AUTUMN.

W. W. STORY.

'Tis the golden gleam of an autumn day,
With the soft rain raining as if in play;
And a tender touch upon everything,
As if autumn remembered the days of spring.

In the listening woods there is not a breath
To shake their gold to the sward beneath;
And a glow as of sunshine on them lies,
Though the sun is hid in the shadowed skies.

The cock's clear crow from the farm-yard comes,
The muffled bell from the belfry booms,
And faint and dim, and from far away,
Come the voices of children in happy play.

O'er the mountains the white rain draws its veil,
And the black rooks, cawing, across them sail,
While nearer the sweeping swallows skim
O'er the steel grey river's fretted brim.

No sorrow upon the landscape weighs,
No grief for the vanished summer days,
But a sense of peaceful and calm repose
Like that which age in autumn knows.

The spring-time longings are past and gone,
The passions of summer no longer are known,
The harvest is gathered, and autumn stands
Serenely thoughtful with folded hands.

Over all is thrown a memorial hue,
A glory ideal the real ne'er knew;
For memory sifts from the past its pain,
And suffers its beauty alone to remain.

With half a smile and with half a sigh,
It ponders the past that has hurried by—
Sees it, and feels it, and loves it all,
Content it has vanished beyond recall.

O glorious autumn, thus serene,
Thus living and loving all that has been!
Thus calm and contented let me be
When the autumn of age shall come on me.

NINETY-THREE.

BY VICTOR HUGO.

PART THE THIRD.

IN VENDÉE.

BOOK THE FIRST.

XVII.—TERRIBLE AS THE ANTIQUE.

Those great commands, with low regimental rank, were, for that matter, a custom among the Republicans. Bonaparte was, after this, at the same time colonel of artillery and general-in-chief of the army of Italy.

The Tower Gauvain had a strange destiny; a Gauvain attacked, a Gauvain defended it. From that fact rose a certain reserve in the attack, but not in the defence, for Lantenac was a man who spared nothing; moreover, he had always lived at Versailles, and had no personal associations with La Tourgue, which he scarcely knew indeed. He had sought refuge there because he had no other asylum—that was all. He would have demolished it without scruple. Gauvain had more respect for the place.

The weak place of the fortress was the bridge, but in the library, which was on the bridge, were the family archives; if the assault took place on that side, the burning of the bridge would be inevitable; to burn the archives seemed to Gauvain like attacking his forefathers. The Tourgue was the ancestral dwelling of the Gauvains; in this tower centred all their fiefs of Brittany just as all the fiefs of France centred in the tower of the Louvre; the home associations of Gauvain were there; he had been born within those walls; the tortuous fatalities of life forced him, a man, to attack this venerable pile which had sheltered him when a child. Could he be guilty of the impiety of reducing this dwelling to ashes? Perhaps his very cradle was stored in some corner of the granary above the library. Certain reflections are emotions. Gauvain felt himself moved in the presence of this ancient house of his family. That was why he had spared the bridge. He had confined himself to making any sally or escape impossible by this outlet, and had guarded the bridge by a battery, and chosen the opposite side for the attack. Hence the mining and sapping at the foot of the tower.

Cimourdain had allowed him to take his own way; he reproached himself for it; his stern spirit revolted against all these Gothic relics, and he no more believed in pity for buildings than for men. Sparing a castle was a beginning of clemency. Now clemency was Gauvain's weak point. Cimourdain, as we have seen, watched him, drew him back from this, in his eyes, fatal weakness. Still he himself, though he felt a sort of rage in being forced to admit it to his soul, had not een La Tourgue again without a secret shock; he felt himself oftened at the sight of that study where were still the first ooks he had made Gauvain read. He had been the priest of the neighbouring village, Parigné; he, Cimourdain, had dwelt n the attic of the bridge-castle; it was in the library that he ad held Gauvain between his knees as a child and taught wim to lisp out the alphabet; it was within those four old walls that he had seen grow this well-beloved pupil, the son of his soul, increase physically and strengthen in mind. This ibrary, this small castle, these walls full of his blessings upon the child, was he about to overturn and burn them? He had shown them mercy. Not without remorse.

He had allowed Gauvain to open the siege from the opposite point. La Tourgue had its savage side, the tower, and its civilized side, the library. Cimourdain had allowed Gauvain to batter a breach in the savage side alone.

In truth, attacked by a Gauvain, defended by a Gauvain, this old dwelling returned in the height of the French Revolution to feudal customs. Wars between kinsmen make up the history of the middle ages; the Eteocles and Polynices are Gothic as well as Grecian, and Hamlet does at Elsinore what Orestes did in Argos.

XVIII.—POSSIBLE ESCAPE.

The whole night was consumed in preparations on the one side and the other.

As soon as the sombre parley which we have just heard had ended, Gauvain's first act was to call his lieutenant.

