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ISHMAEL BY M. E. BRADDON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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ISHMAEL.

A NOVEL.

BY

M. E. BRADDON,

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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ISHMAEL.

CHAPTER I.

"AS A ROE FROM THE HAND OF THE HUNTER."

EIGHTEEN FIFTY-ONE was dead and gone, its bloody close a thing of the past—an old song—forgotten by almost everybody except a few hundred prisoners waiting their doom at the Fort of Bicêtre, or languishing in the Prince's own old prison of Ham, or voyaging over tempestuous seas on their way to Cayenne. The world of Paris troubled its linnet's head but little about that obscure minority in durance or exile. The new year began with pomp and splendour, flourish of trumpets, roll of organs, clank of helmet and sword, a grand *Te Deum* at the cathedral of Notre Dame. The great bell, whose monster clapper sounds but on occasions of grandest import, pealed with deep and solemn voice over the house-tops of the *Cité*; and in that mighty fane, gorgeous with velvet and brocade, gold and jewels, resplendent with myriad tapers, lamp-lit altars, Paris thronged to see the Dictator enthroned upon a dais, while the hierarchy of France invoked

Heaven's blessing upon his lofty mission as elected ruler of the French people, the chosen of seven millions and a half of voters.

Once more the Imperial Eagle, symbol of Roman prowess, Roman pride, spread his broad pinion over Paris. The Republican catchwords, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, were effaced from the public buildings, and the Prince-President left the Elysée to take up his residence at the Tuileries. One of his earliest uses of despotic power was to confiscate the property of the Orleans Princes. This was the first flight of the eagle.

The new year was only a week old when an event happened which threw the whole scheme of Ishmael's life out of gear, one of those few events in a man's life which are fatal.

He had sat up late overnight studying a famous work on the construction of bridges, lent him by his master. The subject was full of mathematical difficulties, and as Ishmael was for the most part a self-taught mathematician, having learnt only the elements of the science from good Father Bressant, he had found the treatise on bridges stiff work, and had toiled deep into the night without making any great progress.

His sense of being baffled by the difficulties of the subject so oppressed him, that when he lay down, in the hope of getting three or four hours' rest before the working day began, he found himself unable to sleep for more than ten minutes at a stretch. His brain was

fevered by the work he had been doing, and, over and above his vexation at non-success, he had a strange vague sense of trouble that weighed him down. Every now and then he turned restlessly on his hard pallet, or started up from his pillow, as if there had been a scorpion lurking under it.

He tried to reason with himself, to calm down nerves and brain. He told himself that the difficulties which had baffled him to-night would be subjugated by persistence and labour; and yet, and yet, the sense of worry, the feeling of oppression, were not to be overcome—grew stronger rather—as the darkness wore on towards dawn.

At last, in a moment of vexation, he gave up the vain effort to sleep, and rose and dressed by candle-light. It was half-past five o'clock, and quite dark; but Ishmael thought that a walk countrywards, even in the darkness, would tranquillize his nerves, and make him fitter for the labour of the coming day. When he tried to open his door, he encountered an obstacle outside, which prevented the door from opening more than half-way. A very human groan, breathed in the darkness, told him that this obstacle was a human form.

"Who is there?" he asked, startled.

"It is I—Pâquerette."

"Pâquerette!"

He went back, and relit his candle hastily, and then went out upon the landing.

Yes, it was Pâquerette. She was sitting on the