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“ DIED AT SEA ”

(From the French of Francois Coppée.)

SOME years ago I passed some weeks in a sea-faring village on the Breton coast. Such a hole, but so picturesque. A bad beaching place for ten or more boats, a single very steep street, parallel to the bed of a torrent, and on the plateau above the cliff a strange Gothic church, surrounded by a cemetery full of wild oats, from where one commanded a view of the ocean. Finding much to interest me, I remained in this little corner until the end of the month of September, which, by a chance very rare in rainy Finisterre, was this year exceptionally clear and pure.

In the single inn of the place I occupied a great whitewashed, well-furnished room, whose window opened on the sea. Here, seated on a straw-bottomed chair before a table of unpainted wood, I had written a poem on the solemn lullaby of the great breakers, which seemed to tell me, without ceasing, that rhyme is a law of nature.

But one cannot always make verses and write, and walks were my exercise and amusement. Very often I walked along the beach, having on my right the arid and monumental cliff and to my left the immense desert of sand laid bare by the low tide and relieved only by some groups of black rocks. The solitude was complete. Scarcely more than two or three times had I exchanged salutes with the coast guard on his beat. I was such a regular and peaceable walker that the sea swallows had no fear of my red cloak and hopped around within a few feet of me, imprinting their star-like footprints on the moist sand. Each day I thus made six or eight kilometers, and I returned with my pockets