

**VIZETELLY'S ONE -
VOLUME NOVELS: XXV.
MY BROTHER YVES**

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Vizetelly's One - Volume Novels: XXV. My Brother Yves by Pierre Loti

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PIERRE LOTI

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XXV.

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BY

PIERRE LOTI

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY MARY P. FLETCHER.



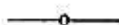
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MY BROTHER YVES.



I.

My brother Yves' certificate-book is like that of any other sailor. It is bound in yellow parchment, and having made many voyages in various lockers, is much soiled and worn. The cover is inscribed in large characters :

KERMADEC, 2091, P.

Kermadec is his surname ; 2091, the number under which he is registered in the navy, and P., the initial letter of Paimpol, the port where he was entered.

If we open it, we shall find, on the first page, the following particulars :—

“Kermadec (Yves-Marie), son of Yves-Marie and Jeanne Danveoch, born August the 28th, 1851, at St Pol-de-Léon, (Finisterre). Height, 5 ft. 10. Brown hair, eyes and eyebrows, nose, chin, and forehead of the ordinary type ; face oval. Special marks : tattooed on the left breast with an anchor, and on the right wrist with a bracelet and fish.”

Tattooings of this sort were still in fashion, ten years or so ago, among good old salts. Those executed by the idle hands of a friend on board the *Flora* have become a subject of mortification to Yves, who has more than once tortured himself in the hope of getting rid of them. He cannot bear the idea

that he is indelibly marked and may be recognised, as long as he lives, and wherever he may go, by these little blue designs.

If we turn to the next page, we shall find a series of printed leaflets setting forth, in neat and concise style, all the misdemeanours of which a sailor may be guilty, accompanied by the list of punishments he will incur, beginning with the trivial faults for which a few nights in irons will atone, and ending with the great mutinies punishable by death.

Unfortunately, these documents for daily perusal have never succeeded in inspiring sailors in general, nor my poor Yves in particular, with the salutary terror so desirable.

Then follow several manuscript pages containing the names of ships, with blue seals, numbers, and dates. The pursers, being men of taste, have adorned this part with elegant flourishes. Here we find his cruises recorded, with details of the pay he has at various times received.

Here are the early years when he earned fifteen francs a month, and kept ten to give to his mother; years which he passed with the wind blowing full on his chest, living half naked in the tops of those mighty oscillating stems which serve as masts, wandering without a care on his mind over the everchanging waste of waters; then come restless years, when the passions of youth dawn and assume tangible form in the inexperienced mind, becoming realised by-and-by in brutish boozings or in dreams of touching purity, according to the character of the places to which the wind wafts him, or that of the women upon whom he happens to light, terrible awakenings of the heart and senses, great outbursts, followed by a return to the ascetic life of the ocean, immured in a floating cloister: all these things lie indicated beneath the numbers, names, and dates, which are accumulating, year by year, on a poor sailor's certificate-book. These yellow leaves contain a strange poem of adventures and sufferings.

II.

THE 28th of August 1851 seems to have been a fine summer's day at St Pol-de-Léon, in the department of Finisterra. The pale Breton sun smiled a welcome on the little stranger who was destined to grow up with such a strong affection both for the sun and for Brittany.

Yves made his first appearance in the world as a very fine baby, plump and brown. The experienced women present on the occasion christened him *Bugel-Du*, which means *dark little child*. This bronzed tint was characteristic of the family, for the Kermadecs, father and son, had all spent the greater part of their lives at sea, and had become well tanned.

A fine summer's day at St Pol-de-Léon is something unusual in that foggy district: a sort of melancholy radiance is diffused over everything. The ancient mediæval town seems to shake off its drowsy slumber under the fog and grow young once more; the old granite glows in the sunshine; the Creizker belfry, a giant among those of Brittany, reveals its delicate open-work carvings in grey stone, variegated with yellow lichens, as it rises against the blue sky under a flood of light: while the moorland, covered with purple heather and golden gorse, stretches on every side, filling the air with the sweet scent of flowering broom.

There were present at the baptism the godmother, a young girl, and the godfather, a sailor, and behind these came the two little brothers, Goulven and Gildas, leading the two little sisters, Yvonne and Marie, who carried nosegays.

As soon as this procession entered the ancient church of the bishops of Léon, the beadle, who was holding the bell-ropes, was about to ring the joyous peal usual on such

occasions. But the curé, who chanced to arrive at the moment, said roughly :

“ For heaven's sake, Marie Bervrac'h, don't pull that bell ! These Kermadecs are people who never give anything at the offertory, and the father spends all his money in the tavern. I am not going to have you ring for such folk.”

And thus my brother Yves began life as a child of poverty. His poor mother, Jeanne Danveoch, kept anxiously listening in her bed, with a presentiment of something wrong, as she lay waiting to hear the vibrations which seemed so slow in beginning. She kept straining her ear, and when no sound came, she understood the public affront offered her, and began to cry.

Her eyes were still wet when the baptismal party returned, much out of countenance.

This humiliation remained in Yves' memory for the rest of his life ; he could never forgive the unkind reception offered him on entering the world, nor the cruel tears shed by his mother ; he owed the Romish clergy a grudge, and closed his Breton heart to mother Church.

III.

ONE December evening, four and twenty years after this occurrence, the rain was falling at Brest. It was fine, cold, penetrating, and incessant ; it streamed down the walls, making the steep slate roofs and lofty granite houses look still darker ; it poured almost merrily on the noisy Sunday crowd, which was swarming in spite of it, all wet and bedraggled, along the narrow streets in the gloomy depressing twilight.

The crowd consisted of tipsy sailors singing, soldiers stumbling along with their swords clattering behind them, and civilians coming in the opposite direction,—city workmen with a miserable and dejected air, women in little merino shawls and peaked muslin caps, who walked along with bright eyes and red cheeks, smelling of brandy; dirty old men and women who had been drinking and had fallen down,—some one had helped them up, and on they went, their backs still smeared with mud.

The rain never ceased: down it came, drenching the Breton hats with their silver buckles, the caps perched over the sailors' ears, the shakos trimmed with gold lace, and the white caps and umbrellas.

There was such an air of sullen gloom over everything, that it was difficult to imagine that a sun still existed. The thick masses of heavy cloud seemed to weigh everything down, it felt as if they could never break and reveal a sky behind. The whole atmosphere was charged with moisture, and the time of day had been forgotten, for who knew whether the darkness was caused by all this rain, or whether the winter's day was really drawing to a close?

The sailors brought a half discordant touch of youth and life into these streets, with their songs and open countenances, their large light collars, and the red tufts which contrasted well with their navy blue dress. They went backwards and forwards from one tavern to another, pushing their way and making senseless jokes at which they laughed. Sometimes they stopped under the rain spouts, in front of shops which displayed wares to suit them: red cotton handkerchiefs, in the centre of which fine ships called *La Bretagne*, *La Triomphante*, or *La Devastation* were printed; gold-lettered ribbons for their caps, complicated arrangements of cord intended for securing the canvas bags