Guéchamp, of whom it will be necessary to know somewhat, was a man of secondary order, honest, intrepid, mediocre, a better soldier than leader, rigorously intelligent up to the point where it ceases to be a duty to understand; never softened; inaccessible to corruption of any sort, whether of venality which corrupts the conscience, or of pity, which corrupts justice. He had on soul and heart those two shades—discipline and the countersign, as a horse has his blinkers on both eyes, and he walked unflinchingly in the space thus left visible to him. His way was straight, but narrow.

A man to be depended on; rigid in command, exact in obedience. Gauvain spoke rapidly to him.

"Guéchamp, a ladder."

"Commandant, we have none."

"One must be had."

"For scaling?"

"No; for escape."

Guéchamp reflected an instant, then answered: "I understand. But for what you want, it must be very high."

"At least three stories."

"Yes, commandant, that is pretty nearly the height."

"It must even go beyond that, for we must be certain of success."

"Without doubt."

"How does it happen that you have no ladder?"

"Commandant, you did not think best to besiege La Tourgue by the plateau; you contented yourself with blockading it on this side; you wished to attack, not by the bridge, but the tower. So we only busied ourselves with the mine, and the escalade was given up. That is why we have no ladders."

"Have one made immediately."

"A ladder three stories high cannot be improvised."

"Have several short ladders joined together."

"One must have them in order to do that."

"Find them."

"There are none to be found. All through the country the peasants destroy the ladders, just as they break up the carts and cut the bridges."

"It is true; they try to paralyze the Republic."

"They want to manage so that we can neither transport baggage, cross a river, nor escalade a wall."

"Still, I must have a ladder."

"I just remember, commandant, at Javené, near Fougères, there is a large carpenter's shop. They might have one there."

"There is not a minute to lose."

"When do you want the ladder?"

"To-morrow at this hour, at the latest."

"I will send an express full speed to Javené. He can take a requisition. There is a post of cavalry at Javené which will furnish an escort. The ladder can be here to-morrow before sunset."

"It is well; that will answer," said Gauvain; "act quickly—go."

Ten minutes after Guéchamp came back and said to Gauvain, "Commandant, the express has started for Javené."

Gauvain ascended the plateau and remained for a long time with his eyes fixed on the bridge-castle across the ravine. The gable of the building, without other means of access than the low entrance closed by the raising of the drawbridge, faced the escarpment of the ravine. In order to reach the arches of the bridge from the plateau, it was necessary to descend this escarpment, a feat possible to accomplish by clinging to the brushwood. But once in the moat, the assailants would be exposed to all the projectiles that might rain from the three stories. Gauvain finished by convincing himself that, at the point which the siege had reached, the veritable attack ought to be by the breach of the tower.

He took every measure to render any escape out of the question; he increased the strictness of the investment; drew closer the ranks of his battalions, so that nothing could pass between. Gauvain and Cimourdain divided the investment of the fortress between them. Gauvain reserved the forest side for himself and gave Cimourdain the side of the plateau. It was agreed that while Gauvain, seconded by Guéchamp, conducted the assault through the mine, Cimourdain should guard the bridge and ravine with every match of the open battery lighted.

XIX.—WHAT THE MARQUIS WAS DOING.

Whilst without every preparation for the attack was going on, within everything was preparing for resistance. It is not without a real analogy that a tower is called a "douve,"* and sometimes a tower is breached by a mine as a cask is bored by an auger. The wall opens like a bung-hole. This was what had happened at La Tourgue.

The great blast of two or three hundredweight of powder had burst the mighty wall through and through. This breach started from the foot of the tower, traversed the wall in its thickest part, and made a sort of shapeless arch in the ground floor of the fortress. On the outside the besiegers, in order to render this gap practicable for assault, had enlarged and finished it off by cannon shots.

The ground-floor which this breach penetrated was a great round hall, entirely empty, with a central pillar which supported the keystone of the vaulted roof. This chamber, the largest in the whole keep, was not less than forty feet in diameter. Each story of the tower was composed of a similar room, but smaller, with guards to the embrasures of the loopholes. The ground-floor chamber had neither loopholes nor airholes; there was about as much air and light as in a tomb.

The door of the dungeons, made more of iron than wood, was in this ground-floor room. Another door opened upon a staircase which led to the upper chambers. All the staircases were contrived in the interior of the wall.

It was into this lower room that the besiegers could arrive by the breach they had made. This hall taken, there would still be the tower to take.

It had always been impossible to breathe in that hall for any length of time. Nobody ever passed twenty-four hours there without suffocating. Now, thanks to the breach, one could exist there.

That was why the besieged had not closed the breach. Besides, of what service would it have been? The cannon would have re opened it.

They stuck an iron torch-holder into the wall, and put a torch in it, which lighted the ground floor.

Now how to defend themselves?

To wall up the hole would be easy, but useless. A retirade would be of more service. A retirade is an entrenchment with a re-entering angle; a sort of raftered barricade, which admits of converging the fire upon the assailants, and while leaving the breach open exteriorly, blocks it on the inside. Materials were not lacking; they constructed a retirade with fissures for the passage of the gun-barrels. The angle was supported by the central pillar; the wings touched the wall on either side. The marquis directed everything. Inspirer, commander, guide, and master—a terrible spirit.

