

GILBERT PARKER

THE BATTLE OF THE STRONG



HISTORICAL NOVEL

Gilbert Parker

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INTRODUCTION

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This book is a protest and a deliverance. For seven years I had written continuously of Canada, though some short stories of South Sea life, and the novel Mrs. Falchion, had, during that time, issued from my pen. It looked as though I should be writing of the Far North all my life. Editors had begun to take that view; but from the start it had never been my view. Even when writing Pierre and His People I was determined that I should not be cabined, cribbed, and confined in one field; that I should not, as some other men have done, wind in upon myself, until at last each succeeding book would be but a variation of some previous book, and I should end by imitating myself, become the sacrifice to the god of the pin-hole.

I was warned not to break away from Canada; but all my life I had been warned, and all my life I had followed my own convictions. I would rather not have written another word than be corralled, bitted, saddled, and ridden by that heartless broncho-buster, the public, which wants a man who has once pleased it, to do the same thing under the fret of whip and spur for ever. When I went to the Island of Jersey, in 1897, it was to shake myself free of what might become a mere obsession. I determined that, as wide as my experiences had been in life, so would my writing be, whether it pleased the public or not. I was determined to fulfil myself; and in doing so to take no instructions except those of my own conscience, impulse, and conviction. Even

then I saw fields of work which would occupy my mind, and such skill as I had, for many a year to come. I saw the Channel Islands, Egypt, South Africa, and India. In all these fields save India, I have given my Pegasus its bridle-rein, and, so far, I have no reason to feel that my convictions were false. I write of Canada still, but I have written of the Channel Islands, I have written of Egypt, I have written of England and South Africa, and my public—that is, those who read my books—have accepted me in all these fields without demur. I believe I have justified myself in not accepting imprisonment in the field where I first essayed to turn my observation of life to account.

I went to Jersey, therefore, with my teeth set, in a way; yet happily and confidently. I had been dealing with French Canada for some years, and a step from Quebec, which was French, to Jersey, which was Norman French, was but short. It was a question of atmosphere solely. Whatever may be thought of The 'Battle of the Strong' I have not yet met a Jerseyman who denies to it the atmosphere of the place. It could hardly have lacked it, for there were twenty people, deeply intelligent, immensely interested in my design, and they were of Jersey families which had been there for centuries. They helped me, they fed me with dialect, with local details, with memories, with old letters, with diaries of their forebears, until, if I had gone wrong, it would have been through lack of skill in handling my material. I do not think I went wrong, though I believe that I could construct the book more effectively if I had to do it again. Yet there is something in looseness of construction which gives an air of naturalness; and it may be that this very looseness which I

notice in 'The Battle of the Strong' has had something to do with giving it such a great circle of readers; though this may appear paradoxical. When it first appeared, it did not make the appeal which 'The Right of Way' or 'The Seats of the Mighty' made, but it justified itself, it forced its way, it assured me that I had done right in shaking myself free from the control of my own best work. The book has gone on increasing its readers year by year, and when it appeared in Nelson's delightful cheap edition in England it had an immediate success, and has sold by the hundred thousand in the last four years.

One of the first and most eager friends of 'The Battle of the Strong' was Mrs. Langtry, now Lady de Bathe, who, born in Jersey, and come of an old Jersey family, was well able to judge of the fidelity of the life and scene which it depicted. She greatly desired the novel to be turned into a play, and so it was. The adaptation, however, was lacking in much, and though Miss Marie Burroughs and Maurice Barrymore played in it, success did not attend its dramatic life.

'The Battle of the Strong' was called an historical novel by many critics, but the disclaimer which I made in the first edition I make again. 'The Seats of the Mighty' came nearer to what might properly be called an historical novel than any other book which I have written save, perhaps, 'A Ladder of Swords'. 'The Battle of the Strong' is not without faithful historical elements, but the book is essentially a romance, in which character was not meant to be submerged by incident; and I do not think that in this particular the book falls short of the design of its author. There was this enormous difference between life in the

Island of Jersey and life in French Canada, that in Jersey, tradition is heaped upon tradition, custom upon custom, precept upon precept, until every citizen of the place is bound by innumerable cords of a code from which he cannot free himself. It is a little island, and that it is an island is evidence of a contracted life, though, in this case, a life which has real power and force. The life in French Canada was also traditional, and custom was also somewhat tyrannous, but it was part of a great continent in which the expansion of the man and of a people was inevitable.

