the extremity of New-Berne quay the crew might have been seen holystoning the deck, after which they loosened the reef lines, under the direction of Effrondat, the boatswain, hoisted in the boats and cleared the halyards.

At eight o'clock the Count d'Artigas had not yet appeared on deck. His companion, Serko the engineer, as he was called on board, had not quitted his cabin. Captain Spade was strolling quietly about giving orders.

The Ebba would have made a splendid racing yacht, though she had never participated in any of the yacht races either on the North American or British coasts. The height of her masts, the extent of the canvas she carried, her shapely, raking

hull, denoted her to be a craft of great speed, and her general lines showed that she was also built to weather the roughest gales at sea. In a favorable wind she would probably make twelve knots an hour.

Notwithstanding these advantages, however, she must in a dead calm necessarily suffer from the same disadvantages as other sailing vessels, and it might have been supposed that the Count d'Artigas would have preferred a steam-yacht with which he could have gone anywhere, at any time, in any weather. But apparently he was satisfied to stick to the old method, even when he made his long trips across the Atlantic.

On this particular morning the wind was blowing gently from the west, which was very favorable to the Ebba, and would enable her to stand straight out of the Neuse, across Pamlico Sound, and through one of the inlets that led to the open sea.

At ten o'clock the Ebba was still rocking lazily at anchor, her stem up stream and her cable tautened by the rapidly ebbing tide. The small buoy that on the previous evening had been moored near the schooner was no longer to be seen, and had doubtless been hoisted in.

Suddenly a gun boomed out and a slight wreath of white smoke arose from the battery. It was answered by other reports from the guns on the chain of islands along the coast.

At this moment the Count d'Artigas and Engineer Serko appeared on deck. Captain Spade went to meet them.

"Guns barking," he said laconically.

"We expected it," replied Serko, shrugging his shoulders. "They are signals to close the passes."

"What has that to do with us?" asked the Count d'Artigas quietly.

"Nothing at all," said the engineer.

They all, of course, knew that the alarm-guns indicated that the disappearance of Thomas Roch and the warder Gaydon from Healthful House had been discovered.

At daybreak the doctor had gone to Pavilion No. 17 to see how his patient had passed the night, and had found no one there. He immediately notified the director, who had the grounds thoroughly searched. It was then discovered that the door in rear of the park was unbolted, and that, though locked, the key had been taken away. It was evident that Roch and his attendant had been carried out that way. But who were the kidnappers? No one could possibly imagine. All that could be ascertained was that at half-past seven on the previous night one of the doctors had attended Thomas Roch, who was suffering from one of his fits, and that when the medical man had left him the invalid was in an unconscious condition. What had happened after the doctor took leave of Gaydon at the end of the garden-path could not even be conjectured.

The news of the disappearance was telegraphed to New Berne, and thence to Raleigh. On receipt of it the Governor had instantly wired orders that no vessel was to be allowed to quit Pamlico Sound without having been first subjected to a most rigorous search. Another dispatch ordered the cruiser Falcon, which was stationed in the port, to carry out the Governor’s instructions in this respect. At the same time measures were taken to keep a strict lookout in every town and village in the State.

The Count d’Artigas could see the Falcon, which was a couple of miles away to the east in the estuary, getting steam up and making hurried preparations to carry out her mission. It would take at least an hour before the warship could be got ready to steam out, and the schooner might by that time have gained a good start.

“Shall I weigh anchor?” demanded Captain Spade.

“Yes, as we have a fair wind; but you can take your time about it,” replied the Count d’Artigas.

“The passes of Pamlico Sound will be under observation,” observed Engineer Serko,

“and no vessel will be able to get out without receiving a visit from gentlemen as inquisitive as they will be indiscreet.”

“Never mind, get under way all the same,” ordered the Count. “When the officers of the cruiser or the Custom-House officers have been over the Ebba the embargo will be raised. I shall be indeed surprised if we are not allowed to go about our business.”

“With a thousand pardons for the liberty taken, and best wishes for a good voyage and speedy return,” chuckled Engineer Serko, following the phrase with a loud and prolonged laugh.

When the news was received at New-Berne, the authorities at first were puzzled to know whether the missing inventor and his keeper had fled or been carried off. As, however, Roch’s flight could not have taken place without the connivance of Gaydon, this supposition was speedily abandoned. In the opinion of the director and management of Healthful House the warder was absolutely above suspicion. They must both, then, have been kidnapped.

It can easily be imagined what a sensation the news caused in the town. What! the French inventor who had been so closely guarded had disappeared, and with him the secret of the wonderful fulgurator that nobody had been able to worm out of him? Might not the most serious consequences follow? Might not the discovery of the new engine be lost to America forever? If the daring act had been perpetrated on behalf of another nation, might not that nation, having Thomas Roch in its power, be eventually able to extract from him what the Federal Government had vainly endeavored to obtain? And was it reasonable, was it permissible, to suppose for an instant that he had been carried off for the benefit of a private individual?

Certainly not, was the emphatic reply to the latter question, which was too ridiculous to be entertained. Therefore the whole power of the State was employed in an effort to recover the inventor. In every county of North Carolina a special surveillance was organized on every road and at every railroad station, and every house in town and

country was searched. Every port from Wilmington to Norfolk was closed, and no craft of any description could leave without being thoroughly overhauled. Not only the cruiser Falcon, but every available cutter and launch was sent out with orders to patrol Pamlico Sound and board yachts, merchant vessels and fishing smacks indiscriminately whether anchored or not and search them down to the keelson.

Still the crew of the Ebba prepared calmly to weigh anchor, and the Count d'Artigas did not appear to be in the least concerned at the orders of the authorities and at the consequences that would ensue, if Thomas Roch and his keeper, Gaydon, were found on board.

At last all was ready, the crew manned the capstan bars, the sails were hoisted, and the schooner glided gracefully through the water towards the Sound.

Twenty miles from New-Berne the estuary curves abruptly and shoots off towards the northwest for about the same distance, gradually widening until it empties itself into Pamlico Sound.

The latter is a vast expanse about seventy miles across from Swan Island to Roanoke. On the seaward side stretches a chain of long and narrow islands, forming a natural breakwater north and south from Cape Lookout to Cape Hatteras and from the latter to Cape Henry, near Norfolk City, in Virginia.

Numerous beacons on the islands and islets form an easy guide for vessels at night seeking refuge from the Atlantic gales, and once inside the chain they are certain of finding plenty of good anchoring grounds.

Several passes afford an outlet from the Sound to the sea. Beyond Swan Island lighthouse is Ocracoke inlet, and next is the inlet of Hatteras. There are also three others known as Logger Head inlet, New inlet, and Oregon inlet. The Ocracoke was the one nearest the Ebba, and she could make it without tacking, but the Falcon was searching all vessels that passed through. This did not, however, make any particular difference, for by this time all the passes, upon which the guns of the forts had been

trained, were guarded by government vessels.

The Ebba, therefore, kept on her way, neither trying to avoid nor offering to approach the searchers. She seemed to be merely a pleasure-yacht out for a morning sail.

No attempt had up to that time been made to accost her. Was she, then, specially privileged, and to be spared the bother of being searched? Was the Count d'Artigas considered too high and mighty a personage to be thus molested, and delayed even for an hour? It was unlikely, for though he was regarded as a distinguished foreigner who lived the life of luxury enjoyed by the favored of fortune, no one, as a matter of fact, knew who he was, nor whence he came, nor whither he was going.

The schooner sped gracefully over the calm waters of the sound, her flag—a gold crescent in the angle of a red field—streaming proudly in the breeze. Count d'Artigas was cosily ensconced in a basket-work chair on the after-deck, conversing with Engineer Serko and Captain Spade.

"They don't seem in a hurry to board us," remarked Serko.

"They can come whenever they think proper," said the Count in a tone of supreme indifference.

"No doubt they are waiting for us at the entrance to the inlet," suggested Captain Spade.

"Let them wait," grunted the wealthy nobleman.

Then he relapsed into his customary unconcerned impassibility.

Captain Spade's hypothesis was doubtless correct. The Falcon had as yet made no move towards the schooner, but would almost certainly do so as soon as the latter reached the inlet, and the Count would have to submit to a search of his vessel if he wished to reach the open sea.

How was it then that he manifested such extraordinary unconcern? Were Thomas

Roch and Gaydon so safely hidden that their hiding-place could not possibly be discovered?

The thing was possible, but perhaps the Count d'Artigas would not have been quite so confident had he been aware that the Ebba had been specially signalled to the warship and revenue cutters as a suspect.

The Count's visit to Healthful House on the previous day had now attracted particular attention to him and his schooner. Evidently, at the time, the director could have had no reason to suspect the motive of his visit. But a few hours later, Thomas Roch and his keeper had been carried off. No one else from outside had been near the pavilion that day. It was admitted that it would have been an easy matter for the Count's companion, while the former distracted the director's attention, to push back the bolts of the door in the wall and steal the key. Then the fact that the Ebba was anchored in rear of, and only a few hundred yards from, the estate, was in itself suspicious. Nothing would have been easier for the desperadoes than to enter by the door, surprise their victims, and carry them off to the schooner.

These suspicions, neither the director nor the personnel of the establishment had at first liked to give expression to, but when the Ebba was seen to weigh anchor and head for the open sea, they appeared to be confirmed.

They were communicated to the authorities of New-Berne, who immediately ordered the commander of the Falcon to intercept the schooner, to search her minutely high and low, and from stem to stern, and on no account to let her proceed, unless he was absolutely certain that Roch and Gaydon were not on board.

Assuredly the Count d'Artigas could have had no idea that his vessel was the object of such stringent orders; but even if he had, it is questionable whether this superbly haughty and disdainful nobleman would have manifested any particular anxiety.

Towards three o'clock, the warship which was cruising before the inlet, after having sent search parties aboard a few fishing-smacks, suddenly manoeuvred to the

entrance of the pass, and awaited the approaching schooner. The latter surely did not imagine that she could force a passage in spite of the cruiser, or escape from a vessel propelled by steam. Besides, had she attempted such a foolhardy trick, a couple of shots from the Falcon's guns would speedily have constrained her to lay to.

Presently a boat, manned by two officers and ten sailors, put off from the cruiser and rowed towards the Ebba. When they were only about half a cable's length off, one of the men rose and waved a flag.

"That's a signal to stop," said Engineer Serko.

"Precisely," remarked the Count d'Artigas.

"We shall have to lay to."

"Then lay to."

Captain Spade went forward and gave the necessary orders, and in a few minutes the vessel slackened speed, and was soon merely drifting with the tide.

The Falcon's boat pulled alongside, and a man in the bows held on to her with a boat-hook. The gangway was lowered by a couple of hands on the schooner, and the two officers, followed by eight of their men, climbed on deck.

They found the crew of the Ebba drawn up in line on the forecastle.

The officer in command of the boarding-party—a first lieutenant—advanced towards the owner of the schooner, and the following questions and answers were exchanged:

"This schooner belongs to the Count d'Artigas, to whom, I presume, I have the honor of speaking?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is her name?"

"The Ebba."

"She is commanded by?—"

“Captain Spade.”

“What is his nationality?”

“Hindo-Malay.”

The officer scrutinized the schooner’s flag, while the Count d’Artigas added:

“Will you be good enough to tell me, sir, to what circumstance I owe the pleasure of your visit on board my vessel?”

“Orders have been received,” replied the officer, “to search every vessel now anchored in Pamlico Sound, or which attempts to leave it.”

He did not deem it necessary to insist upon this point since the Ebba, above every other, was to be subjected to the bother of a rigorous examination.

“You, of course, sir, have no intention of refusing me permission to go over your schooner?”

“Assuredly not, sir. My vessel is at your disposal from peaks to bilges. Only I should like to know why all the vessels which happen to be in Pamlico Sound to-day are being subjected to this formality.”

“I see no reason why you should not be informed, Monsieur the Count,” replied the officer. “The governor of North Carolina has been apprised that Healthful House has been broken into and two persons kidnapped, and the authorities merely wish to satisfy themselves that the persons carried off have not been embarked during the night.”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed the Count, feigning surprise. “And who are the persons who have thus disappeared from Healthful House?”

“An inventor—a madman—and his keeper.”

“A madman, sir? Do you, may I ask, refer to the Frenchman, Thomas Roch?”

“The same.”

“The Thomas Roch whom I saw yesterday during my visit to the

establishment—whom I questioned in presence of the director—who was seized with a violent paroxysm just as Captain Spade and I were leaving?"

The officer observed the stranger with the keenest attention, in an effort to surprise anything suspicious in his attitude or remarks.

"It is incredible!" added the Count, as though he had just heard about the outrage for the first time.

"I can easily understand, sir, how uneasy the authorities must be," he went on, "in view of Thomas Roch's personality, and I cannot but approve of the measures taken. I need hardly say that neither the French inventor nor his keeper is on board the Ebba. However, you can assure yourself of the fact by examining the schooner as minutely as you desire. Captain Spade, show these gentlemen over the vessel."

Then saluting the lieutenant of the Falcon coldly, the Count d'Artigas sank into his deck-chair again and replaced his cigar between his lips, while the two officers and eight sailors, conducted by Captain Spade, began their search.

In the first place they descended the main hatchway to the after saloon—a luxuriously-appointed place, filled with art objects of great value, hung with rich tapestries and hangings, and wainscotted with costly woods.

It goes without saying that this and the adjoining cabins were searched with a care that could not have been surpassed by the most experienced detectives. Moreover, Captain Spade assisted them by every means in his power, obviously anxious that they should not preserve the slightest suspicion of the Ebba's owner.

After the grand saloon and cabins, the elegant dining-saloon was visited. Then the cook's galley, Captain Spade's cabin, and the quarters of the crew in the forecastle were overhauled, but no sign of Thomas Roch or Gaydon was to be seen.

Next, every inch of the hold, etc., was examined, with the aid of a couple of lanterns. Water-kegs, wine, brandy, whisky and beer barrels, biscuit-boxes, in fact, all the provision boxes and everything the hold contained, including the stock of coal, was

moved and probed, and even the bilges were scrutinized, but all in vain.

Evidently the suspicion that the Count d'Artigas had carried off the missing men was unfounded and unjust. Even a rat could not have escaped the notice of the vigilant searchers, leave alone two men.

When they returned on deck, however, the officers, as a matter of precaution looked into the boats hanging on the davits, and punched the lowered sails, with the same result.

It only remained for them, therefore, to take leave of the Count d'Artigas.

"You must pardon us for having disturbed you, Monsieur the Count," said the lieutenant.

"You were compelled to obey your orders, gentlemen."

"It was merely a formality, of course," ventured the officer.

By a slight inclination of the head the Count signified that he was quite willing to accept this euphemism.

"I assure you, gentlemen, that I have had no hand in this kidnapping."

"We can no longer believe so, Monsieur the Count, and will withdraw."

"As you please. Is the Ebba now free to proceed?"

"Certainly."

"Then au revoir, gentlemen, au revoir, for I am an habitué of this coast and shall soon be back again. I hope that ere my return you will have discovered the author of the outrage, and have Thomas Roch safely back in Healthful House. It is a consummation devoutly to be wished in the interest of the United States—I might even say of the whole world."

The two officers courteously saluted the Count, who responded with a nod. Captain Spade accompanied them to the gangway, and they were soon making for the cruiser, which had steamed near to pick them up.

Meanwhile the breeze had freshened considerably, and when, at a sign from d'Artigas, Captain Spade set sail again, the Ebba skimmed swiftly through the inlet, and half an hour after was standing out to sea.

For an hour she continued steering east-northeast, and then, the wind, being merely a land breeze, dropped, and the schooner lay becalmed, her sails limp, and her flag drooping like a wet rag. It seemed that it would be impossible for the vessel to continue her voyage that night unless a breeze sprang up, and of this there was no sign.

Since the schooner had cleared the inlet Captain Spade had stood in the bows gazing into the water, now to port, now to starboard, as if on the lookout for something. Presently he shouted in a stentorian voice:

"Furl sail!"

The sailors rushed to their posts, and in an instant the sails came rattling down and were furled.

Was it Count d'Artigas' intention to wait there till daybreak brought a breeze with it? Presumably, or the sails would have remained hoisted to catch the faintest puff.

A boat was lowered and Captain Spade jumped into it, accompanied by a sailor, who paddled it towards an object that was floating on the water a few yards away.

This object was a small buoy, similar to that which had floated on the bosom of the Neuse when the Ebba lay off Healthful House.

The buoy, with a towline affixed to it, was lifted into the boat that was then paddled to the bow of the Ebba, from the deck of which another hawser was cast to the captain, who made it fast to the towline of the buoy. Having dropped the latter overboard again, the captain and the sailor returned to the ship and the boat was hoisted in.

Almost immediately the hawser tautened, and the Ebba, though not a stitch of

canvas had been set, sped off in an easterly direction at a speed that could not have been less than ten knots an hour.

Night was falling fast, and soon the rapidly receding lights along the American coast were lost in the mist on the horizon.

CHAPTER V.

WHERE AM I?

(Notes by Simon Hart, the Engineer.)

Where am I? What has happened since the sudden aggression of which I was the victim near the pavilion?

I had just quitted the doctor, and was about to mount the steps, close the door and resume my post beside Thomas Roch when several men sprang upon me and knocked me down. Who are they? My eyes having been bandaged I was unable to recognize them. I could not cry for help, having been gagged. I could make no resistance, for they had bound me hand and foot. Thus powerless, I felt myself lifted and carried about one hundred paces, then hoisted, then lowered, then laid down.

Where? Where?

And Thomas Roch, what has become of him? It must have been he rather than I they were after. I was but Gaydon, the warder. None suspected that I was Simon Hart, the engineer, nor could they have suspected my nationality. Why, therefore, should they have desired to kidnap a mere hospital attendant?

There can consequently be no doubt that the French inventor has been carried off; and if he was snatched from Healthful House it must have been in the hope of forcing his secret from him.

But I am reasoning on the supposition that Thomas Roch was carried off with me. Is it so? Yes—it must be—it is. I can entertain no doubt whatever about it. I have not fallen into the hands of malefactors whose only intention is robbery. They would not

have acted in this way. After rendering it impossible for me to cry out, after having thrown me into a clump of bushes in the corner of the garden, after having kidnapped Thomas Roch they would not have shut me up—where I now am.

Where? This is the question which I have been asking myself for hours without being able to answer it.

However, one thing is certain, and that is that I have embarked upon an extraordinary adventure, that will end?—In what manner I know not—I dare not even imagine what the upshot of it will be. Anyhow, it is my intention to commit to memory, minute by minute, the least circumstance, and then, if it be possible, to jot down my daily impressions. Who knows what the future has in store for me? And who knows but what, in my new position, I may finally discover the secret of Roth's fulgurator? If I am to be delivered one day, this secret must be made known, as well as who is the author, or who are the authors, of this criminal outrage, which may be attended with such serious consequences.

I continually revert to this question, hoping that some incident will occur to enlighten me:

Where am I?

Let me begin from the beginning.

After having been carried by the head and feet from Healthful House, I felt that I was laid, without any brutality, I must admit, upon the stretchers of a row-boat of small dimensions.

The rocking caused by the weight of my body was succeeded shortly afterwards by a further rocking—which I attribute to the embarking of a second person. Can there be room for doubt that it was Thomas Roch? As far as he was concerned they would not have had to take the precaution of gagging him, or of bandaging his eyes, or of binding him. He must still have been in a state of prostration which precluded the possibility of his making any resistance, or even of being conscious of what was

being done. The proof that I am not deceiving myself is that I could smell the unmistakable odor of ether. Now, yesterday, before taking leave of us, the doctor administered a few drops of ether to the invalid and—I remember distinctly—a little of this extremely volatile substance fell upon his clothing while he was struggling in his fit. There is therefore nothing astonishing in the fact that this odor should have clung to him, nor that I should have distinguished it, even beneath the bandages that covered my face.

Yes, Thomas Roch was extended near me in the boat. And to think that had I not returned to the pavilion when I did, had I delayed a few minutes longer, I should have found him gone!

Let me think. What could have inspired that Count d'Artigas with the unfortunate curiosity to visit Healthful House? If he had not been allowed to see my patient nothing of the kind would have happened. Talking to Thomas Roch about his inventions brought on a fit of exceptional violence. The director is primarily to blame for not heeding my warning. Had he listened to me the doctor would not have been called upon to attend him, the door of the pavilion would have been locked, and the attempt of the band would have been frustrated.

As to the interest there could have been in carrying off Thomas Roch, either on behalf of a private person or of one of the states of the Old World, it is so evident that there is no need to dwell upon it. However, I can be perfectly easy about the result. No one can possibly succeed in learning what for fifteen months I have been unable to ascertain. In the condition of intellectual collapse into which my fellow-countryman has fallen, all attempts to force his secret from him will be futile. Moreover, he is bound to go from bad to worse until he is hopelessly insane, even as regards those points upon which he has hitherto preserved his reason intact.

After all, however, it is less about Thomas Roch than myself that I must think just now, and this is what I have experienced, to resume the thread of my adventure

where I dropped it:

After more rocking caused by our captors jumping into it, the boat is rowed off. The distance must be very short, for a minute after we bumped against something. I surmise that this something must be the hull of a ship, and that we have run alongside. There is some scurrying and excitement. Indistinctly through my bandages I can hear orders being given and a confused murmur of voices that lasts for about five minutes, but I cannot distinguish a word that is said.

The only thought that occurs to me now is that they will hoist me on board and lower me to the bottom of the hold and keep me there till the vessel is far out at sea. Obviously they will not allow either Thomas Roch or his keeper to appear on deck as long as she remains in Pamlico Sound.

My conjecture is correct. Still gagged and bound I am at last lifted by the legs and shoulders. My impression, however, is that I am not being raised over a ship’s bulwark, but on the contrary am being lowered. Are they going to drop me overboard to drown like a rat, so as to get rid of a dangerous witness? This thought flashes into my brain, and a quiver of anguish passes through my body from head to foot. Instinctively I draw a long breath, and my lungs are filled with the precious air they will speedily lack.

No, there is no immediate cause for alarm. I am laid with comparative gentleness upon a hard floor, which gives me the sensation of metallic coldness. I am lying at full length. To my extreme surprise, I find that the ropes with which I was bound have been untied and loosened. The tramping about around me has ceased. The next instant I hear a door closed with a bang.

Where am I? And, in the first place, am I alone? I tear the gag from my mouth, and the bandages from my head.

It is dark—pitch dark. Not a ray of light, not even the vague perception of light that the eyes preserve when the lids are tightly closed.

I shout—I shout repeatedly. No response. My voice is smothered. The air I breathe is hot, heavy, thick, and the working of my lungs will become difficult, impossible, unless the store of air is renewed.

I extend my arms and feel about me, and this is what I conclude:

I am in a compartment with sheet-iron walls, which cannot measure more than four cubic yards. I can feel that the walls are of bolted plates, like the sides of a ship's water-tight compartment.

I can feel that the entrance to it is by a door on one side, for the hinges protrude somewhat. This door must open inwards, and it is through here, no doubt, that I was carried in.

I place my ear to the door, but not a sound can be heard. The silence is as profound as the obscurity—a strange silence that is only broken by the sonorousness of the metallic floor when I move about. None of the dull noises usually to be heard on board a ship is perceptible, not even the rippling of the water along the hull. Nor is there the slightest movement to be felt; yet, in the estuary of the Neuse, the current is always strong enough, to cause a marked oscillation to any vessel.

But does the compartment in which I am confined, really belong to a ship? How do I know that I am afloat on the Neuse, though I was conveyed a short distance in a boat? Might not the latter, instead of heading for a ship in waiting for it, opposite Healthful House, have been rowed to a point further down the river? In this case is it not possible that I was carried into the cellar of a house? This would explain the complete immobility of the compartment. It is true that the walls are of bolted plates, and that there is a vague smell of salt water, that odor sui generis which generally pervades the interior of a ship, and which there is no mistaking.

An interval, which I estimate at about four hours, must have passed since my incarceration. It must therefore be near midnight. Shall I be left here in this way till morning? Luckily, I dined at six o'clock, which is the regular dinner-hour at

Healthful House. I am not suffering from hunger. In fact I feel more inclined to sleep than to eat. Still, I hope I shall have energy enough to resist the inclination. I will not give way to it. I must try and find out what is going on outside. But neither sound nor light can penetrate this iron box. Wait a minute, though; perhaps by listening intently I may hear some sound, however feeble. Therefore I concentrate all my vital power in my sense of hearing. Moreover, I try—in case I should really not be on terra firma—to distinguish some movement, some oscillation of my prison. Admitting that the ship is still at anchor, it cannot be long before it will start—otherwise I shall have to give up imagining why Thomas Roch and I have been carried off.

At last—it is no illusion—a slight rolling proves to me, beyond a doubt, that I am not on land. We are evidently moving, but the motion is scarcely perceptible. It is not a jerky, but rather a gliding movement, as though we were skimming through the water without effort, on an even keel.

Let me consider the matter calmly. I am on board a vessel that was anchored in the Neuse, waiting under sail or steam, for the result of the expedition. A boat brought me aboard, but, I repeat, I did not feel that I was lifted over her bulwarks. Was I passed through a porthole? But after all, what does it matter? Whether I was lowered into the hold or not, I am certainly upon something that is floating and moving.

No doubt I shall soon be let out, together with Thomas Roch, supposing them to have locked him up as carefully as they have me. By being let out, I mean being accorded permission to go on deck. It will not be for some hours to come, however, that is certain, for they won’t want us to be seen, so that there is no chance of getting a whiff of fresh air till we are well out at sea. If it is a sailing vessel, she must have waited for a breeze—for the breeze that freshens off shore at daybreak, and is favorable to ships navigating Pamlico Sound.

It certainly cannot be a steamer. I could not have failed to smell the oil and other

odors of the engine-room. And then I should feel the trembling of the machinery, the jerks of the pistons, and the movements of the screws or paddles.

