

any feeling he had known for years. He drew out his watch and struck the hour. What time was it?

To his great astonishment he found that it was but ten o'clock. When one has just passed through some terrible convulsion of existence in which every hope and life itself were at stake, one is always astounded to find that those awful minutes were no longer than ordinary ones. The warning cannon had been fired a little before sunset, and La Tourgue attacked by the storming party half an hour later, between seven and eight o'clock, just as night was falling. This colossal combat, begun at eight o'clock, had ended at ten. This whole episode had only taken a hundred and twenty minutes to enact. Sometimes catastrophes sweep on with the rapidity of lightning. The climax is overwhelming from its suddenness.

On reflection, the astonishing thing was that the struggle could have lasted so long. A resistance for two hours of so small a number against so large a force was extraordinary, and certainly it had not been short or quickly finished, this battle of nineteen against four thousand.

But it was time he should be gone. Halmalo must be far away, and the marquis judged that it would not be necessary to wait there longer. He put his watch back into his vest, but not into the same pocket, for he discovered that the key of the iron door given him by Iñanus was there, and the crystal might be broken against the key. Then he moved towards the forest in his turn. As he turned to the left, it seemed to him that a faint gleam of light penetrated the darkness where he stood.

He walked back and across the underbrush, suddenly cut clearly against a red background and become visible in their tiniest outlines, he perceived a great light in the ravine. Only a few paces separated him from it. He hurried forward, then stopped, remembering what folly it was to expose himself in the light. Whatever might have happened, after all it did not concern him. Again he set out in the direction Halmalo had indicated, and walked a little way towards the forest.

Suddenly, deep as he was hidden among the brambles, he heard a terrible cry echo over his head; this cry seemed to proceed from the very edge of the plateau which stretched above the ravine. The marquis raised his eyes and stood still.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

IN DÆMONE DENIS.

I.—FOUND, BUT LOST.

At the moment when Michelle Fléhard had caught sight of the tower, she was more than a league off. She who could scarcely take a step, did not hesitate before these miles which must be traversed. The woman was weak, but the mother found strength. She walked on.

The sun set, the twilight came, then the night. Still pressing on she heard a bell afar off, hidden by the darkness, strike eight o'clock, then nine. The peal probably came from the belfry of Parigné. From time to time she paused to listen to strange sounds like the deadened echo of blows, which perhaps might be the wind in the distance.

She walked straight on, breaking the furze and the sharp heath-stems beneath her bleeding feet. She was guided by a faint light which shone from the distant tower, defining its outlines against the night, and giving a mysterious glow to the tower amid the surrounding gloom. This light became more distinct when the noise sounded louder, then faded suddenly.

The vast plateau across which Michelle Fléhard journeyed was covered with grass and heath—not a house, not a tree appeared. It rose gradually, and, as far as the eye could reach, stretched in a straight hard line against the sombre horizon, where a few stars gleamed. She had always the tower before her eyes; the sight kept her strength from falling.

She saw the massive pile grow slowly as she walked on. We have just said the smothered reports and the pale gleams of light starting from the tower were intermittent; they stopped, then began anew, offering an enigma full of agony to the wretched mother.

Suddenly they ceased; noise and gleam of light both died; there was a moment of complete silence, an ominous tranquillity.

It was just at this moment that Michelle Fléhard reached the edge of the plateau.

She saw at her feet a ravine whose bottom was lost in the wan indistinctness of the night; at a little distance, on the top of the plateau, an entanglement of wheels, metal, and harness, which was a battery, and before her, confusedly lighted by the matches of the cannon, an enormous edifice that seemed built of shadows blacker than the shadows which surrounded it. This mass of buildings was composed of a bridge whose arches were imbedded in the ravine, and of a sort of castle which rose upon the bridge. Both bridge and castle were supported against a lofty circular shadow, the tower towards this mother had journeyed from so far.

You could see lights come and go in the loopholes of the tower, and from the noise which surged up she divined that it was filled with a crowd of men—indeed, now and then their gigantic shadows were flung out on the night.

Near the battery was a camp whose outposts Michelle Fléhard might have perceived through the gloom and the underbrush, but she had as yet noticed nothing.

She went close to the edge of the plateau, so near the bridge that it seemed to her she could almost touch it with her hand. The depth of the ravine alone kept her from reaching it. She could make out in the gloom the three stories of the bridge-castle. How long she stood there she could not have told, for her mind, absorbed in her mute contemplation of this gaping ravine and this shadowy edifice, took no note of time. What was this building? What was going on within? Was it La Tourgue? A strange dizziness seized her; in her confusion she could not tell if this were the goal she had been seeking on the starting-point of a terrible journey. She asked herself why she was here. She looked, she listened.

Suddenly a great blackness shut out every object. A cloud of smoke swept up between her and the pile she was watching; a sharp report forced her to close her eyes. Scarcely had she done so when a great light reddened the lids. She looked again.

It was no longer the night she had before her, it was the day, but a fearful day, the day born of fire. She was watching the beginning of a conflagration.

