

THE STRATAGEM

sir; but no language can depict that hell. I will spare you the description. Sand, vermin, crocodiles, venomous snakes, miasma, mosquitoes, fever, filth, toil, jaundice, malaria, starvation, foul undergrowth, weedy swamps breathing out death, hideous and bloated trees of poison, themselves already poisoned by their earth, heat unendurable, insufferable, intolerable, unbearable (as the *Daily Telegraph* said at the time of the Dreyfus case), heat continuous and stifling, no breeze but the pestilential stench of the lagoon, heat that turned the skin into a raging sea of irritation to which the very stings of the mosquitoes and centipedes came as a relief, the interminable task of the day beneath the broiling sun, the lash on every slightest infraction of the harsh prison rules, or even of the laws of politeness toward our warders, men only one degree less damned than we ourselves—all this was nothing. The only amusement of the governors of such a place is cruelty; and their own discomfort makes them more ingenious than all the inquisitors of Spain, than Arabs in their religious frenzy, than Burmans and Kachens and Shans in their Buddhist hatred of all living men, than even the Chinese in their cold lust of cruelty. The governor was a profound psychologist; no corner of the mind that he did not fathom, so as to devise a means of twisting it to torture. I remember one of us who took pleasure in keeping his spade bright—it was the regulation that spades must be kept bright, a torture in itself in such a place, where mildew grows on everything as fast almost as snow falls in happier climates. Well, sir, the governor found out that this man took a pleasure in the glint of the sun on the steel, and he forbade that man to clean his spade. A trifle, indeed! What do you know of what prisoners think trifles? The man went raving mad, and for no other reason. It seemed to him that such detailed refinement of cruelty was a final proof of the innate and inherent devilishness of the universe. Insanity is the logical consequence of such a faith. No, sir, I will spare you the description."

Bevan thought that there had already been too much description, and in his complacent English way surmised that Duguesclin was exaggerating, as he was aware that Frenchmen did. But he only remarked that it must have been terrible. He would have given a good deal, now,