The best thing to do is to wait patiently. I shan't be taken out of this hole until to-morrow, anyway. Moreover, if I am not released, somebody will surely bring me something to eat. There is no reason to suppose that they intend to starve me to death. They wouldn't have taken the trouble to bring me aboard, but would have dropped me to the bottom of the river had they been desirous of getting rid of me. Once we are out at sea, what will they have to fear from me? No one could hear my shouts. As to demanding an explanation and making a fuss, it would be useless. Besides, what am I to the men who have carried us off? A mere hospital attendant—one Gaydon, who is of no consequence. It is Thomas Roch they were after. I was taken along too because I happened to return to the pavilion at the critical moment.

At any rate, no matter what happens, no matter who our kidnappers may be, no matter where we are taken, I shall stick to this resolution: I will continue to play my role of warder. No one, no! none, can suspect that Gaydon is Simon Hart, the engineer. There are two advantages in this: in the first place, they will take no notice of a poor devil of a warder, and in the second, I may be able to solve the mystery surrounding this plot and turn my knowledge to profit, if I succeed in making my escape.

But whither are my thoughts wandering? I must perforce wait till we arrive at our destination before thinking of escaping. It will be time enough to bother about that when the occasion presents itself. Until then the essential is that they remain ignorant as to my identity, and they cannot, and shall not, know who I am.

I am now certain that we are going through the water. But there is one thing that puzzles me. It is not a sailing vessel, neither can it be a steamer. Yet it is incontestably propelled by some powerful machine. There are none of the noises,

nor is there the trembling that accompanies the working of steam engines. The movement of the vessel is more continuous and regular, it is a sort of direct rotation that is communicated by the motor, whatever the latter may be. No mistake is possible: the ship is propelled by some special mechanism. But what is it?

Is it one of those turbines that have been spoken of lately, which, fitted into a submerged tube, are destined to replace the ordinary screw, it being claimed that they utilize the resistance of the water better than the latter and give increased speed to a ship?

In a few hours' time I shall doubtless know all about this means of locomotion.

Meanwhile there is another thing that equally puzzles me. There is not the slightest rolling or pitching. How is it that Pamlico Sound is so extraordinarily calm? The varying currents continuously ruffle the surface of the Sound, even if nothing else does.

It is true the tide may be out, and I remember that last night the wind had fallen altogether. Still, no matter, the thing is inexplicable, for a ship propelled by machinery, no matter at what speed she may be going, always oscillates more or less, and I cannot perceive the slightest rocking.

Such are the thoughts with which my mind is persistently filled. Despite an almost overpowering desire to sleep, despite the torpor that is coming upon me in this suffocating atmosphere, I am resolved not to close my eyes. I will keep awake till daylight, and there will be no daylight for me till it is let into my prison from the outside. Perhaps even if the door were open it would not penetrate to this black hole, and I shall probably not see it again until I am taken on deck.

I am squatting in a corner of my prison, for I have no stool or anything to sit upon, but as my eyelids are heavy and I feel somnolent in spite of myself, I get up and walk about. Then I wax wrathful, anger fills my soul, I beat upon the iron walls with my fists, and shout for help. In vain! I hurt my hands against the bolts of the plates,

and no one answers my cries.

Such conduct is unworthy of me. I flattered myself that I would remain calm under all circumstances and here I am acting like a child.

The absence of any rolling or lurching movement at least proves that we are not yet at sea. Instead of crossing Pamlico Sound, may we not be going in the opposite direction, up the River Neuse? No! What would they go further inland for? If Thomas Roch has been carried off from Healthful House, his captors obviously mean to take him out of the United States—probably to a distant island in the Atlantic, or to some point on the European continent. It is, therefore, not up the Neuse that our maritime machine, whatever it may be, is going, but across Pamlico Sound, which must be as calm as a mirror.

Very well, then, when we get to sea I shall soon, know, for the vessel will rock right enough in the swell off shore, even though there be no wind,—unless I am aboard a battleship, or big cruiser, and this I fancy can hardly be!

But hark! If I mistake not—no, it was not imagination—I hear footsteps. Some one is approaching the side of the compartment where the door is. One of the crew no doubt. Are they going to let me out at last? I can now hear voices. A conversation is going on outside the door, but it is carried on in a language that I do not understand. I shout to them—I shout again, but no answer is vouchsafed.

There is nothing to do, then, but wait, wait, wait! I keep repeating the word and it rings in my ears like a bell.

Let me try to calculate how long I have been here. The ship must have been under way for at least four or five hours. I reckon it must be past midnight, but I cannot tell, for unfortunately my watch is of no use to me in this Cimmerian darkness.

Now, if we have been going for five hours, we must have cleared Pamlico Sound, whether we issued by Ocracoke or Hatteras inlet, and must be off the coast a good mile, at least. Yet I haven’t felt any motion from the swell of the sea.

It is inexplicable, incredible! Come now, have I made a mistake? Am I the dupe of an illusion? Am I not imprisoned in the hold of a ship under way?

Another hour has passed and the movement of the ship suddenly ceases; I realize perfectly that she is stationary. Has she reached her destination? In this event we can only be in one of the coast ports to the north or south of Pamlico Sound. But why should Thomas Roch be landed again? The abduction must soon have been discovered, and our kidnappers would run the greatest risk of falling into the hands of the authorities if they attempted to disembark.

However this may be, if the vessel is coming to anchor I shall hear the noise of the chain as it is paid out, and feel the jerk as the ship is brought up. I know that sound and that jerk well from experience, and I am bound to hear and feel them in a minute or two.

I wait—I listen.

A dead and disquieting silence reigns on board. I begin to wonder whether I am not the only living being in the ship.

Now I feel an irresistible torpor coming over me. The air is vitiated. I cannot breathe. My chest is bursting. I try to resist, but it is impossible to do so. The temperature rises to such a degree that I am compelled to divest myself of part of my clothing. Then I lie me down in a corner. My heavy eyelids close, and I sink into a prostration that eventually forces me into heavy slumber.

How long have I been asleep? I cannot say. Is it night? Is it day? I know not. I remark, however, that I breathe more easily, and that the air is no longer poisoned carbonic acid.

Was the air renewed while I slept? Has the door been opened? Has anybody been in here?

Yes, here is the proof of it!

In feeling about, my hand has come in contact with a mug filled with a liquid that exhales an inviting odor. I raise it to my lips, which, are burning, for I am suffering such an agony of thirst that I would even drink brackish water.

It is ale—an ale of excellent quality—which refreshes and comforts me, and I drain the pint to the last drop.

But if they have not condemned me to die of thirst, neither have they condemned me to die of hunger, I suppose?

No, for in one of the corners I find a basket, and this basket contains some bread and cold meat.

I fall to, eating greedily, and my strength little by little returns.

Decidedly, I am not so abandoned as I thought I was. Some one entered this obscure hole, and the open door admitted a little of the oxygen from the outside, without which I should have been suffocated. Then the wherewithal to quench my thirst and appease the pangs of hunger was placed within my reach.

How much longer will this incarceration last? Days? Months? I cannot estimate the hours that have elapsed since I fell asleep, nor have I any idea as to what time of the day or night it may be. I was careful to wind up my watch, though, and perhaps by feeling the hands—Yes, I think the little hand marks eight o'clock—in the morning, no doubt. What I do know, however, is that the ship is not in motion. There is not the slightest quiver.

Hours and hours, weary, interminable hours go by, and I wonder whether they are again waiting till night comes on to renew my stock of air and provisions. Yes, they are waiting to take advantage of my slumbers. But this time I am resolved to resist. I will feign to be asleep—and I shall know how to force an answer from whoever enters!

CHAPTER VI.

ON DECK.

Here I am in the open air, breathing freely once more. I have at last been hauled out of that stifling box and taken on deck. I gaze around me in every direction and see no sign of land. On every hand is that circular line which defines earth and sky. No, there is not even a speck of land to be seen to the west, where the coast of North America extends for thousands of miles.

The setting sun now throws but slanting rays upon the bosom of the ocean. It must be about six o'clock in the evening. I take out my watch and it marks thirteen minutes past six.

As I have already mentioned, I waited for the door of my prison to open, thoroughly resolved not to fall asleep again, but to spring upon the first person who entered and force him to answer my questions. I was not aware then that it was day, but it was, and hour after hour passed and no one came. I began to suffer again from hunger and thirst, for I had not preserved either bite or sup.

As soon as I awoke I felt that the ship was in motion again, after having, I calculated, remained stationary since the previous day—no doubt in some lonely creek, since I had not heard or felt her come to anchor.

A few minutes ago—it must therefore have been six o'clock—I again heard footsteps on the other side of the iron wall of my compartment. Was anybody coming to my cell? Yes, for I heard the creaking of the bolts as they were drawn back, and then the door opened, and the darkness in which I had been plunged since the first hour of my captivity was illumined by the light of a lantern.

Two men, whom I had no time to look at, entered and seized me by the arms. A thick cloth was thrown over my head, which was enveloped in such a manner that I could see absolutely nothing.

What did it all mean? What were they going to do with me? I struggled, but they held me in an iron grasp. I questioned them, but they made no reply. The men spoke

to each other in a language that I could not understand, and had never heard before.

They stood upon no ceremony with me. It is true I was only a madhouse warder, and they probably did not consider it necessary to do so; but I question very much whether Simon Hart, the engineer, would have received any more courtesy at their hands.

This time, however, no attempt was made to gag me nor to bind either my arms or legs. I was simply restrained by main force from breaking away from them.

In a moment I was dragged out of the compartment and pushed along a narrow passage. Next, the steps of a metallic stairway resounded under our feet. Then the fresh air blew in my face and I inhaled it with avidity.

Finally they took their hands from off me, and I found myself free. I immediately tore the cloth off my head and gazed about me.

I am on board a schooner which is ripping through the water at a great rate and leaving a long white trail behind her.

I had to clutch at one of the stays for support, dazzled as I was by the light after my forty-eight hours' imprisonment in complete obscurity.

On the deck a dozen men with rough, weather-beaten faces come and go—very dissimilar types of men, to whom it would be impossible to attribute any particular nationality. They scarcely take any notice of me.

As to the schooner, I estimate that she registers from two hundred and fifty to three hundred tons. She has a fairly wide beam, her masts are strong and lofty, and her large spread of canvas must carry her along at a spanking rate in a good breeze.

Aft, a grizzly-faced man is at the wheel, and he is keeping her head to the sea that is running pretty high.

I try to find out the name of the vessel, but it is not to be seen anywhere, even on the life-buoys.

I walk up to one of the sailors and inquire:

“What is the name of this ship?”

No answer, and I fancy the man does not understand me.

“Where is the captain?” I continue.

But the sailor pays no more heed to this than he did to the previous question.

I turn on my heel and go forward.

Above the forward hatchway a bell is suspended. Maybe the name of the schooner is engraved upon it. I examine it, but can find no name upon it.

I then return to the stern and address the man at the wheel. He gazes at me sourly, shrugs his shoulders, and bending, grasps the spokes of the wheel solidly, and brings the schooner, which had been headed off by a large wave from port, stem on to sea again.

Seeing that nothing is to be got from that quarter, I turn away and look about to see if I can find Thomas Roch, but I do not perceive him anywhere. Is he not on board? He must be. They could have had no reason for carrying me off alone. No one could have had any idea that I was Simon Hart, the engineer, and even had they known it what interest could they have had in me, and what could they expect of me?

Therefore, as Roch is not on deck, I conclude that he is locked in one of the cabins, and trust he has met with better treatment than his ex-guardian.

But what is this—and how on earth could I have failed to notice it before? How is this schooner moving? Her sails are furled—there is not an inch of canvas set—the wind has fallen, and the few puffs that occasionally come from the east are unfavorable, in view of the fact that we are going in that very direction. And yet the schooner speeds through the sea, her bows down, throwing off clouds of foam, and leaving a long, milky, undulating trail in her wake.

Is she a steam-yacht? No—there is not a smokestack about her. Is she propelled by

electricity—by a battery of accumulators, or by piles of great power that work her screw and send her along at this rate?

I can come to no other conclusion. In any case she must be fitted with a screw, and by leaning over the stern I shall be able to see it, and can find out what sets it working afterwards.

The man at the wheel watches me ironically as I approach, but makes no effort to prevent me from looking over.

I gaze long and earnestly, but there is no foaming and seething of the water such as is invariably caused by the revolutions of the screw—naught but the long white furrow that a sailing vessel leaves behind is discernible in the schooner's wake.

Then, what kind of a machine is it that imparts such a marvellous speed to the vessel? As I have already said, the wind is against her, and there is a heavy swell on.

I must—I will know. No one pays the slightest attention, and I again go forward.

As I approach the forecastle I find myself face to face with a man who is leaning nonchalantly on the raised hatchway and who is watching me. He seems to be waiting for me to speak to him.

I recognize him instantly. He is the person who accompanied the Count d'Artigas during the latter's visit to Healthful House. There can be no mistake—it is he right enough.

It was, then, that rich foreigner who abducted Thomas Roch, and I am on board the Ebba his schooner-yacht which is so well known on the American coast!

The man before me will enlighten me about what I want to know. I remember that he and the Count spoke English together.

I take him to be the captain of the schooner.

"Captain," I say, "you are the person I saw at Healthful House. You remember me, of course?"

He looks me up and down but does not condescend to reply.

“I am Warder Gaydon, the attendant of Thomas Roch,” I continue, “and I want to know why you have carried me off and placed me on board this schooner?”

The captain interrupts me with a sign. It is not made to me, however, but to some sailors standing near.

They catch me by the arms, and taking no notice of the angry movement that I cannot restrain, bundle me down the hatchway. The hatchway stair in reality, I remark, is a perpendicular iron ladder, at the bottom of which, to right and left, are some cabins, and forward, the men’s quarters.

Are they going to put me back in my dark prison at the bottom of the hold?

No. They turn to the left and push me into a cabin. It is lighted by a port-hole, which is open, and through which the fresh air comes in gusts from the briny. The furniture consists of a bunk, a chair, a chest of drawers, a wash-hand-stand and a table.

The latter is spread for dinner, and I sit down. Then the cook’s mate comes in with two or three dishes. He is a colored lad, and as he is about to withdraw, I try to question him, but he, too, vouchsafes no reply. Perhaps he doesn’t understand me.

The door is closed, and I fall to and eat with an excellent appetite, with the intention of putting off all further questioning till some future occasion when I shall stand a chance of getting answered.

It is true I am a prisoner, but this time I am comfortable enough, and I hope I shall be permitted to occupy this cabin for the remainder of the voyage, and not be lowered into that black hole again.

I now give myself up to my thoughts, the first of which is that it was the Count d’Artigas who planned the abduction; that it was he who is responsible for the kidnapping of Thomas Roch, and that consequently the French inventor must be just as comfortably installed somewhere on board the schooner.

But who is this Count d'Artigas? Where does he hail from? If he has seized Thomas Roch, is it not because he is determined to secure the secret of the fulgurator at no matter what cost? Very likely, and I must therefore be careful not to betray my identity, for if they knew the truth, I should never be afforded a chance to get away.

But what a lot of mysteries to clear up, how many inexplicable things to explain—the origin of this d'Artigas, his intentions as to the future, whither we are bound, the port to which the schooner belongs, and this mysterious progress through the water without sails and without screws, at a speed of at least ten knots an hour!

The air becoming keener as night deepens, I close and secure the port-hole, and as my cabin is bolted on the outside, the best thing I can do is to get into my bunk and let myself be gently rocked to sleep by the broad Atlantic in this mysterious cradle, the Ebba.

The next morning I rise at daybreak, and having performed my ablutions, dress myself and wait.

Presently the idea of trying the door occurs to me. I find that it has been unbolted, and pushing it open, climb the iron ladder and emerge on deck.

The crew are washing down the deck, and standing aft and conversing are two men, one of whom is the captain. The latter manifests no surprise at seeing me, and indicates my presence to his companion by a nod.

This other man, whom I have never before seen, is an individual of about fifty years of age, whose dark hair is streaked with gray. His features are delicately chiselled, his eyes are bright, and his expression is intelligent and not at all displeasing. He is somewhat of the Grecian type, and I have no doubt that he is of Hellenic origin when I hear him called Serko—Engineer Serko—by the Captain of the Ebba.

As to the latter, he is called Spade—Captain Spade—and this name has an Italian twang about it. Thus there is a Greek, an Italian, and a crew recruited from every corner of the earth to man a schooner with a Norwegian name! This mixture strikes

me as being suspicious.

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

Captain Spade and Engineer Serko continue to converse in a low tone of voice. The former is keeping a sharp eye on the man at the wheel, who does not appear to pay any particular attention to the compass in front of him. He seems to pay more heed to the gestures of one of the sailors stationed forward, and who signals to him to put the helm to port or to starboard.

Thomas Roch is near them, gazing vacantly out upon the vast expanse which is not limited on the horizon by a single speck of land. Two sailors watch his every movement. It is evidently feared that the madman may possibly attempt to jump overboard.

I wonder whether I shall be permitted to communicate with my ward.

I walk towards him, and Captain Spade and Engineer Serko watch me.

Thomas Roch doesn't see me coming, and I stand beside him. Still he takes no notice of me, and makes no movement. His eyes, which sparkle brightly, wander over the ocean, and he draws in deep breaths of the salt, vivifying atmosphere. Added to the air surcharged with oxygen is a magnificent sunset in a cloudless sky. Does he perceive the change in his situation? Has he already forgotten about Healthful House, the pavilion in which he was a prisoner, and Gaydon, his keeper? It is highly probable. The past has presumably been effaced from his memory and he lives solely in the present.

In my opinion, even on the deck of the Ebba, in the middle of the sea, Thomas Roch is still the helpless, irresponsible man whom I tended for fifteen months. His intellectual condition has undergone no change, and his reason will return only when he is spoken to about his inventions. The Count d'Artigas is perfectly aware of this mental disposition, having had a proof of it during his visit, and he evidently relies

thereon to surprise sooner or later the inventor's secret. But with what object?

"Thomas Roch!" I exclaim.

My voice seems to strike him, and after gazing at me fixedly for an instant he averts his eyes quickly.

I take his hand and press it. He withdraws it brusquely and walks away, without having recognized me, in the direction of Captain Spade and Engineer Serko.

Does he think of speaking to one or other of these men, and if they speak to him will he be more reasonable than he was with me, and reply to them?

At this moment his physiognomy lights up with a gleam of intelligence. His attention, obviously, has been attracted by the queer progress of the schooner. He gazes at the masts and the furled sails. Then he turns back and stops at the place where, if the Ebba were a steamer, the funnel ought to be, and which in this case ought to be belching forth a cloud of black smoke.

What appeared so strange to me evidently strikes Thomas Roch as being strange, too. He cannot explain what I found inexplicable, and, as I did, he walks aft to see if there is a screw.

On the flanks of the Ebba a shoal of porpoises are sporting. Swift as is the schooner's course they easily pass her, leaping and gambolling in their native element with surprising grace and agility.

Thomas Roch pays no attention to them, but leans over the stern.

Engineer Serko and Captain Spade, fearful lest he should fall overboard, hurry to him and drag him gently, but firmly, away.

I observe from long experience that Roch is a prey to violent excitement. He turns about and gesticulates, uttering incoherent phrases the while.

It is plain to me that another fit is coming on, similar to the one he had in the pavilion of Healthful House on the night we were abducted. He will have to be

seized and carried down to his cabin, and I shall perhaps be summoned to attend to him.

Meanwhile Engineer Serko and Captain Spade do not lose sight of him for a moment. They are evidently curious to see what he will do.

After walking towards the mainmast and assuring himself that the sails are not set, he goes up to it and flinging his arms around it, tries with all his might to shake it, as though seeking to pull it down.

Finding his efforts futile, he quits it and goes to the foremast, where the same performance is gone through. He waxes more and more excited. His vague utterances are followed by inarticulate cries.

Suddenly he rushes to the port stays and clings to them, and I begin to fear that he will leap into the rigging and climb to the cross-tree, where he might be precipitated into the sea by a lurch of the ship.

On a sign from Captain Spade, some sailors run up and try to make him relinquish his grasp of the stays, but are unable to do so. I know that during his fits he is endowed with the strength of ten men, and many a time I have been compelled to summon assistance in order to overpower him.

Other members of the crew, however, come up, and the unhappy madman is borne to the deck, where two big sailors hold him down, despite his extraordinary strength.

The only thing to do is to convey him to his cabin, and let him lie there till he gets over his fit. This is what will be done in conformity with orders given by a new-comer whose voice seems familiar to me.

I turn and recognize him.

He is the Count d’Artigas, with a frown on his face and an imperious manner, just as I had seen him at Healthful House.

I at once advance toward him. I want an explanation and mean to have it.

“By what right, sir?”—I begin.

“By the right of might,” replies the Count.

Then he turns on his heel, and Thomas Roch is carried below.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO DAYS AT SEA.

Perhaps—should circumstances render it necessary—I may be induced to tell the Count d’Artigas that I am Simon Hart, the engineer. Who knows but what I may receive more consideration than if I remain Warder Gaydon? This measure, however, demands reflection. I have always been dominated by the thought that if the owner of the Ebba kidnapped the French inventor, it was in the hope of getting possession of Roch’s fulgurator, for which, neither the old nor new continent would pay the impossible price demanded. In that case the best thing I can do is to remain Warder Gaydon, on the chance that I may be allowed to continue in attendance upon him. In this way, if Thomas Roch should ever divulge his secret, I may learn what it was impossible to do at Healthful House, and can act accordingly.

Meanwhile, where is the Ebba bound?—first question.

Who and what is the Count d’Artigas?—second question.

The first will be answered in a few days’ time, no doubt, in view of the rapidity with which we are ripping through the water, under the action of a means of propulsion that I shall end by finding out all about. As regards the second, I am by no means so sure that my curiosity will ever be gratified.

In my opinion this enigmatical personage has an all important reason for hiding his origin, and I am afraid there is no indication by which I can gauge his nationality. If the Count d’Artigas speaks English fluently—and I was able to assure myself of that fact during his visit to Pavilion No. 17,—he pronounces it with a harsh, vibrating accent, which is not to be found among the peoples of northern latitudes. I do not

remember ever to have heard anything like it in the course of my travels either in the Old or New World—unless it be the harshness characteristic of the idioms in use among the Malays. And, in truth, with his olive, verging on copper-tinted skin, his jet-black, crinkly hair, his piercing, deep-set, restless eyes, his square shoulders and marked muscular development, it is by no means unlikely that he belongs to one of the extreme Eastern races.

I believe this name of d'Artigas is an assumed one, and his title of Count likewise. If his schooner bears a Norwegian name, he at any rate is not of Scandinavian origin. He has nothing of the races of Northern Europe about him.

But whoever and whatever he may be, this man abducted Thomas Roch—and me with him—with no good intention, I'll be bound.

But what I should like to know is, has he acted as the agent of a foreign power, or on his own account? Does he wish to profit alone by Thomas Roch's invention, and is he in the position to dispose of it profitably? That is another question that I cannot yet answer. Maybe I shall be able to find out from what I hear and see ere I make my escape, if escape be possible.

The Ebba continues on her way in the same mysterious manner. I am free to walk about the deck, without, however, being able to go beyond the fore hatchway. Once I attempted to go as far as the bows where I could, by leaning over, perceive the schooner's stem as it cut through the water, but acting, it was plain, on orders received, the watch on deck turned me back, and one of them, addressing me brusquely in harsh, grating English, said:

"Go back! Go back! You are interfering with the working of the ship!"

With the working of the ship! There was no working.

Did they realize that I was trying to discover by what means the schooner was propelled? Very likely, and Captain Spade, who had looked on, must have known it, too. Even a hospital attendant could not fail to be astonished at the fact that a vessel

without either screw or sails was going along at such a speed. However this may be, for some reason or other, the bows of the Ebba are barred to me.

Toward ten o'clock a breeze springs up—a northwest wind and very favorable—and Captain Spade gives an order to the boatswain. The latter immediately pipes all hands on deck, and the mainsail, the foresail, staysail and jibs are hoisted. The work could not have been executed with greater regularity and discipline on board a man-of-war.

The Ebba now has a slight list to port, and her speed is notably increased. But the motor continues to push her along, as is evident from the fact that the sails are not always as full as they ought to be if the schooner were bowling along solely under their action. However, they continue to render yeoman's service, for the breeze has set in steadily.

The sky is clear, for the clouds in the west disappear as soon as they attain the horizon, and the sunlight dances on the water.

My preoccupation now is to find out as near as possible where we are bound for. I am a good-enough sailor to be able to estimate the approximate speed of a ship. In my opinion the Ebba has been travelling at the rate of from ten to eleven knots an hour. As to the direction we have been going in, it is always the same, and I have been able to verify this by casual glances at the binnacle. If the fore part of the vessel is barred to Warder Gaydon he has been allowed a free run of the remainder of it. Time and again I have glanced at the compass, and noticed that the needle invariably pointed to the east, or to be exact, east-southeast.

These are the conditions in which we are navigating this part of the Atlantic Ocean, which is bounded on the west by the coast of the United States of America.

I appeal to my memory. What are the islands or groups of islands to be found in the direction we are going, ere the continent of the Old World is reached?

North Carolina, which the schooner quitted forty-eight hours ago, is traversed by the

thirty-fifth parallel of latitude, and this parallel, extending eastward, must, if I mistake not, cut the African coast at Morocco. But along the line, about three thousand miles from America, are the Azores. Is it presumable that the Ebba is heading for this archipelago, that the port to which she belongs is somewhere in these islands which constitute one of Portugal's insular domains? I cannot admit such an hypothesis.

Besides, before the Azores, on the line of the thirty-fifth parallel, is the Bermuda group, which belongs to England. It seems to me to be a good deal less hypothetical that, if the Count d'Artigas was entrusted with the abduction of Thomas Roch by a European Power at all, it was by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The possibility, however, remains that he may be acting solely in his own interest.

Three or four times during the day Count d'Artigas has come aft and remained for some time scanning the surrounding horizon attentively. When a sail or the smoke from a steamer heaves in sight he examines the passing vessel for a considerable time with a powerful telescope. I may add that he has not once condescended to notice my presence on deck.

