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# THE ABBATIAL CROSIER

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## PROLOGUE

### CHAPTER I.

#### NARBONNE.

Cruel intestine wars between the descendants of the Frankish conquerors were devastating Gaul when the Arab invasion took place in 719. The invaders poured down from the Pyrenees and drove back or subjugated the Visigoths. The exchange of masters was almost a gain to the inhabitants of the region. The conquerors from the south were more civilized than those from the north. Many of the Gauls,--either freemen, or colonists or slaves--took so strongly to the southern invader that they even embraced his religion, the religion of Mahomet, allured thereto by the promises of a paradise peopled with houris. "The virtuous believer," declared the Koran, "will be taken to the delicious home of Eden, enchanted gardens, through which well-shaded rivers flow. There, ornamented with bracelets of gold, clad in green clothes of woven silk and resplendent with glory, the faithful will recline upon nuptial beds, the happy prize in the dwelling of delights." Preferring, accordingly, the white houris promised by the Koran to the winged seraphs of the Christian paradise, many

Gauls embraced Mohamedanism with ardor. Mosques rose in Languedoc beside Christian churches. More tolerant than the bishops, the Arabs allowed the Christians to follow their own religion. Moreover, Mohamedanism, founded by Mahomet during the previous century, 608, acknowledged the divinity of the Scriptures and recognized Moses and the Jewish prophets as beings chosen by God, only it did not recognize the godship of Jesus. "Oh, ye, who have received the Scriptures, keep within the bounds of the faith. Speak only the truth about God. Jesus is the son of Mary, and he was sent by the All-High, but is not his son. Say not that God is a trinity. God is one. Jesus will not blush at being the servant of God. The angels that surround the throne of God obey God!"--thus spoke the Koran.

The town of Narbonne, capital of Languedoc under the dominion of the Arabs, had in 737 quite an Oriental aspect, due as much to the clearness of the sky as to the dress and customs of a large number of its inhabitants. The laurel shrubs, the green oaks and palm trees recalled the vegetation of Africa. Saracen women were seen going to or coming from the fountains with earthen vessels nicely balanced on their heads, and draped in their white clothes like the women of the time of Abraham, or of the young master of Nazareth. Camels with their long necks and loaded with merchandise left the town for Nimes, Beziers, Toulouse or Marseilles.

The caravans passed on these journeys, along the fields, a great variety of settlements--mud hovels thatched with straw and inhabited by Gallic peasants, who were successively the slaves of the Visigoths and of the Musselmen; tents of a Barbary tribe, Arabian mountaineers who had descended to the plains from the peak of Mt. Atlas, and who preserved in Gaul the nomad habits of their old home, warriors, ever ready to mount their tireless and swift horses in answer to the first call of battle from the emir of the province; finally, and at long distances apart, on the crests of the mountains, high towers where, during war, the Saracens lighted fires for the purpose of signaling the approach of the enemy to one another.

In the almost Musselman town of Narbonne, the same as in all the other towns of Gaul under the sway of the Franks and the bishops, there were, sad to say, public market-places where slaves were set up for sale. But that which imparted a peculiar character to the market of Narbonne was the diversity of the races of the captives that were offered to purchasers. There were seen negroes and negresses in large numbers, as well as Ethiopians of ebony blackness; copper-colored mestizos; handsome young Greek girls and boys brought from Athens, Crete or Samos and taken prisoner on some of the frequent maritime raids made by the Arabs. A skilful politician, Mahomet, their prophet, had incited in his sectarians a passion for maritime

expeditions. "The believer who dies on land feels a pain that is hardly comparable with the bite of an ant," says the Koran, "but the believer who dies at sea, feels on the contrary the delicious sensation of a man, who, a prey to burning thirst, is offered iced water mixed with citron and honey." Around the slave market stood numerous Arabian shops filled with merchandise mainly manufactured at Cordova or Granada, centers, at the time, of Saracen art and civilization: brilliant arms inlaid in arabesques with gold and silver, coffers of chiseled ivory, crystal cups, rich silk fabrics, embroidered hose, precious collars and bracelets. Around the shops pressed a crowd of as various races as costumes: aboriginal Gauls in their wide hose, an article that gave this section of Gaul the name of "Bracciata" with the Romans; descendants of the Visigoths who remained faithful to their old Germanic dress, the furred coat, despite the warmth of the climate; Arabians with turbans of all colors. From time to time, the cry of the Musselman priests, calling the believers to prayer from the height of the minarets, mixed with the chimes of basilicas that summoned the Christians to their devotions.

"Christian dogs!" said the Arabs or Musselman Gauls. "Accursed heathens, damned degenerates!" answered the Christians; whereupon both proceeded to exercise their own cult in peace. More tolerant than the bishops of Rome, Mahomet said in the Koran: "Do not

do violence upon men for reason of their religion."

## CHAPTER II.

### ABD-EL-KADER AND ROSEN-AER.

Abd-el-Kader, one of the bravest chiefs of the warriors of Abd-el-Rhaman during the life of this emir, who was killed five years before on the field of Poitiers where he delivered a great battle to Charles Martel (the Hammer)--Abd-el-Kader, after ravaging and pillaging the country and the churches of Tours and of Blois, occupied one of the handsomest dwellings in Narbonne. He had the house arranged in Oriental fashion--the outside windows were closed up, and laurels were planted in the inner courtyard, from the center of which a fountain jetted its steady stream. His harem occupied one of the wings of the house. In one of the chambers of this harem, covered with rich carpets of gay colors, furnished with silk divans, and lighted by a window with gilded bars, sat a woman of rare beauty, although about forty years of age. It was easy to recognize by the whiteness of her skin, the blondness of her hair and the blue of her eyes that she was not of Arabian stock. Her pale and sad face revealed a settled and profound

sorrow. The curtain that covered the door of the chamber was pushed aside and Abd-el-Kader entered. The swarthy-complexioned warrior was about fifty years of age; his beard and moustache were grizzled; his face, calm and grave, expressed dignity and mildness. He stepped slowly towards the woman and said to her: "Rosen-Aër, we meet to-day for the last time, perhaps."

The Gallic matron seemed surprised and replied: "If I am not to see you again, I still shall remember you. I am your slave, but you have been kind and generous to me. I shall never forget that six years ago, when the Arabians invaded Burgundy and raided the valley of Charolles, where my family lived in happiness for more than a century, you respected me when I was taken to your tent. I declared to you then that at the first act of violence on your part, I would kill myself ... you ever treated me as a free woman--"

"Mercy is the badge of the believer. I only obeyed the voice of the prophet. But you, Rosen-Aër, did you not, shortly after you were brought here a prisoner and Ibrahim, my youngest son, was nearly dying, did you not ask to take care of him the same as a mother would? Did you not watch at his bedside during the long nights of his illness as if he were your own son? It was, accordingly, in recompense for your services, as well as in obedience to the behest of the Koran--*deliver your brothers from bondage*--that I offered you your

freedom."

"What else could I have done with my freedom? I am all alone in the world.... I saw my brother and husband killed under my own eyes in a desperate fight with your soldiers when they invaded the valley of Charolles; and before those days I wept my son Amael, who had disappeared six years before. I wept him then, as I do still every day, inconsolable at his absence."

Rosen-Aër spoke these words and could not keep back the tears that welled in her eyes and inundated her face. Abd-el-Kader looked at her sadly and replied: "Your motherly sorrow has often touched me. I can neither console you, nor give you hope. How could your son now be found, seeing he disappeared when barely fifteen years of age! It is a question whether he still lives."

"He would now be twenty-five; but," added Rosen-Aër drying her tears, "let us not now talk of my son; I am afraid he is lost to me forever.... But why say you that we see each other to-day, perhaps, for the last time?"

"Charles Martel, the chief of the Franks, is advancing with forced marches at the head of a formidable army to drive us out of Gaul. I was notified yesterday of his approach. Within two days, perhaps, the Franks will be upon the walls of Narbonne. Abd-el-

Malek, our new emir, is of the opinion that our troops should go out and meet Charles.... We are about to depart. The battle will be bloody. God may wish to send me death. That is why I came to tell you we may never meet again.... If God should will it so, what will become of you?"

"You have several times generously offered me freedom, money and a guide to travel through Gaul and look for my child. But I lacked the courage and strength, or rather my reason told me how insane such an undertaking would be in the midst of the civil wars that are desolating our unhappy country. If I am not to see you again and I must leave this house, where at least I have been able to weep in peace, free from the shame and the trials of slavery, there will be nothing left to me but to die."

