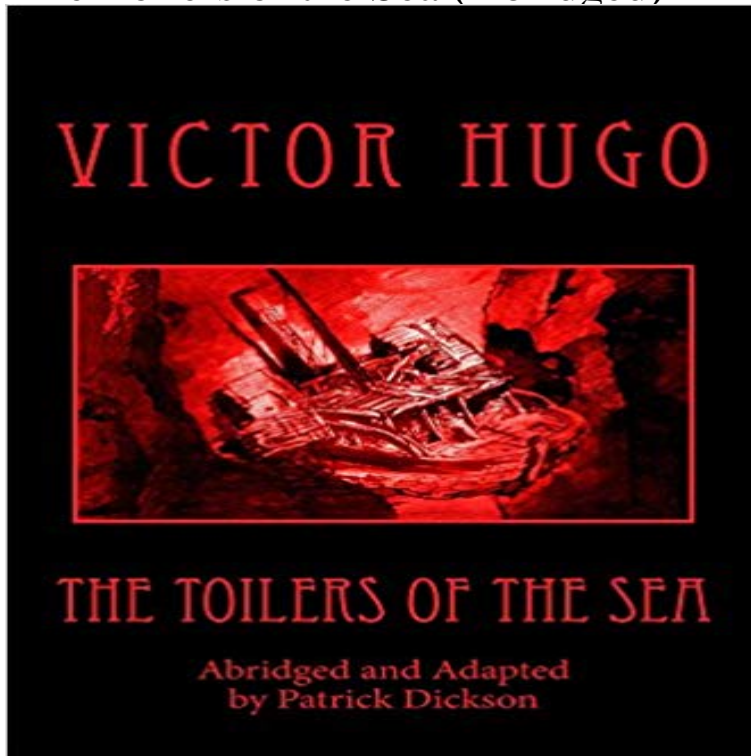


## The Toilers of the Sea (Abridged)



In a small island community a young reclusive fisherman falls dangerously in love with a beautiful local girl. Her uncle, himself an intrepid seaman, owns a paddle-steamer which plies its trade to and from St Malo on the coast of Brittany. The vessel is wrecked on a remote reef in suspicious circumstances and our fisherman sets out alone to salvage the all important machinery, the steam engine itself. If he succeeds he will return home to the promised hand of the girl he darent even talk to. Victor Hugo lived in Guernsey from 1855-70 during the reign of Napoleon the third as a political exile. He was in his early fifties. Thanks to a recent huge publishing success he was able to buy a large house overlooking the main town of St Peter Port. This would be a refuge for Hugo and his family and he set about styling the house according to his imaginative, perhaps eccentric, taste. His personal domain took the form of a glass conservatory atop the three story house which he called the look-out. From here he could gaze down onto the busy little port, across to the neighbouring islands, and on clear days see the coast of Normandy, his beloved France, some 30 nautical miles to the east. It was in this crystal studio that Hugo, pacing back and forth in all weathers, wrote poetry, political treatises and novels including Les Miserables and The Toilers of the Sea. I too lived in Guernsey a full century later (1955-70) and so when I eventually read The Toilers of the Sea many years later, and by then living in Australia far from home, it wasnt hard for me to fall in love with the story as it unfolded so vividly in my minds eye. Hugo spoke directly to my own experiences of Guernsey life, its inhabitants and the special character of what he calls the Norman Archipelago. As a lad I had been lucky enough to sail around the islands rocky coast and beyond, to the coast of Brittany, St Malo in

particular, where the great adventure of the novel plays out. This abridged version of The Toilers of the Sea is about half the length of Hugos published text but the narrative, the ripping yarn, is intact. I set about reducing the novel so that I could record it as an Audio Book and then decided to take the extra step of publishing this adaptation in the printed form which you have in your hand. Hugo is an expansive writer and his huge audience of the time were hungry to read his asides on science, history, meteorology or philosophy. The full novel is a cornucopia of diversions and speculations, of unrestrained examinations of storms, superstition, demographics, psychology, inventions and much, much more. Hugo was clearly a voracious reader with an inquiring mind and he loved to share his knowledge and his opinions. This richness remains in this edition but much of it I have stripped away in the interests of telling the story in a way which I hope will be easier for a contemporary audience to enjoy.

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