Now and then Captain Spade joins him and both exchange a few words in a language that I can neither understand nor recognize.

It is with Engineer Serko, however, that the owner of the Ebba converses more readily than with anybody else, and the latter appears to be very intimate with him. The engineer is a good deal more free, more loquacious and less surly than his companions, and I wonder what position he occupies on the schooner. Is he a personal friend of the Count d'Artigas? Does he scour the seas with him, sharing the enviable life enjoyed by the rich yachtsman? He is the only man of the lot who seems to manifest, if not sympathy with, at least some interest in me.

I have not seen Thomas Roch all day. He must be shut in his cabin, still under the influence of the fit that came upon him last night.

I feel certain that this is so, when about three o'clock in the afternoon, just as he is about to go below, the Count beckons me to approach.

I do not know what he wishes to say to me, this Count d'Artigas, but I do know what I will say to him.

"Do these fits to which Thomas Roch is subject last long?" he asks me in English.

"Sometimes forty-eight hours," I reply.

"What is to be done?"

"Nothing at all. Let him alone until he falls asleep. After a night's sleep the fit will be over and Thomas Roch will be his own helpless self again."

"Very well, Warder Gaydon, you will continue to attend him as you did at Healthful House, if it be necessary."

"To attend to him!"

"Yes—on board the schooner—pending our arrival."

"Where?"

"Where we shall be to-morrow afternoon," replies the Count.

To-morrow, I say to myself. Then we are not bound for the coast of Africa, nor even the Azores. There only remains the hypothesis that we are making for the Bermudas.

Count d'Artigas is about to go down the hatchway when I interrogate him in my turn:

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

"Here, Warder Gaydon," he interrupted, "you have no rights. All you have to do is to answer when you are spoken to." "I protest!"

"Protest, then," replies this haughty and imperious personage, glancing at me menacingly.

Then he disappears down the hatchway, leaving me face to face with Engineer Serko.

“If I were you, Warder Gaydon, I would resign myself to the inevitable,” remarks the latter with a smile. “When one is caught in a trap——”

“One can cry out, I suppose?”

“What is the use when no one is near to hear you?”

“I shall be heard some day, sir.”

“Some day—that’s a long way off. However, shout as much as you please.”

And with this ironical advice, Engineer Serko leaves me to my own reflections.

Towards four o’clock a big ship is reported about six miles off to the east, coming in our direction. She is moving rapidly and grows perceptibly larger. Black clouds of smoke pour out of her two funnels. She is a warship, for a narrow pennant floats from her main-mast, and though she is not flying any flag I take her to be an American cruiser.

I wonder whether the Ebba will render her the customary salute as she passes.

No; for the schooner suddenly changes her course with the evident intention of avoiding her.

This proceeding on the part of such a suspicious yacht does not astonish me greatly. But what does cause me extreme surprise is Captain Spade’s way of manoeuvring.

He runs forward to a signalling apparatus in the bows, similar to that by which orders are transmitted to the engine room of a steamer. As soon as he presses one of the buttons of this apparatus the Ebba veers off a point to the south-west.

Evidently an order of “some kind” has been transmitted to the driver of the machine of “some kind” which causes this inexplicable movement of the schooner by the action of a motor of “some kind” the principle of which I cannot guess at.

The result of this manoeuvre is that the Ebba slants away from the cruiser, whose

course does not vary. Why should this warship cause a pleasure-yacht to turn out of its way? I have no idea.

But the Ebba behaves in a very different manner when about six o'clock in the evening a second ship comes in sight on the port bow. This time, instead of seeking to avoid her, Captain Spade signals an order by means of the apparatus above referred to, and resumes his course to the east—which will bring him close to the said ship.

An hour later, the two vessels are only about four miles from each other.

The wind has dropped completely. The strange ship, which is a three-masted merchantman, is taking in her top-gallant sails. It is useless to expect the wind to spring up again during the night, and she will lay becalmed till morning. The Ebba, however, propelled by her mysterious motor, continues to approach her.

It goes without saying, that Captain Spade has also begun to take in sail, and the work, under the direction of the boatswain Effrondat, is executed with the same precision and promptness that struck me before.

When the twilight deepens into darkness, only a mile and a half separates the vessels.

Captain Spade then comes up to me—I am standing on the starboard side—and unceremoniously orders me to go below.

I can but obey. I remark, however, ere I go, that the boatswain has not lighted the head-lamps, whereas the lamps of the three-master shine brightly—green to starboard, and red to port.

I entertain no doubt that the schooner intends to pass her without being seen; for though she has slackened speed somewhat, her direction has not been in any way modified.

I enter my cabin under the impression of a vague foreboding. My supper is on the

table, but uneasy, I know not why, I hardly touch it, and lie down to wait for sleep that does not come.

I remain in this condition for two hours. The silence is unbroken save by the water that ripples along the vessel's sides.

My mind is full of the events of the past two days, and other thoughts crowd thickly upon me. To-morrow afternoon we shall reach our destination. To-morrow, I shall resume, on land, my attendance upon Thomas Roch, "if it be necessary," said the Count d'Artigas.

If, when I was thrown into that black hole at the bottom of the hold, I was able to perceive when the schooner started off across Pamlico Sound, I now feel that she has come to a stop. It must be about ten o'clock.

Why has she stopped? When Captain Spade ordered me below, there was no land in sight. In this direction, there is no island until the Bermuda group is reached—at least there is none on the map—and we shall have to go another fifty or sixty miles before the Bermudas can be sighted by the lookout men. Not only has the Ebba stopped, but her immobility is almost complete. There is not a breath of wind, and scarcely any swell, and her slight, regular rocking is hardly perceptible.

Then my thoughts turn to the merchantman, which was only a mile and a half off, on our bow, when I came below. If the schooner continued her course towards her, she must be almost alongside now. We certainly cannot be lying more than one or two cables' length from her. The three-master, which was becalmed at sundown, could not have gone west. She must be close by, and if the night is clear, I shall be able to see her through the porthole.

It occurs to me, that perhaps a chance of escape presents itself. Why should I not attempt it, since no hope of being restored to liberty is held out to me? It is true I cannot swim, but if I seize a life buoy and jump overboard, I may be able to reach the ship, if I am not observed by the watch on deck.

I must quit my cabin and go up by the forward hatchway. I listen. I hear no noise, either in the men's quarters, or on deck. The sailors must all be asleep at this hour. Here goes.

I try to open the door, and find it is bolted on the outside, as I might have expected.

I must give up the attempt, which, after all, had small chance of success.

The best thing I can do, is to go to sleep, for I am weary of mind, if not of body. I am restless and racked by conflicting thoughts, and apprehensions of I know not what. Oh! if I could but sink into the blessed oblivion of slumber!

I must have managed to fall asleep, for I have just been awakened by a noise—an unusual noise, such as I have not hitherto heard on board the schooner.

Day begins to peer through the glass of my port-hole, which is turned towards the east. I look at my watch. It is half-past four.

The first thing I wonder is, whether the Ebba has resumed her voyage.

No, I am certain she has not, either by sail, or by her motor. The sea is as calm at sunrise as it was at sunset. If the Ebba has been going ahead while I slept, she is at any rate, stationary now.

The noise to which I referred, is caused by men hurrying to and fro on deck—by men heavily laden. I fancy I can also hear a similar noise in the hold beneath my cabin floor, the entrance to which is situated abaft the foremast. I also feel that something is scraping against the schooner's hull. Have boats come alongside? Are the crew engaged in loading or unloading merchandise?

And yet we cannot possibly have reached our journey's end. The Count d'Artigas said that we should not reach our destination till this afternoon. Now, I repeat, she was, last night, fully fifty or sixty miles from the nearest land, the group of the Bermudas. That she could have returned westward, and can be in proximity to the American coast, is inadmissible, in view of the distance. Moreover, I have reason to

believe that the Ebba has remained stationary all night. Before I fell asleep, I know she had stopped, and I now know that she is not moving.

However, I shall see when I am allowed to go on deck. My cabin door is still bolted, I find on trying it; but I do not think they are likely to keep me here when broad daylight is on.

An hour goes by, and it gradually gets lighter. I look out of my porthole. The ocean is covered by a mist, which the first rays of the sun will speedily disperse.

I can, however, see for a half a mile, and if the three-masted merchantman is not visible, it is probably because she is lying off the other, or port, side of the Ebba.

Presently I hear a key turned in my door, and the bolts drawn. I push the door open and clamber up the iron ladder to the deck, just as the men are battening down the cover of the hold.

I look for the Count d'Artigas, but do not see him. He has not yet left his cabin.

Aft, Captain Spade and Engineer Serko are superintending the stowing of some bales, which have doubtless been hoisted from the hold. This explains the noisy operations that were going on when I was awakened. Obviously, if the crew are getting out the cargo, we are approaching the end of our voyage. We are not far from port, and perhaps in a few hours, the schooner will drop anchor.

But what about the sailing ship that was to port of us? She ought to be in the same place, seeing that there has been and is no wind.

I look for her, but she is nowhere to be seen. There is not a sail, not a speck on the horizon either east, west, north or south.

After cogitating upon the circumstance I can only arrive at the following conclusion, which, however, can only be accepted under reserve: Although I did not notice it, the Ebba resumed her voyage while I slept, leaving the three-master becalmed behind her, and this is why the merchantman is no longer visible.

I am careful not to question Captain Spade about it, nor even Engineer Serko, as I should certainly receive no answer.

Besides, at this moment Captain Spade goes to the signalling apparatus and presses one of the buttons on the upper disk. Almost immediately the Ebba gives a jerk, then with her sails still furled, she starts off eastward again.

Two hours later the Count d'Artigas comes up through the main hatchway and takes his customary place aft. Serko and Captain Spade at once approach and engage in conversation with him.

All three raise their telescopes and sweep the horizon from southeast to northeast.

No one will be surprised to learn that I gaze intently in the same direction; but having no telescope I cannot distinguish anything.

The midday meal over we all return on deck—all with the exception of Thomas Roch, who has not quitted his cabin.

Towards one o'clock land is sighted by the lookout man on the foretop cross-tree. Inasmuch as the Ebba is bowling along at great speed I shall soon be able to make out the coast line.

In effect, two hours later a vague semicircular line that curves outward is discernible about eight miles off. As the schooner approaches it becomes more distinct. It is a mountain, or at all events very high ground, and from its summit a cloud of smoke ascends.

What! A volcano in these parts? It must then be——

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK CUP.

In my opinion the Ebba could have struck no other group of islands but the Bermudas in this part of the Atlantic. This is clear from the distance covered from the American coast and the direction sailed in since we issued from Pamlico Sound.

This direction has constantly been south-southeast, and the distance, judging from the Ebba's rate of speed, which has scarcely varied, is approximately seven hundred and fifty miles.

Still, the schooner does not slacken speed. The Count d'Artigas and Engineer Serko remain aft, by the man at the wheel. Captain Spade has gone forward.

Are we not going to leave this island, which appears to be isolated, to the west?

It does not seem likely, since it is still broad daylight, and the hour at which the Ebba was timed to arrive.

All the sailors are drawn up on deck, awaiting orders, and Boatswain Effrondat is making preparations to anchor.

Ere a couple of hours have passed I shall know all about it. It will be the first answer to one of the many questions that have perplexed me since the schooner put to sea.

And yet it is most unlikely that the port to which the Ebba belongs is situated on one of the Bermuda islands, in the middle of an English archipelago—unless the Count d'Artigas has kidnapped Thomas Roch for the British government, which I cannot believe.

I become aware that this extraordinary man is gazing at me with singular persistence. Although he can have no suspicion that I am Simon Hart, the engineer, he must be asking himself what I think of this adventure. If Warder Gaydon is but a poor devil, this poor devil will manifest as much unconcern as to what is in store for him as any gentleman could—even though he were the proprietor of this queer pleasure yacht. Still I am a little uneasy under his gaze.

I dare say that if the Count d'Artigas could guess how certain things have suddenly become clear to me, he would not hesitate to have me thrown overboard.

Prudence therefore commands me to be more circumspect than ever.

Without giving rise to any suspicion—even in the mind of Engineer Serko—I have

succeeded in raising a corner of the mysterious veil, and I begin to see ahead a bit.

As the Ebba draws nearer, the island, or rather islet, towards which she is speeding shows more sharply against the blue background of the sky. The sun which has passed the zenith, shines full upon the western side. The islet is isolated, or at any rate I cannot see any others of the group to which it belongs, either to north or south.

This islet, of curious contexture, resembles as near as possible a cup turned upside down, from which a fuliginous vapor arises. Its summit—the bottom of the cup, if you like—is about three hundred feet above the level of the sea, and its flanks, which are steep and regular, are as bare as the sea-washed rocks at its base.

There is another peculiarity about it which must render the islet easily recognizable by mariners approaching it from the west, and this is a rock which forms a natural arch at the base of the mountain—the handle of the cup, so to speak—and through which the waves wash as freely as the sunshine passes. Seen this way the islet fully justifies the name of Back Cup given to it.

Well, I know and recognize this islet! It is situated at the extremity of the archipelago of the Bermudas. It is the “reversed cup” that I had occasion to visit a few years ago—No, I am not mistaken. I then climbed over the calcareous and crooked rocks at its base on the east side. Yes, it is Back Cup, sure enough!

Had I been less self-possessed I might have uttered an exclamation of surprise—and satisfaction—which, with good reason, would have excited the attention and suspicion of the Count d’Artigas.

These are the circumstances under which I came to explore Back Cup while on a visit to Bermuda.

This archipelago, which is situated about seven hundred and fifty miles from North Carolina is composed of several hundred islands or islets. Its centre is crossed by the sixty-fourth meridian and the thirty-second parallel. Since the Englishman Lomer was shipwrecked and cast up there in 1609, the Bermudas have belonged to the

United Kingdom, and in consequence the colonial population has increased to ten thousand inhabitants. It was not for its productions of cotton, coffee, indigo, and arrowroot that England annexed the group—seized it, one might say; but because it formed a splendid maritime station in that part of the Ocean, and in proximity to the United States of America. Possession was taken of it without any protest on the part of other powers, and Bermuda is now administered by a British governor with the addition of a council and a General Assembly.

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

The largest of these isles is not more than seventeen miles long and five wide. Leaving out the medium-sized ones, there remains but an agglomeration of islets and reefs scattered over an area of twelve square leagues.

Although the climate of Bermuda is very healthy, very salubrious, the isles are nevertheless frightfully beaten by the heavy winter tempests of the Atlantic, and their approach by navigators presents certain difficulties.

What the archipelago especially lacks are rivers and rios. However, as abundant rains fall frequently, this drawback is got over by the inhabitants, who treasure up the heaven-sent water for household and agricultural purposes. This has necessitated the construction of vast cisterns which the downfalls keep filled. These works of engineering skill justly merit the admiration they receive and do honor to the genius of man.

It was in connection with the setting up of these cisterns that I made the trip, as well as out of curiosity to inspect the fine works.

I obtained from the company of which I was the engineer in New Jersey a vacation of several weeks, and embarked at New York for the Bermudas.

While I was staying on Hamilton Island, in the vast port of Southampton, an event

occurred of great interest to geologists.

One day a whole flotilla of fishers, men, women and children, entered Southampton Harbor. For fifty years these families had lived on the east coast of Back Cup, where they had erected log-cabins and houses of stone. Their position for carrying on their industry was an exceptionally favorable one, for the waters teem with fish all the year round, and in March and April whales abound.

Nothing had hitherto occurred to disturb their tranquil existence. They were quite contented with their rough lot, which was rendered less onerous by the facility of communication with Hamilton and St. George. Their solid barks took cargoes of fish there, which they exchanged for the necessities of life.

Why had they thus abandoned the islet with the intention, as it pretty soon appeared, of never returning to it? The reason turned out to be that they no longer considered themselves in safety there.

A couple of months previously they had been at first surprised, then alarmed, by several distinct detonations that appeared to have taken place in the interior of the mountain. At the same time smoke and flames issued from the summit—or the bottom of the reversed cup, if you like. Now no one had ever suspected that the islet was of volcanic origin, or that there was a crater at the top, no one having been able to climb its sides. Now, however, there could be no possible doubt that the mountain was an ancient volcano that had suddenly become active again and threatened the village with destruction.

During the ensuing two months internal rumblings and explosions continued to be heard, which were accompanied by bursts of flame from the top—especially at night. The island was shaken by the explosions—the shocks could be distinctly felt. All these phenomena were indicative of an imminent eruption, and there was no spot at the base of the mountain that could afford any protection from the rivers of lava that would inevitably pour down its smooth, steep slopes and overwhelm the village

in their boiling flood. Besides, the very mountain might be destroyed in the eruption.

There was nothing for the population exposed to such a dire catastrophe to do but leave. This they did. Their humble Lares and Penates, in fact all their belongings, were loaded into the fishing-smacks, and the entire colony sought refuge in Southhampton Harbor.

The news that a volcano, that had presumably been smouldering for centuries at the western extremity of the group, showed signs of breaking out again, caused a sensation throughout the Bermudas. But while some were terrified, the curiosity of others was aroused, mine included. The phenomenon was worth investigation, even if the simple fisher-folk had exaggerated.

Back Cup, which, as already stated, lies at the western extremity of the archipelago, is connected therewith by a chain of small islets and reefs, which cannot be approached from the east. Being only three hundred feet in altitude, it cannot be seen either from St. George or Hamilton. I joined a party of explorers and we embarked in a cutter that landed us on the island, and made our way to the abandoned village of the Bermudan fishers.

The internal crackings and detonations could be plainly heard, and a sheaf of smoke was swayed by the wind at the summit.

Beyond a peradventure the ancient volcano had been started again by the subterranean fire, and an eruption at any moment was to be apprehended.

In vain we attempted to climb to the mouth of the crater. The mountain sheered down at an angle of from seventy-five to eighty degrees, and its smooth, slippery sides afforded absolutely no foothold. Anything more barren than this rocky freak of nature it would be difficult to conceive. Only a few tufts of wild herbs were to be seen upon the whole island, and these seemed to have no raison d’être.

Our explorations were therefore necessarily limited, and in view of the active symptoms of danger that manifested themselves, we could but approve the action of

the villagers in abandoning the place; for we entertained no doubt that its destruction was imminent.

These were the circumstances in which I was led to visit Back Cup, and no one will consequently be surprised at the fact that I recognized it immediately we hove in sight of the queer structure.

No, I repeat, the Count d'Artigas would probably not be overpleased if he were aware that Warder Gaydon is perfectly acquainted with this islet, even if the Ebba was to anchor there—which, as there is no port, is, to say the least, extremely improbable.

As we draw nearer, I attentively examine Back Cup. Not one of its former inhabitants has been induced to return, and, as it is absolutely deserted, I cannot imagine why the schooner should visit the place.

Perhaps, however, the Count d'Artigas and his companions have no intention of landing there. Even though the Ebba should find temporary shelter between the rocky sides of a narrow creek there is nothing to give ground to the supposition that a wealthy yachtsman would have the remotest idea of fixing upon as his residence an arid cone exposed to all the terrible tempests of the Western Atlantic. To live here is all very well for rustic fishermen, but not for the Count d'Artigas, Engineer Serko, Captain Spade and his crew.

Back Cup is now only half a mile off, and the seaweed thrown up on its rocky base is plainly discernible. The only living things upon it are the sea-gulls and other birds that circle in clouds around the smoking crater.

When she is only two cable's lengths off, the schooner slackens speed, and then stops at the entrance of a sort of natural canal formed by a couple of reefs that barely rise above the water.

I wonder whether the Ebba will venture to try the dangerous feat of passing through it. I do not think so. She will probably lay where she is—though why she should do

so I do not know—for a few hours, and then continue her voyage towards the east.

However this may be I see no preparations in progress for dropping anchor. The anchors are suspended in their usual places, the cables have not been cleared, and no motion has been made to lower a single boat.

At this moment Count d'Artigas, Engineer Serko and Captain Spade go forward and perform some manoeuvre that is inexplicable to me.

I walk along the port side of the deck until I am near the foremast, and then I can see a small buoy that the sailors are hoisting in. Almost immediately the water, at the same spot becomes dark and I observe a black mass rising to the surface. Is it a big whale rising for air, and is the Ebba in danger of being shattered by a blow from the monster's tail?

Now I understand! At last the mystery is solved. I know what was the motor that caused the schooner to go at such an extraordinary speed without sails and without a screw. Her indefatigable motor is emerging from the sea, after having towed her from the coast of America to the archipelago of the Bermudas. There it is, floating alongside—a submersible boat, a submarine tug, worked by a screw set in motion by the current from a battery of accumulators or powerful electric piles.

On the upper part of the long cigar-shaped iron tug is a platform in the middle of which is the "lid" by which an entrance is effected. In the fore part of the platform projects a periscope, or lookout, formed by port-holes or lenses through which an electric searchlight can throw its gleam for some distance under water in front of and on each side of the tug. Now relieved of its ballast of water the boat has risen to the surface. Its lid will open and fresh air will penetrate it to every part. In all probability, if it remained submerged during the day it rose at night and towed the Ebba on the surface.

But if the mechanical power of the tug is produced by electricity the latter must be furnished by some manufactory where it is stored, and the means of procuring the

batteries is not to be found on Back Cup, I suppose.

And then, why does the Ebba have recourse to this submarine towing system? Why is she not provided with her own means of propulsion, like other pleasure-boats?

These are things, however, upon which I have at present no leisure to ruminate.

The lid of the tug opens and several men issue on to the platform. They are the crew of this submarine boat, and Captain Spade has been able to communicate with them and transmit his orders as to the direction to be taken by means of electric signals connected with the tug by a wire that passes along the stem of the schooner.

Engineer Serko approaches me and says, pointing to the boat:

“Get in.”

“Get in!” I exclaim.

“Yes, in the tug, and look sharp about it.”

As usual there is nothing for it but to obey. I hasten to comply with the order and clamber over the side.

At the same time Thomas Roch appears on deck accompanied by one of the crew. He appears to be very calm, and very indifferent too, and makes no resistance when he is lifted over and lowered into the tug. When he has been taken in, Count d’Artigas and Engineer Serko follow.

Captain Spade and the crew of the Ebba remain behind, with the exception of four men who man the dinghy, which has been lowered. They have hold of a long hawser, with which the schooner is probably to be towed through the reef. Is there then a creek in the middle of the rocks where the vessel is secure from the breakers? Is this the port to which she belongs?

They row off with the hawser and make the end fast to a ring in the reef. Then the crew on board haul on it and in five minutes the schooner is so completely lost to sight among the rocks that even the tip of her mast could not be seen from the sea.

Who in Bermuda imagines that a vessel is accustomed to lay up in this secret creek? Who in America would have any idea that the rich yachtsman so well known in all the eastern ports abides in the solitude of Back Cup mountain?

Twenty minutes later the dinghy returns with the four men towards the tug which was evidently waiting for them before proceeding—where?

They climb on board, the little boat is made fast astern, a movement is felt, the screw revolves rapidly and the tug skims along the surface to Back Cup, skirting the reefs to the south.

Three cable's lengths further on, another tortuous canal is seen that leads to the island. Into this the tug enters. When it gets close inshore, an order is given to two men who jump out and haul the dinghy up on a narrow sandy beach out of the reach of wave or weed, and where it will be easily get-at-able when wanted.

This done the sailors return to the tug and Engineer Serko signs to me to go below.

A short iron ladder leads into a central cabin where various bales and packages are stored, and for which no doubt there was not room in the hold of the schooner. I am pushed into a side cabin, the door is shut upon me, and here I am once more a prisoner in profound darkness.

I recognize the cabin the moment I enter it. It is the place in which I spent so many long hours after our abduction from Healthful House, and in which I was confined until well out at sea off Pamlico Sound.

It is evident that Thomas Roch has been placed in a similar compartment.

A loud noise is heard, the banging of the lid as it closes, and the tug begins to sink as the water is admitted to the tanks.

This movement is succeeded by another—a movement that impels the boat through the water.

Three minutes later it stops, and I feel that we are rising to the surface again.

Another noise made by the lid being raised.

The door of my cabin opens, and I rush out and clamber on to the platform.

I look around and find that the tug has penetrated to the interior of Back Cup mountain.

This is the mysterious retreat where Count d'Artigas lives with his companions—out of the world, so to speak.

CHAPTER IX.

INSIDE BACK CUP

The next morning I am able to make a first inspection of the vast cavern of Back Cup. No one seeks to prevent me.

What a night I have passed! What strange visions I have seen! With what impatience I waited for morning!

I was conducted to a grotto about a hundred paces from the edge of the lake where the tug stopped. The grotto, twelve feet by ten, was lighted by an incandescent lamp, and fitted with an entrance door that was closed upon me.

I am not surprised that electricity is employed in lighting the interior of the cavern, as it is also used in the submarine boat. But where is it generated? Where does it come from? Is there a manufactory installed somewhere or other in this vast crypt, with machinery, dynamos and accumulators?

My cell is neatly furnished with a table on which provisions are spread, a bunk with bedding, a basket chair, a wash-hand-stand with toilet set, and a closet containing linen and various suits of clothes. In a drawer of the table I find paper, ink and pens.

My dinner consists of fresh fish, preserved meat, bread of excellent quality, ale and whisky; but I am so excited that I scarcely touch it. Yet I feel that I ought to fortify myself and recover my calmness of mind. I must and will solve the mystery surrounding the handful of men who burrow in the bowels of this island.

So it is under the carapace of Back Cup that Count d'Artigas has established himself! This cavity, the existence of which is not even suspected, is his home when he is not sailing in the Ebba along the coasts of the new world or the old. This is the unknown retreat he has discovered, to which access is obtained by a submarine passage twelve or fifteen feet below the surface of the ocean.

