

THE BRASS BELL

BY

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The Brass Bell

CHAPTER I

THE CONFLAGRATION

The call to arms, sounded by the druids of the forest of Karnak and by the Chief of the Hundred Valleys against the invading forces of the first Caesar, had well been hearkened to.

The sacrifice of Hena, the Virgin of the Isle of Sen, seemed pleasing to Hesus. All the peoples of Brittany, from North to South, from East to West, rose to combat the Romans. The tribes of the territory of Vannes and Auray, those of the Mountains of Ares, and many others, assembled before the town of Vannes, on the left bank, close to the mouth of the river which empties into the great bay of Morbihan. This redoubtable position where all the Gallic forces were to meet, was situated ten leagues from Karnak, and had been chosen by the Chief of the Hundred Valleys, who had been elected Commander-in-Chief of the army.

Leaving behind them their fields, their herds, and their dwellings, the tribes were here assembled, men and women, young and old, and were encamped round about the town of Vannes. Here also were Joel, his family, and his tribe.

Albinik the mariner, together with his wife Meroë left the camp towards sunset, bent on an errand of many days' march. Since her marriage with Albinik, Meroë; was the constant, companion of his voyages and dangers at sea, and like him, she wore the seaman's costume. Like him she knew at a pinch how to put her hand to the rudder, to ply the oar or the axe, for stout was her heart, and strong her arm.

In the evening, before leaving the Gallic army, Meroë dressed herself in her sailor's garments—a short blouse of brown wool, drawn tight with a leather belt, large broad breeches of white cloth, which fell below her knees, and shoes of sealskin. She carried on her left shoulder her short, hooded cloak, and on her flowing hair was a leathern bonnet. By her resolute air, the agility of her step, the perfection of her sweet and virile countenance, one might have taken Meroë for one of those young men whose good looks make maidens dream of marriage. Albinik also was dressed as a mariner. He had flung over his back a sack with provisions for the way. The large sleeves of his blouse revealed his left arm, wrapped to the elbow in a bloody bandage.

Husband and wife had left Vannes for some minutes, when Albinik, stopping, sad and deeply moved, said to Meroë:

"There is still time—consider. We are going to beard the lion in his den. He is tricky, distrustful and savage. It may mean for us slavery, torture, or death. Meroë, let me finish alone this trip and this enterprise, beside which a desperate fight would be but a trifle. Return to my father and mother, whose daughter you are also!"

"Albinik, you had to wait for the darkness of night to say that to me. You would not see me blush with shame at the thought of your thinking me a coward;" and the young woman, while making this answer, instead of turning back, only hastened her step.

"Let it be as your courage and your love for me bid," replied her husband. "May Hena, my holy sister, who is gone, protect us at the side of Hesus."

The two continued their way along the crests of a chain of lofty hills. They had thus at their feet and before their eyes a succession of deep and fertile valleys. As far as eye could reach, they saw here villages, yonder small hamlets, elsewhere isolated farms; further off rose a flourishing town crossed by an arm of the river, in which were moored, from distance to distance, large boats loaded with sheaves of wheat, casks of wine, and fodder.

But, strange to say, although the evening was clear, not a single one of those large herds of cattle and of sheep was to be seen, which ordinarily grazed there till nightfall. No more was there a single laborer in sight on the fields, although it was the hour when, by every road, the country-folk ordinarily began to return to their homes; for the sun was fast sinking. This country, so populous the preceding evening, now seemed deserted.

The couple halted, pensive, contemplating the fertile lands, the bountifulness of nature, the opulent city, the hamlets, and the houses. Then, recollecting what they knew was to happen in a few moments, soon as the sun was set and the moon risen, Albinik and Meroë; shivered with grief and fear. Tears fell from their eyes, they sank to their knees, their eyes fixed with anguish on the depths of the valleys, which the thickening evening shade was gradually invading. The sun had disappeared, but the moon, then in her decline, was not yet up. There was thus, between sunset and the rising of the moon, a rather long interval. It was a bitter one for husband and wife; bitter, like the certain expectation of some great woe.

"Look, Albinik," murmured the young woman to her spouse, although they were alone—for it was one of those awful moments when one speaks low in the middle of a desert—"just look, not a light: not one in these houses, hamlets, or the town. Night is come, and all within these dwellings is gloomy as the night without."

"The inhabitants of this valley are going to show themselves worthy of their brothers," answered Albinik reverently. "They also wish to respond to the voice of our venerable druids, and to that of the Chief of the Hundred Valleys."

"Yes; by the terror which is now come upon me, I feel we are about to see a thing no one has seen before, and perhaps none will see again."

"Meroë, do you catch down there, away down there, behind the crest of the forest, a faint white glimmer!"

"I do. It is the moon, which will soon be up. The moment approaches. I feel terror-stricken. Poor women! Poor children!"

"Poor laborers; they lived so long, happy on this land of their fathers: on this land made fertile by the labor of so many generations! Poor workmen; they found plenty in their rude trades! Oh, the unfortunates! the unfortunates! But one thing equals their great misfortune, and that is their great heroism. Meroë! Meroë!" exclaimed Albinik, "the moon is rising. That sacred orb of Gaul is about to give the signal for the sacrifice."

"Hesus! Hesus!" cried the young woman, her cheeks bathed in tears, "your wrath will never be appeased if this last sacrifice does not calm you."

The moon had risen radiant among the stars. She flooded space with so brilliant a light that Albinik and his wife could see as in full day, and as far as the most distant horizon, the country that stretched at their feet.

Suddenly, a light cloud of smoke, at first whitish, then black, presently colored with the red tints of a kindling fire, rose above one of the hamlets scattered in the plain.

"Hesus! Hesus!" exclaimed Meroë. Then, hiding her face in the bosom of her husband who was kneeling near her, "You spoke truly. The sacred orb of Gaul has given the signal for the sacrifice. It is fulfilled."

"Oh, liberty!" cried Albinik, "Holy liberty!—"

He could not finish. His voice was smothered in tears, and he drew his weeping wife close in his arms.

Meroë did not leave her face hidden in her husband's breast any longer than it would take a mother to kiss the forehead, mouth, and eyes, of her new born babe, but when she again raised her head and dared to look abroad, it was no longer only one house, one village, one hamlet, one town in that long succession of valleys at their feet that was disappearing in billows of black smoke, streaked with red gleams. It was all the houses, all the villages, all the hamlets, all the towns in the laps of all those valleys, that the conflagration was devouring. From North to South, from East to West, all was afire. The rivers themselves seemed to roll in flame under their grain and forage-laden barges, which in turn took fire, and sank in the waters.

The heavens were alternately obscured by immense clouds of smoke, or reddened with innumerable columns of fire. From one end to the other, the panorama was soon nothing but a furnace, an ocean of flame.

Nor were the houses, hamlets, and towns of only these valleys given over to the flames. It was the same in all the regions which Albinik and Meroë had traversed in one night and day of travel, on their way from Vannes to the mouth of the Loire, where was pitched the camp of Caesar.

All this territory had been burned by its inhabitants, and they abandoned the smoking ruins to join the Gallic army, assembled in the environs of Vannes. Thus the voice of the Chief of the Hundred Valleys had been obeyed—the command repeated from place to place, from village to village, from city to city:

"In three nights, at the hour when the moon, the sacred orb of Gaul shall rise, let all the countryside, from Vannes to the Loire, be set on fire. Let Caesar and his army find in their passage neither men nor houses, nor provisions, nor forage, but everywhere, everywhere cinders, famine, desolation, and death."

It was done as the druids and the Chief of the Hundred Valleys had ordered.

The two travelers, who witnessed this heroic devotion of each and all to the safety of the fatherland, had thus seen a sight no one had ever seen in the past; a sight which perhaps none will ever see in the future.

Thus were expiated those fatal dissensions, those rivalries between province and province, which for too long a time, and to the triumph of their enemies, had divided the people of Gaul.

CHAPTER II

IN THE LION'S DEN

The night passed. When the next day drew to its close Albinik and Meroë had traversed all the burnt country, from Vannes to the mouth of the Loire, which they were now approaching. At sunset they came to a fork in the road.

"Of these two ways, which shall we take?" mused Albinik. "One ought to take us toward the camp of Caesar, the other away from it."

Reflecting an instant, the young woman answered:

"Climb yonder oak. The camp fires will show us our route."

"True," said the mariner, and confident in his agility he was about to clamber up the tree. But stopping, he added: "I forgot that I have but one hand left. I cannot climb."

The face of the young woman saddened as she replied:

"You are suffering, Albinik? Alas, you, thus mutilated!"

"Is the sea-wolf caught without a lure?"

"No."

"Let the fishing be good," answered Albinik, "and I shall not regret having given my hand for bait."

The young woman sighed, and after looking at the tree a minute, said to her husband:

"Come, then, put your back to the trunk. I'll step in the hollow of your hand, then onto your shoulder, and from your shoulder I can reach that large branch overhead."

"Fearless and devoted! You are always the dear wife of my heart, true as my sister Hena is a saint," tenderly answered Albinik, and steadying himself against the tree, he took in his hand the little foot of his companion. With his good arm he supported his wife while she placed her foot on his shoulder. Thence she reached the first large bough. Then, mounting from branch to branch, she gained the top of the oak. Arrived there, Meroë cast

her eyes abroad, and saw towards the south, under a group of seven stars, the gleam of several fires. She descended, nimble as a bird, and at last, putting her feet on the mariner's shoulder, was on the ground with one bound, saying:

"We must go towards the south, in the direction of those seven stars. That way lie the fires of Caesar's camp."

"Let us take that road, then," returned the sailor, indicating the narrower of the two ways, and the two travelers pursued their journey. After a few steps, the young woman halted. She seemed to be searching in her garments.

"What is the matter, Meroë?"

"In climbing the tree, I've let my poniard drop. It must have worked out of the belt I was carrying it in, under my blouse."

"By Hesus; we must get that poniard back," said Albinik, retracing his steps toward the tree. "You have need of a weapon, and this one my brother Mikael forged and tempered himself. It will pierce a sheet of copper."

"Oh; I shall find it, Albinik. In that well-tempered little blade of steel one has an answer for all, and in all languages."

After some search up the foot of the oak, Meroë found her poniard. It was cased in a sheath hardly as long as a hen's feather, and not much thicker. Meroë fastened it anew under her blouse, and started again on the road with her husband. After some little travel along deserted paths, the two arrived at a plain. They heard far in the distance the great roar of the sea. On a hill they saw the lights of many fires.

"There, at last, is the camp of Caesar," said Albinik, stopping short, "the den of the lion."

"The den of the scourge of Gaul. Come, come, the evening is slipping away."

"Meroë, the moment has come."

"Do you hesitate now?"

"It is too late. But I would prefer a fair fight under the open heavens, vessel to vessel, soldier to soldier, sword to sword. Ah, Meroë, for us, Gauls, who despise ambuscade or cowardice, and hang brass bells on the iron of our lances to warn the enemy of our approach, to come here—traitorously!"

"Traitorously!" exclaimed the young woman. "And to oppress a free people—is that loyalty? To reduce the inhabitants to slavery, to exile them by herds with iron collars on their necks—is that loyalty? To massacre old men and children, to deliver the women and virgins to the lust of soldiers—is that loyalty? And now, you would hesitate, after having marched a whole day and night by the lights of the conflagration, through the midst of those smoking ruins which were caused by the horror of Roman oppression? No! No! to exterminate savage beasts, all means are good, the trap as well as the boar-spear. Hesitate? Hesitate? Answer, Albinik. Without mentioning your voluntary mutilation, without mentioning the dangers which we brave in entering this camp—shall we not be, if Hesus aids our project, the first victims of that great sacrifice which we are going to make to the Gods? Come, believe me; he who gives his life has nothing to blush for. By the love which I bear you, by the virgin blood of your sister Hena, I have at this moment, I swear to you, the consciousness of fulfilling a holy duty. Come, come, the evening is passing."

"What Meroë, the just and valiant, finds to be just and valiant, must be so," said Albinik, pressing his companion to his breast.

"Yes, yes, to exterminate savage beasts all means are good, the trap as well as the spear. Who gives his life has no cause to blush. Come!"

The couple hastened their pace toward the lights of the camp of Caesar. After a few moments, they heard close at hand, resounding on the earth, the measured tread of several soldiers, and the clashing of their swords on their iron armor. Presently they distinguished the invaders' red crested helmets glittering in the moonlight.

"They are the soldiers of the guard, who keep vigil around the camp," said Albinik. "Let us go to them."

Soon the travelers reached the Roman soldiers, by whom they were immediately surrounded. Albinik, who had learned in the Roman tongue these only words: "We are Breton Gauls; we would speak with Caesar," addressed them to his captors; but these, learning from Albinik's own admission that he and his companion were of the provinces that had risen in arms, forthwith took them prisoners, and treated them as such. They bound them, and conducted them to the camp.

Albinik and Meroë were first taken to one of the gates of the entrenchment. Beside the gate, they saw, a cruel warning, five large wooden crosses. On

each one of these a Gallic seaman was crucified, his clothes stained with blood. The light of the moon illuminated the corpses.

"They have not deceived us," said Albinik in a low voice to his companion. "The pilots have been crucified after having undergone frightful tortures, rather than pilot the fleet of Caesar along the coast of Brittany."

"To make them undergo torture, and death on the cross," flashed back Meroë, "is that loyalty! Would you still hesitate? Will you still speak of 'treachery'?"

Albinik answered not a word, but in the dark he pressed his companion's hand. Brought before the officer who commanded the post, the mariner repeated the only words which he knew in the Roman tongue:

"We are Breton Gauls; we would speak with Caesar." In these times of war, the Romans would often seize or detain travelers, for the purpose of learning from them what was passing in the revolted provinces. Caesar had given orders for all prisoners and fugitives who could throw light on the movements of the Gauls to be brought before him.

The husband and wife were accordingly not surprised to see themselves, in fulfillment of their secret hope, conducted across the camp to Caesar's tent, which was guarded by the flower of his Spanish veterans, charged with watching over his person.

Arrived within the tent of Caesar, the scourge of Gaul, Albinik and Meroë were freed of their bonds. Despite their souls' being stirred with hatred for the invader of their country, they looked about them with a somber curiosity.

The tent of the Roman general, covered on the outside with thick pelts, like all the other tents of the camp, was decorated within with a purple-colored material embroidered with gold and white silk. The beaten earth was buried from sight under a carpet of tiger skins. Caesar was finishing supper, reclining on a camp bed which was concealed under a great lion-skin, decorated with gold claws and eyes of carbuncles. Within his reach, on a low table, the couple saw large vases of gold and silver, richly chased, and cups ornamented with precious stones. Humbly seated at the foot of Caesar's couch, Meroë saw a young and beautiful female slave, an African without doubt, for her white garments threw out all the stronger the copper colored hue of her face. Slowly she raised her large, shining black eyes to the two

strangers, all the while petting a large greyhound which was stretched out at her side. She seemed to be as timid as the dog.

The generals, the officers, the secretaries, the handsome looking young freedmen of Caesar's suite, were standing about his camp bed, while black Abyssinian slaves, wearing coral ornaments at their necks, wrists and ankles, and motionless as statues, held in their hands torches of scented wax, whose gleam caused the splendid armor of the Romans to glitter.

Caesar, before whom Albinik and Meroë cast down their eyes for fear of betraying their hatred, had exchanged his armor for a long robe of richly brodered silk. His head was bare, nothing covered his large bald forehead, on each side of which his brown hair was closely trimmed. The warmth of the Gallic wine which it was his habit to drink to excess at night, caused his eyes to shine, and colored his pale cheeks. His face was imperious, his laugh mocking and cruel. He was leaning on one elbow, holding in one hand, thinned with debauchery, a wide gold cup, enriched with pearls. He looked at it leisurely and fitfully, still fixing his piercing gaze on the two prisoners, who were placed in such a manner that Albinik almost entirely hid Meroë.

Caesar said a few words in Latin to his officers, who had been preparing to retire. One of them went up to the couple, brusquely shoved Albinik back, and took Meroë by the hand. Thus he forced her to advance a few steps, clearly for the purpose of permitting Caesar to look at her with greater ease. He did so, while at the same time and without turning around, reaching his empty cup to one of his young cup-bearers.

Albinik knew how to control himself. He remained quiet while he saw his chaste wife blush under the bold looks of Caesar. After gazing at her for a moment, the Roman general beckoned to one of his interpreters. The two exchanged a few words, whereupon the interpreter drew close to Meroë, and said to her in the Gallic tongue:

"Caesar asks whether you are a youth or a maiden!"

"My companion and I have fled the Gallic camp," responded Meroë ingenuously. "Whether I am a youth or a maiden matters little to Caesar."

At these words, translated by the interpreter to Caesar, the Roman laughed cynically, while his officers partook of the gaiety of their general. Caesar continued to empty cup after cup, fixing his eyes more and more ardently on Albinik's wife. He said a few words to the interpreter, who commenced to

question the two prisoners, conveying as he proceeded, their answers to the general, who would then prompt new questions.

"Who are you!" said the interpreter, "Whence come you!"

"We are Bretons," answered Albinik. "We come from the Gallic camp, which is established under the walls of Vannes, two days' march from here."

"Why have you deserted the Gallic camp!"

Albinik answered not a word, but unwrapped the bloody bandage in which his arm was swathed. The Romans then saw that his left hand was cut off. The interpreter resumed:

"Who has thus mutilated you?"

"The Gauls."

"But you are a Gaul yourself?"

"Little does that matter to the Chief of the Hundred Valleys."

At the name of the Chief of the Hundred Valleys, Caesar knit his brows, and his face was filled with envy and hatred.

The interpreter resumed, addressing Albinik: "Explain yourself."

"I am a sailor, and command a merchant vessel. Several other captains and I received the order to transport some armed men by sea, and to disembark them in the harbor of Vannes, by the bay of Morbihan. I obeyed. A gust of wind carried away one of my masts; my vessel arrived the last of all. Then—the Chief of the Hundred Valleys inflicted upon me the penalty for laggards. But he was generous. He let me off with my life, and gave me the choice between, the loss of my nose, my ears, or one hand. I have been mutilated, but not for having lacked courage or willingness. That would have been just, I would have undergone it according to the laws of my country, without complaint."

"But this wrongful torture," joined in Meroë, "Albinik underwent because the sea wind came up against him. As well punish with death him who cannot see clear in the pitchy night—him who cannot darken the light of the sun."

"And this mutilation covers me for ever with shame!" exclaimed Albinik. "Everywhere it is said: 'That fellow's a coward!' I have never known hatred;

now my heart is filled with it. Perish that Fatherland where I cannot live but in dishonor! Perish its liberty! Perish the liberty of my people, provided only that I be avenged upon the Chief of the Hundred Valleys! For that I would gladly give the other hand which he has left me. That is why I have come here with my companion. Sharing my shame, she shares my hatred. That hatred we offer to Caesar; let him use it as he will; let him try us. Our lives answer for our sincerity. As to recompense, we want none."

"Vengeance—that is what we must have," interjected Meroë.

"In what can you serve Caesar against the Chief of the Hundred Valleys?" queried the interpreter.

"I offer Caesar my service as a mariner, as a soldier, as a guide, as a spy even, if he wishes it."

"Why did you not seek to kill the Chief of the Hundred Valleys, being able to approach him in the Gallic camp?" suggested the interpreter. "You would have been revenged."

