

THE INFANT'S SKULL

BY

EUGÈNE SUE

The Infant's Skull

PART I

THE CASTLE OF COMPIEGNE

CHAPTER I

THE FOUNTAIN OF THE HINDS

A spring of living water, known in the neighborhood by the appropriate name of the "Fountain of the Hinds," empties its trickling stream under the oaks of one of the most secret recesses of the forest of Compiègne. Stags and hinds, deers and does, bucks and she-goats come to water at the spot, leaving behind them numerous imprints of their steps on the borders of the rill, or on the sandy soil of the narrow paths that these wild animals have worn across the copse.

One early morning in the year 987, the sun being up barely an hour, a woman, plainly dressed and breathing hard with rapid walking, stepped out of one of these paths and stopped at the Fountain of the Hinds. She looked in all directions in surprise as if she expected to have been preceded by some one at the solitary rendezvous. Finding her hopes deceived, she made an impatient motion, sat down, still out of breath, on a rock near the fountain, and threw off her cape.

The woman, barely twenty years of age, had black hair, eyes and eye-brows; her complexion was brown; and cherry-red her lips. Her features were handsome, while the mobility of her inflated nostrils and the quickness of her motions betokened a violent nature. She had rested only a little while when she rose again and walked up and down with hurried steps, stopping every now and then to listen for approaching footsteps. Catching at last the sounds of a distant footfall, she thrilled with joy and ran to the encounter of him she had been expecting. He appeared. It was a man, also in plain garb and in the vigor of age, large-sized and robust, with a piercing eye and somber, wily countenance. The young woman leaped at a bound into the arms of this personage, and passionately addressed him: "Hugh, I meant to overwhelm you with reproaches; I meant to strike you; but here you are and I forget everything," and in a transport of amorous delight she added, suiting the deed to the words: "Your lips! Oh, give me your lips to kiss!"

After the exchange of a shower of kisses, and disengaging himself, not without some effort, from the embrace of the fascinated woman, Hugh said to her gravely: "We cannot indulge in love at this hour."

"At this hour, to-day, yesterday, to-morrow, everywhere and always, I love and shall continue to love you."

"Blanche, they are foolhardy people who use the word 'always,' when barely fourteen years separate us from the term assigned for the end of the world! This is a grave and a fearful matter!"

"What! Can you have given me this early morning appointment at this secreted place, whither I have come under pretext of visiting the hermitage of St. Eusebius, to talk to me about the end of the world? Hugh ... Hugh.... To me there is no end of the world but when your love ends!"

"Trifle not with sacred matters! Do you not know that in fourteen years, the first day of the year 1000, this world will cease to be and with it the people who inhabit it?"

Struck by the coldness of her lover's answers, Blanche brusquely stepped back. Her brows contracted, her nostrils dilated, her breast heaved in pain, and she darted a look at Hugh that seemed to wish to fathom the very bottom of his heart. For a few instants her gaze remained fixed upon him; she then cried in a voice trembling with rage: "You love some other woman! You love me no more!"

"Your words are senseless!"

"Heaven and earth! Am I also to be despised.... I the Queen!... Yes, you love some other woman, your own wife, perhaps; that Adelaide of Poitiers whom you promised me you would rid yourself of by a divorce!" Further utterances having expired upon her lips, the wife of King Louis the Do-nothing broke down sobbing, and with eyes that glistened with fury she shook her fists at the Count of Paris: "Hugh, if I were sure of that, I would kill both you and your wife; I would stab you both to death!"

"Blanche," said Hugh slowly and watching the effect of his words upon the face of the Queen, who, with eyes fixed upon the ground, seemed to be meditating some sinister project: "I am not merely Count of Paris and Duke of France, as my ancestors were, I am also Abbot of Saint Martin of Tours and of Saint-Germain-des-Pres, abbot not only by virtue of my cowl—but by virtue of my faith. Accordingly, I blame your incredulity on the subject of the approaching end of the world. The holiest bishops have prophesied it, and

have urged the faithful to hasten to save their souls during the fourteen years that still separate them from the last judgment.... Fourteen years!... A very short period within which to gain the eternal paradise!"

"By the hell that burns in my heart, the man is delivering a sermon to me!" cried the Queen with an outburst of caustic laughter. "What are you driving at? Are you spreading a snare for me? Malediction! this man is a compound of ruse, artifice and darkness, and yet I love him! I am insane!... Oh, there must be some magic charm in this!" and biting into her handkerchief with suppressed rage, she said to him: "I shall not interrupt again, even if I should choke with anger. Proceed, Hugh the Capet! Explain yourself!"

"Blanche, the approach of the dreadful day when the world is to end makes me uneasy about my salvation. I look with fright at our double adultery, seeing we are both married." Stopping with a gesture a fresh explosion of rage on the part of the Queen, the Count of Paris added solemnly raising his hand heavenward: "I swear to God by the salvation of my soul, were you a widow, I would obtain a divorce from the Pope, and I would marry you with holy joy. But likewise do I swear to God by the salvation of my soul, I wish no longer to brave eternal punishment by continuing a criminal intercourse with a woman bound, as I am myself, by the sacrament of marriage. I wish to spend in the mortification of the flesh, in fasting, abstinence, repentance and prayer the years that still separate us from the year 1000, to the end that I may obtain from our Lord God the remission of my sins and of my adultery with you. Blanche, seek not to alter my decision. According as the caprice of your love led you, you have alternately boasted over and cursed the inflexibility of my character. Now, what I have said is said. This shall be the last day of our adulterous intercourse. Our carnal relations shall then end."

While Hugh the Capet was speaking, the wife of Louis the Do-nothing contemplated his face with devouring attention. When he finished, so far from breathing forth desperate criminations, she carried both her hands to her forehead and seemed steeped in meditation. Looking askance upon Blanche, the Count of Paris anxiously waited for the first word from the Queen. Finally, a tremor shook her frame, she raised her head, as if struck by a sudden thought, and curbing her emotions she asked: "Do you believe that King Lothaire, the father of my husband Louis, died of poison in March of last year?"

"I believe he was poisoned."

"Do you believe that Imma, his wife, was guilty of poisoning her husband?"

"She is accused of the crime."

"Do you believe Imma guilty of the crime?"

"I believe what I see."

"And when you do not see?"

"Doubt is then natural."

"Do you know that in that murder Queen Imma's accomplice was her lover Adalberon, bishop of Laon?"

"It was a great scandal to the church!"

"After the poisoning of Lothaire, the Queen and the bishop, finally delivered from the eyes of her husband, indulged their love more freely."

"A double and horrible sacrilege!" cried the Count of Paris with indignation.
"A bishop and a Queen adulterers and homicides!"

Blanche seemed astonished at the indignation of Hugh the Capet and again contemplated him attentively. She then proceeded with her interrogatory:

"Are you aware, Count of Paris, that King Lothaire's death is a happy circumstance for you—provided you were ambitious? Bishop Adalberon, the accomplice and lover of the Queen, that bishop, expert in poisons, was your friend!"

"He was my friend before his crime."

"You repudiate his friendship, but you profit by his crime. That is high statecraft."

"In what way, Blanche, have I profited by that odious crime? Does not the son of Lothaire reign to-day? When my ancestors, the Counts of Paris, aspired at the crown they did not assassinate the kings, they dethroned them. Thus Eudes dethroned Charles the Fat, and Rothbert, Charles the Simple. A transmission of crowns is easy."

"All of which did not prevent Charles the Simple, the nephew of Charles the Fat from re-ascending the throne, the same as Louis Outer-mer, the son of Charles the Simple, also resumed his crown. On the other hand, King Lothaire, who was poisoned last year, will never reign again. Whence we see,

it is better to kill the kings than to dethrone them ... if one wishes to reign in their stead. Not so, Count of Paris?"

"Yes, provided one does not care for the excommunications of the bishops, nor for the eternal flames."

"Hugh, if perchance my husband, although young, should die?... That might happen."

"The will of the Lord is all-powerful," answered Hugh with a contrite air. "There be those who to-day are full of life and youth, and to-morrow are corpses and dust! The designs of God are impenetrable."

"So that if perchance the King, my husband, should die," rejoined Blanche, without taking her eyes from the face of the Count of Paris, "in short, if some day or other I become a widow—your scruples will then cease ... my love will no longer be adulterous, would it, Hugh?"

"No, you would then be free."

"And will you remain faithful to what you have just said ... 'Blanche, I swear to God by the salvation of my soul, if you should become a widow I shall separate from my wife Adelaide of Poitiers, and I shall marry you with a pure and holy joy.' ... Will you be faithful to that oath?"

"Blanche, I repeat it," answered Hugh the Capet avoiding the Queen's eyes that remained obstinately fixed upon him. "I swear to God by the salvation of my soul, if you become a widow I shall demand of the Pope permission to divorce Adelaide of Poitiers, and I shall marry you. Our love will then have ceased to be criminal."

An interval of silence again followed the words of the Count of Paris, whereupon Blanche resumed slowly:

"Hugh, there are strange and sudden deaths."

"Indeed, strange and sudden deaths have been seen in royal families."

"None is safe from accident. Neither princes nor subjects."

"Only the will of heaven disposes of our fates. We must bow before the decrees of God."

"My husband, Louis, the Do-nothing, is, like all other people, subject to death and the decrees of Providence."

"Indeed, kings as well as subjects."

"It may then happen, although he is now barely twenty, that he die suddenly ... within a year ... within six months ... to-morrow ... to-day...."

"Man's end is death."

"Should that misfortune arrive," the Queen proceeded after a pause, "there is one thing that alarms me, Hugh, and on which I desire your advice."

"What, my dear Blanche?"

"Calumniators, seeing Louis dies so suddenly, might talk ... about poison."

"A pure conscience despises calumny. The wicked may be disregarded."

"Oh, as to me, I would despise them. But, you, Hugh, my beloved, whatever may be said, would you also accuse me of being a poisoner? Would you pass such a judgment upon me?"

"I believe what I see.... If I do not see, I doubt. Blanche, may the curse of heaven fall upon me if I ever could be infamous enough to conceive such a suspicion against you!" cried Hugh the Capet taking the Queen in his arms with passionate tenderness. "What! If the Lord should call your husband to Him He would fulfil the most cherished dreams of my life! He would allow me to sanctify with marriage the ardent love that I would sacrifice everything to, everything except my eternal salvation! And would I, instead of thanking God, suspect you of an odious crime! You the soul of my life!"

The Queen seemed overwhelmed with ecstasy. Hugh the Capet proceeded in a low and tremulous voice: "Oh, joy of my heart, if some day you should be my wife before God, our souls would then merge in one and in a love that would then be pure and holy. Then, Oh joy of Heaven, we shall not age! The end of the world approaches. Together we shall quit life full of ardor and love!" saying which the Count of Paris drew his mouth close to the lips of the Queen. The latter closed her eyes and muttered a few words in a faint voice. Hugh the Capet, however, suddenly and with great effort disengaged himself from Blanche's arms exclaiming: "A superhuman courage is needed to overcome the passion that consumes me! Adieu, Blanche, well-beloved of my heart, I return to Paris!"

With these words Hugh the Capet disappeared in the copse, while the Queen, overpowered with passion and the struggle within herself, followed him with her eyes: "Hugh, my lover, I shall be a widow, and you King!"