Why has he severed himself from the world? What has been his past? If, as I suspect, this name of d'Artigas and this title of Count are assumed, what motive has he for hiding his identity? Has he been banished, is he an outcast of society that he should have selected this place above all others? Am I not in the power of an evildoer anxious to ensure impunity for his crimes and to defy the law by seeking refuge in this undiscoverable burrow? I have the right of supposing anything in the case of this suspicious foreigner, and I exercise it.

Then the question to which I have never been able to suggest a satisfactory answer once more surges into my mind. Why was Thomas Roch abducted from Healthful House in the manner already fully described? Does the Count d'Artigas hope to force from him the secret of his fulgurator with a view to utilizing it for the defence of Back Cup in case his retreat should by chance be discovered? Hardly. It would be easy enough to starve the gang out of Back Cup, by preventing the tug from supplying them with provisions. On the other hand, the schooner could never break through the investing lines, and if she did her description would be known in every port. In this event, of what possible use would Thomas Roch's invention be to the Count d'Artigas Decidedly, I cannot understand it!

About seven o'clock in the morning I jump out of bed. If I am a prisoner in the cavern I am at least not imprisoned in my grotto cell. The door yields when I turn the handle and push against it, and I walk out.

Thirty yards in front of me is a rocky plane, forming a sort of quay that extends to right and left. Several sailors of the Ebba are engaged in landing bales and stores

from the interior of the tug, which lays alongside a little stone jetty.

A dim light to which my eyes soon grow accustomed envelops the cavern and comes from a hole in the centre of the roof, through which the blue sky can be seen.

“It is from that hole that the smoke which can be seen for such a distance issues,” I say to myself, and this discovery suggests a whole series of reflections.

Back Cup, then, is not a volcano, as was supposed—as I supposed myself. The flames that were seen a few years ago, and the columns of smoke that still rise were and are produced artificially. The detonations and rumblings that so alarmed the Bermudan fishers were not caused by the internal workings of nature. These various phenomena were fictitious. They manifested themselves at the mere will of the owner of the island, who wanted to scare away the inhabitants who resided on the coast. He succeeded, this Count d’Artigas, and remains the sole and undisputed monarch of the mountain. By exploding gunpowder, and burning seaweed swept up in inexhaustible quantities by the ocean, he has been able to simulate a volcano upon the point of eruption and effectually scare would-be settlers away!

The light becomes stronger as the sun rises higher, the daylight streams through the fictitious crater, and I shall soon be able to estimate the cavern’s dimensions. This is how I calculate:

Exteriorly the island of Back Cup, which is as nearly as possible circular, measures two hundred and fifty yards in circumference, and presents an interior superficies of about six acres. The sides of the mountain at its base vary in thickness from thirty to a hundred yards.

It therefore follows that this excavation practically occupies the whole of that part of Back Cup island which appears above water. As to the length of the submarine tunnel by which communication is obtained with the outside, and through which the tug passed, I estimate that it is fifty yards in length.

The size of the cavern can be judged from these approximate figures. But vast as it

is, I remember that there are caverns of larger dimensions both in the old and new worlds. For instance in Carniole, Northumberland, Derbyshire, Piedmont, the Balearics, Hungary and California are larger grottoes than Back Cup, and those at Han-sur-Lesse in Belgium, and the Mammoth Caves in Kentucky, are also more extensive. The latter contain no fewer than two hundred and twenty-six domes, seven rivers, eight cataracts, thirty two wells of unknown depth, and an immense lake which extends over six or seven leagues, the limit of which has never been reached by explorers.

I know these Kentucky grottoes, having visited them, as many thousands of tourists have done. The principal one will serve as a comparison to Back Cup. The roof of the former, like that of the latter, is supported by pillars of various lengths, which give it the appearance of a Gothic cathedral, with naves and aisles, though it lacks the architectural regularity of a religious edifice. The only difference is that whereas the roof of the Kentucky grotto is over four hundred feet high, that of Back Cup is not above two hundred and twenty at that part of it where the round hole through which issue the smoke and flames is situated.

Another peculiarity, and a very important one, that requires to be pointed out, is that whereas the majority of the grottoes referred to are easily accessible, and were therefore bound to be discovered some time or other, the same remark does not apply to Back Cup. Although it is marked on the map as an island forming part of the Bermuda group, how could any one imagine that it is hollow, that its rocky sides are only the walls of an enormous cavern? In order to make such a discovery it would be necessary to get inside, and to get inside a submarine apparatus similar to that of the Count d’Artigas would be necessary.

In my opinion this strange yachtsman’s discovery of the tunnel by which he has been able to found this disquieting colony of Back Cup must have been due to pure chance.

Now I turn my attention to the lake and observe that it is a very small one, measuring not more than four hundred yards in circumference. It is, properly speaking, a lagoon, the rocky sides of which are perpendicular. It is large enough for the tug to work about in it, and holds enough water too, for it must be one hundred and twenty-five feet deep.

It goes without saying that this crypt, given its position and structure, belongs to the category of those which are due to the encroachments of the sea. It is at once of Neptunian and Plutonian origin, like the grottoes of Crozon and Morgate in the bay of Douarnenez in France, of Bonifacio on the Corsican coast, Thorgatten in Norway, the height of which is estimated at over three hundred feet, the catavaults of Greece, the grottoes of Gibraltar in Spain, and Tourana in Cochin China, whose carapace indicates that they are all the product of this dual geological labor.

The islet of Back Cup is in great part formed of calcareous rocks, which slope upwards gently from the lagoon towards the sides and are separated from each other by narrow beaches of fine sand. Thick layers of seaweed that have been swept through the tunnel by the tide and thrown up around the lake have been piled into heaps, some of which are dry and some still wet, but all of which exhale the strong odor of the briny ocean. This, however, is not the only combustible employed by the inhabitants of Back Cup, for I see an enormous store of coal that must have been brought by the schooner and the tug. But it is the incineration of masses of dried seaweed that causes the smoke vomited forth by the crater of the mountain.

Continuing my walk I perceive on the northern side of the lagoon the habitations of this colony of troglodytes—do they not merit the appellation? This part of the cavern, which is known as the Beehive, fully justifies its name, for it is honeycombed by cells excavated in the limestone rock and in which these human bees—or perhaps they should rather be called wasps—reside.

The lay of the cavern to the east is very different. Here hundreds of pillars of all

shapes rise to the dome, and form a veritable forest of stone trees through the sinuous avenues of which one can thread one's way to the extreme limit of the place.

By counting the cells of the Beehive I calculate that Count d'Artigas' companions number from eighty to one hundred.

As my eye wanders over the place I notice that the Count is standing in front of one of the cells, which is isolated from the others, and talking to Engineer Serko and Captain Spade. After a while they stroll down to the jetty alongside which the tug is lying.

A dozen men have been emptying the merchandise out of the tug and transporting the goods in boats to the other side, where great cellars have been excavated in the rocks and form the storehouses of the band.

The orifice of the tunnel is not visible in the waters of the lagoon, and I remember that when I was brought here I felt the tug sink several feet before it entered. In this respect therefore Back Cup does not resemble either the grottoes of Staffa or Morgate, entrance to which is always open, even at high tide. There may be another passage communicating with the coast, either natural or artificial, and this I shall have to make my business to find out.

The island well merits its name of Back Cup. It is indeed a gigantic cup turned upside down, not only to outward appearance, but inwardly, too, though people are ignorant of the fact.

I have already remarked that the Beehive is situated to the north of the lagoon, that is to say to the left on entering by the tunnel. On the opposite side are the storerooms filled with provisions of all kinds, bales of merchandise, barrels of wine, beer, and spirits and various packets bearing different marks and labels that show that they came from all parts of the world. One would think that the cargoes of a score of ships had been landed here.

A little farther on is a large wooden shed the nature of which is easily

distinguishable. From a pole above it a network of thick copper wires extends which conducts the current to the powerful electric lights suspended from the roof or dome, and to the incandescent lamps in each of the cells of the hive. A large number of lamps are also installed among the stone pillars and light up the avenues to their extremities.

“Shall I be permitted to roam about wherever I please?” I ask myself. I hope so. I cannot for the life of me see why the Count d’Artigas should prohibit me from doing so, for I cannot get farther than the surrounding walls of his mysterious domain. I question whether there is any other issue than the tunnel, and how on earth could I get through that?

Besides, admitting that I am able to get through it, I cannot get off the island. My disappearance would be soon noticed, and the tug would take out a dozen men who would explore every nook and cranny. I should inevitably be recaptured, brought back to the Beehive, and deprived of my liberty for good.

I must therefore give up all idea of making my escape, unless I can see that it has some chance of being successful, and if ever an opportunity does present itself I shall not be slow to take advantage of it.

On strolling round by the rows of cells I am able to observe a few of these companions of the Count d’Artigas who are content to pass their monotonous existence in the depths of Back Cup. As I said before, calculating from the number of cells in the Beehive, there must be between eighty and a hundred of them.

They pay no attention whatever to me as I pass, and on examining them closely it seems to me that they must have been recruited from every country. I do not distinguish any community of origin among them, not even a similarity by which they might be classed as North Americans, Europeans or Asiatics. The color of their skin shades from white to yellow and black—the black peculiar to Australia rather than to Africa. To sum up, they appear for the most part to pertain to the Malay

races. I may add that the Count d'Artigas certainly belongs to that particular race which peoples the Dutch isles in the West Pacific, while Engineer Serko must be Levantine and Captain Spade of Italian origin.

But if the inhabitants of Back Cup are not bound to each other by ties of race, they certainly are by instinct and inclination. What forbidding, savage-looking faces they have, to be sure! They are men of violent character who have probably never placed any restraint upon their passions, nor hesitated at anything, and it occurs to me that in all likelihood they have sought refuge in this cavern, where they fancy they can continue to defy the law with impunity, after a long series of crimes—robbery, murder, arson, and excesses of all descriptions committed together. In this case Back Cup is nothing but a lair of pirates, the Count d'Artigas is the leader of the band and Serko and Spade are his lieutenants.

I cannot get this idea out of my head, and the more I consider the more convinced I am that I am right, especially as everything I see during my stroll about the cavern seems to confirm my opinion.

However this may be, and whatever may be the circumstances that have brought them together in this place, Count d'Artigas' companions appear to accept his all-powerful domination without question. On the other hand, if he keeps them under his iron heel by enforcing the severest discipline, certain advantages, some compensation, must accrue from the servitude to which they bow. What can this compensation be?

Having turned that part of the bank under which the tunnel passes, I find myself on the opposite side of the lagoon, where are situated the storerooms containing the merchandise brought by the Ebba on each trip, and which contain a great quantity of bales.

Beyond is the manufactory of electric energy. I gaze in at the windows as I pass and notice that it contains machines of the latest invention and highest attained

perfection, which take up little space. Not one steam engine, with its more or less complicated mechanism and need of fuel, is to be seen in the place. As I had surmised, piles of extraordinary power supply the current to the lamps in the cavern, as well as to the dynamos of the tug. No doubt the current is also utilized for domestic purposes, such as warming the Beehive and cooking food, I can see that in a neighboring cavity it is applied to the alembics used to produce fresh water. At any rate the colonists of Back Cup are not reduced to catching the rain water that falls so abundantly upon the exterior of the mountain.

A few paces from the electric power house is a large cistern that, save in the matter of proportions, is the counterpart of those I visited in Bermuda. In the latter place the cisterns have to supply the needs of over ten thousand people, this one of a hundred—what?

I am not sure yet what to call them. That their chief had serious reasons for choosing the bowels of this island for his abiding place is obvious. But what were those reasons? I can understand monks shutting themselves behind their monastery walls with the intention of separating themselves from the world, but these subjects of the Count d'Artigas have nothing of the monk about them, and would not be mistaken for such by the most simple-minded of mortals.

I continue my way through the pillars to the extremity of the cavern. No one has sought to stop me, no one has spoken to me, not a soul apparently has taken the very slightest notice of me. This portion of Back Cup is extremely curious, and comparable to the most marvellous of the grottoes of Kentucky or the Balearics. I need hardly say that nowhere is the labor of man apparent. All this is the handiwork of nature, and it is not without wonder, mingled with awe, that I reflect upon the telluric forces capable of engendering such prodigious substructions. The daylight from the crater in the centre only strikes this part of the cavern obliquely, so that it is very imperfectly lighted, but at night, when illuminated by the electric lamps, its

aspect must be positively fantastic.

I have examined the walls everywhere with minute attention, but have been unable to discover any means of communicating with the outside.

Quite a colony of birds—gulls, sea-swallows and other feathery denizens of the Bermudan beaches have made their home in the cavern. They have apparently never been hunted, for they are in no way disturbed by the presence of man.

But besides sea-birds, which are free to come and go as they please by the orifice in the dome, there is a whole farmyard of domestic poultry, and cows and pigs. The food supply is therefore no less assured than it is varied, when the fish of all kinds that abound in the lagoon and around the island are taken into consideration.

Moreover, a mere glance at the colonists of Back Cup amply suffices to show that they are not accustomed to fare scantily. They are all vigorous, robust seafaring men, weatherbeaten and seasoned in the burning beat of tropical latitudes, whose rich blood is surcharged with oxygen by the breezes of the ocean. There is not a youth nor an old man among them. They are all in their prime, their ages ranging from thirty to fifty.

But why do they submit to such an existence? Do they never leave their rocky retreat?

Perhaps I shall find out ere I am much older.

CHAPTER X.

KER KARRAJE.

The cell in which I reside is about a hundred paces from the habitation of the Count d’Artigas, which is one of the end ones of this row of the Beehive. If I am not to share it with Thomas Roch, I presume the latter’s cell is not far off, for in order that Warder Gaydon may continue to care for the ex-patient of Healthful House, their respective apartments will have to be contiguous. However, I suppose I shall soon

be enlightened on this point.

Captain Spade and Engineer Serko reside separately in proximity to D'Artigas' mansion.

Mansion? Yes, why not dignify it with the title since this habitation has been arranged with a certain art? Skillful hands have carved an ornamental façade in the rock. A large door affords access to it. Colored glass windows in wooden frames let into the limestone walls admit the light. The interior comprises several chambers, a dining-room and a drawing-room lighted by a stained-glass window, the whole being perfectly ventilated. The furniture is of various styles and shapes and of French, English and American make. The kitchen, larder, etc., are in adjoining cells in rear of the Beehive.

In the afternoon, just as I issue from my cell with the firm intention of "obtaining an audience" of the Count d'Artigas, I catch sight of him coming along the shore of the lagoon towards the hive. Either he does not see me, or wishes to avoid me, for he quickens his steps and I am unable to catch him.

"Well, he will have to receive me, anyhow!" I mutter to myself.

I hurry up to the door through which he has just disappeared and which has closed behind him.

It is guarded by a gigantic, dark-skinned Malay, who orders me away in no amiable tone of voice.

I decline to comply with his injunction, and repeat to him twice the following request in my very best English:

"Tell the Count d'Artigas that I desire to be received immediately."

I might just as well have addressed myself to the surrounding rock. This savage, no doubt, does not understand a word of English, for he scowls at me and orders me away again with a menacing cry.

I have a good mind to attempt to force the door and shout so that the Count d'Artigas cannot fail to hear me, but in all probability I shall only succeed in rousing the wrath of the Malay, who appears to be endowed with herculean strength. I therefore judge discretion to be the better part of valor, and put off the explanation that is owing to me—and which, sooner or later, I will have—to a more propitious occasion.

I meander off in front of the Beehive towards the east, and my thoughts revert to Thomas Roch. I am surprised that I have not seen him yet. Can he be in the throes of a fresh paroxysm?

This hypothesis is hardly admissible, for if the Count d'Artigas is to be believed, he would in this event have summoned me to attend to the inventor.

A little farther on I encounter Engineer Serko.

With his inviting manner and usual good-humor this ironical individual smiles when he perceives me, and does not seek to avoid me. If he knew I was a colleague, an engineer—providing he himself really is one—perhaps he might receive me with more cordiality than I have yet encountered, but I am not going to be such a fool as to tell him who and what I am.

He stops, with laughing eyes and mocking mouth, and accompanies a "Good day, how do you do?" with a gracious gesture of salutation.

I respond coldly to his politeness—a fact which he affects not to notice.

"May Saint Jonathan protect you, Mr. Gaydon!" he continues in his clear, ringing voice. "You are not, I presume, disposed to regret the fortunate circumstance by which you were permitted to visit this surpassingly marvellous cavern—and it really is one of the finest, although the least known on this spheroid."

This word of a scientific language used in conversation with a simple hospital attendant surprises me, I admit, and I merely reply:

“I should have no reason to complain, Mr. Serko, if, after having had the pleasure of visiting this cavern, I were at liberty to quit it.”

“What! Already thinking of leaving us, Mr. Gaydon,—of returning to your dismal pavilion at Healthful House? Why, you have scarcely had time to explore our magnificent domain, or to admire the incomparable beauty with which nature has endowed it.”

“What I have seen suffices,” I answer; “and should you perchance be talking seriously I will assure you seriously that I do not want to see any more of it.”

“Come, now, Mr. Gaydon, permit me to point out that you have not yet had the opportunity of appreciating the advantages of an existence passed in such unrivalled surroundings. It is a quiet life, exempt from care, with an assured future, material conditions such as are not to be met with anywhere, an even climate and no more to fear from the tempests which desolate the coasts in this part of the Atlantic than from the cold of winter, or the heat of summer. This temperate and salubrious atmosphere is scarcely affected by changes of season. Here we have no need to apprehend the wrath of either Pluto or Neptune.”

“Sir,” I reply, “it is impossible that this climate can suit you, that you can appreciate living in this grotto of——”

I was on the point of pronouncing the name of Back Cup. Fortunately I restrained myself in time. What would happen if they suspected that I am aware of the name of their island, and, consequently, of its position at the extremity of the Bermuda group?

“However,” I continue, “if this climate does not suit me, I have, I presume, the right to make a change.”

“The right, of course.”

“I understand from your remark that I shall be furnished with the means of returning to America when I want to go?”

“I have no reason for opposing your desires, Mr. Gaydon,” Engineer Serko replies, “and I regard your presumption as a very natural one. Observe, however, that we live here in a noble and superb independence, that we acknowledge the authority of no foreign power, that we are subject to no outside authority, that we are the colonists of no state, either of the old or new world. This is worth consideration by whomsoever has a sense of pride and independence. Besides, what memories are evoked in a cultivated mind by these grottoes which seem to have been chiselled by the hands of the gods and in which they were wont to render their oracles by the mouth of Trophonius.”

Decidedly, Engineer Serko is fond of citing mythology! Trophonius after Pluto and Neptune? Does he imagine that Warder Gaydon ever heard of Trophonius? It is clear this mocker continues to mock, and I have to exercise the greatest patience in order not to reply in the same tone.

“A moment ago,” I continue shortly, “I wanted to enter yon habitation, which, if I mistake not, is that of the Count d’Artigas, but I was prevented.”

“By whom, Mr. Gaydon?”

“By a man in the Count’s employ.”

“He probably had received strict orders about it.”

“Possibly, yet whether he likes it or not, Count d’Artigas will have to see me and listen to me.”

“Maybe it would be difficult, and even impossible to get him to do so,” says Engineer Serko with a smile.

“Why so?”

“Because there is no such person as Count d’Artigas here.”

“You are jesting, I presume; I have just seen him.”

“It was not the Count d’Artigas whom you saw, Mr. Gaydon.”

“Who was it then, may I ask?”

“The pirate Ker Karraje.”

This name was thrown at me in a hard tone of voice, and Engineer Serko walked off before I had presence of mind enough to detain him.

The pirate Ker Karraje!

Yes, this name is a revelation to me. I know it well, and what memories it evokes! It by itself explains what has hitherto been inexplicable to me. I now know into whose hands I have fallen.

With what I already knew, with what I have learned since my arrival in Back Cup from Engineer Serko, this is what I am able to tell about the past and present of Ker Karraje:

Eight or nine years ago, the West Pacific was infested by pirates who acted with the greatest audacity. A band of criminals of various origins, composed of escaped convicts, military and naval deserters, etc., operated with incredible audacity under the orders of a redoubtable chief. The nucleus of the band had been formed by men pertaining to the scum of Europe who had been attracted to New South Wales, in Australia, by the discovery of gold there. Among these gold-diggers, were Captain Spade and Engineer Serko, two outcasts, whom a certain community of ideas and character soon bound together in close friendship.

These intelligent, well educated, resolute men would most assuredly have succeeded in any career. But being without conscience or scruples, and determined to get rich at no matter what cost, deriving from gambling and speculation what they might have earned by patient and steady work, they engaged in all sorts of impossible adventures. One day they were rich, the next day poor, like most of the questionable individuals who had hurried to the gold-fields in search of fortune.

Among the diggers in New South Wales was a man of incomparable audacity, one of those men who stick at nothing—not even at crime—and whose influence upon

bad and violent natures is irresistible.

That man's name was Ker Karraje.

The origin or nationality or antecedents of this pirate were never established by the investigations ordered in regard to him. He eluded all pursuit, and his name—or at least the name he gave himself—was known all over the world, and inspired horror and terror everywhere, as being that of a legendary personage, a bogey, invisible and unseizable.

I have now reason to believe that Ker Karraje is a Malay. However, it is of little consequence, after all. What is certain is that he was with reason regarded as a formidable and dangerous villain who had many crimes, committed in distant seas, to answer for.

After spending a few years on the Australian goldfields, where he made the acquaintance of Engineer Serko and Captain Spade, Ker Karraje managed to seize a ship in the port of Melbourne, in the province of Victoria. He was joined by about thirty rascals whose number was speedily tripled. In that part of the Pacific Ocean where piracy is still carried on with great facility, and I may say, profit, tho number of ships pillaged, crews massacred, and raids committed in certain western islands which the colonists were unable to defend, cannot be estimated.

Although the whereabouts of Ker Karraje's vessel, commanded by Captain Spade, was several times made known to the authorities, all attempts to capture it proved futile. The marauder would disappear among the innumerable islands of which he knew every cove and creek, and it was impossible to come across him.

He maintained a perfect reign of terror. England, France, Germany, Russia and America vainly dispatched warships in pursuit of the phantom vessel which disappeared, no one knew whither, after robberies and murders that could not be prevented or punished had been committed by her crew.

One day this series of crimes came to an end, and no more was heard of Ker Karraje.

Had he abandoned the Pacific for other seas? Would this pirate break out in a fresh place? It was argued that notwithstanding what they must have spent in orgies and debauchery the pirate and his companions must still have an enormous amount of wealth hidden in some place known only to themselves, and that they were enjoying their ill-gotten gains.

Where had the band hidden themselves since they had ceased their depredations? This was a question which everybody asked and none was able to answer. All attempts to run them to earth were vain. Terror and uneasiness having ceased with the danger, Ker Karraje's exploits soon began to be forgotten, even in the West Pacific.

This is what had happened—and what will never be known unless I succeed in escaping from Back Cup:

These wretches were, as a matter of fact, possessed of great wealth when they abandoned the Southern Seas. Having destroyed their ship they dispersed in different directions after having arranged to meet on the American continent.

Engineer Serko, who was well versed in his profession, and was a clever mechanic to boot, and who had made a special study of submarine craft, proposed to Ker Karraje that they should construct one of these boats in order to continue their criminal exploits with greater secrecy and effectiveness.

Ker Karraje at once saw the practical nature of the proposition, and as they had no lack of money the idea was soon carried out.

While the so-called Count d'Artigas ordered the construction of the schooner Ebba at the shipyards of Gotteborg, in Sweden, he gave to the Cramps of Philadelphia, in America, the plans of a submarine boat whose construction excited no suspicion. Besides, as will be seen, it soon disappeared and was never heard of again.

The boat was constructed from a model and under the personal supervision of Engineer Serko, and fitted with all the known appliances of nautical science. The

screw was worked with electric piles of recent invention which imparted enormous propulsive power to the motor.

It goes without saying that no one imagined that Count d'Artigas was none other than Ker Karraje, the former pirate of the Pacific, and that Engineer Serko was the most formidable and resolute of his accomplices. The former was regarded as a foreigner of noble birth and great fortune, who for several months had been frequenting the ports of the United States, the Ebba having been launched long before the tug was ready.

Work upon the latter occupied fully eighteen months, and when the boat was finished it excited the admiration of all those interested in these engines of submarine navigation. By its external form, its interior arrangements, its air-supply system, the rapidity with which it could be immersed, the facility with which it could be handled and controlled, and its extraordinary speed, it was conceded to be far superior to the Goubet, the Gymnote, the Zede, and other similar boats which had made great strides towards perfection.

After several extremely successful experiments a public test was given in the open sea, four miles off Charleston, in presence of several American and foreign warships, merchant vessels, and pleasure boats invited for the occasion.

Of course the Ebba was among them, with the Count d'Artigas, Engineer Serko, and Captain Spade on board, and the old crew as well, save half a dozen men who manned the submarine machine, which was worked by a mechanical engineer named Gibson, a bold and very clever Englishman.

The programme of this definite experiment comprised various evolutions on the surface of the water, which were to be followed by an immersion to last several hours, the boat being ordered not to rise again until a certain buoy stationed many miles out at sea had been attained.

At the appointed time the lid was closed and the boat at first manoeuvred on the

surface. Her speed and the ease with which she turned and twisted were loudly praised by all the technical spectators.

Then at a signal given on board the Ebba the tug sank slowly out of sight, and several vessels started for the buoy where she was to reappear.

Three hours went by, but there was no sign of the boat.

No one could suppose that in accordance with instructions received from the Count d'Artigas and Engineer Serko this submarine machine, which was destined to act as the invisible tug of the schooner, would not emerge till it had gone several miles beyond the rendezvous. Therefore, with the exception of those who were in the secret, no one entertained any doubt that the boat and all inside her had perished as the result of an accident either to her metallic covering or machinery.

On board the Ebba consternation was admirably simulated. On board the other vessels it was real. Drags were used and divers sent down along the course the boat was supposed to have taken, but it could not be found, and it was agreed that it had been swallowed up in the depths of the Atlantic.

Two days later the Count d'Artigas put to sea again, and in forty-eight hours came up with the tug at the place appointed.