"Immediately after the mutilation of my husband," answered Meroë, "we were driven from the camp. We could not return."

The interpreter again conversed with the Roman general, who, while listening, did not cease to empty his cup and to follow Meroë with brazen looks.

"You are a mariner, you say!" resumed the interpreter. "You used to command a merchantman?"

"Yes."

"And—are you a good seaman?"

"I am five and twenty years old. From the age of twelve I have traveled on the sea; for four years I have commanded a vessel."

"Do you know well the coast between Vannes and the channel which separates Great Britain from Gaul?"

"I am from the port of Vannes, near the forest of Karnak. For more than sixteen years I have sailed these coasts continuously."

"Would you make a good pilot?"

"May I lose all the limbs which the Chief of the Hundred Valleys has left me, if there is a bay, a cape, an islet, a rock, a sand-bank, or a breaker, which I do not know from the Gulf of Aquitaine to Dunkirk."

"You are vaunting your skill as a pilot. How can you prove it?"

"We are near the shore. For him who is not a good and fearless sailor, nothing is more dangerous than the navigation of the mouth of the Loire, going up towards the north."

"That is true," answered the interpreter. "Even yesterday a Roman galley ran aground on a sand-bank and was lost."

"Who pilots a boat well," observed Albinik, "pilots well a galley, I think."

"Yes."

"To-morrow conduct us to the shore. I know the fisher boats of the country; my wife and I will suffice to handle one. From the top of the bank Caesar will see us skim around the rocks and breakers, and play with them as the sea raven plays with the wave it skims. Then Caesar will believe me capable of safely piloting a galley on the coasts of Brittany."

Albinik's offer having been translated to Caesar by the interpreter, the latter proceeded:

"We accept your test. It shall be done to-morrow morning. If it proves your skill as a pilot—and we shall take all precautions against treachery, lest you should wish to trick us—perhaps you will be charged with a mission which will serve your hatred, all the more seeing that you can have no idea of what that mission is. But for that it will be necessary to gain the entire confidence of Caesar."

"What must I do!"

"You must know the forces and plans of the Gallic army. Beware of telling an untruth; we already have reports on that subject. We shall see if you are sincere; if not, the chamber of torture is not far off."

"Arrived at Vannes in the morning, arrested, judged, and punished almost immediately, and then driven from the Gallic camp, I could not learn the decisions of the council which was held the previous evening," promptly answered Albinik. "But the situation was grave, for the women were called to

the council; it lasted from sun-down to dawn. The current rumor was that heavy re-enforcements to the Gallic army were on the way."

"Who were those re-enforcements?"

"The tribes of Finisterre and of the north coasts, those of Lisieux, of Amiens, and of Perche. They said, even, that the warriors of Brabant were coming by sea."

After translating to Caesar Albinik's answer, the interpreter resumed:

"You speak true. Your words agree with the reports which have been made to us. But some scouts returned this evening and have brought the news that, two or three leagues from here, they saw in the north the glare of a conflagration. You come from the north. Do you know anything about that?"

"From the outskirts of Vannes up to three leagues from here," answered Albinik, "there remains not a town, not a borough, not a village, not a house, not a sack of wheat, not a skin of wine, not a cow, not a sheep, not a rick of fodder, not a man, woman, or child. Provisions, cattle, stores, everything that could not be carried away, have been given up to the flames by the inhabitants. At the hour that I speak to you, all the tribes of the burned regions are rallied to the support of the Gallic army, leaving behind them nothing but a desert of smouldering ruins."

As Albinik progressed with his account, the amazement of the interpreter deepened, his terror increased. In his fright he seemed not to dare believe what he heard. He hesitated to make Caesar aware of the awful news. At last he resigned himself to the requirements of his office.

Albinik did not take his eyes from Caesar, for he wished to read in his face what impression the words of the interpreter would make. Well skilled in dissimulation, they say, was the Roman general. Nevertheless, as the interpreter spoke, stupefaction, fear, frenzy and doubt betrayed themselves in the face of Gaul's oppressor. His officers and councillors looked at one another in consternation, exchanging under their breaths words which seemed full of anguish. Then Caesar, sitting bolt upright on his couch, addressed several short and violent words to the interpreter, who immediately turned to the mariner:

"Caesar says you lie. Such a disaster is impossible. No nation is capable of such a sacrifice. If you have lied, you shall expiate your crime on the rack."

Great was the joy of Albinik and Meroë on seeing the consternation and fury of the Roman, who could not make up his mind to believe the heroic resolution, so fatal to his army. But the couple concealed their emotions, and Albinik answered:

"Caesar has in his camp Numidian horsemen, with tireless horses. Let him send out scouts instantly. Let them scour not only the country which we have just crossed in one night and day of travel, but let them extend their course into the east, to the boundary of Touraine. Let them go still further, as far as Berri; and so much further as their horses can carry them; they will traverse regions ravaged by fire, and deserted."

Hardly had Albinik pronounced these words, when the Roman general shot some orders at several of his officers. They rushed from the tent in haste, while he, relapsing into his habitual dissimulation, and no doubt regretful of having betrayed his fears in the presence of the Gallic fugitives, affected to smile, and stretched himself again on his lion skin. He held out his cup to one of his cup-bearers, and emptied it after saying to the interpreter some words which he translated thus:

"Caesar empties his cup to the honor of the Gauls—and, by Jupiter, he gives them thanks for having done just what he wished to do himself. For old Gaul shall humble herself vanquished and repentant, before Rome, like the most humble slave—or not one of her towns shall remain standing, not one of her warriors living, not one of her people free."

"May the gods hear Caesar," answered Albinik. "Let Gaul be enslaved or devastated, and I shall be avenged on the Chief of the Hundred Valleys—for he will suffer a thousand deaths in seeing subdued or destroyed that fatherland which I now curse."

While the interpreter was translating these words, the general, either to hide all the more his fears, or to drown them in wine, emptied his cup several times, and began to cast at Meroë more and more ardent looks. Then, a thought seeming to strike him, he smiled with a singular air, made a sign to one of the freedmen, and spoke to him in a low voice. He also whispered a few hurried words to the Moorish slave-girl, until then seated at his feet, whereupon she and the freedman left the tent.

The interpreter thereupon returned to Albinik: "So far your answers have proved your sincerity. If the news you have just given is confirmed, if tomorrow you show yourself a capable and courageous pilot, you will be able to serve your revenge. If you satisfy Caesar, he will be generous. If you play

us false your punishment will be terrible. Did you see, at the entrance to the camp, five men crucified!"

"I saw them."

"They are pilots who refused to serve us. They had to be carried to the crosses, because their legs, crushed by the torture, could not sustain them. Such will be your lot and that of your companion, upon the least suspicion."

"I fear these threats no more than I expect a gift from the magnificence of Caesar," haughtily returned Albinik. "Let him try me first, then judge me."

"You and your companion will be taken to a nearby tent; you will be guarded there like prisoners."

At a sign from the Roman, the two Gauls were led away and conducted through a winding passage covered with cloth, into an adjacent tent, where they were left alone.

CHAPTER III

GALLIC VIRTUE

So great was the distrust in which Albinik and his wife held everything Roman, that before passing the night in the tent to which they had been taken, they examined it carefully. The tent, round of form, was decorated inside with woolen cloth, striped in strongly contrasting colors. It was fixed on taut cords which were fastened to stakes driven into the earth. The cloth of the tent did not come down close to the ground, and Albinik remarked that between the coarsely tanned hides which served as a carpet, and the lower edge of the tent, there remained a space three times the width of his palm. There was no other visible entrance to the tent but the one the couple had just crossed, which was closed by two flaps of cloth overlapping each other. An iron bed furnished with cushions was half enveloped in draperies, with which one could shut himself in by pulling a cord hanging over the head of the bed. A brass lamp, raised on a long shaft stuck into the ground, feebly lighted the interior of the tent.

After examining silently and carefully the place where he was to pass the night with his wife, Albinik said to her in a whisper:

"Caesar will have us spied upon to-night. They will listen to our conversation. But no matter how softly they come, or how cunningly they hide themselves, no one can approach the cloth from the outside to listen to us, without our seeing, through that gap, the feet of the spy," and he pointed out to his wife the circular space left between the earth and the lower rim of the tent cloth.

"Do you think, then, Albinik, that Caesar has any suspicions? Could he suppose that a man would have the courage to mutilate himself in order to induce confidence in his feelings of revenge?"

"And our brothers, the inhabitants of the regions which we have just traversed, have they not shown a courage a thousand times greater than mine, in giving up their country to the flames? My one hope is in the absolute need our enemy has of Gallic pilots to conduct his ships along the Breton coasts. Now especially, when the land offers not a single resource to his army, the way by sea is perhaps his only means of safety. You saw, when he learned of that heroic devastation, that he could not, even he, always so dissembling, they say, hide his consternation and fury, which he then tried to forget in the fumes of wine. And that is not the only

debauchery to which he gives himself up. I saw you blush under the obstinate looks of the infamous debauchee."

"Oh, Albinik! while my forehead reddened with shame and anger under the eyes of Caesar, twice my hand sought and clasped under my garments the weapon with which I am provided. Once I measured the distance which separated me from him—it was too great."

"At the first movement, before reaching him, you would have been pierced with a thousand sword thrusts. Our project is worth more. If it thrives," added Albinik, throwing a meaning glance at his companion, and instead of speaking low as he had been doing up till now, raising his voice little by little, "if our project thrives, if Caesar has faith in my word, we will be able at last to avenge ourselves on my tormentor. Oh, I tell you, I feel now for Gaul the hatred with which the Romans once inspired me!"

Surprised by Albinik's words, Meroë stared at him in amazement. But by a sign he showed her, through the empty space left between the ground and the cloth, of the tent, the toes of the sandals of the interpreter, who had approached and now listened without. At once the young woman replied:

"I share your hate, as I have shared your heart's love, and the peril of your mariner's life. May Hesus cause Caesar to understand what services you can render him, and I shall be the witness of your revenge as I was the witness of your torture."

These words, and many others, exchanged by the couple to the end of deceiving the interpreter, apparently reassured the spy of the honesty of the two prisoners, for presently they saw him move away.

Shortly thereafter, at the moment that Albinik and Meroë, fatigued with their long journey, were about to throw themselves into bed in their clothes, the interpreter appeared at the entry. The uplifted cloth disclosed several Spanish soldiers.

"Caesar wishes to converse with you immediately," said the interpreter to the mariner. "Follow me."

Albinik felt certain that the suspicions of the Roman general, if he had any, had just been allayed by the interpreter's report, and that the moment had come when he was to learn the mission with which they wished to charge him. Accordingly, he prepared to leave the tent, and Meroë with him, when the interpreter said to the young woman, stopping her with a gesture:

"You may not accompany us. Caesar wishes to speak with your companion alone."

"And I," answered the seaman, taking his wife by the hand, "I shall not leave Meroë."

"Do you really refuse my order?" cried the interpreter. "Beware, beware!"

"We go together to Caesar," began Meroë, "or we go not at all."

"Poor fools! Are you not prisoners at our mercy?" said the interpreter to them, pointing to the soldiers, motionless at the door of the tent. "Willingly or unwillingly, I will be obeyed."

Albinik reflected that resistance was impossible. Death he was not afraid of; but to die was to renounce his plans at the moment when they seemed to be prospering. Nevertheless, the thought of leaving Meroë alone in the tent disturbed him. The young woman divined the fears of her husband, and feeling, like him, that they must resign themselves, said:

"Go alone. I shall wait for you without fear, true as your brother is an able armorer."

Reassured by his wife's significant words, Albinik followed the interpreter. The door flaps of the tent, for the moment raised, fell back into place. Immediately, from behind them, she heard a heavy thud. She ran towards the place, and saw that a thick wicker screen had been fastened outside, closing the door. The young woman was at first surprised with this precaution, but she presently thought that it would be better to remain thus secured while awaiting Albinik, and that perhaps he himself had asked that the tent be closed till his return.

Meroë accordingly seated herself thoughtfully on the bed, full of hope in the interview which undoubtedly her husband was then having with Caesar. Suddenly her reverie was broken by a singular noise. It came from the part directly in front of the bed. Almost immediately, the cloth parted its whole length. The young woman sprang to her feet. Her first movement was to seize the poniard which she carried under her blouse. Then, trusting in herself and in the weapon which she held, she waited, calling to mind the Gallic proverb, "He who takes his own life in his hands has nothing to fear but the gods!"

Against the background of dense shadows on which the tent cloth parted, Meroë saw the young Moorish slave approach, wrapped in her white

garments. As soon as the slave had put her foot in the tent, she fell upon her knees, and stretched out her clasped hands to Albinik's companion. Touched by the suppliant gesture and the grief imprinted on the face of the slave, Meroë felt neither suspicion nor fear, but compassion mingled with curiosity, and she laid her poniard at the head of the bed. The Moorish girl advanced, creeping on her knees, her two hands still extended towards Meroë, who, full of pity, leaned towards the suppliant, meaning to raise her up. But when the slave had sufficiently approached the bed where the poniard was, she raised herself with a bound, and leaped to the weapon. Evidently she had not lost sight of it since entering the tent, and before Albinik's stupefied companion could oppose her, the poniard was flung into the outer darkness.

By the peal of savage laughter which burst from the Moorish girl when she had thus disarmed Meroë, the latter saw that she had been betrayed. She ran toward the dark passage to recover her poniard, or to flee. But out of those shadows, she saw coming—Caesar.

Stricken with fear, the Gallic woman recoiled several steps, Caesar advanced likewise, and the slave disappeared by the opening, which was immediately closed again. By the uncertain step of the Roman, by the fire in his looks, the excitement which impurpled his cheeks, Meroë saw that he was inebriate. Her terror subsided. He carried under his arm a casket of precious wood. After silently gazing at the young woman with such effrontery that the blush of shame again mounted to her forehead, the Roman drew from the casket a rich necklace of chased gold. He went closer to the lamp-light in order to improve its glitter in the eyes of the woman whom he wished to tempt. Then, simulating an ironical reverence, he stooped and placed the necklace at the feet of the Gaul. Rising, he questioned her with an audacious look.

Meroë, standing with arms crossed on her breast, heaving with indignation and scorn, looked haughtily at Caesar, and spurned the collar with her foot.

The Roman made an insulting gesture of surprise; he laughed with an air of disdainful confidence; and then drew from the casket a magnificent gold net-work for the hair, all encrusted with carbuncles. After making it sparkle in the lamp-light, he deposited the second trinket also at the feet of Meroë. Redoubling his ironical respect, he rose, and seemed to say:

"This time I am sure of my triumph!"

Meroë, pale with anger, smiled disdainfully.

Then Caesar emptied at the young woman's feet all the contents of the casket. It was like a flood of gold, pearls, and precious stones, of necklaces, zones, earrings, bracelets, jewels of all sorts.

This time Meroë did not push away the gewgaws with her foot. She ground under the heel of her boot as many of the trinkets as she could rapidly stamp upon, and drove back the infamous debauchee, who was advancing toward her with confidently open arms.

Confused for a moment, the Roman put his hand to his heart, as if to protest his adoration. The woman of Gaul answered the mute language with a burst of laughter so scornful that Caesar, intoxicated with lust, wine and anger, seemed to say:

"I have offered riches, I have offered prayers. All in vain; I shall use force."

Albinik's wife was alone and disarmed. She knew that her cries would bring her no help. Her resolve was soon taken. The chaste, brave woman leaped upon the bed, seized the long cord which served to lower the draperies, and knotted it around her neck. Then she quickly climbed upon the head of the bed-stead, ready to launch herself into the air, and strangle herself by the weight of her own body at Caesar's first step towards her. So desperate was the resolution depicted on Meroë's face that the Roman general for an instant remained motionless. Then, urged either by compunction for his violence; or by the certainty that, if he attempted force, he would have but a corpse in his possession; or, as the unscrupulous libertine later pretended, by a generous impulse that had guided him throughout;—whatever his motive, Caesar stepped back several paces, and raised his hand to heaven as if to call the gods to witness that he would respect his prisoner. Still suspicious, the Gallic woman kept herself in readiness to give up her life. The Roman turned towards the secret opening of the tent, disappeared into the shadows for a moment, and gave an order in a loud voice. Immediately he returned, but kept himself at a wide distance from the bed, his arms crossed on his toga. Not knowing whether the danger she ran was not still to be increased, Meroë remained standing on the bed-stead with the cord about her neck. After a few minutes she saw the interpreter enter, accompanied by Albinik; with one bound she sprang to her husband.

"Your wife is a woman of manful virtue," said the interpreter to Albinik. "Behold those treasures at her feet; she has spurned them. Great Caesar's love she has scorned. He pretended to resort to violence. Your companion, disarmed by a trick, was prepared to take her own life. Thus gloriously has she come out of the test."

"The test?" answered Albinik, with an air of sinister doubt. "The test? Who, here, has the right to test the virtue of my wife?"

"The thought of vengeance, which have brought you into the Roman camp, are the thoughts of a haughty soul, roused by injustice and barbarity. The mutilation which you have suffered seemed above all to prove the truth of your words," resumed the interpreter. "But fugitives always arouse a secret suspicion. The wife often is a test of the husband. Yours is a valiant wife. To inspire such fidelity, you must be a man of courage and of truth. That is what we wished to make sure of."

"I don't know," began the mariner doubtfully, "the licentiousness of your general is well known——"

"The gods have sent us in you a precious aid; you can become fatal to the Gauls. Do you believe Caesar is foolish enough to wish to make an enemy of you by outraging your wife, at the very moment, perhaps, when he is about to charge you with a mission of trust? No, I repeat: he wished to try you both, and so far the trials are favorable to you."

Caesar interrupted the interpreter, saying a few words to him. Then bowing respectfully to Meroë, and saluting Albinik with a friendly gesture, he slowly and majestically left the tent.

"You and your wife," said the interpreter, "are henceforth assured of the general's protection. He gives you his word for it. You shall no more be separated or disturbed. The wife of the courageous mariner has scorned these rich ornaments," added the interpreter, collecting the jewels and replacing them in the casket. "Caesar wishes to keep as a reminder of Gallic virtue the poniard which she wore, and which he took from her by ruse. Reassure yourself, she shall not remain unarmed."

Almost at the same instant, two young freedmen entered the tent. They carried on a large silver tray a little oriental dagger of rich workmanship, and a Spanish saber, short and slightly curved, hung from a baldric of red leather, magnificently embroidered in gold. The interpreter presented the dagger to Meroë and the saber to Albinik, saying to them as he did so:

"Sleep in peace, and guard these gifts of the grandeur of Caesar."

"And do you assure him," returned Albinik, "that your words and his generosity dissipate my suspicions. Henceforth he will have no more devoted allies than my wife and myself, until our vengeance be satisfied."

