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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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ISHMAEL.

A NOVEL.

BY

M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC. ETC.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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ISHMAEL.

CHAPTER I.

“THE HARVEST IS PAST, THE SUMMER IS ENDED.”

PEN-HOËL, the old château of Pen-Hoël, reared its steep roof and conical turrets in the midst of a land of orchards, and hill-sides, and marshy fertile meadows populous with cattle, and narrow lanes, with here and there a cluster of old stone cottages and a dingy old inn, which called itself a village. The cottages were substantial and roomy, the barns and rickyards had a wealthy air. Here there was a flock of turkeys in a field, there a procession of gray-brother geese marching along a lane. Yonder, across the salt meadows, the shallow winding streamlets, shadowed by the gray foliage of many a willow—a broad stretch of wet sand glistened in the light, and far away beyond the level sands glimmered the gray of a distant sea.

This was Brittany; and the house of Pen-Hoël was one of the oldest châteaux in the province, and the man who owned it counted himself one of the best in the land. He was the descendant of a good old Breton

family, a race that had never been rich, and which had been going downward financially for the last hundred years. But Raymond Caradec of Pen-Hoël did not value himself by the length of his purse. The traditions of his family were to him as gold and silver are to other men. He never forgot to assert his superiority to the common herd. It seemed to him that all the honours and achievements of his race, from the days of St. Louis, had been lying by and accumulating at compound interest to swell his dignity.

Hard for such a man as this to taste the flavour of dishonour. And yet such a cup, bitter as gall, had been given to him to drink, in days gone by, when the tall stalwart lad yonder, dark-haired, dark-browed, sullen, was a little child. The boy looked a somewhat difficult subject to-day, as he lounged in a moody attitude against the gray old stone parapet, clothed with ferns, coloured with lichens, rich with the slow growth of ages. He leant with folded arms resting upon the stone, and his handsome dark eyes looking far away to that silvery light upon the sea, beyond the barren waste of wet brown sands. Far away on his right the fortress of Mont St. Michel frowned against the sky, a conical mass of granite rock and granite towers, looking like an Egyptian pyramid in the distance. Along the green valley wound the shallow, sluggish Couësnon, the stream which divides Normandy from Brittany, and on an inland summit the white houses of Avranches flashed in the sunlight, reminding the lad yonder of a city that is set on a hill, and cannot be hid.

The château of Pen-Hoël stood upon a picturesque height, a green cliff which rose abruptly from the fertile level below, and thus commanded a wide view over the pastoral country, and away to the rocks and the sea, Tombelaine, Mont St. Michel, Cancale. That broad gravel terrace on the height was a delightful walk for a September afternoon such as this, the air clear and mild, the sky a soft, mournful gray, touched with sunlight towards the west, an odour of dead leaves and burning turf from the village in the green valley below.

Between this broad terrace and the château there was a garden, a garden rich in such flowers as flourish abundantly in that genial climate. The nine long windows and glass door of the ground floor, the ten windows of the upper story, looked upon this garden from the gray stone front of the château. At each end of the building there was a Norman tower, with a conical roof, and in the middle of the façade over the glass doorway there was a cupola surmounted by a gilded vane. Under the cupola hung the big bell of Pen-Hoël—a bell that had sounded many a call to arms in days gone by, but which now rang only for breakfast and dinner.

In days gone by, days of adventure, danger, honour, fame. But the days upon which Raymond Caradec brooded with sad and bitter memory this afternoon, as he paced slowly up and down the terrace, were days of trouble and vexation, pain, grief, shame, dishonour; days which he would fain have forgotten,