CHAPTER II

THE IDIOT

Among the household serfs of the royal domain of Compiègne was a young lad of eighteen named Yvon. Since the death of his father, a forester serf, he lived with his grandmother, the washerwoman for the castle, who had received permission from the bailiff to keep her grandson near her. Yvon was at first employed in the stables; but having long lived in the woods, he looked so wild and stupid that he was presently taken for an idiot, went by the name of Yvon the Calf, and became the butt of all. The King himself, Louis the Do-nothing, amused himself occasionally with the foolish pranks of the young serf. He was taught to mimic dogs by barking and walking on all fours; he was made to eat lizards, spiders and grass-hoppers for general amusement. Yvon always obeyed with an idiotic leer. Thus delivered to the sport and contempt of all, since his grandmother's death, the lad met at the castle with the sympathy of none except a poor female serf named Marceline the Golden-haired from the abundant gold-blond ornament of her head. The young girl was a helper of Adelaide, the favorite lady of the Queen's chamber.

The morning of the day that Blanche and Hugh the Capet had met at the Fountain of the Hinds, Marceline, carrying on her head a bucket of water, was crossing one of the yards of the castle towards the room of her mistress. Suddenly she heard a volley of hisses, and immediately after she saw Yvon enter the yard pursued by several serfs and children of the domain, crying at the top of their voices: "The Calf!" "The Calf!" and throwing stones and offal at the idiot. Marceline revealed the goodness of her heart by interesting herself in the wretch, not that Yvon's features or limbs were deformed, but that the idiotic expression of his face affected her. He was in the habit of dressing his long black hair in five or six plaids interwoven with wisps of straw, and the coiffure fell upon his neck like as many tails. Barely clad in a sorry hose that was patched with materials of different colors, his shoes were of rabbit or squirrel skin fastened with osiers to his feet and legs. Closely pursued from various sides by the serfs of the castle, Yvon made several doublings in the yard in order to escape his tormentors, but perceiving Marceline, who, standing upon the first step of the turret stairs that she was about to ascend, contemplated the idiot with pity, he ran towards the young girl, and throwing himself at her feet said joining his hands: "Pardon me, Marceline, but protect poor Yvon against these wicked people!"

"Climb the stairs quick!" Marceline said to the idiot, pointing up the turret. Yvon rose and swiftly followed the advice of the serf maid, who, placing herself at the door, lay down her bucket of water, and addressing Yvon's tormentors, who were drawing near, said to them: "Have pity for the poor idiot, he harms no one."

"I have just seen him leap like a wolf out of the copse of the forest from the side of the Fountain of the Hinds," cried a forester serf. "His hair and the rags he has on are wet with dew. He must have been in some thicket spreading nets for game which he eats raw."

"Oh, he is a worthy son of Leduecq, the forester, who lived like a savage in his den, never coming out of the woods!" observed another serf. "We must have some fun with the Calf."

"Yes, yes, let us dip him up to his ears in the neighboring pool in punishment for spreading nets to catch game with," said the forester; and taking a step toward Marceline who remained at the door: "Get out of the way, you servant of the devil, or we shall give you a ducking along with the Calf!"

"My mistress, Dame Adelaide, a lady of the Queen's chamber, will know how to punish you if you ill-treat me. Begone, you heartless people!"

"The devil take Adelaide! To the pool with the Calf!"

"Yes, to the pool with him! And Marceline also! A good mud-bath for both!"

At the height of the tumult, one of the casements of the castle was thrown open, and a young man of twenty years at most leaned out and cried angrily: "I shall have your backs flayed with a sound strapping, you accursed barking dogs!"

"The King!" exclaimed the tormentors of Yvon, and a minute later all had fled by the gate of the yard.

"Halloa, you girl!" called out Louis the Do-nothing to Marceline who was taking up her bucket of water. "What was the cause of the infernal racket made by that noisy pack?"

"Seigneur," answered Marceline trembling, "they wanted to ill-treat poor Yvon."

"Is the Calf about?"

"Seigneur, I know not where he is gone to hide," explained the maid who feared lest Yvon, barely escaped from one set of tormentors, should fall into the hands of the whimsical King. As the latter thereupon withdrew from the window, Marceline hastened to ascend the stair of the turret. She had scarcely mounted a dozen steps when she saw Yvon crouching with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands. At the sight of the maid he shook his head and with a voice full of emotion said: "Good you; oh, you good! Marceline good!" and he fixed his eyes so full of gratitude upon her that she observed aloud with a sigh: "Who would believe that this wretch, with eyes at times so captivating, still is deprived of reason?" and again laying down her bucket she said to the idiot: "Yvon, why did you go this morning into the forest? Your hair and rags are really moist with dew. Is it true that you spread nets to take game?" The idiot answered with a stupid smile, swaying his head backward and forward. "Yvon," said Marceline, "do you understand me?" The idiot remained mute, but presently observing the bucket of water that the maid had laid down at his feet, he lifted it up, placed it on his own head, and motioned to Marceline to go up ahead of him. "The poor creature is expressing his gratitude as well as he can," Marceline was thinking to herself when she heard steps above coming down the stairs, and a voice cried out:

"Oh, Calf, is it you?"

"That is the voice of one of the King's servants," said Marceline. "He is coming for you, Yvon. Oh, you are going to fall into another tormentor's hands!"

Indeed, one of the men of the royal chamber appeared at the turning of the winding stairs and said to the idiot: "Come, get up quick and follow me! Our lord the King wishes to amuse himself with you, you double Calf!"

"The King! Oh! Oh! The King!" cried Yvon with a triumphant air, clapping his hands gayly. The bucket being left unsupported on his head, fell and broke open at the feet of the King's servitor whose legs were thereby drenched up to his knees.

"A plague upon the idiot!" cried Marceline despite all her good-heartedness. "There is the bucket broken! My mistress will beat me!"

Furious at the accident that drenched his clothes, the royal servitor hurled imprecations and insults upon Yvon the Calf, who, however, seeming not to notice either the imprecations or the insults, continued to repeat triumphantly: "The King! Oh! Oh! The King!"

CHAPTER III

LOUIS THE DO-NOTHING

Like his wife Louis the Do-nothing was barely twenty years of age. Justly nicknamed the "Do-nothing," he looked as nonchalant as he seemed bored. After having scolded through the window at the serfs, whose noise annoyed him, he stretched himself out again upon his lounge. Several of his familiar attendants stood around him. Yawning fit to dislocate his jaws, he said to them: "What a notion that was of the Queen's to go at sunrise with only one lady of the chamber to pray at the hermitage of St. Eusebius! Once awakened, I could not fall asleep again. So I rose! Oh, this day will be endless!"

"Seigneur King, would you like to hunt?" suggested one of the attendants. "The day is fine. We would certainly kill some game."

"The hunt fatigues me. It is a rude sport."

"Seigneur King, would you prefer fishing?"

"Fishing tires me; it is a stupid pastime."

"Seigneur King, if you call your flute and lute-players, you might enjoy a dance."

"Music racks my head, and I cannot bear dancing. Let's try something else."

"Seigneur King, shall your chaplain read to you out of some fine work?"

"I hate reading. I think I could amuse myself with the idiot. Where is he?"

"Seigneur King, one of your attendants has gone out to find him.... I hear steps.... It is surely he coming."

The door opened and a servitor bent the knee and let in Yvon. From the moment of his entrance Yvon started to walk on all fours, barking like a dog; after a little while he grew livelier, jumped and cavorted about clapping his hands and shouting with such grotesque contortions that the King and the attendants began to laugh merrily. Encouraged by these signs of approbation and ever cavorting about, Yvon mimicked alternately the crowing of a rooster, the mewling of a cat, the grunting of a hog and the braying of an ass, interspersing his sounds with clownish gestures and ridiculous leaps, that redoubled the hilarity of the King and his courtiers.

The merriment was at its height when the door was again thrown open, and one of the chamberlains announced in a loud voice from the threshold where he remained: "Seigneur King, the Queen approaches!" At these words the attendants of Louis, some of whom had dropped upon stools convulsing with laughter, rose hastily and crowded to the door to salute the Queen at her entrance. Louis, however, who lay stretched on his lounge, continued laughing and cried out to the idiot: "Keep on dancing, Calf! Dance on! You are worth your weight in gold! I never amused myself better!"

"Seigneur King, here is the Queen!" said one of the courtiers, seeing Blanche cross the contiguous chamber and approach the door. The wing of this door, when thrown open almost reached the corner of a large table that was covered with a splendid Oriental piece of tapestry, the folds of which reached to the floor. Yvon the Calf continued his gambols, slowly approaching the table, and concealed from the eyes of the King by the head-piece of the lounge on which the latter remained stretched. Ranged at the entrance of the door in order to salute the Queen, the prince's attendants had their backs turned to the table under which Yvon quickly blotted himself out at the moment when the seigneurs were bowing low before Blanche. The Queen answered their salute, and preceding them by a few steps moved towards Louis, who had not yet ceased laughing and crying out: "Ho, Calf, where are you? Come over this way that I may see your capers.... Have you suddenly turned mute, you who can bark, mew and crow so well?"

"My beloved Louis is quite merry this morning," observed Blanche caressingly and approaching her husband's lounge. "Whence proceeds the mirth of my dear husband?"

"That idiot could make a dead man laugh with his capers. Ho, there, Calf! Come this way, you scamp, or I'll have your bones broken!"

"Seigneur King," said one of the attendants after glancing around the room for Yvon, "the Calf must have escaped at the moment when the door was opened to admit the Queen. He is not here, nor in the adjoining room."

"Fetch him back, he can not be far!" cried the King impatiently and with rising anger. "Bring him back here immediately!"

One of the seigneurs hurried out to execute the King's orders, while Blanche letting herself down near him, said, smiling tenderly: "I shall try, my beloved seigneur, to enable you to wait patiently for the idiot's return."

"Fetch him back. All of you run after him; the more of you look after him, the quicker will he be found."

Bowing to the King's orders, the courtiers trooped out of the apartment in search of Yvon.

CHAPTER IV

A ROYAL COUPLE

Blanche remained alone with her husband, whose face, that for a moment had brightened up, speedily resumed its normal expression of lassitude. The Queen had thrown off her simple vestment of the morning to don a more elaborate costume. Her black hair, braided with pearls, was combed with skill. She wore an orange colored robe of rich material, with wide flowing sleeves, leaving half exposed her breast and shoulders. A collar and gold bracelets studded with precious stones ornamented her neck and arms. Still reclining on his lounge, now shared by his wife who sat down at its edge, Louis did not even bestow a glance upon her. With his head leaning upon one of the pillows, he was mumbling: "You will see the clumsy fellows will turn out more stupid than the idiot; they will not catch him."

"In such a disastrous event," replied Blanche with an insinuating smile, "I shall have to console you, my darling. Why is your face so careworn? Will you not deign as much as to throw your eyes upon your wife, your humble servant?"

Louis indolently turned his head towards his wife and said: "How dressed up you are!"

"Does this dress please my amiable master?" inquired the Queen caressingly; but noticing that the King suddenly shivered, became gloomy and brusquely turned away his head, she added: "What is the matter, Louis?"

"I do not like the color of that dress!"

"I am sorry I did not know the color of orange displeased you, dear seigneur. I would have guarded against putting it on."

"You were dressed in the same color on the first day of this month last year."