This is how Ker Karraje became possessed of the admirable vessel which was to perform the double function of towing the schooner and attacking ships. With this terrible engine of destruction, whose very existence was ignored, the Count d'Artigas was able to recommence his career of piracy with security and impunity.

These details I have learned from Engineer Serko, who is very proud of his handiwork,—and also very positive that the prisoner of Back Cup will never be able to disclose the secret.

It will easily be realized how powerful was the offensive weapon Ker Karraje now possessed. During the night the tug would rush at a merchant vessel, and bore a hole in her with its powerful ram. At the same time the schooner which could not

possibly have excited any suspicion, would run alongside and her horde of cutthroats would pour on to the doomed vessel's deck and massacre the helpless crew, after which they would hurriedly transfer that part of the cargo that was worth taking to the Ebba. Thus it happened that ship after ship was added to the long list of those that never reached port and were classed as having gone down with all on board.

For a year after the odious comedy in the bay of Charleston Ker Karraje operated in the Atlantic, and his wealth increased to enormous proportions. The merchandise for which he had no use was disposed of in distant markets in exchange for gold and silver. But what was sadly needed was a place where the profits could be safely hidden pending the time when they were to be finally divided.

Chance came to their aid. While exploring the bottom of the sea in the neighborhood of the Bermudas, Engineer Serko and Driver Gibson discovered at the base of Back Cup island the tunnel which led to the interior of the mountain. Would it have been possible for Ker Karraje to have found a more admirable refuge than this, absolutely safe as it was from any possible chance of discovery? Thus it came to pass that one of the islands of the Archipelago of Bermuda, erstwhile the haunt of buccaneers, became the lair of another gang a good deal more to be dreaded.

This retreat having been definitely adopted, Count d'Artigas and his companions set about getting their place in order. Engineer Serko installed an electric power house, without having recourse to machines whose construction abroad might have aroused suspicion, simply employing piles that could be easily mounted and required but metal plates and chemical substances that the Ebba procured during her visits to the American coast.

What happened on the night of the 19th inst. can easily be divined. If the three-masted merchantman which lay becalmed was not visible at break of day it was because she had been scuttled by the tug, boarded by the cut-throat band on the

Ebba, and sunk with all on board after being pillaged. The bales and things that I had seen on the schooner were a part of her cargo, and all unknown to me the gallant ship was lying at the bottom of the broad Atlantic!

How will this adventure end? Shall I ever be able to escape from Back Cup, denounce the false Count d'Artigas and rid the seas of Ker Karraje's pirates?

And if Ker Karraje is terrible as it is, how much more so will he become if he ever obtains possession of Roch's fulgurator! His power will be increased a hundred-fold! If he were able to employ this new engine of destruction no merchantman could resist him, no warship escape total destruction.

I remain for some time absorbed and oppressed by the reflections with which the revelation of Ker Karraje's name inspires me. All that I have ever heard about this famous pirate recurs to me—his existence when he skimmed the Southern Seas, the useless expeditions organized by the maritime powers to hunt him down. The unaccountable loss of so many vessels in the Atlantic during the past few years is attributable to him. He had merely changed the scene of his exploits. It was supposed that he had been got rid of, whereas he is continuing his piratical practices in the most frequented ocean on the globe, by means of the tug which is believed to be lying at the bottom of Charleston Bay.

"Now," I say to myself, "I know his real name and that of his lair—Ker Karraje and Back Cup;" and I surmise that if Engineer Serko has let me into the secret he must have been authorized to do so. Am I not meant to understand from this that I must give up all hope of ever recovering my liberty?

Engineer Serko had manifestly remarked the impression created upon me by this revelation. I remember that on leaving me he went towards Ker Karraje's habitation, no doubt with the intention of apprising him of what had passed.

After a rather long walk around the lagoon I am about to return to my cell, when I hear footsteps behind me. I turn and find myself face to face with the Count

d'Artigas, who is accompanied by Captain Spade. He glances at me sharply, and in a burst of irritation that I cannot suppress, I exclaim:

"You are keeping me here, sir, against all right. If it was to wait upon Thomas Roch that you carried me off from Healthful House, I refuse to attend to him, and insist upon being sent back."

The pirate chief makes a gesture, but does not reply.

Then my temper gets the better of me altogether.

"Answer me, Count d'Artigas—or rather, for I know who you are—answer me, Ker Karraje!" I shout.

"The Count d'Artigas is Ker Karraje," he coolly replies, "just as Warder Gaydon is Engineer Simon Hart; and Ker Karraje will never restore to liberty Engineer Simon Hart, who knows his secrets."

CHAPTER XI.

FIVE WEEKS IN BACK CUP.

The situation is plain. Ker Karraje knows who I am. He knew who I was when he kidnapped Thomas Roch and his attendant.

How did this man manage to find out what I was able to keep from the staff of Healthful House? How comes it that he knew that a French engineer was performing the duties of attendant to Thomas Roch? I do not know how he discovered it, but the fact remains that he did.

Evidently he had means of information which must have been costly, but from which he has derived considerable profit. Besides, men of his kidney do not count the cost when they wish to attain an end they have in view.

Henceforward Ker Karraje, or rather Engineer Serko, will replace me as attendant upon Thomas Roch. Will he succeed better than I did? God grant that he may not, that the civilized world may be spared such a misfortune!

I did not reply to Ker Karraje's Parthian shot, for I was stricken dumb. I did not, however, collapse, as the alleged Count d'Artigas perhaps expected I would.

No! I looked him straight in the eyes, which glittered angrily, and crossed my arms defiantly, as he had done. And yet he held my life in his hands! At a sign a bullet would have laid me dead at his feet. Then my body, cast into the lagoon, would have been borne out to sea through the tunnel and there would have been an end of me.

After this scene I am left at liberty, just as before. No measure is taken against me, I can walk among the pillars to the very end of the cavern, which—it is only too clear—possesses no other issue except the tunnel.

When I return to my cell, at the extremity of the Beehive, a prey to a thousand thoughts suggested by my situation, I say to myself:

"If Ker Karraje knows I am Simon Hart, the engineer, he must at any rate never know that I am aware of the position of Back Cup Island."

As to the plan of confiding Thomas Roch to my care, I do not think he ever seriously entertained it, seeing that my identity had been revealed to him. I regret this, inasmuch as the inventor will indubitably be the object of pressing solicitations, and as Engineer Serko will employ every means in his power to obtain the composition of the explosive and deflagrator, of which he will make such detestable use during future piratical exploits. Yes, it would have been far better if I could have remained Thomas Roch's keeper here, as in Healthful House.

For fifteen days I see nothing of my late charge. No one, I repeat, has placed any obstacles in the way of my daily peregrinations. I have no need to occupy myself about the material part of my existence. My meals are brought to me regularly, direct from the kitchen of the Count d'Artigas—I cannot accustom myself to calling him by any other name. The food leaves nothing to be desired, thanks to the provisions that the Ebba brings on her return from each voyage.

It is very fortunate, too, that I have been supplied with all the writing materials I

require, for during my long hours of idleness I have been able to jot down in my notebook the slightest incidents that have occurred since I was abducted from Healthful House, and to keep a diary day by day. As long as I am permitted to use a pen I shall continue my notes. Mayhap some day, they will help to clear up the mysteries of Back Cup.

From July 5 to July 25.—A fortnight has passed, and all my attempts to get near Thomas Roch have been frustrated. Orders have evidently been given to keep him away from my influence, inefficacious though the latter has hitherto been. My only hope is that the Count d'Artigas, Engineer Serko, and Captain Spade will waste their time trying to get at the inventor's secrets.

Three or four times to my knowledge, at least, Thomas Roch and Engineer Serko have walked together around the lagoon. As far as I have been able to judge, the former listened with some attention to what the other was saying to him. Serko has conducted him over the whole cavern, shown him the electric power house and the mechanism of the tug. Thomas Roch's mental condition has visibly improved since his departure from Healthful House.

Thomas Roch lives in a private room in Ker Karraje's "mansion." I have no doubt that he is daily sounded in regard to his discoveries, especially by Engineer Serko. Will he be able to resist the temptation if they offer him the exorbitant price that he demands? Has he any idea of the value of money? These wretches may dazzle him with the gold that they have accumulated by years of rapine. In the present state of his mind may he not be induced to disclose the composition of his fulgurator? They would then only have to fetch the necessary substances and Thomas Roch would have plenty of time in Back Cup to devote to his chemical combinations. As to the war-engines themselves nothing would be easier than to have them made in sections in different parts of the American continent. My hair stands on end when I think what they could and would do with them if once they gained possession of them.

These intolerable apprehensions no longer leave me a minute's peace; they are wearing me out and my health is suffering in consequence. Although the air in the interior of Back Cup is pure, I become subject to attacks of suffocation, and I feel as though my prison walls were falling upon me and crushing me under their weight. I am, besides, oppressed by the feeling that I am cut off from the world, as effectually as though I were no longer upon our planet,—for I know nothing of what is going on outside.

Ah! if it were only possible to escape through that submarine tunnel, or through the hole in the dome and slide to the base of the mountain!

On the morning of the 25th I at last encounter Thomas Roch. He is alone on the other side of the lagoon, and I wonder, inasmuch as I have not seen them since the previous day, whether Ker Karraje, Engineer Serko, and Captain Spade have not gone off on some expedition.

I walk round towards Thomas Roch, and before he can see me I examine him attentively.

His serious, thoughtful physiognomy is no longer that of a madman. He walks slowly, with his eyes bent on the ground, and under his arm a drawing-board upon which is stretched a sheet of paper covered with designs.

Suddenly he raises his head, advances a step and recognizes me.

"Ah! Gaydon, it is you, is it?" he cries, "I have then escaped from you! I am free!"

He can, indeed, regard himself as being free—a good deal more at liberty in Back Cup than he was in Healthful House. But maybe my presence evokes unpleasant memories, and will bring on another fit, for he continues with extraordinary animation:

"Yes, I know you, Gaydon.—Do not approach me! Stand off! stand off! You would like to get me back in your clutches, incarcerate me again in your dungeon! Never! I have friends here who will protect me. They are powerful, they are rich. The Count

d'Artigas is my backer and Engineer Serko is my partner. We are going to exploit my invention! We are going to make my fulgurator! Hence! Get you gone!"

Thomas Roch is in a perfect fury. He raises his voice, agitates his arms, and finally pulls from his pockets many rolls of dollar bills and banknotes, and handfuls of English, French, American and German gold coins, which slip through his fingers and roll about the cavern.

How could he get all this money except from Ker Karraje, and as the price of his secret? The noise he makes attracts a number of men to the scene. They watch us for a moment, then seize Thomas Roch and drag him away. As soon as I am out of his sight he ceases-to struggle and becomes calm again.

July 27.—Two hours after meeting with Thomas Roch, I went down to the lagoon and walked out to the edge of the stone jetty.

The tug is not moored in its accustomed place, nor can I see it anywhere about the lake. Ker Karraje and Engineer Serko had not gone yesterday, as I supposed, for I saw them in the evening.

To-day, however, I have reason to believe that they really have gone away in the tug with Captain Spade and the crew of the Ebba, and that the latter must be sailing away.

Have they set out on a piracy expedition? Very likely. It is equally likely that Ker Karraje, become once more the Count d'Artigas, travelling for pleasure on board his yacht, intends to put into some port on the American coast to procure the substances necessary to the preparation of Roch's fulgurator.

Ah! if it had only been possible for me to hide in the tug, to slip into the Ebba's hold, and stow myself away there until the schooner arrived in port! Then perchance I might have escaped and delivered the world from this band of pirates.

It will be seen how tenaciously I cling to the thought of escape—of fleeing—fleeing at any cost from this lair. But flight is impossible, except through the tunnel, by

means of a submarine boat. Is it not folly to think of such a thing? Sheer folly, and yet what other way is there of getting out of Back Cup?

While I give myself up to these reflections the water of the lagoon opens a few yards from me and the tug appears. The lid is raised and Gibson, the engineer, and the men issue on to the platform. Other men come up and catch the line that is thrown to them. They haul upon it, and the tug is soon moored in its accustomed place.

This time, therefore, at any rate, the schooner is not being towed, and the tug merely went out to put Ker Karraje and his companions aboard the Ebba.

This only confirms my impression that the sole object of their trip is to reach an American port where the Count d'Artigas can procure the materials for making the explosive, and order the machines in some foundry. On the day fixed for their return the tug will go out through the tunnel again to meet the schooner and Ker Karraje will return to Back Cup.

Decidedly, this evildoer is carrying out his designs and has succeeded sooner than I thought would be possible.

August 3.—An incident occurred to-day of which the lagoon was the theatre—a very curious incident that must be exceedingly rare.

Towards three o'clock in the afternoon there was a prodigious bubbling in the water, which ceased for a minute or two and then recommenced in the centre of the lagoon.

About fifteen pirates, whose attention had been attracted by this unaccountable phenomenon, hurried down to the bank manifesting signs of astonishment not unmingled with fear—at least I thought so.

The agitation of the water was not caused by the tug, as the latter was lying alongside the jetty, and the idea that some other submarine boat had found its way through the tunnel was highly improbable.

Almost at the same instant cries were heard on the opposite bank. The newcomers

shouted something in a hoarse voice to the men on the side where I was standing, and these immediately rushed off towards the Beehive.

I conjectured that they had caught sight of some sea-monster that had found its way in, and was floundering in the lagoon, and that they had rushed off to fetch arms and harpoons to try and capture it.

I was right, for they speedily returned with the latter weapons and rifles loaded with explosive bullets.

The monster in question was a whale, of the species that is common enough in Bermudan waters, which after swimming through the tunnel was plunging about in the narrow limits of the lake. As it was constrained to take refuge in Back Cup I concluded that it must have been hard pressed by whalers.

Some minutes elapsed before the monster rose to the surface. Then the green shiny mass appeared spouting furiously and darting to and fro as though fighting with some formidable enemy.

“If it was driven in here by whalers,” I said to myself, “there must be a vessel in proximity to Back Cup—peradventure within a stone’s throw of it. Her boats must have entered the western passes to the very foot of the mountain. And to think I am unable to communicate with them! But even if I could, I fail to see how I could go to them through these massive walls.”

I soon found, however, that it was not fishers, but sharks that had driven the whale through the tunnel, and which infest these waters in great numbers. I could see them plainly as they darted about, turning upon their backs and displaying their enormous mouths which were bristling with their cruel teeth. There were five or six of the monsters, and they attacked the whale with great viciousness. The latter’s only means of defence was its tail, with which it lashed at them with terrific force and rapidity. But the whale had received several wounds and the water was tinged with its life-blood; for plunge and lash as it would, it could not escape the bites of its

enemies.

However, the voracious sharks were not permitted to vanquish their prey, for man, far more powerful with his instruments of death, was about to take a hand and snatch it from them. Gathered around the lagoon were the companions of Ker Karraje, every whit as ferocious as the sharks themselves, and well deserving the same name, for what else are they?

Standing amid a group, at the extremity of the jetty, and armed with a harpoon, was the big Malay who had prevented me from entering Ker Karraje's house. When the whale got within shot, he hurled the harpoon with great force and skill, and it sank into the leviathan's flesh just under the left fin. The whale plunged immediately, followed by the relentless sharks. The rope attached to the weapon ran out for about sixty yards, and then slackened. The men at once began to haul on it, and the monster rose to the surface again near the end of the tunnel, struggling desperately in its death agony, and spurting great columns of water tinged with blood. One blow of its tail struck a shark, and hurled it clean out of water against the rocky side, where it dropped in again, badly, if not fatally injured.

The harpoon was torn from the flesh by the jerk, and the whale went under. It came up again for the last time, and lashed the water so that it washed up from the tunnel end, disclosing the top of the orifice.

Then the sharks again rushed on their prey, but were scared off by a hail of the explosive bullets. Two men then jumped into a boat and attached a line to the dead monster. The latter was hauled into the jetty, and the Malays started to cut it up with a dexterity that showed they were no novices at the work.

No more sharks were to be seen, but I concluded that it would be as well to refrain from taking a bath in the lagoon for some days to come.

I now know exactly where the entrance to the tunnel is situated. The orifice on this side is only ten feet below the edge of the western bank. But of what use is this

knowledge to me?

August 7.—Twelve days have elapsed since the Count d'Artigas, Engineer Serko, and Captain Spade put to sea. There is nothing to indicate that their return is expected, though the tug is always kept in readiness for immediate departure by Gibson, the engine-driver. If the Ebba is not afraid to enter the ports of the United States by day, I rather fancy she prefers to enter the rocky channel of Back Cup at nightfall. I also fancy, somehow, that Ker Karraje and his companions will return to-night.

August 10.—At ten o'clock last night, as I anticipated, the tug went under and out, just in time to meet the Ebba and tow her through the channel to her creek, after which she returned with Ker Karraje and the others.

When I look out this morning, I see Thomas Roch and Engineer Serko walking down to the lagoon, and talking. What they are talking about I can easily guess. I go forward and take a good look at my ex-patient. He is asking questions of Engineer Serko With great animation. His eyes gleam, his face is flushed, and he is all eagerness to reach the jetty. Engineer Serko can hardly keep up with him.

The crew of the tug are unloading her, and they have just brought ashore ten medium-sized boxes. These boxes bear a peculiar red mark, which Thomas Roch examines closely.

Engineer Serko orders the men to transport them to the storehouses on the left bank, and the boxes are forthwith loaded on a boat and rowed over.

In my opinion, these boxes contain the substances by the combination or mixture of which, the fulgurator and deflagrator are to be made. The engines, doubtless, are being made in an American foundry, and when they are ready, the schooner will fetch them and bring them to Back Cup.

For once in a while, anyhow, the Ebba has not returned with any stolen merchandise. She went out and has returned with a clear bill. But with what terrible

power Ker Karraje will be armed for both offensive and defensive operations at sea! If Thomas Roch is to be credited, this fulgurator could shatter the terrestrial spheroid at one blow. And who knows but what one day, he will try the experiment?

CHAPTER XII.

ENGINEER SERKO'S ADVICE.

Thomas Roch has started work and spends hours and hours in a wooden shed on the left bank of the lagoon that has been set apart as his laboratory and workshop. No one enters it except himself. Does he insist upon preparing the explosive in secret and does he intend to keep the formula thereof to himself? I should not wonder.

The manner of employing Roch's fulgurator is, I believe, very simple indeed. The projectile in which it is used requires neither gun nor mortar to launch it, nor pneumatic tube like the Zalinski shell. It is autopropulsive, it projects itself, and no ship within a certain zone when the engine explodes could escape utter destruction. With such a weapon as this at his command Ker Karraje would be invincible.

From August 11 to August 17.—During the past week Thomas Roch has been working without intermission. Every morning the inventor goes to his laboratory and does not issue therefrom till night. I have made no attempt to stop him or speak to him, knowing that it would be useless to do so.

Although he is still indifferent to everything that does not touch upon his work he appears to be perfectly self-possessed. Why should he not have recovered his reason? Has he not obtained what he has so long sought for? Is he not at last able to carry out the plans he formed years and years ago?

August 18.—At one o'clock this morning I was roused by several detonations.

"Has Back Cup been attacked?" was my first thought. "Has the schooner excited suspicion, and been chased to the entrance to the passes? Is the island being bombarded with a view to its destruction? Has justice at last overtaken these evil-doers ere Thomas Roch has been able to complete the manufacture of his

explosive, and before the autopropulsive engine could be fetched from the continent?”

The detonations, which are very violent, continue, succeeding each other at regular intervals, and it occurs to me that if the schooner has been destroyed, all communication with the bases of supply being impossible, Back Cup cannot be provisioned.

It is true the tug would be able to land the Count d’Artigas somewhere on the American coast where, money being no object, he could easily buy or order another vessel. But no matter. If Back Cup is only destroyed before Ker Karraje has Roch’s fulgurator at his disposal I shall render thanks to heaven.

A few hours later, at the usual time, I quit my cell. All is quiet at the Beehive. The men are going about their business as usual. The tug is moored near the jetty. Thomas Roch is going to his laboratory, and Ker Karraje and Engineer Serko are tranquilly pacing backwards and forwards by the lake and chatting. The island therefore could not have been attacked during the night. Yet I was awakened by the report of cannon, this I will swear.

At this moment Ker Karraje goes off towards his abode and Engineer Serko, smilingly ironical, as usual, advances to meet me.

“Well, Mr. Simon Hart,” he says, “are you getting accustomed to your tranquil existence? Do you appreciate at their just merit the advantages of this enchanted grotto? Have you given up all hope of recovering your liberty some day or other?”

What is the use of waxing wroth with this jester? I reply calmly:

“No, sir. I have not given up hope, and I still expect that I shall be released.”

“What! Mr. Hart, separate ourselves from a man whom we all esteem—and I from a colleague who perhaps, in the course of Thomas Roch’s fits of delirium, has learned some of his secrets? You are not serious!”

So this is why they are keeping me a prisoner in Back Cup! They suppose that I am in part familiar with Roch's invention, and they hope to force me to tell what I know if Thomas Roch refuses to give up his secret. This is the reason why I was kidnapped with him, and why I have not been accommodated with an involuntary plunge in the lagoon with a stone fastened to my neck. I see it all now, and it is just as well to know it.

"Very serious," I affirm, in response to the last remark of my interlocutor.

"Well," he continues, "if I had the honor to be Simon Hart, the engineer, I should reason as follows: 'Given, on the one hand, the personality of Ker Karraje, the reasons which incited him to select such a mysterious retreat as this cavern, the necessity of the said cavern being kept from any attempt to discover it, not only in the interest of the Count d'Artigas, but in that of his companions—'"

"Of his accomplices, if you please."

"'Of his accomplices,' then—'and on the other hand, given the fact that I know the real name of the Count d'Artigas and in what mysterious safe he keeps his riches—'"

"Riches stolen, and stained with blood, Mr. Serko."

"'Riches stolen and stained with blood,' if you like—'I ought to understand that this question of liberty cannot be settled in accordance with my desires.'"

It is useless to argue the point under these conditions, and I switch the conversation on to another line.

"May I ask," I continue, "how you came to find out that Gaydon, the warder, was Simon Hart, the engineer?"

"I see no reason for keeping you in ignorance on the subject, my dear colleague. It was largely by hazard. We had certain relations with the manufactory in New Jersey with which you were connected, and which you quitted suddenly one day under

somewhat singular circumstances. Well, during a visit I made to Healthful House some months before the Count d'Artigas went there, I saw and recognized you."

"You?"

"My very self, and from that moment I promised myself the pleasure of having you for a fellow-passenger on board the Ebba."

I do not recall ever having seen this Serko at Healthful House, but what he says is very likely true.

"I hope your whim of having me for a companion will cost you dear, some day or other," I say to myself.

Then, abruptly, I go on:

"If I am not mistaken, you have succeeded in inducing Thomas Roch to disclose the secret of his fulgurator?"

"Yes, Mr. Hart. We paid millions for it. But millions, you know, are nothing to us. We have only the trouble of taking them! Therefore we filled all his pockets—covered him with millions!"

"Of what use are these millions to him if he is not allowed to enjoy them outside?"

"That, Mr. Hart, is a matter that does not trouble him a little bit! This man of genius thinks nothing of the future: he lives but in the present. While engines are being constructed from his plans over yonder in America, he is preparing his explosive with chemical substances with which he has been abundantly supplied. He! he! What an invention it is, this autopropulsive engine, which flies through the air of its own power and accelerates its speed till the goal is reached, thanks to the properties of a certain powder of progressive combustion! Here we have an invention that will bring about a radical change in the art of war."

"Defensive war, Mr. Serko."

"And offensive war, Mr. Hart."

“Naturally,” I answer.

Then pumping him still more closely, I go on:

“So, what no one else has been able to obtain from Thomas Roch—”

“We obtained without much difficulty.”

“By paying him.”

“By paying him an incredible price—and, moreover, by causing to vibrate what in him is a very sensitive chord.”

“What chord?”

“That of vengeance!”

“Vengeance?—against whom?”

“Against all those who have made themselves his enemies by discouraging him, by spurning him, expelling him, by constraining him to go a-begging from country to country with an invention of incontestable superiority! Now all notion of patriotism is extinct in his soul. He has now but one thought, one ferocious desire: to avenge himself upon those who have denied him—and even upon all mankind! Really, Mr. Hart, your governments of Europe and America committed a stupendous blunder in refusing to pay Roch the price his fulgurator is worth!”

And Engineer Serko describes enthusiastically the various advantages of the new explosive which, he says, is incontestably superior to any yet invented.

“And what a destructive effect it has,” he adds. “It is analogous to that of the Zalinski shell, but is a hundred times more powerful, and requires no machine for firing it, as it flies through the air on its own wings, so to speak.”

I listen in the hope that Engineer Serko will give away a part of the secret, but in vain. He is careful not to say more than he wants to.

“Has Thomas Roch,” I ask, “made you acquainted with the composition of his explosive?”

“Yes, Mr. Hart—if it is all the same to you—and we shall shortly have considerable quantities of it stored in a safe place.”

“But will there not be a great and ever-impending danger in accumulating large quantities of it? If an accident were to happen it would be all up with the island of——!”

Once more the name of Back Cup was on the point of escaping me. They might consider me too well-informed if they were aware that in addition to being acquainted with the Count d’Artigas’ real name I also know where his stronghold is situated.

Luckily Engineer Serko has not remarked my reticence, and he replies:

“There will be no cause for alarm. Thomas Roch’s explosive will not burn unless subjected to a special deflagrator. Neither fire nor shock will explode it.”

“And has Thomas Roch also sold you the secret of his deflagrator?”

“Not yet, Mr. Hart, but it will not be long before the bargain is concluded. Therefore, I repeat, no danger is to be apprehended, and you need not keep awake of nights on that account. A thousand devils, sir! We have no desire to be blown up with our cavern and treasures! A few more years of good business and we shall divide the profits, which will be large enough to enable each one of us to live as he thinks proper and enjoy life to the top of his bent—after the dissolution of the firm of Ker Karraje and Co. I may add that though there is no danger of an explosion, we have everything to fear from a denunciation—which you are in the position to make, Mr. Hart. Therefore, if you take my advice, you will, like a sensible man, resign yourself to the inevitable until the disbanding of the company. We shall then see what in the interest of our security is best to be done with you!”