Lantenac belonged to that race of warriors of the eighteenth century who, at eighty years of age, saved cities. He resembled that Count d'Alberg who, almost a centenarian, drove the King of Poland from the Riga.

"Courage, friends," said the marquis; "at the commencement of this century, in 1713, at Bender, Charles XII., shut up in a house with three hundred Swedes, held his own against twenty thousand Turks."

They barricaded the two lower floors, fortified the chambers, battlemented the alcoves, supported the doors with joists driven in by blows from a mallet; and thus formed a sort of buttress. It was necessary to leave free the spiral staircase which joined the different floors, for they must be able to get up and down, and to stop it against the besiegers would have been to close it against themselves. The defence of any place has thus always some weak side.

The marquis, indefatigable, robust as a young man, lifted beams, carried stones, set an example, put his hand to the work, commanded, aided, fraternized, laughed with this ferocious clan, but remained always the noble still—haughty, familiar, elegant, savage.

He permitted no reply to his orders. He had said: "If the half of you should revolt, I would have them shot by the other half, and defend the place with those that were left."

XX.—WHAT IMANUS WAS DOING.

While the marquis occupied himself with the breach and the tower, Imânus was busy with the bridge. At the beginning of the siege, the escape-ladder which hung transversely below the windows of the second story had been removed by the marquis's orders, and Imânus had put it in the library. It was, perhaps, the loss of this ladder which Gauvain wished to supply. The windows of the lower floor, called the guard-room, were defended by a triple bracing of iron bars, set in the stone, so that neither ingress or egress was possible by them. The library windows had no bars, but they were very high. Imânus took three men with him who, like himself, possessed capabilities and resolution that would carry them through anything. These men were Hoisnard, called Branche-d'Or, and the two brothers Pique-en Bois. Imânus, carrying a dark lantern, opened the iron door and carefully visited the three stories of the bridge castle. Hoisnard Branche d'Or was as implacable as Imânus, having had a brother killed by the republicans.

Imânus examined the upper room, filled with hay and straw, and the ground-floor, where he had several fire-pots added to the tuns of tar; he placed the heap of fascines so that they touched the casks, and assured himself of the good condition of the sulphur-match, of which one end was in the bridge and the other in the tower. He spread over the floor under the tuns and fascines, a pool of tar, in which he dipped the end of the sulphur-match. Then he brought into the library, between the ground-floor where the tar was and the garret filled with straw, the three cribs in which lay René-Jean, Gros-Alain, and Georgette, buried in deep sleep. They carried the cradles very gently in order not to waken the little ones.

They were simple village cribs, a sort of low osier basket which stood on the floor so that a child could get out unaided. Near each cradle Imânus placed a porringer of soup, with a wooden spoon. The escape-ladder, unhooked from its cramp-irons, had been set on the floor against the wall; Imânus arranged the three cribs, end to end, in front of the ladder. Then, thinking that a current of air might be useful, he opened wide the six windows of the library. The summer night was warm and starlight. He sent the brothers Pique-en-Bois to open the windows of the upper and lower stories. He had noticed on the eastern façade of the building a great dried old ivy, the colour of tinder, which covered one whole side of the bridge from top to bottom and framed in the windows of the three stories. He thought this ivy might be left. Imânus took a last watchfull glance at everything; that done, the four men left the châtelet and returned to the tower. Imânus double-locked the heavy iron door, studied attentively the enormous bolts, and nodded his head in a satisfied way at the sulphur-match which passed through the hole he had drilled, and was now the sole communication between the tower and the bridge. This train or wick started from the round chamber, passed beneath the iron door, entered under the arch, twisted like a snake down the spiral staircase leading to the lower story of the bridge, crept over the floor, and ended in the heap of dried fascines laid on the pool of tar. Imânus had calculated that it would take about a quarter of an hour for this wick, when lighted in the interior of the tower, to set fire to the pool of tar under the library. These arrangements all concluded, and every work carefully inspected, he carried the key of the iron door back to the marquis, who put it in his pocket. It was important that every movement of the besiegers should be watched. Imânus, with his cow-herd's horn in his belt, placed himself as sentinel in the watch-tower of the platform at the top of the tower. While keeping a constant look-out, one eye on the forest and one on the plateau, he worked at making cartridges, having near him, in the embrasure of the watch-tower window, a powder-horn, a canvass bag full of good-sized balls, and some old newspapers, which he tore up for wadding.

When the sun rose, it lighted in the forest eight battalions, with sabres at their sides, cartridge-boxes on their backs, and guns with fixed bayonets, ready for the assault; on the plateau a battery, with caissons, cartridges, and boxes of case-shot; within the fortress, nineteen men loading several guns, muskets, blunderbusses, and pistols;—and three children sleeping in their cradles.

* *Douve*, a stave, cask made of staves.