"My memory is not as perfect as yours on the subject, my dear seigneur."

"It was on the second of May of last year that I saw my father die, poisoned by my mother!" answered the King mournfully.

"What a sad souvenir! How I now hate this accursed orange color, seeing it awakens such recollections in your mind!"

The King remained silent; he turned on his cushions and placed his hands over his eyes. The door of the apartment was re-opened and one of the courtiers said: "Seigneur, despite all our search, we have not been able to find Yvon the Calf; he must have hidden in some corner; he shall be severely punished soon as we find him again." Louis made no answer, and Blanche motioned the courtier with an imperious gesture to retire. Left again alone, and seeing her husband more and more mentally troubled, Blanche redoubled her blandishments, seeking to provoke a return of her caresses: "Dear seigneur, your sadness afflicts me."

"Your tenderness is extreme ... this morning. Quite different from usual."

"My tenderness for you increases by reason of the sorrow that I see you steeped in, dear seigneur."

"Oh, I lost everything with my father's death," Louis murmured despondently, and he added with concentrated fury:

"That felonious bishop of Laon! Poisoner and adulterer! Infamous prelate! And my mother! my mother his accomplice! Such crimes portend the end of the world! I shall punish the guilty!"

"Pray, my seigneur, do forget that dark past. What is it you said about the end of the world? It is a fable."

"A fable! What! Do not the holiest bishops assert that in fourteen years the world must come to an end ... in the year 1000?"

"What makes me question their assertion, Louis, is that, while announcing the end of the world, these prelates recommend to the faithful to part with their goods to the Church and to donate their domains to them."

"Of what use would it be to keep perishable riches if soon everything is to perish?"

"But then, dear seigneur, if everything is to perish, what is the Church to do with the goods that she is eternally demanding from the faithful?"

"After all, you are right. It may be another imposture of the tonsured fraternity. Nor should anything of the sort surprise us when we see bishops guilty of adultery and poisoning."

"You always come back to those lugubrious thoughts, dear seigneur! Pray forget those unworthy calumnies regarding your mother.... Just God! Can a

woman be guilty of her husband's murder! Impossible! God would not permit it!"

"But did I not witness the agony and death of my father! Oh, the effect of the poison was strange ... terrible!" said the King in somber meditation. "My father felt his feet growing cold, icy and numb, unable to support him. By degrees the mortal lethargy invaded his other members, as if he were being slowly dipped into an ice bath! What a terrible spectacle that was!"

"There are illnesses so sudden, so strange, my beloved master.... When such crimes are charged, I am of those who say: 'When I see I believe, when I do not see I refuse to accept such theories.'"

"Oh, I saw but too much!" cried Louis, and again hiding his face in his hands he added in a distressful voice: "I know not why these thoughts should plague me to-day. Oh, God, have pity on me. Remove these fears from my spirit!"

"Louis, do not weep like that, you tear my heart to pieces. Your sadness is a wrong done to this beautiful May day. Look out of the window at that brilliant sun; look at the spring verdure of the forest; listen to the gay twittering of the birds. Why, all around us, everything in nature is lovely and joyous; you alone are sad! Come, now, my beautiful seigneur," added Blanche taking both the hands of the King. "I am going to draw you out of this dejection that distresses me as much as it does you.... I am all the gladder at my project, which is intended to please and amuse you."

"What is your project?"

"I propose to spend the whole day near you. We shall take our morning meal here. I have issued orders to that effect, my indolent boy. After that we shall go to mass. We shall then take a long outing in a litter through the forest. Finally.... But, no, no, the surprise I have in store for you shall remain a secret. It shall be the price of your submission."

"What is the surprise about?"

"You will never have spent such a delightful evening.... You whom everything tires and whom everything is indifferent to ... you will be charmed by what I have in store for you, my dear husband."

Louis the Do-nothing, a youth of indolent and puerile mind, felt his curiosity pricked, but failed to draw any explanation from Blanche. A few minutes later the chamberlains and servants entered carrying silver dishes and gold

goblets, together with the eatables that were to serve for the morning repast. Other attendants of the royal chamber took up the large table covered to the floor with tapestry and under which Yvon the Calf had hidden himself, and carried it forward to the lounge on which were Louis and Blanche. Bent under the table, and completely concealed by the ample folds of the cover which trailed along the floor, the idiot moved forward on his hands and knees as, carried by the servants, the table was being taken towards the royal lounge. When it was set down before Louis and Blanche, Yvon also stopped. Menials and equerries were preparing to render the habitual services at table when the Queen said smiling to her husband: "Will my charming master consent that to-day I be his only servant?"

"If it please you," answered Louis the Do-nothing, and he proceeded in an undertone: "But you know that according to my habit I shall neither eat nor drink anything that you have not tasted before me."

"What a child you are!" answered Blanche smiling upon her husband with amiable reproach. "Always suspicious! We shall drink from the same cup like two lovers."

The officers of the King left upon a sign from the Queen. She remained alone with Louis.

CHAPTER V

THE FOUNDING OF A DYNASTY

Day was waning. Darkness began to invade the spacious apartment where seventy-five years before Francon, archbishop of Rouen, informed Charles the Simple that he was to give his daughter Ghisele together with the domains of Neustria to Rolf the Norman pirate, and where now King Louis and his wife Blanche had spent the day.

Louis the Do-nothing was asleep at full length upon his lounge near to the table that was still covered with the dishes and vases of gold and silver. The King's sleep was painful and restless. A cold sweat ran down his forehead that waxed livid by the second. Presently an overpowering torpor succeeded his restlessness, and Louis remained plunged in apparent calmness, although his features were rapidly becoming cadaverous. Standing behind the lounge with his elbows resting against its head, Yvon the Calf contemplated the King of the Franks with an expression of somber and savage triumph. Yvon had dropped his mask of stupidity. His features now revealed undisguised intelligence, hidden until then by the semblance of idiocy. The profoundest silence reigned in the apartment now darkened by the approach of night. Suddenly, emitting a deep groan, the King awoke with a start. Yvon stooped down and disappeared behind the lounge while the King muttered to himself: "There is a strange feeling upon me.... I felt so violent a pain in my heart that it woke me up...." then looking towards the window: "What! Is it night!... I must have slept long.... Where is the Queen?... Why was I left alone?... I feel heavy and my feet are cold.... Halloa, someone!" he called out turning his face to the door, "Halloa, Gondulf!... Wilfrid!... Sigefried!" At the third name that he pronounced, Louis' voice, at first loud, became almost unintelligible, it sunk to a husky whisper. He sat up. "What is the matter with me? My voice is so feeble that I can hardly hear myself. My throat seems to close ... then this icy feeling ... this cold that freezes my feet and is rising to my legs!" The King of the Franks had barely uttered these words when a shudder of fear ran through him. He saw before him Yvon the Calf who had suddenly risen and now stood erect behind the head of the lounge. "What are you doing there?" asked Louis, and he immediately added with a sinking voice: "Run quick for some one.... I am in danger....", but interrupting himself he observed: "Of what use is such an order; the wretch is an idiot.... Why am I left thus alone?... I shall rouse myself," and Louis rose painfully; but hardly had he put his feet down when his limbs gave way under him and he fell in a heap with a dull thud upon the floor. "Help! Help!... Oh, God, have pity upon me!... Help!"

"Louis, it is too late!" came from Yvon in a solemn voice. "You are about to die ... barely twenty years old, Oh, King of the Franks!"

"What says that idiot? What is the Calf doing here?"

"You are about to die as died last year your father Lothaire, poisoned by his wife! You have been poisoned by Queen Blanche!"

Fear drew a long cry from Louis; his hair stood on end over his icy forehead, his lips, now purple, moved convulsively without producing a sound; his eyes, fixed upon Yvon, became troubled and glassy, but still retaining a last glimmer of intelligence, while the rest of his body remained inert.

"This morning," said Yvon, "the Count of Paris, Hugh the Capet, met your wife by appointment in the forest. Hugh is a cunning and unscrupulous man. Last year he caused the poisoning of your father by Queen Imma and her accomplice the bishop of Laon; to-day he caused you to be poisoned by Blanche, your wife, and to-morrow the Count of Paris will be King!" Louis understood what Yvon was saying, although his mind was beclouded by the approach of death. A smile of hatred contracted his lips. "You believed yourself safe from danger," Yvon proceeded, "by compelling your wife to eat of the dishes that she served you. All poison has its antidote. Blanche could with impunity moisten her lips in the wine she had poisoned—" Louis seemed hardly to hear these last words of Yvon; his limbs stiffened, his head dropped and thumped against the floor; his eyes rolled for a last time in their depths; a slight froth gathered on his now blackened lips; he uttered a slight moan, and the last crowned scion of the Carolingian stock had passed away.

"Thus end the royal races! Thus, sooner or later, do they expiate their original crime!" thought Yvon contemplating the corpse of the last Carolingian king lying at his feet. "My ancestor Amæl, the descendant of Joel and of Genevieve, declined to be the jailor of little Childeric, in whom the stock of Clovis was extinguished, and now I witness the crime by which is extinguished, in the person of Louis the Do-nothing, the stock of Charles the Great—the second dynasty of the conquerors of Gaul. Perchance some descendant of my own will in the ages to come witness the punishment of this third dynasty of kings, now raised by Hugh the Capet through an act of cowardly perfidy!"

Steps were heard outside. Sigefried, one of the courtiers, entered the apartment saying to the King: "Seigneur, despite the express orders of the

Queen, who commanded us not to disturb your slumber, I come to announce to you the arrival of the Count of Paris."

So saying, Sigefried drew near, leaving the door open behind him. Yvon profited by the circumstance and groped his way out of the apartment under cover of the dark. Receiving no answer from Louis, Sigefried believed the King was still asleep, when, drawing still nearer he saw the King's body lying on the floor. He stooped and touched the icy hand. Struck with terror he ran to the door crying out: "Help!... Help!" and crossed the next room continuing to call for assistance. Several servitors soon appeared with torches in their hands, preceding Hugh the Capet, who now was clad in his brilliant armor and accompanied by several of his officers. "What?" cried the Count of Paris addressing Sigefried in an accent of surprise and alarm, "The King cannot be dead!"

"Oh, Sire, I found Louis on the floor where he must have dropped down from the lounge. I touched his hand. It was icy!" saying which Sigefried followed Hugh the Capet into the apartment that now was brilliantly lighted by the torches of the servants. The Count of Paris contemplated for an instant the corpse of the last Carolingian king, and cried in a tone of pity: "Oh! Dead! And only twenty years of age!" and turning towards Sigefried with his hands to his eyes as if seeking to conceal his tears: "How can we account for so sudden a death?"

"Seigneur, the King was in perfect health this morning. He sat down at table with the Queen; after that she left giving us orders not to disturb her husband's sleep; and—" Sigefried's report was interrupted by nearing lamentations, and Blanche ran in followed by several of her women. Her hair was tumbled, her looks distracted. "Is Louis really dead?" and upon the answer that she received she cried:

"Woe is me! Woe is me! I have lost my beloved husband! For pity's sake, seigneur Hugh, do not leave me alone! Oh, promise me to join your efforts to mine to discover the author of his death, if my Louis died by crime!"

