THE IRON ARROW HEAD OR THE BUCKLER MAIDEN

BY

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THE IRON ARROW HEAD

CHAPTER I

ROTHBERT, COUNT OF PARIS

The house of Master Eidiol, the dean of the Skippers' or Mariners' Guild of Paris, was situated not far from the port of St. Landry and of the ramparts of that part of the town that is known as the Cité, which is bathed by the two branches of the Seine, and is flanked with towers at the entrance of the large and the small bridge, its only means of access from the suburban portions of the larger Paris. No one could cross the bridge without paying toll to the bishop, the ecclesiastical feudal lord of the Cité. Like all other houses of the common people, Master Eidiol's was constructed of wooden slats held together by means of cross-beams; it was only two storeys high, and was roofed with thatch. Only the basilicas, the rich abbeys of St. Germain-des-Prés, of St. Germain-d'Auxerre and others, as also the residences of the counts, the viscounts and the bishops of Paris were built of stone and covered with lead, not infrequently with gilded roofings. In the upper storey of Master Eidiol's house, Martha, his wife, was engaged on some needlework, seated near her daughter Anne the Sweet, who was busy spinning. Agreeable to a new-fangled style of the time which, started by the royal families and their grandees, descended to the common towns-people, Eidiol had given a surname to his children. He called his daughter Anne, "the Sweet," for there was nothing in the world milder or sweeter than this child, whose nature was as angelic as her face. His son Guyrion, Eidiol surnamed "the Plunger", because the daring lad, a skipper like his father, was one of the most skilful divers that ever cut across the swift waters of the Seine. Anne the Sweet spun her hemp at the side of her mother, a good old woman of more than sixty years, delicate in appearance, clad in black, and wearing a number of relics around her neck. Pointing to the cheerful rays of the May sun that entered through the little lead-bordered glass squares of the narrow window of her chamber, Martha observed to her daughter:

"What a beautiful spring day. We may perhaps see to-day Father Fultrade, the worthy leader of the choir at St. Denis, out taking a ride on his fine horse."

"By this beautiful May day, I would prefer to go on foot! Do you remember, mother, how Rustic the Gay wagered with my brother a tame quail that he would walk two leagues in an hour? And how he won the wager, and gave me the quail?"

"How foolish you are! Do you imagine that so distinguished a personage as the leader of the choir at St. Denis could afford to walk two leagues and more, like other common people?"

"But Father Fultrade is still young enough, big enough, and robust enough to walk any such distance. Rustic the Gay would do it in a little more than half an hour."

"Rustic is not Father Fultrade! What a holy man! It is from him I have all these sacred relics that I wear. He gave them to me when he lived in this town as the priest of the Church of Notre Dame, and great favorite with Seigneur Rothbert, the Count of the City of Paris. Alas! Without these sacred relics I would certainly have died of that violent cough, which has not yet quite left me."

"Poor mother, that cough does not cease to cause uneasiness to my father, my brother and myself. And yet you might now be wholly healed of it if you would only consent to try the remedy that has been so highly recommended to us."

"What remedy?"

"The one that the skippers of the port use. They put some tar in a bowl of water, boil it, and drink it down warm. Rustic the Gay has told us of the wonderful cures that he knows the potions to have effected."

"You are always talking about Rustic the Gay."

"I?" ingenuously answered the young girl, turning her candid face toward her mother and without betraying the slightest embarrassment. "If I frequently talk to you about him it is unintentional."

"I believe you, my child. But how can you expect that any human medicine could cure me completely, when my distemper resists the relics? You might as well try to make me believe that any human power could return to me the dear little girl, who, alas! disappeared from our side ten years before the birth of your brother. Let us bow before the will of God!"

"Poor little sister! I weep over her absence, although I have never known her."

"My poor little daughter could have taken my place near you. She would now be old enough to be your mother."

A loud noise, interspersed with cries and proceeding from the street, interrupted at this point the conversation between Martha and her daughter.

"Oh! Mother," exclaimed Anne with a shudder, "it may be another penitent whom the mob is falling upon with insults and blows! Only yesterday, an unfortunate fellow whom they were pursuing in that way remained bleeding and half dead upon the street. His clothes were in shreds and his flesh not much better."

"That's right!" answered Martha with a nod of her head. "It was just! I like to see these penitents thoroughly punished. If they are penitents it is because they have been convicted of impiousness, or of lack of faith. I can not pity impious people."

"But, mother, is not the penance that the church imposes upon them in expiation of their sins severe enough? They must walk bare-footed, with irons to their limbs, for two or three years, often longer, dressed in sack-cloth, their heads covered with ashes, and they are compelled to beg their bread, seeing that the sentence forbids them to work."

"My child, these penitents, upon whom the mobs love to shower blows, should bless each wound that they receive. Each wound brings them nearer to salvation. But hark! The noise and the tumult increase. Open the window. Let us see what is going on in the street."

Anne and her mother rose and hastened to the narrow window, through which Martha quickly put her head, while her daughter, leaning on her shoulder, hesitated to look out. Happily for the tender-hearted child it was not one of those savage hunts in which the good Christians took delight against the penitents whom they regarded as unclean animals. The narrow street, bordered with thatched wooden houses, like the one of Eidiol, offered but a strait passage. A severe rainfall on the previous day had so soaked the earth that a heavy wagon, driven by two teams of oxen and loaded high with lumber, sank into the mud up to the hub of one of the wheels. Too heavy to be pulled out of the deep mud, the outfit completely blocked the passage, and stood in the way of several knights, who were riding from the opposite direction, with Rothbert, the Count of Paris and Duke of France, and brother of Eudes, who had himself proclaimed King, in prejudice of Charles the Simple, the weak descendant of Charles the Great, who now, in the year 912, reigned over France. Escorted by five or six knights Rothbert found his way blocked by the wagon which, despite all that its driver could do, remained motionless where it had stuck fast. The count, a man of haughty

and flinty countenance, always armed with casque and cuirass, together with iron leggings, thigh-pieces and gloves, as if marching to war, now rode a black horse. He hurled imprecations upon the wagon, the teams of oxen and the poor serf who drove them, and who, frightened by the threats of the seigneur, hid himself under the wagon. More and more enraged at the obstacle in his path, the Count of Paris called out to one of his men:

"Prick the vile slave with the point of your lance and force him to crawl out from under the wagon. Prick him in the chest; prick him in the head. Prick hard!"

The knight alighted with his lance, and stooping to the ground sought to reach the serf, who, bent down upon his hands and knees, jumped back and to the sides in order to escape the point of the lance. The Frank grew nettled, began to blaspheme and was angrily prodding with his lance under the wagon, when unexpectedly he felt a severe blow dealt to his weapon and immediately saw a hook fastened to a long pole swung under the wagon, while a firm and sonorous voice cried to him:

"If the knights of the count have their lances, the skippers of Paris have their iron hooks!"

At the sight of the sharp iron and the sound of the threatening words, the knight leaped back, while Count Rothbert cried out, pale with rage:

"Where is the villain who dares to threaten one of my men?"

The hook disappeared immediately, and a moment later a tall lad of manly countenance, wearing a cloth coat and the wide breeches of the skippers of the port, jumped with one bound on top of the lumber with which the wagon was loaded, stood up boldly, holding in his hand the long iron-tipped pole with which he had defended the teamster against the knight, and challenged the question of the count:

"He who prevented a poor serf from being struck through with lance thrusts is I! My name is Guyrion the Plunger. I am a skipper of Paris. I fear neither you nor your men!"

"My brother!" screamed the tender Anne, affrighted and leaning out of the window; "for the love of God, Guyrion, do not defy the knights!"

The impetuous young man, however, taking no notice of the fears of his sister and mother, continued to defy the count's men from the height of the wagon, while brandishing his redoubtable weapon:

"Who wishes to try the assault?" and half turning toward the horror-stricken serf who had crouched behind the wagon, "Save yourself, poor man; your master will come himself and reclaim his oxen."

The slave promptly took the wise advice and disappeared. The Count of Paris, on the other hand, ever more enraged, shook his iron gauntleted fist at Guyrion the Plunger, and yelled furiously at his men:

"Do you allow yourselves to be insulted by that vile scamp? Alight, all of you, and seize the river crawfish!"

"Crawfish, no! Scorpion, yes! And here is my dart!" answered Guyrion, brandishing in his powerful hand the redoubtable hook, which, deftly handled, became so terrible a weapon that the count's knights, looking from the corners of their eyes at the rapid gyrations of the nautical implement, descended from their horses with cautious slowness. Leaning heavily out of the window, Martha and her daughter were imploring Guyrion to desist from the dangerous contest, when suddenly a new personage, grey of hair and beard, and likewise dressed in the garb of a skipper, climbed upon the wagon behind the bold youth, and placing his hand on Guyrion's shoulder, said to him deliberately:

"My son, do not expose yourself to the anger of these soldiers."

Guyrion turned around surprised at the presence of his father. The latter, however, bade him with a sign of authority to keep silent, and lowering the hook with which the young skipper was armed, the old man addressed the Count of Paris:

"Rothbert, I arrived only this moment from the port of St Landry, and have just learned what has happened. My son has yielded to the impetuosity of his age; he is wrong. But your men also were wrong in trying to wound an inoffensive serf with their lances. All of us here, myself, my son and our neighbors will put our shoulders to the wheels of this wagon and push it out of the rut in which it is fast. We shall make room for you to pass. That should have been done from the first;" and turning to his son, who obeyed him unwillingly, "come, Guyrion," said he, "step down from the wagon! Step down!"

The sensible words of the old skipper did not seem to allay the rage of the Count of Paris. The latter continued to speak in angry tones and in a low voice to his men, while, thanks to the efforts of Eidiol, Guyrion and several of their neighbors, the wheel was raised from the deep rut into which it had

sunk, and the wagon was finally drawn to one side of the street. The passage was now open to Rothbert and his knights. But while one of them held the bridles of his companions' horses, the others, instead of remounting, rushed upon Eidiol and his son. Both, taken by surprise, and before their neighbors could bring them help, were speedily overpowered, thrown to the ground, and to the utter dismay of Martha and Anne, were held prisoners by the count's men. Upon beholding the old skipper and his son thus maltreated, the two women left their window precipitately, and rushing out of the house threw themselves at the feet of Rothbert, imploring his mercy for the two prisoners. Eidiol saw the action of his wife and daughter, and frowning with indignation, cried out to them:

"Rise to your feet, my wife! Rise to your feet, my daughter! Go back into the house!"

Not daring to disobey the aged man, both Martha and Anne rose and returned sobbing into the house.

"Rothbert," resumed Eidiol, when his wife and daughter had re-entered the house, "you have no right to hold us prisoners. Thanks to God, we are not left to the utter mercy of our masters, like the serfs of the field. We enjoy certain franchises in the city. If we are guilty, we must, as skippers, be tried before the bourgeois Court of the water merchants."

"The officer whose duty it is to lop off the ears of bandits of your kind at the cross of Trahoir, will furnish you with a practical proof of my right to un-ear you," was the sententious answer made to Eidiol by the count as he remounted his horse. "Back into the saddle," the count ordered his men. "Two of you shall follow me; the others will take the two prisoners to the jail of the Chatelet; my provost will pass sentence upon them; and to-morrow—to the gallows! They shall both be hanged high and short."

"Seigneur count," broke in a man, who stepped forward out of the crowd that had in the meanwhile been gathering in the narrow thoroughfare, "Seigneur count, I am the sergeant of the Bishop of Paris."

"I see as much by your garb; what is it you want?"

"The jurisdiction of the left side of this street belongs to my seigneur, the bishop. I claim the prisoners. This crowd will lend me their physical assistance, if need be, to take the prisoners to the bishop's court, where they will be judged by our own provost, as is our right."

"If the left side of the street belongs to the jurisdiction of the bishop, the right is under my authority," cried the Count of Paris. "I shall keep the prisoners, and shall bring them before my own court."

"Seigneur, that would be your right if the crime had been committed on the side of the street that is subject to your fief—"

"The two scamps," Rothbert went on to say, interrupting the sergeant, "were on top of a wagon that obstructed the street in its whole breadth. There can be no question of right side or left."

"In that case, seigneur count, the culprits belong to the bishop as well as to yourself."

"And I," rejoined Eidiol, "claim that only the bourgeois court has jurisdiction over us."

"I care a fig for the bourgeois court, and not a whit more for the bishop's court!" cried the count. "The prisoners are mine! Make room there, canaille!"

Both the sergeant and Eidiol were about to reiterate and insist upon their respective rights, when a new personage, before whom the crowd fell devoutly upon their knees, stepped upon the scene.

CHAPTER II

FATHER FULTRADE

The personage whose bare appearance had imposed silence upon the crowd was no sooner discovered by the bishop's sergeant than the latter cried out to him:

"Good Father Fultrade, come to my assistance! You will be better able than myself to convince the seigneur count of the bishop's priority of right over these prisoners."

Father Fultrade, the leader of the choir at St. Denis, whom the sergeant addressed, was an able-bodied monk of not more than thirty years of age. He was riding slowly up the street, distributing from his high perch benedictions to the right and left with a hand hirsute up to the nails. The monk had the frame of a Hercules, a rubicund face, scarlet ears, and, despite the ordinances of the councils that commended the clergy to be clean shaven, wore a long beard, that was as black as his thick eyebrows and that reached down to his robust chest. Having heard the appeal of the bishop's sergeant and also recognizing the Count of Paris on horseback, Father Fultrade alighted from his own mount, confided the reins to a young boy who bowed down devoutly before him, and pushed his way quickly toward Rothbert through the crowd that was rapidly swelling in numbers and growing more and more excited. Some were loudly taking sides with the judicial claims advanced by the bishop's sergeant, others with those of the skippers, while a small minority sustained the pretensions of the count. The count realized the situation that he was in. Aware that, different from the serfs of the fields, whom nothing protected against the oppression of the seigneurs, the dwellers in the cities, however miserable their plight might be, at least enjoyed some few franchises which it was often prudent to respect; anxious, moreover, to gain the support of the monk to his side, Rothbert controlled his choler and cordially addressed the latter:

"You are welcome, Fultrade! You are a learned man. You will certainly agree with me in the matter of these two scamps. Think of it, they had the audacity to insult me. And now they demand to be tried by the bourgeois court, while the bishop's sergeant claims them as his prisoners. I maintain that they fall under the jurisdiction of my own provost."

The monk looked at the prisoners, recognized Eidiol and his son, gave them an affectionate greeting with his eyes and turned to Rothbert:

"Seigneur count, there is a way of conciliating all interested. You are the offended party, be charitable; set the prisoners at liberty. Do not deny my prayer," the monk hastened to add in answer to a gesture of impatience from the count. "When I was the priest of Notre Dame, you often tendered me your good offices. Grant grace to these two men for my sake. I have known them long. I can vouch for their repentance. Mercy and pity for them!"

"Fultrade!" impetuously broke out Guyrion the Plunger, little pleased at the intercession of the monk, "say nothing about my repentance! No, I do not repent! If I only had my hands free, I would thrust my hook into the bellies of these cowards, who require three of them to hold one man!"

"You hear the wretch!" said the count to the monk.

"Rothbert," resumed Eidiol, making a sign to his son to keep quiet, "youth is hot-headed and deserves indulgence. But I, whose beard is white, demand of you, not mercy, but justice. Order us taken to the bourgeois court!"

"Noble count," Fultrade whispered to Rothbert, "do not irritate this rabble; we may need it any time; are we not in the spring of the year?" And lowering his voice still more he added: "Is it not at this season of the year that the Northman pirates are in the habit of ascending the river as far as Paris? If the rabble is irritated, instead of repelling the invader, it will lie low, and then we, the churchmen and the seigneurs, will be obliged to pay whatever ransom those pagans may choose to exact."

The monk's words seemed to have some effect upon the Count of Paris. He reflected for a moment, but soon again recovered from the apprehensions that the chanter had awakened, and remarked:

"Nothing indicates a fresh descent of the Northmans. Their vessels have not been signalled this year at the mouth of the Seine."

"Do not these accursed pirates swoop down upon us with the suddenness of a tempest? Out of prudence and out of policy, count, show yourself merciful towards these two men."

Rothbert still hesitated to accept the clergyman's proposition, which wounded his pride, when his eyes accidentally fell upon the house of Eidiol, at the entrance of which Martha and Anne the Sweet stood weeping and trembling. Suddenly recollecting that the two women had only shortly before interceded for the culprits, and noticing now for the first time the angelic

beauty of the old skipper's daughter, the count smiled sarcastically at the monk and said to him:

"By all the saints! What a fool I was! The girl explains to me the motive of your charity towards the two scamps."

"What does the motive of charity matter?" answered the chanter, exchanging smiles with the seigneur.

"Very well, be it so!" finally said Rothbert, who had in the meantime again alighted. He beckoned one of his men to lead his horse back to him, and while remounting observed to the chanter:

"It is not to any apprehension on the score of the Northmans that I yield. In granting to you grace for these two scamps, I am only guided by the desire to render you agreeable to your mistress, a dainty strawberry to be plucked."

"Noble seigneur, the girl is my spiritual daughter. Honni soit qui mal y pense."

"Tell that to others, you expert catcher of young birds in their nests," replied Rothbert, swinging himself into his saddle; and raising his voice he proceeded, addressing his men who held Eidiol and Guyrion, "Let the fellows go; but if they ever dare to cross my path, I shall want you to break the shafts of your lances upon their backs."

The Count of Paris, before whom the crowd parted, departed at a gallop. A few words whispered in the ear of the bishop's sergeant caused this dignitary also to renounce his purpose of lodging a complaint against Eidiol and Guyrion and his renunciation was obtained all the more quickly seeing that the count, the aggrieved party, had pardoned the offence. The crowd dispersed. The old skipper, accompanied by his son, re-entered his house, whither Fultrade preceded him with a solemn and patronizing air.

The instant the monk stepped into the house, Martha threw herself at his feet, with tears in her eyes, exclaiming:

"Thanks be to you, my holy father in God! You have delivered back to me my husband and my son!"

"Rise, good woman," answered Fultrade, "I have only obeyed Christian charity. Your son has been very imprudent. Let him be wiser hereafter." Saying this the monk moved towards the wooden staircase that led to the

upper rooms, and said to Eidiol's wife: "Martha, let us go upstairs with your daughter, I want to speak to you both on holy matters."

"Fultrade," said the old skipper, who, no less than his son, seemed to dislike the sight of the monk in his house, "I had justice on my side in this dispute with the count; nevertheless, I thank you for your good intentions. But, my good wife, before turning your thoughts to holy matters, you will be kind enough to let my son and myself have a pot of beer and a piece of bread and bacon for immediate consumption. Then I wish you to prepare some provisions for us, because within an hour we have to sail down to the lower Seine, where we shall remain until to-morrow evening."

While he was making the announcement of his speedy departure, Eidiol observed, without however taking any particular notice of the circumstance, that the monk, otherwise impassible, seemed slightly to thrill with joy. The old man's attention was immediately drawn away from Fultrade by his daughter's caresses.

"What, father!" exclaimed Anne the Sweet, with a sad look and throwing her arms around her father's neck, "Are you to leave us so soon, and with my brother, too? Do you really expect to remain a whole day out of the house?"

"We have a cargo to take to the little port of St. Audoin," answered Eidiol. "Do not feel alarmed, my dear child, we shall surely be back to-morrow." And again addressing his wife, "Come, Martha, let us have something to eat, fetch us a pot of beer and get the provisions ready. We have not much time left."

"Could you not wait a little while, my friend—good Father Fultrade wishes to speak to me and Anne upon some sacred matters?"

"Well, then, let my daughter stay with me," answered the old skipper with some impatience. "She will be able to attend to us."

The monk made a sign to Martha to accept her husband's proposition, and she followed the holy man into the upper chamber where the two remained alone.

"Martha," the monk hastened to say the instant the two were seated, "I have but a few minutes to spend here. The fervent piety of yourself and your daughter deserves a reward. The treasures of the Abbey of St. Denis have just received from our holy father in Rome a relic of inestimable value—a lock from the hair of our Lord Jesus Christ, cut by a lad at the wedding feast of Cana."

"Good God! What a divine treasure!"

"Doubly divine! The faithful, lucky enough to be able to touch this matchless relic, will not be only temporarily relieved of their ailments, they will be forever healed of all sorts of fevers."

"Healed forever!" exclaimed Martha, clasping her hands in ecstatic wonderment. "Healed forever of all sorts of dangerous fevers!"

"Besides, thanks to the doubly miraculous virtue of the relic, even those who have always enjoyed health, are preserved from all future sicknesses."

"Oh, good father! What an immense concourse of people will not immediately crowd to your abbey, in order to profit by such miraculous blessings."

"It is for that reason that, in reward to your piety, I wish that you and your daughter be the first to approach the treasure. The seigneurs and the grandees will come only after you. I have reserved the first admission for you two."

"For the like of us, poor women!"

