

**THE TOILERS OF THE  
SEA: A  
NOVEL. NO. 267**

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The Toilers of the Sea: A Novel. No. 267 by Victor Hugo

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No. 267.

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TOILERS OF THE SEA.

A Novel.

BY  
VICTOR HUGO,  
AUTHOR OF  
"LES MISÉRABLES."

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*Richard Hugo*



VICTOR HUGO.

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# THE TOILERS OF THE SEA.

## FIRST PART.—SIEUR CLUBIN.

### BOOK I.

#### THE HISTORY OF A BAD REPUTATION.

##### I.

###### A WORD WRITTEN ON A WHITE PAGE.

CHRISTMAS day in the year 182— was somewhat remarkable in the island of Guernsey. Snow fell on that day. In the Channel Islands, a frosty winter is remarkable, and a fall of snow is an event.

On that Christmas morning, the road which skirts the seashore from St. Pierre Port au Valle was clothed in white. From midnight till the break of day the snow had been falling. Towards nine o'clock, a little after the rising of the wintry sun, as it was too early yet for the Church of England folks to go to St. Sampson's, or for the Wesleyans to repair to Eldad Chapel, the road was almost deserted. Throughout that portion of the highway which separates the first from the second tower, only three foot-passengers could be seen. These were a child, a man, and a woman. Walking at a distance from each other, these wayfarers had no visible connection. The child, a boy of about eight years old, had stopped, and was looking curiously at the wintry scene. The man walked behind the woman, at a distance of about a hundred paces. Like her he was coming from the direction of the church of St. Sampson. The appearance of the man, who was still young, was something between that of a workman and a sailor. He wore his working-day clothes—a kind of Guernsey shirt of coarse brown stuff, and trousers partly concealed by tarpaulin leggings—a costume which seemed to indicate that, notwithstanding the holy day, he was going to no place of worship. His heavy shoes of rough leather, with their soles covered with large nails, left upon the snow, as he walked, a print more like that of a prison lock than the foot of a man. The woman, on the contrary, was evidently dressed for church. She wore a large mantle of black silk, wadded, under which she had coquettishly adjusted a dress of Irish poplin, trimmed alternately with white and pink; but for her red stockings, she might have been taken

for a Parisian. She walked on with a light and free step, so little suggestive of the burden of life that it might easily be seen that she was young. Her movements possessed that subtle grace which indicates the most delicate of all transitions—that soft intermingling, as it were, of two twilights—the passage from the condition of a child to that of womanhood. The man seemed to take no heed of her.

Suddenly, near a group of oaks at the corner of a field, and at the spot called the Basses Maisons, she turned, and the movement seemed to attract the attention of the man. She stopped, seemed to reflect a moment, then stooped, and the man fancied that he could discern that she was tracing with her finger some letters in the snow. Then she rose again, went on her way at a quicker pace, turned once more, this time smiling, and disappeared to the left of the roadway, by the footpath under the hedges which leads to the Château de Lierre. When she had turned for the second time, the man had recognized her as Déruchette, a charming girl of that neighbourhood.

The man felt no need of quickening his pace; and some minutes later he found himself near the group of oaks. Already he had ceased to think of the vanished Déruchette; and if, at that moment, a porpoise had appeared above the water or a robin had caught his eye in the hedges, it is probable that he would have passed on his way. But it happened that his eyes were fixed upon the ground; his gaze fell mechanically upon the spot where the girl had stopped. Two little footprints were there plainly visible; and beside them he read this word, evidently written by her in the snow—

“GILLIATT.”

It was his own name.

He lingered for awhile motionless, looking at the letters, the little footprints, and the snow; and then walked on, evidently in a thoughtful mood.