"I do not like to see you despair, Rosen-Aër. This is my plan for you. During my absence you shall leave Narbonne. My forces are to take the field against the Franks; my army is brave, but the will of God is immovable. If it be his pleasure that victory fall to Charles and that the Franks prevail over the Crescent, they may lay siege to this town and take it. In that event you and all its inhabitants will be exposed to the fate of people in a place carried by assault--death or slavery. It is with an eye to withdrawing you from so sad a fate that I would induce you to leave the town, and to take

temporary shelter in one of the Gallic colonies nearby that cultivate my fields."

"Your fields!" exclaimed Rosen-Aër with bitterness; "you should rather say the fields that your soldiers seized by force and rapine, the inseparable companions of conquest."

"Such was the will of God."

"Oh, for the sake of your race and of yourself, Abd-el-Kader, I hope the will of God may save you the pain of some day seeing the fields of your fathers at the mercy of conquerors!"

"God ordains ... Man submits. If God decrees against Charles Martel at the approaching battle and we are victorious, you can return here to Narbonne; if we are vanquished, if I am killed in the battle, if we are driven out of Gaul, you shall have nothing to fear in the retreat that I am providing for you. You can remain with the family of my servant. Here is a little purse with enough gold pieces to supply your wants."

"I shall remember you, Abd-el-Kader, as a generous man, despite the wrong your race has done mine."

"God sent us hither to cause the religion preached by Mahomet to triumph, the only true religion. May his name be glorified."

"But the Christian bishops, priests and monks also pretend that their religion is the only true one."

"Let them prove it ... we leave them free to preach their belief. Barely a century since its foundation, the Musselman faith has subjugated the Orient almost entirely, Spain and a portion of Gaul. We are instruments of the divine will. If God has decided that I shall die in the approaching battle, then we shall not meet again. Should I die and yet our arms triumph, my sons, if they survive me, will take care of you.... Ibrahim venerates you as his own mother."

"Do you take Ibrahim to battle?"

"The youth who can manage a steed and hold a sword is of battle age.... Do you accept my offer, Rosen-Aër?"

"Yes; I tremble at the very thought of falling into the hands of the Franks! Sad days these are for us. We have only the choice of servitudes. Happy, at least, are those who, like myself, meet among their masters compassionate hearts."

"Make yourself ready.... I myself shall depart in an hour at the head of a part of my troops. I shall come for you. We shall leave the house together; you to proceed to the colonist who occupies my country house, and I to march against the Frankish army."

When Abd-el-Kader returned for Rosen-Aër, he had donned his battle costume. He wore a brilliant steel cuirass, and a red turban wrapped around his gilded casque. A scimitar of marvelous workmanship hung from his belt; its sheath as well as its handle of massive gold was ornamented with arabesques of corals and diamonds. The Arab warrior said to Rosen-Aër with suppressed emotion: "Allow me to embrace you as a daughter."

Rosen-Aër gave Abd-el-Kader her forehead, saying: "I pray that your children may long retain their father."

The Arab and the Gallic woman left the harem together. Outside they met the five sons of the chief--Abd-Allah, Hasam, Abul-Casem, Mahomet and Ibrahim, the youngest, all in full armor, on horseback and carrying over their arms long and light white woolen cloaks with black tufts. The youngest of the family, a lad of barely fifteen, alighted from his horse when he saw Rosen-Aër, took her hand, kissed it respectfully and said: "You have been a mother to me; before departing for battle I greet you as a son."

The Gallic woman thought of her son Amael, who also was fifteen years when he departed from the valley of Charolles, and answered the young man: "May God protect you, you who are now to incur the risk of war for the first time!"

"'Believers, when you march upon the enemy, be unshakable,' says the prophet," the lad replied with mild yet grave voice. "We are going to deliver battle to the infidel Franks. I shall fight bravely under the eyes of my father.... God alone disposes of our lives. His will be done."

Once more kissing the hand of Rosen-Aër, the young Arab helped her mount her mule that was led by a black slave. From the distance the martial bray of the Saracen clarions was heard. Abd-el-Kader waved his last adieu to Rosen-Aër, and the Arab, with whom age had not weakened the martial ardor of younger years, leaped upon his horse and galloped off, followed by his five sons. For a few moments longer the Gallic woman followed with her eyes the long white cloaks that the rapid course of the Arab and his five children raised to the wind. When they had disappeared in a cloud of dust at a turning of the street, Rosen-Aër ordered the black slave to lead the mule towards the main gate of the town in order to ride out and reach the colonist's house.

## PART I.

### THE CONVENT OF ST. SATURNINE

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE LAST OF THE MEROVINGIANS.

About a month had elapsed since the departure of Abd-el-Kader and his five sons to meet Charles Martel in battle.

A boy of eleven or twelve years, confined in the convent of St. Saturnine in Anjou, was leaning on his elbows at the sill of a narrow window on the first floor of one of the buildings of the abbey, and looking out upon the fields. The vaulted room in which the boy was kept was cold, spacious, bare and floored with stone. In a corner stood a little bed, and on a table a few toys roughly cut out of coarse wood. A few stools and a trunk were its only furniture. The boy himself, dressed in a threadbare and patched black serge, had a sickly appearance. His face, biliously pale, expressed profound sadness. He looked at the distant fields, and tears ran down his hollow cheeks. While he was dreaming awake, the door of the room opened and a young girl of about

sixteen stepped in softly. Her complexion was dark brown but extremely fresh, her lips were red, her hair as well as her eyes jetty black, and her eyebrows were exquisitely arched. A more comely figure could ill be imagined, despite her drugged petticoat and coarse apron, the ends of which were tucked under her belt and which was full of hemp ready to be spun. Septimine held her distaff in one hand and in the other a little wooden casket. At the sight of the boy, who remained sadly leaning on his elbows at the window, the young girl sighed and said to herself: "Poor little fellow ... always sorry ... I do not know whether the news I bring will be good or bad for him.... If he accepts, may he never have cause to look back with regret to this convent." She softly approached the child without being heard, placed her hand upon his shoulder with gentle familiarity and said playfully: "What are you thinking about, my dear prince?"

The child was startled. He turned his face bathed in tears towards Septimine, and letting himself down with an air of utter dejection on a stool near the window, said: "Oh, I am weary!... I am weary to death!" and the tears flowed anew from his fixed and red eyes.

"Come now, dry those ugly tears," the young maid replied affectionately. "I came to entertain you. I brought along a large supply of hemp to spin in your company while talking to you, unless you prefer a game

of huckle-bones--"

"Nothing amuses me. Everything tires me."

"That is sad for those who love you; nothing amuses you, nothing pleases you. You are always downcast and silent. You take no care of your person. Your hair is unkempt ... and your clothes in rags! If your hair were well combed over your forehead, instead of falling in disorder, you would not look like a little savage.... It is now three days since you have allowed me to arrange it, but to-day, will ye, nill ye, I shall comb it."

"No; no; I won't have it!" said the boy stamping his foot with feverish impatience. "Leave me alone; your attentions annoy me."

"Oh, oh! You can not frighten me with your stamping," Septimie replied mirthfully. "I have brought along in this box all that I need to comb you. Be wise and docile."

"Septimie.... Leave me in peace!"

But the young girl was not to be discouraged. With the authority of a "big sister" she turned around the chair of the recalcitrant boy and forced him to let her disentangle his disordered hair. While thus giving him her care with as much affection as grace, Septimie,

standing behind him said: "Are you not a hundred times better looking this way, my dear prince?"

"What is the difference, good looking or not?... I am not allowed to leave this convent.... What have I done to be so wretched?"

"Alack, poor little one ... you are the son of a king!"

The boy made no answer, but he hid his face in his hands and fell to weeping, from time to time crying in a smothered voice: "My father.... Oh, my father.... Alas!... He is dead!"

"Oh, if you again start crying, and, worst of all, to speak of your father, you will make me also cry. Although I scold you for your negligence, I do pity you. I came to give you some hope, perhaps."

"What do you mean, Septimine?"

Having finished dressing the boy's hair, the young girl sat down near him on a stool, took up her distaff, began to spin and said in a low and mysterious voice: "Do you promise to be discreet?"

"Whom do you expect I can talk to? Whom could I reveal secrets to? I have an aversion to all the people in this place."

"Excepting myself.... Not true?"

"Yes, excepting you, Septimaine.... You are the only one who inspires me with some little confidence."

"What distrust could a little girl, born in Septimany, inspire you with? Am not I as well as my mother, the wife of the outside porter of this convent, a slave? When eighteen months ago you were brought to this place and I was not yet fifteen, I was assigned to you, to entertain you and play with you. Since then we have grown up together. You became accustomed to me.... Is it not of course that you should have some confidence in me?"

"You just told me you had some hope to give me.... What hope can you give me? I want to hear?"

"Do you first promise to be discreet?"

"Be easy on that score. I shall be discreet."

"Promise me also not to begin to weep again, because I shall have to speak about your father, a painful subject to you."

"I shall not weep, Septimaine."