Tradition gets somewhat battered in a new land, and even where, as in French Canada, the priest and the Church have such supervision, and can bring such pressure to bear that every man must feel its influence; yet there is a happiness, a blitheness, and an exhilaration even in the most obscure quarter of French Canada which cannot be observed in the Island of Jersey. In Jersey the custom of five hundred years ago still reaches out and binds; and so small is the place that every square foot of it almost—even where the potato sprouts, and the potato is Jersey's greatest friend—is identified with some odd incident, some naive circumstance, some big, vivid, and striking historical fact. Behind its rugged coasts a little people proudly hold by their own and to their own, and even a Jersey criminal has more friends in his own environment than probably any other criminal anywhere save in Corsica; while friendship is a passion even with the pettiness by which it is perforated.

Reading this book again now after all these years, I feel convinced that the book is truly Jersiais, and I am grateful to

it for having brought me out from the tyranny of the field in which I first sought for a hearing.

PROEM

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There is no man living to-day who could tell you how the morning broke and the sun rose on the first day of January 1800; who walked in the Mall, who sauntered in the Park with the Prince: none lives who heard and remembers the gossip of the moment, or can give you the exact flavour of the speech and accent of the time. Down the long aisle of years echoes the air but not the tone; the trick of form comes to us but never the inflection. The lilt of the sensations, the idiosyncrasy of voice, emotion, and mind of the first hour of our century must now pass from the printed page to us, imperfectly realised; we may not know them through actual retrospection. The more distant the scene, the more uncertain the reflection; and so it must needs be with this tale, which will take you back to even twenty years before the century began.

Then, as now, England was a great power outside these small islands. She had her foot firmly planted in Australia, in Asia, and in America—though, in bitterness, the American colonies had broken free, and only Canada was left to her in that northern hemisphere. She has had, in her day, to strike hard blows even for Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. But among her possessions is one which, from the hour its charter was granted it by King John, has been loyal, unwavering, and unpurchasable. Until the beginning of the century the language of this province was not our language, nor is English its official language to-day; and with a pretty

pride oblivious of contrasts, and a simplicity unconscious of mirth, its people say: "We are the conquering race; we conquered England, England did not conquer us."

A little island lying in the wash of St. Michael's Basin off the coast of France, Norman in its foundations and in its racial growth, it has been as the keeper of the gate to England; though so near to France is it, that from its shores on a fine day may be seen the spires of Coutances, from which its spiritual welfare was ruled long after England lost Normandy. A province of British people, speaking still the Norman-French that the Conqueror spoke; such is the island of Jersey, which, with Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Herm, and Jethou, form what we call the Channel Isles, and the French call the Iles de la Manche.

CHAPTER I

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In all the world there is no coast like the coast of Jersey; so treacherous, so snarling; serrated with rocks seen and unseen, tortured by currents maliciously whimsical, encircled by tides that sweep up from the Antarctic world with the devouring force of a monstrous serpent projecting itself towards its prey. The captain of these tides, travelling up through the Atlantic at a thousand miles an hour, enters the English Channel, and drives on to the Thames. Presently retreating, it meets another pursuing Antarctic wave, which, thus opposed in its straightforward course, recoils into St. Michael's Bay, then plunges, as it were, upon a terrible foe. They twine and strive in mystic conflict, and, in rage of equal power, neither vanquished nor conquering, circle, mad and desperate, round the Channel Isles. Impeded, impounded as they riot through the flumes of sea, they turn furiously, and smite the cliffs and rocks and walls of their prison-house. With the frenzied winds helping them, the island coasts and Norman shores are battered by their hopeless onset: and in that channel between Alderney and Cap de la Hague man or ship must well beware, for the Race of Alderney is one of the death-shoots of the tides. Before they find their way to the main again, these harridans of nature bring forth a brood of currents which ceaselessly fret the boundaries of the isles.

Always, always the white foam beats the rocks, and always must man go warily along these coasts. The

swimmer plunges into a quiet pool, the snowy froth that masks the reefs seeming only the pretty fringe of sentient life to a sleeping sea; but presently an invisible hand reaches up and grasps him, an unseen power drags him exultingly out to the main—and he returns no more. Many a Jersey boatman, many a fisherman who has lived his whole life in sight of the Paternosters on the north, the Ecrehos on the east, the Dog's Nest on the south, or the Corbiere on the west, has in some helpless moment been caught by the unsleeping currents which harry his peaceful borders, or the rocks that have eluded the hunters of the sea, and has yielded up his life within sight of his own doorway, an involuntary sacrifice to the navigator's knowledge and to the calm perfection of an admiralty chart.