"'The last shall be the first, and the first shall be the last'—so hath our Redeemer said. A magnificent case is being prepared for the relic. It is not to be offered to the adoration of the faithful until the goldsmith's work is ready. But I mean to introduce you two secretly, you and your daughter, this very evening, into the oratory of the Abbot of St. Denis, where the relic has been temporarily deposited."

"Oh! How bounden I shall be to you! I shall be forever healed of my fevers, and my daughter will never be ill! And do you think that this miraculous relic, this lock of hair, may be powerful enough to enable me to find again my little daughter, my little girl, who, when still a child, disappeared from this place, about thirty years ago?"

"Nothing is impossible to faith. But in order to enjoy the blessings of the relic, you will have to make haste. I accompanied our abbot to St. Germain-d'Auxerre. He will remain there only until to-morrow. It will, accordingly, be imperative for you and your daughter to come with me to St. Denis this very evening. Towards nightfall I shall wait for you near the tower of the Little Bridge. You will both ride at the crupper of my horse; we shall depart for the abbey; I shall introduce you two into the oratory of the abbot, where you will make your devotions, and then, after you have spent the night in the house of one of our female serfs you can both return to Paris in the morning."

"Oh, holy father in Christ! How impenetrable are the designs of Providence! My husband, who has not the faith in relics that we have, would surely have opposed our pious pilgrimage. But this very night he will be absent!"

"Martha, neither your husband nor your son are on the road to their salvation. You must redouble your own piety to the end that you may be more surely able to intercede for them with the Lord. I forbid you to mention our pilgrimage either to Eidiol or your son."

"I shall obey you, good father. Is it not to the end of living longer at their side that I wish to go and adore that incomparable relic?"

"It is then agreed. Towards nightfall, you and your daughter will wait for me on the other side of the Little Bridge. Understood?"

"Myself and Anne will wait for you, holy father, well muffled in our capes."

Fultrade left the room, descended the staircase with meek gravity, and before leaving the house said to the old skipper, while affecting not to look at Anne the Sweet:

"May the Lord prosper your voyage, Eidiol."

"Thanks for the good wish, Fultrade," answered Eidiol, "but my voyage could not choose but be favorable. We are to descend the Seine; the current carries us; my vessel hasbeen freshly scraped; my ash-tree oars are new, my sailors are young and vigorous, and I am an old pilot myself."

"All that is nothing without the will of the Lord," answered the monk with a look of severity, while following with lustful side glances the movements of Anne, who was ascending the stairs to fetch from the upper chambers the great coats which her father and brother wished to take along for use during the night on the water. "No!" continued Fultrade, "without the will of the Lord, no voyage can be favorable; God wills all things."

"By the wine of Argenteuil, which you sold to us at such dear prices in the church of Notre Dame, when we used to go there and play dice, Father Fultrade, how like a sage you are now talking!" cried Rustic the Gay, whose name well fitted his looks. The worthy lad, having learned at the Port of St. Landry about the arrest of the dean of the Skippers' or Mariners' Guild of Paris, had hastened to the spot, greatly alarmed about Martha and her daughter, to whom he came to offer his services. "Oh, Father Fultrade!" the young and merry fellow went on to say, "what good broiled steaks, what delicate sausages did you not use to sell us in the rear of the little chapel of

St. Gratien where you kept your tap-room! How often have I not seen monks, vagabonds and soldiers wassailing there with the gay lassies of Four-Banal street! What giddy whirls did they not use to dance in front of your hermitage!"

"Thanks be to God, Father Fultrade needs no longer to sell wine and broiled steaks!" put in Martha with marked impatience at the jests of Rustic the Gay, and annoyed at seeing the young skipper endeavor to humiliate the holy man with the recollection of the former traffic in wine and victuals in which he had indulged as was the habit with the priests of lower rank. "Father Fultrade is now the leader of the choir of St. Denis and one of the high dignitaries of the Church. Hold your tongue, brainless boy!"

"Martha, let the fool talk!" replied the monk disdainfully, walking to the door. "The true Christian preaches humility. I am not ashamed of having kept a tap-room. The end justifies the means. All that is done in the temple of the Lord is sanctified."

"What, Father Fultrade!" exclaimed Rustic the Gay, "Is everything sanctified?—even debauchery?"

The monk left the house shrugging his shoulders and without uttering a word. But Martha, angered at the lad's language, addressed him with bitterness in her tone:

"Rustic, if all you come here for is to humiliate our good Father Fultrade, you may dispense with putting your feet over our threshold. Shame upon speakers of evil!"

"Come, come, dear wife," said Eidiol, "calm yourself. After all, the lad has only said the truth. Is it not a fact that the lower clergy traffic in wine and food, even in pretty girls?"

"Thanks be to the Lord!" answered Martha. "At least what is drunk and what is eaten on the premises of holy places is sanctified, as the venerable Father Fultrade has just said. Is it not better to go and drink there than in the taverns where Satan spreads his nets?"

"Adieu, good wife! I do not care to discuss such subjects. Nevertheless it does seem strange to me, despite the general custom, to see the house of the Lord turned into a tavern."

"Oh, my God! My poor husband!" exclaimed Martha, sighing and painfully affected by the obduracy of her husband. "Is the custom not general? In all the chapels there is feasting done."

"It is the custom; I admit it; I said so before, dear wife. Let us not quarrel over it. But where is Anne? She has not returned from above;" and stepping towards the staircase, the old man twice called out his daughter's name.

"Here I am, father," answered the blonde girl with her sweet voice, and she descended with her father's and brother's great coats on her arm.

The preparations for departure were soon ended by Eidiol, his son, and Rustic the Gay, all the quicker and more cheerful for the hand that Anne took in them. A large hamper was filled with provisions and the men took leave of the women folks.

"Adieu, dear wife; adieu, dear daughter, till to-morrow. Forget not to lock the street door well to-night. Penitent marauders are dangerous fellows. There is no worse breed of thieves."

"The Lord will watch over us," answered Martha, dropping her eyes before her husband.

"Adieu, good mother," said Guyrion, in turn. "I regret to have caused you the fright of this forenoon. My father was right. I was too quick with my hook against the lances of the Franks."

"Thanks to God, my son," replied Martha with unction, "our good Father Fultrade happened along, like an angel sent by God to save you. Blessed be he for his intervention!"

"If the angels look like him, what a devil of a face must not the demons have!" murmured Rustic the Gay, taking charge of the hamper, while Guyrion threw two spare oars and his redoubtable hook over his shoulder.

At the moment when, following last upon the steps of Eidiol and his son, Rustic the Gay was leaving the house, Anne the Sweet approached the young man and said to him in a low voice:

"Rustic, keep good watch over my father and my brother. Mother and myself will pray to God for you three."

"Anne," answered the young skipper in his usual merry voice and yet in a penetrating tone: "I love your father like my own; Guyrion like a brother; I

have a stout heart and equally stout arms; I would die for all of you. I can tell you no more."

Rustic exchanged a last parting look with the young girl, whose face turned cherry-red with joy and girlish embarrassment. He ran to catch up with Eidiol and Guyrion, and all three disappeared at the next turning of the street from the lingering looks of Martha and Anne, who lovingly followed them with their eyes and called after them: "A pleasant voyage!"

CHAPTER III

GAELO AND SHIGNE

On the very day when Master Eidiol, bound for the small port of St. Audoin, descended the Seine on board his trading vessel, two other craft, proceeding from the opposite direction, were ascending the river with forceful strokes of oars. Both these craft were of unusual shape—they were narrow, about thirty feet long, and rose only slightly above the water's line. They resembled sea-serpents. Their prows, shaped like their poops, enabled them to advance or retreat without the necessity of turning about, but by merely placing the rudders forward or aft, according as the maritime maneuver demanded. These craft, supplied with a single mast and square sail, the latter of which was now clawed fast to the cross beam, there being only little wind, manned with twelve oarsmen, a steersman and a captain—the two "holkers" as these craft were called by the Northmans, were so light that the pirates could carry them on their shoulders for a long distance and set them floating again. Although the two holkers were of equal build and swiftness they resembled each other only in the sense that a robust man may be said to resemble a lissome lass. One of them, painted black, had for its prow ornament a sea eagle painted red; its beak and talons were of polished iron. On the top of the mast a weather vane, or, as they called it, "eire-wire," also representing a sea eagle engraved on a metal sheet, turned at the slightest breeze, the direction of which was indicated by the fluttering of a light red streamer placed on the starboard side of the holker and carrying the same sea bird embroidered in black. Just below the rail, which was pierced with the holes necessary for the operation of the oars, a row of iron bucklers glistened in the rays of the setting sun, which also played upon the pirates' polished armor, that consisted of little iron scales, which, covering them from head to foot, imparted to the wearers the appearance of gigantic fishes.

Fierce people were these pirates! Sailing over the main from the shores of Sweden, Norway and Denmark, they arrived only after some days' journey at the coasts of Gaul. They boasted in their "sagas," or popular songs, of "never having slept under a board roof, or having emptied their cups near a sheltered fireplace." Pillaging churches, castles and abbeys, turning chapels into stables, cutting shirts and breeches for themselves out of altar-cloths, ravaging everything that they encountered—in this style, as they expressed themselves, they "sang the mass of the lances, beginning at dawn with the matins and closing at dusk with the vespers." To conduct his vessel as a skilful knight manages his horse, to be able to run over its oars while in motion, and to be able to hurl three successive javelins at the plate on the top of the mast, receive them back in his own hands and hurl them up again

without once missing his aim—such were some of the essential accomplishments for an able pirate.

"Let us then

Defy the weather,"

so ran their sea song,

"For the tempest

Is our servant,

Helps our oars and

Fills our sails,

Wafts us where we

Wish to go.

"Where we land we

Eat the repast

There prepared for

Us by others;

Slay our host and

Fire his dwelling,

And resume the

Azure swan route."

These Northmans had for their divinity Odin, the God of the North, who promised to the brave, killed in battle, a home in Walhalla, the brilliant residence of the celestial heroes. Nevertheless, relying more on their own intrepidity than upon the aid of their God, they never invoked him. "My brother in arms and myself," thus did Gunkator, a famous sea-king who frequently ravaged the castles and churches of Gaul, speak of himself and his fellow pirates; "my brother in arms and myself never sacrifice to the Gods; we place our faith only upon our oars and our own strength; we get

along very well in that way." Several of the chiefs of these pirates claimed to have issued from the embraces of Trolls, sea sprites, and the Ases and Dwalines, gentle fairies, who delighted in dancing by the light of the moon on the ice of the northern lakes, or in disporting themselves among the snow-covered branches of the tall fir-trees.

Well might Gaëlo, who was in command of the black holker with the sea-eagle ornament at its prow, trust to his own strength; it matched his bravery, and his bravery matched his skilfulness. Nevertheless, what surpassed his skilfulness, his bravery, and his strength, was the masculine beauty of the young pirate chief, as, with one hand resting on his harpoon, covered from head to foot in his flexible armor of iron scales, Gaëlo stood in the prow of his vessel. From his belt hung by his side his long sword and his ivory horn whose notes were well known of the pirates. His pointed casque, almost devoid of visor, exposed his features, browned by the sea air, because no less than the heroes of the Saga, Gaëlo "never slept under a roof, nor emptied his cup near a sheltered fireplace." It was easy to surmise from the intrepidity of his eyes, and the curve of his lip that he also had often "from dawn to dusk sung the mass of the lances," perchance also carved his own shirt from some altar-cloth, and, who knows, more than once, burnt down an abbey after having eaten the abbot's supper. But he certainly never killed the abbot, if the latter was defenceless and offered no resistance. No; the noble cast of Gaëlo's face bore no trace of ferocity. Though he was of those who practiced the principle of Trodd the Dane of the country of Garderig: "A good pirate never seeks for shelter during a tempest, and never binds his wounds before the end of the fray; he must attack an enemy single-handed, defend himself against two, never yield to three and flee without shame before four"—though Gaëlo followed this maxim, he also practiced this other given by the good chief. Half to his fellow champions: "Women must not be killed, nor must little children be tossed in the air to be received for amusement upon the points of your lances." No; Gaëlo had not a ferocious face. Far from that, particularly at this moment did his face denote the most tender sentiments. His eyes snapped with the fire of gentleness as from time to time he turned his head towards the other holker that was vying with his own in swiftness.

Indeed, never before did pirate vessel present to a mariner's eyes a more charming sight! Constructed in the same proportions as Gaëlo's, only finer and more dashing, the second holker was painted white. The spare oars and the bucklers ranged in a row like those of the black holker were of azure blue. A gilded swan ornamented its prow. On the top of its mast a swan with outspread wings and engraved upon a sheet of polished copper, responded to the rising evening breeze, which also raised a streamer of azure blue

embroidered with a white swan. Within-board, swords, pikes and axes, symmetrically ranked, hung within easy reach of the rowers, who were clad in flexible armor, not of scales, but of iron mail, with casques with short visors on their heads.

Like Gaëlo, the chief of this second holker was standing near the craft's prow, with one hand upon a long harpoon which its holder frequently used in order to turn the vessel's head aside whenever it grazed the edges of several islets, grown with willows, that lay in the vessel's course. This Northman chief, slenderer but as tall as Gaëlo, was a woman, a virgin of twenty years, known as the Beautiful Shigne. Like the female warriors whom she chieftained, Shigne wore an armor of steel mail so fine and flexible that it might have been taken for a grey silk. This species of tunic descended from the maid's neck to just above her knees, and fitted so closely that it betrayed the robust contours of her bosom. An embroidered belt gathered the coat of mail around her waist, from the belt hung, on one side, her ivory horn, on the other her sword. No less plainly outlined were the Beautiful Shigne's nether limbs, likewise encased in flexible iron mail. Her shoes were made of the skin of the sea-lion, and they were tightly laced around her ankles.

The warrior maid had laid her casque at her feet. Her hair, of a pale blonde, parted over her wide forehead and cut short at the neck, framed in with its ringlets a daring white face slightly tinged with the rose. The cold azure of the northern heaven seemed to be reflected in her large, clear, blue and limpid eyes. Her aquiline nose, her serious and haughty mouth, imparted an austere expression to her masculine beauty.

Before now the sagas had sung the bravery of the Beautiful Shigne, one of the bravest of the "Buckler Maidens" or "Skoldmoë" as the Northmans called them. The number of these female warriors was considerable in those countries of the North. They took part in the expeditions of the pirates, and not infrequently excelled them in daring. There was nothing more savage or more indomitable than these haughty beings. One instance, taken from a thousand others, will convey an idea of their character. Thoborge, the daughter of the pirate Eric, a young "Buckler Maiden," beautiful and chaste, always armed, always ready for the combat, had refused all applicants for her hand. She chased them away with contempt, wounded and even killed several of them when they presumed to talk to her of love. Sigurd, a pirate of renown, attacked Thoborge in her home on the isle of Garderig, where she had entrenched herself with her female companions in arms. She resisted heroically. A large number of pirates and of "Buckler Maidens" met their death at that battle. Sigurd having at last seriously wounded Thoborge with

the blow of a battle axe, she confessed herself vanquished and espoused the pirate.

Of such a nature was the savage chastity of these brave daughters of the North. The Beautiful Shigne indicated that she was worthy of her stock. An orphan since the death of her father and mother, both of whom were killed at a sea battle, the young female warrior-maid had been adopted by Rolf, an old Northman pirate chief, who was celebrated for his numerous excursions into Gaul. This year he had come in less than a fortnight from his northern seas to the mouth of the Seine, and was now ascending the river with the intent to lay siege to Paris at the head of a fleet of two thousand ships of war that were leisurely advancing under the strokes of their oars and were preceded by the holkers of Gaëlo and Shigne. The two had the lead of the fleet by about one league. It was the result of a challenge.

"The arms of my virgins are more robust than those of your champions," the Beautiful Shigne had said to Gaëlo. "I challenge your holker to compete in swiftness with mine. The arms of your champions will be tired out before my virgin mates begin to slacken the strokes of their oars."

"Shigne, I accept the challenge. But if the test turns against you, will you allow my holker to do battle side by side with yours in this war?"

"You must be looking for help from me in case of danger," Shigne answered, smiling haughtily; saying which, she motioned to her mates to bend more vigorously to their oars and to start on the race.

Gaëlo issued a like order to his men, and the two holkers rapidly rowed away and ahead of the Northman fleet, each trying to gain the lead of the other. For a long stretch the Buckler Maidens had the advantage, but thanks to their redoubled efforts, Gaëlo's "Champions," as the Northman chieftains styled their men, recovered the lost distance. The sun was now sinking behind the wooded hills of one of the islets of the Seine when the two craft were speeding forward abreast of each other and with equal swiftness.

"Shigne, the sun is going down," observed the pirate Gaëlo. "Our vessels are exactly abreast of each other, and the arms of my champions are not yet tired."

"Their strength is great, seeing that they held up against my virgins," was the answer that the heroine made, accompanying the words with a disdainful smile.

"Do your words mean praise for my champions, or do they imply mockery? Explain your thoughts more clearly."

"Had we not a battle on hand with the Franks, my reply to you would be an invitation to land on one of these islets and to fight, seven against seven. You would soon enough discover whether my virgins are a match for your champions or not."

"Must you, then, be vanquished in order to be pleased?"

"I do not know—I never have been vanquished. Orwarold asked my hand from Rolf, our chief. Rolf answered him: 'I give you Shigne if you can take her; I shall have her to-morrow on the isle of Garin, alone and armed; go there.' Orwarold came; we fought; he wounded me in my arm with a sword thrust; I killed him. Later, Olaf wished to marry me. But just as the combat was to begin he said: 'Woman, I have not the courage to raise my sword against you.'"

"Shigne, be just. The sagas have sung the prowesses of Olaf; he is brave among the bravest. If he did not battle with you, it was not out of cowardice, but out of love."

The Amazon laughed disdainfully, and rejoined: "I slashed Olaf's face with the point of my sword, that was my answer to him."

"Your heart is colder than the ice of your native land! You reject my love because I am of the Gallic race!"

"I care not about your race! Olaf and Orwarold were, like myself, born on an island of Denmark. They could not vanquish me. The one tried and failed, and lost his life for his presumption; the other did not dare. The one I killed, the other's face I marked for life."

"Promise me, at least, that you will be no other's wife."

"An easy promise. Where is the warrior powerful and brave enough to vanquish me?"

"And if you were vanquished, would you not be filled with anger? Would you not ever after hate the victor?"

"No! I could only admire his courage!"

"Shigne, you and I could not cross swords in combat. Either you would kill me, or I would have to kill you; in either case you would be lost to me for a wife. But, seeing a combat is thus interdicted to us—would you at least love me if I accomplished some great deed of valor? If the sagas of your country sang my name side by side with the names of the most renowned warriors?"

"Your bravery will never throw mine into amazement."

"Yesterday an old Gallic fugitive serf notified old Rolf that the Franks had fortified the abbey of St. Denis in such a manner that it was impregnable."

"There is no fortress, town or abbey that is impregnable. All that may happen is that we may be detained several days before the monastery of St. Denis, which Rolf had expected to capture by surprise. It is an important post. It lies close to Paris."

"Will you love me if I seize the abbey of St. Denis, single-handed with my companions?"

The face of the Buckler Maiden became purple. The throbs of her marble bosom raised the mail of her armor. Straightening up to her full length, she haughtily answered Gaëlo: "I will capture the abbey of St. Denis, reputed to be impregnable."

Immediately upon these words, the Beautiful Shigne ordered her virgins to row back and join the fleet of Rolf, whither the white hull of her holker darted like an arrow.

CHAPTER IV

A BERSERKER

Following with saddened eyes the light holker that carried away the warrior maid, Gaëlo remained silent and pensive, while his champions rested upon their oars. The steersman, a man of about thirty years, of a merry face and clad in the coat and wide breeches of the skippers of the Seine, was named Simon Large-Ears. He owed his surname to an enormous pair of ears, that stood out far from his temples, and which were as red as his nose. Simon, once a serf of the fisheries attached to the abbey of St. Paterne, had, jointly with three other companions, who were seated on the oarsmen's benches, and who wore the Northman pointed casque and cuirass of iron scales, run away to the pirates and offered them their services in the capacity of pilot and oarsmen, the moment that the numerous Northman fleet had appeared at the mouth of the Seine. Simon and his comrades, as well as many other Gallic serfs, who availed themselves of the opportunity to drop their servitude and revenge upon their masters the ill-treatment that the latter subjected them to, only demanded from their Northman allies a share of the prospective booty.[1]

Leaning on his harpoon, silent and pensive, Gaëlo contemplated the holker of the Beautiful Shigne as it rowed back and became indistinct in the light mist that frequently rises at sunset from the surface of the river's waters. Simon Large-Ears, seated at the poop, and, as pilot, holding the rudder in his hand, said to one of his companions surnamed Robin Jaws, by reason of his lower jaw-bones protruding like a Molossian's:

"Did you hear the conversation between the Beautiful Shigne and Gaëlo? What savage she-devils are these Northman virgins! They must be courted with rough sword whacks, caressed with battle-axe cracks, and their hearts can be reached only by boring through their breasts, and if you don't, then these furies make you wed death. How do you like such betrothals?"