"It is now eighteen months since your father, King Thierry, died on his domain in Compiègne, and the steward of the palace, that wicked Charles Martel, had

you taken to this place and kept imprisoned ... poor dear innocent boy!"

"My father always said to me: 'My little Childeric, you will be a king like myself, you will have dogs and falcons to hunt with, handsome horses, chariots to ride in, slaves to serve you'; and yet I have none of these things here. Oh, God! Oh, God! How unhappy I am!"

"Are you going to start weeping again?"

"No, Septimine; no, my little friend."

"That wicked Charles Martel had you brought to this convent, as I was saying, in order to reign in your place, as he virtually reigned in the place of your father, King Thierry."

"But there are in this country of Gaul enough dogs, falcons, horses and slaves for that Charles to have an abundance and I also. Is it not so?"

"Yes ... if to reign means simply to have all these things ... but I, poor girl, do not understand these things. I only know that your father had friends who are enemies of Charles Martel, and that they would like to see you out of this convent. That is the secret that I had for you."

"And I, Septimine, would also like to be out of

here! The devil take the monks and their convent."

After a moment's hesitation, the young girl stopped spinning and said to the young prince in a still lower voice and looking around as if fearing to be heard: "It depends upon you to get out of this convent."

"Upon me!" cried Childeric. "That would be quickly done on my part. But how?"

"Mercy! Do not speak so loud," replied Septimine uneasily and casting her eyes towards the door. "I always fear some one is there listening." She rose and went on tip-toe to listen at the door and peep through the keyhole. Feeling reassured by the examination, Septimine returned to her seat, again started to spin, and went on talking with Childeric: "You can walk in the garden during the day?"

"Yes, but the garden is surrounded by a high wall, and I am always accompanied by one of the monks. That is why I prefer to remain in this room to walking in such company."

"They lock you up at night--"

"And a monk sleeps outside before my door."

"Just look out of this window."

"What for?"

"To see whether the height of the window above the ground would frighten you."

Childeric looked out of the window. "It is very high, Septimine; it is really very high."

"You little coward! It is only eight or ten feet at most. Suppose a rope with large knots were fastened to that iron bar yonder, would you have the courage to descend by the rope, helping yourself with your feet and hands?"

"Oh, I never could do that!"

"You would be afraid? Great God, is it possible!"

"The attempt looks to me above my strength."

"I would not be afraid, and I am only a girl.... Come, have courage, my prince."

The boy looked once more out of the window, reflected and proceeded to say: "You are right.... It is not as high as it looked at first. But the rope, Septimine, how am I to get it? And then, when I am down there, at night.... What shall I do then?"

"At the bottom of the window you will find my

father. He will throw upon your shoulders the caped cloak that I usually wear. I am not really much taller than you. If you wrap the mantle well around you and lower the cape well over your face, my father could, with the help of the night, make you pass for me, traverse the interior of the convent, and reach his lodge outside. There, friends of your father would be waiting on horseback. You would depart quickly. You would have the whole night before you, and in the morning, when your flight was discovered, it would be too late to start in your pursuit.... Now answer, Childeric, will you have the courage to descend from this window in order to regain your freedom?"

"Septimine, I have a strong desire to do so ... but--"

"But you are afraid.... Fie! A big boy like you! It is shameful!"

"And who will give me a rope?"

"I.... Are you decided? You will have to hurry; your father's friends are in the neighborhood.... To-night and to-morrow night they will be waiting with horses not far from the walls of the convent ... to take you away--"

"Septimine, I shall have the courage to descend, yes ... I promise you."

"Forget not, Childeric, that my mother, my father

and I are exposing ourselves to terrible punishment, even death perhaps, by favoring your flight. When the proposition was made to my father to help in your escape, he was offered money. He refused, saying: 'I want no other reward than the satisfaction of having contributed in the deliverance of the poor little fellow, who is always sad and weepful all these eighteen months, and who is dying of grief.'

"Oh, be easy. When I shall be king, like my father, I shall make you handsome presents; I shall give you fine clothes, jewelry--"

"I do not need your presents. You are a child that one must sympathize with. That is all that concerns me. 'It is not because the poor little fellow is the son of a king that I take an interest in him,' my father has said to me, 'because, after all, he is of the race of those Franks who have held us in bondage, us the Gauls, ever since Clovis. No, I wish to help the poor little fellow because I pity him.' Now, remember, Childeric, the slightest indiscretion on your part would draw terrible misfortunes upon my family."

"Septimine, I shall say nothing to anybody, I shall have courage, and this very night I shall descend by the window to join my father's friends. Oh! What happiness!" the child added, clapping his hands, "what happiness! I shall be free to-morrow!... I shall be a king

like my father!"

"Wait till you are away to rejoice!... And now, listen to me carefully. You are always locked in after evening prayers. The night is quite dark by that time. You will have to wait about half an hour. Then tie the rope and let yourself down into the garden. My father will be at the foot of the window--"

"Agreed.... But where is the rope?"

"Here," said Septimine, taking from amidst the flax that she held in her apron a roll of thin but strong rope, furnished with knots at intervals. "There is at the end, as you see, an iron hook; you will fasten that to this bar, and you will then let yourself down from knot to knot till you reach the ground."

"Oh! I am no longer afraid! But where shall I hide the rope? Where shall I keep it until evening?"

"Under the mattress of your bed."

"Good! Give it to me!" and the young prince, helped by Septimine, hid the rope well under the mattress. Hardly had they re-covered the bed when trumpets were heard blowing at a distance. Septimine and Childeric looked at each other for a moment in astonishment. The young girl returned to her seat, took up her distaff and observed in great excitement:

"Something unusual is going on outside of the abbey.... They may come here.... Take up your huckle-bones and play with them."

Childeric mechanically obeyed the orders of the young girl, sat down on the floor, and began to play huckle-bones, while Septimine, with apparent unconcern, spun at her distaff near the window. A few minutes later the door of the room opened. Father Clement, the abbot of the convent, came in and said to the young girl: "You can go away; I shall call you back if I want you."

Septimine hastened to leave; but thinking she could profit by a moment when the monk did not see her, she placed her finger to her lips in order to convey to Childeric a last warning of discretion. The abbot happening to turn around suddenly, the girl hardly had time to carry her hand to her hair in order to conceal the meaning of her first gesture. Septimine feared she had aroused the suspicion of Father Clement, who followed her with penetrating eyes, and her apprehensions ripened into certainty when, having arrived at the threshold of the door and turning a last time to salute the Father, her eyes met his scrutinizing gaze fixed upon her.

"May God help us," said the poor girl seized with mortal anxiety and leaving the room. "At the sight of the

monk the unhappy prince became purple in the face....  
He did not take his eyes from the bed where we hid the  
rope. Oh, I tremble for the little fellow and for us!... Oh!  
What will come of it?"

## CHAPTER II.

### CHARLES MARTEL.

Charles the Hammer, or Martel, had arrived at the convent of St. Saturnine escorted by only about a hundred armed men. He was on the way to join a detachment of his army that lay encamped at a little distance from the abbey. The steward of the palace and one of the officers of the squad that accompanied him were installed in a room that served as the refectory of Father Clement, while the latter went for the little prince.

At this period in the full vigor of his age, Charles Martel exaggerated in his language and costume the rudeness of his Germanic stock. His beard and hair, which were of a reddish blonde, were kept untrimmed and shaggy, and framed in a face of high color, that bore the imprint of rare energy coupled with a good nature that was at times both jovial and sly. His keen eyes revealed an intelligence of superior order. Like the lowest of his soldiers, he wore a coat of goat-skin over his tarnished armor. His boots, made of heavy leather, were armed with rusty iron spurs. From his leather

baldric hung a long sword of Bordeaux, a town renowned for its manufacture of arms.

The officer who accompanied Charles Martel seemed to be twenty-five years of age--tall, slender, powerfully built. He wore his brilliant steel armor with military ease, half-hidden under a long white cloak with black tufts, after the Arabian fashion. His magnificent scimitar, with both handle and scabbard of solid gold and ornamented with arabesques of coral and diamonds, likewise was of Arabian origin. The young man's face was of rare manly beauty. He had placed his casque upon a table. His wavy black hair, divided in the middle of his head, fell in ringlets on both sides of his forehead, which was furrowed by a deep scar, and shaded his manly face that bore a slight brown beard. His eyes of the blue of the sea, usually mild and proud, seemed however to reveal a secret sorrow or remorse. At times a nervous twitch brought his eyebrows together, and his features would for a while become somber. Soon, however, thanks to the mobility of his impressions, the ardor of his blood, and the impetuosity of his character, his face would again resume its normal expression.

Charles, who for a while had been silently contemplating his young companion with a kind and sly satisfaction, at last broke the silence, saying in his hoarse voice:

"Berthoald, how do you like this abbey and the fields that we have just traversed?"