"Oh, worthy spouse, I swear to God and his saints, I shall help you discover the criminal!" answered Hugh the Capet solemnly; and seeing Blanche tremble and stagger on her feet like one about to fall he cried: "Help! Blanche is swooning!" and he received in his arms the seemingly fainting body of Blanche who whispered in his ear: "I am a widow ... you are King!"

CHAPTER VI

YVON AND MARCELINE

Upon leaving the room where lay the corpse of Louis the Do-nothing, Yvon descended the stairs to the apartment of Adelaide, the lady of the Queen's chamber, and mistress of the golden-haired Marceline, whom he expected to find alone, Adelaide having followed the Queen when the latter ran to the King's apartment feigning despair at the death of her husband. Yvon found the young female serf at the threshold of the door in a state of great agitation at the tumult that had suddenly invaded the castle. "Marceline," Yvon said to her, "I must speak with you; let us step into your mistress's room. She will not leave the Queen for a long time. We shall not be interrupted. Come!" The young woman opened wide her eyes at seeing for the first time the Calf expressing himself in a sane manner, and his face now free of its wonted look of stupidity. In her astonishment, Marceline could not at first utter a word, and Yvon explained, smiling: "Marceline, my language astonishes you. The reason is, you see, I am no longer Yvon the Calf but ... Yvon who loves you! Yvon who adores Marceline!"

"Yvon who loves me!" cried the poor serf in fear. "Oh, God, this is some sorcery!"

"If so, Marceline, you are the sorceress. But, now, listen to me. When you will have heard me, you will answer me whether you are willing or not to have me for your husband." Yvon entered the room mechanically followed by Marceline. She thought herself in a dream; her eyes did not leave the Calf and found his face more and more comely. She remembered that, often struck by the affectionateness and intelligence that beamed from Yvon's eyes, she had asked herself how such looks could come from a young man who was devoid of reason.

"Marceline," he proceeded, "in order to put an end to your surprise, I must first speak to you of my family."

"Oh, speak, Yvon, speak! I feel so happy to see you speak like a sane person, and such language!"

"Well, then, my lovely Marceline, my great-grandfather, a skipper of Paris named Eidiol, had a son and two daughters. One of these, Jeanike, kidnapped at an early age from her parents, was sold for a serf to the superintendant of this domain, and later she became the wet-nurse of the

daughter of Charles the Simple, whose descendant, Louis the Do-nothing, has just died."

"Is the rumor really true? Is the King dead? So suddenly? It is strange!"

"Marceline, these kings could not die too soon. Well, then, Jeanike, the daughter of my great-grandfather had two children, Germain, a forester serf of this domain, and Yvonne, a charming girl, whom Guyrion the Plunger, son of my great-grandfather, took to wife. She went with him to Paris, where they settled down and where he plied his father's trade of skipper. Guyrion had from Yvonne a son named Leduecq ... and he was my father. My grandfather Guyrion remained in Paris as skipper. A woman named Anne the Sweet was assaulted by one of the officers of the Count of the city, and her husband, Rustic the Gay, a friend of my father, killed the officer. The soldiers ran to arms and the mariners rose at the call of Rustic and Guyrion, but both of them were killed together with Anne in the bloody fray that ensued. My grandfather being one of the leaders in the revolt, the little he owned was confiscated. Reduced to misery, his widow left Paris with her son and came to her brother Germain the forester for shelter. He shared his hut with Yvonne and her son. Such is the iniquity of the feudal law that those who dwell a year and a day upon royal or seigniorial domain become its serfs. Such was the fate of my grandfather's widow and her son Leduecq. She was put to work in the fields, Leduecq following the occupation of his uncle succeeded him as forester of the canton of the Fountain of the Hinds. Later he married a serf whose mother was a washerwoman of the castle. I was born of that marriage. My father, who was as gentle towards my mother and myself as he was rude and intractable towards all others, never ceased thinking of the death of my grandfather Guyrion, who was slaughtered by the soldiers of the Count of Paris. He never left the forest except to carry his tax of game to the castle. Of a somber and indomitable character, often switched for his insubordination towards the bailiff's agents, he would have taken a cruel revenge for the ill-treatment that he was subjected to were it not for the fear of leaving my mother and myself in want. She died about a year ago. My father survived her only a few months. When I lost him, I came by orders of the bailiff to live with my maternal aunt, a washerwoman at the castle of Compiègne. You now know my family."

"The good Martha! When you first came here she always said to me: 'It is no wonder that my grandson looks like a savage; he never left the forest.' But during the last days of her life your grandmother often said to me with tears in her eyes: 'The good God has willed it that Yvon be an idiot.' I thought as she did, and therefore had great pity for you. And yet, how mistaken I was."

You speak like a clerk. While you were just now speaking, I said to myself: 'Can it be?... Yvon the Calf, who talks that way? And he in love?'"

"And are you pleased to see your error dispelled? Do you reciprocate my feelings?"

"I do not know," answered the young serf blushing. "I am so taken by surprise by all that you have been telling me! I must have time to think."

"Marceline, will you marry me, yes or no? You are an orphan; you depend upon your mistress; I upon the bailiff; we are serfs of the same domain; can there be any reason why they should refuse their consent to our marriage?" And he added bitterly: "Does not the lambkin that is born increase its master's herd?"

"Alack! According to the laws our children are born and die serfs as ourselves! But would my mistress Adelaide give her consent to my marrying an idiot?"

"This is my project: Adelaide is a favorite and confidante of the Queen. Now, then this is a beautiful day for the Queen."

"What! The day when the King, her husband, died?"

"For that very reason. The Queen is to-day in high feather, and for a thousand reasons her confidante, your mistress, must feel no less happy than the widow of Louis the Do-nothing. To ask for a favor at such a moment is to have it granted."

"What favor would you ask?"

"If you consent to marry me, Marceline, you will need Adelaide's permission and we shall want her promise to have me appointed forester serf with the canton of the Fountain of the Hinds under my charge. Two words of your mistress to the Queen, two words of the Queen to the bailiff of the domain, and our wishes are fulfilled."

"But, Yvon, do you consider that everybody takes you for an idiot? And would they entrust you with a canton? It is out of the question."

"Let them give me a bow and arrows and I am ready to acquit myself as an archer. I have an accurate eye and steady hand."

"But how will you explain the sudden change that has turned you from an idiot to a sane man? People will want to know why you pretended to be an idiot. You will be severely punished for the ruse. Oh, my friend, all that makes me tremble."

"After I am married I shall tell you my reasons for my long comedy. As to my transformation from idiocy to sanity, that is to be the subject of a miracle. The thought struck me this morning while I followed your mistress and the Queen to the hermitage of St. Eusebius. Everything is explainable with the intervention of a saint."

"And why did you follow the Queen?"

"Having woke up this morning before dawn, I happened near the fosse of the castle. Hardly was the sun up when I saw at a distance your mistress and the Queen going all alone towards the forest. The mysterious promenade pricked my curiosity. I followed them at a distance across the copse. They arrived at the hermitage of St. Eusebius. Your mistress remained there, but the Queen took the path to the Fountain of the Hinds."

"What could she be up to at that early hour? My curiosity also is now pricked."

"That is another question that I shall satisfy you upon after we are married, Marceline," answered Yvon after a moment's reflection; "but to return to the miracle that is to explain my transformation from idiocy to sanity, it is quite simple: St. Eusebius, the patron of the hermitage, will be credited with having performed the prodigy, and the monk, who now derives a goodly revenue from the hermitage will not deny my explanation, seeing that the report of the new miracle will double his tithes. His whole fraternity speculate upon human stupidity."

The golden-haired Marceline smiled broadly at the young man's idea, and replied:

"Can it be Yvon the Calf that reasons thus?"

"No, my dear and sweet maid, it is Yvon the lover; Yvon on whom you took pity when he was everybody else's butt and victim; Yvon, who, in return for your good heart, offers you love and devotion. That is all a poor serf can promise, seeing that his labor and his life belong to his master. Accept my offer, Marceline, we shall be as happy as one can be in these accursed times. We shall cultivate the field that surrounds the forester's hut; I shall kill for the castle the game wanted there, and as sure as the good God has

created the stags for the hunt, we never shall want for a loin of venison. You will take charge of our vegetable garden. The streamlet of the Fountain of the Hinds flows but a hundred paces from our home. We shall live alone in the thick of the woods without other companions than the birds and our children. And now, again, is it 'yes' or 'no'? I want a quick answer."

"Oh, Yvon," answered Marceline, tears of joy running from her eyes, "if a serf could dispose of herself, I would say 'yes' ... aye, a hundred times, 'yes'!"

"My beloved, our happiness depends upon you. If you have the courage to request your mistress's permission to take me for your husband, you may be certain of her consent."

"Shall I ask Dame Adelaide this evening?"

"No, but to-morrow morning, after I shall have come back with my sanity. I am going on the spot to fetch it at the hermitage of St. Eusebius, and to-morrow I shall bring it to you nice and fresh from the holy place—and with the monk's consent, too."

"And people called him the 'Calf!'" murmured the young serf more and more charmed at the retorts of Yvon, who disappeared speedily, fearing he might be surprised by the Queen's lady of the chamber, Adelaide.

CHAPTER VII

THE STOCK OF JOEL

Yvon's calculations proved right. He had told Marceline that no more opportune time could be chosen to obtain a favor from the Queen, so happy was she at the death of Louis the Do-nothing and the expectation of marrying Hugh the Capet. Thanks to the good-will of Adelaide, who consented to the marriage of her maid, the bailiff of the domain also granted his consent to Yvon after the latter, agreeable to the promise he had made Marceline, returned with his sanity from the chapel of the hermitage of St. Eusebius. The serf's story was, that entering the chapel in the evening, he saw by the light of the lamp in the sanctuary a monstrous black snake coiled around the feet of the saint; that suddenly enlightened by a ray from on high, he stoned and killed the horrible dragon, which was nothing else than a demon, seeing that no trace of the monster was left; and that, in recompense for his timely assistance, St. Eusebius miraculously returned his reason to him. In glorification of the miracle that was thus performed by St. Eusebius in favor of the Calf, Yvon was at his own request appointed forester serf over the canton of the Fountain of the Hinds, and the very morning after his marriage to the golden-haired Marceline, he settled down with her in one of the profound solitudes of the forest of Compiègne, where they lived happily for many years.

As was to be expected, Marceline's curiosity, pricked on the double score of the reasons that led Yvon to simulate idiocy for so many years, and that took the Queen to the Fountain of the Hinds at the early hours of the morning of May 2nd, instead of dying out, grew intenser. Yvon had promised after marriage to satisfy her on both subjects. She was not slow to remind him of the promise, nor he to satisfy her.

