SHADOWS

WHEN a summer visitor goes to Saint-Malo, he sees the obvious; the ancient town peering over her encircling walls, the narrow streets and tall old houses, the great church with its single soaring steeple and the arrogant castle of the Duchess Anne: very interesting if he cares for such things and likes to inquire into their history, very picturesque if he prefers to take them only at their scenic value. And in most cases he is probably content so to regard them, or to read of them in the common or garden guide-book. But for those who care to look a little deeper, Saint-Malo has other and more intimate tales to tell—tales that are sometimes based on history and sometimes have grown out of tradition, and oftenest of all belong to both. And these tales have left shadows behind them—shadows that like ghosts still linger about her shores as in her houses, and if unseen are at least unforgotten to-day. Assuredly, on both sides of her, seaward and river-ward, there are places that have every right to be remembered.

On the Sillon, the roadway that links Saint-Malo to the mainland, there stands opposite the casino, a cross of granite. I was not able to discover its precise date, but it is said to be very old; it is known locally as the 'Stone-Cross' and a story is told of its origin for which there seems to be little reliable authority. Be that as it may, it serves now to mark a spot on the beach above which it stands that is a place of very notable memories; there is nothing else now left to record them—and yet these memories are actual history, and not only tradition.

For, as I myself once described in an article published some years ago, in that aftermath of the Revo-

lution that is known as the *Chouannerie* there was a fight of some importance that took place at Dol, twenty miles inland, and sixty-eight prisoners were brought from thence to Saint-Malo. They arrived—on foot—about four in the afternoon. The men were shut up in the church of Saint-Sauveur within the town—it had already of course been secularised and closed to religious use—the women and children placed under guard in some building within the walls, it is not recorded where. But it matters little, for their imprisonment lasted but one night; next morning they were all, men, women, and children, taken about ten o'clock to the beach below the Stone-Cross and set in a row, their backs against the rough wall of the dyke and their faces to the sea. According to papers still preserved in the archives, one of them—a little boy only ten years old—had his hat carried away by the wind and chased it until he was knee-deep in the water; then he returned to take his place in the waiting line. It is written that this *divertit fort l'assistance*—greatly amused all who looked on (that is, the public).

Meanwhile the soldiers had made ready, and now the firing began. It lasted a long twenty minutes—I quote precisely; and when it was finished, the row of great tumbrils that stood ready were loaded up and driven, leaving a trail of blood behind them all along the road they traversed, to the cemetery, where the bodies were thrown into a huge pit. That cemetery is the one in use to-day. But the site of the pit is unmarked now, and can only be uncertainly traced by referring to the contemporary records; originally a rough wooden cross marked the spot, but in 1815 this was removed and in that year also the last commemorative Mass was said in the Cathedral. Since then there has been no official or religious recognition of the sixty-eight men, women, and children, who were shot on the Grand' Grève at the foot of the Stone Cross.

But the sea—so the story goes—preserves its own memories; all the tides that have come and gone have never wholly washed away the blood that was spilt on the sand, and there are times when some declare that it can still, though faintly, be seen. And there are many who believe that on the Sillon in the quiet of the night the wailing of the dead can still be heard—as once was heard, on this same spot, the wailing of the dying.

And on the other, the river-ward side of the old city, there are ghosts also.

In these days, when any wish to reach Saint-Servan afoot without travelling all the way round by the quays and the new roads, they go by the *Pont-Roulant*, the mechanical bridge or platform that runs backwards and forwards across the narrow entrance to the Inner Harbour—so well-known to all who visit Saint-Malo that there is little more to be said about it. It is a thing of yesterday, ugly, useful, and only interesting in that the long legs on which it travels bear witness to the extraordinary rise of even normal tides on this coast. But till recently, before the Inner Harbour was reclaimed and the new quays built, these tides rushed in by a broad channel; the water swept right up to the walls of the town and into the lower streets. Even to-day, in spring, the high quays are still sometimes submerged and boats can be rowed up to the gates. But in earlier days the present Inner Harbour was at low water a wide stretch of wet but in the main uncovered ground, seamed by several deep channels, and only crossed by tracks that followed the emerging banks and by the seven low bridges that spanned the streams as they hurried to the sea. And for so short a time at each tide could this be crossed dry-shod, that there was in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries a regular service of vehicles that carried pas-