"The abbey seems to me large, the fields fertile. Why do you ask?"

"Because I would like to make you a present to your taste, my lad."

The young man looked at the Frankish chief with profound astonishment.

Charles Martel proceeded: "In 732, it is now nearly six years ago, at the time that those heathens from Arabia, who had settled in Gaul, pushed forward as far as Tours and Blois, I marched against them. One day I saw arrive at my camp a young chief followed by fifty daring devils. It was you, the son, as you told me, of a Frankish seigneur, who was dead and had been dispossessed of his benefice, like so many others. I cared nothing about your birth. When the blade is well tempered I care little about the name of the armorer," Charles explained as he noticed a slight quiver in the eyelashes of Berthoald whose forehead swiftly mantled with a blush and whose eyes dropped in involuntary confusion. "You searched your fortune in war and had assembled a band of determined men. You came to offer me your sword and your services. The next day, on the plains of Poitiers, you and your men fought so bravely against the Arabs that you lost three-fourths of your

little troop. With your own hands you killed Abd-el-Rhaman, the general of those heathens, and you received two wounds in disengaging me from a group of horsemen who were about to kill me, and would thereby have ended the war to the lasting injury of the Franks."

"It was my duty as a soldier to defend my chief. I deserve no praise for that."

"And it is now my duty as your chief to reward your soldierly courage. I shall never forget that I owe my life to your valor. Neither will my children. They will read in some notes I have left on my campaign: 'At the battle of Poitiers, Charles owed his life to Berthoald; let my children remember it every time they see the scar that the brave warrior carries on his forehead.'"

"Charles, your praises embarrass me."

"I love you sincerely. Since the battle of Poitiers I have looked upon you as one of my best companions in arms, although at times you are as stubborn as a mule and quite odd in your tastes. If the matter in hand is a war in the east or the north against the Frisians or the Saxons, or in the south against the Arabs, there is no more rageful hammerer on the enemies' heads than yourself; but when we had to suppress some revolts of the Gauls you fought gingerly, almost against your will.... You no longer were the same daring champion.... Your sword did not leave its scabbard."

"Charles, tastes differ," answered Berthoald laughing with so obvious an effort that it betrayed some poignant recollection. "In matters of battle it is as in matters of women, tastes differ. Some like blondes, others brunettes; they are all fire for the one, and all ice for the other. And so my preference is for war against the Frisians, Saxons and Arabs."

"I have no such predilections. As true as I have been surnamed Martel, so long as I can strike and crush what stands in my way, all enemies are equally to my taste.... I believed that those Arabian dogs who had been so roughly hammered would recross the Pyrenees in a hurry after their rout at Poitiers. I was mistaken. They still hold their ground firmly in Languedoc. Despite the success of our last battle we have not been able to seize Narbonne, the place of refuge of those heathens. I am now called back to the north of Gaul to resist the Saxons who are returning with more threatening forces. I regret to have to leave Narbonne in the hands of the Saracens. But we have at least ravaged the neighborhood of that large town, made an immense booty, carried away a large number of slaves, and devastated in our retreat the countries of Nimes, of Toulouse and of Beziers. It will be a good lesson for the populations who took the side of the Arabs. They will long remember what is to be gained by leaving the Gospels for the Koran, or rather, because, after all, I care as little for the Pope as I do for Mahomet, what is to be gained by an alliance with the

Arabs against the Franks. For the rest, although they remain masters of Narbonne, these pagans worry me little. Travelers from Spain have informed me that civil war has broken out between the Caliphs of Granada and of Cordova. Busy with their own internal strifes, they will not send fresh troops into Gaul, and the accursed Saracens will not dare to advance beyond Languedoc, whence I shall drive them away later. At rest about the south, I now return north. But before doing so I wish to provide, to their own taste and mine, for a large number of soldiers, who, like yourself, have served me valiantly, and turn them into fat abbots, rich bishops or other large beneficiaries."

"Charles, would you make out of me an abbot or a bishop? You are surely joking."

"Why not? It is the abbey and the bishopric that make the abbot and the bishop, whoever be the incumbent."

"Please explain yourself more clearly."

"I have been able to sustain my great wars in the north and south only by constantly recruiting my forces from the German tribes on the other side of the Rhine. The descendants of the seigneurs who were the beneficiaries of Clovis and his sons have degenerated. They have become do-nothings like their kings. They seek to escape their obligations of leading their columns

to war, under the pretext that they need hands to cultivate the soil. Apart from a few fighting bishops, old men with the devil in them, who changed the casque for the mitre, and who, redonning their cuirasses brought their men to my camp, the Church has not wished and does not wish to contribute to the expenses of the war. Now, upon the word of Martel, that will not do! My brave warriors, fresh from Germany, the chiefs of the bands that have served me faithfully, have a right to a share of the lands of Gaul. They have more right thereto than the rapacious bishops and the debauched abbots who keep harems like the Caliphs of the Arabs. I want to restore order in the matter; to reward the brave and to punish the cowards and do-nothings. I propose to distribute a part of the goods of the Church among my men who have recently arrived from Germany. I shall in that manner provide for my chiefs and their men, and instead of leaving so much land and so many slaves in the hands of the tonsured brothers, I shall form a strong reserve army of veterans, ever ready to take the field at the first signal. And to begin, I present this abbey to you, its lands, buildings, slaves, with no other charge upon you than to contribute a certain sum into my treasury and to turn out with your men at my first call."

"I a count of this country! I the possessor of such broad estates!" the young chief cried with joy, hardly believing so magnificent a gift possible. "But the goods of this abbey are immense! Its lands and forests extend

more than two leagues in a circle!"

"So much the better, my lad! You and your men will settle down here. Handsome female slaves are sure to abound on the place. You will raise a good breed of soldiers. Moreover this abbey is bound, due to its situation, to become an important military post. I shall grant to the abbot of this convent some more land ... if any is left. And that is not all, Berthoald; I entertain as much affection for [you] as I place confidence in you. I make the gift to you out of affection; now, as to my confidence. I shall give you a strong proof of it by establishing you here and charging you with so important a duty ... that, in the end, it will be I who remain your debtor...."

"Why do you halt, Charles?" asked Berthoald noticing the chief of the Franks reflect instead of continuing.

After a few seconds of silence, Charles resumed: "During the century and a half and more that we have reigned in fact, we the stewards of the palace ... of what earthly use have the kings been, the descendants of Clovis?"

"Have I not heard you say a hundred times that those do-nothings spend their time drinking, eating, playing, hunting, sleeping in the arms of their concubines, going to church and building churches in

atonement for some crime committed in the fury of their drunkenness?"

"Such has been the life of those 'do-nothing' kings--well named such. We the stewards of the palace govern in fact. At every assembly of the Field of May, we pulled one of our royal mannikins out of his residence of Compiègne, of Kersey-on-the-Oise, or of Braine. We had him set up in a gilded chariot drawn by four oxen according to the old Germanic custom, and, with a crown upon his head, a scepter in his hand, purple on his back, his face ornamented with a long artificial beard, if he had no beard, so as to impart to him a certain degree of majesty, the image was promenaded around the Field of May, and received the pledge of homage from the dukes, counts and bishops, gathered at the assembly from all parts of Gaul.... The comedy over, the idol was thrust back into its box until the next year. But what useful purpose can these mummeries serve? He only should be king who governs and fights. Consequently, as I have no taste for what is superfluous, I have suppressed the royalty.... I confiscated the King."

"You deserve to be praised for that, Charles; the Frankish kings descended from Clovis, have inspired me with hatred and contempt--"

"But whence the hate?"

Berthoald blushed and puckered up his brows: "I

have always hated idleness and cruelty."

"The last one of these kings, Thierry IV, dead now eighteen months, left a son behind ... a child of about nine years.... I had him deported to this abbey--"

"What do you purpose to do with him?"

"To keep him.... We Franks are fickle folks. For a century and a half we fell into the habit of despising the kings that one time we worshipped.... Accordingly, when the first Field of May took place without the royal mummery, not one of the dukes and bishops missed the idol that was absent from the feast. This year, however, some did ask where was the king; and others answered: 'What is the use of the king?' It may, nevertheless, happen that one of these days they may demand to see the royal mannikin make the tour of the Field of May according to the old custom.... I do not care, provided I reign. Accordingly, I keep in reserve for them the child that is here. With the aid of a false beard on his chin and a crown on his head, the little monkey will play his role in the chariot neither better nor worse than so many other kings of twelve or fifteen years who preceded him. In case of need, next year he will be Childeric III, if I think it advisable."

"Kings of twelve!... How low can royalty fall!... How low the degradation of the people!"

