

THE STRATAGEM

was an obvious remark : but Dodu had no reason to think highly of my intelligence. 'By *stratagem*,' he repeated with emphasis.

" 'I have a plan,' he continued. 'It will take twenty-three days to communicate, if we are not interrupted; between three and four months to prepare; two hours and eight minutes to execute. It is theoretically possible to escape by air, by water, or by earth. But as we are watched day and night, it would be useless to try to drive a tunnel to the mainland: we have no aeroplanes or balloons, or means of making them. But if we could once reach the water's edge, which we must do in whatever direction we set out if we only keep in a straight line, and if we can find a boat unguarded, and if we can avoid arousing the alarm, then we have merely to cross the sea, and either find a land where we are unknown or—disguise ourselves and our boat and return to Devil's Island as shipwrecked mariners. The latter idea would be foolish. You will say that the Governor would know that Dodu would not be such a fool; but more, he would know also that Dodu would not be such a fool as to try to take advantage of that circumstance; and he would be right, curse him!' It implies the intensest depth of feeling to curse in the Morse code with one's feet—ah! how we hated him!

"Dodu explained to me that he was telling me these obvious things for several reasons: (1) to gauge my intelligence by my reception of them, (2) to make sure that if we failed it should be by my stupidity and not by his neglect to inform me of every detail, (3) because he had acquired the professorial habit as another man might have the gout.

"Briefly, however, this was his plan; to elude the guards, make for the coast, capture a boat, and put to sea. Do you understand? Do you get the idea?"

Bevan replied that it seemed to him the only possible plan.

"A man like Dodu," pursued Duguesclin, "takes nothing for granted. He leaves no precaution untaken: in his plans, if chance be an element, it is an element whose value is calculated to twenty-eight places of decimals.

"But hardly had he laid down these bold outlines of his scheme when interruption came. On the fourth day of our intercourse he signalled only 'Wait. Watch me'