"My dear wife," said Yvon to Marceline the first morning that they awoke in their new forest home, "What were the motives of my pretended idiocy?—I was brought up by my father in the hatred of kings. My grandfather Guyrion, slaughtered in a popular uprising, had taught my father to read and write, so that he might continue the chronicle of our family. He preserved the account left by his grandfather Eidiol, the dean of the skippers of Paris, together with an iron arrow-head, the emblem attached to the account. We do not know whatever became of the branch of our family that lived in Brittany near the sacred stones of Karnak. It has the previous chronicles and relics that our ancestors recorded and gathered from generation to generation since the days of Joel, at the time of the Roman invasion of Gaul by Julius Caesar. My grandfather and my father wrote

nothing on their obscure lives. But in the profound solitude where we lived, of an evening, after a day spent hunting or in the field, my father would narrate to me what my grandfather Guyrion had told him concerning the adventures of the descendants of Joel. Guyrion received these traditions from Eidiol, who received them from his grandfather, a resident of Brittany, before the separation of the grandchildren of Vortigern. I was barely eighteen years old when my father died. He made me promise him to record the experience of my life should I witness any important event. To that end he handed me the scroll of parchment written by Eidiol and the iron arrow-head taken from the wound of Paelo, the pirate. I carefully put these cherished mementos of the past in the pocket of my hose. That evening I closed my father's eyes. Early next morning I dug his grave near his hut and buried him. His bow, his arrows, a few articles of dress, his pallet, his trunk, his porridge-pot—everything was a fixture of and belonged to the royal domain. The serf can own nothing. Nevertheless I cogitated how to take possession of the bow, arrows and a bag of chestnuts that was left, determined to roam over the woods in freedom, when a singular accident upturned my projects. I had lain down upon the grass in the thick of a copse near our hut, when suddenly I heard the steps of two riders and saw that they were men of distinguished appearance. They were promenading in the forest. They alighted from their richly caparisoned horses, held them by the bridle, and walked slowly. One of them said to the other:

'King Lothaire was poisoned last year by his wife Imma and her lover, the archbishop of Laon ... but there is Louis left, Lothaire's son ... Louis the Do-nothing.'

'And if this Louis were to die, would his uncle, the Duke of Lorraine, to whom the crown would then revert by right, venture to dispute the crown of France from me ... from me, Hugh, the Count of Paris?'

'No, seigneur; he would not. But it is barely six months since Lothaire's death. It would require a singular chain of accidents for his son to follow him so closely to the tomb.'

'The ways of Providence are impenetrable.... Next spring, Louis will come with the Queen to Compiègne, and—'

"I could not hear the end of the conversation, the cavaliers were walking away from me as they spoke. The words that I caught gave me matter for reflection. I recalled some of the stories that my father told me, that of Amæl among others, one of our ancestors, who declined the office of jailor of the last scion of Clovis. I said to myself that perhaps I, a descendant of Joel,

might now witness the death of the last of the kings of the house of Charles the Great. The thought so took hold of me that it caused me to give up my first plan. Instead of roaming over the woods, I went the next morning to my grandmother. I had never before stepped out of the forest where I lived in complete seclusion with my father. I was taciturn by nature, and wild. Upon arriving at the castle in quest of my grandmother, I met by accident a company of Frankish soldiers who had been exercising. For pastime they began to make sport of me. My hatred of their race, coupled with my astonishment at finding myself for the first time in my life among such a big crowd, made me dumb. The soldiers took my savage silence for stupidity, and they cried in chorus: 'He is a calf!' Thus they carried me along with them amidst wild yells and jeers, and not a few blows bestowed upon me! I cared little whether I was taken for an idiot or not, and considering that nobody minds an idiot, I began in all earnest to play the rôle, hoping that, thanks to my seeming stupidity, I might succeed in penetrating into the castle without arousing suspicion. My poor grandmother believed me devoid of reason, the retainers at the castle, the courtiers, and later the King himself amused themselves with the imbecility of Yvon the Calf. And so one day, after having been an unseen witness to the interview of Hugh the Capet with Blanche near the Fountain of the Hinds, I saw the degenerate descendant of Charles the Great expire under my very eyes; I saw extinguished in Louis the Do-nothing the second royal dynasty of France."

Marceline followed Yvon closely with her hands in his, and kissed him, thinking the recital over.

"But I have a confession to make to you," Yvon resumed. "Profiting by the facility I enjoyed in entering the castle, I committed a theft.... I one day snatched away a roll of skins that had been prepared to write upon. Never having owned one denier, it would have been impossible for me to purchase so expensive an article as parchment. As to pens and fluid, the feathers that I pluck from eagles and crows, and the black juice of the trivet-berry will serve me to record the events of my life, the past and recent part of which is monumental, and whose next and approaching part promises to be no less so."

PART II

THE END OF THE WORLD

CHAPTER I

THE APOCALYPTIC FRENZY

Two months after the poisoning of Louis the Do-nothing in 987, Hugh the Capet, Count of Paris and Anjou, Duke of Isle-de-France, and Abbot of St. Martin of Tours and St. Germain-des-Pres, had himself proclaimed King by his bands of warriors, and was promptly consecrated by the Church. By his ascension to the throne, Hugh usurped the crown of Charles, Duke of Lorraine, the uncle of Blanche's deceased husband. Hugh's usurpation led to bloody civil strifes between the Duke of Lorraine and Hugh the Capet. The latter died in 996 leaving as his successor his son Rothbert, an imbecile and pious prince. Rothbert's long reign was disturbed by the furious feuds among the seigneurs; counts, dukes, abbots and bishops, entrenched in their fortified castles, desolated the country with their brigandage. Rothbert, Hugh's son, died in 1031 and was succeeded by his son Henry I. His advent to the throne was the signal for fresh civil strife, caused by his own brother, who was incited thereto by his mother. Another Rothbert, surnamed the Devil, Duke of Normandy, a descendant of old Rolf the pirate, took a hand in these strifes and made himself master of Gisors, Chaumont and Pontoise. It was under the reign of Hugh the Capet's grandson, Henry I, that the year 1033 arrived, and with it unheard-of, even incredible events—a spectacle without its equal until then—which was the culmination of the prevalent myth regarding the end of the world with the year 1000.

The Church had fixed the last day of the year 1000 as the final term for the world's existence. Thanks to the deception, the clergy came into possession of the property of a large number of seigneurs. During the last months of that year an immense saturnalia was on foot. The wildest passions, the most insensate, the drollest and the most atrocious acts seemed then unchained.

"The end of the world approaches!" exclaimed the clergy. "Did not St. John the Divine prophesy it in the Apocalypse saying: 'When the thousand years are expired, Satan will be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth; the book of life will be opened; the sea will give up the dead which were in it; death and hell will deliver up the dead which were in them; they will be judged every man according to his works; they will be judged by Him who is seated upon a brilliant throne, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth.'—

Tremble, ye peoples!" the clergy repeated everywhere, "the one thousand years, announced by St. John, will run out with the end of this year! Satan, the anti-Christ is to arrive! Tremble! The trumpet of the day of judgment is about to sound; the dead are about to arise from their tombs; in the midst of thunder and lightning, and surrounded by archangels carrying flaming swords, the Eternal is about to pass judgment upon us all! Tremble, ye mighty ones of the earth: in order to conjure away the implacable anger of the All-Mighty, give your goods to the Church! It is still time! It is still time! Give your goods and your treasures to the priests of the Lord! Give all you possess to the Church!"

The seigneurs, themselves no less brutified than their serfs by ignorance and by the fear of the devil, and hoping to be able to conjure away the vengeance of the Eternal, assigned to the clergy by means of authentic documents, executed in all the forms of terrestrial law, lands, houses, castles, serfs, their harems, their herds of cattle, their valuable plate, their rich armors, their pictures, their statues, their sumptuous robes.

Some of the shrewder ones said: "We have barely a year, a month, a week to live! We are full of youth, of desires, of ardor! Let us put the short period to profit! Let us stave-in our wine casks, let us indulge ourselves freely in wine and women!"

"The end of the world is approaching!" exclaimed with delirious joy millions of serfs of the domains of the King, of the lay and of the ecclesiastical seigneurs. "Our poor bodies, broken with toil, will at last take rest in the eternal night that is to emancipate us. A blessing on the end of the world! It is the end of our miseries and our sufferings!"

And those poor serfs, having nothing to spend and nothing to assign away, sought to anticipate the expected eternal repose. The larger number dropped their plows, their hoes and their spades so soon as autumn set in. "What is the use," said they, "of cultivating a field that, long before harvest time, will have been swallowed up in chaos?"

As a consequence of this universal panic, the last days of the year 999 presented a spectacle never before seen; it was even fabulous! Light-headed indulgence and groans; peals of laughter and lamentations; maudlin songs and death dirges. Here the shouts and the frantic dances of supposed last and supreme orgies; yonder the lamentations of pious canticles. And finally, floating above this vast mass of terror, rose the formidable popular curiosity to see the spectacle of the destruction of the world. It came at last, that day said to have been prophesied by St. John the Divine! The last hour arrived,

the last minute of that fated year of 999! "Tremble, ye sinners!" the warning redoubled; "tremble, ye peoples of the earth! the terrible moment foretold in the holy books is here!" One more second, one more instant, midnight sounds—and the year 1000 begins.

In the expectation of that fatal instant, the most hardened hearts, the souls most certain of salvation, the dullest and also the most rebellious minds experienced a sensation that never had and never will have a name in any language—

Midnight sounded!... The solemn hour.... Midnight!

The year 1000 began!

Oh, wonder and surprise!... The dead did not leave their tombs, the bowels of the earth did not open, the waters of the ocean remained within their basins, the stars of heaven were not hurled out of their orbits and were not striking against one another in space. Aye, there was not even a tame flash of lightning! No thunder rolled! No trace of the cloud of fire in the midst of which the Eternal was to appear. Jehovah remained invisible. Not one of the frightful prodigies foretold by St. John the Divine for midnight of the year 1000 was verified. The night was calm and serene; the moon and stars shone brilliantly in the azure sky, not a breath of wind agitated the tops of the trees, and the people, in the silence of their stupor, could hear the slightest ripple of the mountain streams gliding under the grass. Dawn came ... and day ... and the sun poured upon creation the torrents of its light! As to miracles, not a trace of any!

Impossible to describe the revulsion of feeling at the universal disappointment. It was an explosion of regret, of remorse, of astonishment, of recrimination and of rage. The devout people who believed themselves cheated out of a Paradise that they had paid for to the Church in advance with hard cash and other property; others, who had squandered their treasures, contemplated their ruin with trembling. The millions of serfs who had relied upon slumbering in the restfulness of an eternal night saw rising anew before their eyes the ghastly dawn of that long day of misery and sufferings, of which their birth was the morning and only their death the evening. It now began to be realized that, left uncultivated in the expectation of the end of the world, the land would not furnish sustenance to the people, and the horrors of famine were foreseen. A towering clamor rose against the clergy; the clergy, however, knew how to bring public opinion back to its side. It did so by a new and fraudulent set of prophecies.

"Oh, these wretched people of little faith," thus now ran the amended prophecy and invocation; "they dare to doubt the word of the All-powerful who spoke to them through the voice of His prophet! Oh, these wretched blind people, who close their eyes to divine light! The prophets have announced the end of time; the Holy Writ foretold that the day of the last judgment would come a thousand years after the Saviour of the world!... But although Christ was born a thousand years before the year 1000, he did not reveal himself as God until his death, that is thirty-two years after his birth. Accordingly it will be in the year 1032 that the end of time will come!"