"The stewardship of the palace, a post that became hereditary, came very near dropping to the same level.... Did I not have a brother of eleven who was the steward of the palace to a king of ten?"

"You joke, Charles!"

"No, indeed, I do not, because those days were far from pleasant for me.... My step-mother, Plectrude, had me cast into prison after the death of my father Pepin of Heristal.... According to the dame, I was only a bastard, good either for the gibbet or the priest's frock, while my father left to my brother Theobald the post of steward of the palace; hereditary in our family.... And so it happened that my brother, then only eleven, became the steward of the palace of the then king, who was only ten, and who became the grandfather of this little Childeric, who is a prisoner in this convent. That king and steward could exercise no rivalry over each other except at tops or huckle-bones. Thus the good dame Plectrude expected to rule in the place of the two urchins, while they would be at play. Such audacity and folly aroused the Frankish seigneurs. At the end of a few years Plectrude was driven away with her son, while I, Charles, for whom she had only bad names, came out of prison, and now became steward of the palace of Dagobert III. Since then I have made so much noise in the world, hammering here and yonder upon the heads of Saxons, Frisians and Saracens, that the name of

Martel has stuck to me. Dagobert III left a son, Thierry IV, who died eighteen months ago, and he was the father of little Childeric, the prisoner of this place. While having to cross the region, I wished to pay a visit to the royal brat and learn how he stood his captivity. I said I had a token of confidence to give.... I confide to you the keeping of that child, the last scion of the stock of Clovis, of the Merovingian conquerors of Gaul."

"I shall keep this last scion of Clovis?" cried Berthoald, at first stupefied, but immediately thrilled with savage joy. "I shall keep him? The boy who has among his ancestors a Clotaire, the murderer of children! a Chilperic, the Nero of the Gauls! a Fredegonde, a second Messalina! a Clotaire II, the executioner of Brunhild, and so many other crowned monsters! Shall I be the jailor of their last issue?... The fate of man is often strange.... I to be the guardian of the last descendant of that conqueror of Gaul so much abhorred by my fathers!... Oh, the gods are just!"

"Berthoald, are you going crazy? What is there so astonishing in your becoming the watcher of this child?"

"Excuse me, Charles," answered Berthoald recollecting and fearing to betray himself. "I was greatly struck with the thought that I, an obscure soldier, should watch and hold as a prisoner the last scion of so many kings! Is it not a strange fate?"

"Indeed this stock of Clovis, once so valiant, ends miserably!... But how else could it be! These kinglets--fathers before fifteen, decayed at thirty, brutified by wine, dulled by idleness, unnerved by youthful debauchery, emaciated, stunted, and stupid--could not choose but end this-wise.... The stewards of the palace, on the contrary--rough men, always on the march from north to south, from east to west, and back again, always on horseback, always fighting, always governing--they run out into a Charles, and he is not frail, he is not stunted! Not he! His beard is not artificial; he will be able to raise a breed of true kings.... Upon the word of Martel, this second breed of kings will not allow themselves to be exhibited in carts neither before nor after the assemblies of the Field of May by any stewards of palaces!"

"Who can tell, Charles! It may happen that if you raise a breed of kings, their stock will run down just as that of Clovis has done, whose last scion you wish to put under my charge."

"By the devil! By the navel of the Pope! Do you see any sign of decay in us, the sons of Pepin of Old, who have been the hereditary stewards of the palace since the reign of Queen Brunhild?"

"You were not kings, Charles; and royalty carries with it a poison that in the long run enervates and kills

the most virile stock--"

At this moment Father Clement came tumbling into the room in great excitement, and broke the thread of the conversation between Charles Martel and Berthoald.

## CHAPTER III.

### FATHER CLEMENT'S REFECTORY.

"Seigneur," said Father Clement to Charles, as he precipitately broke into the room, "I have just discovered a plot! The young prince obstinately refused to accompany me hither--"

"A plot! Ho, ho! The folks of your abbey indulge in conspiracies!"

"Thanks be to heaven, seigneur, myself and brothers are utter strangers to the unworthy treason. The guilty ones are the miserable slaves who will be punished as they deserve!"

"Explain yourself! And stop circumlocutions!"

"I must first of all inform you, sir, that when the young prince first arrived at this convent, Count Hugh who brought him, recommended to me to place near the child some young female slave, a pretty girl, if possible, above all one that would provoke love ... and who would be willing to submit to the consequences--"

"In order, I suppose, that he be educated after the fashion that old Queen Brunhild followed towards her own grandchildren.... Count Hugh exceeded my orders; and you, holy man, did you not blush at the role of coupler in the infamous scheme?"

"Oh, seigneur! What an abomination! The two children remained pure as angels.... To make it short, I placed a young female slave near the prince. The girl, an innocent creature, together with her father and mother took pity on the fate of Childeric. They listened to detestable propositions, and this very night and by means of a rope, the child was to slip from his room with the connivance of the porter slave, and join some faithful adherents of the deceased King Thierry who are lying in hiding near the convent. That was the plot."

"Ha! Ha! The old royal party is stirring! They thought I would be long kept busy with the Arabs! They planned to restore the royalty in my absence!"

"A minute ago, as I entered the room of the young prince, my suspicions were awakened. The confusion he was in and the redness in his face told of his guilt. He would not take his eyes from his bed. A sudden idea occurred to me. I raised the mattress, and there I found a rope carefully stowed away. I pressed the child with questions, and amidst tears he confessed to me the full project of escape."

"Treason!" cried the chief of the Franks, affecting more rage than he really felt. "How came I to confide this child to the care of monks who are either traitors or incapable of defending their prisoner!"

"Oh, seigneur!... We traitors!"

"How many men did this abbey contribute to the army?"

"Seigneur, our colonists and slaves are hardly enough to cultivate the land; our vines are neglected; our fields lie fallow. We could not spare a single man for the army."

"How much did you pay into the treasury towards the expenses of the war?"

"All our revenues were employed in charitable works ... in pious foundations."

"You extend fat charities to yourselves. Such are these churchmen! Always receiving and taking, never giving or returning! Ye are a race of vipers! Under whom does this old abbey hold the land?"

"From the liberalities of the pious King Dagobert. The charter of our endowment is of the year 640 of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Do you, monk, believe that the Frankish kings made these endowments to you of the tonsured fraternity to the end that you might grow fat in idleness and abundance, and without ever contributing towards the expenses of the war with either men or money?"

"Seigneur ... remember the obligations of the monastery ... keep in mind the expenses of the cult!"

"I confide an important prisoner to you and you prove unable to watch him ... you miserable tonsured idlers ... toppers and do-nothings!"

"Seigneur, we are innocent and incapable of betraying you!"

"That will never do. I shall settle soldiers on the domain ... men who will be able to watch the prisoner, and, when need be, defend the abbey, if the folks of the royal party should attempt to carry off the prince by force," and turning to Berthoald, Charles said: "You and your men will take possession of this abbey. I present it to you!"

The abbot raised his hands to heaven in sign of mute desolation, while Berthoald, who had pensively stood near, said to Charles Martel:

"Charles, the commission of jailor is repugnant to my character of a soldier. I feel thankful to you, but I

must decline the gift."

"Your refusal afflicts me. You have heard the monk. I need here a vigilant guardian. This abbey is, by its position, an important military post."

"Charles, there are other soldiers in your army whom you can charge with the child and to whom you can confide the defence of the post. You will find men enough who will not be restrained by any scruples such as restrain me."

For a few minutes the chief of the Franks remained silent and thoughtful, then he said: "Monk, how much land, how many colonists and slaves have you?"

"Seigneur, we have five thousand eight hundred acres of land, seven hundred colonists, and nineteen hundred slaves."

"Berthoald ... you hear it! That is what you decline for yourself and your men. Moreover, I would have created you count of the domain."

"Reserve for others than myself the favor you meant to bestow upon me. I absolutely refuse the function of jailor."

"Seigneur," put in Father Clement with a holy resignation that, however, but ill-concealed his anger at

Charles: "You are the chief of the Franks and all-powerful. If you establish your armed men on this domain, we shall have to obey, but what will become of us?"

"And what will become of my companions in arms, who have valiantly served me during the war while you were counting your beads?... Are they to steal or beg their bread along the roads?"

"Seigneur ... there is a way of satisfying both your companions in arms and ourselves. You wish to change this abbey into a military post. I admit it, your armed men would be better keepers of the young prince than we poor monks. But since you dispose of this abbey, deign, illustrious seigneur, to bestow another one upon us. There is near Nantes the abbey of Meriadek. One of our brothers, who died recently, lived there several years as the intendant. He left with us an inventory containing an exact list of the goods and persons of that abbey. It was at the time under the rule of St. Benoit. We have learned that later it was changed into a community of women. But we have no positive information on that head. But that would matter little."