The interpreter left, taking with him the two freedmen. Albinik then told his wife that when he had been taken into the Roman general's tent, he had waited for Caesar, in company with the interpreter, up to the moment when they both returned to the tent, under the conduct of a slave. Meroë told in turn what had occurred to her. The couple concluded that Caesar, half drunk, had at first yielded to a foul thought, but that Meroë's desperate resolve, backed up by the reflection that he was running the risk of estranging a fugitive from whom he might reap good service, had curbed the Roman's passion. With his habitual trickery and address, he had given, under the pretext of a "trial," an almost generous appearance to the odious attempt.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRIAL

The next morning Caesar, accompanied by his generals, set out for the bank which commanded the mouth of the Loire, where a tent had been set up for him. From this place the sea and its dangerous shores, strewn with sand-bars and rocks level with the water, could be seen in the distance. The wind was blowing a gale. Moored to the bank was a fisherman's boat, at once solid and light, rigged Gallic fashion, with one square sail with flaps cut in its lower edge. To this craft Albinik and Meroë were forthwith conducted.

"It is stormy, the sea is menacing," said the interpreter to them. "Will you dare to venture it alone with your wife? There are some fishermen here who have been taken prisoners—do you want their help?"

"My wife and I have before now braved tempests alone in our boat, when we made for my ship, anchored far out from shore on account of bad weather."

"But now you are maimed," answered the interpreter. "How will you be able to manage!"

"One hand is enough for the tiller. My companion will raise the sail—the woman's business, since it is a sort of cloth," gaily added the mariner to give the Romans faith in him.

"Go ahead then," said the interpreter. "May the gods direct you."

The bark, pushed into the waves by several soldiers, rocked a minute under the flappings of the sail, which had not yet caught the wind. But soon, held by Meroë, while her husband managed the tiller, the sail filled, and bellied out to the blast. The boat leaned gently, and seemed to fly over the crests of the waves like a sea-bird. Meroë, dressed in her mariner's costume, stayed at the prow, her black hair streaming in the wind. Occasionally the white foam of the ocean, bursting from the prow of the boat, flung its stinging froth in the young woman's noble face. Albinik knew these coasts as the ferryman of the solitary moors of Brittany knows their least detours. The bark seemed to play with the high waves. From time to time the couple saw in the distance the tent of Caesar, recognizable by its purple flaps, and saw gleaming in the sun the gold and silver which decked the armor of his generals.

"Oh, Caesar!—scourge of Gaul—the most cruel, the most debauched of men!" exclaimed Meroë. "You do not know that this frail bark, which at this

moment you are following in the distance with your eyes, bears two of your most desperate enemies. You do not know that they have beforehand given over their lives to Hesus in the hope of making to Teutates, god of journeys by land and by sea, an offering worthy of him—an offering of several thousand Romans, sinking in the depths of the sea. It is with hands raised to you, thankful and happy, O, Hesus, that we shall disappear in the bottom of the deep, with the enemies of our sacred Gaul!"

The bark of Albinik and Meroë, almost grazing the rocks and glancing over the surges along the dangerous ashore, sometimes drew away from, sometimes approached the bank. The mariner's companion, seeing him sad and thoughtful, said:

"Still brooding, Albinik! Everything favors our projects. The Roman general is no longer suspicious; your skill this morning will decide him to accept your services; and to-morrow, mayhap, you will pilot the galleys of our enemies——"

"Yes, I will pilot them to the bottom, where they will be swallowed up, and we with them."

"What a magnificent offering to the gods! Ten thousand Romans, perhaps!"

"Meroë," answered Albinik with a sigh, "then, after ending our lives here, even as the soldiers, brave warriors after all, we shall be resurrected elsewhere with them. They will say to me: 'It was not through bravery, with the lance and the sword, that you overcame us. No, you slew us without a combat, by treason. You watched at the rudder, we slept in peace and confidence. You steered us on the rocks—in an instant the sea swallowed us. You are like a cowardly poisoner, who would send us to our death by putting poison in our food. Is that an act of valor? No, no longer do you know the open boldness of your fathers, those proud Gauls who fought us half naked, who railed at us in our iron armor, asking why we fought if we were afraid of wounds or death.'"

"Ah!" exclaimed Meroë, sadly and bitterly, "Why did the druidesses teach me that a woman ought to escape the last outrage by death! Why did your mother Margarid tell us so often, as a noble example to follow, the deed of your grandmother Syomara, who cut off the head of the Roman who ravished her, and carrying the head under the skirt of her robe to her husband, said to him these proud and chaste words: 'No two men living can boast of having possessed me!' Why did I not yield to Caesar?"

"Meroë!"

"Perhaps you would then have been avenged! faint heart! weak spirit! Must then the outrage be completed, the ignominy swallowed, before your anger is kindled?"

"Meroë, Meroë!"

"It is not enough for you, then, that the Roman has proposed to your wife to sell herself, to deliver herself to him for gifts? It is to your wife—do you hear!—to your wife, that Caesar made that offer of shame!"

"You speak true," answered the mariner, feeling anger fire his heart at the memory of these outrages, "I was a spiritless fellow——"

But his companion went on with redoubled bitterness:

"No, I see it now. This is not enough. I should have died. Then perhaps you would have sworn vengeance over my body. Oh, they arouse pity in you, these Romans, of whom we wish to make an offering to the gods! They are not accomplices to the crime which Caesar attempted, say you? Answer! Would they have come to my aid, these soldiers, these brave warriors, if, instead of relying on my own courage and drawing my strength from my love for you, I had cried, implored, supplicated, 'Romans, in the name of your mothers, defend me from the lust of your general'? Answer! Would they have come at my call? Would they have forgotten that I was a Gaul—that Caesar was Caesar? Would the 'generous hearts' of these brave fellows have revolted? After rape, do not they themselves drown the infants in the blood of their mothers?——"

Albinik did not allow his companion to finish. He blushed at his lack of heart. He blushed at having an instant forgotten the horrible deeds perpetrated by the Romans in their impious war. He blushed at having forgotten that the sacrifice of the enemies of Gaul was above all else pleasing to Hesus. In his anger, he rang out, for answer, the war song of the Breton seamen, as if the wind could carry his words of defiance and death to Caesar where he stood on the bank:

Tor-e-benn! Tor-e-benn!

As I was lying in my vessel I heard

The sea-eagle calling, in the dead of night.

He called his eaglets and all the birds of the shore.

He said to them as he called:

'Arise ye, all—come—come.

It is no longer the putrid flesh of the dog or sheep we must have—

It is Roman flesh.'

"Tor-e-benn! Tor-e-benn!

Old sea-raven, tell me, what have you there?

The head of the Roman leader I clutch;

I want his eyes—his two red eyes!

And you, sea-wolf, what have you there?

'The heart of the Roman leader I hold—

I am devouring it.'

And you, sea-serpent, what are you doing there,

Coiled 'round that neck, your flat head so close

To that mouth, already cold and blue?

'To hear the soul of the Roman leader

Take its departure am I here!'

Tor-e-benn! Tor-e-benn!"

Stirred up, like her husband, by the song of war, Meroë repeated with him, seeming to defy Caesar, whose tent they discerned in the distance:

"Tor-e-benn! Tor-e-benn! Tor-e-benn!"

Still the bark of Albinik and Meroë played with the rocks and surges of those dangerous roads, sometimes drawing off shore, sometimes in.

"You are the best and most courageous pilot I have ever met with, I, who have in my life traveled so much on the sea," said Caesar to Albinik when he had regained dry land, and, with Meroë, had left the boat. "To-morrow, if the weather is fair, you will guide an expedition, the destination of which you will know at the moment of setting sail."

CHAPTER V

INTO THE SHALLOWS

The following day, at sunrise, the wind being favorable and the sea smooth, the Roman galleys were to sail. Caesar wished to be present at the embarkment. He had Albinik brought to him. Beside the general was a soldier of great height and savage mien. A flexible armor, made of interwoven iron links, covered him from head to foot. He stood motionless, a statue of iron, one might say. In his hand he held a short, heavy, two-edged axe. Pointing out this man, the interpreter said to Albinik:

"You see that soldier. During the sail he will stick to you like your shadow. If through your fault or by treason, a single one of the galleys grates her keel, he has orders to kill you and your companion on the instant. If, on the contrary, you carry the fleet to harbor safely, the general will overwhelm you with gifts. You will then give the most happy mortals cause for envy."

"Caesar shall be satisfied," answered Albinik.

Followed by the soldier with the axe, he and Meroë went up into the galley Pretoria which was to lead the fleet. She was distinguished from the other ships by three gilded torches placed on the poop.

Each galley carried seventy rowers, ten sailors to handle the sails, fifty light-armed archers and slingers, and one hundred and fifty soldiers cased in iron from top to toe.

When the galleys had pulled out from shore, the praetor, military commandant of the fleet, told Albinik, through an interpreter, to steer for the lower part of the bay of Morbihan, in the neighborhood of the town of Vannes, where the Gallic army was assembled. Albinik with his hand at the tiller was to convey to the interpreter his orders to the master of the rowers. The latter beat time for the rowers, according to the pilot's orders, with an iron hammer with which he rapped on a gong of brass. As the speed of the Pretoria, whose lead the rest of the Roman fleet followed, needed quickening or slackening, he indicated it by quickening or slowing the strokes of the hammer.

The galleys, driven by a fair wind, sailed northward. As the interpreter had done before, so now the oldest sailors admired the bold manoeuvre and quick sight of the Gallic pilot. After a sail of some length, the fleet found itself near the southern point of the bay of Morbihan, and knew that now it was to enter into those channels, the most dangerous on all the coast of

Brittany because of the great number of small islands, rocks and sand banks, and above all, because of the undercurrents, which ran with irresistible violence.

A little island situated in the mouth of the bay, which was still more constricted by two points of land, divided the inlet into two narrow lanes. Nothing in the surface of the sea, neither breakers nor foam nor change in the color of the waters gave token of the slightest difference between the two passes. Nevertheless, in one lay not a rock, while the other was strewn with danger. In the latter channel, after a hundred strokes of the oars, the ships in single file, led by the Pretoria, would have been dragged by a submarine current toward a reef of rocks which was visible in the distance, and over which the sea, calm everywhere else, broke tumultuously. The commanders of the several galleys could perceive their peril only one by one; each would be made aware of it only by the rapid drifting of the galley ahead of him. Then it would be too late. The violence of the current would drag and hurl vessel upon vessel. Whirling in the abyss, fouling the bottom, and crashing into one another, their timbers would part and they would sink into the watery depths with all on board, or else dash themselves on the rocky reef. A hundred more strokes of the oar, and the fleet would be annihilated in this channel of ruin.

The sea was so calm and beautiful that not one of the Romans had any suspicion of danger. The rowers accompanied with songs the measured fall of their oars. Of the soldiers some were cleaning their arms; some were stretched out in the bow asleep; others were playing at huckle-bones. A short distance from Albinik, who was still at the helm, a white haired veteran with battle-scarred face was seated on one of the benches in the poop, between his two sons, fine young archers of eighteen or twenty years. They were conversing with their father, each with one arm familiarly laid on a shoulder of the old warrior, whom they thus held tight in their embrace; all three seemed to be talking in pleasant confidence, and to love one another tenderly. In spite of the hatred he entertained for the Romans, Albinik could not help sighing with pity when he thought of the fate of these three soldiers, who did not imagine they were so near the jaws of death.

Just then one of those light boats used by the Irish seamen shot out from the bay of Morbihan by the safe channel. Albinik had, on his journeys, made frequent voyages to the coast of Ireland, an island that is inhabited by people of Gallic stock. They speak a language almost the same as that of the Gauls, yet difficult to understand for one who had not been as often on their coast as Albinik had.

The Irishman, either because he feared that he would be pursued and caught by one of the men-of-war which he saw approaching, and wished to avoid that danger by coming up to the fleet of his own accord, or else because he had useful information to give, steered straight toward the Pretoria. Albinik shuddered. Perhaps the interpreter would question the Irishman, and he might point out the danger which the fleet ran in taking one of the passages. Albinik therefore gave orders to bend to the oars, in order to get inside the channel of destruction before the Irishman could join the galleys. But after a few words exchanged between the military commandant and the interpreter, the latter ordered them to wait for the boat which was drawing near, so as to ask for tidings of the Gallic fleet. Albinik obeyed; he did not dare to oppose the commandant for fear of arousing suspicion. Before long the little Irish shallop was within hailing distance of the Pretoria. The interpreter, stepping forward, hailed the Irishman in Gallic:

"Where do you come from, and where are you bound to? Have you met any vessels at sea?"

At these questions the Irishman motioned that he did not understand. Then he began in his own half-Gallic tongue:

"I am coming to the fleet to give you news."

"What language does the man speak?" said the interpreter to Albinik. "I do not catch his meaning, although his language does not seem entirely strange."

"He speaks half Irish, half Gallic," answered Albinik. "I have often trafficked on the coasts of his country. I understand the tongue. The fellow says he has steered up to us to give us important news."

"Ask him what his news is."

"What information have you to give?" called Albinik to the Irishman.

"The Gallic vessels," answered he, "coming from various ports of Brittany, joined forces yesterday evening in the bay I have just left. They are in great number, well armed, well manned, and cleared for action. They have chosen their anchorage at the foot of the bay, near the harbor of Vannes. You will not be able to see them till after doubling the promontory of A'elkern."

"The Irishman carries us favorable tidings," cried Albinik to the interpreter. "The Gallic fleet is scattered on all sides; part of the ships are in the river

Auray; the others, still more distant, towards the bay of Audiern, and Ouessant. At the foot of this bay, for the defense of Vannes, are but five or six poor merchantmen, barely armed in their haste."

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed the interpreter, "the gods, as always, are favorable to Caesar!"

The praetor and the officers, to whom the interpreter repeated the false news given by the pilot, seemed also overjoyed at the dispersion of the fleet of Gaul. Vannes was thus delivered into the hands of the Romans almost without defenses on the sea side.

Then Albinik said to the interpreter, indicating the soldier with the axe:

"Caesar has suspected me. The gods have been kind to allow me to prove the injustice of his suspicions. Do you see that islet, about a hundred oar-lengths ahead?"

"I see it."

"In order to enter the bay, we must take one of two passages, one to the right of the islet, the other to the left. The fate of the Roman fleet is in my hands. I could pilot you by one of these passages, which to the eye is exactly like the other, and an undercurrent would tow your galleys onto a sunken reef. Not one would escape."

"What say you?" exclaimed the interpreter. As for Meroë, she gazed at her husband in pained surprise, for, by his words, he seemed finally to have renounced his vengeance.

"I speak the truth," answered Albinik. "I'll prove it to you. That Irishman knows as well as I the dangers attendant upon entering the bay he has just left. I shall ask him to go before us, as pilot, and in advance I shall trace for you the route he will take. First he will take the channel to the right of the islet; then he will advance till he almost touches that point of land which you see furthest off; then he will make a wide turn to the right until he is just off those black rocks which tower over yonder; that pass behind us, those rocks shunned, we shall be safely in the bay. If the Irishman executes this manoeuvre from point to point, will you still suspect me?"

"No, by Jupiter!" answered the interpreter. "It would then be absurd to entertain the least doubt of your good faith."

"Judge me then," said Albinik, and he addressed a few words to the Irishman, who consented to pilot the ships. His manoeuvring tallied exactly with what Albinik had foretold. The latter, having given to the Romans this testimony of his truthfulness, deployed the fleet in three files, and for some time he guided them among the little islands with which the bay was dotted. Then he ordered the rowers to rest on their oars. From this place they could not see the Gallic fleet, anchored at the furthest part of the bay at almost two leagues' distance, and screened from all eyes by a lofty promontory.

"Now," said Albinik to the interpreter, "We now run only one danger; it is a great one. Before us are shifting sandbanks, occasionally displaced by the high tides; the galleys might ground there. It is necessary, then, that I reconnoitre the passage plummet in hand, before bringing the fleet into it. Let them rest as they are on their oars. Order the smallest boat your galley has to be launched, with two rowers. My wife will take the tiller. If you have any suspicion, you and the soldier with the axe may accompany us in the boat. Then, the passage reconnoitred, I shall return on board to pilot the fleet even to the mouth of the harbor of Vannes."

"I no longer suspect," answered the interpreter. "But according to Caesar's order, neither the soldier nor I may leave you a single instant."

"Let it be as you wish," assented Albinik.

A small boat was lowered from the galley. Two rowers descended into it, with the soldier and the interpreter; Albinik and Meroë embarked in their turn; and the boat drew away from the Roman fleet, which was disposed in a crescent, waiting on its oars, for the pilot's return. Meroë, seated at the helm, steered the boat according to the directions of her husband. He, kneeling and hanging over the prow, sounded the passage by means of a ponderous lead fastened to a long stout cord. Behind the little islet which the boat was then skirting stretched a long sand-bar which the tide, then ebbing, was beginning to uncover. Beyond the sand-bar were several rocks fringing the bank. Albinik was just about to heave the lead anew; while seeming to be examining on the cord the traces of the water's depth, he exchanged a rapid look with his wife, indicating with a glance the soldier and the interpreter. Meroë understood. The interpreter was seated near her on the poop; then came the two rowers on their bench; and at the farther end stood the man with the axe, behind Albinik, who was leaning at the bow, his lead in his hand. Rising suddenly he made of the plummet a terrible weapon. He imparted to it the rapid motion that a slinger imparts to his sling. The heavy lead attached to the cord struck the soldier's helmet so violently that the man sank to the bottom of the boat stunned with the blow.

The interpreter rushed forward to the aid of his companion, but Meroë seized him by the hair and pulled him back; loosing his balance he toppled into the sea. One of the two rowers, who had raised his oar at Albinik, immediately rolled headlong overboard. The movement given to the rudder by Meroë made the boat approach so close to the rocky islet that she and her husband both leaped on it. Rapidly they climbed the steep rocks. There was now but one obstacle to their reaching shore. That was the sand-bar, one part of which, already uncovered by the sea, was in motion, as could be seen from the air bubbles which continually rose to the surface. To take that way to reach the rocks of the shore was to die in the abyss hidden under the treacherous surface. Already the couple heard, from the other side of the island, which hid them from view, the cries and threats of the soldier, who had recovered from his daze, and the voice of the interpreter, whom the rowers had doubtlessly pulled out of the water. Thoroughly familiar with these coasts, Albinik discovered, by the size of the gravel and the clearness of the water that covered it, that the sand-bar some paces off was firm. At that point, he and Meroë crossed, wading up to their waists. They reached the rocks on the shore, clambered up nimbly, and then stopped a moment to see if they were pursued.

The man with the axe, hampered by his heavy armor and being, no more than the interpreter, accustomed to move upon slippery rocks covered with seaweed, such as were those of the islet which they had to cross in order to reach the fugitives, arrived after many efforts opposite the quicksands, which were now left high and dry by the tide. Furious at the sight of Albinik and his companion, from whom he saw himself separated by only a narrow and level sand-bar, the soldier thought the passage easy, and dashed on. At the first step he sank in the quicksand up to his knees. He made a violent effort to clear himself but sank deeper yet, up to his waist. He called his companions to his aid, but hardly had he called when only his head was above the abyss. Then the head also disappeared. The soldier raised his hands to heaven as he sank. A moment later only one of his iron gauntlets was to be seen convulsively quivering above the sand. Presently nothing was to be seen—nothing except some bubbles of air on the surface of the quagmire.