From black the smoke had become scarlet, filled with a mighty flame which appeared and disappeared, writhing and twisting in serpentine coils. The flame burst out like a tongue from that which resembled blazing jaws—it was the embrasure of a window filled with fire. This window, crossed by iron bars, already reddening in the heat, was a casement in the lower story of the bridge-castle. Nothing of the edifice was visible except this window. The smoke covered even the plateau, leaving only the mouth of the ravine black against the vermillion flames. Michelle Fléhard stared in dumb wonder; it was like a dream—she could no longer tell where reality ended and the confused fancies of her poor troubled brain began. Ought she to fly? Should she remain? There was nothing real enough for any definite decision to steady her mind.

A wind swept up and tore away the curtain of smoke; in the opening the frowning bastille rose suddenly in view, donjon, bridge, châtelet, dazzling in the terrible gilding of conflagration which framed it from top to bottom. The appalling illumination showed Michelle Fléhard every detail of the ancient keep.

The lowest story of the bridge-castle was burning. Above rose the other two stories, still untouched, but, as it were, supported on a pedestal of flames.

From the edge of the plateau where Michelle Fléhard stood she could catch broken glimpses of the interior between the clouds of smoke and fire. The windows were all open.

Through the great casements of the second story Michelle Fléhard could make out the cupboards stretched along the walls, which looked to her full of books, and by one of the windows could see a little group lying on the floor, in the shadow, indistinct and massed together like birds in a nest, which at times she fancied she saw move. She looked fixedly in this direction.

What was that little group lying there in the shadow?

Sometimes it flashed across her mind that those were living forms, but she had fever, she had eaten nothing since morning, she had walked without intermission, she was utterly exhausted, she felt herself giving way to a sort of hallucination which she had still reason enough to struggle against. Still her eyes fixed themselves ever more steadily upon that one point; she could not look away from that little heap upon the floor—a mass of inanimate objects doubtless that had been left in that room below while the flames roared and bellowed.

Suddenly the fire, as if animated by a will and purpose, flung downward a jet of flame toward the great dead ivy which covered the façade at which Michelle Fléhard was gazing.

It seemed as if the fire had just discovered this outwork of dried branches, a spark darted greedily upon it, and a line of flame spread upward from twig to twig with frightful rapidity. In the twinkling of an eye it reached the second story. As they rose the flames illuminated the chamber of the first floor, and the awful glare threw out in bold relief the three little creatures lying asleep upon the floor. A lovely, statuesque group of legs and arms interlaced, closed eyes, and angelic, smiling faces.

The mother recognized her children.

She uttered a terrible cry. That cry of indescribable agony is only given to mothers. No sound is at once so savage or so touching. When a woman utters it you seem to hear the yell of a she-wolf; when the she-wolf cries thus you seem to hear the voice of a woman.

This cry of Michelle Fléhard was a howl. Hecuba howled, says Homer.

It was this cry which reached the Marquis de Lantenac. When he heard it he stood still. The marquis was between the outlet of the passage through which he had been guided by Halmalo and the ravine. Across the brambles which enclosed him he saw the bridge in flames and La Tourgue red with the reflection. Looking upward through the opening which the branches left above his head, he perceived close to the edge of the plateau on the opposite side of the gulf, in front of the burning castle, in the full light of the conflagration, the haggard, anguish-stricken face of a woman bending over the depth.

It was this woman who had uttered the cry.

The face was no longer that of Michelle Fléhard, it was that of Medusa. She was appalling in her agony. The peasant woman was transformed into one of the Eumenides. This unknown villager, vulgar, ignorant, unreasoning, had risen suddenly to the epic grandeur of despair. Great sufferings swell the soul to gigantic proportions. This was no longer a simple mother—the voice of all motherhood cried out through hers; whatever sums up and becomes a type of humanity grows superhuman. There she towered on the edge of the ravine, in front of the conflagration, in presence of that crime, like a power from beyond the grave; she moaned like a wild beast, but her attitude was that of a goddess; the mouth, which uttered imprecations, was set in a flaming mask. Nothing could have been more despotic than her eyes shooting lightnings through her tears.

The marquis listened. Her voice flung its echoes down upon his head—inarticulate, heartrending, sobs rather than words.

"Ah, my children! Those are my children! Help! Fire! Fire! Fire! O you brigands! Is there no one here? My children are burning! Georgette! My babies! Gros-Alain—René-Jean! What does it mean? Who put my children there? They are asleep. Oh, I am mad! It cannot be! Help, help!"

Still a great bustle and movement was apparent in La Tourgue and upon the plateau. The whole camp rushed out to the fire which had just burst forth. The besiegers, after meeting the grape-shot, had now to deal with the conflagration. Gauvain, Cimourdain, and Guéchamp were giving orders. What was to be done? Only a few buckets of water could be drained from the half-dried brook of the ravine. The consternation increased. The whole edge of the plateau was covered with men whose troubled faces watched the progress of the flames.

What they saw was terrible. They gazed, and could do nothing.

The flames had spread along the ivy and reached the top-most story, leaping greedily upon the straw with which it was filled. The entire granary was burning now. The flames wreathed and danced as if in fiendish joy. A cruel breeze fanned the flames. One could fancy the evil spirit of Iñanus urging on the fire, and rejoicing in the destruction which had been his last earthly crime.