"And that abbey," Charles asked, rubbing his beard with a sly look, "you ask me for it as a charity to you and your monks?"

"Yes, seigneur; since you dispossess us of this one,

we solicit indemnity."

"And what is to become of the present holders of the abbey of Meriadek?"

"Alack! what we would have become. The will of God be done. Charity begins at home."

"Yes, provided the will of God turn in your favor. Is the abbey rich?"

"Seigneur, with the aid of God, we could live there humbly and in seclusion and prayer and with a little privation."

"Monk, no false pretences! Is that abbey worth more or is it worth less than this one? I wish to know whether it is a cow or a goat I am giving away. If you deceive me, I may some day go back upon my gift. Moreover, you just said you had an exact inventory of the abbey's havings. Come, speak up, you old dotard!"

"Yes, seigneur," answered the abbot biting his lips and proceeding to look in a drawer among several rolls of parchment for the inventory of the abbey of Meriadek. "Here," said he, producing the document, "you will see from this that the revenues of Meriadek are worth about as much as those that we draw here.... We may even, by retrenching upon our good works, by reducing our charities, contribute two hundred gold sous

annually to your treasury."

"You say that rather late," replied Charles turning the leaves of the inventory which did, indeed, accurately set forth the extent and limits of the domain of Meriadek. "Have you parchments to write on? I wish to make the bequest in due form."

"Yes, seigneur," cried the monk in great glee, running to his trunk and believing himself in full possession of the abbey of Meriadek. "Here is a roll of parchment, gracious seigneur. Be kind enough to dictate the terms of the bequest ... unless you prefer to adopt the usual formula."

Saying this the abbot was about to sit down and take pen in hand, when, pushing him away from the table, Charles said: "Monk, I am not like the do-nothing and ignorant kings; I know how to write; and I like to transact my business myself."

Consulting from time to time the parchments that the abbot had handed to him, and from time to time casting a look upon Berthoald, who had remained steeped in thought and a stranger to what was going on near him, Charles began to write. A few steps from the table, and following the hand of Charles with greedy eyes, the monk was congratulating himself upon his having thought of the abbey of Meriadek, and he no doubt was computing the advantage that would accrue

to himself by the exchange. Addressing the chief of the Franks, who was silently writing, the monk said: "Mighty seigneur, my names are Bonaventure Clement, an unworthy priest and monk of the order of St. Benoit."

Charles raised his head, looked fixedly at the abbot and a singular smile played around his lips. He then proceeded to write, and a few minutes later said: "Wax!... I wish to place my seal on this charter as a last formality."

The abbot hastened to fetch what he was ordered; Charles pulled from his finger a large gold ring and placed it on the burning wax. "Now the charter of the bequest is in good shape."

"Gracious seigneur," cried the abbot extending his hands, "we shall every day pray that heaven may protect you."

"You have my thanks, monk; disinterested prayers are particularly agreeable to the Almighty;" and turning towards his young officer: "Berthoald, by this charter I make you count of the county of Nantes, and I donate to you and your men the abbey of Meriadek, together with its dependencies."

The abbot remained petrified. Berthoald trembled with joy, and cried in accents of profound gratitude: "Charles, will your generosity never tire?"

"No, no, my valiant boy! No more than your arm tires in battle.... And now, to horse, noble count. Should the abbey of Meriadek turn out to be a convent of tonsured friars with some fighting abbot at their head who refuses to make room for you, you have your sword; your men have their lances. If it happens to be a convent of women and that the nuns are young and handsome, by the devil!--"

Again the conversation in the monk's refectory was suddenly broken in upon; this time by Septimine.

## CHAPTER IV.

### MORDECAI THE SLAVE-DEALER.

Pale, affrighted, her face in tears, her hair unloosened, Septimine broke into the room and threw herself at the feet of the abbot, crying:

"Mercy, Father, mercy!"

Close upon the heels of Septimine entered two slaves armed with whips, and carrying rolls of rope. They had run after the young girl, but now stood respectfully awaiting the abbot's orders. Septimine was so beautiful, her distress so touching, her suppliant attitude, accentuated by the tears that flowed down her charming face, so pathetic, that Berthoald was struck with admiration and suddenly felt an irrepressible interest in the distracted girl. Charles Martel himself could not hold back the cry of admiration: "My faith, what a pretty girl!"

"What do you want here?" brutally asked Father Clement, smarting under the pain of having seen the gift of the abbey of Meriadek slip from him; and turning to the two slaves, who remained motionless at the door:

"Why have you not punished this wretch?"

"Father, we were about to strip off her clothes and tie her to the whipping-post. But she fought us so hard that she slipped away from us."

"Oh, Father!" cried Septimine in a voice suffocated with sobs and raising her suppliant hands to the abbot; "order me killed, but spare me the disgrace!"

"Charles," said Father Clement, "this slave girl sought to help the young prince to escape!... Drag her away!" he added to the slaves at the door; "Have her well whipped!"

The slaves took a step forward, but Berthoald held them back with a menacing gesture. Approaching Septimine he took her hand and said: "Fear not, poor child; Charles the chief of the Franks will not allow you to be punished."

The young woman, not yet daring to rise, turned her charming face towards Berthoald, and remained no less struck by the generosity of the young man than by his comely looks. Their eyes met. Berthoald felt a profound emotion, while Charles said to Septimine: "Come, I pardon you; but why the devil, my little girl, did you want that royal urchin to run away?"

"Oh, seigneur, the child is so unhappy! My father

and mother, the same as myself, felt pity for him.... That is all our crime, seigneur.... I swear by the salvation of my soul;" and sobs again choked her voice. Again joining her hands, she could only utter the words: "Mercy; mercy for my father and mother! Have pity upon us, noble seigneur!"

"You are weeping fit to choke yourself," said Charles, touched, despite his roughness, at the sight of such youth, anguish and beauty: "I forbid that your father and mother be punished."

"Seigneur ... they want to sell me and to separate me from my parents.... Have pity upon us!"

"What about that, monk?" asked Charles, while Berthoald, who felt his sorrow, admiration and pity increase by the second, could not take his eyes from the charming maid.

"Seigneur," answered Father Clement, "I gave orders that, after being severely whipped, the three slaves, father, mother and daughter, be sold and taken far away from the convent. One of those slave-dealers who travel through the country came this morning to offer me two carpenters and a smith that we stand in need of. I offered him the young girl in exchange together with her father and mother. But Mordecai refused the exchange."

"Mordecai!" involuntarily exclaimed Berthoald, whose face, suddenly turning pale, now expressed as much fear as anxiety. "That Jew!"

"What the devil is the matter with you?" said Charles to the young man. "You look as white as your cloak."

Berthoald sought to control his emotions, dropped his eyes and answered in a quivering voice: "The horror that these accursed Jews inspire me with is such ... that I can not see them, or even hear their names mentioned, without shuddering, despite myself." Saying this, Berthoald quickly took his casque from the table and put it on his head, pushing it down as far as he could so that the visor might conceal his face.

"I can understand your horror for the Jews," replied Charles; "I share your aversion for that race. Proceed, monk."

"Mordecai consented to take the girl, for whom he has a place; but he does not want either the father or the mother. I, accordingly, sold him the girl, reserving the right of having her punished before delivery to him. I shall sell her parents to some other slave-dealer."

"Seigneur!" cried Septimine breaking out into a fresh flood of tears, "slavery is a cruel condition, but it seems less hard when borne in the company of those

whom we love--"

"The bargain is closed," said the abbot. "Mordecai paid me earnest money; he has my word; he is waiting for the girl."

When Berthoald heard that the Jew was in the convent he trembled anew, retreated into a niche in the wall, and threw the cape of his long Arabian cloak over his casque so as to conceal his face. He then addressed the Frankish chief in a hurried voice like a man in fear of some imminent danger and anxious to leave the place:

"Charles, before I bid you good-bye, perhaps for a long time, cap the climax of your generosity towards me. Give the father and mother of this child their freedom, and buy her back from the Jew to prevent her being separated from her parents. Guilty though she was, it was only pity that led her astray. You are about to place vigilant soldiers in this place. The little prince's escape will not need to be feared."

Hearing the tender words of Berthoald, Septimine raised her face to him, full with ineffable gratitude.

"Rest assured, Berthoald," said Charles; "and you, my girl, rise; this abbey, where I wish to establish my warriors, shall have three slaves less. I can refuse nothing to this valiant officer."

"Take this, my child," said the young man putting several Arabian gold pieces into the hand of Septimine. "This is to help you, your father and mother to live. May you be happy! Bless the generosity of Charles Martel; and remember me occasionally."

With an unconscious movement that absolutely controlled her will, Septimine took the hand that Berthoald reached out to her, and without taking the gold pieces that he tendered and that rolled down over the floor, she kissed the young man's hand with such passionate thankfulness, that his own eyes were moistened with tears. Charles Martel noticed the circumstance, and pointing at the young folks, cried with the boisterous laugh peculiar to himself:

"Upon the word of Martel, I believe he weeps!"