Yet within the circle of danger bounding this green isle the love of home and country is stubbornly, almost pathetically, strong. Isolation, pride of lineage, independence of government, antiquity of law and custom, and jealousy of imperial influence or action have combined to make a race self-reliant even to perverseness, proud and maybe vain, sincere almost to commonplaceness, unimaginative and reserved, with the melancholy born of monotony—for the life of the little country has coiled in upon itself, and the people have drooped to see but just their own selves reflected in all the dwellers of the land, whichever way they turn. A hundred years ago, however, there was a greater and more general lightness of heart and vivacity of spirit than now. Then the song of the harvester and the fisherman, the boat-builder and the stocking-knitter, was heard on a summer afternoon, or from the veille of a

winter night when the dim crasset hung from the roof and the seaweed burned in the chimney. Then the gathering of the vrac was a fete, and the lads and lasses footed it on the green or on the hard sand, to the chance flageolets of sportive seamen home from the war. This simple gaiety was heartiest at Christmastide, when the yearly reunion of families took place; and because nearly everybody in Jersey was "couzain" to his neighbour these gatherings were as patriarchal as they were festive.

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The new year of seventeen hundred and eighty-one had been ushered in by the last impulse of such festivities. The English cruisers lately in port had vanished up the Channel; and at Elizabeth Castle, Mont Orgueil, the Blue Barracks and the Hospital, three British regiments had taken up the dull round of duty again; so that by the fourth day a general lethargy, akin to content, had settled on the whole island.

On the morning of the fifth day a little snow was lying upon the ground, but the sun rose strong and unclouded, the whiteness vanished, and there remained only a pleasant dampness which made sod and sand firm yet springy to the foot. As the day wore on, the air became more amiable still, and a delicate haze settled over the water and over the land, making softer to the eye house and hill and rock and sea.

There was little life in the town of St. Heliers, there were few people upon the beach; though now and then some one who had been praying beside a grave in the parish churchyard came to the railings and looked out upon the

calm sea almost washing its foundations, and over the dark range of rocks, which, when the tide was out, showed like a vast gridiron blackened by fires. Near by, some loitering sailors watched the yawl-rigged fishing craft from Holland, and the codfish-smelling cul-de-poule schooners of the great fishing company which exploited the far-off fields of Gaspé in Canada.

St. Heliers lay in St. Aubin's Bay, which, shaped like a horseshoe, had Noirmont Point for one end of the segment and the lofty Town Hill for another. At the foot of this hill, hugging it close, straggled the town. From the bare green promontory above might be seen two-thirds of the south coast of the island—to the right St. Aubin's Bay, to the left Greve d'Azette, with its fields of volcanic-looking rocks, and St. Clement's Bay beyond. Than this no better place for a watchtower could be found; a perfect spot for the reflective idler and for the sailorman who, on land, must still be within smell and sound of the sea, and loves that place best which gives him widest prospect.

This day a solitary figure was pacing backwards and forwards upon the cliff edge, stopping now to turn a telescope upon the water and now upon the town. It was a lad of not more than sixteen years, erect, well-poised, having an air of self-reliance, even of command. Yet it was a boyish figure too, and the face was very young, save for the eyes; these were frank but still sophisticated.

The first time he looked towards the town he laughed outright, freely, spontaneously; threw his head back with merriment, and then glued his eye to the glass again. What he had seen was a girl of about five years of age with a

man, in La Rue d’Egypte, near the old prison, even then called the Vier Prison. Stooping, the man had kissed the child, and she, indignant, snatching the cap from his head, had thrown it into the stream running through the street. Small wonder that the lad on the hill grinned, for the man who ran to rescue his hat from the stream was none other than the Bailly of the island, next in importance to the Lieutenant-Governor.

The lad could almost see the face of the child, its humorous anger, its wilful triumph, and also the enraged look of the Bailly as he raked the stream with his long stick, tied with a sort of tassel of office. Presently he saw the child turn at the call of a woman in the Place du Vier Prison, who appeared to apologise to the Bailly, busy now drying his recovered hat by whipping it through the air. The lad on the hill recognised the woman as the child’s mother.