"I would prefer to court one of those African lionesses of which Ibrahim the Saracen was telling us the other day," and turning towards his bench-mate, a gigantic Northman of a beard so blonde that it seemed almost white, Robin said: "Helloa, Lodbrog! If all the women of your race receive their lovers in that manner, there must be more dead bodies than new-born ones in your country."

"Yes—but the children of these virgin warriors, whom none possesses until after he has vanquished his chosen one with the sword, become men,

everyone of whom are worth ten others in vigor and bravery," answered the giant gravely, and raising his enormous head he proceeded: "All such children are born, like myself, berserkers."

"Aye, aye!" put in the other Northman oarsmen in a low voice and with an accent of deference that bordered on fear. "Lodbrog was born a berserker!"

"I do not deny it, comrades," replied Simon; "but by the devil! Explain to me what 'berserker' means."

"A warrior who is always terrible to his enemies," explained one of the Northmans, "and sometimes dangerous to his friends."

The giant Lodbrog nodded his head affirmatively, while Simon and Robin looked at him in astonishment, not having understood the mysterious words of the pirates. At this moment Gaëlo approached his men. He had awakened from the profound revery into which the disappearance of the Buckler Maiden plunged him. The Northman chieftain looked determined.

"My champions," said Gaëlo in a resonant voice, "we must be ahead of the Beautiful Shigne and seize the abbey of St. Denis ourselves! Yours shall be the booty, mine the glory!"

"Gaëlo," observed Simon, "when I heard you mention the feat to your warrior maid, I, who am well acquainted with the abbey of St. Denis, where I have recently been more than once, when I was a serf of the fishery of St. Paterne, may hell consume it, I took your words simply as a lover's jest. Guarded as the abbey is, and fortified with thick walls, the place can resist five or six hundred determined men. How can you think of taking it with only fifteen? Come, Gaëlo, you must give up the plan."

"My braves," resumed Gaëlo, after a moment's silence, "if I were to tell you that a serf, a swine-herd, is at this very hour a count, the seigneur and master of a province that Charles the Bald, grandfather of Charles the Simple, who is now king of the Franks, presented him with, you would answer me: 'A serf, a swine-herd, become master and seigneur of a province? It is impossible!'"

"By the faith of Large-Ears, that would, indeed, be my answer. A swine-herd can never become a count!"

"You think not?" replied Gaëlo. "And who is the present Count of Chartres and master of the country if not a pirate who one time was a swine-herd at Trancout, a poor village located near Troyes?"[2]

"Oh! Oh! Chief," put in Robin Jaws, "you have Hastain in mind, the old bandit who fought in the ranks of the Northman pirates! We know the song:

"When he had sacked the Franks,

Saw all his ships full rigged,

Hastain of Rome heard tell,

Vowed he would go there.

Vowed he would take the place,

Plunder and pillage it,

And make of Rome the King

His friend Boern Iron Sides."

"Simon," said Gaëlo, interrupting Robin's song, "listen well with both your large ears to the end of the song! Proceed my champion!"

"The song ends well," answered Robin, resuming the thread of the ballad:

"Down Into Italy,

Plundering, the pirates went,

Laded their ships with rich

Spoils of the Churches.

Then Hastain gave the word,

For the return to France,

And to the Frankish shores

Steered they their way back.

"But the old Frankish King,

Dreading the pirates' band,

Quoth unto Hastain then:

'Strike not the abbeys;

Touch not nor plunder them,

Nor the seigniorial burgs,—

I shall establish you

Count of the Chartres.'

"Hastain the pirate Chief,

Well with the offer pleased,

Answered agreeably,

'Lo, I am willing!'

Thus was the bargain struck,

Thus he became the Count

Of the vast Chartres land,

He, once a swine-herd!"

"By the devil and his horns! Long live Hastain! All is possible!" cried Simon Large-Ears, saying which he joined his piercing voice to the deep voices of the pirates, who, striking with their oars upon the row of bucklers that hung from the sides of the holker, sang fit to rend the welkin:

"Thus was the bargain struck,

Thus he became the Count

Of the vast Chartres land,

He, once a swine-herd!"

"And now," Gaëlo resumed after his champions had finished the martial refrain, "if a swine-herd serf could become the master of a province, do you hold it impossible for fifteen resolute champions to take possession of the abbey of St. Denis, the richest abbey of all Gaul?"

"No! No!" cried the pirates fired with the prospect of pillage, and again smiting with their oars the bucklers that hung from the sides of the holker. "To St. Denis! To St. Denis! Death to its tonsured masters! Pillage! Pillage! Fire and blood!"

The thundering voice of Lodbrog the Giant dominated the din that proceeded from the Northmans' throats and the clangor of the smitten shields. Standing on his bench and whirling in one hand his long oar with the ease that he would have handled a reed, he bellowed at the top of his voice: "To St. Denis! To St. Denis!" And intoxicating and lashing himself into a fury with his own clamor, his savage features speedily betokened a degree of exaltation that developed into a kind of delirium. His eyes rolled rapidly in their orbits; his lips whitened with foam; and finally, emitting a terrible cry, he bent his oar in his hands and broke it in two as if it had been a cane.

At the sight of such a display of superhuman strength, the Northmans, who had for some little while before been observing Lodbrog with anxious looks, now cried out in chorus:

"Beware all! He is berserk! He will kill us all!" And before Gaëlo had time to prevent it, all the pirates threw themselves upon the giant, and by their united efforts rolled him overboard into the Seine.

Gaëlo had anchored his vessel at a short distance from one of the woody islets, washed by the river. Lodbrog fell heels over head into the water between the holker and the nearby shore. With one bound the giant leaped out of the river, which was deep and rapid at that spot, and gained the shore, where he ran about shouting: "To St. Denis! To St Denis!" The frenzy that possessed the giant increased ten-fold the man's prodigious strength. He uprooted a twenty-foot poplar, and armed with the tree as with a mace, smote and crushed the other trees within his reach. The largest branches flew into splinters, the trunks broke in two, and still the furious vertigo of the colossus was on the increase. Not far from the shore stood the ruins of a house still partly covered by its roof; its walls arrested for a moment the demented course of the berserker. But the obstacle redoubled his rage. The trunk of the poplar served him for a ram. Its repeated blows broke through a portion of the lower wall, which thereupon came tumbling down with a great crash. Held up by the iron work in the opposite wall, a portion of the roof still remained in place. The giant clambered over the debris, grasped the beams of the roof with both hands and shook them furiously, ever bellowing: "To St. Denis! To St. Denis!" At last the beams yielded, and the worm-eaten roof, still partly covered with tiles, sank down upon Lodbrog with a deafening crash. For an instant the raging maniac disappeared under a

cloud of dust, but presently reappeared unscathed from the falling timber and tiles. His casque and iron armor had protected him. He mounted the heap of ruins, looked around, and seeing nothing more to destroy, descended, pulled up the joists and beams, lifted up enormous stones and hurled them about with the irresistible force of those engines of war that are called catapults. Suddenly the berserker was heard to emit a roar like that of a lion; he raised his powerful arms heavenward, his body became rigid; for a moment he remained motionless like a gigantic iron statue, and then, like a colossus about to tumble from its base, swayed for an instant in air, dropped to the ground and rolled like a solid block from the top of the heap of ruins down to its foot, where he lay prone, seemingly as inanimate as a corpse.

Gaëlo and the Northman pirates were not amazed at the frenzy of Lodbrog. They knew well that many a Northman mariner was subject to these frightful fits, frightful like the fury of the insane, a sort of epilepsy peculiar to the berserkers, with whom the anticipation or the ardor of battle, anger or drunkenness brought on the spell. Simon Large-Ears and Robin Jaws, however, now witnessed the spectacle for the first time; they gazed at it with surprise and affright. Finally, seeing from the distance that Lodbrog lay unconscious and rigid amidst the wreck that he had wrought, Simon cried:

"He is now fortunately dead! We have nothing more to fear!"

"The Northmans are right," put in Robin; "such frantic folks are as dangerous to their friends as to their enemies. If that berserker had remained among us in the holker, he would have strangled or drowned us all!"

"After which he would have flung the vessel over his head like a wooden shoe. He could have done it. I saw him flinging around beams and rocks that must have surely weighed three times as much as any man," added Large-Ears. "What an amount of strength all wasted! How he would have scattered about death and desolation in the abbey of St. Denis, where he thought he was fighting. After all, it is a pity that he is dead and gone."

"He is not dead—weigh anchor, my champions! With two strokes of the oars we can reach the isle, and presently you will see Lodbrog return to himself as if awakening from a dream."

"By the horns of the devil!" exclaimed Simon. "Out of fear that he may take to dreaming again and harpoon me, I prefer to stay on the vessel with my friend Robin;" and Large-Ears never once took his eyes off the berserker who

continued motionless only a hundred feet from the shore and in plain sight of his companions.

"The Northmans may go alone to the assistance of the maniac, if they so desire," observed Robin as the holker approached the shore. "It will be a sweet sensation for Lodbrog to recognize the faces of folks from his native land, when he regains consciousness, will it not?"

"It sometimes happens that fires, thought to be extinct, suddenly flame up," Large-Ears rejoined sagely.

The vessel touched land, and Gaëlo and the Northmans approached the colossus, not, however, without caution. One of the pirates took off his casque, filled it half-full with water, threw into it a handful of sand that he picked up from the shore and shook up the mixture, while his companions vainly sought to raise Lodbrog into a sitting posture. The body was rigid like a bar of iron. They found it impossible to extract from his clenched fist a stone that he still held as firmly as in a vise between his fingers. His face, surrounded by the borders of his casque, was livid and motionless, his jaws were set, his lips were covered with froth, his eyes fixed, dilated, glassy. The Northman, dipping out of his casque the sand moistened with cold water, threw it by handfuls upon the prostrate giant's face.

"Be careful!" called out Gaëlo. "You will blind him with the moist sand."

"No, no!" confidently answered the pirate, redoubling his sandy douches. "It is especially when the fine gravel enters the eye that the good effect is produced."

The pirate's experience did not deceive him. Soon slight convulsive tremors began to agitate the lines on Lodbrog's face. His rigid fingers loosened and allowed the stone that they clenched to roll off. A few minutes later his limbs became supple. One of the Northmans ran to the river and dipped up some fresh water and dashed it in the berserker's face. The latter was soon heard to mumble in a ruffled voice while he rubbed his eyelids:

"My eyes burn me. Am I in the celestial Walhalla promised by Odin to departed warriors?"

"You are here among your companions of war, my brave champion," Gaëlo answered him. "You have broken down a score of huge trees and demolished a house. Was that enough to limber up your strength? What do you still want?"

"Oh! Oh!" mumbled the giant, shaking his enormous head, and without ceasing to rub his eyes with his fists. "I am not at all surprised at having played such havoc. I began to feel myself berserk when I cried out, 'To St. Denis!' and all the time after I imagined myself demolishing the abbey and slaughtering the monks and their soldiers. I was trying to exterminate them all."

"Do not be disappointed, my Hercules," Gaëlo replied encouragingly. "The moon will rise early; we shall row all night; to-morrow evening we shall be at St. Denis, and day after to-morrow at Paris."

CHAPTER V

THE ABBEY OF ST DENIS

The abbey of St. Denis resembled a vast fortified castle. The high and thick walls that enclosed it, the only entrance through which was a vaulted gate, covered with heavy sheets of iron and, like the walls, pierced with narrow loop-holes through which the archers could reach the enemy with their arrows, rendered the place safe against any surprise. In order to take this fortress, large engines of war would be required and a powerful attacking force.

Agreeable to her promise made to Father Fultrade, Martha and her daughter Anne the Sweet found themselves towards nightfall at the trysting place named by the monk. He also was on time. He arrived on his large horse, an animal powerful enough to carry Eidiol's wife on its crupper and in front of the saddle the young girl, whom the priest thus had an opportunity to hold in his arms. Despite its robust neck and haunches, the horse that bore the triple load could proceed only slowly along the ancient Roman route, which, connecting Paris with Amiens, led by the abbey of St. Denis. The nocturnal trip was long and made in silence. Martha, proud of finding herself riding at the crupper of a holy man, thought only of the relic whose divine influence was to preserve her as well as her daughter from all present and future ills. Anne had come with repugnance. The monk ever inspired her with a vague sense of fear. The night was dark; the route uncertain. When, as it happened from time to time, the horse seemed to take fright, the maid felt Fultrade tighten his hold upon her, and his hot breath smite her cheeks.

When, finally, the monk arrived with his two female traveling companions at the massive gate of the abbey, he knocked in a particular manner. The knock was speedily answered by the gleam of a lantern at the wicket; the wicket was then opened; a few words were exchanged in a low voice between the brother at the gate and Fultrade; the light went out; the ponderous door turned on its hinges, leaving a passage for the new arrivals, and then closed again when all three had entered.

Martha and her daughter stood in utter darkness. An invisible personage took charge of the priest's horse and led it away. Fultrade then took the arm of Martha and whispered to her:

"Give your hand to your daughter, and both follow me. Your arrival here must be kept a profound secret."

After descending a steep staircase, and following for a considerable time the windings of a vaulted passage-way, the monk stopped and groped for the orifice of the lock of a door, which he opened.

"Step in, my dear daughters in Christ," said the monk; "you may wait for me here; in the meantime say your prayers."

A few minutes later the door opened again, and returning without a light, as before, the monk said:

"Martha, you will first adore the relic; your daughter's turn will come after you."

"Oh! No!" cried Anne the Sweet in deep anxiety. "I will not remain alone here in the dark! No! I wish to remain near my mother!"

"My child, fear nothing," said Martha reassuringly; "we are in a holy abbey, and besides, under the protection of Father Fultrade."

"Moreover," interjected the monk, "one is never alone when thinking of God. Your mother will be back shortly."

"Mother, I will not leave you—I am afraid," screamed the young girl.

It was in vain. Before Anne could find her mother in the dark to cling to her, the girl felt a vigorous hand staying her off. Martha was hurried out, and the door closed behind her and upon her daughter. More and more affrighted, Anne screamed aloud. In vain again. The steps of Fultrade and Martha receded. Soon all sound ceased, and a brooding darkness reigned around the helpless girl. A minute later the blood rushed to Anne's heart. Distinctly she heard near her, as if groping about in the darkness, the respiration of one panting for breath. Immediately she felt herself seized by two vigorous arms and raised from the floor. The young girl strove to free herself and called aloud to her mother for help. The struggle was so violent and the girl's outcry so loud that it at first drowned the sound of a rap at the door. But the rapping speedily became so vehement that it soon drowned the violent struggle within and a voice was heard uttering at the door some Latin words in a hurried tone and in accents of alarm. Anne felt herself immediately delivered from the close embrace that terrified her, and soon as released fell fainting to the floor. Someone passed by her, opened and double-locked the door in great hurry, and ran away precipitately.

While, aided by another monk, his accomplice, Fultrade was locking up Martha and her daughter in separate subterranean cells of the abbey where

serfs and other culprits under the jurisdiction of the abbot were usually confined, a great commotion reigned in another quarter of the holy place. Monks, suddenly shaken from their slumbers, were running about under the arches of the cloister, with torches in their hands. In the center of one of the interior courtyards a score of horsemen were seen. The sweat that streamed down the steeds gave evidence of the length and precipitancy of a recent run. They had escorted to the abbey the Count of Paris, who, arriving from his city in hot haste, proceeded immediately to the apartment of Fortunat, the Abbot of St Denis. The prelate, a man of shapeless obesity and with his eyes still half closed with sleep, was hastily donning a long and warmly furred morning robe that one of his servants was helping him into. Other menials of the abbey were lighting the candles of two candelabra made of solid silver and placed upon a richly ornamented table. There was nothing more sumptuous than the abbot's bedroom. Having finally put on his gown, the abbot rubbed his eyes, seated on the edge of his downy couch. Count Rothbert, who had been taken to the abbot, was impatiently demanding that Fultrade be called.

"Seigneur count, he has been sent for, but he was not in his cell," answered the abbot's chamberlain, who had accompanied the count to the abbot's apartment and was followed by several of his fellow officials—the marshal, the equerry, the butler and other dignitaries of the abbey.

"Father Fultrade must be in church," put in a voice, "he must have gone to early matins."

"Unless he remained in Paris, where I ran across him this morning," replied Rothbert. "Never was his presence more needed than here and now!"

"Count," said the abbot gulping down a yawn, "none of my dear brothers in Christ sleep outside of the abbey, unless sent on a mission by me. Fultrade must surely have returned home this evening. Will you not please to communicate to me the cause of this night alarm?"

"I shall give you news of a nature to make you open wide your eyes and ears. The Northmans have reappeared at the mouth of the Seine. They are advancing upon Paris with a fleet of vessels!"

Despite his enormous corpulence, Abbot Fortunat bounded up from his bed. His triple chin shivered; his large red face was blanched; he clasped his hands in terror; his lips trembled convulsively; but his fear prevented him from articulating a single word. The other personages attached to the abbey looked, like himself, terror-stricken at the tidings brought by the count.

Some moaned, others fell upon their knees and invoked the intercession of the Lord. All, the abbot included, who had finally found his voice, cried:

"Almighty God, have mercy upon us! Deliver us from these pagans! From these demons! Alack! Alack! What ills are about to afflict the servitors of your Church! What ravages! Our goods will be pillaged by these sacrilegious wretches! Oh, Lord! Deliver us from the Northmans! Command your angels to exterminate these pagans!"

In the midst of these exclamations Fultrade entered, at last. He looked cross and irritated. His face was inflamed.

"Come in, Fultrade," the count called to him when he saw the monk appear at the threshold of the abbot's apartment. "Come in; you are the only man of thought and action in this place;" and turning to the abbot, whose whimpering annoyed him, the count added: "Fortunat, quit your lamentations! The hour calls for action, not for whines!"

The monks repressed their moans with difficulty, while the Count of Paris, addressing Fultrade in particular, said:

"The moments are precious—the Northmans have appeared at the mouth of the Seine. They are said to be under the command of one of their most intrepid sea-kings, named Rolf. Their fleet is so numerous that it covers the whole width of the mouth of the river. They can not now be further away than ten or twelve leagues from here. The means to repel them must be considered."

"And how comes it that we have not been apprised of the arrival of these accursed men?" inquired Fultrade in a rage. "They have passed Rouen. How comes it that the people of that city did not spread the alarm? There is treason in this!"

"Oh! What do the people of Rouen care about the arrival of the pirates? Not having been this time themselves attacked by the Northmans, they do not concern themselves about the rest of the provinces. It was only this evening that I was notified by some messengers of the seigneurs and abbots, whose lands border on the Seine, that the Northmans were here. They furthermore informed me that the vile rustic plebs, which has nothing to lose, shows itself everywhere happy at the thought of the ills that these pagans will inflict upon the Church and the seigneurs. It is for us, accordingly, for us seigneurs and clergy, to join hands and defend one another! We need not look for help from Charles the Simple, who will think of nothing but the

defence of his own royal domain, if he be capable of even that. He will allow the Northmans to plunder us to their hearts' content."

"Alack! Alack!" resumed the Abbot of St. Denis with a fresh outburst of moans. "What direful calamities are again in store for us!—Did we not see Charles the Bald grant the country of Chartres to that execrable Hastain! to that chieftain of Northman pirates! to that vile revolted serf! to that bandit, soiled with all crimes and abominable sacrileges! Alack!—What horrible times these are in which we live!—What shall we do, Oh, Lord!—What else can we do but invoke your holy name!"

"What we are to do?—It is plain! We must rely upon ourselves alone! Organize ourselves for our own defence; arm our colonists and our towns-people; and lead them out, under pain of death, to do battle with the Northman!—You, Fultrade, are a man of energy and intelligence. Immediately take horse and ride at full gallop with some of my officers and a good escort, to summon in my name the bishops and abbots of my duchy of France to arm their serfs and towns-men. A portion of these men is to be left in the abbeys and castles as a garrison, the others are to be marched to Paris in small detachments, to defend the Commune."

"Count, what are you thinking of!" exclaimed the abbot, raising his hands to heaven. "At so dangerous a moment, would you send Father Fultrade from my side!"

"You need not be afraid," answered Rothbert. "Before leaving Paris I issued orders to one hundred of my men at arms to march hither at the double quick, in order to defend this post which dominates the Seine."

"Alack!" murmured the abbot, breaking out in tears. "Already, five times has this abbey been invaded, sacked and pillaged by these pagans. Although the place has been surrounded by new fortifications, it never could resist the Northmans! Alack! The thickest walls crumble down before these demons! We are lost!"