sengers across for one *sou* each. At one time these were known (from their owner) as '*Les voitures Galopet*,' and in 1708 it is recorded that the Sieur Galopet introduced great improvements—notably by adding a hood of canvas to protect the occupants from 'wind, mud, and the splashing of sea-water.' But when the tide rushed in over banks and bridges alike, it was not by carriage (however much improved) but by boat that the crossing was made. The *traversée*, though shorter than by the bridges, cost also one *sou* and the boats carried six passengers each time; if you were in a hurry and paid all the six sous yourself, you could cry *Poussez* ! in lordly fashion and the boatman would start without delay. This service still exists (or did so till a few years ago) and is in occasional use in spite of the *Pont-Roulant*; and many an old sailor finds a precarious living as a *batelier du Naye*—which is the pointed nose of land that stretches out from Saint-Servan towards the sister-town of Saint-Malo.

In the old days, however, the *Nayoux*, as they were then called, had other and rather terrible duties; for when prisoners were condemned by the courts to the *noyade*, it was they who conveyed them to the place of their drowning in the deep water that lay then as it lies to-day, just off the Rochers du Naye. The boat that had been commissioned waited by the town gate —when the tide permitted—in the dusk of evening (about eight o'clock was the customary time), till the sound of clanking iron and heavy feet told of the arrival of the prisoner heavily fettered and walking between two armed guards; and round them a body of warders from the gaol. Out to the Rochers du Naye the boat was then rowed; and there the condemned man was thrust into a canvas sack weighted with stones, and cast overboard . . . In the morning at low tide, the body was fished out of what was by that time only an isolated pool and taken to burial in the lonely

little cemetery on the river bank beyond Saint-Servan which is still used for those given up by the sea.

I will quote from a contemporary account of the noyade or execution by drowning of one Jehan Angot, on the night of the 7th November, 1689. (It may be noted in passing that the *noyade* as a method of punishment was by no means an invention of the Revolution.) In this case, at the usual hour of the evening, the tide was low; so that the boat could not start directly from the gate.

'A low-wheeled cart or lorry went to the prison to fetch the condemned man at a quarter past eight in the evening. On the order of the Porte-Baguette (the head-warder), the prisoner having been confessed by the Abbé Goupil, was bound by the executioner and his assistant, enveloped in a strong sack and laid, feet first, on the cart. The procession then set off; it was composed of the prison guards surrounding the lorry and carrying torches, the priest, the head-warder, the executioner and his assistant. When they had passed out by the Grand' Porte and down the slope on to the stretch of ground left uncovered by the tide, the Abbé Goupil began to recite the prayers for the dying, the responses being made by the friends and relatives of the condemned man who had joined the procession on its way through the town. When they arrived at the Pont l'Evèque, the bridge by which the Bishop makes his formal entrance to Saint-Malo on his appointment to the See—(the bridge moreover that spanned the Routhouan, the rapid stream that fell into the pool off the Naye)—the driver turned the cart and backed it to the edge of the deep channel. The priest then very solemnly pronounced the words —'I recommend to You the soul of Jehan Angot!'— and with a great cry from the shrouded man, the executioner and his assistant thrust off the sack into the water. The body fell in with a loud splash and was

carried away by the rapid stream to the pool whence the relatives removed it next day for burial in the *Cimetière des noyés* beyond Saint-Servan.'

To this contemporary description I may add that the 'Cemetery of the drowned' still exists, a quiet and very beautiful spot above the river near the Hôpital du Rosais. If no victims of the Noyade are caried to it now those still lie there whom the waters give up, those who in the local speech '*ne reviennent pas*'—who do not come home—save to this last and peaceful resting place.

But to return to the Noyades; it is said (I am not certain of the precise truth) that this practice altered the name of the point of land that runs towards Saint-Malo from the further side of the harbour, from the 'Nez' or nose as it was at some time written and as its shape undoubtedly suggests, to Naye; for in the local *patois* or country-side speech *nayer* means what is in ordinary French *noyer*—to drown. However that may be the name is now given on all maps, in all guidebooks, as the Pointe du Naye, and close by it are the Rochers du Naye; and here may still be heard—as it is said and by many believed—the wailing voices of the dead; the cry of those who were thrust out into the waters of death, as well as the cries and prayers of those who mourned them.

Yes, Saint-Malo may have her ghosts, that is as may be; she has at least her places of terrible memories.

M. C. BALFOUR.