This little episode over, he turned once more towards the sea, watching the sun of late afternoon fall upon the towers of Elizabeth Castle and the great rock out of which St. Helier the hermit once chiselled his lofty home. He breathed deep and strong, and the carriage of his body was light, for he had a healthy enjoyment of all physical sensations and all the obvious drolleries of life. A broad sort of humour was written upon every feature; in the full, quizzical eye, in the width of cheek-bone, in the broad mouth, and in the depth of the laugh, which, however, often ended in a sort of chuckle not entirely pleasant. It suggested a selfish enjoyment of the odd or the melodramatic side of other people’s difficulties.

At last the youth encased his telescope, and turned to descend the hill to the town. As he did so, a bell began to ring. From where he was he could look down into the Vier Marchi, or market-place, where stood the Cohue Royale and house of legislature. In the belfry of this court-house, the bell was ringing to call the Jurats together for a meeting of the States. A monstrous tin pan would have yielded as much assonance. Walking down towards the Vier Marchi the lad gleefully recalled the humour of a wag who, some days before, had imitated the sound of the bell with the words:

“Chicane—chicane! Chicane—chicane!”

The native had, as he thought, suffered somewhat at the hands of the twelve Jurats of the Royal Court, whom his vote had helped to elect, and this was his revenge—so successful that, for generations, when the bell called the States or the Royal Court together, it said in the ears of the Jersey people—thus insistent is apt metaphor:

“Chicane—chicane! Chicane—chicane!”

As the lad came down to the town, trades-people whom he met touched their hats to him, and sailors and soldiers saluted respectfully. In this regard the Bailly himself could not have fared better. It was not due to the fact that the youth came of an old Jersey family, nor by reason that he was genial and handsome, but because he was a midshipman of the King’s navy home on leave; and these were the days when England’s sailors were more popular than her soldiers.

He came out of the Vier Marchi into La Grande Rue, along the stream called the Fauxbie flowing through it, till he passed under the archway of the Vier Prison, making

towards the place where the child had snatched the hat from the head of the Bailly.

Presently the door of a cottage opened, and the child came out, followed by her mother.

The young gentleman touched his cap politely, for though the woman was not fashionably dressed, she was distinguished in appearance, with an air of remoteness which gave her a kind of agreeable mystery.

“Madame Landresse—” said the young gentleman with deference.

“Monsieur d’Avranche—” responded the lady softly, pausing.

“Did the Bailly make a stir? I saw the affair from the hill, through my telescope,” said young d’Avranche, smiling.

“My little daughter must have better manners,” responded the lady, looking down at her child reprovingly yet lovingly.

“Or the Bailly must—eh, Madame?” replied d’Avranche, and, stooping, he offered his hand to the child. Glancing up inquiringly at her mother, she took it. He held hers in a clasp of good nature. The child was so demure, one could scarcely think her capable of tossing the Bailly’s hat into the stream; yet looking closely, there might be seen in her eyes a slumberous sort of fire, a touch of mystery. They were neither blue nor grey, but a mingling of both, growing to the most tender, greyish sort of violet. Down through generations of Huguenot refugees had passed sorrow and fighting and piety and love and occasional joy, until in the eyes of this child they all met, delicately vague, and with the wistfulness of the early morning of life.

“What is your name, little lady?” asked d’Avranche of the child.

“Guida, sir,” she answered simply.

“Mine is Philip. Won’t you call me Philip?”

She flashed a look at her mother, regarded him again, and then answered:

“Yes, Philip—sir.”

D’Avranche wanted to laugh, but the face of the child was sensitive and serious, and he only smiled. “Say ‘Yes, Philip’, won’t you?” he asked.

“Yes, Philip,” came the reply obediently.

After a moment of speech with Madame Landresse, Philip stooped to say good-bye to the child. “Good-bye, Guida.”

A queer, mischievous little smile flitted over her face—a second, and it was gone.

“Good-bye, sir—Philip,” she said, and they parted. Her last words kept ringing in his ears as he made his way homeward. “Good-bye, sir—Philip”—the child’s arrangement of words was odd and amusing, and at the same time suggested something more. “Good-bye, Sir Philip,” had a different meaning, though the words were the same.

“Sir Philip—eh?” he said to himself, with a jerk of the head—“I’ll be more than that some day.”

CHAPTER II

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The night came down with leisurely gloom. A dim starlight pervaded rather than shone in the sky; Nature seemed somnolent and gravely meditative. It brooded as broods a man who is seeking his way through a labyrinth of ideas to a conclusion still evading him. This sense of cogitation enveloped land and sea, and was as tangible to feeling as human presence.