"Fear is deranging your mind, Fortunat. I tell you again that nothing short of a regular siege will take the place. My hundred soldiers will suffice for the defence against these Northmans. And, now, Fultrade, to horse! If you succeed in your mission you will receive from me a rich bishopric in reward."

The monk had until then looked troubled and given but scant attention to the words of the count. The moment, however, that he heard an abbey

promised to him his eyes brightened and his forehead smoothed. With sparkling eyes he answered:

"Seigneur, if our holy abbot allows me, I shall carry out his orders and yours. May heaven protect me! I trust I may be able to carry your commission to a successful issue."

At this point one of the count's officers entered, saying:

"Agreeable to your orders, several archers whom our riders brought on the cruppers of their horses were posted on the river bank. By the light of the moon they noticed a large vessel ascending the Seine. They compelled the sailors to land, threatening them, in case of refusal, to treat them to a volley of arrows. The master of the vessel is being brought in."

"Have him come here immediately," answered Rothbert; and turning to the abbot he explained: "I have issued orders to allow no vessel to pass without questioning the skippers. They may be able to furnish us with some information on the fleet of the pirates; they may have picked up something."

The master who was forthwith introduced was Eidiol, the dean of the Skippers' Guild, who had been so brutally treated by the count on that very day. Assuming a look of surprise, mingled with cordiality, Rothbert said to Eidiol:

"I did not expect to see you quite so soon again, my trusty skipper!" and waving his hand towards the aged man, he said to the abbot: "This man is the dean of the honorable Skippers' and Mariners' Guild of Paris."

Greatly astonished at the cordial and respectful reception that he now received at the hand of Rothbert, who, that very forenoon had treated him with so much contempt, Eidiol looked suspiciously at the count and sought to explain to himself the cause of so sudden a change in his favor. As to Fultrade, the monk at first seemed nailed to the floor with stupefaction at the sight of the father of Anne the Sweet, but speedily recovering his self-control, said to Rothbert:

"Time presses. I shall depart instantly on the mission that you have charged me with."

"Make it clear to the seigneurs and the abbots that we can not choose but win, provided we act concertedly."

The monk vanished, and redoubling his affability toward Eidiol, Rothbert resumed: "Be welcome, my trusty skipper. You could not possibly have arrived at a more opportune moment. Your advice will be useful to us."

"Your archers must, no doubt, have thought so, seeing they threatened to let fly a volley of arrows at us if our vessel did not promptly land where they ordered."

"Such severe measures are unavoidable at this moment, my worthy skipper. No doubt you have heard the news? The Northmans have reappeared at the mouth of the Seine."

"Oh!" exclaimed Eidiol with perfect indifference. "It is the Northmans, is it? Yes, I have learned of their approach. I even know, from the master of a lighter that was pulling up the river, that the pirates' fleet dropped anchor this evening near the isle of Oissel, one of their former and favorite rendezvous."

"By the sword of my great father, Rothbert the Strong!" cried Rothbert, stupefied and indignant at the unconcern of the skipper with regard to the invasion of the Northman pirates. "This upsets me! What do you mean by such a display of apathy at the prospect of the terrible ills that are about to fall over our heads?!"

"Oh, I am by no means unconcerned touching the arrival of the pirates. Instead of descending the river as far as St. Audoin, whither I was taking a cargo, I am now ascending the river to return to Paris, where I thought my presence might be needed."

"That is right, my brave skipper! I was mistaken. You were not indifferent but calm, like all brave people in sight of danger."

"To speak truly, I can not see wherein lies the danger."

"Are you not fleeing before the approach of those pagans?"

"No, I am not fleeing. I am returning to Paris to embrace my wife and daughter. And I am all the happier about it, seeing I did not expect to be with them again until to-morrow evening. I meant, after that, to take council with my compères upon what to do."

"And who are your compères?"

"Why, of course, the deans of the other guilds of the city of Paris—of the blacksmiths, carpenters, armorers, weavers, curriers, stone-cutters, and others."

"Of course, the purpose of such a council is to organize the defense of Paris against the pirates! Glory to you, my towns-men! I feel proud of numbering such stalwarts as yourselves in my city!"

"Blessed be they who defend the Church! All their sins will be remitted!" put in the abbot who, until now overwhelmed with grief and fear, seemed to gather some hope from the words of the count.

"Oh!" repeated Rothbert, pointing proudly at Eidiol, "at the head of such men, we shall be invincible!"

"And yet," replied the aged skipper, "only this forenoon, you were ordering your knights to break their lances upon our backs!"

Rothbert bit his lips, puckered his brow, and answered with embarrassment:

"You must excuse an accidental outburst of excitement."

"Your present glorifications contrast singularly with the insolent words that you bestowed upon me this forenoon."

"Fortunat," rejoined the count, turning to the abbot and with difficulty suppressing his anger: "This good fellow loves to banter. I think, however, he should choose his time better. We must run to arms, not joke, when these accursed Northmans threaten our peace."

"Well! well! They are not so deserving of curses, after all," remarked Eidiol, smiling with nonchalance. "Thanks to these very Northmans, you are now treating me with civility and courting my friendship. The noble is flattering the villein!"

"Quit your raillery, old man!" commanded Rothbert, relapsing, despite himself, into his wonted haughty and violent temper.

"Seigneur count, I am speaking to the point because I am in a hurry to embrace my wife and daughter. It is now about twenty-seven years ago, in the year 885, when the Northmans, under the lead of Hastain, to-day master and Seigneur of the country of Chartres, invaded the country and laid siege to Paris for the fifth or sixth time."

"On that occasion, at least, and it was the only time, the plebs of Paris, under the command of Eudes, my brother, offered a brave resistance, since when the pirates have no longer ravaged the city. It will be so again now. I swear it to God, will ye, nill ye, villeins, you shall be marched to the ramparts to give battle!"

"Until that year of which you speak, Paris had never offered any resistance to the pirates. The reason was simple. The people, the guilds and the artisans did not care to undertake the defence—"

"Yes, yes!" broke in Rothbert with concentrated rage "That plebs allowed the churches, the abbeys and the castles to be pillaged and set on fire!"

"The Northmans only plunder the rich. They surely do not care to load their barks with our rags, our rough furniture and our sand-stone pots when they can load them to overflowing with vases of gold and silver and all manner of costly things with which the castles, the churches and the abbeys are gorged. They attack the seigneurs. Let the seigneurs defend themselves!"

"By the death of Christ! This old man has gone crazy!" cried Rothbert beyond himself with rage and yet not daring fully to give a loose to his pent-up anger. "How could wedefend ourselves without the aid of the people! Could I repel thirty thousand Northmans with the two thousand soldiers that I keep in my duchy of France?"

"Oh, I know it! You can do nothing without the people. Your brother, Count Eudes, knew it also. At the approach of the pirates he sought to propitiate the people, and convoked the deans of the guilds at his little castle of Paris. My father, the then dean of the skippers, said to your brother: 'You, kings, seigneurs and clergymen, need us to protect your goods from the pillage of the Northmans. Well, then, let us strike a bargain. Lighten our taxes, render our lives less hard, and we shall defend your riches.' 'Agreed!' answered Count Eudes, and certain franchises and other measures of relief for the plebs of the city were agreed on. On the morrow that good plebs rushed to the ramparts and fought with intrepidity. Many of them were killed, many more were wounded. My father and myself were among the latter. The Northmans were repelled. But the danger being over, the King, the seigneurs and the dignitaries of the Church forgot their promise."

While Eidiol spoke the Count of Paris controlled his indignation with difficulty; finally he broke forth pale with rage: "Do you mean that your plebs will refuse to defend the city?"

"I think so. We, the skippers, will take on board our vessels our own families and those of our friends who are willing to follow us. We shall sail out of the waters of Paris on one side while the Northmans enter by the other, and we shall calmly ascend the Seine towards the Marne, leaving you, seigneurs and abbots, to arrange matters with the Northmans the best way you may know how."

"Listen to him! The infamous poltroon! Is your vile slave's heart moved neither with anger nor shame at the bare idea of the disgrace of seeing the foreigners, the Northmans, in Paris!"

At these insulting words a slight flush suffused Eidiol's face, a spark of lightning glistened in his eyes. But the self-possessed old man controlled himself and answered:

"Count, my grandfather read in the old parchments of our family that a small colony of men of my race, now more than three centuries ago, lived free and happy in a corner of Burgundy when the Arabs invaded and ravaged Gaul[3]—"

"And that colony of cravens," broke in the count, "trembling before the Arabs, like you now before the Northmans, of course left the pagans to ravage, pillage and burn down the country!"

"Count," proceeded the old skipper proudly, "the people of that colony were killed to the last man because they fought in defence of their rights, their families, their soil and their liberty. But, seeing that that handful of brave men were, with the single exception of the indomitable Bretons, the only free men in all Gaul, the Arabs were able to ravage the other provinces and to settle down in Languedoc. In this century the same thing will happen with the Northmans. The population—a horde of slaves on the field, a mass of wretched beings in the towns—is indifferent to the ills that smite you—you rich seigneurs and prelates. And now, adieu. I am in a hurry to return to Paris and embrace my wife and daughter."

While Eidiol was uttering these last sentences, the count issued some orders in a low voice to one of his officers, who thereupon hurriedly left the apartment. The old man moved towards the door, but Rothbert, motioning his men to bar the passage, cried in a menacing tone:

"You shall not go to introduce disturbance and revolt in my city of Paris!" And addressing the abbot: "Have you a prison in the place?"

"We have cells, and quite strong, too, in which to keep the impious criminals who dare resist our will."

"Let one of your clerks show the way to my men, who will lock this insolent skipper in one of these cells of the abbey."

Eidiol was unable to suppress a first impulse of astonishment and sorrow.

"My son," said he, "has remained on board of my vessel; allow me to see him and apprise him of what has happened to me, that he may inform my wife and daughter. They will otherwise feel uneasy at my absence."

"Your wishes," answered Rothbert with a cruel smile, "shall be satisfied. I have sent to fetch the other skippers from your vessel."

"Treason!" cried Eidiol. "They will come confident that no harm is meant, and a prison cell awaits them!"

"You have said it," replied the Count of Paris, and, pointing his finger at Eidiol, he ordered his officers: "To prison with him!"

"My dear wife, my sweet daughter! How uneasy will you not feel when to-morrow you see neither my son nor myself coming back home," murmured the old man sadly, and, without offering any resistance, he followed the officer who took him in charge and conducted him to the subterranean cells of the abbey.

CHAPTER VI

SISTER AGNES

Shortly after the count's departure from the abbey, the reinforcement of a hundred soldiers promised by him arrived at the place. Their captain spent the night in preparing the fortifications for the defence. Under the physical lash of their foreman, above all intimidated by the fear of the fiery furnace of hell, the serfs and villeins transported to the platform of the walls large stones, logs of wood and heavy beams, intended to serve as projectiles against the expected assailants. They were also made to carry heavy barrels of oil and pitch, which, boiled in large caldrons, were held ready to be poured over the heads of the enemy; besides a large number of bags full of chalk dust, whose contents, dropped upon the besiegers, would serve to blind them.

During the night and part of the morning the cattle of the abbey's domain were driven within its walls. Thither also a large number of the abbey's serfs and villeins congregated, summoned by the abbot to its defence. Many more, however, took to flight, determined to join the Northmans the moment they disembarked and to glean whatever they could in the wake of the invaders' tracks.

Many "Franks", as the free holders of little farms were styled, who lived in the environs of St. Denis, bundled up their most valuable havings and went for shelter behind thewalls of the abbey. The court-yards and galleries of the cloister became by the hour more encumbered with a frightened crowd, whose baggage was piled up high hither and thither, while cattle of every description were huddled close together in the garden and on a spacious meadow that was enclosed within the fortifications.

Finally, the abbot himself, helped by his canons who were armed with spades and mattocks, was busily engaged in the work of hastily burying under the ground of a little sequestered court all the rich paraphernalia of the church—vases, reliquaries, chalices, monstrances, statues, crosses, candelabra, chalice-covers, and other holy utensils wrought in silver or solid gold, and enriched with costly ornaments,—all proceeding from the toil and taxes of the serfs and villeins. A small group of priests were upon their knees in the basilica, imploring, amid moans, the assistance of heaven and invoking all manner of maledictions upon the heads of the Northmans.

The larger part of the day had been spent in continual frights. The men at the lookout, who kept watch on the ramparts above the gate, saw it

frequently open in order to give passage to belated serfs and herds of cattle, or to wagons filled with the fodder needed for feeding the large number of horses and other animals that had been crowded within the walls. Two of these conveyances, loaded with hay, and each drawn by a double yoke of oxen, were conducted by a man of sinister face and barely dressed in rags. The man was well known in the abbey. So soon as he hove in sight, a monk of large paunch, who was placed at the wicket of the gate, cried:

"Blessings upon you and your load! We have so many cattle within that we have been in fear of want of provender for them. Have you any tidings of those pagan Northmans? Have their vessels been seen on the Seine? Are they near or still far away?"

"They are said to be drawing nearer. But thanks to God, the abbey is impregnable. Oh! A curse upon these Northmans!" answered the serf, whose name was Savinien. As the man spoke, a strange smile flitted over his careworn countenance; he cast a sly side-smile upon the load of hay that was heaped up high on the wagons and added: "I have driven my oxen so fast, in order to place myself at the order of our holy abbot, that, I fear, the poor brutes are foundered.—See how heavy they breathe!"

"They will not have to blow long. They will be speedily killed to feed the large number of noble Franks who have fled hither for refuge," replied the monk.

As the monk spoke, he began to remove, with the assistance of several other brothers, the enormous iron bars and chains that reinforced the massive gate from within. About to throw open the gate, however, he heard, from a short distance without, mournful moans and canticles rising from female voices. Such was the panic that the approach of the Northmans threw the church people into, that the gate-monk, frightened out of his senses by the feminine lamentations which were slowly drawing nearer, did not venture, despite all insistence on the serfs part, to open the gate of the abbey, and refused admittance even to Savinien's welcome load. In the midst of the altercation between the monk and the serf, there appeared from behind a clump of trees, that rose at a distance from the abbey, a short procession of nuns distinguishable by their black and white robes, as well as by the long veils that covered their faces and that were intended to withdraw the saintly maids from the gaze of the profane. Four of the nuns carried on a stretcher, improvised of recently felled tree-branches, the inert body of one of their companions. The pall-bearers, together with the other eight or ten nuns who composed the funeral cortège, emitted incessant and heart-rending lamentations. Another young nun, whose veil was partly raised, preceded

the body by a few steps, wringing her hands in despair, and from time to time crying out distracted:

"Lord! Lord! Have mercy upon us! Our holy abbess is killed!"

Savinien, who, from the moment admission into the abbey was refused him, had been casting increasingly anxious and uneasy looks at his load, piously dropped down on his knees the moment he saw the mortuary procession, led by the weepful nun, approach. Stepping more rapidly ahead of her suite, the latter walked up to the gate of the abbey, and, with a voice broken by sobs, cried through the wicket:

"My dear brothers, open this holy place of asylum to the poor lambs who are fleeing before ravaging wolves. Already our venerable mother in God has succumbed. We are carrying her mortal remains. Open the gate of the sacred monastery!"

"Is that you, Sister Agnes?" inquired the big gate-monk through the wicket "Are those Northman demons so near that they have invaded the convent of St. Placida?"

"Alack, my dear brother! Last night, about a score of the accursed pagans disembarked not far from our convent," answered the nun with an outburst of sobs. "Awakened by the light of the flames that shot up from the conflagration, and by the cries of terror of the serfs who occupied the outside buildings, a few of us managed to throw on our clothesand to flee in all haste with our holy abbess through a gate that opened on the field. But alack! alack! so severe was the shock upon our venerable mother, already enfeebled by disease, that after about a quarter of an hour's march she fainted in our arms,—and immediately," proceeded Sister Agnes after she had overcome a fresh fit of heart-rending sobs, "immediately our venerable mother passed from the earth to heaven!—We are bringing her body with us in order that the last rites may be performed over her remains, and that they may be buried in consecrated ground."

The gate-brother listened to the distressful tale, sobbing no less loudly than Sister Agnes and smiting his chest. When she finished he quickly opened the gate and sent one of his assistants to notify the abbot of the misfortune. The body of the deceased mother-superior entered the abbey, together with the nuns who accompanied it, and followed by Savinien's two wagons of hay. The somber face of the serf seemed to lighten up with a sinister joy, which he had no little difficulty in suppressing, when at last he found himself within, and the abbey gate closed behind him.

The fugitives who crowded the court-yard of the abbey dropped upon their knees at the passage of the nuns. The latter, led by one of the monks, marched to the parvis of the basilica, followed by the crowd who sang in chorus the prayer that for fully a century had been repeated in all the abbeys and all the castles of Gaul:

"Lord, have mercy upon us! Lord, deliver us from the Northmans! Lord, exterminate the accursed pagans!"

The funeral cortège arrived at the entrance of the basilica and was received by one of the deacons. The prelate had hastily donned his sacerdotal robes. Priests bearing the crossaloft and carrying candles stood behind the officiating prelate. They looked down-cast and pale, and trembled. They repeated the funeral psalms with precipitation and absent-mindedly. The evidence before them of the pirates' being nigh, made them shudder. The first prayers being finished, the body, still carried by the nuns upon the improvised stretcher of branches, was taken to the choir and deposited upon the flagstones, not far from the chanters' desk.

An indescribable disorder reigned in the interior of the vast church. Monks, assisted by serfs, were in hot haste finishing the removal of the precious ornaments of the splendid basilica. Ranged in the transepts, or aisles, that extended to either side of the nave, were a number of crypts, subterranean grooves, above which rose numerous mausoleums erected to the memory of kings and queens of the stock of Clovis and of Charles Martel. The frightened faces of the monks of St. Denis, the lamentations that they uttered while at work removing the sacred ornaments from the altars, the funeral chants that were sung in muffled voices for the repose of the soul of the mother-superior, whose body had just been carried into the church by the nuns, the moans of the noble Franks and their families, who had taken refuge in the holy place—all these lugubrious notes added fuel to the general feeling of dread.

Attracted, probably, more by curiosity than piety, the larger number of the soldiers, who were sent by the Count of Paris for the defense of the abbey, had followed the funeral procession into the church. These men of war, savage, coarse and as impious as either the Northmans or the Arabs, brusquely pushed their way forward as far as the choir where the body of the mother-abbess lay surrounded by her nuns. Little affected by the religious character of the ceremony or by the solemnity of the sacred place, these soldiers fastened their licentious glances upon the daughters of the Lord, whose faces they sought to discover across the transparency of their lowered veils. On his knees beside one of these, who, likewise on her knees

and her forehead bowed down, seemed steeped in prayer, Sigefred, a captain of the soldiers, made bold to touch the elbow of the holy maid. The latter was for an instant startled, but controlled herself, and remained silent. Encouraged by his success, Sigefred quietly raised the veil which fell from the head of the nun down to her waist, and carried his audacity to the point of sliding a profane hand up to the collar of the maid's robe. No sooner had he committed the indignity than he quickly withdrew his hand as if it had touched a piece of burning coal.

"By the navel of the Pope!" growled Sigefred in an undertone, "This nun has a skin of iron!"

The venturesome ruffian had no time for another word. He dropped dead, stabbed with a dagger by the nun of the skin of iron. For an instant the other soldiers remained dumb with stupefaction, seeking to explain how the long and large sleeves of the saintly maid could conceal an arm and hand whose epidermis seemed of metal.

"A miracle!" cried some of the witnesses of Sigefred's attempt. "A miracle! The Lord protects the chastity of his virgins by covering them with a tissue of steel mail!"

"Treason!" cried the less credulous warriors, drawing their swords. "These nuns are soldiers dressed like women! Treason! To arms! To arms! Revenge Sigefred! To the devil with miracles and maids!"

"Skoldmoë!" suddenly shouted with resonant voice the mother-abbess whose funeral was being celebrated, and rising to her full length, freeing herself from her long veil and dropping her black robe to her feet, Shigne the Buckler Maiden stood there in her battle armor, with her bold face framed in a hair-net of iron mail that replaced her usual casque. "Skoldmoë!" she shouted again, repeating her war-cry. "Up, my virgins! Mercy for the women! Exterminate the men! Kill them all, to the last one!" and brandishing a double-edged axe, she bounded forward like a panther and struck down one of the Frankish warriors who rushed upon her.

"Skoldmoë!" cried back the other Buckler Maidens, likewise disengaging themselves of their veils and their monastic robes, and like Shigne, they forthwith charged upon the soldiers with their axes and swords.

The faithful, only a minute before absorbed in prayer, fled in dismay towards the doors of the basilica; the monks hid themselves behind the mausoleums over the royal crypts or embraced the altars—their last refuge. The vault of

the church resounded with cries of terror, with hysterical moans, and with invocations to the Supreme Being, while above the confused noise rose the din of the Northman virgins' battle-cry, the thud of their heavy blows, the shrieks of the soldiers whom they smote.