It will be admitted that these words are not exactly calculated to reassure me. However, a lot of things may happen ere then. I have learned one good thing from this conversation, and that is that if Thomas Roch has sold his explosive to Ker

Karraje and Co., he has at any rate, kept the secret of his deflagrator, without which the explosive is of no more value than the dust of the highway.

But before terminating the interview I think I ought to make a very natural observation to Mr. Serko.

“Sir,” I say, “you are now acquainted with the composition of Thomas Roch’s explosive. Does it really possess the destructive power that the inventor attributes to it? Has it ever been tried? May you not have purchased a composition as inert as a pinch of snuff?”

“You are doubtless better informed upon this point than you pretend, Mr. Hart. Nevertheless, I thank you for the interest you manifest in our affairs, and am able to reassure you. The other night we made a series of decisive experiments. With only a few grains of this substance great blocks of rock were reduced to impalpable dust!”

This explanation evidently applies to the detonation I heard.

“Thus, my dear colleague,” continues Engineer Serko, “I can assure you that our expectations have been answered. The effects of the explosive surpass anything that could have been imagined. A few thousand tons of it would burst our spheroid and scatter the fragments into space. You can be absolutely certain that it is capable of destroying no matter what vessel at a distance considerably greater than that attained by present projectiles and within a zone of at least a mile. The weak point in the invention is that rather too much time has to be expended in regulating the firing.”

Engineer Serko stops short, as though reluctant to give any further information, but finally adds:

“Therefore, I end as I began, Mr. Hart. Resign yourself to the inevitable. Accept your new existence without reserve. Give yourself up to the tranquil delights of this subterranean life. If one is in good health, one preserves it; if one has lost one’s health, one recovers it here. That is what is happening to your fellow countryman. Yes, the best thing you can do is to resign yourself to your lot.”

Thereupon this giver of good advice leaves me, after saluting me with a friendly gesture, like a man whose good intentions merit appreciation. But what irony there is in his words, in his glance, in his attitude. Shall I ever be able to get even with him?

I now know that at any rate it is not easy to regulate the aim of Roch's auto-propulsive engine. It is probable that it always bursts at the same distance, and that beyond the zone in which the effects of the fulgurator are so terrible, and once it has been passed, a ship is safe from its effects. If I could only inform the world of this vital fact!

August 20.—For two days no incident worth recording has occurred. I have explored Back Cup to its extreme limits. At night when the long perspective of arched columns are illuminated by the electric lamps, I am almost religiously impressed when I gaze upon the natural wonders of this cavern, which has become my prison. I have never given up hope of finding somewhere in the walls a fissure of some kind of which the pirates are ignorant and through which I could make my escape. It is true that once outside I should have to wait till a passing ship hove in sight. My evasion would speedily be known at the Beehive, and I should soon be recaptured, unless—a happy thought strikes me—unless I could get at the Ebba's boat that was drawn up high and dry on the little sandy beach in the creek. In this I might be able to make my way to St. George or Hamilton.

This evening—it was about nine o'clock—I stretched myself on a bed of sand at the foot of one of the columns, about one hundred yards to the east of the lagoon. Shortly afterwards I heard footsteps, then voices. Hiding myself as best I could behind the rocky base of the pillar, I listened with all my ears.

I recognized the voices as those of Ker Karraje and Engineer Serko. The two men stopped close to where I was lying, and continued their conversation in English—which is the language generally used in Back Cup. I was therefore able to

understand all that they said.

They were talking about Thomas Roch, or rather his fulgurator.

“In a week’s time,” said Ker Karraje, “I shall put to sea in the Ebba, and fetch the sections of the engines that are being cast in that Virginian foundry.”

“And when they are here,” observed Engineer Serko, “I will piece them together and fix up the frames for firing them. But beforehand, there is a job to be done which it seems to me is indispensable.”

“What is that?”

“To cut a tunnel through the wall of the cavern.”

“Through the wall of the cavern?”

“Oh! nothing but a narrow passage through which only one man at a time could squeeze, a hole easy enough to block, and the outside end of which would be hidden among the rocks.”

“Of what use could it be to us, Serko?”

“I have often thought about the utility of having some other way of getting out besides the submarine tunnel. We never know what the future may have in store for us.”

“But the walls are so thick and hard,” objected Ker Karraje.

“Oh, with a few grains of Roch’s explosive I undertake to reduce the rock to such fine powder that we shall be able to blow it away with our breath,” Serko replied.

It can easily be imagined with what interest and eagerness I listened to this. Here was a ray of hope. It. was proposed to open up communication with the outside by a tunnel in the wall, and this held out the possibility of escape.

As this thought flashed through my mind, Ker Karraje said:

“Very well, Serko, and if it becomes necessary some day to defend Back Cup and prevent any ship from approaching it——. It is true,” he went on, without finishing

the reflection, “our retreat would have to have been discovered by accident—or by denunciation.”

“We have nothing to fear either from accident or denunciation,” affirmed Serko.

“By one of our band, no, of course not, but by Simon Hart, perhaps.”

“Hart!” exclaimed Serko. “He would have to escape first and no one can escape from Back Cup. I am, by the bye, interested in this Hart. He is a colleague, after all, and I have always suspected that he knows more about Roch’s invention than he pretends. I will get round him so that we shall soon be discussing physics, mechanics, and matters ballistic like a couple of friends.”

“No matter,” replied the generous and sensible Count d’Artigas, “when we are in full possession of the secret we had better get rid of the fellow.”

“We have plenty of time to do that, Ker Karraje.”

“If God permits you to, you wretches,” I muttered to myself, while my heart thumped against my ribs.

And yet, without the intervention of Providence, what hope is there for me?

The conversation then took another direction.

“Now that we know the composition of the explosive, Serko,” said Ker Karraje, “we must, at all cost, get that of the deflagrator from Thomas Roch.”

“Yes,” replied Engineer Serko, “that is what I am trying to do. Unfortunately, however, Roch positively refuses to discuss it. Still he has already made a few drops of it with which those experiments were made, and he will furnish as with some more to blow a hole through the wall.”

“But what about our expeditions at sea?” queried Ker Karraje.

“Patience! We shall end by getting Roch’s thunderbolts entirely in our own hand, and then——”

“Are you sure, Serko?”

“Quite sure,—by paying the price, Ker Karraje.”

The conversation dropped at this point, and they strolled off without having seen me—very luckily for me, I guess. If Engineer Serko spoke up somewhat in defence of a colleague, Ker Karraje is apparently animated with much less benevolent sentiments in regard to me. On the least suspicion they would throw me into the lake, and if I ever got through the tunnel, it would only be as a corpse carried out by the ebbing tide.

August 21.—Engineer Serko has been prospecting with a view to piercing the proposed passage through the wall, in such a way that its existence will never be dreamed of outside. After a minute examination he decided to tunnel through the northern end of the cavern about sixty feet from the first cells of the Beehive.

I am anxious for the passage to be made, for who knows but what it may be the way to freedom for me? Ah! if I only knew how to swim, perhaps I should have attempted to escape through the submarine tunnel, as since it was disclosed by the lashing back of the waters by the whale in its death-struggle, I know exactly where the orifice is situated. It seems to me that at the time of the great tides, this orifice must be partly uncovered. At the full and new moon, when the sea attains its maximum depression below the normal level, it is possible that—I must satisfy myself about this.

I do not know how the fact will help me in any way, even if the entrance to the tunnel is partly uncovered, but I cannot afford to miss any detail that may possibly aid in my escape from Back Cup.

August 29.—This morning I am witnessing the departure of the tug. The Count d’Artigas is, no doubt, going off in the Ebba to fetch the sections of Thomas Roch’s engines. Before embarking, the Count converses long and earnestly with Engineer Serko, who, apparently, is not going to accompany him on this trip, and is evidently giving him some recommendations, of which I may be the object. Then, having

stepped on to the platform, he goes below, the lid shuts with a bang, and the tug sinks out of sight, leaving a trail of bubbles behind it.

The hours go by, night is coming on, yet the tug does not return. I conclude that it has gone to tow the schooner, and perhaps to destroy any merchant vessels that may come in their way.

It cannot, however, be absent very long, as the trip to America and back will not take more than a week.

Besides, if I can judge from the calm atmosphere in the interior of the cavern, the Ebba must be favored with beautiful weather. This is, in fact, the fine season in this part of the world. Ah! if only I could break out of my prison!

CHAPTER XIII.

GOD BE WITH IT.

From August 29 to September 10.—Thirteen days have gone by and the Ebba has not returned. Did she then not make straight for the American coast? Has she been delayed by a buccaneering cruise in the neighborhood of Back Cup? It seems to me that Ker Karraje’s only desire would be to get back with the sections of Roch’s engines as soon as possible. Maybe the Virginian foundry had not quite finished them.

Engineer Serko does not display the least anxiety or impatience. He continues to greet me with his accustomed ironical cordiality, and with a kindly air that I distrust—with good reason. He affects to be solicitous as to my health, urges me to make the best of a bad job, calls me Ali Baba, assures me that there is not, in the whole world, such an enchanting spot as this Arabian Nights cavern, observes that I am fed, warmed, lodged, and clothed, that I have no taxes to pay, and that even the inhabitants of the favored principality of Monaco do not enjoy an existence more free from care.

Sometimes this ironical verbiage brings the blood to my face, and I am tempted to

seize this cynical banterer by the throat and choke the life out of him. They would kill me afterwards. Still, what would that matter! Would it not be better to end in this way than to spend years and years amid these infernal and infamous surroundings? However, while there is life there is hope, I reflect, and this thought restrains me.

I have scarcely set eyes upon Thomas Roch since the Ebba went away. He shuts himself up in his laboratory and works unceasingly. If he utilizes all the substances placed at his disposition there will be enough to blow up Back Cup and the whole Bermudan archipelago with it!

I cling to the hope that he will never consent to give up the secret of his deflagrator, and that Engineer Serko's efforts to acquire it will remain futile.

September 3.—To-day I have been able to witness with my own eyes the power of Roch's explosive, and also the manner in which the fulgurator is employed.

During the morning the men began to pierce the passage through the wall of the cavern at the spot fixed upon by Engineer Serko, who superintended the work in person. The work began at the base, where the rock is as hard as granite. To have continued it with pickaxes would have entailed long and arduous labor, inasmuch as the wall at this place is not less than from twenty to thirty yards in thickness, but thanks to Roch's fulgurator the passage will be completed easily and rapidly.

I may well be astonished at what I have seen. The pickaxes hardly made any impression on the rock, but its disaggregation was effected with really remarkable facility by means of the fulgurator.

A few grains of this explosive shattered the rocky mass and reduced it to almost impalpable powder that one's breath could disperse as easily as vapor. The explosion produced an excavation measuring fully a cubic yard. It was accompanied by a sharp detonation that may be compared to the report of a cannon.

The first charge used, although a very small one, a mere pinch, blew the men in every direction, and two of them were seriously injured. Engineer Serko himself was

projected several yards, and sustained some rather severe contusions.

Here is how this substance, whose bursting force surpasses anything hitherto conceived, is employed.

A small hole about an inch and a half in length is pierced obliquely in the rock. A few grains of the explosive are then inserted, but no wad is used.

Then Thomas Roch steps forward. In his hand is a little glass phial containing a bluish, oily liquid that congeals almost as soon as it comes in contact with the air. He pours one drop on the entrance of the hole, and draws back, but not with undue haste. It takes a certain time—about thirty-five seconds, I reckon—before the combination of the fulgurator and deflagrator is effected. But when the explosion does take place its power of disaggregation is such—I repeat—that it may be regarded as unlimited. It is at any rate a thousand times superior to that of any known explosive.

Under these circumstances it will probably not take more than a week to complete the tunnel.

September 19.—For some time past I have observed that the tide rises and falls twice every twenty-four hours, and that the ebb and flow produce a rather swift current through the submarine tunnel. It is pretty certain therefore that a floating object thrown into the lagoon when the top of the orifice is uncovered would be carried out by the receding tide. It is just possible that during the lowest equinoctial tides the top of the orifice is uncovered. This I shall be able to ascertain, as this is precisely the time they occur. To-day, September 19, I could almost distinguish the summit of the hole under the water. The day after to-morrow, if ever, it will be uncovered.

Very well then, if I cannot myself attempt to get through, may be a bottle thrown into the lagoon might be carried out during the last few minutes of the ebb. And might not this bottle by chance—an ultra-providential chance, I must avow—be

picked up by a ship passing near Back Cup? Perhaps even it might be borne away by a friendly current and cast upon one of the Bermudan beaches. What if that bottle contained a letter?

I cannot get this thought out of my mind, and it works me up into a great state of excitement. Then objections crop up—this one among others: the bottle might be swept against the rocks and smashed ere ever it could get out of the tunnel. Very true, but what if, instead of a bottle a diminutive, tightly closed keg were used? It would not run any danger of being smashed and would besides stand a much better chance of reaching the open sea.

September 20.—This evening, I, unperceived, entered one of the store houses containing the booty pillaged from various ships and procured a keg very suitable for my experiment.

I hid the keg under my coat, and returned to the Beehive and my cell. Then without losing an instant I set to work. Paper, pen, ink, nothing was wanting, as will be supposed from the fact that for three months I have been making notes and dotting down my impressions daily.

I indite the following message:

“On June 15 last Thomas Roch and his keeper Gaydon, or rather Simon Hart, the French engineer who occupied Pavilion No. 17, at Healthful House, near New-Berne, North Carolina, United States of America, were kidnapped and carried on board the schooner Ebba, belonging to the Count d’Artigas. Both are now confined in the interior of a cavern which serves as a lair for the said Count d’Artigas—who is really Ker Karraje, the pirate who some time ago carried on his depredations in the West Pacific—and for about a hundred men of which his band is composed.

“When he has obtained possession of Roch’s fulgurator whose power is, so to speak, without limit, Ker Karraje will be in a position to carry on his crimes with complete

impunity.

“It is therefore urgent that the states interested should destroy his lair without delay.

“The cavern in which the pirate Ker Karraje has taken refuge is in the interior of the islet of Back Cup, which is wrongly regarded as an active volcano. It is situated at the western extremity of the archipelago of Bermuda, and on the east is bounded by a range of reefs, but on the north, south, and west is open.

“Communication with the inside of the mountain is only possible through a tunnel a few yards under water in a narrow pass on the west. A submarine apparatus therefore is necessary to effect an entrance, at any rate until a tunnel they are boring through the northwestern wall of the cavern is completed.

“The pirate Ker Karraje employs an apparatus of this kind—the submarine boat that the Count d’Artigas ordered of the Cramps and which was supposed to have been lost during the public experiment with it in Charleston Bay. This boat is used not only for the purpose of entering and issuing from Back Cup, but also to tow the schooner and attack merchant vessels in Bermudan waters.

“This schooner Ebba, so well known on the American coast, is kept in a small creek on the western side of the island, behind a mass of rocks, and is invisible from the sea.

“The best place to land is on the west coast formerly occupied by the colony of Bermudan fishers; but it would first be advisable to effect a breach in the side of the cavern by means of the most powerful melinite shells.

“The fact that Ker Karraje may be in the position to use Roch’s fulgurator for the defence of the island must also be taken into consideration. Let it be well borne in mind that if its destructive power surpasses anything ever conceived or dreamed of, it extends over a zone not exceeding a mile in extent. The distance of this dangerous zone is variable, but once the engines have been set, the modification of the distance occupies some time, and a warship that succeeds in passing the zone has nothing

further to fear.

“This document is written on the twentieth day of September at eight o’clock in the evening and is signed with my name

“THOMAS HART, Engineer.”

The above is the text of the statement I have just drawn up. It says all that is necessary about the island, whose exact situation is marked on all modern charts and maps, and points out the expediency of acting without delay, and what to do in case Ker Karraje is in the position to employ Roch’s fulgurator.

I add a plan of the cavern showing its internal configuration, the situation of the lagoon, the lay of the Beehive, Ker Karraje’s habitation, my cell, and Thomas Roch’s laboratory.

I wrap the document in a piece of tarpaulin and insert the package in the little keg, which measures six inches by three and a half. It is perfectly watertight and will stand any amount of knocking about against the rocks.

There is one danger, however, and that is, that it may be swept back by the returning tide, cast up on the island, and fall into the hands of the crew of the Ebba when the schooner is hauled into her creek. If Ker Karraje ever gets hold of it, it will be all up with me.

It will be readily conceived with what anxiety I have awaited the moment to make the attempt: I am in a perfect fever of excitement, for it is a matter of life or death to me. I calculate from previous observations that the tide will be very low at about a quarter to nine. The top of the tunnel ought then to be a foot and a half above water, which is more than enough to permit of the keg passing through it. It will be another half hour at least before the flow sets in again, and by that time the keg may be far enough away to escape being thrown back on the coast.

I peer out of my cell. There is no one about, and I advance to the side of the lagoon, where by the light of a nearby lamp, I perceive the arch of the tunnel, towards which

the current seems to be setting pretty swiftly.

I go down to the very edge, and cast in the keg which contains the precious document and all my hopes.

“God be with it!” I fervently exclaim. “God be with it!”

For a minute or two the little barrel remains stationary, and then floats back to the side again. I throw it out once more with all my strength.

This time it is in the track of the current, which to my great joy sweeps it along and in twenty seconds, it has disappeared in the tunnel.

Yes, God be with it! May Heaven guide thee, little barrel! May it protect all those whom Ker Karraje menaces and grant that this band of pirates may not escape from the justice of man!

CHAPTER XIV.

BATTLE BETWEEN THE “SWORD” AND THE TUG.

Through all this sleepless night I have followed the keg in fancy. How many times I seem to see it swept against the rocks in the tunnel into a creek, or some excavation. I am in a cold perspiration from head to foot. Then I imagine that it has been carried out to sea. Heavens! if the returning tide should sweep it back to tho entrance and then through the tunnel into the lagoon! I must be on the lookout for it.

I rise before the sun and saunter down to the lagoon. Not a single object is floating on its calm surface.

The work on the tunnel through the side of the cavern goes on, and at four o’clock in the afternoon on September 23, Engineer Serko blows away the last rock obstructing the issue, and communication with the outer world is established. It is only a very narrow hole, and one has to stoop to go through it. The exterior orifice is lost among the crannies of the rocky coast, and it would be easy to obstruct it, if such a measure became necessary.

It goes without saying that the passage will be strictly guarded. No one without special authorization will be able either to go out or come in, therefore there is little hope of escape in that direction.

September 25.—This morning the tug rose from the depth of the lagoon to the surface, and has now run alongside the jetty. The Count d'Artigas and Captain Spade disembark, and the crew set to work to land the provisions—boxes of canned meat, preserves, barrels of wine and spirits, and other things brought by the Ebba, among which are several packages destined for Thomas Roch. The men also land the various sections of Roch's engines which are discoid in shape.

The inventor watches their operations, and his eyes glisten with eagerness. He seizes one of the sections, examines it, and nods approval. I notice that his joy no longer finds expression in incoherent utterances, that he is completely transformed from what he was while a patient at Healthful House. So much is this the case that I begin to ask myself whether his madness which was asserted to be incurable, has not been radically cured.

At last Thomas Roch embarks in the boat used for crossing the lake and is rowed over to his laboratory. Engineer Serko accompanies him. In an hour's time the tug's cargo has all been taken out and transported to the storehouses.

Ker Karraje exchanges a word or two with Engineer Serko and then enters his mansion. Later, in the afternoon, I see them walking up and down in front of the Beehive and talking earnestly together.

Then they enter the new tunnel, followed by Captain Spade. If I could but follow them! If I could but breathe for awhile the bracing air of the Atlantic, of which the interior of Back Cup only receives attenuated puffs, so to speak.

From September 26 to October 10.—Fifteen days have elapsed. Under the directions of Engineer Serko and Thomas Roch the sections of the engines have been fitted together. Then the construction of their supports is begun. These supports are simple

trestles, fitted with transverse troughs or grooves of various degrees of inclination, and which could be easily installed on the deck of the Ebba, or even on the platform of the tug, which can be kept on a level with the surface.

Thus Ker Karraje, will be ruler of the seas, with his yacht. No warship, however big, however powerful, will be able to cross the zone of danger, whereas the Ebba will be out of range of its guns. If only my notice were found! If only the existence of this lair of Back Cup were known! Means would soon be found, if not of destroying the place, at least of starving the band into submission!

October 20.—To my extreme surprise I find this morning that the tug has gone away again. I recall that yesterday the elements of the piles were renewed, but I thought it was only to keep them in order. In view of the fact that the outside can now be reached through the new tunnel, and that Thomas Roch has everything he requires, I can only conclude that the tug has gone off on another marauding expedition.

Yet this is the season of the equinoctial gales, and the Bermudan waters are swept by frequent tempests. This is evident from the violent gusts that drive back the smoke through the crater and the heavy rain that accompanies it, as well as by the water in the lagoon, which swells and washes over the brown rocks on its shores.

But it is by no means sure that the Ebba has quitted her cove. However staunch she may be, she is, it seems to me, of too light a build to face such tempests as now rage, even with the help of the tug.

On the other hand, although the tug has nothing to fear from the heavy seas, as it would be in calm water a few yards below the surface, it is hardly likely that it has gone on a trip unless to accompany the schooner.

I do not know to what its departure can be attributed, but its absence is likely to be prolonged, for it has not yet returned.

Engineer Serko has remained behind, but Ker Karraje, Captain Spade, and the crew of the schooner, I find, have left.

Life in the cavern goes on with its usual dispiriting monotony. I pass hour after hour in my cell, meditating, hoping, despairing, following in fancy the voyage of my little barrel, tossed about at the mercy of the currents and whose chances of being picked up, I fear, are becoming fainter each day, and killing time by writing my diary, which will probably not survive me.

Thomas Roch is constantly occupied in his laboratory manufacturing his deflagrator. I still entertain the conviction that nothing will ever induce him to give up the secret of the liquid's composition; but I am perfectly aware that he will not hesitate to place his invention at Ker Karraje's service.

I often meet Engineer Serko when my strolls take me in the direction of the Beehive. He always shows himself disposed to chat with me, though, it is true, he does so in a tone of impertinent frivolity. We converse upon all sorts of subjects, but rarely of my position. Recrimination thereanent is useless and only subjects me to renewed bantering.

October 22.—To-day I asked Engineer Serko whether the Ebba had put to sea again with the tug.

"Yes, Mr. Simon Hart," he replied, "and though the clouds gather and loud the tempest roars, be in no uneasiness in regard to our dear Ebba."

"Will she be gone long?"

"We expect her back within forty-eight hours. It is the last voyage Count d'Artigas proposes to make before the winter gales render navigation in these parts impracticable."

"Is her voyage one of business or pleasure?"

"Of business, Mr. Hart, of business," answered Engineer Serko with a smile. "Our engines are now completed, and when the fine weather returns we shall resume offensive operations."

“Against unfortunate merchantmen.”

“As unfortunate as they are richly laden.”

“Acts of piracy, whose impunity will, I trust, not always be assured,” I cried..

“Calm yourself, dear colleague, be calm! Be calm! No one, you know, can ever discover our retreat, and none can ever disclose the secret! Besides, with these engines, which are so easily handled and are of such terrible power, it would be easy for us to blow to pieces any ship that attempted to get within a certain radius of the island.”

“Providing,” I said, “that Thomas Roch has sold you the composition of his deflagrator as he has sold you that of his fulgurator.”

“That he has done, Mr. Hart, and it behooves me to set your mind at rest upon that point.”

From this categorical response I ought to have concluded that the misfortune had been consummated, but a certain hesitation in the intonation of his voice warned me that implicit reliance was not to be placed upon Engineer Serko’s assertions.

October 25.—What a frightful adventure I have just been mixed up in, and what a wonder I did not lose my life! It is only by a miracle that I am able to resume these notes, which have been interrupted for forty-eight hours. With a little luck, I should have been delivered! I should now be in one of the Bermudan ports—St. George or Hamilton. The mysteries of Back Cup would have been cleared up. The description of the schooner would have been wired all over the world, and she would not dare to put into any port. The provisioning of Back Cup would be impossible, and Ker Karraje’s bandits would be condemned to starve to death!

This is what occurred:

At eight o’clock in the evening on October 23, I quitted my cell in an indefinable state of nervousness, and with a presentiment that a serious event was imminent. In

vain I had tried to seek calmness in sleep. It was impossible to do so, and I rose and went out.

Outside Back Cup the weather must have been very rough. Violent gusts of wind swept in through the crater and agitated the water of the lagoon.

I walked along the shore on the Beehive side. No one was about. It was rather cold, and the air was damp. The pirates were all snugly ensconced in their cells, with the exception of one man, who stood guard over the new passage, notwithstanding that the outer entrance had been blocked. From where he was this man could not see the lagoon, moreover there were only two lamps alight, one on each side of the lake, and the forest of pillars was wrapt in the profoundest obscurity.

I was walking about in the shadow, when some one passed me.

I saw that he was Thomas Roch.

He was walking slowly, absorbed by his thoughts, his brain at work, as usual.

Was this not a favorable opportunity to talk to him, to enlighten him about what he was probably ignorant, namely, the character of the people into whose hands he had fallen?

“He cannot,” I argued, “know that the Count d’Artigas is none other than Ker Karraje, the pirate. He cannot be aware that he has given up a part of his invention to such a bandit. I must open his eyes to the fact that he will never be able to enjoy his millions, that he is a prisoner in Back Cup, and will never be allowed to leave it, any more than I shall. Yes, I will make an appeal to his sentiments of humanity, and point out to him what frightful misfortunes he will be responsible for if he does not keep the secret of his deflagrator.”

All this I had said to myself, and was preparing to carry out my resolution, when I suddenly felt myself seized from behind.