Such was the general state of besottedness that many of the faithful blissfully accepted the new prediction. Several seigneurs, however, rushed at the "men of God" to take back by force the property they had bequeathed to them. The "men of God," however, well entrenched behind fortified walls, defended themselves stoutly against the dispossessed claimants. Hence a series of bloody wars between the scheming bishops, on the one hand, and the despoiled seigneurs, on the other, to which disasters were now superadded the religious massacres instigated by the clergy. The Church had urged Clovis centuries ago to the extermination of the then Arian heretics; now the Church preached the extermination of the Orleans Manichæans and the Jews. A conception of these abominable excesses may be gathered from the following passages in the account left by Raoul Glaber, a monk and eye-witness. He wrote:

"A short time after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in the year 1010, it was learned from unquestionable sources that the calamity had to be charged to the perverseness of Jews of all countries. When the secret leaked out throughout the world, the Christians decided with a common accord that they would expel all the Jews, down to the last, from their territories and towns. The Jews thereby became the objects of universal execration. Some were chased from the towns, others massacred with iron, or thrown into the rivers, or put to death in some other manner. This drove many to voluntary death. And thus, after the just vengeance wreaked upon them, there were but very few of them left in the Roman Catholic world."

Accordingly, the wretched Jews of Gaul were persecuted and slaughtered at the order of the clergy because the Saracens of Judea destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem! As to the Manichæans of Orleans, another passage from the same chronicle expresses itself in these words:

"In 1017, the King and all his loyal subjects, seeing the folly of these miserable heretics of Orleans, caused a large pyre to be lighted near the town, in the hope that fear, produced by the sight, would overcome their

stubbornness; but seeing that they persisted, thirteen of them were cast into the flames ... and all those that could not be convinced to abandon their perverse ways met the same fate, whereupon the venerable cult of the Catholic faith, having triumphed over the foolish presumption of its enemies, shone with all the greater luster on earth."

What with the wars that the ecclesiastical seigneurs plunged Gaul into in their efforts to retain possession of the property of the lay seigneurs whom they had despoiled by the jugglery of the "End of the World," and what with these religious persecutions, Gaul continued to be desolated down to the year 1033, the new term that had been fixed for the last day of judgment. The belief in the approaching dissolution of the world, which the clergy now again zealously preached, although not so universally entertained as that of the year 1000, was accompanied with results that were no less horrible. In 999, the expectation of the end of the world had put a stop to work; all the fields except those belonging to the ecclesiastical seigneurs, lay fallow. The formidable famine of the year 1000 was then the immediate result, and that was followed by a wide-spread mortality. Agriculture pined for laborers; every successive scarcity engendered an increased mortality; Gaul was being rapidly depopulated; famine set in almost in permanence during thirty years in succession, the more disastrous periods being those of the years 1003, 1008, 1010, 1014, 1027, 1029 and 1031; finally the famine of 1033 surpassed all previous ones in its murderous effects. The serfs, the villeins and the town plebs were almost alone the victims of the scourge. The little that they produced met the needs of their masters—the seigneurs, counts, dukes, bishops or abbots; the producers themselves, however, expired under the tortures of starvation. The corpses of the wretches who died of inanition strewed the fields, roads and highways; the decomposing bodies poisoned the air, engendered illnesses and even pestilential epidemics until then unknown; the population was decimated. Within thirty-three years, Gaul lost more than one-half its inhabitants—the new-born babies died vainly pressing their mother's breasts for nourishment.

CHAPTER II

YVON THE FORESTER'S HUT

Yvon—now no longer the Calf, but the Forester, since his appointment over the canton of the Fountain of the Hinds—and his family did not escape the scourge.

About five years before the famine of 1033, his beloved wife Marceline died. He still inhabited his hut, now shared with him by his son Den-Brao and the latter's wife Gervaise, together with their three children, of whom the eldest, Nominoe, was nine, the second, Julyan, seven, and the youngest, Jeannette, two years of age. Den-Brao, a serf like his father, was since his youth employed in a neighboring stone quarry. A natural taste for masonry developed itself in the lad. During his hours of leisure he loved to carve in certain not over hard stones the outlines of houses and cottages, the structure of which attracted the attention of the master mason of Compiègne. Observing Den-Brao's aptitude, the artisan taught him to hew stone, and soon confided to him the plans of buildings and the overseership in the construction of several fortified donjons that King Henry I ordered to be erected on the borders of his domains in Compiègne. Den-Brao, being of a mild and industrious disposition and resigned to servitude, had a passionate love for his trade. Often Yvon would say to him:

"My child, these redoubtable donjons, whose plans you are sketching and which you build with so much care, either serve now or will serve some day to oppress our people. The bones of our oppressed and martyred brothers will rot in these subterraneous cells reared above one another with such an infernal art!"

"Alack! You are right, father," Den-Brao would at such times answer, "but if not I, some others will build them ... my refusal to obey my master's orders would have no other consequence than to bring upon my head a beating, if not mutilation and even death."

Gervaise, Den-Brao's wife, an industrious housekeeper, adored her three children, all of whom, in turn, clung affectionately to Yvon.

The hut occupied by Yvon and his family lay in one of the most secluded parts of the forest. Until the year 1033, they had suffered less than other serf families from the devastations of the recurring famine. Occasionally Yvon brought down a stag or doe. The meat was smoked, and the provision thus laid by kept the family from want. With the beginning of the year 1033,

however, one of the epidemics that often afflict the beasts of the fields attacked the wild animals of the forest of Compiègne. They grew thin, lost their strength, and their flesh that speedily decomposed, dropped from their bones. In default of venison, the family was reduced towards the end of autumn to wild roots and dried berries. They also ate up the snakes that they caught and that, fattened, crawled into their holes for the winter. As hunger pressed, Yvon killed and ate his hunting dog that he had named Deber-Trud in memory of the war-dog of his ancestor Joel. Subsequently the family was thrown upon the juice of barks, and then upon the broth of dried leaves. But the nourishment of dead leaves soon became unbearable, and likewise did the sap-wood, or second rind of young trees, such as elders and aspen trees, which they beat to a pulp between stones, have to be given up. At the time of the two previous famines, some wretched people were said to have supported themselves with a kind of fattish clay. Not far from Yvon's hut was a vein of such clay. Towards the end of December, Yvon went out for some of it. It was a greenish earth of fine paste, soft but heavy, and of insipid taste. The family thought themselves saved. All its members devoured the first meal of the clay. But on the morrow their contracted stomachs refused the nourishment that was as heavy as lead.

CHAPTER III

ON THE BUCK'S TRACK

Thirty-six hours of fast had followed upon the meal of clay in Yvon's hut. Hunger gnawed again at the family's entrails.

During these thirty-six hours a heavy snow had fallen. Yvon went out. His family was starving within. He had death on his soul. He went towards the nets that he had spread in the hope of snaring some bird of passage during the snow storm. His expectations were deceived. A little distance from the nets lay the Fountain of the Hinds, now frozen hard. Snow covered its borders. Yvon perceived the imprint of a buck's feet. The size of the imprint on the snow announced the animal's bulk. Yvon estimated its weight by the cracks in the ice on the stream that it had just crossed, the ice being otherwise thick enough to support Yvon himself. This was the first time in many months that the forester had run across a buck's track. Could the animal, perhaps, have escaped the general mortality of its kind? Did it come from some distant forest? Yvon knew not, but he followed the fresh track with avidity. Yvon had with him his bow and arrows. To reach the animal, kill it and smoke its flesh meant the saving of the lives of his family, now on the verge of starvation. It meant their life for at least a month. Hope revived the forester's energies; he pursued the buck; the regular impress of its steps showed that the animal was quietly following one of the beaten paths of the forest; moreover its track lay so clearly upon the snow that he could not have crossed the stream more than an hour before, else the edges of the imprint that he left behind him would have been less sharp and would have been rounded by the temperature of the air. Following its tracks, Yvon confidently expected to catch sight of the buck within an hour and bring the animal down. In the ardor of the chase, the forester forgot his hunger. He had been on the march about an hour when suddenly in the midst of the profound silence that reigned in the forest, the wind brought a confused noise to his ears. It sounded like the distant bellowing of a stag. The circumstance was extraordinary. As a rule the beasts of the woods do not cry out except at night. Thinking he might have been mistaken, Yvon put his ear to the ground.... There was no more room for doubt. The buck was bellowing at about a thousand yards from where Yvon stood. Fortunately a turn of the path concealed the hunter from the game. These wild animals frequently turn back to see behind them and listen. Instead of following the path beyond the turning that concealed him, Yvon entered the copse expecting to make a short cut, head off the buck, whose gait was slow, hide behind the bushes that bordered the path, and shoot the animal when it hove in sight.

The sky was overcast; the wind was rising; with deep concern Yvon noticed several snow flakes floating down. Should the snow fall heavily before the buck was shot, the animal's tracks would be covered, and if opportunity failed to dart an arrow at it from the forester's ambushade, he could not then expect to be able to trace the buck any further. Yvon's fears proved correct. The wind soon changed into a howling storm surcharged with thick snow. The forester quitted the thicket and struck for the path beyond the turning and at about a hundred paces from the clearing. The buck was nowhere to be seen. The animal had probably caught wind of its pursuer and jumped for safety into the thicket that bordered the path. It was impossible to determine the direction that it had taken. Its tracks vanished under the falling snow, that lay in ever thicker layers.

A prey to insane rage, Yvon threw himself upon the ground and rolled in the snow uttering furious cries. His hunger, recently forgotten in the ardor of the hunt, tore at his entrails. He bit one of his arms and the pain thus felt recalled him to his senses. Almost delirious, he rose with the fixed intent of retracing the buck, killing the animal, spreading himself beside its carcass, devouring it raw, and not rising again so long as a shred of meat remained on its bones. At that moment, Yvon would have defended his prey with his knife against even his own son. Possessed by the fixed and delirious idea of retracing the buck, Yvon went hither and thither at hap-hazard, not knowing in what direction he walked. He beat about a long time, and night began to approach, when a strange incident came to his aid and dissipated his mental aberration.

CHAPTER IV

GREGORY THE HOLLOW-BELLIED

Driven by the gale, the snow continued to fall, when suddenly Yvon's nostrils were struck by the exhalations emitted by frying meat. The odor chimed in with the devouring appetite that was troubling his senses, and at least bestowed back upon him the instinct of seeking to satisfy his hunger. He stood still, whiffed the air hither and thither like a wolf that from afar scents carrion, and looked about in order to ascertain by the last glimmerings of the daylight where he was. Yvon was at the crossing of a path in the forest that led from the little village of Ormesson. The road ran before a tavern where travelers usually put up for the night. It was kept by a serf of the abbey of St. Maximim named Gregory, and surnamed the Hollow-bellied, because, according to him, nothing could satisfy his insatiable appetite. An otherwise kind-hearted and cheerful man, the serf often, before these distressful times, and when Yvon carried his tithe of game to the castle, had accommodatedly offered him a pot of hydromel. A prey now to the lashings of hunger and exasperated by the odor of fried meat which escaped from the tavern, Yvon carefully approached the closed door. In order to allow the smoke to escape, Gregory had thrown the window half open without fear of being seen. By the light of a large fire that burned in the hearth, Yvon saw Gregory seated on a stool placidly surveying the broiling of a large piece of meat whose odor had so violently assailed the nostrils of the famishing forester.