At last the night seemed to wake from reverie. A movement, a thrill, ran through the spangled vault of dusk and sleep, and seemed to pass over the world, rousing the sea and the earth. There was no wind, apparently no breath of air, yet the leaves of the trees moved, the weather-vanes turned slightly, the animals in the byres roused themselves, and slumbering folk opening their eyes, turned over in their beds, and dropped into a troubled doze again.

Presently there came a long moaning sound from the tide, not loud but rather mysterious and distant—a plaint, a threatening, a warning, a prelude?

A dull labourer, returning from late toil, felt it, and raised his head in a perturbed way, as though some one had brought him news of a far-off disaster. A midwife, hurrying to a lowly birth-chamber, shivered and gathered her mantle more closely about her. She looked up at the sky, she looked out over the sea, then she bent her head and said to herself that this would not be a good night, that ill-luck was in the air. “The mother or the child will die,” she said to herself. A

'longshoreman, reeling home from deep potations, was conscious of it, and, turning round to the sea, snarled at it and said yah! in swaggering defiance. A young lad, wandering along the deserted street, heard it, began to tremble, and sat down on a block of stone beside the doorway of a baker's shop. He dropped his head on his arms and his chin on his knees, shutting out the sound and sobbing quietly.

Yesterday his mother had been buried; to-night his father's door had been closed in his face. He scarcely knew whether his being locked out was an accident or whether it was intended. He thought of the time when his father had ill-treated his mother and himself. That, however, had stopped at last, for the woman had threatened the Royal Court, and the man, having no wish to face its summary convictions, thereafter conducted himself towards them both with a morose indifference.

The boy was called Ranulph, a name which had passed to him through several generations of Jersey forebears—Ranulph Delagarde. He was being taught the trade of ship-building in St. Aubin's Bay. He was not beyond fourteen years of age, though he looked more, so tall and straight and self-possessed was he.

His tears having ceased soon, he began to think of what he was to do in the future. He would never go back to his father's house, or be dependent on him for aught. Many plans came to his mind. He would learn his trade of ship-building, he would become a master-builder, then a shipowner, with fishing-vessels like the great company sending fleets to Gaspé.

At the moment when these ambitious plans had reached the highest point of imagination, the upper half of the door beside him opened suddenly, and he heard men's voices. He was about to rise and disappear, but the words of the men arrested him, and he cowered down beside the stone. One of the men was leaning on the half-door, speaking in French.

"I tell you it can't go wrong. The pilot knows every crack in the coast. I left Granville at three; Rulle cour left Chaussey at nine. If he lands safe, and the English troops ain't roused, he'll take the town and hold the island easy enough."

"But the pilot, is he certain safe?" asked another voice. Ranulph recognised it as that of the baker Carcaud, who owned the shop. "Olivier Delagarde isn't so sure of him."

Olivier Delagarde! The lad started. That was his father's name. He shrank as from a blow—his father was betraying Jersey to the French!

"Of course, the pilot, he's all right," the Frenchman answered the baker. "He was to have been hung here for murder. He got away, and now he's having his turn by fetching Rullecour's wolves to eat up your green-bellies. By to-morrow at seven Jersey 'll belong to King Louis."

"I've done my promise," rejoined Carcaud the baker; "I've been to three of the guard-houses on St. Clement's and Grouville. In two the men are drunk as donkeys; in another they sleep like squids. Rullecour he can march straight to the town and seize it—if he land safe. But will he stand by 's word to we? You know the saying: 'Cadet Roussel

has two sons; one's a thief, t'other's a rogue.' There's two Rullecours—Rullecour before the catch and Rullecour after!"

"He'll be honest to us, man, or he'll be dead inside a week, that's all."

"I'm to be Connetable of St. Heliers, and you're to be harbour-master—eh?"

"Naught else: you don't catch flies with vinegar. Give us your hand—why, man, it's doggish cold."

"Cold hand, healthy heart. How many men will Rullecour bring?"

"Two thousand; mostly conscripts and devil's beauties from Granville and St. Malo gaols."

"Any signals yet?"

"Two—from Chaussey at five o'clock. Rullecour 'll try to land at Gorey. Come, let's be off. Delagarde's there now."

