

him let us forgive our torturers and thank God for having left us time to know each other.

‘There it comes!’ said the sergeant to himself, as his brows fell; “the sermon is beginning.”

The priest perceived this movement, and smiling, added: “Rest assured, I shall take no mean advantage of your inability to interrupt me, to teach you catechism against your will. I have more confidence in God’s infinite mercy and power than in my own poor eloquence. Above, He will take into account what you have undergone here below.”

The veteran shook his head.

“Come! come! Hardened as you may be, you have somewhere a dear old mother, who taught you your prayers when a child and who prays for you today, an aged mother whose heart perhaps you have broken, and who, for this very reason, loves you still more; for a mother’s tenderness, like God’s, is lavished the most on her prodigal children.”

“I, too, had a devout mother. She is now in heaven. We were two brothers. It was my good fortune never to have caused her to shed a single tear, but poor Joseph was for her a source of ceaseless anxiety. And what do you think? In her dying hour, her most loving thoughts were for him who had been her greatest grief.”

The soldier made a movement.

“I tire you, my friend? Perhaps my words annoy you?”

The other by a gesture signified “no.”

“We are indeed strangers to each other. We never met before and we cannot recall memories of childhood or youth, but we have a common mother, France. Although one may come from the north and the other from the south, we are nevertheless both French.”

The soldier made a gesture of approval.

“I am a Breton,” said the missionary in answer to a dumb interrogation.

The poor mutilated man struck his breast restlessly with his stump.

“You also?”

“Yes,” was the answer the priest read in his look.

“From what part?”