To Yvon's great surprise, the tavern-keeper's appearance had greatly changed. He was no longer the lean and wiry fellow of before. Now his girth was broad, his cheeks were full, wore a thick black beard and tinkled with the warm color of life and health. Within reach of the tavern-keeper lay a cutlass, a pike and an ax—all red with blood. At his feet an enormous mastiff picked a bone well covered with meat. The spectacle angered the forester. He and his family could have lived a whole day upon the remnants left by the dog; moreover, how did the tavern-keeper manage to procure so large a loin? Cattle had become so dear that only the seigneurs and the ecclesiastics could afford to purchase any; beef cost a hundred gold sous, sheep a hundred silver sous! A sense of hate rose in Yvon's breast against Gregory whom he had until then looked upon very much as a friend. The forester could not take his eyes from the meat, thinking of the joy of his family if he were to return home loaded with such a booty. For a moment Yvon was tempted to knock at the door of the serf and demand a share, at least the chunks thrown at the dog. But judging the tavern-keeper by himself, and noticing, moreover, that the former was well armed, he

reflected that in days like those bread and meat were more precious than gold and silver; to request Gregory the Hollow-bellied to yield a part of his supper was folly; he would surely refuse, and if force was attempted he would kill the intruder. These thoughts rapidly succeeded one another in Yvon's troubled brain. To add to his dilemma, his presence was scented by the mastiff who, at first, growled angrily without, however, dropping his bone, and then began to bark.

At that moment Gregory was removing the meat from the spit. "What's the matter, Fillot? Be brave, old boy! We shall defend our supper. You are furnished with good strong jaws and fangs, I with weapons. Fear not. No one will venture to enter. So be still, Fillot! Lie down and keep quiet!" But so far from lying down and keeping quiet, the mastiff dropped his bone, stood up, and approaching the window where Yvon stood, barked louder still. "Oh, oh!" remarked the tavern-keeper depositing the meat in a large wooden platter on the table. "Fillot drops a bone to bark ... there must be someone outside." Yvon stepped quickly back, and from the dark that concealed him he saw Gregory seize his pike, throw the window wide open and leaning out call with a threatening voice: "Who is there? If any one is in search of death, he can find it here." The deed almost running ahead of the thought, Yvon raised his bow, adjusted an arrow and, invisible to Gregory, thanks to the darkness without, took straight aim at the tavern-keeper's breast. The arrow whizzed; Gregory emitted a cry followed by a prolonged groan; his head and bust fell over the window-sill, and his pike dropped on the snow-covered ground. Yvon quickly seized the weapon. It was done none too soon. The furious mastiff leaped out of the window over his dead master's shoulders and made a bound at the forester. A thrust of the pike nailed the faithful brute to the ground. Yvon had committed the murder with the ferocity of a famished wolf. He appeased his hunger. The dizziness that had assailed his head vanished, his reason returned, and he found himself alone in the tavern with a still large piece of meat beside him,—more than half of the original chunk.

Feeling as if he just woke from a dream, Yvon looked around and felt frozen to the marrow. The light emitted by the hearth enabled him to see distinctly among the bloody remnants near where the mastiff had been gnawing his bone, a human hand and the trunk of a human arm. Horrified as he was, Yvon approached the bleeding members.

There was no doubt. Before him lay the remains of a human body. The surprising girth that Gregory the Hollow-bellied had suddenly developed came to his mind. The mystery was explained. Nourished by human flesh, the monster had been feeding on the travelers who stopped at his place. The

roast that had just been hungrily swallowed by Yvon proceeded from a recent murder. The forester's hair stood on end; he dare not look towards the table where still lay the remains of his cannibal supper. He wondered how his mouth did not reject the food. But that first and cultivated sense of horror being over, the forester could not but admit to himself that the meat he had just gulped down differed little from beef. The thought started a poignant reflection: "My son, his wife and children are at this very hour undergoing the tortures of hunger; mine has been satisfied by this food; however abominable it may be, I shall carry off the rest; the same as I was at first ignorant of what it was that I ate, my family shall not know the nature of the dish.... I shall at least have saved them for a day!" The reasoning matured into resolution.

As Yvon was about to quit the tavern with his load of human flesh, the gale that had been howling without and now found entrance through the window, violently threw open the door of a closet connecting with the room he was in. The odor of a charnel house immediately assailed the forester's nostrils. He ran to the hearth, picked up a flaming brand, and looked into the closet. Its naked walls were bespattered with blood; in a corner lay a heap of dried twigs and leaves used for kindling a fire and from beneath them protruded a foot and part of a leg. Yvon scattered the heap of kindling material with his feet ... they hid a recently mutilated corpse. The penetrating smell obviously escaped from a lower vault. Yvon noticed a trap door. Raising it, there rose so putrid an odor that he staggered back; but driven despite himself to carry his investigation to the end, he approached the flaming brand to the opening and discovered below a cavern that was almost filled with bones, heads and other human members, the bloody remnants of the travelers whom Gregory the Hollow-bellied had lived upon. In order to put an end to the horrible spectacle, Yvon hurled his flaming brand into the mortuary cellar; it was immediately extinguished; for a moment the forester remained in the dark; he then stepped back into the main room; and overcoming a fresh assault of human scruple, darted out with the remains of the roast in his bag, thinking only of his famishing family.

Without, the gale blew violently; its rage seemed to increase. The moon, then at its fullest, cast enough light, despite the whirls of snow, to guide Yvon's steps. He struck the road to the Fountain of the Hinds in haste, moving with firm though rapid strides. The infernal food he had just partaken of returned to him his pristine strength. About two leagues from his hut, he stopped, struck with a sudden thought. The mastiff he had killed was enormous, fleshy and fat. It could furnish his family with food for at least three or four days. Why had he forgotten to bring it along? Yvon turned back to the

tavern, long though the road was. As he approached the house of Gregory he noticed a great brilliancy from afar and across the falling snow. The light proceeded from the door and window of the tavern. Only two hours before when he left, the hearth was extinct and the place dark. Could someone have gone in afterwards and rekindled the fire? Yvon crept near the house hoping to carry off the dog without attracting notice, but voices reached him saying:

"Friends, let us wait till the dog is well roasted."

"I'm hungry! Devilish hungry!"

"So am I ... but I have more patience than you, who would have eaten the dainty raw.... Pheu! What a smell comes from that charnel room! And yet the door and window are open!"

"Never mind the smell!... I'm hungry!"

"So, then, Master Gregory the Hollow-bellied slaughtered the travelers to rob them, I suppose.... One of them must have been beforehand with him and killed him.... But the devil take the tavern-keeper! His dog is now roasted. Let's eat!"

"Let's eat!"

CHAPTER V

THE DELIRIUM OF STARVATION

Too old a man to think of contesting the spoils for which he had returned to Gregory's tavern, Yvon hurried back home and reached his hut towards midnight.

On entering, a torch of resinous wood, fastened near the wall by an iron ring, lighted a heart-rending spectacle. Stretched out near the hearth lay Den-Brao, his face covered by his mason's jacket; himself expiring of inanition, he wished to escape the sight of the agony of his family. His wife, Gervaise, so thin that the bones of her face could be counted, was on her knees near a straw pallet where Julyan lay in convulsions. Almost fainting, Gervaise struggled with her son who was alternately crying with fury and with pain and in the frenzy of starvation sought to apply its teeth to his own arms. Nominoe, the elder, lay flat on his face, on the pallet with his brother. He would have been taken for dead but for the tremor that from time to time ran over his frame still more emaciated than his brother's. Finally Jeannette, about three years old, murmured in her cradle with a dying voice: "Mother ... I am hungry.... I am hungry!"

At the sound of Yvon's steps, Gervaise turned her head: "Father!" said she in despair, "if you bring nothing with you, I shall kill my children to shorten their agony ... and then myself!"

Yvon threw down his bow and took his bag from his shoulders. Gervaise judged from its size and obvious weight that it was full. She wrenched it from Yvon's hands with savage impatience, thrust her hand in it, pulled out the chunk of roasted meat and raising it over her head to show it to the whole family cried out in a quivering voice: "Meat!... Oh, we shall not yet die! Den-Brao.... Children!... Meat!... Meat!" At these words Den-Brao sat up precipitately; Nominoe, too feeble to rise, turned on his pallet and stretched out his eager hands to his mother; little Jeannette eagerly looked up from her cradle; while Julyan, whom his mother was not now holding, neither heard nor saw aught but was biting into his arms in the delirium of starvation, unnoticed by either Yvon or any other member of the family. All eyes were fixed upon Gervaise, who running to a table and taking a knife sliced off the meat crying: "Meat!... Meat!"

"Give me!... Give me!" cried Den-Brao, stretching out his emaciated arms, and he devoured in an instant the piece that he received.

"You next, Jeannette!" said Gervaise, throwing a slice to the little girl who uttered a cry of joy, while her mother herself, yielding to the cravings of starvation bit off mouthfuls from the slice that she reached out to her oldest son, Nominoe, who, like the rest, pounced upon the prey, and fell to eating in silent voracity. "And now, you, Julian," continued Gervaise. The lad made no answer. His mother stooped down over him: "Julian, do not bite your arm! Here is meat, dear boy!" But his elder brother, Nominoe, having swallowed up his own slice, brusquely seized that which his mother was tendering to Julian. Seeing that the latter continued motionless, Gervaise insisted: "My child, take your arm from your teeth!" But hardly had she pronounced these words than, turning towards Yvon, she cried: "Come here, father.... His arm is icy and rigid ... so rigid that I cannot withdraw it from his jaws."

Yvon rushed to the pallet where Julian lay. The little boy had expired in the convulsion of hunger, although less unfeebled than his brother and sister. "Step aside," Yvon said to Gervaise; "step aside!" She realized that Julian was dead, obeyed Yvon's orders and went on to eat. But her hungerbeing appeased, she approached her son's corpse and sobbed aloud:

"My poor little Julian!" she lamented. "Oh, my dear child! You died of hunger!... A few minutes longer and you would have had something to eat like the others ... at least for to-day!"

"Where did you get this roast, father?" asked Den-Brao.

"I found the tracks of a buck," answered Yvon dropping his eyes; "I followed the animal but failed to come up to it. In that way I went as far as the tavern of Gregory the Hollow-bellied. He was at supper.... I shared his repast, and he gave me what you have just eaten."

"Such a gift! and in days of famine, father! in such days when only seigneurs and the clergy do not suffer of hunger!"

"I made the tavern-keeper sympathize with our distress," Yvon answered brusquely, and, in order to put an end to the subject he added: "I am worn out with fatigue; I must rest," saying which he walked into the contiguous room to stretch himself out on his couch, while his son and daughter remained on their knees near the body of little Julian. The other two children fell asleep, still saying they were hungry. After a long and troubled sleep, Yvon woke up. It was day. Gervaise and her husband still knelt near Julian. His brother and sister were saying: "Mother, give us something to eat; we are hungry!"

"Later, dear little ones," answered the unhappy woman to console them; "later you shall have something to eat."

Den-Brao raised his head and asked: "Where are you going, father?"

"I am going to dig the grave of my little grandson.... I wish to save you the sad task."

"Dig ours also, father," Den-Brao replied with a dejected mien. "We shall all die to-night. For a moment allayed, our hunger will rise more violent than last night ... dig a wide grave for us all."

"Despair not, my children. It has stopped snowing. I may be able to find again the traces of the buck."