The library, though between the two burning stories, was not yet on fire; the height of the ceiling and the thickness of

the walls retarded the fatal moment, but it was fast approaching, the flames from below licked the stones, the flames from above whirled down to caress them with the awful embrace of death; beneath, a cave of lava, above, an arch of embers. If the floor fell first the children would be flung into the lava stream; if the ceiling gave way they would be buried beneath a brazier of burning coals.

The little ones slept still; across the sheets of flame and smoke which now hid, now exposed the casements, they were visible in that fiery grotto, within that meteoric glare, peaceful, lovely, motionless, like three confident cherubs slumbering in a hell; a tiger might have wept to see those angels in that furnace, those cradles in that tomb.

And the mother was shrieking still—"Fire! I say, Fire! Are they all dead, that nobody comes? They are burning my children! Come—come, you men that I see yonder. Oh, the days and days that I have searched, and that is where I find them. Fire! help! Three angels—to think of three angels burning there! What had they done, the innocents? They shot me—they are burning my little ones. Who is it does these things? Help! Save my children! Do you not hear me? A dog—one would have pity on a dog. My children, my children! They are asleep. O Georgette—I see her face. René-Jean—Gros-Alain! Those are their names. You may know I am their mother. Oh, it is horrible! I have travelled days and nights. Why, this very morning I talked of them with a woman. Help, help! Where are those monsters? Horror, horror! The eldest not five years old, the youngest not two. I can see their little bare legs. They are asleep, Holy Virgin! Heaven gave them to me, and devils snatch them away. To think how far I have journeyed. My children, that I nourished with my milk. I, who thought myself wretched because I could not find them. Have pity on me. I want my children—I must have my children. And there they are in the fire. See how my poor feet bleed. Help! It is not possible, if there are men on the earth, that my little ones will be left to die like this. Help! Murder! Oh, such a thing was never seen. O assassins! What is that dreadful house there? They stole my children from me in order to kill them. God of mercy, give me my children. They shall not die! Help—help—help! Oh, I shall curse Heaven itself if they die like that!"

While the mother's awful supplications rang out other voices rose upon the plateau and in the ravine.

"A ladder!"

"There is no ladder."

"Water!"

"There is no water!"

"Up yonder—in the tower—in the second story—there is a door."

"It is iron."

"Break it in."

"Impossible."

And the mother redoubled her agonizing appeals:—"Fire! Help! Hurry, I say, if you will not kill me! My children, my children! O the horrible fire!"

In the interval between these clamours the triumphant crackling of the flames could be heard.

The marquis put his hand in his pocket and touched the key of the iron door. Then, stooping again beneath the vault through which he had escaped, he turned back into the passage from whence he had just emerged.

(To be continued.)

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

England has joined the Postal Convention at Berne.

The Hon. Mr. Needham, of Fredericton, N. B., died very suddenly on Tuesday week.

In spite of military opposition thereto, the Black Hills expedition is organizing, and preparing for departure.

Four companies of cavalry have been ordered to Western Alabama, on account of the unsettled state of that district.

Department of Agriculture returns of the United States show that the wheat crop will nearly average that of last year.

In the Proctor libel suit against Moulton, District-Attorney Winslow has reduced the defendant's bail from \$20,000 to \$3,000.

The Wesleyan General Conference, lately in session at Toronto, has adjourned, to meet in this city on the first Wednesday of September, 1878.

Funds for the payment of the debt of the Prince of Wales have been provided out of his own private property.

The direct Cable, being laid by the "Faraday," has parted and been lost in a severe gale, and the steamer has returned to Queenstown.

A report is current in Copenhagen that England and Russia are endeavouring to settle the Schleswig-Holstein question in a way that will be acceptable to both Prussia and Denmark.

There are said to be signs of the breaking up of the Carlist army, several insurgent leaders having surrendered, and others shot by order of Don Carlos for demanding a cessation of hostilities and the restoration of peace.

Our Halifax despatch says the Newfoundland Legislature has been dissolved, within twelve months of the last election.

Don Carlos is reported to have been seriously wounded by a mutineer.

Count Von Arnim has been arrested for the embezzlement of State papers.

Hon. Messrs. Garneau and Angers have been returned by acclamation for their seats in the Quebec Legislature.

At the opening of the Danish Parliament King Christian delivered the Speech from the Throne in person.

Garibaldi issues a manifest to electors for the Chambers of Deputies, to vote for those at present incarcerated for political offences.

Germany has requested the French Government to send 25,000 troops to the frontier to put a stop to aid being rendered to the Carlists. If the French Government fail to comply, Germany threatens to do so herself.

The insurrection in Buenos Ayres is becoming formidable. The Chambers are in permanent session, the National Guard have been mobilized, and the disturbed district generally declared in a state of siege.

Leading Republicans and Democrats in Louisiana say if the terms of the compromise are carried out, and Kellogg allowed the people a fair election, their party will refrain from further violence, and a peaceable election may be looked for.