Two men held me by the arms, and another appeared in front of me.

Before I had time to cry out the man exclaimed in English:

“Hush! not a word! Are you not Simon Hart?”

“Yes, how did you know?”

“I saw you come out of your cell.”

“Who are you, then?”

“Lieutenant Davon, of the British Navy, of H.M.S. Standard, which is stationed at the Bermudas.”

Emotion choked me so that it was impossible for me to utter a word.

“We have come to rescue you from Ker Karraje, and also propose to carry off Thomas Roch,” he added.

“Thomas Roch?” I stammered.

“Yes, the document signed by you was found on the beach at St. George——”

“In a keg, Lieutenant Davon, which I committed to the waters of the lagoon.”

“And which contained,” went on the officer, “the notice by which we were apprised that the island of Back Cup served as a refuge for Ker Karraje and his band—Ker Karraje, this false Count d’Artigas, the author of the double abduction from Healthful House.”

“Ah! Lieutenant Davon——”

“Now we have not a moment to spare, we must profit by the obscurity.”

“One word, Lieutenant Davon, how did you penetrate to the interior of Back Cup?”

“By means of the submarine boat Sword, with which we have been making experiments at St. George for six months past.”

“A submarine boat!”

“Yes, it awaits us at the foot of the rocks. And now, Mr. Hart, where is Ker Karraje’s tug?”

“It has been away for three weeks.”

“Ker Karraje is not here, then?”

“No, but we expect him back every day—every hour, I might say.”

“It matters little,” replied Lieutenant Davon. “It is not after Ker Karraje, but Thomas Roch, we have come—and you also, Mr. Hart. The Sword will not leave the lagoon till you are both on board. If she does not turn up at St. George again, they will know that I have failed—and they will try again.”

“Where is the Sword, Lieutenant?”

“On this side, in the shadow of the bank, where it cannot be seen. Thanks to your directions, I and my crew were able to locate the tunnel. We came through all right, and ten minutes ago rose to the surface of the lake. Two men landed with me. I saw you issue from the cell marked on your plan. Do you know where Thomas Roch is?”

“A few paces off. He has just passed me, on his way to his laboratory.”

“God be praised, Mr. Hart!”

“Amen, Lieutenant Davon.”

The lieutenant, the two men and I took the path around the lagoon. We had not gone far when we perceived Thomas Roch in front of us. To throw ourselves upon him, gag him before he could utter a cry, bind him before he could offer any resistance, and bear him off to the place where the Sword was moored was the work of a minute.

The Sword was a submersible boat of only twelve tons, and consequently much inferior to the tug, both in respect of dimensions and power. Her screw was worked by a couple of dynamos fitted with accumulators that had been charged twelve hours previously in the port of St. George. However, the Sword would suffice to take us out of this prison, to restore us to liberty—that liberty of which I had given up all hope. Thomas Roch was at last to be rescued from the clutches of Ker Karraje and

Engineer Serko. The rascals would not be able to utilize his invention, and nothing could prevent the warships from landing a storming party on the island, who would force the tunnel in the wall and secure the pirates!

We saw no one while the two men were conveying Thomas Roch to the Sword, and all got on board without incident. The lid was shut and secured, the water compartments filled, and the Sword sank out of sight. We were saved!

The Sword was divided into three water-tight compartments. The after one contained the accumulators and machinery. The middle one, occupied by the pilot, was surmounted by a periscope fitted with lenticular portholes, through which an electric search-lamp lighted the way through the water. Forward, in the other compartment, Thomas Roch and I were shut in.

My companion, though the gag which was choking him had been removed, was still bound, and, I thought, knew what was going on.

But we were in a hurry to be off, and hoped to reach St. George that very night if no obstacle was encountered.

I pushed open the door of the compartment and rejoined Lieutenant Davon, who was standing by the man at the wheel. In the after compartment three other men, including the engineer, awaited the lieutenant’s orders to set the machinery in motion.

“Lieutenant Davon,” I said, “I do not think there is any particular reason why I should stay in there with Roch. If I can help you to get through the tunnel, pray command me.”

“Yes, I shall be glad to have you by me, Mr. Hart.”

It was then exactly thirty-seven minutes past eight.

The search-lamp threw a vague light through the water ahead of the Sword. From where we were, we had to cross the lagoon through its entire length to get to the

tunnel. It would be pretty difficult to fetch it, we knew, but, if necessary, we could hug the sides of the lake until we located it. Once outside the tunnel the Sword would rise to the surface and make for St. George at full speed.

“At what depth are we now?” I asked the lieutenant.

“About a fathom.”

“It is not necessary to go any lower,” I said. “From what I was able to observe during the equinoctial tides, I should think that we are in the axis of the tunnel.”

“All right,” he replied.

Yes, it was all right, and I felt that Providence was speaking by the mouth of the officer. Certainly Providence could not have chosen a better agent to work its will.

In the light of the lamp I examined him. He was about thirty years of age, cool, phlegmatic, with resolute physiognomy—the English officer in all his native impassibility—no more disturbed than if he had been on board the Standard, operating with extraordinary sang-froid, I might even say, with the precision of a machine.

“On coming through the tunnel I estimated its length at about fifty yards,” he remarked.

“Yes, Lieutenant, about fifty yards from one extremity to the other.”

This calculation must have been pretty exact, since the new tunnel cut on a level with the coast is thirty-five feet in length.

The order was given to go ahead, and the Sword moved forward very slowly for fear of colliding against the rocky side.

Sometimes we came near enough to it to distinguish a black mass ahead of it, but a turn of the wheel put us in the right direction again. Navigating a submarine boat in the open sea is difficult enough. How much more so in the confines of a lagoon!

After five minutes’ manoeuvring, the Sword, which was kept at about a fathom

below the surface, had not succeeded in sighting the orifice.

“Perhaps it would be better to return to the surface, Lieutenant,” I said. “We should then be able to see where we are.”

“I think you are right, Mr. Hart, if you can point out just about where the tunnel is located.”

“I think I can.”

“Very well, then.”

As a precaution the light was turned off. The engineer set the pumps in motion, and, lightened of its water ballast, the boat slowly rose in the darkness to the surface.

I remained at my post so that I could peer through the lookouts.

At last the ascensional movement of the Sword stopped, and the periscope emerged about a foot.

On one side of me, lighted by the lamp by the shore, I could see the Beehive.

“What is your opinion?” demanded the lieutenant.

“We are too far north. The orifice is in the west side of the cavern.”

“Is anybody about?”

“Not a soul.”

“Capital, Mr. Hart. Then we will keep on a level with the surface, and when we are in front of the tunnel, and you give the signal, we will sink.”

It was the best thing to be done. We moved off again and the pilot kept her head towards the tunnel.

When we were about twelve yards off I gave the signal to stop. As soon as the current was turned off the Sword stopped, opened her water tanks and slowly sank again.

Then the light in the lookout was turned on again, and there in front of us was a

black circle that did not reflect the lamp's rays.

"There it is, there is the tunnel!" I cried.

Was it not the door by which I was going to escape from my prison? Was not liberty awaiting me on the other side?

Gently the Sword moved towards the orifice.

Oh! the horrible mischance! How have I survived it? How is it that my heart is not broken?

A dim light appeared in the depth of the tunnel, about twenty-five yards in front of us. The advancing light could be none other than that, projected through the lookout of Ker Karraje's submarine boat.

"The tug! The tug!" I exclaimed. "Lieutenant, here is the tug returning to Back Cup!"

"Full speed astern," ordered the officer, and the Sword drew back just as she was about to enter the tunnel.

One chance remained. The lieutenant had swiftly turned off the light, and it was just possible that we had not been seen by the people in the tug. Perhaps, in the dark waters of the lagoon, we should escape notice, and when the oncoming boat had risen and moored to the jetty, we should be able to slip out unperceived.

We had backed close in to the south side and the Sword was about to stop, but alas, for our hopes! Captain Spade had seen that another submarine boat was about to issue through the tunnel, and he was making preparations to chase us. How could a frail craft like the Sword defend itself against the attacks of Ker Karraje's powerful machine?

Lieutenant Davon turned to me and said: "Go back to the compartment where Thomas Roch is and shut yourself in. I will close the after-door. There is just a chance that if the tug rams us the water-tight compartments will keep us up."

After shaking hands with the lieutenant, who was as cool as though we were in no danger, I went forward and rejoined Thomas Roch. I closed the door and awaited the issue in profound darkness.

Then I could feel the desperate efforts made by the Sword to escape from or ram her enemy. I could feel her rushing, gyrating and plunging. Now she would twist to avoid a collision. Now she would rise to the surface, then sink to the bottom of the lagoon. Can any one conceive such a struggle as that in which, like two marine monsters, these machines were engaged in beneath the troubled waters of this inland lake?

A few minutes elapsed, and I began to think that the Sword had eluded the tug and was rushing through the tunnel.

Suddenly there was a collision. The shock was not, it seemed to me, very violent, but I could be under no illusion: the Sword had been struck on her starboard quarter. Perhaps her plates had resisted, and if not, the water would only invade one of her compartments, I thought.

Almost immediately after, however, there was another shock that pushed the Sword with extreme violence. She was raised by the ram of the tug which sawed and ripped its way into her side. Then I could feel her heel over and sink straight down, stern foremost.

Thomas Roch and I were tumbled over violently by. this movement. There was another bump, another ripping sound, and the Sword lay still.

Just what happened after that I am unable to say, for I lost consciousness.

I have since learned that all this occurred many hours ago.

I however distinctly remember that my last thought was:

“If I am to die, at any rate Thomas Roch and his secret perish with me—and the pirates of Back Cup will not escape punishment for their crimes.”

CHAPTER XV.

EXPECTATION.

As soon as I recover my senses I find myself lying on my bed in my cell, where it appears I have been lying for thirty-six hours.

I am not alone. Engineer Serko is near me. He has attended to me himself, not because he regards me as a friend, I surmise, but as a man from whom indispensable explanations are awaited, and who afterwards can be done away with if necessary.

I am still so weak that I could not walk a step. A little more and I should have been asphyxiated in that narrow compartment of the Sword at the bottom of the lagoon.

Am I in condition to reply to the questions that Engineer Serko is dying to put to me? Yes—but I shall maintain the utmost reserve.

In the first place I wonder what has become of Lieutenant Davon and the crew of the Sword. Did those brave Englishmen perish in the collision? Are they safe and sound like us—for I suppose that Thomas Roch has also survived?

The first question that Engineer Serko puts to me is this:

“Will you explain to me what happened, Mr. Hart?”

Instead of replying it occurs to me to question him myself.

“And Thomas Roch?” I inquire.

“In good health, Mr. Hart.” Then he adds in an imperious tone: “Tell me what occurred!”

“In the first place, tell me what became of the others.”

“What others?” replies Serko, glancing at me savagely.

“Why, those men who threw themselves upon Thomas Roch and me, who gagged, bound, and carried us off and shut us up, I know not where?”

On reflection I had come to the conclusion that the best thing to do was to pretend

that I had been surprised before I knew where I was or who my aggressors were.

“You will know what became of them later. But first, tell me how, the thing was done.”

By the threatening tone of his voice, as he for the third time puts this question, I understand the nature of the suspicions entertained of me. Yet to be in the position to accuse me of having had relations with the outside he would have had to get possession of my keg. This he could not have done, seeing that it is in the hands of the Bermudan authorities. The pirates cannot, I am convinced, have a single proof to back up their suspicions.

I therefore recount how about eight o’clock on the previous evening I was walking along the edge of the lagoon, after Thomas Roch had passed me, going towards his laboratory, when I felt myself seized from behind; how having been gagged, bound, and blindfolded, I felt myself carried off and lowered into a hole with another person whom I thought I recognized from his groans as Thomas Roch; how I soon felt that I was on board a boat of some description and naturally concluded that it was the tug; how I felt it sink; how I felt a shock that threw me violently against the side, and how I felt myself suffocating and lost consciousness, since I remember nothing further.

Engineer Serko listens with profound attention, a stern look in his eyes and a frown on his brow; and yet he can have no reason that authorizes him to doubt my word.

“You claim that three men threw themselves upon you?” he asks.

“Yes. I thought they were some of your people, for I did not see them coming. Who were they?”

“Strangers, as you must have known from their language.”

“They did not utter a word!”

“Have you no idea as to their nationality?”

“Not the remotest.”

Do you know what were their intentions in entering the cavern?”

“I do not.”

“What is your opinion about it?”

“My opinion, Mr. Serko? I repeat I thought they were two or three of your pirates who had come to throw me into the lagoon by the Count d’Artigas’ orders, and that they were going to do the same thing to Thomas Roch. I supposed that having obtained his secrets—as you informed me was the case—you had no further use for him and were about to get rid of us both.”

“Is it possible, Mr. Hart, that you could have thought such a thing!” continued Serko in his sarcastic way.

“I did, until having been able to remove the bandage from my eyes, I perceived that I was in the tug.”

“It was not the tug, but a boat of the same kind that had got through the tunnel.”

“A submarine boat?” I ejaculate.

“Yes, and manned by persons whose mission was to kidnap you and Thomas Roch.”

“Kidnap us?” I echo, continuing to feign surprise.

“And,” adds Engineer Serko, “I want to know what you think about the matter.”

“What I think about it? Well, it appears to me that there is only one plausible explanation possible. If the secret of your retreat has not been betrayed—and I cannot conceive how you could have been betrayed or what imprudence you or yours could have committed—my opinion is that this submarine boat was exploring the bottom of the sea in this neighborhood, that she must have found her way into the tunnel, that she rose to the surface of the lagoon, that her crew, greatly surprised to find themselves inside an inhabited cavern, seized hold of the first persons they came across, Thomas Roch and myself, and others as well perhaps, for of course I

do not know——”

Engineer Serko has become serious again. Does he realize the inanity of the hypothesis I try to pass off on him? Does he think I know more than I will say? However this may be, he accepts my professed view, and says:

“In effect, Mr. Hart, it must have happened as you suggest, and when the stranger tried to make her way out through the tunnel just as the tug was entering, there was a collision—a collision of which she was the victim. But we are not the kind of people to allow our fellow-men to perish before our eyes. Moreover, the disappearance of Thomas Roch and yourself was almost immediately discovered. Two such valuable lives had to be saved at all hazards. We set to work. There are many expert divers among our men. They hastily donned their suits and descended to the bottom of the lagoon. They passed lines around the hull of the Sword——”

“The Sword?” I exclaim.

“That is the name we saw painted on the bow of the vessel when we raised her to the surface. What satisfaction we experienced when we recovered you—unconscious, it is true, but still breathing—and were able to bring you back to life! Unfortunately all our attentions to the officer who commanded the Sword, and to his crew were useless. The shock had torn open the after and middle compartments, and they paid with their lives the misfortune—due to chance, as you observe—of having discovered our mysterious retreat.”

On learning that Lieutenant Davon and his companions are dead, my heart is filled with anguish; but to keep up my role—as they were persons with whom, presumably, I was not acquainted, and had never seen—I am careful not to display any emotion. I must, on no account, afford ground for the suspicion that there was any connivance between the commander of the Sword and me. For aught I know, Engineer Serko may have reason to be very skeptical about the discovery of the tunnel being accidental.

What, however, I am most concerned about is that the unlooked-for occasion to recover my liberty was lost. Shall I ever be afforded another chance? However this may be, my notice reached the English authorities of the archipelago, and they now know where Ker Karraje is to be found. When it is seen that the Sword does not return to Bermuda, there can be no doubt that another attempt will be made to get inside Back Cup, in which, had it not been for the inopportune return of the tug, I should no longer be a prisoner.

I have resumed my usual existence, and having allayed all mistrust, am permitted to wander freely about the cavern, as usual.

It is patent that the adventure has had no ill effect upon Thomas Roch. Intelligent nursing brought him around, as it did me. In full possession of his mental faculties he has returned to work, and spends the entire day in his laboratory.

The Ebba brought back from her last trip bales, boxes, and a quantity of objects of varied origin, and I conclude that a number of ships must have been pillaged during this marauding expedition.

The work on the trestles for Roch’s engine goes steadily forward, and there are now no fewer than fifty engines. If Ker Karraje and Engineer Serko are under the necessity of defending Back Cup, three or four will be sufficient to render the island unapproachable, as they will cover a zone which no vessel could enter without being blown to pieces. And it occurs to me that they intend to put Back Cup in a state of defence after having argued as follows:

“If the appearance of the Sword in the lagoon was due to chance the situation remains unchanged, and no power, not even England, will think of seeking for the Sword inside the cavern. If, on the other hand, as the result of an incomprehensible revelation, it has been learned that Back Cup is become the retreat of Ker Karraje, if the expedition of the Sword was a first effort against the island, another of a different kind—either a bombardment from a distance, or an attack by a landing

party—is to be expected. Therefore, ere we can quit Back Cup and carry away our plunder, we shall have to defend ourselves by means of Roch's fulgurator."

In my opinion the rascals must have gone on to reason still further in this wise:

"Is there any connection between the disclosure of our secret—if it was, and however it may have been made—and the double abduction from Healthful House? Is it known that Thomas Roch and his keeper are confined in Back Cup? Is it known that the abduction was effected in the interest of Ker Karraje? Have Americans, English, French, Germans, and Russians reason to fear that an attack in force against the island would be doomed to failure?"

Ker Karraje must know very well that these powers would not hesitate to attack him, however great the danger might be. The destruction of his lair is an urgent duty in the interest of public security and of humanity. After sweeping the West Pacific the pirate and his companions are infesting the West Atlantic, and must be wiped out at all costs.

In any case, it is imperative that the inhabitants of Back Cup should be on their guard. This fact is realized, and, from the day on which the Sword was destroyed, strict watch has been kept. Thanks to the new passage, they are able to hide among the rocks without having recourse to the submarine tunnel to get there, and day and night a dozen sentries are posted about the island. The moment a ship appears in sight the fact is at once made known inside the cavern.

Nothing occurs for some days, and the latter succeed each other with dreadful monotony. The pirates, however, feel that Back Cup no longer enjoys its former security. Every moment an alarm from the sentries posted outside is expected. The situation is no longer the same since the advent of the Sword. Gallant Lieutenant Davon, gallant crew, may England, may the civilized nations, never forget that you have sacrificed your lives in the cause of humanity!

It is evident that now, however powerful may be their means of defence, even more

powerful than a network of torpedoes, Engineer Serko and Captain Spade are filled with an anxiety that they vainly essay to dissemble. They hold frequent conferences together. Maybe they discuss the advisability of quitting Back Cup with their wealth, for they are aware that if the existence of the cavern is known means will be found to reduce it, even if the inmates have to be starved out.

This is, of course, mere conjecture on my part. What is essential to me is that they do not suspect me of having launched the keg that was so providentially picked up at Bermuda. Never, I must say, has Engineer Serko ever made any allusion to any such probability. No, I am not even suspected. If the contrary were the case I am sufficiently acquainted with Ker Karraje to know that he would long ago have sent me to rejoin Lieutenant Davon and the Sword at the bottom of the lagoon.

The winter tempests have set in with a vengeance. The wind howls though the hole in the roof, and rude gusts sweep through the forest of pillars producing sonorous sounds, so sonorous, so deep, that one might sometimes almost fancy they were produced by the firing of the guns of a squadron. Flocks of seabirds take refuge in the cavern from the gale, and at intervals, when it lulls, almost deafen us with their screaming.

It is to be presumed that in such weather the schooner will make no attempt to put to sea, for the stock of provisions is ample enough to last all the season. Moreover, I imagine the Count d’Artigas will not be so eager in future to show his Ebba along the American coast, where he risks being received, not, as hitherto, with the consideration due to a wealthy yachtsman, but in the manner Ker Karraje so richly merits.

It occurs to me that if the apparition of the Sword was the commencement of a campaign against the island, a question of great moment relative to the future of Back Cup arises.

Therefore, one day, prudently, so as not to excite any suspicion, I ventured to pump

Engineer Serko about it.

We were in the neighborhood of Thomas Roch's laboratory, and had been conversing for some time, when Engineer Serko touched upon the extraordinary apparition of an English submarine boat in the lagoon. On this occasion he seemed to incline to the view that it might have been a premeditated expedition against Ker Karraje.

"That is not my opinion," I replied, in order to bring him to the question that I wanted to put to him.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because if your retreat were known a fresh attempt, if not to penetrate to the cavern, at least to destroy Back Cup, would ere this have been made."

"Destroy it!" cried Serko. "It would be a dangerous undertaking, in view of the means of defence of which we now dispose."

"They can know nothing about this matter, Mr. Serko. It is not imagined, either in the new world or the old, that the abduction from Healthful House was effected for your especial benefit, or that you have succeeded in coming to terms with Thomas Roch for his invention."

Engineer Serko made no response to this observation, which, for that matter, was unanswerable.

I continued:

"Therefore a squadron sent by the maritime powers who have an interest in breaking up this island would not hesitate to approach and shell it. Now, I argue from this that as this squadron has not yet appeared, it is not likely to come at all, and that nothing is known as to Ker Karraje's whereabouts, and you must admit that this hypothesis is the most cheerful one, as far as you are concerned."

"That may be," Engineer Serko replied, "but what is, is. Whether they are aware of

the fact or no, if warships approach within five or six miles of this island they will be sunk before they have had time to fire a single shot!”

“Well, and what then?”

“What then? Why the probability is that no others would care to repeat the experiment.”

“That, again, may be. But these warships would invest you beyond the dangerous zone, and the Ebba would not be able to put in to the ports she previously visited with the Count d’Artigas. In this event, how would you be able to provision the island?”

Engineer Serko remained silent.

This argument, which he must already have brooded over, was too logical to be refuted or dismissed, and I have an idea that the pirates contemplate abandoning Back Cup.

Nevertheless, not relishing being cornered, he continued:

“We should still have the tug, and what the Ebba could not do, this would.”

“The tug?” I cried. “But if Ker Karraje’s secrets are known, do you suppose the powers are not also aware of the existence of the Count d’Artigas’ submarine boat?”

Engineer Serko looked at me suspiciously.

“Mr. Hart,” he said, “you appear to me to carry your deductions rather far.”

“I, Mr. Serko?”

“Yes, and I think you talk about all this like a man who knows more than he ought to.”

This remark brought me up abruptly. It was evident that my arguments might give rise to the suspicion that I was not altogether irresponsible for the recent incident. Engineer Serko scrutinized me sharply as though he would read my innermost thoughts.

“Mr. Serko,” I observed, “by profession, as well as by inclination, I am accustomed to reason upon everything. This is why I communicated to you the result of my reasoning, which you can take into consideration or not, as you like.”

Thereupon we separate. But I fancy my lack of reserve may have excited suspicions which may not be easy to allay.

From this interview, however, I gleaned a precious bit of information, namely, that the dangerous zone of Roch’s fulgurator is between five and six miles off. Perhaps, during the next equinoctial tides, another notice to this effect in another keg may also reach a safe destination.

But how many weary months to wait before the orifice of the tunnel will again be uncovered!

The rough weather continues, and the squalls are more violent than ever. Is it the state of the sea that delays another campaign against Back Cup? Lieutenant Davon certainly assured me that if his expedition failed, if the Sword did not return to St. George, another attempt under different conditions would be made with a view to breaking up this bandits’ lair. Sooner or later the work of justice must be done, and Back Cup be destroyed, even though I may not survive its destruction.

Ah! why can I not go and breathe, if only for a single instant, the vivifying air outside? Why am I not permitted to cast one glance over the ocean towards the distant horizon of the Bermudas? My whole life is concentrated in one desire: to get through the tunnel in the wall and hide myself among the rocks. Perchance I might be the first to catch sight of the smoke of a squadron heading for the island.

This project, alas! is unrealizable, as sentries are posted day and night at each extremity of the passage. No one can enter it without Engineer Serko’s authorization. Were I to attempt it, I should risk being deprived of my liberty to walk about the cavern, and even worse might happen to me.

Since our last conversation, Engineer Serko’s attitude towards me has undergone a

change. His gaze has lost its old-time sarcasm and is distrustful, suspicious, searching and as stern as Ker Karraje's.

November 17.—This afternoon there was a great commotion in the Beehive, and the men rushed out of their cells with loud cries.

I was reclining on my bed, but immediately rose and hurried out.

All the pirates were making for the passage, in front of which were Ker Karraje, Engineer Serko, Captain Spade, Boatswain Effrondat, Engine-driver Gibson and the Count d'Artigas' big Malay attendant.

I soon learn the reason for the tumult, for the sentries rush in with shouts of alarm.

Several vessels have been sighted to the northwest—warships steaming at full speed in the direction of Back Cup.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONLY A FEW MORE HOURS.

What effect this news has upon me, and what emotion it awakens within my soul! The end, I feel, is at hand. May it be such as civilization and humanity are entitled to.

Up to the present I have indited my notes day by day. Henceforward it is imperative that I should inscribe them hour by hour, minute by minute. Who knows but what Thomas Roch's last secret may be revealed to me and that I shall have time to commit it to paper! Should I die during the attack God grant that the account of the five months I have passed in Back Cup may be found upon my body!

At first Ker Karraje, Engineer Serko, Captain Spade, and several of their companions took up position on the exterior base of the island. What would I not give to be able follow to them, and in the friendly shelter of a rook watch the on-coming warships!

An hour later they return after having left a score of men to keep watch. As the days

at this season of the year are very short there is nothing to fear before the morrow. It is not likely that the ships will attempt a night attack and land a storming party, for they must imagine that the place is in a thorough condition of defence.

All night long the pirates work, installing the trestles at different points of the coast. Six have been taken through the passage to places selected in advance.

This done, Engineer Serko joins Thomas Roch in his laboratory. Is he going to tell him what is passing, that a squadron is in view of Back Cup, and that his fulgurator will be employed to defend the island?

What is certain is that half a hundred engines, each charged with several pounds of the explosive and of the substance that ensures a trajectory superior to that of any other projectile, are ready for their work of destruction.

As to the deflagrator liquid, Thomas Roch has a certain number of phials of it, and—I know only too well—will not refuse to help Ker Karraje's pirates with it.