Yvon picked up a spade with which to dig Julyan's grave near where the boy's great-grandfather, Leduecq, lay buried. Near the place was a heap of dead branches that had been gathered shortly before by the woodsmen serfs to turn into coal. After the grave was dug, Yvon left his spade near it and as the snow had ceased falling he started anew in pursuit of the buck. It was in vain. Nowhere were the animal's tracks to be seen. It grew night with the prospect of a long darkness, seeing the moon would not rise until late. Yvon was reminded by the pangs of hunger, that began to assail him, that in his hut the sufferings must have returned. A spectacle, even more distressing than that of the previous night now awaited him—the convulsive cries of starving children, the moaning of their mother, the woe-begone looks and dejection of his son who lay on the floor awaiting death, and reproaching Yvon for having prolonged his own and the sufferings of his family with their lives. Such was the prostration of these wretched beings that, without turning their heads to Yvon, or even addressing a single word to him, they let him carry out the corpse of the deceased child.

An hour later Yvon re-entered his hut. It was pitch dark; the hearth was cold. None had even the spirit to light a resin torch. Hollow and spasmodic rattlings were heard from the throats of those within. Suddenly Gervaise jumped up and groped her way in the dark towards Yvon crying: "I smell roast meat ... just as last night ... we shall not die!... Den-Brao, your father has brought some more meat!... Come, children, come for your share.... A light quick!"

"No, no! We want no light!" Yvon cried in a tremulous voice. "Take!" said he to Gervaise, who was tugging at the bag on his shoulders. "Take!... Divide this venison among yourselves, and eat in the dark!"

The wretched family devoured the meat in the dark; their hunger and feebleness did not allow them to ask what kind of meat it was. But Yvon fled from the hut almost crazed with horror. Abomination! His family was again feeding upon human flesh!

CHAPTER VI

THE FLIGHT TO ANJOU

Long, aimless, distracted, Yvon wandered about the forest. A severe frost had succeeded the fall of snow that covered every inch of the ground. The moon shone brilliantly in the crisp air. The forester felt chilled; in despair he threw himself down at the foot of a tree, determined there to await death.

The torpor of death by freezing was creeping upon the mind of the heart-broken serf when, suddenly, the crackling of branches that announce the passage of game fell upon his ears and revived him with the promise of life. The animal could not be more than fifty paces away. Unfortunately Yvon had left his bow and arrows in his hut. "It is the buck! Oh, this time I shall kill him!" he murmured to himself. His revived will-power now dominated the exhaustion of his forces, and it was strong enough to cause him to lose no time in vain regrets at not having his hunting arms with him, now when the prey would be certain. The crackling of the branches drew nearer. Yvon found himself under a clump of large and old oaks, a little distance away was the thick copse through which the animal was then passing. He rose up and planted himself motionless close to and along the trunk of the tree at the foot of which he had thrown himself down. Covered by the tree's thickness and the shadow that it threw, with his neck extended, his eyes and ears on the alert, the serf took his long forester's knife between his teeth and waited. After several minutes of mortal suspense—the buck might get the wind of him or come from cover beyond his reach—Yvon heard the animal approach, then stop an instant close behind the tree against which he had glued his back. The tree concealed Yvon from the eyes of the animal, but it also prevented him from seeing the prey that he breathlessly lay in wait for. Presently, six feet from Yvon and to the right, he saw plainly sketched upon the snow, that the light of the moon rendered brilliant, the shape of the buck and the wide antlers that crowned his head. Yvon stopped breathing and remained motionless so long as the shadow stood still. A moment later the shadow began to steal towards him, and with a prodigious bound Yvon rushed at and seized the animal by the horns. The buck was large and struggled vigorously; but clambering himself around the horns with his left arm, Yvon plunged his knife with his right hand into the animal's throat. The buck rolled over him and expired, while Yvon, with his mouth fastened to the wound, pumped up and swallowed the blood that flowed in a thick stream.

The warm and healthy blood strengthened and revived the serf.... He had not eaten since the previous night.

Yvon rested a few moments; he then bound the hind legs of the buck with a flexible twig and dragging his booty, not without considerable effort by reason of its weight, he arrived with it at his hut near the Fountain of the Hinds. His family was now for a long time protected from hunger. The buck could not yield less than three hundred pounds of meat, which carefully prepared and smoked after the fashion of foresters, could be preserved for many months.

Two days after these two fateful nights, Yvon learned from a woodsman serf, that one of his fellows, a forester of the woods of Compiègne like himself, having discovered the next morning the body of Gregory the Hollow-bellied pierced with an arrow that remained in the wound, and having identified the weapon as Yvon's by the peculiar manner in which it was feathered, had denounced him as the murderer. The bailiff of the domain of Compiègne detested Yvon. Although the latter's crime delivered the neighborhood of a monster who slaughtered the travelers in order to gorge himself upon them, the bailiff ordered his arrest. Thus notified in time, Yvon the Forester resolved to flee, leaving his son and family behind. But Den-Brao as well as his wife insisted upon accompanying him with their children.

The whole family decided to take the road and place their fate in the hands of Providence. The smoked buck's meat would suffice to sustain them through a long journey. They knew that whichever way they took, serfdom awaited them. It was a change of serfdom for serfdom; but they found consolation in the knowledge that the change from the horrors they had undergone could not but improve their misery. The famine, although general, was not, according to reports, equally severe everywhere.

The hut near the Fountain of the Hinds was, accordingly, abandoned. Den-Brao and his wife carried the little Jeannette by turns on their backs. The other child, Nominoë, being older, marched besides his grandfather. They reached and crossed the borders of the royal domain, and Yvon felt safe. A few days later the travelers learned from some pilgrims that Anjou suffered less of the famine than did any other region. Thither they directed their steps, induced thereto by the further consideration that Anjou bordered on Brittany, the cradle of the family. Yvon wished eventually to return thither in the hope of finding some of his relatives in Armorica.

The journey to Anjou was made during the first months of the year 1034 and across a thousand vicissitudes, almost always accompanied by some pilgrims, or by beggars and vagabonds. Everywhere on their passage the traces were met of the horrible famine and not much less horrible ravages

caused by the private feuds of the seigneurs. Little Jeannette perished on the road.

EPILOGUE.

The narrative of my father, Yvon the Forester, breaks off here. He could not finish it. He was soon after taken sick and died. Before expiring he made to me the following confession which he desired inserted in the family's annals:

"I have a horrible confession to make. Near by the grave to which I took the body of Julyan, lay a large heap of wood that was to be reduced to coal by the woodsmen. My family was starving in the hut. I saw no way of prolonging their existence. The thought then occurred to me: 'Last night the abominable food that I carried to my family from Gregory's human charnel house kept them from dying in the agonies of starvation. My grandson is dead. What should I do? Bury the body of little Julyan or have it serve to prolong the life of those who gave him life?'

"After long hesitating before such frightful alternatives, the thought of the agonies that my family were enduring decided me. I lighted the heap of dried wood. I laid upon it the flesh of my grandson, and by the light cast from the pyre I buried his bones, except a fragment of his skull, which I preserved as a sad and solemn relic of those accursed days, and on which I engraved these fateful words in the Gallic tongue: Fin-al-bred—The End of the World. I then took the broiled pieces of meat to my expiring family!... You all ate in the dark.... You knew not what you ate.... The ghastly meal saved your lives!"

My father then delivered to me the parchment that contained his narrative, accompanied with the lettered bone from the skull of my poor little Julyan, and also the iron arrow-head which accompanied the narrative left by our ancestor Eidiol, the skipper of Paris. Some day, perhaps, these two narratives may be joined to the chronicle of our family, no doubt held by those of our relatives who must still be living in Brittany.

My father Yvon died on the 9th of September, 1034.

This is how our journey ended: Following my father's wishes and also with the purpose of drawing near Brittany, we marched towards Anjou, where we arrived on the territory of the seigneur Guiscard, Count of the region and castle of Mont-Ferrier. All travelers who passed over his territory had to pay tribute to his toll-gatherers. Poor people, unable to pay, were, according to the whim of the seigneur's men, put through some disagreeable, or

humiliating, or ridiculous performance: they were either whipped, or made to walk on their hands, or to turn somersaults, or kiss the bolts of the toll-gatherer's gate. As to the women, they were subjected to revolting obscenities. Many other people as penniless as ourselves were thus subjected to indignity and brutality. Desirous of sparing my father and my wife the disgrace, I said to the bailiff of the seignior who happened to be there: "The castle I see yonder looks to me weak in many ways. I am a skillful mason; I have built a large number of fortified donjons; employ me and I shall work to the satisfaction of your seigneur. All I ask of you is not to allow my father, wife and children to be maltreated, and to furnish us with shelter and bread while the work lasts." The bailiff accepted my offer gladly, seeing that the mason, who was killed during the last war against the castle of Mont-Ferrier, had not yet been replaced, and besides I furnished ample evidence of knowing how to build. The bailiff assigned us to a hut where we were to receive a serf's pittance. My father was to cultivate a little garden attached to our hovel, while Nominoe, then old enough to be of assistance, was to help me at my work which would last until winter. We contemplated a journey to Brittany after that. We had lived here five months when, three days ago, I lost my father.

To-day the eleventh day of the month of June, of the year 1035, I, Den-Brao add this post-script to the above lines that I appended to my father's narrative. I have to record a sad event. The work on the castle of Mont-Ferrier not being concluded before the winter of 1034, the bailiff of the seigneur, shortly after my father's death proposed to me to resume work in the spring. I accepted. I love my trade. Moreover, my family felt less wretched here than in Compiègne, and I was not as anxious as my father to return to Brittany where, after all, there may be no member of our family left. I accepted the bailiff's offer, and continued to work upon the buildings, that are now completed. The last piece of work I did was to finish up a secret issue that leads outside of the castle. Yesterday the bailiff came to me and said: "One of the allies of the seigneur of Mont-Ferrier, who is just now on a visit at the castle, expressed great admiration for the work that you did, and as he is thinking of improving the fortifications of his own manor, he offered the count our master to exchange you for a serf who is a skillful armorer, and whom we need. The matter was settled between them."

"But I am not a serf of the seigneur of Mont-Ferrier," I interposed; "I agreed to work here of my own free will."

The bailiff shrugged his shoulders and replied: "The law says—every man who is not a Frank, and who lives a year and a day upon the land of a seigneur, becomes a serf and the property of the said seigneur, and as such

is subject to taille at will and mercy. You have lived here since the tenth day of June of the year 1034; we are now at the eleventh day of June of the year 1035; you have lived a year and a day on the land of the seigneur of Mont-Ferrier; you are now his serf; you belong to him, and he has the right to exchange you for a serf of the seigneur of Plouernel. Drop all thought of resisting our master's will. Should you kick up your heels, Neroweg IV, seigneur and count of Plouernel, will order you tied to the tail of his horse, and drag you in that way as far as his castle."

I would have resigned myself to my new condition without much grief, but for one circumstance. For forty years I lived a serf on the domain of Compiègne, and it mattered little to me whether I exercised my trade of masonry in one seigniory or another. But I remember that my father told me that he had it from his grandfather Guyrion how an old family of the name of Neroweg, established in Gaul since the conquest of Clovis, had ever been fatal to our own. I felt a sort of terror at the thought of finding myself the serf of a descendant of the Terrible Eagle—that first of the Nerowegs that crossed our path.

May heaven ordain it so that my forebodings prove unfounded! May heaven ordain, my dear son Nominoe, that you shall not have to register on this parchment aught but the date of my death and these few words:

"My father Den-Brao ended peaceably his industrious life of a mason serf."

THE END