The rowers and the interpreter, seized with fear, remained motionless, not daring to risk certain death in the capture of the fugitives. Feeling safe at last, Albinik addressed these words to the interpreter:

"Say thou to Caesar that I maimed myself to inspire him with confidence in the sincerity of my offers of service. My design was to conduct the Roman fleet to certain perdition, sacrificing my companion and myself. Accident

changed my plan. Just as I was piloting you into the channel of destruction, whence not a galley would have come back, we met the Irishman who informed me that the Gallic ships, since yesterday assembled in great numbers and trimmed for fight, are anchored at the foot of the bay, two leagues off. Learning that, I changed my plan. I no longer wished to cast away the galleys. They will be annihilated just the same, but not by a snare or by treachery; it will come about in valorous combat, ship to ship, Gaul to Roman. Now, for the sake of the fight to-morrow, listen well to this: I have purposely led your galleys into the shallows, where in a few minutes they will be left high and dry on the sands. They will stay there grounded, for the tide is falling. To attempt to disembark is to commit suicide; you are surrounded on all sides by moving quicksands like the one in which your soldier and his axe have just been swallowed up. Remain on board of your ships. To-morrow they will be floated again by the rising tide. And to-morrow, battle—battle to the finish. The Gaul will have once more showed that NEVER DID BRETON COMMIT TREASON, and that if he glories in the death of his enemy, it is because he has killed his enemy fairly."

Then Albinik and Meroë, leaving the interpreter terrified by their words, turned in haste to the town of Vannes to give the alarm, and to warn the crews of the Gallic fleet to prepare for combat on the morrow.

On the way, Albinik's wife said to him:

"The heart of my beloved husband is more noble than mine. I wished to see the Roman fleet destroyed by the sea-rocks. My husband wishes to destroy it by the valor of the Gauls. May I forever be proud that I am wife to such a man!"

CHAPTER VI

THE EVE OF BATTLE

It was the eve of the battle of Vannes; the battle of Vannes which, waged on land and sea, was to decide the fate of Brittany, and, consequently, of all Gaul, whether for liberty or enslavement. On this memorable evening, in the presence of all the members of our family united in the Gallic camp, except my brother Albinik, who had joined the Gallic fleet in the bay of Morbihan, my father Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak, addressed me, his eldest born, Guilhern the laborer, who now writes this account. He said to me:

"To-morrow, my son, is the day of battle. We shall fight hard. I am old—you are young. The angel of death will doubtless carry me hence first; perhaps to-morrow I shall meet in the other life my sainted daughter Hena. Here, now, is what I ask of you, in the face of the misfortunes which menace our country, for to-morrow the fortunes of war may go with the Romans. My desire is that as long as our stock shall last, the love of old Gaul and sacred memories of our fathers shall be ever kept fresh in our family. If our children should remain free men, the love of country, the reverence for the memory of their ancestors, will all the more endear their liberty to them. If they must live and die slaves, these holy memories will remind them, from generation to generation, that there was a time when, faithful to their gods, valiant in war, independent and happy, masters of the soil which they had won from nature by severe toil, careless of death, whose secret they held, the Gallic race lived, feared by the whole world, yet withal hospitable to peoples who extended to them a friendly hand. These memories, kept alive from age to age, will make slavery more horrible to our children, and some day give them the strength to overthrow it. In order that these memories may be thus transmitted from century to century, you must promise by Hesus, my son, to be faithful to our old Gallic custom. You must tenderly guard this collection of relics which I am going to entrust you with; you must add to it; you must make your son Sylvest swear to increase it in his turn, so that the children of your grandchildren may imitate their fore-fathers, and may themselves be imitated by their posterity. Here is the collection. The first roll contains the story of all that has chanced to our family up to the anniversary of my dear Hena's birthday, that day which also saw her die. This other roll I received this evening about sunset from my son Albinik the mariner. It contains the story of his journey across the burnt territory, to the camp of Caesar. This account throws honor on the courage of the Gaul, it throws honor on your brother and his wife, faithful as they were, almost excessively so, to that maxim of our fathers: 'Never did Breton commit treason.' These writings I confide to you. You will return them to me after to-

morrow's conflict if I survive. If not, do you preserve them, or in lack of you, your brothers. Do you inscribe the principal events of your life and your family's; hand the account over to your son, that he may do as you, and thus on, forever—generation after generation. Do you swear to me, by Hesus, to respect my wishes?"

I, Guilhern the laborer, answered: "I swear to my father Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak, that I will faithfully carry out his desires."

The orders then given to me by my father, I have carried out to-day, long after the battle of Vannes, and after innumerable misfortunes. I make the recital of these misfortunes for you, my son Sylvest. It is not with blood that I should write this narrative. No blood would run dry. I write with tears of rage, hatred and anguish,—their source never runs dry!

After my poor and well-beloved brother Albinik piloted the Roman fleet into the bay of Morbihan, the following was the course of events on the day of the battle of Vannes. It all took place under my own eyes—I saw it all. Were I to have lived all the days I am to live in the next world and into all infinity, yet will the remembrance of that frightful day, and of the days; that followed it, be ever vivid before me, as vivid as it is now, as it was, and as it ever will be.

Joel my father, Margarid my mother, Henory my wife, my two children Sylvest and Syomara, as well as my brother Mikael the armorer, his wife Martha, and their children, to mention only our nearest relatives, had, like all the rest of our tribe, gathered in the Gallic camp. Our war chariots, covered with cloth, had served us for tents until the day of the battle at Vannes. During the night, the council, called together by the Chief of the Hundred Valleys, and Tallyessin, the oldest of the druids, had met. Several mountaineers of Ares, mounted on their tireless little horses, were sent out in the evening to scout the area of the conflagration. At dawn they hastened back to report that at six leagues' distance from Vannes they saw the fires of the Roman army, encamped that night in the midst of the ruins of the town of Morh'ek. The Chief of the Hundred Valleys concluded that Caesar, to escape from the circle of devastation and famine that was drawing in closer and closer upon his army, had left the wasted country behind him by forced marches, and intended to offer battle to the Gauls. The council resolved to advance to meet Caesar, and to await him on the heights which overlooked the river Elrik. At break of day, after the druids had invoked the blessings of the gods, our tribe took up its march for its post in the battle.

Joel, mounted on his high-mettled stallion Tom-Bras, commanded the Mahrek-Ha-Droad, of which myself and my brother Mikael were members, I

as a horseman, Mikael as a foot-soldier. According to the custom of the army, it was our duty to fight side by side, I on horse-back, he afoot, and mutually support each other. The war chariots, armed with scythes at the hubs, were placed in the center of the army, with the reserve. In one of them were my mother and wife, the wife of Mikael, and our children. Some young lads, lightly armed, surrounded the chariots and were with difficulty holding back the great war-dogs, which, after the example of Deber-Trud, the man-eater, were howling and tugging at their leashes, already scenting battle and blood. Among the young men of the tribe who were in the array, were two who had taken the bond of friendship, like Julyan and Armel. Moreover, to make it more certain that they would share the same fate, a stout iron chain was riveted to their collars of brass, and fastened them together. The chain as the symbol of their pledge of solidarity held them inseparable, scathless, wounded, or dead.

On the way to our post in the battle, we beheld the Chief of the Hundred Valleys passing at the head of the Trimarkisia. He rode a superb black horse, in scarlet housings; his armor was of steel; his helmet of plated copper, which shone like the sun, was capped by the emblem of Gaul, a gilded cock with half spread wings. At either side of the Chief rode a bard and a druid, clad in long white robes striped with purple. They carried no arms, but when the troops closed in to battle, then, disdainful of danger, they stood in the front ranks of the combatants, encouraging these with their words and their songs of war. Thus chanted the bard at the moment when the Chief of the Hundred Valleys passed by Joel's column:

"Caesar has come against us.

In a loud voice he asks:

'Do you want to be slaves?

Are ye ready?'

"No, we do not want to be slaves.

No, we are not ready.

Gauls!

Children of the same race,

Let us raise our standards on the mountains and pour down upon the plains.

March on!

March on against Caesar,

Joining in the same slaughter him and his army!

To the Romans!

To the Romans!"

As the bard sang this song, every heart beat with the ardor of battle.

As the Chief of the Hundred Valleys passed the troop at the head of which was my father Joel, he reined in his horse and cried:

"Friend Joel, when I was your guest, you asked my name. I answered that I was called Soldier so long as our old Gaul should be under the oppressor's scourge. The hour has come when we must show ourselves faithful to the motto of our fathers: 'In all war, there is but one of two outcomes for the man of courage: to conquer or to die.' O, that my love for our common country be not barren! O, that Hesus keep our arms! Perhaps then the Chief of the Hundred Valleys will have washed off the stain which covers a name he no longer dares to bear. Courage, friend Joel, the sons of your tribe are brave of the brave. What blows will they not deal on this day which makes for the welfare of Gaul!"

"My tribe will strike its best, and with all its might," answered my father. "We have not forgotten that song of the bards who accompanied you, when the first war-cry burst from them in the forest of Karnak: 'Strike the Roman hard—strike for the head—still harder—strike!—The Romans, strike!'"

With one voice the whole tribe of Joel took up the cry:

"Strike!—The Romans, strike!"

CHAPTER VII

THE BATTLE OF VANNES

The Chief of the Hundred Valleys took his departure, in order to address a few words of exhortation to each tribe. Before proceeding to our post of battle, far from the war chariots which held our wives, daughters and children, my father, brother and myself wished to make sure by a last look that nothing was lacking for the defense of that car which held our dear ones. My mother, Margarid, as calm as when she held the distaff in the corner of her own fireplace, was leaning against the oak panel which formed the body of the chariot. She had set Henory and Martha to work, giving more play to the straps which, fastened to pegs driven in the edge of the chariot, secured the handles of the scythes, which were used for defense in the same manner as oars fastened to the gunwhale of a boat.

Several young girls and women of our kindred were occupied with other cares. Some were preparing behind the chariots, with thick skins stretched on cords, a retreat where the children would be under cover from the arrows and stones thrown by the slingers and archers of the enemy. Already the children were laughing and frolicking with joyous cries around the half finished den. As an additional protection, my mother Margarid, watchful in everything, had some sacks filled with grain placed in front of the hut. Other young girls were placing, along the interior walls of the car, knives, swords and axes, to be used in case of need, and weighing no more on their strong white arms than did the distaff. Two of their companions, kneeling near my mother, were opening chests of linen, and preparing oil, balm, salt and witch-hazel, to dress the wounds, following the example of the druidesses, near whom the car was stationed.

At our approach the children ran gaily from the depths of their retreat into the fore-part of the wagon, whence they stretched out their little hands to us. Mikael, being on foot, took in his arms his son and his daughter, while Henory, to spare me the trouble of dismounting from my horse, reached out, one at a time, my little Syomara and Sylvest into my arms. I seated them both before me on the saddle, and at the moment of starting for the fight, I had the pleasure of kissing their yellow heads. My father, Joel, then said to my mother:

"Margarid, if fortune turns against us, and the car is attacked by the Romans, do not free the dogs until the moment of attack. The brave animals will be only the more furious for their long wait, and will not then stray away from where you are."

"Your advice will be followed, Joel," answered my mother. "Look and see if these straps give the scythes enough play."

"Yes, they are free enough," answered my father, looking at some of the straps. Then, examining the array of scythes which defended the other side of the chariot, he broke out:

"Wife, wife! What were those girls thinking of! Look here! Oh, the rattle heads! On this side the scythe-blades are turned towards the shaft of the chariot, and over there they are pointed backwards!"

"It was I who had the weapons placed so," said she.

"And why are not all the blades turned the same way, Margarid?"

"Because a car is almost always attacked before and behind at once. In that case the two rows of scythes, placed in opposite directions, are the best defense. My mother taught me that, and I am showing the method to these dear girls."

"Your mother saw further than I, Margarid. A good harvest time is thus made certain. Let the Romans come and assault the car! Heads and limbs will fall, mown down like ripe ears at the reaping! Let Hesus make it a good one, this human harvest!"

Then, listening intently, my father said to Mikael and myself:

"Sons, I hear the cymbals of the bards and the clarions of the Trimarkisia. Let us rejoin our friends. Well, Margarid, well, my daughters,—till we meet again, here—or above!"

"Here or above, our fathers and husbands will find us pure and unstained," answered Henory, more proud, more beautiful than ever.

"Victorious or dead you will see us again," added Madalen, a young maiden of sixteen. "But enslaved or dishonored, no. By the glorious blood of our Hena—— no—— never!"

"No!" said Martha, the wife of Mikael, pressing to her bosom her two children, whom their father had just replaced in the chariot.

"These dear girls are of our race—rest easy, Joel," continued my mother, even now calm and grave. "They will do their duty."

"Even as we will do ours. And thus will Gaul be delivered," answered my father. "You also will do your duty, old man-eater, old Deber-Trud!" added the brenn, stroking the enormous head of the war-dog, who in spite of his chain, was standing up with his paws on the horse's shoulder. "Soon will come the hour of the quarry, fine bloody quarry, Deber-Trud! Her! Her! To the Romans!"

The mastiff and the rest of the war pack responded to these words with furious bayings. The brenn, my brother and myself cast one last look upon our families. My father turned his spirited stallion's head towards the ranks of the army, and speedily came up with them. I followed my father, while Mikael, robust and agile, holding tightly with his left hand to the long mane of my galloping horse, ran along beside me. Sometimes falling in with the sway of the horse, Mikael leaped with it, and was thus raised off the ground for several steps. We two, like many others of our tribe, had in time of peace familiarized ourselves with the manly military exercise of the Mahrek-Ha-Droad. Thus the brenn, my brother and myself rejoined our tribe and took our stand in the ranks of battle.

The Gallic army occupied the summit of a hill about one league's distance from Vannes. To the east their line of battle was covered by the forest of Merek, which was filled with their best archers. To the west they were defended by the lofty cliffs which rose from the bay of Morbihan. At the lower end of the bay was the fleet, already weighing anchor to proceed to the attack of the Roman galleys, which, motionless as a flock of sea-swans, lay at rest on the waves. No longer piloted by Albinik, the fleet of Caesar, although floated by the rising tide, still held its position of the previous evening, for fear of running upon the invisible rocks.

Before the army flowed the River Roswallan. The Romans would have to ford it in order to attack us. Skillfully had the Chief of the Hundred Valleys chosen his position. He had before him a river; behind him the town of Vannes; on the west the sea; on the east the forest of Merek: its border chopped down, offered insurmountable obstacles to the Roman cavalry; and with an eye to the Roman infantry, the best of Gaul's archers were scattered among the mighty trees.

The ground before us, on the opposite side of the river, rose in a gentle slope. Its crest hid from us the road by which the Roman army would arrive. Suddenly, on the summit of the slope there dashed into view several Ares mountaineers, who had been sent out as scouts to signal to us the approach of the enemy. They dashed down the hill at full speed, forded the river, joined us, and breathlessly announced the advance of the Roman army.

"Friends!" the Chief of the Hundred Valleys called out to each tribe as he passed on horse-back before the army in battle array; "rest on your arms until the Romans, drawn up on the other bank of the river, begin to cross it. At that moment let the slingers and archers shower their stones and arrows upon the enemy. Then, when the Romans are forming their cohorts on this side, after crossing, let our whole line fall back, leaving the reserve with the war-chariots. Then, the foot soldiers in the center, the cavalry on the wings, let us pour down in a torrent from the top of this rapid decline. The enemy, driven back again to the river, will not withstand the impetuosity of our first charge!"

Immediately the hill-top opposite the army was covered by the numberless troops of Caesar. In the vanguard marched the "Harassers," marked by the lion's skin which covered their heads and shoulders. The old legions, named from their experience and daring, as the "Thunderer," the "Iron Legion," and many others whom the Chief of the Hundred Valleys pointed out to his men, formed the reserve. We saw glittering in the sun the arms and the distinctive emblems of the legions, an eagle, a wolf, a dragon, a minotaur, and other figures of gilded bronze, decorated with leaves. The wind bore to us the piercing notes of the long Roman clarions, and our hearts leaped at the martial music. A horde of Numidian horsemen, wrapped in long white robes, preceded the army. The column halted a moment, and several of the Numidians went down at full tilt to the brink of the river. In order to ascertain whether it was fordable, they entered it on horse-back, and approached the nearer side, notwithstanding the hail of stones and arrows which the Gallic slingers and archers poured down upon them. More than one white robe was seen to float upon the river current, and more than one riderless horse returned to the bank and the Romans. Nevertheless, several Numidians, in spite of the stones and darts which were hurled upon them, crossed the entire breadth of the river several times. Such a display of bravery caused the Gallic archers and slingers to hold their fire by common accord, and do honor to such supreme valor. Courage in our enemies pleases us; it proves them more worthy of our steel. The Numidians, certain of having found a ford, ran to convey the news to the Roman army. Then the legions formed in several deep columns. The passage of the river commenced. According to the orders of the Chief of the Hundred Valleys, the archers and slingers resumed their shooting, while Cretan archers and slingers from the Balearic Islands, spreading over the opposite bank, answered our people.

"My sons," said Joel to us, looking towards the bay of Morbihan, "your brother Albinik advances to the fight on the water as we begin the fight on land. See—our fleet has met the Roman galleys."

Mikael and I looked in the direction the brenn was pointing, and saw our ships with their heavy leathern sails, bent on iron chains, grappling with the galleys. The brenn spoke true. The battle was joined on land and sea simultaneously. On that double combat depended the freedom or slavery of Gaul. But as I turned my attention from the two fleets back to our own army, I was struck to the heart with a sinister omen. The Gallic troops, ordinarily such chatterers, so gay in the hour of battle that from their ranks rise continually playful provocations to the enemy, or jests upon the dangers of war, were now sober and silent, resolved to win or die.

The signal for battle was given. The cymbals of the bards spoke back to the Roman clarions. The Chief of the Hundred Valleys, dismounting from his horse, put himself some paces ahead of the line of battle. Several druids and bards took up their station on either side of him. He brandished his sword and started on a run down the steep hill-side. The druids and bards kept even pace with him, striking as they went upon their golden harps. At that signal, our whole army precipitated itself upon the enemy, who, now across the river, were re-forming their cohorts.

The Mahrek-Ha-Droad, cavalry and footmen, of the tribes near that of Karnak, which my father commanded, darted down the slope with the rest of the army. Mikael, holding his axe in his right hand, was, during this impetuous descent, almost continually suspended from the mane of my horse, which he had seized with his left. At the foot of the slope, that troop of the Romans called the Iron Legion, because of their heavy armor, formed in a wedge. Immovable as a wall of steel, bristling with spears, it made ready to receive our charge on the points of its lances. I carried, in common with all the Gallic horsemen, a saber at my left side, an axe at my right, and in my hand a heavy staff capped with iron. For helmet I had a bonnet of fur, for breastplate a jacket of boar-hide, and strips of leather were wrapped around my legs where the breeches did not cover them. Mikael was armed with a tipped staff and a saber, and carried a light shield on his left arm.

"Leap on the crupper!" I cried to my brother at the moment when the horses, now no longer under control, arrived at full gallop on the lances of the Iron Legion. Immediately we arrived within range we hurled our iron capped staffs full at the heads of the Romans with all our might. My staff struck hard and square on the helmet of a legionary, who, falling backward, dragged down with him the soldier behind. Through this gap my horse plunged into the thickest of the legion. Others followed me. In the melee the fight grew sharp. Mikael, always at my side, leaped sometimes, in order to deliver a blow from a greater height, to my horse's crupper, other times he made of the animal a rampart. He fought valorously. Once I was half

unhorsed. Mikael protected me with his weapon till I regained my seat. The other foot-soldiers of the Mahrek-Ha-Droad fought in the same manner, each one beside his own horseman.