During these preparations night has come on. Only the lamps of the Beehive are lighted and a semi-obscurity reigns in the cavern.

I return to my cell. It is to my interest to keep out of the way as much as possible, for Engineer Serko's suspicions might be revived now that the squadron is approaching Back Cup.

But will the vessels sighted continue on their course in this direction? May they not be merely passing on their way to Bermuda? For an instant this doubt enters my mind. No, no, it cannot be! Besides, I have just heard Captain Spade declare that they are lying to in view of the island.

To what nation do they belong? Have the English, desirous of avenging the destruction of the Sword, alone undertaken the expedition? May not cruisers of other nations be with them? I know not, and it is impossible to ascertain. And what does it matter, after all, so long as this haunt is destroyed, even though I should perish in the ruins like the heroic Lieutenant Davon and his brave crew?

Preparations for defence continue with coolness and method under Engineer Serko's superintendence. These pirates are obviously certain that they will be able to annihilate their assailants as soon as the latter enter the dangerous zone. Their confidence in Roch's fulgurator is absolute. Absorbed by the idea that these warship are powerless against them, they think neither of the difficulties nor menaces held out by the future.

I surmise that the trestles have been set up on the northwest coast with the grooves turned to send the engines to the north, west, and south. On the east, as already stated, the island is defended by the chain of reefs that stretches away to the Bermudas.

About nine o'clock I venture out of my cell. They will pay little attention to me, and perhaps I may escape notice in the obscurity. Ah! if I could get through that passage and hide behind some rock, so that I could witness what goes on at daybreak! And why should I not succeed now that Ker Karraje, Engineer Serko, Captain Spade, and the pirates have taken their posts outside?

The shores of the lake are deserted, but the entrance to the passage is kept by Count d'Artigas' Malay. I saunter, without any fixed idea, towards Thomas Roch's laboratory. This reminds me of my compatriot. I am, on reflection, disposed to think that he knows nothing about the presence of a squadron off Back Cup. Probably not until the last moment will Engineer Serko apprise him of its proximity, not till he brusquely points out to him the vengeance he can accomplish.

Then I conceive the idea of enlightening Thomas Roch, myself, of the responsibility he is incurring and of revealing to him in this supreme hour the character of the men who want him to co-operate in their criminal projects.

Yes, I will, attempt it, and may I succeed in fanning into a flame any spark of patriotism that may still linger in his rebellious soul!

Roch is shut up in his laboratory. He must be alone, for never does he allow any one

to enter while he is preparing his deflagrator.

As I pass the jetty I notice that the tug is moored in its accustomed place. Here I judge it prudent to walk behind the first row of pillars and approach the laboratory laterally—which will enable me to see whether anybody is with him. When I have gone a short distance along the sombre avenue I see a bright light on the opposite side of the lagoon. It is the electric light in Roch's laboratory as seen through a narrow window in the front.

Except in that particular spot, the southern shore of the lake is in darkness, whereas, in the opposite direction, the Beehive is lit up to its extremity at the northern wall. Through the opening in the dome, over the lake I can see the stars shining. The sky is clear, the tempest has abated, and the squalls no longer penetrate to the interior of Back Cup.

When near the laboratory, I creep along the wall and peep in at the window.

Thomas Roch is there alone. The light shines full on his face. If it is somewhat drawn, and the lines on the forehead are more pronounced, his physiognomy, at least, denotes perfect calmness and self-possession. No, he is no longer the inmate of Pavilion No. 17, the madman of Healthful House, and I ask myself whether he is not radically cured, whether there is no further danger of his reason collapsing in a final paroxysm.

He has just laid two glass phials upon the table, and holds a third in his hand. He holds it up to the light, and observes the limpidity of the liquid it contains.

I have half a mind to rush in, seize the tubes and smash them, but I reflect that he would have time to make some more of the stuff. Better stick to my first plan.

I push the door open and enter.

"Thomas Roch!" I exclaim.

He has not heard, nor has he seen me.

“Thomas Roch!” I repeat.

He raises his head, turns and gazes at me.

“Ah! it is you, Simon Hart!” he replies calmly, even indifferently.

He knows my name. Engineer Serko must have informed him that it was Simon Hart, and not Keeper Gaydon who was watching over him at Healthful House.

“You know who I am?” I say.

“Yes, as I know what your object was in undertaking such a position. You lived in hopes of surprising a secret that they would not pay for at its just value!”

Thomas Roch knows everything, and perhaps it is just as well, in view of what I am going to say.

“Well, you did not succeed, Simon Hart, and as far as this is concerned,” he added, flourishing the phial, “no one else has succeeded, or ever will succeed.”

As I conjectured, he has not, then, made known the composition of his deflagrator.

Looking him straight in the face, I reply:

“You know who I am, Thomas Roch, but do you know in whose place you are?”

“In my own place!” he cries.

That is what Ker Karraje has permitted him to believe. The inventor thinks he is at home in Back Cup, that the riches accumulated in this cavern are his, and that if an attack is made upon the place, it will be with the object of stealing what belongs to him! And he will defend it under the impression that he has the right to do so!

“Thomas Roch,” I continue, “listen to me.”

“What do you want to say to me, Simon Hart?”

“This cavern into which we have been dragged, is occupied by a band of pirates, and—”

Roch does not give me time to complete the sentence—I doubt even whether he has

understood me.

“I repeat,” he interrupts vehemently, “that the treasures stored here are the price of my invention. They have paid me what I asked for my fulgurator—what I was everywhere else refused—even in my own country—which is also yours—and I will not allow myself to be despoiled!”

What can I reply to such insensate assertions? I, however, go on:

“Thomas Roch, do you remember Healthful House?”

“Healthful House, where I was sequestrated after Warder Gaydon had been entrusted with the mission of spying upon me in order to rob me of my secret? I do, indeed.”

“I never dreamed of depriving you of the benefit of your secret, Thomas Roch. I would never have accepted such a mission. But you were ill, your reason was affected, and your invention was too valuable to be lost. Yes, had you disclosed the secret during one of your fits you would have preserved all the benefit and all the honor of it.”

“Really, Simon Hart!” Roch replies disdainfully. “Honor and benefit! Your assurances come somewhat late in the day. You forget that on the pretext of insanity, I was thrown into a dungeon. Yes, it was a pretext; for my reason has never left me, even for an hour, as you can see from what I have accomplished since I am free.”

“Free! Do you imagine you are free, Thomas Roch? Are you not more closely confined within the walls of this cavern than you ever were at Healthful House?”

“A man who is in his own home,” he replies angrily, “goes out as he likes and when he likes. I have only to say the word and all the doors will open before me. This place is mine. Count d’Artigas gave it to me with everything it contains. Woe to those who attempt to attack it. I have here the wherewithal to annihilate them, Simon Hart!” The inventor waves the phial feverishly as he speaks.”

“The Count d’Artigas has deceived you,” I cry, “as he has deceived so many others. Under this name is dissembled one of the most formidable monsters who ever scoured the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. He is a bandit steeped in crime—he is the odious Ker Karraje!”

“Ker Karraje!” echoes Thomas Roch.

And I wonder if this name has not impressed him, if he remembers who the man is who bears it. If it did impress him, it was only momentarily.

“I do not know this Ker Karraje,” he says, pointing towards the door to order me out. “I only know the Count d’Artigas.”

“Thomas Roch,” I persist, in a final effort, “the Count d’Artigas and Ker Karraje are one and the same person. If this man has purchased your secret, it is with the intention of ensuring impunity for his crimes and facilities for committing fresh ones. He is the chief of these pirates.”

“Pirates!” cries Roch, whose irritation increases the more I press him. “The real pirates are those who dare to menace me even in this retreat, who tried it on with the Sword—for Serko has told me everything—who sought to steal in my own home what belongs to me, what is but the just price of my discovery.”

“No, Thomas Roch, the pirates are those who have imprisoned you in this cavern of Back Cup, who will utilize your genius to defend it, and who will get rid of you when they are in entire possession of your secrets!”

Thomas Roch here interrupts me. He does not appear to listen to what I say. He has a fixed idea, that of vengeance, which has been skilfully worked upon by Engineer Serko, and in which his hatred is concentrated to the exclusion of everything else.

“The bandits,” he hisses, “are those who spurned me without a hearing, who heaped injustice and ignominy upon me, who drove me from country to country, whereas I offered them superiority, invincibleness, omnipotence!”

It is the eternal story of the unappreciated inventor, to whom the indifferent or envious refuse the means of testing his inventions, to pay him the value he sets upon them. I know it well—and also know all the exaggeration that has been written upon this subject.

It is clearly no time for reasoning with Thomas Roch. My arguments are entirely lost upon the hapless dupe of Ker Karraje and his accomplices. In revealing to him the real name of the Count d'Artigas, and denouncing to him this band and their chief I had hoped to wean him from their influence and make him realize the criminal end they have in view. My hope was vain. He does not believe me. And then what does he care whether the brigand's name is Count 'd'Artigas or Ker Karraje? Is not he, Thomas Roch, master of Back Cup? Is he not the owner of these riches accumulated by twenty years of murder and rapine?

Disarmed before such moral degeneracy, knowing not how I can touch his ulcerated, irresponsible heart, I turn towards the door. It only remains for me to withdraw. What is to be, will be, since it is out of my power to prevent the frightful dénouement that will occur in a few hours.

Thomas Roch takes no more notice of me. He seems to have forgotten that I am here. He has resumed his manipulations without realizing that he is not alone.

There is only one means of preventing the imminent catastrophe. Throw myself upon Roch, place him beyond the power of doing harm—strike him—kill him—yes, kill him! It is my right—it is my duty!

I have no arms, but on a near-by shelf I see some tools—a chisel and a hammer. What is to prevent me from knocking his brains out? Once he is dead I have but to smash the phials and his invention dies with him. The warships can approach, land their men upon the island, demolish Back Cup with their shells. Ker Karraje and his band will be killed to a man. Can I hesitate at a murder that will bring about the chastisement of so many crimes?

I advance to the shelf and stretch forth my hand to seize the chisel.

As I do so, Thomas Roch turns round.

It is too late to strike. A struggle would ensue. The noise and his cries would be heard, for there are still some pirates not far off, I can even now hear some one approaching, and have only just time to fly if I would not be seen.

Nevertheless, I make one last attempt to awaken the sentiment of patriotism within him.

“Thomas Roch,” I say, “warships are in sight. They have come to destroy this lair. Maybe one of them flies the French flag!”

He gazes at me. He was not aware that Back Cup is going to be attacked, and I have just apprised him of the fact. His brow darkens and his eyes flash.

“Thomas Roch, would you dare to fire upon your country’s flag—the tricolor flag?”

He raises his head, shakes it nervously, and with a disdainful gesture:

“What do you mean by ‘your country?’ I no longer have any country, Simon Hart. The inventor spurned no longer has a country. Where he finds an asylum, there is his fatherland! They seek to take what is mine. I will defend it, and woe, woe to those who dare to attack me!”

Then rushing to the door of the laboratory and throwing it violently open he shouts so loudly that he must be heard at the Beehive:

“Go! Get you gone!”

I have not a second to lose, and I dash out.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONE AGAINST FIVE.

For a whole hour I wander about among Back Cup’s dark vaults, amid the stone trees, to the extreme limit of the cavern. It is here that I have so often sought an issue, a crevice, a crack through which I might squeeze to the shore of the island.

My search has been futile. In my present condition, a prey to indefinable hallucinations it seems to me that these walls are thicker than ever, that they are gradually closing in upon and will crush me.

How long this mental trouble lasts I cannot say. But I afterwards find myself on the Beehive side, opposite the cell in which I cannot hope for either repose or sleep. Sleep, when my brain is in a whirl of excitement? Sleep, when I am near the end of a situation that threatened to be prolonged for years and years?

What will the end be as far as I am personally concerned? What am I to expect from the attack upon Back Cup, the success of which I have been unable to assure by placing Thomas Roch beyond the possibility of doing harm? His engines are ready to be launched, and as soon as the vessels have reached the dangerous zone they will be blown to atoms.

However this may be, I am condemned to pass the remaining hours of the night in my cell. The time has come for me to go in. At daybreak I shall see what is best for me to do. Meanwhile, for aught I know I may hear the thunder of Roch's fulgurator as it destroys the ships approaching to make a night attack.

I take a last look round. On the opposite side a light, a single light, is burning. It is the lamp in Roch's laboratory and it casts its reflection upon the waters of the lake.

No one is about, and it occurs to me that the pirates must have taken up their lighting positions outside and that the Beehive is empty.

Then, impelled by an irresistible instinct, instead of returning to my cell, I creep along the wall, listening, spying, ready to hide if I hear voices or footsteps.

I at length reach the passage.

God in heaven! No one is on guard there—the passage is free!

Without giving myself time to reflect I dart into the dark hole, and grope my way along it. Soon I feel a fresher air—the salt, vivifying air of the sea, that I have not

breathed for five months. I inspire it with avidity, with all the power of my lungs.

The outer extremity of the passage appears against the star-studded sky. There is not even a shadow in the way. Perhaps I shall be able to get outside.

I lay down, and crawl along noiselessly to the orifice and peer out.

Not a soul is in sight!

By skirting the rocks towards the east, to the side which cannot be approached from the sea on account of the reefs and which is not likely to be watched, I reach a narrow excavation about two hundred and twenty-five yards from where the point of the coast extends towards the northwest.

At last I am out of the cavern. I am not free, but it is the beginning of freedom.

On the point the forms of a few sentries stand out against the clear sky, so motionless that they might be mistaken for pieces of the rock.

On the horizon to the west the position lights of the warship show in a luminous line.

From a few gray patches discernable in the east, I calculate that it must be about five o’clock in the morning.

November 18.—It is now light enough for me to be able to complete my notes relating the details of my visit to Thomas Roch’s laboratory—the last lines my hand will trace, perhaps.

I have begun to write, and shall dot down the incidents of the attack as they occur.

The light damp mist that hangs over the water soon lifts under the influence of the breeze, and at last I can distinguish the warships.

There are five of them, and they are lying in a line about six miles off, and consequently beyond the range of Roch’s engines.

My fear that after passing in sight of the Bermudas the squadron would continue on its way to the Antilles or Mexico was therefore unfounded. No, there it is, awaiting

broad daylight in order to attack Back Cup.

There is a movement on the coast. Three or four pirates emerge from the rocks, the sentries are recalled and draw in, and the entire band is soon assembled. They do not seek shelter inside the cavern, knowing full well that the ships can never get near enough for the shells of the big guns to reach, the island.

I run no risk of being discovered, for only my head protrudes above the hole in the rock and no one is likely to come this way. The only thing that worries me is that Serko, or somebody else may take it into his head to see if I am in my cell, and if necessary to lock me in, though what they have to fear from me I cannot conceive.

At twenty-five minutes past seven: Ker Karraje, Engineer Serko and Captain Spade advance to the extremity of the point, where they sweep the north-western horizon with their telescopes. Behind them the six trestles are installed, in the grooves of which are Roch's autopropulsive engines.

Thirty-five minutes past seven: Smoke arises from the stacks of the warships, which are getting under way and will soon be within range of the engines.

Horrible cries of joy, salvos of hurrahs—howls of wild beasts I might more appropriately say—arise from the pirate horde.

At this moment Engineer Serko quits Ker Karraje, whom he leaves with Captain Spade, and enters the cavern, no doubt to fetch Thomas Roch.

When Ker Karraje orders the latter to launch his engines against the ships will he remember what I told him? Will not his crime appear to him in all its horror? Will he refuse to obey? No, I am only too convinced of the contrary. It is useless to entertain any illusion on the subject. The inventor believes he is on his own property. They are going to attack it. He will defend it.

The five warships slowly advance, making for the point. Perhaps they imagine on board that Thomas Roch has not given up his last and greatest secret to the pirates—and, as a matter of fact, he had not done so when I threw the keg into the

lagoon. If the commanders propose to land storming parties and the ships advance into the zone of danger there will soon be nothing left of them but bits of shapeless floating wreckage.

Here comes Thomas Roch accompanied by Engineer Serko. On issuing from the passage both go to the trestle that is pointing towards the leading warship.

Ker Karraje and Captain Spade are awaiting them.

As far as I am able to judge, Roch is calm. He knows what he is going to do. No hesitation troubles the soul of the hapless man whom hatred has led astray.

Between his fingers shines the glass phial containing the deflagrator liquid.

He then gazes towards the nearest ship, which is about five miles' distant.

She is a cruiser of about two thousand five hundred tons—not more.

She flies no flag, but from her build I take her to belong to a nation for which no Frenchman can entertain any particular regard.

The four other warships remain behind.

It is this cruiser which is to begin the attack.

Let her use her guns, then, since the pirates allow her to approach, and may the first of her projectiles strike Thomas Roch!

While Engineer Serko is estimating the distance, Roch places himself behind the trestle. Three engines are resting on it, charged with the explosive, and which are assured a long trajectory by the fusing matter without it being necessary to impart a gyratory movement to them—as in the case of Inventor Turpin's gyroscopic projectiles. Besides, if they drop within a few hundred yards of the vessel, they will be quite near enough to utterly destroy it.

The time has come.

"Thomas Roch!" Engineer Serko cries, and points to the cruiser.

The latter is steaming slowly towards the northwestern point of the island and is

between four and five miles off.

Roch nods assent, and waves them back from the trestle.

Ker Karraje, Captain Spade and the others draw back about fifty paces.

Thomas Roch then takes the stopper from the phial which he holds in his right hand, and successively pours into a hole in the rear-end of each engine a few drops of the liquid, which mixes with the fusing matter.

Forty-five seconds elapse—the time necessary for the combination to be effected—forty-five seconds during which it seems to me that my heart ceases to beat.

A frightful whistling is then heard, and the three engines tear through the air, describing a prolonged curve at a height of three hundred feet, and pass the cruiser.

Have they missed it? Is the danger over?

No! the engines, after the manner of Artillery Captain Chapel's discoid projectile, return towards the doomed vessel like an Australian boomerang.

The next instant the air is shaken with a violence comparable to that which would be caused by the explosion of a magazine of melinite or dynamite, Back Cup Island trembles to its very foundations.

The cruiser has disappeared,—blown to pieces. The effect is that of the Zalinski shell, but centupled by the infinite power of Roch's fulgurator.

What shouts the bandits raise as they rush towards the extremity of the point! Ker Karraje, Engineer Serko, and Captain Spade remain rooted to the spot, hardly able to credit the evidence of their own eyes.

As to Thomas Roch, he stands with folded arms, and flashing eyes, his face radiant with pride and triumph.

I understand, while I abhor his feelings.

If the other warships approach they will share the same fate as the cruiser. They will

inevitably be destroyed. Oh! if they would but give up the struggle and withdraw to safety, even though my last hope would go with them! The nations can consult and arrive at some other plan for destroying the island. They can surround the place with a belt of ships that the pirates cannot break through and starve them to death like so many rats in a hole.

But I know that the warships will not retire, even though they know they are going to certain death. One after the other they will all make the attempt.

And I am right. Signals are exchanged between them. Almost immediately clouds of black smoke arise and the vessels again advance.

One of them, under forced draught, distances the others in her anxiety to bring her big guns quickly into action.

At all risks I issue from my hole, and gaze at the on-coming warship with feverish eyes, awaiting, without being able to prevent it, another catastrophe.

This vessel, which visibly grows larger as it comes nearer, is a cruiser of about the same tonnage as the one that preceded her. No flag is flying and I cannot guess her nationality. She continues steaming at full speed in an effort to pass the zone of danger before other engines can be launched. But how can she escape them since they will swoop back upon her?

Thomas Roch places himself behind the second trestle as the cruiser passes on to the surface of the abysm in which she will in turn soon be swallowed up.

No sound disturbs the stillness.

Suddenly the rolling of drums and the blare of bugles is heard on board the warship.

I know those bugle calls: they are French bugles! Great God! She is one of the ships of my own country’s navy and a French inventor is about to destroy her!

No! it shall not be. I will rush towards Thomas Roch—shout to him that she is a French ship. He does not, cannot, know it.

At a sign from Engineer Serko the inventor has raised the phial.

The bugles sound louder and more strident. It is the salute to the flag. A flag unfurls to the breeze—the tricolor, whose blue, white and red sections stand out luminously against the sky.

Ah! What is this? I understand! Thomas Roch is fascinated at the sight of his national emblem. Slowly he lowers his arm as the flag flutters up to the mast-head. Then he draws back and covers his eyes with his hand.

Heavens above! All sentiment of patriotism is not then dead in his ulcerated heart, seeing that it beats at the sight of his country's flag!

My emotion is not less than his. At the risk of being seen—and what do I now care if I am seen?—I creep over the rocks. I will be there to sustain Thomas Roch and prevent him from weakening. If I pay for it with my life I will once more adjure him in the name of his country. I will cry to him:

"Frenchman, it is the tricolor that flies on yonder ship! Frenchman, it is a very part of France that is approaching you! Frenchman, would you be so criminal as to strike it?"

But my intervention will not be necessary. Thomas Roch is not a prey to one of the fits to which he was formerly subject. He is perfectly sane.

When he found himself facing the flag he understood—and drew back.

A few pirates approach to lead him to the trestle again. He struggles and pushes them from him.

Ker Karraje and Engineer Serko run up. They point to the rapidly advancing ship. They order him to launch his engines.

Thomas Roch refuses.

Captain Spade and the others, mad with rage, menace him—curse him—strike him—try to wrest the phial from him.

Roch throws it on the ground and crushes it under foot.

Then panic seizes upon the crowd of wretches. The cruiser has passed the zone and they cannot return her fire. Shells begin to rain all over the island, bursting the rocks in every direction.

But where is Thomas Roch? Has he been killed by one of the projectiles? No, I see him for the last time as he dashes into the passage.

Ker Karraje, Engineer Serko and the others follow him to seek shelter inside of Back Cup.

I will not return to the cavern at any price, even if I get killed by staying where I am.

I will jot down my final notes and when the French sailors land on the point I will go—

END OF ENGINEER SIMON HART'S NOTES.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON BOARD THE "TONNANT."

After the failure of Lieutenant Davon's mission with the Sword, the English authorities waited in vain for the expedition to return, and the conviction at length gained ground that the bold sailors had perished; but whether the Sword had been lost by striking against a rock or had been destroyed by Ker Karraje's pirates, could not, of course, be ascertained.

The object of the expedition, based upon the indications of the document found in the keg that was thrown up on the shore at St. George, was to carry off Thomas Roch ere his engines were completed. The French inventor having been recovered—without forgetting Engineer Simon Hart—he was to be handed over to the care of the Bermudan authorities. That done, there would be nothing to fear from his fulgurator when the island was attacked.

When, however, the Sword had been given up for lost, another expedition of a

different kind, was decided upon.

The time that had elapsed—nearly eight weeks—from the date of the document found in the keg, had to be taken into consideration. It was thought that during the interval, Ker Karraje might have gained possession of Roch's secrets.

An entente concluded between the maritime powers, resulted in the sending of five warships to Bermudan waters. As there was a vast cavern inside Back Cup mountain, it was decided to attempt to bring the latter down like the walls of a bastion, by bombarding it with powerful modern artillery.

The squadron assembled at the entrance to the Chesapeake, in Virginia, and sailed for the archipelago, which was sighted on the evening of November 17.

The next morning the vessel selected for the first attack, steamed forward. It was about four and a half miles from the island, when three engines, after passing the vessel, swerved round and exploded about sixty yards from her. She sank immediately.

The effect of the explosion, which was superior to any previously obtained by new explosives, was instantaneous. Even at the distance they were from the spot where it occurred, the four remaining ships felt the shock severely.

Two things were to be deduced from this sudden catastrophe:

1.—The pirate Ker Karraje was in possession of Roch's fulgurator.

2.—The new engine possessed the destructive power attributed to it by its inventor.

After the disappearance of the unfortunate cruiser, the other vessels lowered boats to pick up a few survivors who were clinging to the floating wreckage.

Then it was that the signals were exchanged and the warships started towards the island.

The swiftest of them, the Tonnant, a French cruiser, forged ahead while the others forced their draught in an effort to catch up with her.

The Tonnant, at the risk of being blown to pieces in turn, penetrated the danger zone half a mile, and then ran up her flag while manoeuvring to bring her heavy guns into action.

From the bridge the officers could see Ker Karraje's band scattered on the rocks of the island.

The occasion was an excellent one for getting a shot at them before the bombardment of their retreat was begun, and fire was opened with the result that the pirates made a rush to get into the cavern.

A few minutes later there was a shock terrific enough to shake the sky down.

Where the mountain had been, naught but a heap of smoking, crumbling rocks was to be seen. Back Cup had become a group of jagged reefs against which the sea, that had been thrown back like a gigantic tidal wave, was beating and frothing.

What was the cause of the explosion?

Had it been voluntarily caused by the pirates when they realized that escape was impossible?

The Tonnant had not been seriously damaged by the flying rocks. Her boats were lowered and made towards all that was left of Back Cup.

The landing parties explored the ruins, and found a few horribly mangled corpses. Not a vestige of the cavern was to be seen.

One body, and one only, was found intact. It was lying on the northeast side of the reefs. In one hand, tightly clasped, was a note-book, the last line of which was incomplete.

A close examination showed that the man was still breathing. He was conveyed on board the Tonnant, where it was learned from the note-book that he was Simon Hart.

For some time his life was despaired of, but he was eventually brought round, and from the answers made to the questions addressed to him the following conclusion

was reached:

Moved to his very soul at the sight of the tricolor flag, being at last conscious of the crime of lèse-patrie he was about to commit, Thomas Roch rushed through the passage to the magazine where a considerable quantity of his explosive was stored. Then, before he could be prevented, brought about the terrible explosion which destroyed the island of Back Cup.

And now Ker Karraje and his pirates have disappeared—and with them Thomas Roch and the secret of his invention.

THE END.

End of the Voyage Extraordinaire

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FACING THE FLAG ***

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