Sister Agnes, who had introduced the pirate women into the abbey, was a poor victim of sacerdotal authority. She had been compelled to enter the convent of St. Placida. The previous night the Northman warrior maids forced open the doors of the monastery. She saw her opportunity to regain her freedom, and aided the Buckler Maidens in carrying outthe strategem which Shigne devised in order to capture the abbey of St. Denis.

More numerous than the pirate women, the soldiers in the abbey strove to break a passage through the frightened mass at the door and join their comrades in the interior of the church in order to overpower their assailants. But the prodigy of a combat with woman warriors, some of whom were of surpassing beauty, struck the younger of the men with amazement. Their arms were involuntarily stayed in the act of striking the beautiful maids. These, on the contrary, fired by the example of Shigne, who was making havoc among the soldiers with her battle-axe, fought with matchless heroism. The older soldiers, being less susceptible to the emotions of some of their younger companions at the thought of a struggle to the death with young women, fell upon these with fury. Several of Shigne's virgins were killed, others were wounded. But the latter did not seem to feel their wounds, and only fought with increased ardor.

The mêlée was still at its height when Fultrade arrived back at the abbey from the mission that the Count of Paris had charged him with. The noise of the battle in the church drew him thither. When he entered he saw Shigne with her back against the mausoleum of Clovis battling with intrepidity against two Frankish soldiers. The heroine whirled her weapon with such agility and dexterity that every time her battle-axe struck the swords of her two adversaries the sparks were made to fly by the shock of the iron against the steel. During this struggle the sword of one of the soldiers was broken. At the moment when Shigne was about to let her axe descend upon his head and kill her disarmed adversary, Fultrade, who had glided silently behind the mausoleum, seized her by the legs. Thus taken by surprise, Shigne fell to the ground and dropped her axe. The two Frankish soldiers threw themselves upon her and made desperate efforts to keep her under their knees.

"Skoldmoë!—To me, my sisters!"

But the voice of the Buckler Maiden was drowned in the general clash of arms and in the furious roars of the soldiers, mingled with the war-cry of the other virgins who still continued the fray under the fretted vaults of the basilica. In vain the heroine called to her companions. Fultrade, who had knelt down beside her in order to assist the two soldiers in keeping her on the floor, placed both his hands upon her mouth, and yielding to his licentious instinct, whispered to the two men at arms:

"Comrades, this witch is young and beautiful; let us drag her into the crypt of this mausoleum; she shall be ours!"

The two Franks broke into a savage laugh of approval, and aided by Fultrade dragged the Buckler Maiden, despite the superhuman resistance that she offered, into a cavity that was dug under the mausoleum—an underground nook perpetually lighted by a sepulchre lamp.

CHAPTER VII

KOEMPE!

The monk and the two soldiers had barely stretched the Buckler Maiden upon the slab-stones of the crypt, when an icy terror ran through their frames. A noise, at first heard indistinctly, now smote their ears with all its formidable meaning. It was the war-cry of the Northman pirates. "Koempe!" "Koempe!" resounded from the court-yard of the abbey. The cry grew louder; it invaded the church; it presently reached clear, powerful, distinct into the underground recess of the crypt.

"Malediction upon us!" exclaimed the monk listening. "It is the war-cry of the Northmans! They have invaded the abbey!"

"Where could they have entered by?" asked one of the soldiers with chattering teeth. "The demons must have leaped out of hell!"

"To me, my virgins!" the warrior maid now cried with renewed vigor, although still held pinioned to the ground under the knees of the monk and the soldiers. "To me, my sisters! Skoldmoë! Skoldmoë!"

The last words of Shigne were answered by the sonorous voice of Gaëlo:

"Shigne, here I am!" and almost immediately the young pirate appeared at the entrance of the crypt, followed by Simon Large-Ears, Robin Jaws and Savinien, the serf who had driven the two wagons loaded with hay into the abbey. All three shouted at the top of their voices: "Koempe! To death and to the sack! Pillage! Pillage!"

At the sight of the unexpected reinforcement that rushed to the aid of their fair prisoner, Fultrade and his accomplices quitted their intended victim. Shigne leaped to her feet, seized the sword of one of the soldiers, plunged it into the breast of the monk, who dropped stone dead, and, still trembling with rage and shame, rushed sword in hand upon the young pirate.

"Either I shall kill you, or you will kill me, Gaëlo! You shall not be allowed to say that you saw me exposed to extreme outrage!"

Stupefied at the sudden attack of a young woman to whose aid he had hastened to come, Gaëlo at first contented himself with parrying Shigne's blows, but wounded in the face by her weapon, he precipitated himself upon her crying:

"Your will be done! Either you shall kill me, or I shall kill you!"

The combat between Gaëlo and Shigne was furious. Simon Large-Ears and Robin Jaws, who had turned their first attention to the two soldiers hidden in the remotest corner of the crypt under Clovis' mausoleum, killed them both. As they stepped out, Simon Large-Ears said:

"These nuns who came whining to the gate of the abbey while we were concealed under the hay of Savinien's wagons, turned to strategem like ourselves in order to get in. Theirs was a feminine ruse!"

"Oh, Simon," answered Robin pointing to the Buckler Maiden and Gaëlo, who were engaged in a deadly duel; "what a pity! To think of such a magnificent lad and so beautiful a girl seeking to kill each other, instead of making love!"

"And if they survive they will love each other but hobblingly. It is clear that in their rage both will lose some member. Just watch the blows that they deal to each other!"

Never had Gaëlo met more redoubtable an adversary than Shigne. To inordinary strength she coupled skill, coolness and intrepidity. Carried away by the ardor of the struggle, the pirate forgot his passionate love. If he at all kept in mind that he was fighting with a woman, he only felt all the more nettled at finding in her such indomitable powers of resistance. After a long exchange of parried thrusts, Gaëlo succeeded in dealing so violent a blow with his sword upon the virgin's skull that neither her hair-net of linked iron, nor her thick head of hair, through both of which the pirate's sword cut its way, could save her from a severe scalp wound. The blood poured down Shigne's face, her weapon slipped from her grasp, and she dropped down first upon both her knees and then on her side.

"Unhappy me!" cried Gaëlo in despair. "I have killed her!" and kneeling down beside the young woman, he raised her beautiful head, now pale, bleeding and with eyes half closed.

"Gaëlo," murmured the Buckler Maiden in a fainting voice, "you were able to vanquish me; I love you!" and her eyes closed.

Struck with sympathy, Simon and Robin approached Gaëlo to offer him their services, when a new cry arose from the distance, and again dominated the lingering clash of arms between the Northman pirates and the small remnant of the rapidly diminishing garrison of the abbey. It was the cry of "Berserk!" "Berserk!" warningly uttered by the pirates themselves.

"Lodbrog the Giant is again in a fit of fury!" cried Simon Large-Ears in terror. "The berserker is as terrible to his friends as to his enemies. Gaëlo, the fray may roll this way; your sweetheart is perhaps not dead; let us carry her into the crypt; she will be there safer than here."

Gaëlo hastened to follow Simon's advice. Raising the insensible warrior maid in his arms, he laid her down gently in a remote corner of the sepulchral recess.

A prodigious spectacle, a giant battle, was elsewhere taking place at that moment. The Frankish soldiers posted on the ramparts had left their posts to run to the assistance of their companions, first engaged by the Buckler Maidens and subsequently attacked by the band under Gaëlo that emerged out of Savinien's hay wagons. Until then, Lodbrog the berserker had fought valiantly without his intellect being clouded. But the intoxication of the battle, the odor of carnage, the sight of the Frankish reinforcement that poured down from the ramparts and rushed toward the main door of the basilica crying: "Death! Death! Kill the Northmans!"—all this combined threw the giant into a new attack of frenzy. Brandishing a spiked iron mace, the Northman, leaped forward with a roar and dashed upon the compact group of Franks. Ten blacksmiths' hammers beating upon ten anvils could not produce the deafening sound produced by Lodbrog's mace falling, falling again, rising only to fall again and again upon the casques and the armors of the soldiers. Some sink to the earth, crushed under the thundering blows, without uttering a sound: their skulls are ground into pulp within their casques like nuts in their shells; others roll to the ground emitting shrieks of pain and rage. The corpses are heaped up high at the feet of Lodbrog. He mounts the heap. He mounts it as on a pedestal, and his size assumes still more gigantic proportions. The tops of the casques of the soldiers who still dare sustain the contest with him, barely reach his belt. Gaëlo, who rushed out of the basilica, thinking his aid needed in the general battle that he imagined was in progress, arrived at the moment when the surviving soldiers were surrounding the berserker, then at the climax of his fury. The spectacle presented looked like assailants trying to scale a tower. Twenty arms holding twenty swords rose at once to smite the giant. But towering above those arms and swords appeared the cuirassed bust of the colossus, and his iron mace rose and descended, splintering swords, cracking heads, crushing limbs, pulverizing arms! Gaëlo, the others of his band and the surviving Buckler Maidens precipitated themselves upon the rear of the soldiers who besieged Lodbrog. Suddenly the berserker was heard to emit a fresh roar, throw his mace into the air, stoop down and immediately rise again holding a soldier by the hair and belt. Vainly did the luckless Frank struggle to escape from the giant's clutch. He was hurled wrathfully from on

high against the handful of soldiers who still assailed the Northman. Several of them rolled over the ground. Lodbrog despatched them by trampling over their prostrate bodies with his colossal feet like an enraged elephant that tramples upon and pounds his victims to death. Thereupon, seeing no more enemies to fight, all his opponents having been killed or wounded by himself or the other pirates, but still a prey to his own vertigo of destruction, riddled with wounds that he did not feel, but the gushing blood of which reddened his armor that was broken through in twenty places, Lodbrog's eyes fell upon a large black mausoleum just within the basilica. It was the tomb of Fredegonde.[4] The giant rushed in headlong; he seized with both his mighty hands one of the pillars that supported the entablature; shook it; loosened it with an effort of superhuman strength; the pillar yielded and carried down with it a portion of the architecture of the mausoleum, which thereupon crumbled to the ground. The loud crash of the ruin added fuel to the rage of the berserker. His eyes encountered the sepulchral light that escaped from the crypt where the Beautiful Shigne lay. The berserker rushed thither with the roar of a goaded bull, and vanished from sight.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RESCUE

A night and almost a whole day had passed since Anne the Sweet, taken into one of the underground cells of the abbey of St. Denis by Father Fultrade, had escaped the outrageous purposes of the monk.

Deepest darkness reigned in the dungeon in which Anne the Sweet was confined. The feelings of terror and despair that at first seized her at being separated from her mother, had been followed by mental and physical prostration. Her tears had run dry. Seated on the stone slabs of the cell with her back to the wall, the young girl dropped into a feverish slumber agitated by sinister dreams. One time, it was the monk Fultrade who appeared before her, and then she awoke shuddering with horror—a horror that was intensified by the brooding darkness around her. At other times Anne dreamed that she had been forgotten in the underground chamber, and felt herself a prey to the agonies of hunger while her torture was rendered still more excruciating by the heart-rending cries of her mother, likewise a prey to the torments of famine. Suddenly the young girl was awakened from her cruel dreams by a loud noise of voices and steps that tumultuously drew near. She leaped up, listened, and recognizing the voices of Eidiol and of Guyrion the Plunger, she bounded towards the door which she struck with all her strength, crying:

"Father! Brother! Deliver me! Come, come to my help!"

"Step back from the door, my child!" answered the skipper. "We shall break it in."

Beside herself with joy, the young girl fell back a few steps. Shaken from its hinges by the blows of the iron bars that Eidiol and Guyrion and Rustic the Gay wielded with energy, the door soon fell over and Anne rushed into the arms of her father and brother; but looking around as if missing someone she had expected to see, she asked with fear:

"And my mother? Where is my dear mother?"

"You will see her in an instant, my child. It is from her I just learned about the treason of the infamous monk," answered the dean of the Skippers' Guild, who could not bestow sufficient caresses upon the daughter whom he feared to have lost. "When she saw me," continued the happy father, "poor Martha felt such a pang that she lost consciousness. Fortunately she

returned to her senses, but her weakness is such that she could not walk out of the cell in which she also was confined. It is near by."

"But you here, father, in this abbey?" the young girl inquired, as soon as her first emotions were calmed. "And you, too, brother? And you, Rustic? Am I dreaming? Is it yourselves I see in this dungeon?"

"The Count of Paris posted some archers along the banks of the Seine in order to stop all the vessels that ascended the river," the old man explained. "Two of his soldiers took me to Rothbert. I had an altercation with him, and he ordered me locked up here."

"And the traitor thereupon sent us one of his men to say that my father wanted to see us immediately," added Guyrion; "we came without suspecting any harm—"

"And we had hardly set foot inside the abbey," broke in Rustic the Gay, "when the count's soldiers fell upon us unexpectedly and took us also prisoners."

"But you are now free," replied Anne. "Who set you free?"

"The Northman pirates, my dear child."

"Great God!" cried the young girl affrighted and clasping her hands. "Oh! father! were those pagans merciful to you?"

"Pagans who set us free are better than Christians who imprison us. Moreover, these brave and wily folks entered the abbey by strategem, and have slaughtered about a hundred Frankish soldiers, without counting the monks whom they despatched."

"After which, sister," proceeded Guyrion, "they started to pillage the basilica and the abbey. There is a heap of booty, as high as the portal of the cloister, piled up in the court-yard."

"And then," said Rustic, "the Northmans descended into the cellar to stave in the heads of the casks of wine that the abbot kept there. In this way they landed at the entrance of the gallery that leads to these underground dungeons. Expecting to find large treasures locked up there, they broke in the door. They found us huddled together in the gallery. Their chief, a magnificent young warrior whom they call Gaëlo, ordered them to treat us well and to assist us in setting the rest of the prisoners free. That is the history of our own deliverance."

"Thus, my child, we reached the cell in which your mother was confined," added Eidiol, again embracing Anne the Sweet.

"The young chief Gaëlo quitted us to join old Rolf, the chief of all the Northman forces," rejoined Guyrion, "who had just disembarked near the abbey. He entered the place and now holds it with a large body of men. The pirates are now hastily throwing up earth-works above the abbey on the side of Paris. Before sailing up towards the city they wish to fortify themselves here so as to have a safe place of refuge."

"Halloa! Halloa, there! Where are the Parisian skippers?" Gaëlo's voice was at this moment heard calling out from a distance. "Come here, my worthy men; Rolf wishes to see you!"

"Young man," said Eidiol to the pirate who was approaching them, "we thank you for having set us free. We shall follow you. But grant that my son remain near his sister and mother, who, like ourselves, were locked up in this underground prison. They need his protection."

"Let it be so," answered Gaëlo.

While Anne the Sweet and her brother walked to the cell where Martha lay, the dean of the Skippers' Guild of Paris, together with Rustic the Gay and his other men, followed Gaëlo to be presented to Rolf, who was feasting in the apartment recently occupied by the gourmandizing and craven Abbot of St. Denis. On their way thither, the young pirate left Eidiol and his men for an instant, and ran to one of the lower apartments of the abbey whither the Beautiful Shigne, whose wound, although serious, was not mortal, had been transported and was being tended. When Lodbrog the berserker, still under the spell of his vertigo of fury dashed into the crypt of the mausoleum of Clovis where the wounded warrior maid lay, the structure would inevitably have been demolished had he not stumbled at the first step of the short stone stairs that led down into the cell, and rolled to the bottom where he fell prostrate, bleeding to death from the wounds that he had received, not a few of which would have even singly proved mortal.

CHAPTER IX

THE NORTHMAN SEA-KING

Rolf, the Sea-King and supreme Chief of the Northman pirates, was a man far advanced in years. His beard and hair, naturally of a yellow blonde, were heavily streaked with grey. Numerous scars criss-crossed his face, which was of a brick-red hue, tanned and copper-colored by the sun and the sea air. His physiognomy was rendered hideous by a saber cut that put out his left eye and cut his nose off to the bone. His single eye glistened like a burning coal under its bushy eye-brow; his heavy lips, half-hidden under his bristling moustache and by his shaggy beard, imparted to his mouth a scoffing and sensuous expression. Rolf was of middle size and of athletic frame. His arms were abnormally long. Like his champions, the Northman Chieftain wore an armor of iron scales. But, in order to feast and frolic more at ease, he had doffed his cuirass, and now kept on only a jacket of reindeer-skin, blackened at several places by the friction of his armor, and that fell open from time to time, exposing his shirt and, under his shirt, a chest as hirsute as that of the bears of the northern sea. The pirate chieftain was just finishing his repast. Canons and a few other surviving dignitaries of the abbot served Rolf upon their knees. The friars looked haggard and were pale with fear. He allowed them to move about only on all fours, or upon their knees when they were wanted to reach out dishes and wine cups to him. Every time that the movements of these servitors seemed too slow, either the pirates themselves, or former serfs of the abbey, who now saw their opportunity to avenge the ill-treatments that they had been subjected to, quickened, with kicks and sticks, the motions of the holy men.

Rolf, just finishing his sumptuous feast, seemed to be in great good humor. Half seas over with the old wines of Gaul, he was indulging himself in the well upholstered easy-chair of the abbot. He had just placed a woman on each knee, when, back from his call upon the Beautiful Shigne, and at ease concerning her recovery, Gaëlo entered the banquet-hall, accompanied by Eidiol, Rustic and the other skippers whom he was to present to Rolf.

"So the priests of this place were keeping you prisoners!" remarked Rolf to the skippers while wiping with the back of his hand his thick moustache, still wet with wine. "You should side with us against the church rats and the castle falcons!"

"We river-pikes can escape the rats and the falcons easy enough," answered Eidiol. "Nevertheless, we love to see the falcons transfixed with arrows, and

the rats drowned in their traps. We applaud your victory over the monks of St. Denis."

"Are you of the city of Paris?"

"Yes, seigneur; I am the dean of the Skippers' Guild."

"Will the Parisians defend their city?"

"If you injure the poor folks, yes; if, however, all you mean to do is to burn down the churches, levy ransoms on the rich abbeys and on the palaces of the Frankish seigneurs, then the people will not budge."

"So, then, the good people of Paris will offer us no resistance. That will be wise on their part. What with the reserve that I shall leave in this fortified abbey, and my two thousand vessels that will ascend the Seine as far as Paris, resistance could come neither from Count Rothbert nor from Charles the Simple. Your King will pay us ransom, after which we shall wing our flight towards the North on the tracks of the swans,—unless I should take it into my head to settle down in this country of Gaul, the same as my comrade Hastain did when he settled down in the country of Chartres. He! He! my champions! I am growing old. Perhaps I should settle down in this country, in some fat province rich in pretty girls and good wine! Oh, my champions! As our saga sings: 'I am an old sea-crow; for nearly forty years I have grazed with my wings the fresh waters of rivers and the briny waves of the sea'. Now, then, there must be an end of this, my brave champions! Charles the Simple has a daughter called Ghisèle. She is a girl of fourteen, and pretty enough to make one's head swim. Maybe I shall take the daughter of Charles the Simple to wife and demand of him a whole province for dower. What think you of this project?"

No less intoxicated than their chieftain, the pirates emitted loud roars of laughter and answered vociferously:

"We shall drink to your wedding, old Rolf! A handsome maid belongs in your couch. Glory to the husband of Ghisèle, the daughter of Charles the Simple."

"The old brigand is drunk as a thrush in autumn, Master Eidiol; what wild scheme is that which he pursues?" whispered Rustic to the old skipper.

A great tumult interrupted the answer. The noise proceeded from without, it grew louder and approached the apartment. Imprecations and threats were

vociferated wildly. Presently the door burst open and several pirates rushed in, dragging after them Guyrion the Plunger, his face bathed in blood.

"My son!" cried Eidiol running towards the lad. "My son is wounded!"

"And your mother—your sister—where are they?" added Rustic, rushing upon the heels of the old skipper. "Oh! I fear me a great misfortune has happened!"

"These bandits have killed my mother from whose arms they strove to drag my sister," answered Guyrion in despair. "I sought to defend them—these men struck me over the head with a saber and knocked me senseless!"

"My wife dead!" exclaimed the old man stupefied; and turning to the chieftain of the pirates, he cried out in a thundering voice: "Rolf! Justice! Justice! I demand vengeance!"

"Yes, Rolf, justice and vengeance!" cried several of the pirates who rushed in with Guyrion. "This dog whom we bring here to you has killed one of our companions. We want justice!"

Rolf, more and more under the influence of the heady wine, seeing that he continued to empty cup after cup, answered in a husky voice: "Yes, my champions; I shall order that justice be done. Only let me finish this flagon of wine."

At the same moment other pirates rushed in. They carried Anne the Sweet unconscious in their arms and deposited her at the feet of the Northman chieftain saying:

"Old Rolf, here is a beautiful girl that we have reserved for you. She belongs to your part of the booty."

Eidiol, Rustic, Guyrion and the other skippers in their company ran to the rescue of Anne, but they were violently repelled and held back by the pirates.