The boy stiffened with horror—his father was a traitor! The thought pierced his brain like a hot iron. He must prevent this crime, and warn the Governor. He prepared to steal away. Fortunately the back of the man's head was towards him.

Carcaud laughed a low, malicious laugh as he replied to the Frenchman.

"Trust the quiet Delagarde! There's nothing worse nor still waters. He'll do his trick, and he'll have his share if the rest suck their thumbs. He doesn't wait for roasted larks to drop into his mouth—what's that!" It was Ranulph stealing away.

In an instant the two men were on him, and a hand was clapped to his mouth. In another minute he was bound,

thrown onto the stone floor of the bakehouse, his head striking, and he lost consciousness.

When he came to himself, there was absolute silence round him-deathly, oppressive silence. At first he was dazed, but at length all that had happened came back to him.

Where was he now? His feet were free; he began to move them about. He remembered that he had been flung on the stone floor of the bakeroom. This place sounded hollow underneath—it certainly was not the bakeroom. He rolled over and over. Presently he touched a wall—it was stone. He drew himself up to a sitting posture, but his head struck a curved stone ceiling. Then he swung round and moved his foot along the wall—it touched iron. He felt farther with his foot-something clicked. Now he understood; he was in the oven of the bakehouse, with his hands bound. He began to think of means of escape. The iron door had no inside latch. There was a small damper covering a barred hole, through which perhaps he might be able to get a hand, if only it were free. He turned round so that his fingers might feel the grated opening. The edge of the little bars was sharp. He placed the strap binding his wrists against these sharp edges, and drew his arms up and down, a difficult and painful business. The iron cut his hands and wrists at first, so awkward was the movement. But, steeling himself, he kept on steadily.

At last the straps fell apart, and his hands were free. With difficulty he thrust one through the bars. His fingers could just lift the latch. Now the door creaked on its hinges, and in a moment he was out on the stone flags of the bakeroom.

Hurrying through an unlocked passage into the shop, he felt his way to the street door, but it was securely fastened. The windows? He tried them both, one on either side, but while he could free the stout wooden shutters on the inside, a heavy iron bar secured them without, and it was impossible to open them.

Feverish with anxiety, he sat down on the low counter, with his hands between his knees, and tried to think what to do. In the numb hopelessness of the moment he became very quiet. His mind was confused, but his senses were alert; he was in a kind of dream, yet he was acutely conscious of the smell of new-made bread. It pervaded the air of the place; it somehow crept into his brain and his being, so that, as long as he might live, the smell of new-made bread would fetch back upon him the nervous shiver and numbness of this hour of danger.

As he waited, he heard a noise outside, a clac-clac! clac-clac! which seemed to be echoed back from the wood and stone of the houses in the street, and then to be lifted up and carried away over the roofs and out to sea—clac-clac! clac-clac! It was not the tap of a blind man's staff—at first he thought it might be; it was not a donkey's foot on the cobbles; it was not the broom-sticks of the witches of St. Clement's Bay, for the rattle was below in the street, and the broom-stick rattle is heard only on the roofs as the witches fly across country from Roberth to Bonne Nuit Bay.

This clac-clac came from the sabots of some nightfarer. Should he make a noise and attract the attention of the passer-by? No, that would not do. It might be some one who would wish to know whys and wherefores. He must, of

course, do his duty to his country, but he must save his father too. Bad as the man was, he must save him, though, no matter what happened, he must give the alarm. His reflections tortured him. Why had he not stopped the nightfarer?

Even as these thoughts passed through the lad's mind, the clac-clac had faded away into the murmur of the stream flowing by the Rue d'Egypte to the sea, and almost beneath his feet. There flashed on him at that instant what little Guida Landresse had said a few days before as she lay down beside this very stream, and watched the water wimpling by. Trailing her fingers through it dreamily, the child had said to him:

"Ro, won't it never come back?" She always called him "Ro," because when beginning to talk she could not say Ranulph.

Ro, won't it never come back? But while yet he recalled the words, another sound mingled again with the stream-clac-clac! clac-clac! Suddenly it came to him who was the wearer of the sabots making this peculiar clatter in the night. It was Dormy Jamais, the man who never slept. For two years the clac-clac of Dormy Jamais's sabots had not been heard in the streets of St. Heliers—he had been wandering in France, a daft pilgrim. Ranulph remembered how these sabots used to pass and repass the doorway of his own home. It was said that while Dormy Jamais paced the streets there was no need of guard or watchman. Many a time had Ranulph shared his supper with the poor beganne whose origin no one knew, whose real name had long since dropped into oblivion.