"Brother, you are wounded," I said to Mikael. "See, your blouse is red."

"You too, brother," he responded. "Look at your bloody breeches."

And, in truth, in the heat of combat, we do not feel these wounds.

My father, chief of the Mahrek-Ha-Droad, was not accompanied by a foot-soldier. Twice we joined him in the midst of the fight. His arm, strong for all his age, struck incessantly. His heavy axe resounded on the iron armors like a hammer on the anvil. His stallion Tom-Bras bit furiously all the Romans within reach. One of them he almost lifted off the ground in his rearing. He held the man by the nape of the neck, and the blood was spurting. When the tide of the combat again carried Mikael and myself near our father, he was wounded. I overcame one of the brenn's assailants by trampling him under my horse's feet; then we were again separated from my father. Mikael and myself knew nothing of the other movements of the battle. Engaged in the conflict before us, we had no other thought than to tumble the Iron Legion into the river. To that end we struggled hard. Already our horses were stumbling over corpses as if in a quagmire. We heard, not far off, the piercing voices of the bards; their voices were heard over the tumult.

"Victory to Gaul!—Liberty! Liberty! Another blow with the axe! Another effort! Strike, strike, ye Gauls.—And the Roman is vanquished.—And Gaul delivered. Liberty! Liberty! Strike the Roman hard! Strike harder!—Strike, ye Gauls!"

The song of the bards, the hope of victory with which they inspired their countrymen, caused us to redouble our efforts. The remains of the Iron Legion, almost annihilated, recrossed the river in disorder. At that moment we saw running in our direction a Roman cohort, panic-stricken and in full rout. Our men had driven them back from the top of the hill, at the foot of which was the tribe of Karnak. The cohort, thus taken between two enemies, was destroyed. Slaughter was beginning to tire Mikael's arm and my own when I noticed a Roman warrior of medium height, whose magnificent armor announced his lofty rank. He was on foot, and had lost his helmet in the fight. His large bald forehead, his pale face and his terrible look gave him a terrifying appearance. Armed with a sword, he was furiously beating his own soldiers, all unable to arrest their flight. I called my brother's attention to him.

"Guilhern," said he, "if they have fought everywhere as we have here, we are victorious. That soldier, by his gold and steel armor, must be a Roman general. Let us take him prisoner; he will be a good hostage. Help me and we'll have him."

Mikael immediately hurled himself on the warrior of the golden armor, while the latter was still trying to halt the fugitives. With a few bounds of my horse, I rejoined my brother. After a brief struggle, Mikael threw the Roman. Wishing not to kill, but to take him prisoner, Mikael held him under his knees, with his axe uplifted, to signify to the Roman that he would have to give himself up. The Roman understood; no longer struggled to free himself; and raised to heaven the one hand he had free that the gods might witness he yielded himself a prisoner.

"Off with him," said Mikael to me.

Mikael, who like myself, was stalwart and stout, while our prisoner was slim and not above middle height, took the Roman in his arms and lifted him from the ground. I grasped him by the collar of buffalo-hide which he had on over his breastplate, drew him towards me, pulled him up, and threw him across my horse, in front of the saddle. Then, taking the reins in my teeth so as to have one hand to hold the prisoner, and the other to threaten him with my axe, I pressed the flanks of my horse, and set out in this fashion towards the reserve of our army, both for the purpose of putting the prisoner in safe keeping, and to have my wounds dressed. I had hardly started, when one of the horsemen of the Mahrek-Ha-Droad, happening that way in his pursuit of the fleeing Romans, cried out, as he recognized the man I was carrying:

"IT IS CAESAR—STRIKE—KILL HIM!"

Thus I became aware that I had on my horse the direst of Gaul's foes. So far from entertaining any thought of killing him, and seized with stupor, my axe slipped from my hand, and I leaned back in order the better to contemplate that terrible Caesar whom I had in my power.

Unhappy me! Alas for Gaul! Caesar profited by my stupid astonishment, jumped down from my horse, called to his aid a troop of Numidian horsemen who were riding in search of him, and when I regained consciousness from my stupid amazement, the blunder was irreparable. Caesar had leaped upon one of the Numidian riders' horse, while the others surrounded me. Furious at having allowed Caesar to escape, I now defended myself with frenzy. I received several fresh wounds and saw my brother Mikael die at my side. That misfortune was only the signal for others.

Victory, so long hovering over our standards, went to the Romans. Caesar rallied his wavering legions; a considerable re-enforcement of fresh troops came to his aid; and our whole army was driven back in disorder upon the reserve, where were also our war-chariots, our wounded, our women and our children. Carried by the press of retreating combatants, I arrived in the proximity of the chariots, happy in the midst of defeat at having at least come near my mother and family, and at being able to defend them—if indeed the strength were spared me, for my wounds were weakening me more and more. Alas! The gods had condemned me to a horrible trial. I can now repeat the words of Albinik and his wife, both killed in the attack on the Roman galleys, and battling on the water as we did on the land for the freedom of our beloved country: "None ever saw, nor will ever see the frightful scene that I witnessed."

Thrown back towards the chariots, still fighting, attacked at once by the Numidian cavalry, by the legionaries and by the Cretan archers, we yielded ground step by step. Already we could hear the bellowing of the oxen, the shrill sound of the numerous brass bells which trimmed their yokes, and the barking of the war dogs, still chained about the cars. Husbanding my ebbing strength, I no longer sought to fight, I strove only to reach the place where my family was in danger. Suddenly my horse, which had already sustained several wounds, received on the flank his death blow. The animal stumbled and rolled upon me. My leg and thigh, pierced with two lance thrusts, were caught as in a vise between the ground and the dead weight of my fallen steed. In vain I struggled to disengage myself. One of my comrades who, at the time of my fall, was following me, ran against the fallen horse. Steed and rider tumbled over the obstacle, and were instantly despatched by the blows of the legionaries. Our resistance became desperate. Corpse upon corpse piled up, both on top of and around me. More and more enfeebled by the loss of blood, overcome by the pains in my limbs, bruised under that heap of dead and dying, unable to make a motion, all sense left me; my eyes closed. Recalled to myself a moment later by the violent throbbing of my wounds, I opened my eyes again. The sight which met them at first made me believe I was seized with one of those frightful nightmares from which escape is vain. It was the horrible reality.

Twenty paces from me I saw the car in which my mother, Henory my wife, Martha the wife of Mikael, their children, and several young women and girls of the family had taken refuge. Several men of our kindred and tribe, who had run like myself to the cars, were defending them against the Romans. Among the defenders I saw the two saldunes, fastened to each other by the iron chain, the symbol of their pledge of brotherhood. Both were young, beautiful and valiant. Their clothes were in tatters, their heads and

chest naked and bloody. But their eyes flashed fire, and a scornful smile played on their lips, as, armed only with their staffs, they fearlessly fought the Roman legionaries sheathed in iron, and the Cretans clad in jackets and thigh-pieces of leather. The large dogs of war, shortly unchained, leaped at the throats of their assailants, often bearing them over backwards with their furious dashes. Their terrible jaws not being able to pierce either helmet or breastplate, they devoured the faces of their victims, killing without once letting go their grips. The Cretan archers, almost without defensive armor, were snatched by the legs, arms, shoulders, anywhere. Each bite of these savage dogs carried away a chunk of bleeding flesh.

Several steps from where I lay, I saw an archer of gigantic stature, calm in the midst of the tumult, choose from his quiver his sharpest arrow, lay it on the string of his bow, pull it with a sinewy arm, and take long aim at one of the two chained *saldunes*, who, dragged down by the fall of his comrade, now dead by his side, could only fight on one knee. But so much the more valiantly did he ply his iron-capped staff. He swung it before him with such tireless dexterity that for some time none dared to brave its blows, for each stroke carried death. The Cretan archer, waiting for the proper moment, was again aiming at the *saldune*, when old Deber-Trud bounded forth. Held tight where I lay under the heap of dead which was crushing me, unable to move without causing intense pain in my wounded thigh, I summoned all my remaining strength to cry out:

"Hou! Hou! Deber-Trud—at the Roman."

The dog, increasingly excited by my voice, which he recognized, dashed with one bound upon the Cretan, at the moment when the arrow hissed from the string, and buried itself, still quivering, in the stalwart breast of the *saldune*. With this new wound his eyes closed, his heavy arms let fall the staff, his other knee gave way, his body sank to the ground; but by a last effort, the *saldune* rose on both knees, snatched the arrow from the wound, and threw it back at the Roman legionaries, calling in a voice still strong, and with a smile of supreme contempt:

"For you, cowards, who shelter your fear and your bodies under plates of iron. The breastplate of the Gaul is his naked bosom."

And the *saldune* fell dead upon the body of his brother-in-arms.

Both of them were avenged by Deber-Trud. The terrible dog had hurled down and was holding under his enormous paws the Cretan archer, who was uttering frightful cries. With one bite of his fangs, as dangerous as

those of a lion, the dog tore his victim's throat so deeply that two jets of warm blood poured out on the archer's chest. Though still alive, the man could utter no sound. Deber-Trud, seeing that his prey still lived, fell upon him, roaring furiously, swallowing or throwing aside shreds of severed flesh. I heard the sides of the Cretan crack and grind under the teeth of Deber-Trud, who dug and dug, burying his bloody muzzle up to the eyes in the man's chest. Then a legionary ran up and transfixed Deber-Trud with one thrust of his lance. The dog gave not a groan. He died like a good war-dog, his monstrous head plunged in the Roman's entrails.

After the death of the two saldunes, the defenders of the chariots fell one by one. My mother Margarid, Martha, Henory, and the young girls of the family, with burning eyes and cheeks, their hair flying, their clothes disordered from the struggle, their arms and bosoms half uncovered, were running fearlessly from one end of the chariot to the other, encouraging the combatants by voice and gesture, and casting at the Romans with no feeble or untrained hands short pikes, knives, and spiked clubs. At last the critical moment came. All the men were killed, the chariot, surrounded by bodies piled half way up its sides, was defended only by the women. There they were, with my mother Margarid, five young women and six maidens, almost all of superb beauty, heightened by the ardor of battle.

The Romans, sure of this prize of their obscene revels, and wishing to take it alive, consulted a moment on a plan of attack. I understood not their words, but from their coarse laugh, and the licentious looks which they threw upon the Gallic women, there could be no doubt as to the fate which awaited them. I lay there, broken, pinned fast; breathless, full of despair, horror, and impotent rage I lay there, seeing a few steps from me the chariot in which were my mother, my wife, my children.—Oh, wrathful heavens!—like one unable to awake from a horrible dream, I lay there condemned to see all, hear all, and yet to remain motionless.

An officer of savage and insolent mien advanced alone towards the chariot and addressed to the women some words in the Latin tongue which the soldiers received with roars of revolting laughter. My mother, calm, pale, and terrible, exhorted the young women around her to maintain their self-control. Then the Roman, adding a word or two, closed with an obscene gesture. Margarid happened at that moment to have in her hand a heavy axe. So straight at the officer's head she hurled it, that he reeled and fell. His fall was the signal for the attack. The legionaries pressed forward to the capture of the chariot. Then the women rushed to the scythes, which on each side defended the cart, and plied them with such vigor and harmony, that the Romans, seeing a great number of their men killed or disabled,

conceived a wholesome fear for such terrible arms, so intrepidly plied. They suspended the attack, and, applying their long lances after the fashion of crow-bars, succeeded, without approaching too near, in shattering the handles of the scythes. This safeguard demolished, a new attack commenced. The issue was not doubtful. While the scythes were falling under the blows of the soldiers, my mother hurriedly said a few words to Martha and Henory. The two, with a look of pride and determination on their faces, ran towards the cover which sheltered the children. Margarid also spoke to the young childless women, and they, as well as the young girls, took and piously kissed her hands.

At that moment, the last scythes fell. Margarid seized a sword in one hand and a white cloth in the other. She stepped to the front of the chariot, waved the white cloth, and threw away the sword, as if to announce to the enemy that all the women wished to give themselves up. The soldiers, at first astonished at the proposed surrender, answered with laughs of ironical consent. Margarid seemed to be awaiting a signal. Twice she impatiently cast her eyes toward the shelter, where the two women had gone. Evidently, as the signal she seemed to wait for was not given, she was trying to distract the enemy's attention, and again waved her cloth, pointing alternately to the town of Vannes and to the sea.

The soldiers, unable to take in the meaning of these gestures, looked at one another questioningly. Then Margarid, after another hasty glance at the redoubt, exchanged a few words with the girls round about her, seized a dagger, and, in quick succession struck three of the maidens, who had nobly bared their chaste bosoms to the knife. Meanwhile the other young women dispatched one another with steady hands. They had just fallen when Martha reappeared from the enclosure where the children had been hidden during the battle. Proud and serene, she held her two little daughters in her arms. A spare wagon-pole stood in front of her, the upper extremity of which was at a considerable elevation from the ground. She leaped on the edge of the car; a cord was around her neck. She passed the end of the cord through the ring at the extremity of the pole. Margarid steadied it in both hands. Martha leaped into the air with outspread arms, and hung there, strangled. Her two little children, instead of falling to the ground, remained suspended on either side of her breast, for she had passed the noose around their necks also.

All this occurred so rapidly, that the Romans, at first struck dumb with astonishment and fear, had no time to prevent the heroic deaths. They had barely recovered from their amazement when Margarid, seeing all her family

either dying or dead at her feet, raised to heaven her blood-stained knife, and exclaimed in a calm and steady voice:

"Our daughters shall not be outraged; our children shall not be enslaved; all of us, of the family of Joel the brenn of the tribe of Karnak, dead, like our husbands and brothers, for the liberty of Gaul, are on our way to rejoin them above. Perhaps, O Hesus, all this spilled blood will appease you;" and with a hand which did not waver, she plunged the dagger into her own heart.

All these terrible events which happened around the Chariot of Death I was compelled to behold, as I lay nearby, pinned to the ground. My wife Henory not having emerged from the enclosure, I concluded that she had put an end to herself there, first putting to death my little ones Sylvest and Syomara. My brain began to reel, my eyes closed; I felt that I was dying, and thanked Hesus for not leaving me behind alone when all my dear ones were to enter together upon the other life in the unknown world.

But, no, it was here below, on earth, that I was to return to life—to face new torments after those I had just undergone.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER THE BATTLE

After I had beheld my mother and all the other women of the tribe die to escape the shame and outrages of slavery, the blood which I had lost caused me to swoon away. A long time passed in which I was bereft of reason. When my senses returned, I found myself lying on straw, along with a great number of other men, in a vast shed. At my first motion I found myself chained by the leg to a stake driven into the ground. I was half clad; they had left me my shirt and breeches, in a secret pocket of which I had hidden the writings of my father and of my brother Albinik, together with the little gold sickle, the gift of my sister Hena. A dressing had been put on my wounds, which no longer occasioned me much pain. I experienced only a great weakness and dizziness which made my last memories a confused mass. I looked about me. I was one of perhaps fifty wounded prisoners, all chained to their litters. At the further end of the shed were several armed men, who did not bear the appearance of regular Roman troops. They were seated round a table, drinking and singing. Some among them, who carried short-handled scourges twisted of several thongs and terminating in bits of lead, detached themselves from time to time from the group, and walked here and there with the uncertain gait of drunken men, casting jeering looks on the prisoners. Next to me lay an aged man with white hair and beard, very pale and thin. A bloody band half hid his forehead. He was sitting up, his elbows on his knees, and his face between his hands. Seeing him wounded and a prisoner, I concluded he was a Gaul. I did not err.

"Good father," I said to him, laying my hand lightly upon the old man's arm, "where are we?"

Slowly raising his sad and mournful visage, the old prisoner answered compassionately:

"Those are the first words you have spoken for two days."

"For two days?" I repeated, greatly astonished. I was unable to believe so much time had passed since the battle of Vannes. I sought to recall my wandering memory. "Is it possible? What, I have been here two days?"

"Yes, and you have been unconscious, in a delirium. The physician who dressed your wounds made you take several potions."

"Now I recall it confusedly. And also—a ride in a chariot?"

"Yes, to come here from the battle-ground. I was with you in the chariot, whither they carried you wounded and dying."

"And here we are—?"

"At Vannes."

"Our army?"

"Destroyed."

"Our fleet?"

"Annihilated."

"O, my brother, and your courageous wife Meroë, both dead also!" flashed through my mind. "And Vannes, where we are," I added aloud to my companion, "Vannes is in the power of the Romans?"

"Even as the whole of Brittany, they say."

"And the Chief of the Hundred Valleys?"

"He has fled into the mountains of Ares with a handful of cavalry. The Romans are in pursuit of him." Then raising his eyes to heaven, he continued, "May Hesus and Teutates protect that last defender of the Gauls!"

I had put these questions while my thoughts were still disordered. But when I recalled the struggle at the chariot of war, the death of my mother, my father, my brother Mikael, my brother's wife and his two children, and finally, the almost certain death of my own wife with her son and daughter—for up to the moment when I lost consciousness I had not seen Henory leave the shelter behind the chariot—when I recalled all that, I heaved, in spite of myself, a great sigh of despair at finding myself alone in the world. I buried my face in the straw to shut out the light of day.

One of the tipsy keepers became irritated at hearing my moans, and showered several cruel blows of the scourge, accompanied with oaths, upon my shoulders. Forgetting the pain in the shame that I felt at the thought of me, the son of Joel, being struck with the lash, I leaped to my feet notwithstanding my weakness, intending to throw myself upon the keeper. But my chain, sharply tightened by the jerk, checked me, and made me trip and fall upon my knees. The keeper, enabled by the length of his scourge to

keep out of the prisoners' reach, thereupon redoubled his blows, lashing me across the face, chest, and back. Other keepers ran up, fell upon me, and slipped manacles of iron upon my wrists.

Oh, my son, my son! You, for whose eyes I write all this down, obedient to the wishes of my father, never do yourself forget, and let also your sons preserve the memory of this outrage, the first that our stock ever underwent. Live, that you may avenge the outrage in due time. And if you cannot, let your sons wreak vengeance upon the Romans therefore.

With my feet chained and my hands in irons, unable to move, I did not wish to afford my tormentors the spectacle of impotent rage. I closed my eyes and lay still, betraying neither anger nor grief, while the keepers, provoked by my calmness, beat me furiously. Presently, however, a strange voice having interposed and spoken a few angry words in the Latin tongue, the blows ceased. I opened my eyes and three new personages stood before me. One of them was speaking rapidly to the keepers, gesticulating angrily, and pointing at me from time to time. This man was short and stout; he had a very red face, white hair and pointed grey beard. He wore a short robe of brown wool, buck-skin stocks, and low leather boots; he was not dressed in the Roman fashion. Of the two men who accompanied him, one, dressed in a long black robe, had a grave and sinister mien. The other held a casket under his arm. While I was gazing at these persons, my aged neighbor called my attention with a rapid glance to the fat little man with the red face and the white hair, who was conversing with the keepers, and said to me with a look of anger and disgust:

"The horse-dealer; the horse-dealer!"

"What are you talking about?" I answered him, unable to understand what he meant. "A horse-dealer?"

"That is what the Romans call the slave merchants."

"How! They traffic in wounded men?" I asked the old man in surprise. "Are there men who buy the dying?"