"My champions, I shall administer justice!" cried Rolf from his seat in a maudlin voice; and addressing himself to Guyrion the Plunger, who, forgetful of his wound that bathed his forehead in blood, looked alternately with despairing eyes from his father to his sister who lay prostrate in a swoon: "Who are you? Where do you come from? Answer, young man!"

"He is my son," answered Eidiol, choking with rage. "He is a skipper, like myself, and he came to join me at the abbey, where I was retained a prisoner."

"And as truly as I have managed the oar since my childhood," cried Rustic, "seeing that you, Rolf, and your men, ill-treat us poor people in such a manner, our Skippers' Guild will call the other guilds of Paris to arms against you."

Rolf received the threat with a loud roar of laughter. He rose, and trying to steady himself upon his feet answered in a voice frequently interrupted by hiccoughs:

"I pardon all these fellows; but I shall keep the girl. And now, you, Parisians, return to your city; you are free. I forbid my champions do you the least harm."

"Rolf!" cried Eidiol imploringly, "return my daughter to me! Allow us to carry away in our vessel the body of my wife!"

"My champions, cast these dogs out at the gate of the abbey, and let them hurry to announce to Charles the Simple that—I want—to marry his daughter Ghisèle—Yes, I want that maid for my wife."

"Yes, yes! You shall wed the princess!" cried the pirates, delighted at the whim of their chief; and dragging the Parisian skippers despite all the resistance that they offered, drove them out of the abbey of St. Denis at the point of their swords.

CHAPTER X

ROLF'S COURTSHIP

The large fleet of the pirates pulled from the banks on which the abbey of St. Denis rose, and, driven by a favorable wind, steered for Paris since early sunrise of the next morning. The fleet numbered more than two thousand vessels, carrying twenty-five thousand combatants. The sailing order was determined by the river's channel. The light vessels of the draft of holkers navigated close to the two banks; toward the center of the river sailed the "snekars", vessels with twenty oarsmen's benches; finally along the deepest part of the channel came the "drekars", men-of-war that greatly resembled the Roman galleys. Thick sheets of iron defended the flanks of the latter; a "kastali", a semicircular wooden tower from eight to ten feet high, rose at their poop. Posted upon the platform of these towers, the Northmans hurled against their foe stones, bolts, javelins, fire-brands, heavy beams of wood, and also fragile little vases filled with a corrosive dust that blinded whoever sought to board them, while other pirates, armed with long scythes, cut the cordage of the hostile ships.

The Northman vessels, that, ascending the Seine, made sail for Paris, covered the river from bank to bank, and a full league in length. Its waters disappeared under the mass of craft of all sizes, and all filled with pirates. As the fleet moved up it presented the aspect of a huge swarm of men, of casques, of arms, of cuirasses, of bucklers and of uncouth figures, painted or gilded and placed either at the prow or the poop of the vessels, sometimes on the tops of the masts. Pavilions of all colors surmounted with large painted streamers on which fabulous animals were depicted—winged dragons, double-headed eagles, fishes with the heads of lions, and other monsters—floated in the wind. The savage war-songs of the Northmans resounded far and wide, and were answered by and mingled with the joyful cries of the revolted serfs who followed the banks of the river and regulated their march by the progress of the fleet. At last the Northmans reached a part of the river whence were seen in the distance, across the evening haze, the steeples, towers and walls of the city of Paris, enclosed within a fortified island, at the extremity of which rose the cathedral. On the opposite sides, and along either arm of the river, where the open fields and the suburbs lay, the belfries of churches were discernible, as well as the numerous buildings of the abbeys of St. Germain-d'Auxerre, St. Germain-des-Prés, and St. Etienne-des-Grès, while further away along the distant horizon loomed the high hill on which stood the basilica of St. Geneviève. At the sight of the city that had during the last century been so often attacked, ravaged, pillaged

and levied ransom upon by the men of their race, the Northmans uttered wild shouts of triumph, and cried out: "Paris!" "Paris!"

The fleet was headed by the drekar of Rolf the Sea-King. This vessel was named Grimsnoth. Rolf captured it from another pirate after a murderous combat. According to the saga of Gothrek, Grimsnoth surpassed the other drekars of the seas of the North by its beauty and size as much as Rolf himself surpassed the other pirates by his valor. Indeed, never yet was ship seen comparable with Grimsnoth. The drekar resembled a gigantic dragon, whose copper head and scaly neck protruded from the prow that represented the monster's massive breast equipped with two folded and gilded wings, thrown backward and fashioned in such manner as to represent the coil of the marine monster's tail. In the middle of the huge square red sail of the drekar another dragon was designed. At its poop rose the kastali—the little semicircular fortress in itself, constructed of strong smooth beams circled by iron bands and pierced by narrow loop-holes through which the archers on the inside could shoot their darts from cover, in case the foe attempted to board thedrekar. A wide platform, spacious enough to hold twenty armed men, crowned the fortification, and had a belt of iron bucklers for its parapet.

Old Rolf stood erect on top of his kastali. His mien was savage. It looked inspired. His weapon and hands streamed blood. At his feet, stretched out in a pool of blood, and still palpitating with its ebbing life, lay the body of a white horse that was taken from the stables of the Abbot of St. Denis, bound by the four feet, and raised with the aid of pulleys and cordage to the platform of the kastali in order to be there solemnly sacrificed to Odin and the gods of the North. When the sacrifice was done, the old pirate took his ivory horn and blew three times, giving a particular intonation to each blast. The chief of each vessel put his horn to his own lips and repeated the signal given by Rolf. Thus the signal ran from mouth to mouth, from one end of the fleet to the other. The war-songs of the pirates were hushed, and immediately, obedient to the order given by the blast from their chief'shorn, the Northmans maneuvered their sails in such manner that their vessels remained motionless on the current of the stream. The holkers of Gaëlo and of Shigne served as scouts to the drekar of Rolf and sailed a little distance ahead of him. The old pirate hailed the two young leaders and ordered them to board his drekar. Both obeyed and crossed over a narrow plank furnished with solid cramp-irons that was thrown out to each of the holkers from the sides of Grimsnoth. The Buckler Maiden, still pale from the loss of blood, wore her head bandaged under the iron hair-net that she used for a casque. At the moment when she was about to ascend the kastali of Rolf, Gaëlo said to the heroine:

"Shigne, war has its hazards; I may be killed to-morrow. Become my wife this night. Let our union be consummated."

The Buckler Maiden blushed; her eyes, that never before were dropped at the sight of man, now felt veiled by a mist before the ardent gaze of Gaëlo; in a low and trembling voice she answered:

"Gaëlo, you vanquished me; I belong to you; I am proud that I do; I could belong to no braver man. Rolf has been a father to me. I should consult him on your request. If he says yes, I will say yes, and from to-night I shall be yours." Without another word the warrior maid preceded Gaëlo to the platform of the kastali where the old pirate stood awaiting them.

"Gaëlo," said Rolf, "you and Shigne shall precede the fleet; ply your oars and reach Paris with your two holkers."

"Never shall I have obeyed you with greater joy."

"Order yourselves to be conducted before the Count of Paris. Shigne is to say to him: 'The King of the Franks has a young and handsome daughter. Rolf demands that daughter in marriage.'" The pirate thereupon rubbed his beard, laughed aloud with his usual roar, and added: "I have taken it into my head to wed a maid of royal race!" And addressing Gaëlo, the pirate continued: "As to you, Gaëlo, you shall tell the Count of Paris that I shall want, together with the daughter, and for dower, the territory of Neustria. It is a rich and fertile region, and it is washed by the sea, exactly suitable to a mariner who loves the ocean. Old Hastain obtained from Charles the Bald the country of Chartres; Rolf, the Chief of the Northmans will have Neustria, which we shall call Northmandy, and where I shall establish you both, my champions!"

"We shall carry your orders to the Count of Paris, who, for all answer, will have us stabbed, both of us, Shigne and myself."

"By Odin, he will not dare to! You will tell the count that my fleet will cast anchor under the walls of Paris; and that if, to-morrow, before sunset, you and Shigne are not back on my drekar, I shall set the city on fire, sack it, and kill all its inhabitants. If to-morrow, before the close of day, Charles the Simple has not granted me his daughter, Neustria, and ten thousand pounds of silver for the ransom of Paris, there will be left not one stone upon the other in the city. That is my message."

"Rolf, we shall immediately depart to carry out your orders. To-morrow we shall be either dead or back to you before sunset. I have requested Shigne to

accept me for her husband this very night. She answered saying: 'I shall say yes, if Rolf says yes, and from to-night I shall be yours.'!"

"Gaëlo," answered the old pirate with a sly look, "will wed the Beautiful Shigne the day that Rolf weds Ghisèle, the daughter of the King of the Franks! Go on the mission that I have charged you with—duty and love, each in its season."

CHAPTER XI

BRENN—KARNAK

Upon quitting the drekar of Rolf, Shigne and Gaëlo reembarked upon their own holkers and ordered their oarsmen to ply their oars vigorously. The two holkers glided swiftly over the water and they were steered towards the fortified point of the island where Paris was situated. The rest of the fleet followed slowly behind.

"Gaëlo," said Simon Large-Ears, keeping in swing with the quick and vigorous stroke of his companions, "just look at those bands of serfs who have been following us along the river bank since yesterday. Look at them running like a pack of wolves hungering for the abbeys that we see strewn hither and thither."

"I fear they mean to start the pillaging without waiting for us!" exclaimed Robin Jaws in a tone of lamentation, which was soon joined by the voices of the other pirates, who ceased rowing for a moment in order to cast their angry looks at the ragged rabble rout. The latter, wholly unconcerned by the indignation that they had provoked, ran apace brandishing their staves, their forks and their scythes, and from time to time emitting furious yells.

"If Lodbrog had not died like a true berserker, such a sight as this would throw the fit of frenzy upon him. What evidences of misery do we not see on all sides!"

"To your oars, my champions! To your oars!" cried Gaëlo. "You need not worry about your share in the pillage. Now, however, row!" saying which Gaëlo pointed to theholker of Shigne which had taken the lead of them, and he added: "Will you allow yourselves to be beaten by the Buckler Maidens? Fall to, champions!"

Grumbling at Gaëlo's orders the pirates bent to their oars and strove to overtake the white holker. On the right bank of the Seine there rose large clumps of trees, planted in the middle of wide meadows that belonged to the abbey of St. Germain-des-Prés. On the left side of the river, the bank, which rose much higher than on the opposite side, made a sharp turn and shut off the horizon. From the foot of the slope, a jetty constructed of stones closely set together ran out some fifty feet into the river. It was the breakwater of the port of Grève, now deserted, but where vessels took refuge when the current was strong. Propelled by their oars and steered so as just to clear the jetty, the two holkers were pushing vigorously forward, when, suddenly

dashing from behind the further side of the stone structure, a Parisian vessel manned by Eidiol, Guyrion, Rustic the Gay and several other Gallic skippers intercepted the progress of the Northman boats. The men on board the vessel shot a volley of arrows at the Northmans, threw a grappling iron into the holkernearer to them, which happened to be Gaëlo's, and as quickly taking up their cutlasses, pikes and axes leaped forward resolutely to the fray, while Eidiol cried out to them:

"Exterminate the Northmans, but seize the two chiefs alive. They shall serve us for hostages!"

At the moment of this unexpected attack, Shigne and Gaëlo, the latter of whom was struck by a barbed arrow just below his armlet, were, as was their wont, standing near the helm. Both dashed forward to engage the Gauls, but the same instant that Eidiol issued the order to exterminate the pirates, a cry of glad surprise went up from the holker of the Buckler Maidens, and immediately after, these words reached the ear of the aged dean of the Skippers' Guild:

"Father! Father! Do not hurt these young warrior maids. Their chief has protected me. She was taking me to Paris, back to you! She is charged with a pacific mission," and standing up in the middle of the holker, Anne the Sweet extended her arms to Eidiol.

"Guy! Rustic! Drop your arms," the old man cried. "Anne, my dear child, is in the vessel of the warrior maids!"

Still under the excitement of the interrupted battle, Shigne ordered her virgins to lay down their weapons, while Anne, with her arms still extended towards Eidiol, cried out:

"Bless this warrior maid! Oh, my father! Thanks to her I have escaped being outraged by the pirates!"

"How sorry I am for having shot that arrow at you!" Guyrion was at the same moment saying to Gaëlo, whom he saw endeavoring to extract the arrow that had struck him in the arm. "I now recognize you, worthy pirate! It was you who opened the doors of our cells in the abbey of St. Denis!"

Still with his cutlass in his hand and contemplating Simon, who was making wry faces while holding his hand to one side of his bleeding head, "I also regret to have cut off half the ear of this Northman, but it stuck out clean beyond his casque!" exclaimed Rustic the Gay.

"Another meeting," cried Simon Large-Ears, shaking his fist at Rustic, "it is that insolent tongue of yours that I mean to cut out, by the faith of Simon!"

"Why, you are as little of a Northman as myself, honest pirate!" exclaimed Rustic as he recognized his countryman. "My regret is then only all the deeper for leaving you in so ridiculous a state. I should have clipped off both your ears. But that can still be done."

Simon made no answer to the renewed joke. He was kept busy stanching the flow of blood from his wound, which he washed with fresh water that he dipped up from the river with his casque, while his friend Robin Jaws tried to console him saying:

"If we only had here some fire; I would heat the point of my sword red, and would quickly burn your wound dry."

Shortly after the boarding that was stopped so happily, the grappling irons of the Parisian vessel were removed. Jumping from the holker of the Buckler Maiden on board her own father's vessel, Anne the Sweet related to him, to Guyrion and to Rustic how she had recovered her senses in the midst of the pirates who took her to Rolf just at the moment when the warrior maid stepped into the apartment; how she threw herself at Shigne's feet; how Shigne, touched with pity, obtained from Rolf the freedom of his prisoner and took her to her own holker, where she remained in safety until the unexpected encounter with her father. Eidiol, in turn, informed Anne that, enraged at seeing her in the hands of the Northmans, and knowing from experience that they were in the habit of expediting some light craft ahead of the main fleet, he placed himself in ambush behind the breakwater of the port of Grève, determined to wreak vengeance for the death of Martha upon all the pirates whom he could seize, and to keep their chiefs alive in order to exchange them for Anne.

The two holkers, as well as the Parisian vessel, thereupon proceeded jointly towards Paris, and disembarked all their crews upon the river bank at a little distance from the ramparts. There the Northmans were to await the return of Shigne and Gaëlo, who were charged with carrying the will of Rolf to the Count of Paris.

At a point of the river bank whence the road led inland toward the city, which could not be entered save by one of the bridges, both of which were defended by towers, Eidiol said to Gaëlo:

"In order to reach the palace of the Count of Paris in safety both you and your female companion should throw over your armor the hooded great-coats of two of our skippers. Your quality of messengers from Rolf might not be respected by the count's soldiers. You are both brave. But what will bravery boot if you find yourselves two against a hundred? I shall lead you as far as the palace. Once arrived there, you can demand to see one of Rothbert's officers and he will enable you to carry out your mission."

"I accept your offer, brave skipper," answered Gaëlo after exchanging a few words in a low voice with Shigne. "I am anxious to succeed in the mission that I am charged with. We wish to arrive as promptly as possible before the count."

"Moreover," added Guyrion addressing the pirate, "I see by the way you carry your arm that you suffer greatly from the wound I gave you. The iron head of my arrow has remained in the wound. Step into our house before you proceed to the palace. We shall dress your wound. Although my mother's death is due to the Northmans, I may not forget that it was you who delivered me, together with my companions and my father, from the prison of the abbey, and that it is your friend who saved my sister from the pollution of Rolf. Our gratitude is due you."

"I accept your proposal," answered the young man.

The Beautiful Shigne and Gaëlo threw over themselves the great-coats of two of the skippers, left the river bank behind them, climbed the bluff and took the road to the bridge. Towards the north the bright glare of a fire struggled on the horizon with the light of the sinking sun. As they drew nearer to the city, an ever louder tumult struck their ears, until presently they found themselves in the midst of a mob of slaves that was hurrying under the leadership of several clericals towards the gate of the tower over the bridge, and taking to the city for safe-keeping the treasures of sanctuaries that had been set on fire by bands of revolted serfs. The docile serfs, whom the priests had in charge, bore on their backs big cases filled with corn, altar ornaments of gold and silver, statues of precious metals, massive shrines that glistened with precious stones and some of which required seven serfs to carry. The priests marched near the reliquaries, either moaning with grief, or frantically ejaculating maledictions on the invaders and their seconders, the revolted serfs. Among the serfs themselves, some joined in the lamentations of the priests, but less anxious to mount the ramparts and do battle with the Northmans, they answered the pressing urgings of the clericals with the submissive exclamation: "The will of God be done!" Within the city the emissaries of the Count of Paris were no more successful in

evoking the martial ardor of the people. In vain did the count's men gallop through the city and call out: "To arms, villeins! To arms, towns-folk! To the ramparts!" But villeins and towns-folk hurried into their own frame houses and barricaded the doors.

After traversing several tortuous streets, Eidiol and his suite arrived at the door of the skipper's house. Guyrion opened it, and Gaëlo, Shigne, Rustic, Anne and her father were speedily gathered together in the apartment on the lower floor, whose shutters they prudently closed.

"Light a lamp, sister," said Guyrion, "and let me have a cup with water, some lint and oil;" and addressing Gaëlo, while Anne fetched the materials required for dressing the Northman's wound, "roll up your armlet; I shall extract the arrowhead; after the wound is washed with cold water and covered with lint saturated in aromatic oil, you will feel relieved."

Gaëlo removed his armor, rolled up the sleeve of his reindeer jacket, and left his bleeding arm bare. In himself trying to extract the arrow from his wound, the pirate had broken the shaft, leaving the sharp arrowhead imbedded under the flesh. The operation of extraction was thereby rendered more difficult. Nevertheless, Eidiol succeeded in taking hold of a portion of the shaft that still obtruded above the flesh, and by dint of no little dexterity finally drew out the arrowhead itself. Greatly pained during the operation, Gaëlo felt relieved when the missile was at last extracted. Before placing the lint on the wound, the old skipper moistened a piece of cloth in water and was about to wash away the clotted blood that covered almost all the upper arm, when he uttered a cry of surprise, took a step back, gazed anxiously upon Gaëlo and exclaimed with intense curiosity:

"Who burnt into your arm these two Gallic words: 'Brenn—Karnak'—that I see here? Speak, young man!"

"My father; he burnt the inscription into my arm shortly after my birth."

"Where is your father?"

"He, as well as my mother, are dead."

"He surely was not of the Northman race?"

"No, although he was born in their country, and always went to battle with them. He was of the Gallic race—"

"In what year did your father's father go to live among the Northmans?"

"Towards the middle of the last century."

"Was that not after a fresh and violent insurrection broke out in Brittany, when the Bretons, in order to make a head against the Franks, applied for aid from the Northmans, who happened to have their camp at the mouth of the Loire?"

"Yes," answered Gaëlo. "But how come you to know all that? Who told you of it?"

"What were the circumstances that induced your grandfather to join the Northmans?"

"After the fresh insurrection of Armorica, which at first bade fair to succeed, dissensions broke out among the Breton chiefs. Even my grandfather's family was divided. In the course of a violent altercation with one of his brothers, the two drew their swords. Wounded in that fratricidal duel, my grandfather left Brittany forever, and embarked with a troop of Northmans who were just then setting sail at the mouth of the Loire to return to Denmark, where my father and myself were born."

"Your grandfather's name was Ewrag," Eidiol proceeded with increasing emotion; "he was the son of Vortigern,[5] one of the most valiant companions-in-arms of Morvan, who heroically resisted the arms of Louis the Pious on the moor of Kennor, the marsh of Peulven and across the defiles of Armorica. Vortigern's grandfather was Amael, who lived to be more than a hundred years, declined to be the jailor of the last descendant of Clovis, and was one of the chiefs of the bands of Charles Martel, the ancestor of Charles the Great, whose descendant reigns to-day under the name of Charles the Simple."

"Old man!" cried Gaëlo, "who could have informed you so accurately on the history of my family?"

"Your family is mine," answered Eidiol, over whose eyes the film of a tear was gathering. "I am a descendant of Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak.[6] My grandfather was your grandfather's brother. That is our kinship."

"What say you?" cried Gaëlo. "Are you really of Joel's stock, like myself? Are we of the same family?"

"These words, which your father traced on your arm as a sign of identification, are carried by me also, as well as by my son and my

daughter, obedient to the recommendation of Ronan the Vagre,[7] one of our joint ancestors who lived in the days of Queen Brunhild."

"We are relatives!" cried Anne and Guyrion in chorus, drawing near to Gaëlo, while Shigne and Rustic listened with redoubled interest to the conversation between the old skipper and Gaëlo.