The rattle of the sabots came nearer, the footsteps were now in front of the window. Even as Ranulph was about to knock and call the poor vagrant's name, the clac-clac stopped, and then there came a sniffing at the shutters as a dog sniffs at the door of a larder. Following the sniffing came a guttural noise of emptiness and desire. Now there was no mistake; it was the half-witted fellow beyond all doubt, and he could help him—Dormy Jamais should help him: he should go and warn the Governor and the soldiers at the Hospital, while he himself would speed to Gorey in search of his father. He would alarm the regiment there at the same time.

He knocked and shouted. Dormy Jamais, frightened, jumped back into the street. Ranulph called again, and yet again, and now at last Dormy recognised the voice.

With a growl of mingled reassurance and hunger, he lifted down the iron bar from the shutters. In a moment Ranulph was outside with two loaves of bread, which he put into Dormy Jamais's arms. The daft one whinnied with delight.

"What's o'clock, bread-man?" he asked with a chuckle.

Ranulph gripped his shoulders. "See, Dormy Jamais, I want you to go to the Governor's house at La Motte, and tell them that the French are coming, that they're landing at Gorey now. Then to the Hospital and tell the sentry there. Go, Dormy—allez kedainne!"

Dormy Jamais tore at a loaf with his teeth, and crammed a huge crust into his mouth.

"Come, tell me, will you go, Dormy?" the lad asked impatiently.

Dormy Jamais nodded his head, grunted, and, turning on his heel with Ranulph, clattered up the street. The lad sprang ahead of him, and ran swiftly up the Rue d'Egypte, into the Vier Marchi, and on over the Town Hill along the road to Grouville.

CHAPTER III

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Since the days of Henry III of England the hawk of war that broods in France has hovered along that narrow strip of sea dividing the island of Jersey from the duchy of Normandy. Eight times has it descended, and eight times has it hurried back with broken pinion. Among these truculent invasions two stand out boldly: the spirited and gallant attack by Bertrand du Guesclin, Constable of France; and the freebooting adventure of Rullecour, with his motley following of gentlemen and criminals. Rullecour it was, soldier of fortune, gambler, ruffian, and embezzler, to whom the King of France had secretly given the mission to conquer the unconquerable little island.

From the Chaussey Isles the filibuster saw the signal light which the traitor Olivier Delagarde had set upon the heights of Le Couperon, where, ages ago, Caesar built fires to summon from Gaul his devouring legions.

All was propitious for the attack. There was no moon—only a meagre starlight when they set forth from Chaussey. The journey was made in little more than an hour, and Rullecour himself was among the first to see the shores of Jersey loom darkly in front. Beside him stood the murderous pilot who was leading in the expedition, the colleague of Olivier Delagarde.

Presently the pilot gave an exclamation of surprise and anxiety—the tides and currents were bearing them away from the intended landing-place. It was now almost low

water, and instead of an immediate shore, there lay before them a vast field of scarred rocks, dimly seen. He gave the signal to lay-to, and himself took the bearings. The tide was going out rapidly, disclosing reefs on either hand. He drew in carefully to the right of the rock known as L'Echiquelez, up through a passage scarce wide enough for canoes, and to Roque Platte, the south-eastern projection of the island.

You may range the seas from the Yugon Strait to the Erebus volcano, and you will find no such landing-place forimps or men as that field of rocks on the southeast corner of Jersey called, with a malicious irony, the Bane des Violets. The great rocks La Coniere, La Longy, Le Gros Etac, Le Teton, and the Petite Sambiere, rise up like volcanic monuments from a floor of lava and trailing vraic, which at half-tide makes the sea a tender mauve and violet. The passages of safety between these ranges of reef are but narrow at high tide; at half-tide, when the currents are changing most, the violet field becomes the floor of a vast mortuary chapel for unknowing mariners.

A battery of four guns defended the post on the landward side of this bank of the heavenly name. Its guards were asleep or in their cups. They yielded, without resistance, to the foremost of the invaders. But here Rullecour and his pilot, looking back upon the way they had come, saw the currents driving the transport boats hither and thither in confusion. Jersey was not to be conquered without opposition—no army of defence was abroad, but the elements roused themselves and furiously attacked the fleet. Battalions unable to land drifted back with the tides to Granville, whence they had come. Boats containing the