"Do you not know," he answered with a somber smile, "that after the battle of Vannes there were more dead than living, and not an unwounded Gaul? Upon these wounded men, in default of more able-bodied prey, the slave-dealers who follow the Roman army fell like so many ravens upon corpses."

There was no more room for doubt. I realized that I was a slave. I had been bought. I would be sold again. The "horse-dealer," having finished speaking

to the keepers, approached the old man, and said to him in Gallic, but with an accent that proved his foreign origin:

"My old Pierce-Skin—how has your neighbor come on? Has he at last recovered from his stupor? Is he at last able to speak?"

"Ask him," snapped the old man, turning over on the straw. "He'll answer you himself."

The "horse-dealer" thereupon walked over to my side. He seemed no longer angry. His countenance, naturally jovial, was beaming. Putting his two hands on his knees, he stooped down to me; grinned at me; and spoke to me hurriedly, often putting questions which he answered himself, not seeming to care whether I heard him or not.

"You have, then, recovered your spirits, my fine Bull? Yes? Ah, so much the better! By Jupiter, it's a good sign. Now your appetite will return, and it is returning, isn't it? Still better! Before eight days you will be in fine feather. Those brutes of keepers, always in their cups, scourged you, did they? Yes? I'm not a bit surprised—they never do anything else. The wine of Gaul makes them stupid. To strike you! To strike you! And that when you can hardly stand up; besides the fact that in men of the Gallic race, choler is likely to produce bad results. But you are no longer angry, are you? No! So much the better! It is I who should be provoked at those tipsters. Suppose the fury raging in your blood had stifled you! But, bah! those brutes care little for making me lose twenty-five or thirty gold sous, which you will presently be worth to me, my fine Bull. But for greater safety I'll have you taken to a shelter where you will be alone and better off than here. It was occupied by a wounded fellow who died last night—a superb fellow. That was a loss! Ah, commerce is not all gain. Come, follow me."

He set to work to unfasten my chain by a secret spring. I asked him why he always called me "Bull." I would have preferred by far the keeper's lash to the jovial loquacity of this trafficker in human flesh. Certain now that I was not dreaming, still I could hardly accept the reality of what I saw. Unable to resist, I followed the man. At least I would no longer be under the eyes of the keepers who beat me, and the sight of whom made my blood boil. I made an effort to raise myself, but my weakness was still excessive. The "horse-dealer" unhooked the chain, and held one end. As my hands were still shackled, the man with the long black robe and the one who carried the casket took me under the arms, and led me to the extremity of the shed. They made me mount several stairs and enter a small room that was lighted through an iron-barred opening. I looked through the opening and

recognized the great square of the town of Vannes, and, in the distance, the house where I had often gone to see my brother Albinik and his wife. In the room were a stool, a table, and a long box of fresh straw, in place of the one in which the other slave had died. I was made to sit on the stool. The black-robed man, a Roman physician, examined my two wounds, constantly conversing in his own language with the "horse-dealer." He took various salves from the casket which his companion was carrying, dressed my hurts, and went to render his services to the other slaves, not, however, before helping the "horse-dealer" to fasten my chain to the wooden box which served as my bed. The physician then took his departure, and left me alone with my master.

CHAPTER IX

MASTER AND SLAVE

"By Jupiter," began my master immediately after the departure of the physician. "By Jupiter," he repeated in his satisfied and hilarious manner, so revolting to me: "Your injuries are healing so fast that you can see them heal, a proof of the purity of your blood; and with pure blood there are no such things as wounds, says the son of Aesculapius. But here you are back in your senses, my brave Bull. You are going to answer my questions, aren't you? Yes? Then, listen to me."

Drawing from his pocket a stylus and a tablet, covered with wax, the "horse-dealer" continued:

"I do not ask your name. You have no longer any name but that which I have given you, until your new owner shall name you differently. As for me, I have named you Bull—a proud name, isn't it? You are worthy to bear it. It becomes you. So much the better."

"Why have you named me Bull?"

"Why did I name that old fellow, your late neighbor, Pierce-Skin? Because his bones stick out through his skin. But you, apart from your two wounds, what a strong constitution you have! What broad shoulders! What a chest! What a back! What powerful limbs!" While pouring out these praises, the "horse-dealer" rubbed his hands and gazed at me with satisfaction and covetousness, already figuring in advance the price I would fetch. "And your height! It exceeds by a palm that of the next tallest captive in my lot. So, seeing you so robust, I have named you Bull. Under that name you are entered in my inventory, at your number; and under that name will you be cried at the auction!"

I knew that the Romans sold their slaves to the slave merchants. I knew that slavery was horrible, and I approved of a mother's killing her children sooner than have them live a captive's life. I knew that a slave became a beast of burden. While the "horse-dealer" was speaking, I drew my hand across my forehead to make sure that it was really I, Guilhern, the son of Joel the brenn of the tribe of Karnak, a son of that free and haughty race, whom they were treating like a beef for the mart. The shame of a life of slavery seemed to me insupportable, and I took heart at the resolve to flee at the first opportunity, or to kill myself and thus rejoin my relatives. That thought calmed me. I had neither the hope nor the desire to learn whether my wife

and children had escaped death; but remembering that I had seen neither Henory, Sylvest nor Syomara come from the enclosure behind the war-chariot, I said to the "horse-dealer":

"Where did you purchase me?"

"In the place where we make all our purchases, my fine Bull. On the field of battle, after the combat."

"So it was on the battlefield of Vannes you bought me?"

"The same."

"You doubtlessly picked me up at the place where I fell?"

"Yes, there was a great pile of you Gauls there, in which there were only you and three others worth taking, among them that great booby, your neighbor—you know, Pierce-Skin. The Cretan archers gave him to me for good measure after the sale. That is the way with you Gauls. You fight so desperately that after a battle live captives are exceedingly rare, and consequently priceless. I simply can't put out much money, so I must come down to the wounded ones. My partner, the son of Aesculapius, goes with me to the battlefield to examine the wounded men and guard the ones I choose. Thus, in spite of your two wounds and your unconsciousness, the young doctor said to me, after examining you and sounding your hurts, 'Buy, my pal, buy. Nothing but the flesh is cut, and that is in good condition; that will lower the value of your merchandise but little, and will prevent any breach of contract.' Then you see, I, a real 'horse-dealer' who knows the trade, I said to the archers, poking you with my foot, 'As to that great corpse there, who has no more than his breath, I don't want him in my lot at all.'"

"When I used to buy cattle in the market," I said to the "horse-dealer," mockingly, "when I used to buy cattle in the market, I was less skilful than you."

"Oh, that is because I am an old hand, and know my trade. So the Cretans answered me, seeing that I didn't think much of you, 'But this thrust of the lance and this saber-cut are mere scratches.' 'Scratches, my masters!' said I in my turn, 'but it's no use poking or turning him,' and I kicked you and turned you over, 'See, he gives no sign of life. He is dying, my noble sons of Mars. He is already cold.' In short, my fine Bull, I had you for two sous of gold."

"I see I cost but little; but to whom will you sell me?"

"To the traffickers from Italy and the southern part of Gaul. They buy their slaves second-hand. Several of them have already arrived here, and have commenced making their purchases."

"And they will take me far away?"

"Yes, unless you are bought by one of those old Roman officers, who, too much disabled to follow a life of war, wish to found military colonies here, in accordance with the orders of Caesar."

"And thus rob us of our lands!"

"Of course. I hope to get out of you twenty-five or thirty gold sous, at least, and more if you are of an occupation easy to dispose of, such as a blacksmith, carpenter, mason, goldsmith, or some other good trade. It is in order to find that out that I am questioning you, so as to write it in my bill of sale. So, let us see:" (and the "horse-dealer" took up his tablet and began writing with his stylus) "Your name? Bull. Race, Breton Gaul. I can see that at a glance. I am a connoisseur. I would not take a Breton for a Bourignon, nor a Poitevin for an Auvergnat. I sold lots of Auvergnats last year, after the battle of Puy. Your age?"

"Twenty-nine."

"Age, twenty-nine," he wrote on his tablet. "Your occupation?"

"Laborer."

"Laborer," repeated the "horse-dealer" in a surprised and injured tone, scratching his ear with his stylus. "You are nothing but a laborer? You have no other profession?"

"I am a soldier also."

"Oh, a soldier. He who wears the iron collar has no more to do with lance or sword. So then," added the "horse-dealer," reading from his tablet with a sigh:

"No. 7. Bull; race, Breton Gaul; of great strength and very great height; aged twenty-nine years; excellent laborer." Then he said:

"Your character?"

"My character?"

"Yes, what is it? rebellious or docile? open or sly? violent or peaceable? gay or moody? The buyers always inquire as to the character of the slave they are buying, and although one may not be compelled to answer them, it is a bad business to deceive them. Let us see, friend Bull, what is your character? In your own interest, be truthful. The master who buys you will sooner or later know the truth, and will make you pay more dearly for your lie than I would."

"Then write upon your tablet: 'The draft-bull loves servitude, cherishes slavery, and licks the hand that strikes him.'"

"You are joking. The Gallic race love service? As well say that the eagle or the falcon loves his cage."

"Then write that when his strength has come back, the Bull at the first chance will break his yoke, gore his master, and fly to the woods to live in freedom."

"There is more truth in that. Those brutes of keepers who beat you told me that at the first touch of the lash you gave a terrible jump the length of your chain. But, you see, friend Bull, if I offer you to the purchasers with the dangerous account which you give, I shall find few customers. An honest merchant should not boast his merchandise too much, no more should he underestimate it. So I shall announce your character as follows." And he wrote:

"Of a violent character, sulky, because of his not being accustomed to slavery, for he is still green; but he can be broken in by using at different times gentleness, severity and chastisement."

"Go over it again."

"Over what?"

"The description I am to be sold under."

"You are right, my son. We must make sure that the description sounds well to the ear. Imagine that I am the auctioneer, thus:

"No. 7. Bull; race, Breton Gaul; of great strength and very great height; aged twenty-nine years; excellent laborer; of a violent character, sulky, because of

his not being accustomed to slavery, for he is still green; but he can be broken in by application of gentleness, severity, and chastisement."

"That is what is left of a free and proud man whose only crime is having defended his country against Caesar!" I cried bitterly. "And yet I did not kill that same Caesar, who has reduced our people to slavery and is now about to divide among his soldiers the lands of our fathers, I did not kill him when I was making off with him on my horse!"

"You, my fine Bull, you took great Caesar prisoner?" asked the "horse-dealer" mockingly. "It's too bad I can't proclaim that at the auction. It would make a rare slave of you."

I reproached myself for having uttered before that trafficker in human flesh words which resembled a regret or a complaint. Coming back to my first thought, which made me endure patiently the loquacity of the man, I said to him:

"When you picked me up where I fell on the battlefield, did you see hard by a war chariot harnessed to four black bulls, with a woman and two children hanging from the pole?"

"Did I see them? Did I see them!" exclaimed the "horse-dealer" with a mournful sigh. "Ah, what excellent goods lost! We counted in that chariot eleven young women and girls, all beautiful—oh, beautiful!—worth at least forty or fifty gold sous apiece—but dead. They had all killed themselves. They were no good to anyone."

"And in the chariot were there no women nor children still alive?"

"Women? No,—alas, no. Not one, to the great loss of the Roman soldiers and myself. But of children, there were, I believe, two or three who had survived the death which those fierce Gallic women, furious as lionesses, wished to inflict upon them."

"And where are they?" I exclaimed, thinking of my son and daughter, who were, perhaps, among them, "where are those children? Answer! Answer!"

"I told you, my Bull, that I buy only wounded persons; one of my fellows bought the lot of children, and also some other little ones, for they picked up some alive from the other chariots. But what does it matter to you whether or not there are children to sell?"

"Because I had a son and a daughter in that chariot," I answered, my heart bursting.

"And how old were they?"

"The girl was eight, the boy nine."

"And your wife?"

"If none of those eleven women found in the chariot were living, my wife is dead."

"Isn't that too bad—too bad! Your wife had already borne you two children; you four would have made a fine deal. Ah, what a lost treasure!"

I repressed a gesture of impotent anger at the scoundrel, and answered:

"Yes, they would have billed us as the Bull and the Heifer!"

"Surely! And since Caesar is going to distribute much of your depopulated country among his veterans, those who have no reserve prisoners will be under the necessity of buying slaves to cultivate and re-people their parcels of land. You are of that strong rustic race, and consequently I have hopes of getting a good price for you from some new colonist."

"Listen to me. I would rather know that my son and daughter were dead, like their mother, than have them saved to be slaves. Nevertheless, since there were found near the chariot some children who had survived—a thing that astonishes me, since the women of Gaul always strike with a firm and sure hand when it is a case of snatching their race from shame—it is possible that my children may be among those found. How can I find out?"

"What good will finding out do you?"

"I will at least have with me my two children."

The "horse-dealer" began to laugh, shrugged his shoulders, and answered:

"Then you didn't hear me? By Jupiter, I advise you not to be deaf—you would be returned to me. I told you that I neither bought nor sold children."

"What does that matter to me?"

"Among a hundred purchasers of slaves for farm-hands, there would not be ten so foolish as to buy a man and his two children, without their mother. So that to offer you for sale with two brats, if they are still living, would make me lose half your value by burdening your purchaser with two useless mouths. Do you catch on; thick-head? No, for you look at me with a ferocious and stupefied air. I repeat that if I had been obliged to buy the two children in one lot with you, or even if they had been given to me to boot, in the market, like old Pierce-Skin, my first care would have been to have put you up for sale without them. Do you understand at last, double and triple block that you are?"

At last I did understand; heretofore I had not dreamed of such refinement of torture in slavery. To think that my two children, if alive, might be sold, I know not where, or to whom, and taken far from me! I had not thought it possible. My heart swelled with grief. So great was my suffering that I almost supplicated the "horse-dealer." I said to him:

"You are deceiving me. What can my children do? Who would wish to buy such poor little things, so young? useless mouths—as you said yourself?"

"Oh, those who carry on the trade in children have a separate and assured patronage, especially if the children are favored with pretty features. Are your young ones good-looking?"

"Yes," I answered in spite of myself. Before me was the vision of the charming fair faces of my little Sylvest and Syomara, who looked as much alike as twins and whom I had embraced a moment before the battle of Vannes. "Oh yes, they were good-looking. They were like their mother, who was so beautiful—!"

"If they had good looks, be easy, my fine Bull. They will be easy to dispose of. The dealers in children have for their especial patrons the decrepit and surfeited Roman Senators, who love fresh fruits. By the way, they have announced the near arrival of the patrician Trymalcion, a very rich and very noble man, an old and very capricious expert. He is traveling through the Roman colonies of southern Gaul, and is expected here, they say, on his galley which is as splendid as a palace. No doubt he would like to take back to Italy some graceful specimens of Gallic brats. If your children are pretty, their fate is assured, for the patrician Trymalcion is one of my partner's patrician customers."

At first I listened to the "horse-dealer," without catching his meaning. But I was presently seized with a vertigo of horror at the idea that my children,

who might unfortunately have escaped the death which their far-sighted mother had intended for them, might be carried to Italy to fulfill such a monstrous destiny. I felt neither anger nor fury, but a grief so great, and a fear so terrible, that I kneeled on the straw, and in spite of my manacles, stretched my pleading hands toward the "horse-dealer." Not finding words to utter my feelings, I wept, kneeling.

The "horse-dealer" looked at me in great surprise, and said:

"Well, well! What is it, my fine Bull? What ails you?"

"My children!" was all I could say, for sobs choked me. "My children! if they are living!"

"Your children?"

"What you said—the fate that awaits them—if they are sold to those men—"

"How? Their fate causes you alarm?"

"Hesus! Hesus!" I exclaimed, calling on the god in my lamentation. "It is horrible!"

"Are you going crazy?" demanded the "horse-dealer." "And what is there so horrible in the fate which awaits your children? Ah, what barbarians you are in Gaul, indeed. But, know: there is no life easier nor more flowery than that of these little flute-players and dancers with which these rich old fellows amuse themselves. If you could see them, the little rogues, their foreheads crowned with roses, their flowery robes spangled with gold, their rich earrings adorning their heads. And the little girls, if you could see them with their tunics and—"

I could contain myself no longer. A bloody mist passed before my eyes. Furiously and desperately I leapt on the vile fellow. But my chain again tightening sharply, I stumbled and fell back on the straw. I looked around me—not a stick nor a stone. Then, crazed with rage, I doubled upon my chain, and gnawed at it like a wild animal.

"What a brute of a Gaul!" exclaimed the "horse-dealer," shrugging his shoulders, and keeping well out of reach. "There he is, roaring and jumping and grinding at his chain like a staked wolf, and all because he has been told that his children, if they are pretty, are to live in the midst of wealth, ease and pleasure! What would it have been, then, fool that you are, if they were ugly or deformed? Do you know to whom they would have been sold?"

They would have been sold to those rich lords, who are so curious to read the future in the palpitating entrails of children freshly slaughtered for divination."

"Oh, Hesus!" I cried, filled with hope at the thought, "let it be so with mine, despite their beauty! Oh, death for them! Only let them enter the other world in their innocence, and live near their chaste mother." I could no longer hold back my tears.

"Friend Bull," began the "horse-dealer" in a dissatisfied tone, "I was not a bit mistaken in putting you down in my tablet as violent and hot-headed. But I fear lest you have a fault worse than these—I mean a tendency towards tears. I have seen sullen slaves melt away like the snows of winter under a spring sun, dry up like parchment, and cause great loss to their owners by their pitiful appearance. So, look out for yourself. There remain but fifteen days before the auction at which you are to be sold. It is a short while to restore you to your natural fleshiness, to give you a fresh and rested complexion, a sleek and supple skin, in short, all those signs of vigor and health which allure the experts, jealous of possessing a sound and robust slave. To obtain this result, I wish to spare nothing, neither good food, nor care, nor any of those little artifices known to us to make our merchandise show off to advantage. On your part you must second my efforts. But if, on the contrary, you do not get over your fits of anger, if you begin to weep, if you begin to make yourself miserable, to waste away, so to speak, vainly dreaming of your children, instead of affording me honor and profit by your good figure, as a good slave should who is jealous of his master's interests,—beware, friend Bull, beware! I am not a novice in my business. I have carried it on for many years and in many lands. I have subdued more intractable fellows than you. I have made Sardinians docile, and Sarmatians as gentle as lambs, so you can judge of my skill. Therefore, believe me, do not expect yourself to cause me harm by pining away. I am very mild, very gentle. I am not at all fond of chastisements; often they leave marks which lower a slave's value. Nevertheless, if you oblige me to, you will make the acquaintance of the jail for recalcitrants. Consider that, friend Bull. It will soon be meal-time; the physician says that you can now be put upon a substantial diet. You will be brought boiled chicken, oatmeal wet with gravy of roast sheep, good bread, and some good wine and water. I shall know whether you have eaten with a good appetite and in a manner to recuperate your strength, instead of losing it in weeping. So then, eat; it is the only way of gaining my favor. Eat plenty, eat often—I'll see that you have it. You will never eat too much to please me, for you are far from being well-fed, and that's what you must be, well-fed, before fifteen days, the time of the

auction. I leave you to these reflections; pray the gods that they improve you. If not—oh, if not, I weep for you, friend Bull."