"We are relatives!" repeated Gaëlo looking alternately from Eidiol to Anne and Guyrion, and turning to the warrior maid he proceeded: "Shigne, I am doubly grateful to you; the young girl so magnanimously saved by you happens to be my own relative."

"She shall be like a sister to me," answered the Buckler Maiden in her grave and sonorous voice. "My sword will ever be ready in her defense."

"And in default of your sword, fair heroine," put in Rustic, "my two arms joined to those of Master Eidiol and of my friend Guyrion will ever protect Anne the Sweet, although it unfortunately happened that all our three pairs of arms proved insufficient to defend the poor child from Rolf."

"Good father," Gaëlo said to Eidiol, "please tell me for what reason you left Brittany."

"Your grandfather, Ewrag, had two brothers, like himself, the sons of Vortigern. When, on the occasion of the fatal dissension that you spoke of, Ewrag quitted Brittany to settle down in the country of the Northmans, his two brothers, Rosneven and Gomer, the latter of whom was my grandfather, continued to live at the cradle of our family, near the sacred stones of Karnak. Nominoë, Judicaël, Allan Strong-Beard were successively elected the chiefs of Armorica. More than once during that time did the Franks invade and ravage our country, but they never were able to establish their conquest as firmly as they succeeded in doing in the other regions of Gaul. The druid influence long kept alive among our people an inveterate hatred for the foreigner. Unhappily, the perfidious counsels of the Christian priests, coupled with the example set by the Frankish seigneurs, who had gradually become by the right of conquest the hereditary masters of both the land and the peoples of Gaul, at last had their fatal effect upon the Breton chiefs themselves. Originally elected by the free suffrage of the people, as was the ancient Gallic custom, and chosen by reason of their bravery, wisdom and patriotism, these chiefs sought to render their office hereditary in their own families, in imitation of the seigneurs all over Gaul. The Christian priests joined the Breton chiefs in their iniquitous scheme, and ordered the people to submit to these new masters, as they had ordered them to submit to

Clovis and his leudes. By little and little Brittany lost her old franchises. The chiefs, one time elective and temporary, now having become hereditary and autocratic with the assistance of the clergy, stripped the Breton people of almost all their rights. Nevertheless, until now they have not degraded them to the point of treating them as slaves or serfs. Of the two brothers of your grandfather, one, Gomer, my own grandfather, saw the gradual debasement of Brittany with grief and indignation. Gomer was a mariner. His home being in Vannes, like Albinik's,[8] one of our ancestors, he often made trips to England and also carried cargoes as far south as the mouths of the Somme and the Seine. On one occasion he ascended the river as far as Paris. His trade of mariner brought him in contact with the dean of the Skippers' Guild of Paris, who had a pretty and bright daughter. My grandfather married her. My father was born of that union. He also became a skipper. His life was spent amidst the ordinary trials of our people, good and evil successively alternating. I followed the same trade. My life has until now been as happy as it is possible to be in these disturbed times. Only two misfortunes have so far befallen me: the death of Martha, whom I lost yesterday, and, about thirty years ago, the disappearance of a daughter, the first born of all my children. Her name was Jeanike."

"And how did she come to disappear?"

"My wife, being sick at the time, confided the child to one of our neighbors for a walk outside of the city. We never saw her again, neither her nor the neighbor."

"Fortunately the children that are left to you must have alleviated your grief," remarked Gaëlo. "But tell me, good father, did you ever have any tidings from the branch of our family that remained in Brittany?"

"I learned from a traveler that the tyranny of the Breton seigneurs rested ever heavier upon the people of Armorica, and that they are now wholly ridden by the priests."

"Eidiol," said Gaëlo picking up the iron arrowhead which the old man dropped on the floor after it was extracted from the arm of the young pirate, "preserve this iron arrowhead. It will increase the number of the relics of our family. Should you ever meet again those of our relatives, who, perhaps, still live in Brittany, and who may have preserved the legends left by our ancestors, add this relic to the others together with the legend of our own times—"

Gaëlo was interrupted by a great noise on the street that seemed to be drawing nearer and nearer. Presently the tramp of horses and clanking of arms were distinguished. Rustic ran to open the upper panel of the door, looked out, and turning to those within announced in a low voice:

"It is Count Rothbert passing with his men, accompanied by the Archbishop of Rouen. He is no doubt coming back from the ramparts and is returning to his castle."

"Good father," said Gaëlo gravely, and rolling down his armlet, "you promised to accompany me and my companion to the palace of the Count of Paris. Come; time presses. I am in a hurry to fulfil the singular mission that has brought me to the city."

"What mission is that?"

"The Beautiful Shigne is to notify the count that Rolf, the Northman pirate chieftain, demands Ghisèle, the daughter of Charles the Simple, King of the French, for his wife; and I am to notify him that Rolf demands Neustria for his dower."

Eidiol remained for a moment mute with stupor, and then cried out: "Such is the termination of royal stocks! One of the descendants of Joel declined to be the jailor of the last descendant of Clovis, and now another descendant of Joel is commissioned to notify the successor of Charles the Great that his daughter is demanded from him by an old pirate, soiled with all manner of crimes, and to boot, one of the most beautiful of the few provinces still left to the King!"

A few minutes later the Beautiful Shigne and Gaëlo, having again thrown the hooded great-coats of two of the Parisian mariners over their own casques and armor, marched under the guidance of Eidiol to the castle of Count Rothbert, in order to carry to him the message of old Rolf.

CHAPTER XII

ARCHBISHOP FRANCON

One of the pavilions of the royal residence at Compiegne served as the apartment of Ghisèle, the daughter of Charles the Simple, King of the Franks. The young princess usually was in the company of her female associates in the large hall on the first floor. A high and narrow window, made of little glass squares, pierced a wall ten feet thick, and opened upon the sombre and vast forest in the midst of which rose the palace of Compiegne. This morning Ghisèle was engaged upon a piece of tapestry. She had just completed her fourteenth year. Married at sixteen, her father, Charles the Simple, was a parent at seventeen.

Ghisèle's face was childlike and mild. Her nurse, a woman of about forty, handed to her the strands of woolen thread of different colors which the princess used at her work. At the princess' feet, on a wooden bench, sat Yvonne, her foster-sister. A little further away, several young girls were busily spinning, or conversed in an undertone while plying their needles.

"Jeanike," said Ghisèle to her nurse, "my father always comes to embrace me in the morning; he has not yet come to-day."

"Count Rothbert and seigneur Francon, the Archbishop of Rouen, arrived last night from Paris with a large escort. The chamberlain was sent to wake up the King, your father. Since four in the morning he has been in conversation with the count and the archbishop. The conference must be on some very important matter."

"This night call makes me uneasy. I only hope it does not mean some bad news."

"What bad news is there to be feared? The proverb runs: 'Can the Northmans be in Paris?'" retorted the nurse smiling and shrugging her shoulders. "Do not take alarm so quickly, my dear child."

"I know, Jeanike, that the Northmans are not in Paris. May God save us from those pirates! May He hold them back in their frozen haunts."

"The chaplain was telling us the other day," put in Yvonne, "that they have hoofs of goats and on their heads horns of oxen."

"Keep still! Keep still, Yvonne!" exclaimed Ghisèle with a shudder. "Do not mention those pagans! Their bare name horrifies me! Alas, were they not the cause of my mother's death?"

"It is true," answered the nurse sadly. "Oh, it was a fearful night in which those demons, led by the accursed Rolf, attacked the castle of Kersey-on-the-Oise after a rapid and unexpected ascent of the river. The Queen, your mother, was nursing you at the time. She was so frightened that her breasts dried and she died. It was upon that misfortune that you shared my milk with my little Yvonne. Until that time I had felt very wretched. A stray child, sold in her early years to the intendant of the royal domain of Kersey, my fate improved when I became your foster-mother. It helped my eldest son, Germain, to become one of the chief foresters of the woods of Compiegne."

"Oh, nurse," replied Ghisèle with a sigh, her eyes filling with tears, "everyone has his troubles! I am a King's daughter, but am motherless. For pity's sake never mention in my hearing the name of those Northmans, of those accursed pagans who deprived me of a mother's love!"

"Come, dear child, do not cry," said Jeanike affectionately and drying the tears on Ghisèle's face, while the princess' foster-sister, kneeling upon the little bench and unable to repress her own tears, looked at the princess disconsolately.

At that moment the curtain over the farther door of the apartment was pushed aside, and the King of the Franks, Charles the Simple, stepped in. This descendant of Charles the great emperor, was then thirty-two years of age. His bulging eyes, his retreating chin, his hanging lower lip imparted to his physiognomy a look of such stupidity and dullness that anyone would pronounce him a fool, at first sight. His long hair, the symbol of royalty, framed in a puffed face that was fringed with a sparse beard. The King looked profoundly downcast, and brusquely said to Jeanike:

"Go out, nurse! Out of the room everybody!"

The King remained alone with Ghisèle. The child embraced her father tenderly and looked to find in his presence the needed consolation for the painful thoughts that the recollection of her mother had awakened in her. Charles the Simple quietly submitted to the caresses of his daughter, and said:

"Good morning, child; good morning. But why do you weep?"

"For very little, good father. I was feeling sad. Your sight banishes my sadness. You are late this morning. My nurse tells me that last night the Count of Paris arrived at the castle together with the Archbishop of Rouen."

The King sighed, and nodded affirmatively with his head.

"They did not, I hope, bring you bad news, father?"

"Alas," answered Charles the Simple, sighing again and looking up at the ceiling, "the tidings that they bring would be disastrous, aye, they would, if I refuse to accept certain conditions!"

"And is it in your power to fulfil those conditions?" asked Ghisèle, and the girl looked into her father's face with so childlike and mild a countenance that Charles the Simple, but not wicked, seemed embarrassed and touched. He dropped his eyes before his daughter and stammered:

"Those conditions! Oh, those conditions! They are hard! Oh, so very hard! But—what is to be done? Fain would I resist. But I am forced to. What would you have me do if I should be forced to do what should give us pain?"

"You can not be commanded, you, the master, the sovereign, the King of the Franks!"

"I, King of the Franks!" cried Charles the Simple with bitterness and rage. "Is there, perchance, a King of the Franks in existence? The counts, the dukes, the marquises, the bishops, the abbots—they are the kings! Have not the seigneurs, for the last century, made themselves the sovereign and hereditary masters of the counties and duchies which they were simply put there to administer during their lives and in the name of the King? Who is it that reigns in Vermandois? Is it I? No, it is Count Herbert! Who reigns over the country of Melun? Is it I? No, it is Count Errenger!—and over the country of Rheims? Archbishop Foulque; and in Provence? Duke Louis the Blind; and in Lorraine? Duke Louis IV; and in Burgundy? Duke Rodulf; and in Brittany? Duke Allan—Those are the brigands, they and so many other thieves, small and large, who have plucked us of one province after another; bit by bit they have appropriated to themselves the royal heritage of our fathers. I tell you this, my child, in order that you may understand that, however hard the conditions may be that are imposed upon me, I must, alas! submit. The seigneurs command, I obey. Am I in a condition to resist them? Are they not intrenched in the fortified castles that they have made Gaul to bristle with all over the face of the land? I barely can muster up enough soldiers to defend the small domain that is left to me. Over what

region can I say that I reign to-day—I, the descendant of Charles the Great, the redoubtable emperor who ruled over the world? I do not possess the hundredth part of Gaul! Figure it out, Ghisèle, figure it out, and you will see that there is nothing now left to me but the Orleanois, Neustria, the country of Laon and my domains of Compiegne, Fontainebleau, Braine and Kersey. How would you expect me to resist the seigneurs, and that I say 'No!' when they order me to say 'Yes!' seeing my forces are so trifling?" And Charles the Simple, stamping the floor with rage, clenched his fists and cried out: "Oh, my poor Ghisèle! If we only had our ancestor Charles the Great to defend us now, we would not now be dictated to as we are! The brave emperor would march forth at the head of his troops to crush the insolent seigneurs and archbishops in their own lairs!—Alack! Alack! I have neither the courage, nor the will, nor the power! They call me 'the Simple'!—They are right," added the King overcome with sorrow and weeping profusely. "Yes, yes; I am asimpleton! But a poor simpleton who is greatly to be pitied—especially at this hour—my child!"

"Good father!" exclaimed Ghisèle, throwing herself on the neck of the King whose face was bathed in tears. "Do not give way to grief so. Will there not always be enough land left to you in which to live in peace with your daughter who loves and your servants who are attached to you?"

The King looked fixedly at Ghisèle, and wiping his eyes with the back of his hand said in a voice broken with sobs: "Do you know what Count Rothbert—" but suddenly breaking off he proceeded with an explosion of idle rage: "I abhor this family of the Counts of Paris! It is they who robbed us of the duchy of France.—Those people are our most dangerous enemies! Some fine day, that Rothbert will dethrone me absolutely, as his brother Eudes dethroned Charles the Fat! Oh, felonious, impudent and thieving family! With what joy would I not exterminate you, if I only had the power of Charles the Great!—But I have no courage—I do not even dare to order them to be killed. They are well aware of this—and that is why they trample over me!" The King's voice was smothered by his sobs. He could only add: "Shame and humiliation!"

"I conjure you, dear father; drive away these evil thoughts—But what did that wicked Count Rothbert say to you?"

"First of all, he said to me that the Northmans were before Paris, and in immense numbers."

"The Northmans!" cried Ghisèle turning pale and shuddering from head to foot with fear. "The Northmans before Paris! Oh, woe, woe is us!" and the

child hid her face in her hands, while tears inundated her countenance and her frame shook with convulsive sobs.

With his eyes fixed on the floor, not venturing to raise them lest they should encounter his daughter's, Charles the Simple proceeded with a tremulous voice:

"The Count of Paris, as I was saying, informed me that the Northmans were before the city. 'What would you have me do against it?' I asked him; 'I have neither soldiers nor men; you, seigneurs, who are the masters of almost all Gaul, have nothing else to do but to defend your own possessions; that is your concern.' Rothbert answered me: 'The Northmans threaten to burn down Paris, massacre the people, and to overrun Gaul ravaging and sacking the fields and towns. No resistance can be offered them. The majority of the villeins and serfs refuse to take the field against them. The soldiers at the disposal of us, the seigneurs, are too few in number to pretend to combat the pirates. We must treat with them.' I then, my little Ghisèle, said to the count: 'Very well, treat; that is your affair, seeing those pagans are before your walls of Paris and in your duchy of France.' 'And so I did,' Rothbert answered me; 'I treated in your name with the envoys of Rolf, the Northman chief.'"

"With Rolf," murmured Ghisèle clasping her hands in horror. "With that pirate! That felon steeped in crime and sacrilege! That monster who was the cause of my mother's death!"

"Alas! To the desolation of us both, dear daughter, this accursed Rothbert, aiming only at the protection of his city of Paris and of his duchy of France from the clutches of the old Northman brigand, promised in my name that I would relinquish Neustria to him—Neustria, the best of the provinces left to me—and besides—"

As Ghisèle perceived that her father hesitated to finish the sentence, she wiped his tears and asked; "And besides, what else do they demand, father?"

Charles the Simple remained for a moment silent, and shuddered. Presently, however, overcoming the imbecile weakness of his character, he broke out into fresh tears, crying: "No! No! I will not! However much of a simpleton I may be, that shall never be. No! For once, at least, in my life I shall act the King!" And closing his daughter in his arms, Charles the Simple covered her head with kisses and cried: "No! No! He shall not have my Ghisèle! The insolence of that old brigand, to think of marrying—the grand-daughter of Charles the Great—and she a child of barely fourteen! Sooner than see you

the wife of Rolf, I would kill you—I would kill you on the spot. Oh, Lord God, have mercy upon me!"

Ghisèle heard her father's words almost without understanding them. She was gazing upon him with mingled doubt and stupor when a new personage stepped into the hall. It was Francon, Archbishop of Rouen. The man's impassive face, cold and hard, resembled a marble mask. He approached close to Ghisèle and her father, who still clung together in a close embrace, and pointing with his hand to the curtain behind which he had kept himself concealed up to then, said in his sharp, short style:

"Charles, I have heard everything."

"You spied upon me!" cried the King. "You have dared to surprise the secrets of your master!"

"I mistrusted your weakness. After our interview with Rothbert, I followed you. I have overheard everything;" and addressing himself to the young girl who, trembling at every limb, had fallen back upon her seat, the Archbishop of Rouen proceeded in a solemn and threatening voice: "Ghisèle, your father told you the truth. He is King only in name. The little territory that he still is master of is, like his crown, at the mercy of the Frankish seigneurs. They will dethrone him whenever it should please them, as they dethroned Charles the Fat and crowned in his stead Eudes, the Count of Paris, only twenty-five years ago."

"Yes! Yes! And there will be no lack for a bishop to consecrate the new usurper, just as there was found one to consecrate Count Eudes, not so, Francon?" cried Charles the Simple with bitterness. "Such is the gratitude of the priests towards the descendants of the Frankish Kings that have made the Church so rich!"

"The Church owes nothing to Kings; the Kings owe to the Church the remission of their sins!" was the disdainful reply of the archbishop. "The Kings have bestowed wealth upon the Church here below, on earth; they have been rewarded a hundredfold in heaven and all eternity. Now, Ghisèle, listen to what I have to say to you. If, by reason of your refusal, or the refusal of your father, the Northman pagans should, as they threaten to do, renew against Gaul the frightful and sacrilegious warfare that we are all familiar with, but which they promise to put an end to in the event of your father's consenting to grant your hand to their chieftain Rolf and to relinquish Neustria to him, then you and your father will be alone responsible for the frightful ills that will anew desolate the land."

"Francon," put in Charles the Simple imploringly, "the seigneurs also have provinces and daughters. Why could not they give to Rolf one of their provinces and one of their daughters?"

"Rolf wants Neustria, and Neustria belongs to you; Rolf wants Ghisèle, and Ghisèle is your daughter. The two sacrifices impose themselves upon the King!"

"I to marry that monster who caused my mother's death!" cried Ghisèle. "No! Never! Never! Rather would I die!"

"A curse, then, upon you in this world and the next!" shouted the archbishop in a thundering voice. "Let the blood that is to flow in this impious war fall upon your head and your father's! You will both have to answer before God for all the acts of sacrilege that you can prevent! You will both expiate these sins here on earth by the excommunication that I shall hurl upon you, and after death in everlasting flames! Charles, excommunicated and damned in this world shall be an object of horror to all his subjects. The Church that consecrated him King, will pronounce him damned and forfeit of his throne! His life will be ended in a dungeon!"

The terror that took hold of Charles the Simple as the Archbishop of Rouen spoke, now reached its height. He fell upon his knees at the priest's feet and clasping his hands implored:

"Mercy! Mercy, holy father! I shall give Neustria to Rolf—but not my daughter! She is barely fourteen years of age! Fourteen years! It is in itself almost a crime to marry a child at that age! And, then, she is so timid! Alas, to place her in that monster's bed would be to consign her to death!" And the wretched sovereign sobbed convulsively, and still implored: "Mercy! Mercy! Can you threaten me with eternal punishment because I refuse to deliver my child to a bandit whom the Church has excommunicated for his unspeakable crimes?"

"Rolf will be baptized!" answered the prelate solemnly. "The lustral waters will wash away his soilure, and he will enter the nuptial couch clad in the white robes of a catechumen, the symbol of innocence!"

"Help! Nurse, help! My daughter is dying!" cried Charles the Simple leaping from the floor and convulsively straining in his arms the inert body of Ghisèle, who pale and cold as a corpse, had swooned away in her seat.

The prelate triumphed.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WEDDING OF ROLF

The city of Rouen was in gala. Large crowds of people filled the streets and pressed eagerly towards the basilica whose bells were pealing at their loudest. Among those who were wending their way towards the church were Eidiol, his daughter Anne the Sweet, Guyrion the Plunger and Rustic the Gay. They had left Paris two days before; they descended the Seine as far as Rouen in the vessel of the dean of the guild of the skippers of Paris. It was a trip of pleasure and profit. Eidiol sailed to Rouen in order to convey thither a cargo of merchandise and to witness the wedding of the daughter of Charles the Simple, King of the Franks, with Rolf, the chieftain of the Northman pirates, but now elevated to the rank of sovereign Duke of Neustria, which assumed the name of Northmandy.

Such was the indifference of that wretched population of serfs and villeins to the form of the yoke that oppressed them, that the people of Rouen, the capital of Neustria, now named Northmandy, actually delighted to see the great province in the hand of the pirates.

Eidiol and his family walked towards the square of the basilica, intending to watch the nuptial procession at close quarters. Anne rested on the arms of her father and brother. Rustic preceded them in order to clear a passage for them across the crowd that became denser and more compact as they drew nearer to the cathedral. Finally, after much struggling, the family of Eidiol succeeded in securing a post at the corner of a street that ran out into the square.

"Master Eidiol," said Rustic, "there is a milestone here. Let Anne stand on it. She will be better able to see the procession, and she will be free from the crush."

"No, Rustic," answered the young girl, "I would not dare to take that place."

