IT began in the Clos-Poulet, it may be said to have ended in the Pacific—and yet I think that its true ending is at home where long ago it began; for it is written in grey, the colour of Brittany skies, the colour of tears—there is no heat or brilliance in it as of southern seas. Surely here or there, this is a *breton* tale, strayed but returning home at last; so that the record of it has to be pieced together, as it were, on two sides of the world.

It is not difficult to picture the beginning, though Clémentine will tell little of that. But there was a day some fifty odd years ago when there lay in the bay of St. Malo a little ship straining at her cables and shaking out her sails to catch the wind; a ship home-built and home-manned, launched in the harbour yonder and christened, like so many of her crew, by the *curé* from the grey cathedral that lifts its single spire above the close-walled little city. It is easy to picture her, to know her very make and shape and rig; for year by year her sister *goélettes* are still built and equipped and sent out from St. Malo to the Iceland and Newfoundland fishings. Year by year in the first days of spring they steal out into the bay from the harbour where they have lain during the winter; year by year they pass out, unchanging, familiar, with the same lines of paint fresh on graceful sides, the same gilding at the bow, the same well-remembered *Marie-Joseph*, it may be, or the *Sainte-Anne*, or the *Etoile-de-Mer*. And yet, after all, it is only an illusion, a trick of paint and rig and building, a perpetuated name; for year by year there are many changes, and of all those that go out there are many that never return home.

The ship that sailed from the bay some fifty years ago—Clémentine's ship—was one of these; she came

back no more to those who watched for her so long. In the course of time—it may have been years—there came a rumour of her brought on the winds from the south; a ghost, as it were, that found its way home to be laid to rest. And after that, she was forgotten; I cannot discover her name—perhaps it has faded even from Clémentine's mind; I do not know how, or why, she drifted to her fate in the South Pacific. I only know that as she drew out of the bay of St. Malo she carried with her in her crew Clémentine's man, Janik, and his devoted black dog; and that as she stood with a cluster of women waiting on the breakwater to see her pass (as other women do to-day) she joined as well as she could for tears in the old hymn that her crew sang as they looked their last on home—the hymn that belongs to the men who go out into the deep waters—

Ave maris stella,
Dei mater alma;
Atque semper virgo,
Felix caeli porta . . . .

And so she set sail into the west and returned no more: some would say, therefore, that here is the end of the story of Janik and his black dog who went away, and of Clémentine who stayed behind; but they would be wrong—for it is only the beginning, and the second chapter is written on the other side of the world.

I confess there is a blank—I confess that even the little that is known is both misty and uncertain, with small evidence to prove what is truth, and what is only rumour. Certainly there are none now who can tell what precisely happened, nor how it came that somewhere in the South Pacific, in the season of storms, when the winds were let loose and were fighting like devils incarnate, there was a small ship tossed at the mercy of the waves and in sore distress. She was drifting on to a lee-shore, fringed with reefs and

sucked by a thousand currents; there were inlets far too narrow for her to find an entrance, bays that with every effort she could not reach. There was inevitable disaster; one more wreck in those wreck-strewn waters. She went down with her crew—so much is known from the wreckage that was washed ashore; I imagine that her name was discovered—assuredly her home port. And it is said that the only two creatures that reached the shore alive were a man and a black dog, unconscious, helpless, barely on the hither side of death. But the natives who found them carried the two to their huts, tended them impartially, and nursed them back into as much of life as was left to either.

This may seem a simple thing, needing little comment; but in fact it is so strange that I have sought for, and found, no explanation. For the land on which they had been cast was one of the lesser Marquesas—an island of dreadful reputation; few strangers had ever been allowed to reach its shores alive —and fewer still had lived to tell of it. Yet these same people preserved, cared for, seem to have adopted and cherished, the half-dead sailor and his dog. Why? . . . . What sense of pity and protection can have been aroused in them? . . . . I cannot imagine. How long it lasted cannot now be guessed; the Marquesans had few precise words for the passage of time —a waving hand, a lingering inflection of voice, suggested that it may have been long. Rumour—when it came home at last—only said that he never spoke, that he was helpless, perhaps paralysed; and that in the end, when his dog died (the only thing that he seemed to recognise and turn to)—he died too. There is so little that is known, perhaps there is very little to know; only that a *goélette* from St. Malo was wrecked in those waters; that a man and his dog were saved to linger on in a living death; and that they had been treated with tenderness, remembered with a strange

sort of reverence, by a people known to be cannibal. So the story found its way slowly among such as trafficked in those far waters, and in the end came home to the little Brittany port from whence the *goélette* had sailed. In the end, but not, I think, for many years.

And at home in the corner of France that Janik had left so long ago, there was—there is still—Clémentine. More than fifty years back she had stood on the breakwater with the other women to wave to her man as his ship sailed out of the bay, and had tried, like the rest, to sing the *Ave Maris stella*; and ever since it had been flavoured for her with the taste of tears. And year by year in the autumn, the season of home-coming, she had gone there again, to watch and wait—and to pray. But there is not much time for grieving in such a life as hers.

La vie, c'est l'agonie—
Le trépas, c'est la joie!

—say the *bretons;* but while one is alive one must eat, and therefore one must work. And working year in and year out, in the struggle to keep this side of actual hunger, she has grown old and bent and wrinkled; she has fought a hard fight for bare life and is no more than one among the patient, shrewd, money-loving, not too honest, quarrelsome and pious old gossips that crowd round every *lavoir* in Brittany. There is no beauty about her—even of age; she is in no way particularly interesting or picturesque. But she has still her memories; and hidden away from curious eyes, her romance. For night after night in her little one-roomed hut she lies quaking and sleepless till dawn behind her bed-curtains, with the door set ajar on the darkness and cold of the night without; her least terror, the robbers who prowl the streets and who, she assures us, will certainly some day murder her; her greatest, those innumerable groping souls—I do not know how

else to describe them—that make darkness to the *breton* a pulsing horror.

The night is black, and the wind
Sings about the key-holes;
The night is full of fingers that come and go—
And of feet that tread without sound—
And of voices sighing on the thresholds;
A blackness within the blackness are the dead,
Dumb and shapeless . . . .

So says that wonderful, terrible Song of the Dead that not long ago was still sung on the Eve of All Souls, and so, in their hearts, they believe it to be still. We cannot conceive the dreadfulness of that open door to the old woman lying defenceless behind the bed curtains. But she says that some day—(after fifty years!)—some day Janik may come home, and he must not find her door shut against him. Some day—she says, trembling but almost fiercely determined, Janik may come home . . . .

And so all night the wind and the darkness creep in at the open door, and set the little boat hanging below the Crucifix in the corner swinging and dipping as if, like the lost *goélette* of fifty years ago, it lifted with the heaving of the sea.

M. C. BALFOUR.