

4 THE BATTLE OF THE STRONG

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 Ecréhos on the east, the Dog's Nest on the south, or the Corbière on the west, has in some helpless moment been caught by the unsleeping currents that 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