"Jump on the milestone yourself," said the old man, "in case we can not see with our own eyes, we shall be able to see with yours. Myself and Guyrion will stay close to Anne."

As Eidiol spoke the distant sound of clarions was heard mingling with the redoubled clanging of the nearby bells, and a wild clamor of joy went up from the crowd.

"Here is the procession," cried Rustic from his perch; "it has turned into the square; clarion blowers on horseback head the march; they are followed by Frankish cavaliers, armed with lances bearing streamers; they carry painted gilt bucklers hanging from their necks. Oh, here come the Northman pirates clad in their armor and carrying the standard of old Rolf. The standard has a seagull with open beak and claws for its device. Well may you screech your cry of triumph, old sea bird! Your prey is magnificent: a province of Gaul and the daughter of a King!"

"Oh, Rustic, how can you joke in that way!" remarked Anne the Sweet in a tone of sad yet affectionate reproach. "Poor little Ghisèle! To wed that old monster! Do you see the poor girl? Poor victim!"

"No; I see nothing of her as yet. Ah, here come the female pirates! How martial they look in their armor of steel scales, with their azure bucklers on their arms! Now come the seigneurs of the suite of the Count of Paris, in their long robes embroidered with gold and ornamented with fur. Hold! They stop! They are looking back uneasily. What can have happened?" and leaning against the wall Rustic raised himself on the tips of his feet in order to see further. A minute later he cried: "Oh, the poor girl! Anne, you were right! Although she is the daughter of a King the girl is to be pitied. She looks like a victim led to death!"

"Is it of Ghisèle that you are talking, Rustic?" inquired the young girl. "What has happened to her? How I pity the poor child!"

"She was marching, leaning on the arm of Charles the Simple and paler than a corpse under her white bridal robe, when suddenly her strength entirely failed her. She collapsed and fell in a swoon into the arms of the seigneurs who stood near her."

"Oh, father!" said Anne the Sweet to Eidiol, her eyes moist with tears, "Is not that wretched girl's fate shocking!"

"And yet less shocking than the fate of millions of the women of our own race who have been violated by the seigneurs and the ecclesiastics. Those wretched women left their master's couch only to return to the exhausting and even crushing toils of servitude. Degraded, dejected, bought and sold like cattle, dying of grief or under their master's blows, ignorant of the joys of family life and depraved, they were brutified by slavery. Such, for centuries past, has been the condition of the women of our race, and still continues to be. How many millions of the women of our class die macerated, body and soul!"

"Alas! This poor King's daughter is surely guiltless of all these crimes! She is much to be pitied!"

"Master Eidiol," resumed Rustic, "Charles the Simple's daughter has regained consciousness; she now walks again, sustained by her father and the Count of Paris. Oh! Here comes Rolf! He wears a long white shirt over his armor. Behind Rolf marches our relative Gaëlo, together with the Beautiful Shigne. The procession has halted. It now resumes its march to the basilica. The clergy, with Archbishop Francon at the head, halt under the portal. Oh, Master Eidiol! I am dazzled! The precious stones glisten on the gilded copes of the priests, on their gold mitres, on the gold crosses! Gold, rubies, pearls, diamonds and emeralds glitter everywhere! The large cross, carried before the clergy, seems to be of massive gold! It is studded with precious stones! The wealth of Golconda!"

"Oh, young man of Nazareth!" exclaimed Eidiol. "Oh, Jesus, the carpenter! The friend of the poor in rags! You, whom our ancestress Geneviève saw done to death in Jerusalem by the high priests of your day! Would you acknowledge as your disciples these priests, these bishops so gorgeously robed and surrounded by so much splendor? Oh, clergy, ye modern generation of vipers!"

"Do you hear the chaunts of the priests and the sound of the portable organs, Master Eidiol? The clarions break in between. The bells are chiming with increased noise. The King, his daughter and old Rolf enter the portal of the basilica. Gold censers are being swung right and left and the smoke of incense mounts to the sky!"

"They burned incense to Clovis, the firebrand and blood-thirsty monster; they burned incense to Charles the Great who dethroned the stock of Clovis! And to-day they burn incense to Rolf, to Rolf the old pirate, to Rolf the murderer, to Rolf the perpetrator of sacrilege! The god of the priests is gold!"

The marriage of Rolf and Ghisèle was blessed and consecrated by Archbishop Francon in the princely cathedral of Rouen. The prelate also on the same day blessed the union of Shigne and Gaëlo. The ceremony of Ghisèle's marriage was barely over when the wretched girl again swooned away—the third time on that day—and was carried into an adjoining chamber on the arms of her women in waiting. Rolf, Charles the Simple, the Count of Paris, together with the seigneurs of their respective suites proceeded to the vast hall of the chapter of the Archbishopric of Rouen. On his head the gold crown of the Frankish Kings, in his hand his scepter, and the long royal mantle trailing on the floor behind him, Charles the Simple

ascended and remained standing on an elevated dais. The Archbishop of Rouen and the bishops of the neighboring dioceses placed themselves to the right, while to the left of the King were ranked Rothbert, Count of Paris and Duke of France, and the Viscounts of Monthery, of Argenteuil, of Pontoise, together with many other Frankish seigneurs, among and above whom towered the tall figure of Burchart, seigneur of the country of Montmorency. At the foot of the dais, and facing the King and this assemblage of seigneurs and prelates, stood Rolf, accompanied by Gaëlo and Shigne, together with the leading Northman chiefs. The old pirate still had on the white shirt of the neophyte over his armor. His demeanor was triumphant, insolent and sly. Charles the Simple, on the contrary, looked sad and dejected, and furtively wiped away the tears that insisted on forcing themselves to his eyes. Despite his imbecility, the man loved his daughter; and the fate of Ghisèle overpowered him with grief.

Radiant with joy at having escaped the fresh disasters that Rolf had threatened to overwhelm Gaul with, the Count of Paris, the Archbishop of Rouen and all the other seigneurs and prelates enjoyed the abject state of the King. Nevertheless, however abased and hollow his title, still they envied it. Clad in the full magnificence of his episcopal robes, Archbishop Francon descended the steps of the dais with majestic tread, approached Rolf and said to him in a loud and solemn tone:

"It has pleased Charles, King of the Franks, to bestow upon you and your men all the fields, forests, towns, burgs, villages, inhabitants and cattle of Neustria—"

"If the King had refused to give me the province I would have taken it" put in Rolf, calmly interrupting the prelate. "You baptized me and my champions; we allowed ourselves to be dipped naked in a large basin of water, like so many fishes; we allowed you to sprinkle us with salt water, the genuine brine of the ocean; and we were then told to put long white shirts over our armor. I simply humored you in your priestly monkey shines."

"It is the sacred symbol of the purity of your soul, which has been cleansed of its soilure by the holy immersion of baptism," replied the archbishop. "Henceforth you are a Catholic and son of the Church of Rome. It is a very distinguished honor done to you."

"Aye, but you demanded from me, in exchange, all the lands of the abbeys of my new duchy of Northmandy for your Church. I have since learned that they make up one-fourth of my province."

"The goods of the Church are the goods of God," retorted the archbishop haughtily. "What is God's, is God's; no human power can lay hands on it."

"Priest!" cried Rolf puckering his brows with mingled anger and slyness, "take care lest the humor seize me to chase the whole pack of tonsured gentry from their nests in the abbeys, in order to prove to you once more that Rolf and his champions take and keep whatever it may please Rolf and his champions to take or to keep, without asking leave of your Church."

"To the devil with the man of the gold cap with two points!" chimed in several voices from among the freshly baptized pirates. "By the white horse of our god Thomarog! Does the fellow take us for fools? Death to the tonsured knave!"

"Rolf!" said the Archbishop of Rouen insinuatingly in order to calm the old pirate, "the light of our faith has not yet sufficiently dispelled the darkness in which paganism held your soul imprisoned. I do not threaten you—I shall remain faithful to our compact."

"That's then agreed!" replied Rolf. "It is give and take between us. If your priests serve me well, they shall keep their lands. But I must recoup myself for the property that I leave to your abbots;" and addressing the King, who, wholly indifferent to the conversation that was taking place before him, remained silent, somber and sad: "Charles, you gave me Ghisèle and Neustria. That is not now enough. A King's daughter should be more richly dowered. My duchy of Northmandy borders on Brittany. I demand this province also, together with all its towns, abbeys and dependencies."

"You want Brittany!" cried Charles the Simple, for the first time awaking from his gloomy apathy. "Oh, you want Brittany! I give it to you with all my heart! You can have it. Go and take possession of it. It will be a bright day to me, the day that I shall hear that you set foot in that country. I gladly make you a present of Armorica, with its cities, abbeys and dependencies! All you have to do is to take possession!"

Not a little astonished at the King's eagerness to grant him so considerable a cession, the old pirate turned towards his men inquiringly. Gaëlo whispered to him:

"Charles grants you the country of the Bretons because he knows that it is impregnable, being defended by a race of indomitable men."

"There is nothing impregnable to you, my champions! You will take charge of the task."

"Since six hundred years the Franks have been endeavoring to subjugate that land, and they have not yet succeeded in establishing themselves firmly in it. They have invaded it; they have vanquished its forces—but never yet have they subjugated it."

"The Northmans will subjugate those who have resisted the Franks."

"Armorica," replied Gaëlo, "will be the grave of your best soldiers."

The old pirate shrugged his shoulders with incredulity and not a little impatience; he took two steps towards the King and said: "Well, then, Charles, that province also is mine—"

"Yes—yes. It is yours—Duke of Northmandy and of Brittany—provided you can conquer it!"

"Rolf," resumed Gaëlo in a low voice, "renounce your pretensions over Armorica—you will otherwise have reasons to regret your obstinacy."

"Rolf wills what he wills!" answered the pirate haughtily.

"From this day," replied Gaëlo resolutely, "you must no longer count me among your men—"

The Northman chief was on the point of inquiring from the young warrior the reason for his sudden resolution when the Archbishop of Rouen addressed the pirate:

"Rolf, Charles has invested you with the sovereignty of the Duchies of Northmandy and Brittany. You must now take the pledge of fealty and homage to Charles, King of the Franks, as your suzerain seigneur. It is the custom. Your investiture will not be complete until after this formality."

"Very well; only waste no time about it. I am hungry, and I am anxious to join my wife—the royal little girl must be waiting for me."

"Rolf, repeat after me the consecrated formula," said the Archbishop of Rouen, and he pronounced deliberately and slowly the following words which the Northman chief repeated in the measure that they fell from the prelate's lips:

"In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, indivisible Trinity, I, Rolf, Duke of Northmandy and of Brittany, swear fealty and homage to Charles, King of the Franks. I swear absolute fealty to him, to render him

assistance in all things, and never to give, to his prejudice, assistance to his enemies with my arms. I swear it in the presence of the Divine Majesty and of the souls of the blissful, hoping for eternal blessing as the reward for my fidelity. Amen!"

Charles the Simple listened to the oath of fealty and homage with gloomy bitterness. He knew from experience the hollowness of the formula which had been invented by the priests.

"Is it done, now?" asked the pirate of the archbishop. "This mummery tires me."

"There is one more formality to be filled," answered the archbishop. "In token of respect you must kiss the King's foot."

At these words, spoken loud enough by the Archbishop of Rouen to be heard all over the spacious hall, there followed an explosion of hisses, imprecations and threats from the assembled Northman warriors. They revolted at the mere thought of the humiliating act that the archbishop dared to exact from their chieftain. Rolf himself, whose face grew purple with indignation, answered Francon's proposition with so threatening a gesture that the archbishop took fright and retreated precipitately from the immediate neighborhood of the Northman. However, after a second's reflection, the pirate chieftain calmed with a sign the tumultuous manifestations of his men, approached the archbishop, and said in a savage tone, that but ill concealed the slyness that struggled to the surface:

"Accordingly—I must kiss the feet of Charles?"

"Usage demands that you give to the King this mark of respect and humility."

"My champions!" cried the Northman chieftain to his pirates, making them a sign of intelligence, "Rolf will, agreeable to usage, prove the magnitude of his respect for theFrankish Kings." Saying this, Rolf stepped gravely towards the dais on which Charles stood and said to him: "Let me have your foot!"

The poor simpleton reached his right foot to Rolf, but the old bandit, instead of bending to bestow the kiss of humility upon his suzerain, quickly seized the proffered limb by the ankle, and gave it so violent a pull that Charles the Simple lost his balance and fell backwards, measuring his full length on the floor of the dais. As the King rolled over, Rolf broke out in his wonted guffaw and cried:

"This is the way that the Duke of Northmandy and Brittany shows his respect for the King of the Franks."

The pirate's brutal horse-play was received with a loud outburst of joy by his Northmans, while the Frankish seigneurs and prelates, so far from thinking of avenging the outrage done to their King, remained silent and motionless. The descendant of Charles, the great emperor, rose unaided, weeping with humiliation and physical pain. He had hurt his head with the fall. The blood flowed.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE SWAN'S ROUTE

Eidiol, his son, his daughter, and Rustic the Gay, back from Rouen two days past, were congregated in the evening at their humble home in Paris. More than ever did they now realize the void made at their hearth by the death of Martha, good housekeeper that she was. The street was silent; the night dark. A rap was heard at the door. Rustic opened it and Gaëlo, accompanied by Shigne, now his wife, stepped in, with their cloaks closely wrapped over their armor. The old skipper had not met the young couple since the night when they returned to Eidiol's house, in order there to await the return of Count Rothbert, who departed in hot haste to Compiegne in order to inform Charles the Simple of the pirate's will.

"Good father," said Gaëlo to Eidiol, "my wife and I have come to bid you good-bye and to bring you tidings that will no doubt cheer your heart. I heard you deplore the sudden disappearance of a daughter, the first born of all your children. She is not dead. I have seen her—"

"My daughter!" cried the old skipper in wonderment and clasping his hands. "What! Jeanike is alive! You have seen her?"

"Where is our sister?" cried Anne and Guyrion at once. "Where can we see her?"

"She is near Ghisèle, the wife of Rolf, Duke of Northmandy."

"Can it be possible!" again exclaimed Eidiol with increasing astonishment. "And how does she come to be near Ghisèle?"

"According to her vague recollections, your daughter was carried off by some of those mendicants who kidnap children in order to sell them. She was disposed of to the intendant of the royal domain. It therefore happened that she lived and grew up in Kersey-on-the-Oise. Later she was married to a serf of the place. Jeanike was soon afterwards attached to the palace among the domestics. There she gave birth to two children, a boy, who now is a forester serf of the forest of Compiegne, and a girl whom she had at her breast at the same time that the Queen-mother nursed Ghisèle. The Queen having died of fright on the occasion of one of the Northman descents upon Kersey, the baby was placed in charge of Jeanike, whose own baby thus shared its nourishment with the princess. Jeanike, as the princess' foster-mother, was afterwards manumitted; but she never left the side of the poor creature, who to-day is the wife of Rolf."

"What a strange accident!" said Eidiol deeply moved. "But why did not Jeanike accompany you hither? Did you not inform her that we were relatives and that I lived in Paris?"

"Ghisèle is on her deathbed. The horror that Rolf inspires in her is carrying her to the grave. She has requested your daughter not to leave her. Jeanike could not refuse."

"Oh, brother!" said Anne the Sweet weeping with joy and sorrow, "the sister whom we find again is also full of compassion for that unhappy King's daughter."

"The woman who is cowardly enough to share the bed of a man whom she hates deserves Ghisèle's fate," put in the Beautiful Shigne with savage pride. "There must be no pity for despicable hearts!"

"Alas!" exclaimed Anne the Sweet timidly without venturing to raise her eyes to the female warrior, "what could the unfortunate Ghisèle do?"

"Kill Rolf!" promptly answered the heroine. "And if she did not deem her hand firm enough to strike the blow, she should have killed herself—"

"Gaëlo!" interrupted the old skipper, "your wife speaks like our mothers of old, who preferred death to the shame of slavery. But how did you happen to recognize my daughter?"

"After the ceremony of the marriage and of the investiture of the Duchies of Northmandy and Brittany Rolf went to supper. He drank to the point of intoxication and started for his wife's chamber. However little I commiserate the royal races, the fate of Ghisèle touched me. I made Rolf understand that his wife should be notified of his visit, and taking the mission upon myself, I ordered a servant to conduct me to Ghisèle's apartment. Her nurse received me. We were considering how, at least for this first night, she might conceal the young bride, so as to save her from the maudlin brutalities of Rolf. While speaking with Jeanike, my eyes accidentally fell upon the words 'Brenn—Karnak' burnt into her arm which, as is the custom with the domestics, was half bare—"

"I understand the rest!" broke in Eidiol. "Recognizing—"

"Yes; I soon was convinced that Jeanike was your daughter. I told her so! Imagine her joy at the revelation! Unfortunately kept near the bedside of the dying Ghisèle, Jeanike could not fly to you, as she wanted. But you will soon see her, together with her daughter Yvonne and her son Germain, the

forester serf, provided he can obtain leave for a day. And now, adieu. I depart happy at the thought that I leave in your heart a good souvenir of myself, seeing that I have returned your daughter to you. That souvenir will remain in your midst."

"Where are you going, Gaëlo?"

"I return to the land of the North with my beloved Shigne."

"And what do you purpose to do in that distant region?"

"War!" boldly answered the heroine wife. "Gaëlo and I are not of the number of the cowards, who, forgetful of their vow never to sleep under a roof, desert the combat of the ocean to live on land, as Rolf and his companions are doing."

"Charles the Simple bestowed also the Duchy of Brittany upon Rolf. Vainly did I predict to him that that region will be the grave of his best followers, if they ever try to invade it. He has persisted in his plans of conquest, and wished to give me the command of the fleet which he intends sending to the coast of Armorica in order to take possession. I could not dissuade him."

"And you refused to take charge of such a mission, my worthy Gaëlo?"

"Yes. But how singular are the events that accompany the Frankish conquest of Gaul! One of our ancestors, Amael, the favorite of Charles Martel, served the Franks. He knew how to atone for his error when Charles proposed to him to invade Brittany, the sacred cradle of our family. A century later, my grandfather, my own father and now myself have, out of hatred for the Franks, fought against them, and now Rolf proposes to me to be the leader in his war against Armorica. Oh! Although ridden by the priests and oppressed by seigneurs of the Breton race, Armorica still is free when compared with the other provinces of Gaul. Sooner than seek to invade Brittany I would defend its existing vestiges of freedom against the Northmans themselves."

"And what prevents you from obeying that generous prompting and going to Brittany?"

"Old man!" put in the Beautiful Shigne. "Rolf's men are of my race. Would you, for instance, fight the men of Brittany?"

"I can not but approve of your resolution," answered Eidiol upon a moment's reflection.

"And now, before a last adieu," said Gaëlo placing a sealed roll in the old skipper's hands, "keep these parchments. You will there find the narrative of the adventures that have led to my wedding Shigne. You will also find there some details on the customs of the Northman pirates, and of the stratagem by the aid of which my companion and myself seized the abbey of St. Denis. If, obedient to the behest of our ancestor Joel, you or your son should some day write a chronicle intended to continue the history of our family, you may narrate my life and join to the narrative the iron arrowhead that you extracted from my wound. Our names will thus be handed down to our descendants."

"Gaëlo, your wishes shall be fulfilled," answered the old skipper, deeply moved. "However obscure my life has until now been, I always had it in mind to narrate the events that have happened since the Northman pirates made their first appearance under the walls of Paris. I shall now do so, bringing the narrative down to the marriage of Rolf with the daughter of Charles the Simple, and I shall supplement the story with the notes that you have furnished me."

After a last and tender embrace, Gaëlo and the Beautiful Shigne left the house of Eidiol. Their two holkers—one manned by the champions of Gaëlo, the other by the Buckler Maidens—awaited the couple at the port of St. Landry. With sails spread and swollen to the wind, the two light craft speedily descended the Seine and took the azure route of the swans across the billows of the northern sea.

EPILOGUE

I, Eidiol, wrote the preceding chronicle shortly after the departure of Gaëlo. I used the notes he left me in the matters that relate to his previous adventures, to the life of the Northman pirates and to the Buckler Maidens.

The day after Gaëlo's departure I sailed to Rouen to meet my beloved Jeanike. With joy I embraced her two children, Yvonne and Germain the forester. After the tender pleasures of our first meeting Jeanike narrated to me her conversation with Ghisèle, the conversation of the latter with her father, and lastly the conversation of both with the Archbishop of Rouen at the castle of Compiegne. My daughter had overheard every word, and I have thus been enabled to reproduce with accuracy all the facts connected with the marriage of the pirate Rolf and Ghisèle, the ill-starred and now expiring daughter of King Charles.

I finished this narrative to-day, the eleventh day of August, in the year 912, a happy day, because this morning I entrusted the fate of Anne the Sweet to Rustic the Gay.

Alas, only my poor wife Martha was wanting to complete the joy at our hearth.

THE END.