So saying the "horse-dealer" shut the heavy door of the room behind him, leaving me chained within.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST CALL TO ARMS

But for my uncertainty concerning the fate of my children, immediately upon the "horse-dealer's" departure I would have killed myself by butting my head against the wall of my prison, or by refusing all nourishment. Many Gauls had thus escaped the doom of slavery. But I felt that I should not die before doing what I could to snatch them from the destiny which menaced them.

I examined my room to see whether, my strength once restored, there was any chance for escape. Three sides of the room were solid wall, the other was a thick partition re-enforced with beams, between two of which opened the door which was always carefully bolted without. A bar of iron crossed the window, leaving an opening too narrow to give me passage. I examined my chain, and the rings, one of which was riveted to my leg, the other to one of the cross-bars of the bed. It was impossible for me to unchain myself, even at my greatest strength. I then thought of a plan, a trick, to put myself in the good graces of the "horse-dealer," so as to obtain from him information of my little Sylvest and Syomara. With that end in view, it would not do to repine, to appear sad or afraid of the lot reserved for the children. I feared I might not be able to carry out the role, for I came of a race unaccustomed to deceit and lying. The Gauls either triumphed or died.

On the evening of that same day when, regaining consciousness, I had become aware of my slavery, I witnessed a spectacle of terrible grandeur. It raised my courage. I could no longer despair for the safety and liberty of Gaul. The night was about to fall, when I heard the tramping of several troops of cavalry arriving at a walk in the great public square of Vannes, which I could see from the narrow window of my prison. I looked out, and beheld the following scene.

Two cohorts of Roman infantry, and one of cavalry, both in battle array, surrounded a vacant space, in the middle of which rose a large scaffold of timber. On the platform was a heavy block, such as is used for chopping meat on. Beside the block stood a Moor of gigantic stature and bronzed of color. His arms and legs were bare, his hair was bound with a scarlet band; he wore a coat and a pair of short trousers of tanned skin, splashed here and there with dark red; in his hand was an axe.

In the distance sounded the long clarions of the Romans, playing a funeral march. The sound drew nearer. One of the cohorts that were drawn up on

the square opened its ranks, forming a double row. Through this lane the clarioneers entered. They preceded a troop of steel-clad legionaries. After the troop came the prisoners taken in the Gallic army, tied two and two. Then came the women and children, also in bonds. More than two stone's throws separated me from these captives. At such a distance I could not distinguish their features, try as I might. Nevertheless, my little son and daughter might be among them. The prisoners, of all ages and sexes, closed in by the two rows of soldiers, were stationed at the foot of the platform. Still more troops marched into the square; after them, five and twenty captives were led in, in single file, but not chained. I recognized them by their free and haughty pace. They were the chiefs and elders of the town and tribe of Vannes, all white-haired fathers. Among them, marching last, I distinguished two druids and a bard of the college of the forest of Karnak, marked, the first by their long white robes, the second by his tunic striped with purple. Then appeared more Roman infantry; finally, between two escorts of white-robed Numidian cavalry, Caesar, on horse-back, in the midst of his officers. I recognized the scourge of Gaul by his armor, which was the same he wore when, aided by my brother Mikael the armorer, I was carrying him off in full panoply on my horse. Oh, how at the sight of the man I cursed anew my stupid astonishment, that so unfortunately proved the safety of my country's butcher.

Caesar drew rein a short distance from the platform, and made a sign with his hand. Immediately the twenty-five prisoners, the bard and druids passing last, mounted with calm tread the steps of the scaffold. One by one they placed their white heads on the block, and each one of the venerable heads, stricken off by the axe of the Moor, rolled at the feet of the bound captives.

The bard and the two druids were the only ones left. The three rushed together in a final embrace, they raised their faces and their hands towards heaven, and intoned in a loud voice the song of Hena, the virgin of the isle of Sen, uttered at the hour of her voluntary sacrifice on the rocks of Karnak, that song which had been the signal for the rising of Brittany against the Romans:

"Hesus, Hesus! By the blood which is about to flow, clemency for Gaul!"

"Gauls, by the blood which is about to flow, victory to our arms!"

And the bard added:

"The Chief of the Hundred Valleys is safe. There is hope for our arms!"

Thereupon all the Gallic captives, men, women, and children present at the execution, all together repeated the last words of the druids, acclaiming them with so powerful a voice that the air shook even in my prison. After that supreme chant, the three placed their sacred heads in turn upon the block, and went the same way as the elders of Vannes. As the bard's and the druids' heads rolled upon the scaffold, all the captives took up the war-cry of the druids—"Strike the Roman! Strike at the head!"—in a voice so fierce and menacing that the legionaries, lowering their lances, hurriedly surrounded the unarmed and chained prisoners in a circle of iron, bristling with lance heads. But that mighty voice of their brothers and sisters had reached the wounded men shut up in the slave-shed, and all, myself included, answered the refrain:

"Strike the Roman! Strike! Strike at the head! Strike the Roman hard!"

Thus ended the war in Brittany. Thus ended the call to arms made by the druids from the heights of the sacred rocks of the forest of Karnak, after the sacrifice of Hena—the call to arms that led to the battle of Vannes. But in my lonely cell I did not yet lose hope. Our native Gaul, although invaded on all sides, would still resist. The Chief of the Hundred Valleys, forced to leave Brittany, had gone to arouse the regions still unvanquished.

CHAPTER XI

THE SLAVES' TOILET

Night fell, and with it my spirits, in my lonely prison.

Hesus! Hesus! I was left to the torture, not alone of my thoughts about my sacred and beloved country, but also of my reflections concerning the misfortunes of my family. Alas, at every wound inflicted upon our country our families bleed.

Forcibly resigned to my lot, I little by little regained my natural strength, encouraged each day by the hope of obtaining from the "horse-dealer" some intelligence of my children. I described them to him as accurately as possible. Every day his report was that among the captives seen there were none answering to my description, but that several merchants made a practice of hiding their choice slaves from all eyes until the day of the public sale. The dealer also informed me that the patrician Trymalcion, whose very name now made me shudder with horror, had arrived at Vannes in his galley.

The evening before the sale, the dealer entered my room. It was, almost dark. He brought in the meal himself, and waited on me. He brought as an extra a flagon of old Gallic wine.

"Friend Bull," said he, with his habitual joviality, "I am satisfied with you. Your skin is almost filled up. You have no more crazy spells of anger, and if you don't appear exceedingly joyous, at least I no longer find you sad and tearful. We will drink this flagon together, to your happy placing with a good master, and to the gain which I shall get by you."

"No," I answered, "I shall not drink."

"And why not?"

"Servitude sours wine, especially the wine of the country where one was born."

"You respond ill to my kindness. You do not wish to drink? Suit yourself. I would have liked to empty one cup to your happy placing, and a second to your reunion with your children. I have my reasons for the latter."

"What say you!" I cried aloud, filled with hope and anguish. "You know something about them?"

"I know nothing about them," he answered curtly, rising to go out. "You refuse my friendly advance. You have supped well—now sleep well."

"But what do you know of my children? Speak, I beg you, speak!"

"Wine alone loosens my tongue, friend Bull, and I am not one of those men who loves to drink by himself. You are too proud to empty a cup with your master. Sleep well till to-morrow, the day of the auction."

He took another step toward the door. I feared that by refusing to yield to the man's fancy I would anger him, and above all lose the chance of obtaining news of my beloved children.

"Do you really wish it?" I said. "Then I shall drink, and especially shall I drink to the hope of soon meeting my son and daughter."

"You pray well," answered the "horse-dealer" approaching his chattel, but keeping the chain's length away; then he poured me a full cup of wine, and another for himself. I later recollected that the man had held the cup a long time to his lips, but without my being able to see whether he drank or not. "Come," he added. "Come, let us drink to the good gain I shall make on you!"

"Yes, let us drink to the hope of meeting my children."

I emptied my cup. The wine seemed excellent.

"I made you a promise," began the dealer, "I shall keep my promise. You told me that the chariot which held your family on the day of the battle of Vannes was harnessed to four black oxen?"

"Yes."

"Four black oxen, with a little white mark in the middle of their foreheads?"

"Yes, all four were brothers, and alike," I answered, unable to repress a sigh at the thought of that fine yoke, raised on our own meadows, which my father and mother had always admired.

"Those oxen carried on their necks leathern collars trimmed with little brass bells like this one?" continued the "horse-dealer," fumbling in his pocket, out of which he drew a little brass bell that he held up before me.

I recognized it. It had been made by my brother Mikael, the armorer, and bore the mark with which he stamped all the articles of his fashioning.

"This bell comes from our oxen," I answered. "Will you give it to me? It has no value."

"What," asked the dealer, laughing, "do you want to hang bells at your neck too, friend Bull? It is your right. Here, take it. I brought it only to know from you if the yoke it came from was of your family's chariot."

"Yes," I replied, putting the bell into my breeches pocket, as, perhaps, the only reminder of the past which might be left to me. "Yes, that yoke was ours. But it seems to me that I saw two of the oxen fall wounded in the fight."

"You are not mistaken. Two of the oxen were killed in the battle. The other two, though slightly wounded, are alive, and were bought by one of my companions, who also bought three children left in the chariot. Two of them, a little boy and a little girl of about eight or nine, still had the cord around their necks. But my companion who found them was luckily able to bring them back to life."

"Where is that merchant?" I asked, in a tremble.

"Here, at Vannes. You will see him to-morrow. We drew lots for our places at the auction, our stands are opposite to each other. If the children he is to sell are yours, you will be near them."

"Shall I be really close?"

"You will be as close to them as twice the length of your room. But why do you press your hands to your forehead?"

"I don't know. It is a long time since I have drunk wine. The glow of what you poured out to me has gone to my head—a few seconds ago—I feel giddy."

"That proves, friend Bull, that my wine is generous," answered the "horse-dealer" with a strange smile, and stepping out, he called to one of the keepers. Presently he returned with a chest under his arm. He carefully shut the door, and hung a piece of curtain before the window, to prevent anyone looking from without into the room, which was now lighted by a lamp. That done, he again passed his eyes very attentively over me, without saying a word, all the while opening his chest, from which he took several flasks, sponges, a little silver vase with a long curved tube, and also several instruments, one of which seemed very keen. I watched my master closely, feeling an inexplicable numbness gradually creeping over me. My heavy eye-

lids fell once or twice in spite of myself. I had been seated on my bed of straw, to which I was still chained; but now I was compelled to lean my head against the wall, so heavy had it grown. Noticing the effect of the wine upon me, the "horse-dealer" said:

"Friend Bull, do not be disturbed at what is happening to you."

"What—" I answered, trying to shake off my stupor, "What is happening to me?"

"You feel a sort of half-drowse creeping over you in spite of your resistance."

"True."

"You hear me, you see me, but as if your ears and eyes were covered with a veil."

"It is true," I murmured, for my voice also was growing weak, and without experiencing any pain, my whole life seemed to be little by little ebbing out. Nevertheless, I made an effort, and said to the man:

"Why am I in this condition!"

"Because I have prepared you for the slaves' toilet."

"A toilet?"

"I possess, friend Bull, certain magic philters to increase the attractiveness of my merchandise. Although you are now quite well filled out, the deprivation of exercise and the open air, the fever which your wounds caused, the sadness which captivity always occasions, and many other things, have dried and dulled your skin, and turned you yellow. But thanks to my philters, to-morrow morning you will have a skin as fresh and sleek, and a color as ruddy as if you were coming in from the fields some lovely spring morning, my fine rustic. That appearance will last barely a day or two, but I expect, by Jupiter, to have you sold by to-morrow evening, free to turn yellow and waste away under your new master. So I am going to commence by stripping you, and anointing you with this preparation of oil." The "horse-dealer" unlocked one of his flasks.

The performance affected me as so deep a disgrace put upon my dignity, that in spite of the numbness which was more and more depressing me, I sprang to my feet, and shaking my hands and arms, then unshackled, cried out:

"To-day I have no manacles on. If you come near I will strangle you!"

"I foresaw all that, friend Bull," chuckled the "horse-dealer," calmly pouring the oil of his flask into a vase and soaking a sponge in it. "I knew you would get hot and resist. I might have had you bound by the keepers, but in your violence you would have bruised your limbs, a detestable sign for the sale. These bruises always denote a stubborn slave. And all the time, what cries you would have let out! What a rebellion, when your head had to be shaved, in token of your slavery!"

At this last insulting threat, I called up all my remaining strength. I arose, and threateningly cried out at the dealer:

"By Ritha-Gaur, the saint of the Gauls, who made himself a shirt of the beards of the kings he had shaved, if you dare to touch a single hair of my head, I'll kill you!"

"Oh, oh! Reassure yourself, friend Bull," answered the "horse-dealer," pointing to his little sharp instrument. "Reassure yourself. I shall not cut a single one of your hairs—but all."

I could retain my standing position no longer. Swaying on my legs like a drunken man, I fell back on the straw, and heard the "horse-dealer" burst out laughing, and, while still pointing at his steel instrument, say:

"Thanks to this, your forehead will soon be as bald as that of the great Caesar, whom, you say, you carried on your horse in full armor. And the magic philter which you drank in that Gallic wine will put you at my mercy, quiet as a corpse."

The "horse-dealer" spoke true. These words were the last I remember. A leaden torpor fell upon me, and I lost all knowledge of what was done with me.

CHAPTER XII

SOLD INTO BONDAGE

The experience of that evening was only the prelude for a horrid day, a day doubly horrid due to the mystery that surrounded it.

Aye, to this hour, when I write this for you, O my son Sylvest, to the end that from this truthful and detailed account, in which I recite to you one by one the torments and the indignities heaped upon our country and our race, you may contract a hate implacable for the Romans, while awaiting the day of vengeance and deliverance;—aye, to this hour the mysteries of that horrid day of sale are still impenetrable to me, unless they be explained by the sorceries of the "horse-dealer," many of his people being given to magic. But our venerable druids affirm that magic does not exist.

The day of the auction I was roused from my stupor by my master. I had slept profoundly. I remembered what had occurred the previous evening. My first movement was to carry my hands to my head. It was shaved, and my beard also! A thrill of anguish shot through me at the discovery; but instead of flying into a rage, as I would have done the evening before, I only shed a few tears, fearfully regarding the "horse-dealer." Aye, I cried before that man—aye, I looked at him with fear.

What could have come over me during the night? Was I still under the influence of the philter poured into the wine? No, my torpor had gone. I found myself active of body, and in sound mind, but in character and heart I found myself softened, enervated, timid,—and, why not say the word?—cowardly! Aye, cowardly! I, Guilhern, son of Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak. I looked timidly around me. Every minute my heart seemed to sink, and tears came to my eyes, as formerly the flush of anger and pride had mantled my forehead. Of this inexplicable transformation, due, perhaps, to sorcery, I was dimly conscious and wondered thereat. Down to this day, when I recall the incident, I wonder, and none of the details of the horrid day has escaped from my memory.

The "horse-dealer" observed me in silence with an air of triumph. He had left me my breeches only. I was stripped to the waist. I was seated on my bed of straw. The dealer addressed me:

"Get up!" said he.

I hastened to obey. My master drew from his pocket a steel mirror, handed it to me, and resumed:

"Look at yourself!"

I looked at myself. Thanks to the witch-craft of my master, my cheeks were red, my face clear, as if awful misfortune had not settled upon me and my family. Nevertheless, on seeing for the first time in the mirror my face and head completely shaved, as the badge of my bondage, I shed fresh tears, but tried to hide them from the "horse-dealer," for fear of annoying him. He replaced the mirror in his pocket, took from the table a braided wreath of beech leaves, and said:

"Put your head down."

I obeyed. The dealer put the wreath on my head. Then he took a parchment on which were written several lines in large Roman characters, and hung the inscription on my chest by means of two strings which he tied behind my neck. Over my shoulders he threw a woollen covering. Then he opened the secret spring which held my chain to the end of the bed, and fastened it to another iron ring which had been riveted on my other ankle during my heavy sleep. This way, although chained by both legs, I could still walk with short steps. Finally, my hands were bound behind me.

Obedient to the "horse-dealer's" orders, whom I followed as quiet and submissive as a dog does his master, I descended the stairs which led from my cell to the shed. The descent was affected not without pain to my limbs owing to the shortness of the chain. In the shed I found several captives, among whom I had passed my first night, lying upon straw. No doubt their recovery was far enough advanced to admit of their being put up for sale. Other slaves whose heads had likewise been shaved, either by trick or by force, also wore wreaths on their foreheads, inscriptions on their breasts, handcuffs on their hands and heavy shackles on their feet. They had started, under the supervision of armed keepers, to defile by a door which opened on the town square. It was there the auction sale was to be held. Nearly all the captives seemed to me to be mournful, depressed and submissive like myself. They lowered their eyes like men ashamed to look at one another. Among the last, I recognized two or three men of my own tribe. One of them passed close to me, and said in a low voice:

"Guilhern, we are shaven; but hair will grow again, and nails also."

I comprehended that the Gaul wished to give me to understand that some day would come the hour of vengeance. But in the great cowardice which paralyzed me since my awakening, such was my fear of the "horse-dealer" that I pretended not to understand my countryman.

The space engaged by the "horse-dealer" for the auction was not a great way from the shed where we had been kept prisoners. We speedily arrived at a sort of booth or stall, surrounded on three sides by planks, covered with canvas, and with the floor strewn with straw. Other booths, similar to it, were arranged to the right and left of a long space like a street. In this space Roman officers and soldiery walked in crowds, together with the buyers and sellers of slaves and various other men who follow in the wake of armies. They looked at the captives chained in the booths with a jeering and insulting curiosity. My master had informed me that his stall in the market was directly opposite that of his companion in whose possession were the two children. A cloth was lowered over the opening. I only heard, a few moments later, imprecations and piercing shrieks, mingled with mournful moans, from women, who were crying in Gallic:

"Death, death, but not disgrace!"

"Those timorous fools are playing the vestals, because they are stripped naked to be shown to the customers," said the "horse-dealer," who had kept near me. Presently he took me to the rear of the booth. On the way I counted nine captives, some in their youth, others middle-aged, and only two were past their prime. Some were seated on the straw, their faces turned down to escape the looks of the curious, others were lying prone, their faces to the ground; a few stood erect casting fierce glances around them. The keepers, their scourges in their hands, their swords at their sides, kept watch. The "horse-dealer" pointed to a wooden cage, a sort of large box at the back of the booth, and said to me:

"Friend Bull, you are the pearl, the carbuncle of my assortment. Enter this cage. The comparisons which would be made between you and my other slaves would lower their value too much. As a thrifty merchant, I will try to sell first what is of least value. One sells the small fry before the big fish."

I obeyed. I went into the cage, and the door was closed upon me. I found that I could stand up. An opening through the top permitted me to breathe without being seen from the outside. Just then a bell sounded. It was the signal for the sale. On all sides arose the squeaky voices of the auctioneers announcing the bids of the purchasers of human flesh. The merchants bragged their slaves in the Roman tongue, and invited the purchaser into their booths. Several customers entered to inspect the "horse-dealer's" stock. Without understanding the words that he spoke, I guessed by the inflections of his voice that he strove to capture them, while the auctioneer all the while called out the bids. From time to time a loud tumult arose in the booth, mingled with the sound of the keepers' lashes, and the curses of the dealer.