Berthoald pulled the cape of his cloak further down over his face, leaving it now almost wholly covered.

"You are right, my brave fellow, to lower your cape and conceal your tears."

"I shall not long treat you to the spectacle of my weakness, Charles; allow me to depart immediately with my men for the abbey of Meriadek."

"Go, my good companion in arms. I excuse your impatience. Be vigilant! Keep your men in daily

exercise; let them be ever ready to answer my first call. I may have to use them against the accursed Bretons who have withstood our arms since the days of Clovis. You are the count of the county of Nantes, close to the frontiers of that bedeviled Armorica. Your loyal sword may yet have occasion to render me such service that in the end it may yet be I who will be your debtor. May we soon meet again! A happy trip and a fat abbey are my best wishes to you."

Thanks to the cape that almost wholly veiled Berthoald's face, he was able to conceal from Charles the cruel agony that he became a prey to the moment he heard Charles say that some day he might receive orders to invade the country of the Bretons that had so far remained indomitable. He bent a knee before the chief of the Franks and left the refectory in such a state of wild and complex anxiety that he did not even have a parting look for Septimine, who remained upon her knees amidst the Saracen gold pieces that lay strewn around her.

The young officer crossed the courtyard of the abbey to reach his horse, when, turning the corner of a wall, he found himself face to face with a little grey-bearded man. It was the Jew Mordecai. Berthoald shivered and walked quickly by; but although his face was hidden under the cape of his cloak, his eyes encountered the piercing ones of the Jew, who smiled

sardonically while the young chief walked rapidly away.

The Jew had recognized Berthoald.

## PART II.

### THE ABBEY OF MERIADEK

#### CHAPTER I.

##### ELOI THE GOLDSMITH.

A gold and silversmith's shop is a sight agreeable to the eye of the artisan who, freeman or slave, has grown old at the beautiful art made illustrious by Eloi, the most celebrated of all Gallic goldsmiths. The eye rests with pleasure upon the burning furnace, upon the crucible where the metal boils, upon the anvil that seems to be of silver veined with gold--so much gold and silver has been beaten on it. The work-bench, equipped with its files, its hammers, its chip-axes, its burins, its bloodstone and agate polishing stones is no less pleasing to the eye. Then there are also the earthen molds into which the metal is poured, and here and there upon little tables some models taken from the debris of antique art that have been found among the ruins of Roman Gaul. There is nothing from the grinding of the files to the panting breath of the bellows, that is not like sweet music to the ear of the artisan grown old at the trade. Such is the passion of this art that the slave at times

forgets his bondage, and has no thought but for the marvels that he fashions for his master.

Like other rich convents of Gaul, the abbey of Meriadek had its little gold and silver shop. An old man, almost ninety-six years of age, was overseeing the work of four young apprentices, slaves like himself, all busy in a vaulted ground floor room, lighted by an arched window, that was furnished with iron bars and that opened upon a moat full of water, the convent having been built upon a sort of peninsula almost wholly surrounded by deep ponds. The forge was placed against one of the walls, into the thick body of which a kind of vault was dug that led below by several steps. It contained the supply of charcoal required for the work. The old goldsmith, whose face and hands were blackened by the smoke of the forge, wore a smock-frock half hidden by a large leathern apron, and was engaged in chiseling with great professional delight a little silver abbatial crosier that he held on his knees.

"Father Bonaik," said one of the young slaves to the old man, "this is the eighth day that our comrade Eleuthere has not come at all to the workshop ... where can he be?"

"God knows, my boys ... but let us talk of something else."

"I am half of your opinion, old father; on the matter

of Eleuthere I have as strong a desire to speak as to hold my tongue. I have discovered a secret. It burns my tongue. And I fear it will be cut off if I talk."

"Come, my lad," replied the old man, chiseling away at his work, "keep your secret. That's the most prudent thing you can do."

But more inquisitive than the old man, the other young apprentices insisted so much with their comrade that, overcome by their importunities, he told them: "Day before yesterday--it was the sixth day since the disappearance of Eleuthere--I took, by order of Father Bonaik, a silver bowl to the abbey. The attendant at the turning-box told me to wait while she went inside to inquire whether there were any articles of silver that needed mending. Left alone during her absence, I had the curiosity to step upon a stool so as to look out of a high window that opened upon the garden of the monastery. And what did I see? Or, rather, what is it that I thought I saw? Because there are resemblances that are so striking ... so extraordinary--"

"Well, what did you see in the garden?"

"I saw the abbess, distinguished by her high stature, walking between two young nuns with an arm resting upon the shoulder of each."

"You talk as though our abbess were almost a

hundred years old, like Father Bonaik--she who rides like a warrior, who hunts with falcons, and whose upper lip is shaded by a slight reddish moustache neither more nor less than that of a youth of eighteen!"

"It surely was not out of feebleness but tenderness that the abbess leaned upon the two nuns. One of them having stepped upon her robe, lost her balance, tripped and turned her head ... and I recognized, or believed I recognized ... guess whom ... Eleuthere!"

"Dressed like a nun?"

"Dressed like a nun."

"Go away!... You must have been dreaming."

"And yet," replied another and less incredulous slave, "that is quite possible. Our comrade is not yet eighteen, and his chin is as innocent of a beard as any young girl's."

"I maintain that if that nun is not Eleuthere, she is his sister ... if he has one."

"I tell you," put in the old goldsmith with marked impatience, "I tell you that you are ninnies, and that if you are anxious for a trip to the whipping-post and to renew your acquaintance with the thongs of the whip, all you have to do is to persevere in talks like that."

"But Father Bonaik--"

"I allow chattering at work; but when the words may translate themselves into the strokes of a whip on your backs, then the subject seems to me badly chosen. You know, as well as I, that the abbess--"

"Is hot-tempered and bedeviled, Father Bonaik."

"Are you anxious to have the flesh flayed off your backs, unhappy lads! I order you to hold your tongues."

"And what are we to talk about if not of our masters and the abbess?"

"Here," said the old man anxious to have the subject drop, "I have often promised you to tell you the story of the illustrious master of our trade, the glory of the artisans of Gaul. Let us talk of that artist."

"About the good Eloi? The great and saintly Eloi, Father Bonaik, the friend of the good King Dagobert?"

"Call him the 'good' Eloi, my boys; never was there a better; but do not say the 'good' King Dagobert. That King had everybody who displeased him throttled; he pillaged, he levied ransom upon the poor, and he kept a harem like an Arabian Caliph. Listen, children. The good Eloi was born in 588 or thereabouts, at Catalacte, a small village in the neighborhood of Limoges. His

parents were freemen, but of obscure and poor condition."

"Father Bonaik, if Eloi was born in 588, that must have been about a hundred and fifty years ago. That is a century and a half."

"Yes, my boys, seeing we are now almost at 738."

"And did you know him?" asked one of the lads with an incredulous smile. "Did you know the good Eloi?"

"Certainly, I did, seeing I shall soon be ninety-six, and that he died last century, in 659, nearly eighty years ago."

"You were then quite young?"

"I was sixteen and a half years old the last time I saw him.... His father was called Eucher and his mother Terragie. Noticing that his son was since early boyhood ever fashioning in wood some figure or small utensil of pretty design, his father apprenticed him to a skilful goldsmith of Limoges, named Master Abbon, who at that epoch also directed the mint in the town of Limoges. After having acquired a good deal of skill in his art, to the point that he surpassed his master, Eloi left the neighborhood and his family, much regretted by everybody, he being beloved by all on account of his

cheerful disposition, the mildness of his nature and his excellent heart. He went to seek his fortune in Paris, one of the residential towns of the Frankish kings. Eloi was recommended by his old master to a certain Bobbon, a goldsmith and treasurer of Clotaire II. Having accepted Eloi as a workman, Bobbon soon perceived the young man's talent. One day King Clotaire ordered a chair of solid gold, wrought with art and ornamented with precious stones."

"A chair of solid gold! Father Bonaik, what magnificence! Nothing is too costly to these kings."

"Alack, my boys, the gold cost the Frankish kings in Gaul only the trouble of picking it up, and they were not slow at it. Well, then, Clotaire II had the fancy to own a gold chair. But nobody in the workshops of the palace was able to accomplish such a task. The treasurer Bobbon knew the skill of Eloi and proposed to him to undertake the work. Eloi accepted; he went to the forge and the crucible, and out of the large quantity of gold given for one chair he fashioned two. He then took to the palace one of the two chairs and hid the other--"

"Ho! Ho!" said one of the young slaves laughing. "The good Eloi did as millers do who are sharp, artful and not very scrupulous. He drew double pay for one bag--"

"Wait, my boys, wait before you judge our

venerable master. Charmed at the elegance and delicacy of the artisan's work, Clotaire II issued orders on the spot to recompense him generously. Eloi thereupon showed the second chair to Bobbon saying: 'This is what I spent the rest of your gold in so as to lose nothing of the stuff. I have acted as you would have wished.'