Evidently they were scourging some of my companions in slavery who refused to follow the new master to whom they had been "knocked down." But speedily the clamor ceased, choked off by the gag. Other times I heard the trampings of a confused struggle, desperate, though muffled. These struggles also came to an end under the efforts of the keepers. I was frightened at the courage displayed by the captives. I no longer understood resistance or boldness. I was plunged into my cowardly sluggishness. All at once the door of my cage opened, and the "horse-dealer" cried out in great glee:

"All sold, save you, my pearl, my carbuncle. And by Mercury, to whom I promise an offering in recognition of my day's profits, I believe I have found for you a purchaser by private contract."

My master made me step out of my cage; I traversed the booth, in which I saw not a single slave left. I found myself face to face with a gray haired man, of a cold, hard countenance. He wore the military dress, limped very badly, and supported himself on a vine-wood cane, which was the mark of the centurion rank in the Roman army. The dealer lifted from my shoulders the woolen covering in which I was wrapped, and left me stripped to the waist; he then made me get out of my breeches also. My master, with the air of a man proud of his merchandise, thus exposed my nakedness to the customer. Several of the curious, assembled outside of the stall, looked in and contemplated me. I dropped my eyes in shame and sorrow, not in anger.

After the prospective purchaser read the writing which hung from my neck, he looked me over carefully, answering with affirmative nods of the head to what the merchant, with his usual volubility, was saying to him in Latin. Often he stopped to measure, with his spread out fingers, the size of my chest, the thickness of my arms, or the width of my shoulders.

His first examination must have pleased the centurion, for my master said to me: "Be proud for your master, friend Bull, your build is found faultless. 'See'—I just said to the customer—'would not the Grecian sculptors have taken this superb slave as a model for a Hercules?' My customer agreed with me. Now you must show him that your strength and agility are not inferior to your appearance."

My master pointed to a lead weight in readiness for the trial, and said to me while loosening my arms:

"Now put on your breeches again, then take this weight in your two hands, lift it over your head, and hold it there as long as you can."

I was about, in my stupid docility, to do as I was bid, when the centurion stooped towards the weight, and attempted to lift it from the ground, which he did, with much difficulty, while my master said to me:

"This mischievous cripple is as foxy as myself. He knows that many dealers use hollow weights which appear to weigh two or three times as much as they actually do. Come, friend Bull, show this suspicious fellow that you are as powerful as you are well built."

My strength was not yet entirely returned. Nevertheless, I took the heavy weight in my hands, throwing it over my head, and balanced it there a moment. A vague idea flitted at that instant across my mind to let the weight fall on my master's skull, and thus crush him at my feet. But that gleam of my bygone courage died out, and I dropped the weight on the ground. The lame Roman seemed satisfied.

"Better and better, friend Bull," said my master to me, "by Hercules, your patron god, never did a slave do more honor to his owner. Your strength is demonstrated. Now let us witness your agility. Two keepers will hold this wooden bar about half a yard from the ground. Although your feet are in chains, you will jump over the bar several times. Nothing will better prove the strength and nimbleness of your muscles."

In spite of my recent wounds, and the weight of my chain, I leaped several times with my joined feet over the bar, to the increasing satisfaction of the centurion.

"Better and better," repeated my master. "You are proven as strong as you are powerfully built, and as limber as both. It now remains to exhibit the inoffensive gentleness of your nature. As to this last proof, I am, in advance, certain of your success," saying which he again bound my hands behind my back.

At first I did not understand what the dealer meant. But he took a scourge from the hand of a keeper, and pointing with its handle to me, spoke to the purchaser in a low voice. The latter made a gesture of assent, and my master passed the scourge over to the centurion.

"The old fox, still suspicious, fears that I would not strike you hard enough, friend Bull," my master explained to me. "Come, do not make a slip. Do me this last honor, and gain me this last profit, by showing that you endure chastisement patiently."

Hardly had he pronounced the words, when the cripple rained a shower of blows on my shoulders and chest. I felt neither shame nor indignation, only pain. I fell down on my knees in tears and begged for mercy. Outside, the curious crowd, gathered at the door, roared with laughter.

The centurion, surprised at so much resignation in a Gaul, dropped the whip, and looked at my master who by his gesture seemed to say:

"Did I deceive you?"

Thereupon, patting me with the flat of his hand on my lacerated back, the same as one would pat an animal that pleased him, my master said to me:

"If you are a bull for strength, you are a lamb for meekness. I expected so. Now some questions as to your laborer's trade, and the sale is concluded. The customer wishes to know in what place you were employed."

"In the tribe of Karnak," I answered, with a cowardly sigh, "there my family and I cultivated the lands of our fathers."

The "horse-dealer" reported my answer to the cripple, who seemed both surprised and pleased. He exchanged a few words with the dealer, who continued:

"The customer asks where the lands and house of your fathers were situated."

"Not far to the east of the rocks of Karnak, on the heights of Craig'h."

At this answer the Roman was so pleased that he seemed hardly to believe what he heard, and the "horse-dealer" turned to me:

"That cripple beats all for distrustfulness. To be certain that I do not deceive him, and that I have translated your words faithfully to him, he demands that you trace before him on the sand, the position of the lands and house of your family with reference to the rocks of Karnak and the sea-shore. Unfortunately I don't know his reasons, for if it were a convenience to him, I would make him pay for it. But do as he bids you."

My hands were once more loosed. I took the handle of a lash from one of the keepers, and traced with it on the sand, followed by the eager eyes of the centurion, the location of the rocks of Karnak and the coast of Craig'h, and then the place of our dwelling to the east of Karnak.

The cripple clapped his hands for joy. He drew from his pocket a long purse, took out a certain number of gold pieces, and offered them to the "horse-dealer." After a long chaffer, seller and buyer finally reached an agreement.

"By Mercury," said the dealer to me; "I have sold you for thirty-eight sous of gold, one-half cash as a deposit, the other half at the close of the market, when the lame fellow will come to fetch you. Was I wrong when I called you the carbuncle of my stock?" After exchanging a few words with the centurion, he turned to me:

"Your new master—and I can understand it, seeing he has paid so good a price for you—your new master is of the opinion that you are not chained securely enough. He wants clogs fastened to your chain. He will come for you in a chariot."

In addition to my chain, I was loaded down with two heavy clogs of iron, which would have prevented me from moving except by leaping with both feet; even if I could lift so heavy a weight. My manacles were carefully inspected and locked on my wrists, and I sat down in a corner of the stall while the dealer counted and recounted his gold.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BOOTH ACROSS THE WAY

While I sat in my former master's stall awaiting the arrival of my new purchaser to take me away, the cloth that covered the entrance of the opposite stall was raised.

On one side were three beautiful young women, the same, I doubted not, who a little before had filled the air with groans and supplications while their clothes were being torn off them, in order to exhibit their charms to purchasers. They were still half nude, their feet bare, plastered with chalk and fastened by rings to a long iron bar. Huddled close together, these three held one another in such close embrace that two of them, still crushed down with shame, hid their faces in the bosom of the third. The latter, pale and somber, hung her head, letting her disheveled black hair fall before her bruised and naked breast—bruised no doubt in the vain struggle against the keepers who disrobed her. A short distance from them, two little children, three or four years old, bound around their waists merely by a light cord fastened to a stake, laughed and played in the straw with the heedlessness common to their age. The children evidently did not belong to either of the three women.

At the other side of the stall I saw a matron of the noble carriage of my mother Margarid. Manacles were on her wrists, shackles on her ankles. She was standing, leaning against a beam to which she was chained by the waist. She stood still as a statue; her grey hair disordered, her eyes fixed, her face livid and fearful. Time and again she gave vent to a burst of threatening and crazy laughter. Finally, at the rear of the stall, was a cage resembling the one which I myself had occupied. In that cage, if what the "horse-dealer" said was true, would be my two children. Tears filled my eyes. In spite of my weakness, the thought of my children, so close to me, caused a flush of warmth to rise to my face—a symptom of my returning powers.

And now, Sylvest, my son, you for whom I write this report, read slowly what is now about to follow. Aye, read slowly, to the end that every word may imbue your soul with its indelible hatred for the Romans—a hatred that I feel certain must some day, the day of vengeance, break out with terrific force. Read, my son, and you will understand how your mother, after having given life to you and your sister, after having heaped all her tenderness upon you, could in the end give you no stronger proof of her maternal love than by endeavoring to kill you, to the end that she might carry you hence,

to return to life in the other world at her side and in the circle of our family. Alas! You survived her foresight!

This, my son, is what happened!

I had my eyes fixed on the cage in which I surmised you and your sister were imprisoned, when I saw an old man, richly dressed, enter the stall. It was the rich patrician Trymalcion, worn out as much by debauchery as by years. His dull, cold, corpse-like eyes seemed to look into vacancy. His hideously wrinkled visage was half hidden under a coat of thick paint. He wore a frizzled yellow wig, earrings blazing with precious stones, and in the girdle of his robe a large bouquet, of which his red plush mantle off and on allowed a glimpse. He painfully dragged his limbs after him, leaning on the shoulders of two young slaves fifteen or sixteen years of age, who were luxuriously dressed, but in such a style, and so effeminately, that it was impossible to tell whether they were young men or girls. Two other and older slaves followed. One carried under his arm his master's thick cloak, the other a golden night-vessel.

The proprietor of the stall hastened to receive his patrician customer with tokens of reverence, exchanged a few words with him, and then moved forward a stool on which the old man let himself down. As the seat had no back, one of the young slaves immediately stationed himself motionless behind his master, to serve him as a support, while the other slave lay down on the ground at a sign from the patrician, lifted his feet, which were encased in rich sandals, and wrapping them in a fold of his own robe, held them to his breast to warm them.

Thus supported with his back and feet on the bodies of his slaves, the old man spoke some words to the merchant. The latter first pointed toward the three half-naked women. At sight of them, Trymalcion turned half way round and spat at them, as if to evince the most sovereign disdain.

At this indignity, the old man's slaves and the Romans, assembled in the vicinity of the stall, broke into coarse laughter. Then the merchant pointed out to lord Trymalcion the two children playing on the straw. The senile debauchee shrugged his shoulders, while he uttered some horrible words. His words must have been horrible, because the laughter redoubled.

The merchant, hoping at last to please so fastidious a customer, went up to the cage, opened it, and brought out three children, draped in long white veils which hid their faces. Two of the children corresponded in height to my son and daughter; the other was smaller. The smallest one was the first to

be unveiled to the eyes of the old man. I recognized her as the daughter of one of my relatives, whose husband was killed in the defense of the chariot; the mother had killed herself with the other women of the family, forgetting in that supreme moment, to kill the little one. The girl was sickly and without beauty. Patrician Trymalcion looked her over rapidly and made an impatient gesture with his hand, as if annoyed that they should dare to offer to his sight so unattractive an object. She was, accordingly, taken back to the cage by a keeper. The other two children remained, still veiled.

I was eagerly watching these events from the corner of the "horse-dealer's" stall, my arms pinioned behind my back with double iron manacles, my legs chained and my feet fastened by fetters of enormous weight. I still felt under the influence of the sorcery that had been practiced upon me. Nevertheless, my blood, so long frozen in my veins, began to circulate more and more freely. A slight tremor occasionally went through my limbs. The spell was breaking. I was not the only one to tremble. The young Gallic women and the matron, forgetting their own shame and despair, experienced in their hearts of maid, of wife, or mother, a frightful horror at the fate of the children offered to that detestable old man.

Although half nude, they no longer thought of withdrawing themselves from the licentious looks of the spectators who were crowding at the entrance to the booth. Their eyes brooded with motherly terror upon the two veiled children, while the matron, bound to the post, her eyes glittering and her teeth set in impotent fury, raised her chained arms to heaven as if to call down the punishments of the gods upon such monstrosities.

At a sign from lord Trymalcion, the veils dropped—I recognized you both—you, my son Sylvest and your sister Syomara. You were both pale and wan; you were shivering with fear. Anguish was depicted in your tear-bathed faces. The long blonde hair of my little girl fell upon her shoulders. She dared not raise her eyes, neither did you; you held each other by the hand, closely clasped. Despite the terror that disfigured her face, I beheld my daughter in her singular and infantine beauty—accursed beauty! At sight of her Trymalcion's dead eyes lighted up and glistened like glowing coals in the middle of his wrinkled, paint-covered visage. He stood up, stretched out his emaciated arms towards my daughter as if to seize his prey, while a shocking smile disclosed his yellow teeth. Terror-stricken, Syomara threw herself back and clung to your neck. The merchant quickly tore you from each other and brought Syomara to the old man. The latter impatiently pushed away with his foot the slave that crouched on the ground before him, and grabbing my little girl, took her between his knees. He easily subdued the efforts she made to escape, while she uttered piercing cries; he

violently snapped the strings that fastened my little girl's robe, and stripped her half naked in order to examine her chest and shoulders. While this was going on, the merchant was holding you back, my son, and I—the father of the two victims—I, loaded with chains, beheld the spectacle. At the sight of this crime of the patrician Trymalcion, outraging the chastity of a child, the three fettered Gallic women and the matron made a desperate but vain effort to break from their irons, and began to pour out a torrent of imprecations and groans.

Trymalcion finished complacently his disgusting examination, and said a few words to the merchant. Immediately a keeper replaced the robe on my girl, who was more dead than alive, wrapped her up in her long white veil, which he tied around her, and taking the slender burden under his arm, held himself in readiness to follow the old man, who was taking some gold from his purse to pay the merchant. At that moment of supreme despair—you and your sister, poor little ones bewildered with terror, cried out as if you believed you would be heard and succored:

"Mother! Father!"

Up to that moment I had witnessed the scene panting, almost crazy with grief and rage. Slowly my heart, struggling against the sorcery of the "horse-dealer," was gaining the upper hand. But at that cry, uttered by you and your sister, the charm broke with a clap. All my intelligence, all my courage rushed back to me. The sight of you two gave me such a shock, it threw me into such a transport of rage that, unable to break my irons, I rose upon my feet, and, with my hands still pinioned behind me, my legs still loaded with heavy chains, I bounded out of my stall with two leaps, and fell like a thunderbolt upon the old patrician. The shock caused the old man to roll under me. In default of the liberty of my hands to strangle him, I bit him in the face, near the neck. The "horse-dealers" and their keepers threw themselves upon me; but bearing with all my weight upon the hideous old debauchee, who was howling at the top of his voice, I kept my teeth in his flesh. The monster's blood filled my mouth—a shower of whip lashes and blows from sticks and stones rained upon me—yet I budged not. No more than our old war dog Deber-Trud the man-eater did I drop my prey.—No!—Like the dog, when I did let go, it was only to carry away between my teeth—a strip of flesh, a bleeding mouthful that I spat back into Trymalcion's hideous, tortured face, as he had spat at the Gallic women.

"Father! Father!" you cried out to me through the tumult. Wishing then to approach you two, my children, I stood up, an object of terror—aye, terror.

For a moment a circle of fear surrounded the Gallic slave, with his load of irons.

"Father! Father!" you cried again, stretching out your little arms, in spite of the keepers who held you back. I made a bound toward you, but the merchant, from the top of the cage where you had been confined, suddenly threw a large piece of cloth over my head. At the same time I was seized by the legs, thrown down, and tied with a thousand bonds. The cloth, which covered my head and shoulders, was tied down around my neck, and through it they made a gap, which unfortunately permitted me to breathe—I had hoped to smother.

I felt myself being carried across to my own booth, where I was thrown on the straw, incapable of making the slightest motion. Quite a while later I heard the centurion, my new master, in a sharp altercation with the "horse-dealer" and the merchant who had sold Syomara to Trymalcion. Presently they all went out. Silence reigned around me. Some time later, the dealer returned; he approached me; he kicked me angrily; he tore off the cover from my face, and said to me in a voice trembling with rage:

"Scoundrel! Do you know what it has cost me, that mouthful of flesh you tore out of the face of the noble Trymalcion? Do you know, ferocious beast? That mouthful of flesh cost me twenty sous of gold! More than half of what I sold you for, for I am responsible for your misdeeds, wretch! while you are in my stall, double villain! So that it is I who have made a present of your daughter to the old man. She was sold to him for twenty gold sous, which I paid in his stead. He insisted upon it. And even so I got off cheaply. He demanded that indemnity."

"That monster is not dead! Hena! he is not dead!" I cried in despair. "And my daughter is not dead either! Hesus, Teutates, take pity on my daughter!"

"Your daughter, gallows bird! Your daughter is in Trymalcion's hands, and it is upon her he will wreak his revenge on you. He rejoices over the circumstance in advance. He sometimes is taken with savage caprices, and is rich enough to indulge them."

I was unable to make answer to these words, save with long drawn out moans.

"And that is not all, infamous scoundrel! I have lost the confidence of the centurion to whom I sold you. He reproached me with having outrageously deceived him; with having sold him, instead of a lamb, a tiger who exercised

his teeth upon rich patricians. He wanted to sell you right back. To sell you back, as if anyone would consent to buy—after such an exhibition! As well buy a wild beast. Luckily for me, I received the deposit before witnesses. The fierceness of your nature will not set aside the contract; the centurion has no choice but to keep you. He'll keep you, I warrant, but he'll make you pay dear for your criminal instincts. Oh, you don't know the life that awaits you in the ergastula! You don't know—"

"But my son," I asked, interrupting the "horse-dealer," well knowing that he would answer out of cruelty. "Is my son also sold? To whom?"

"Sold? And who do you think would still want him? Sold? Better say given away. You bring bad luck to everybody, double traitor. Did not your ragings and the shrieks of that mis-born limb teach everyone that he is of your beastly blood? No one offered even an obole for him! Who would buy a wolf's whelp? Anyway, I was going to speak to you about that son of yours, to delight your father's heart. Know that he was given to boot by my partner at the end of the sale, to the same purchaser to whom he sold the grey-haired matron, who will be good to turn a mill-wheel."

"And that purchaser," I enquired, "who is he? What is he going to do with my son?"

"That purchaser is the centurion—your master!"

"Hesus!" I exclaimed, hardly able to believe what I heard. "Hesus, you are kind and merciful. At least I shall have my son near me."

"Your son near you! Then you are as stupid as you are scoundrelly. Ah, do you imagine that it is for your paternal contentment that your master has burdened himself with that wolf-cub? Do you know what your master said to me? 'I have only one means of subduing that savage beast you sold me, you egregious cheat.—The chances are, that madman loves his little one. I'll keep the wolf-whelp in a cage, and the son will answer to me for the father's docility.—At the father's first, and least offence, he will see the tortures which he will make his cub suffer, under my very eyes.'"

I paid no further attention to what the "horse-dealer" said—I was at least sure of seeing you, or of knowing that you were near me, my child. That will help me to bear the awful grief caused to me by the fate of my little daughter Syomara, who, two days later, was carried into Italy on board the galley of the patrician Trymalcion.

My father Guilhern was not granted time to finish his narrative.

Death—oh, what a death!—death overtook him the very day after he traced the above last lines. I preserve them together with the little brass bell that my father got from the "horse-dealer."

The narrative of the sufferings of our race, I, Sylvest, shall continue in obedience to my father Guilhern, the same as he obeyed the behest of his father Joel the brenn of the tribe of Karnak.

Hesus was merciful to you, O, my father.—You died ignorant of the life of your daughter Syomara—

It is left to me to narrate my sister's fate.

THE END