"You are right, Father Bonaik, we were too quick in judging the good Eloi."

"That act of probity, so honorable in the poor artisan, was the start of his future fortune. Clotaire II wished to attach him to his court as a goldsmith. It was then that Eloi achieved his finest productions: vases of chiseled gold ornamented with rubies, pearls and diamonds; pieces of furniture of solid silver and admirable design and set off with chiseled stone; reliquaries, curtain pins, Bible cases encrusted with carbuncles.... I saw the chalice of enameled gold more than a foot high that he made for the abbey of Chelles. It was a miracle in enamel and gold."

"It is enough to dazzle one to hear you tell of such beautiful works, Father Bonaik."

"Oh, children, this room could not contain the masterpieces of that one artisan, the glory of Gallic artisanship. The coins that he has struck as the minter of Clotaire II, of Dagobert and of Clovis II have admirable

reliefs: they are gold thirds of a sou of a superb stamp. Eloi succeeded in all the branches of the goldsmith's art. He excelled, like the goldsmiths of Limoges, in the incrustation of enamel and the setting of precious stones; he also excelled, as did the goldsmiths of Paris, in statuaries of hammered gold and silver. He chiseled jewelry as delicately as the jewelers of Metz. The cloths of woven gold thread manufactured under his eyes and after his designs, were not less magnificent than those of Lyon. My boys, what a hard worker was Eloi. Ever at his forge from earliest dawn, ever with his leathern apron on his loins, and the file, the hammer or the burin in his hand. He often did not leave his workshop until a late hour in the night, and had ever at his side his favorite apprentice, a Saxon named Thil. I knew that Thil. He was then an old man, and he also was a great artist. They should be models for you."

"Eloi was not a slave, and as he enjoyed the fruit of his labor he must have become very rich, Father Bonaik?"

"Yes, my boys, very rich. Dagobert, upon succeeding to the throne of his father Clotaire II, kept Eloi as his goldsmith. But the good Eloi, mindful of his hard condition as an artisan, and of the cruel fate of the slaves who had often been his fellow-workmen, when he became rich spent all his income in ransoming slaves. He used in that way to emancipate twenty, thirty

and even fifty on one day. He often went to Rouen and bought whole cargoes of slaves of both sexes taken from all countries to that town, celebrated for its market of human flesh. Among those unfortunate people were Romans, Gauls, English, and even Moors, but above all Saxons. If it happened that the good Eloi did not have money enough to purchase the slaves, he used to distribute among them all the money he had in order to relieve their misery. 'How often,' Thil, his favorite apprentice said to me, 'his purse being exhausted, I saw my master sell his cloak, his belt and even his shoes.' But you must know, my boys, that that mantle, that belt, those shoes were embroidered with gold and often enriched with pearls. The good Eloi, who ornamented the robes of others, also took pleasure in ornamenting his own. In his younger years he was magnificently dressed."

"It was the least he could do to deck himself out well--he who decked others so well. It is not as with us who work on gold and silver, and never have but rags."

"My poor boys, we are slaves, while Eloi had the fortune of being free; but he utilized his freedom for the benefit of his fellows. He had around him several servants who adored him. I knew some of them, among others, Bauderic, Tituen, Buchin, Andre, Martin and John. So you see old Bonaik has a good memory. But how can one fail to remember anything connected with

Eloi!"

"Do you know, master, that it is an honor to us poor goldsmith slaves, to number such a man in our profession?"

"A great honor, my boys! Certes, we should be proud of it. Imagine that the reputation of the good Eloi for charity was such that his name was known all over Gaul, and even in other countries. Strangers considered it an honor to call upon the goldsmith who was at once so great an artist and so good a man. If anyone asked in Paris where he lived, the first passer-by would answer: 'Do you want to know where the good Eloi lives? Go where you will find the largest number of poor people gathered together. He lives there.'"

"Oh, the good Eloi," said one of the lads with eyes moist with tears. "Oh, the good Eloi, so well named!"

"Yes, my friends, he was as active in charity as at his trade. In the evening, at his meal hour, he would send out his servants in different directions to gather people who suffered hunger, and also travelers in distress. They were taken to him and he fed them. Filling the office of a servant when they came, he helped some to unload their packs, sprinkled warm water on the hands of others, poured out wine into their cups, broke their bread, carved their meat and distributed it--all himself. After having thus served all

with sweet pleasure, he would sit down himself, and only then did he himself share in the meal that he offered these poor people. That was his way of practicing charity."

"And how did the good Eloi look, Father Bonaik? Was he tall or short?"

"He was tall and of a florid complexion. In his younger days, his apprentice Thil said to me, his black hair was naturally curly. His hand, though hardened by the hammer, was white and well-shaped; there was something angelic in his expression; yet his straightforward eyes were full of keenness."

"That is just the way I would picture him to myself, dressed in the magnificent robes that he used to sell in order to ransom slaves."

"When he grew in years, the good Eloi renounced splendor altogether. He wore only a robe of coarse wool, with a cord for belt.... When about forty he was appointed bishop of Noyon at his own request."

"He? Did so great an artist aspire after a bishopric?"

"Yes, my lads.... Grieved at the sight of so many covetous and wicked prelates, who devoured the substance of his well-beloved poor, the good Eloi applied to the King for the bishopric of Noyon, saying

to himself that at least that bishopric would be ruled by the sweet morality of Jesus. And he put that morality into practice up to the last day of his life, without thereby renouncing his art. He founded several monasteries, where he set up large gold and silversmiths' shops under the direction of the apprentices whom he raised in the abbey of Solignac and elsewhere in Limousin. It was thither, my lads, that I was taken as a slave at sixteen after having undergone many trials. But I was born in Brittany ... in that Brittany that is still free to this day, and that I never expect to see again, although this abbey lies not far from the cradle of my family," and the old man, who during the whole of his narrative had kept steadily at work at the abbatial crosier that he was chiseling, dropped on his knee the hand that held the burin. He remained silent and pensive for a few seconds. Then, waking up with a start, he proceeded addressing the young slaves under him, who wondered at his silence: "My lads, I have allowed myself to be carried away despite myself by recollections that are at once sweet and painful to my mind.... Where did I leave off?"

"You were telling us, Father Bonaik, that you were taken as a slave at the age of sixteen to the abbey of Solignac in Limousin."

"Yes; well, it was there that I first saw the great artist. Once every year he left Noyon to visit the abbey.

He had inducted his apprentice Thil abbot of the place, and the abbot directed the goldsmith's workshop. The good Eloi was quite old then; but he loved to come to the workshop to oversee and direct the work. He often took the file or the burin from our hands to show us how to use it, and in such a paternal manner did he act that all our hearts went out to him. Oh! those were good days.... The slaves were not allowed to leave the territory of the monastery, but they felt as happy there as one can under bondage. At every visit that he paid the place, Eloi inquired after them to ascertain whether they were kindly treated. After his death, however, everything changed."

The old goldsmith had reached this epoch in his narrative when the door of the workshop opened and two personages stepped in.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE INTENDANT RICARIK.

One of the persons who entered Father Bonaik's workshop was Ricarik, the intendant of the abbey, a Frank of a low and vulgar appearance; the other was Septimine, the slave of the abbey of St. Saturnine, whose freedom, together with her father's and mother's, Berthoald had a few days previous sued for and obtained at the hands of Charles Martel. Since her departure from the abbey of St. Saturnine, the poor child had become hardly recognizable. Her charming face had thinned and was pale--so much had she suffered and wept. She followed the intendant silent and confused.

"Our holy dame, Abbess Meroflede, sends you this slave," said Ricarik to the old goldsmith, pointing at Septimine, who, ashamed at finding herself among the young apprentices, did not dare to raise her eyes. "Meroflede bought her yesterday from the Jew Mordecai.... You are to teach her to polish jewelry; our holy abbess wishes to keep her near her for that work. Within a month at the latest, she must be versed in her work; if not, both she and you shall be punished."

At these words Septimine trembled and took courage to raise her eyes to the old man, who stepped forward and said to her kindly: "Do not be afraid, my child; with a little good will on your part, we shall be able to teach you how to polish jewelry and meet the wishes of our holy abbess. You shall work there, near me."

For the first time in several days did the features of the young girl express sentiments other than those of fear and sadness. She timidly raised her eyes to Bonaik, and, struck by the kindness of his face, answered him in an accent of profound gratitude: "Oh! Thank you, good father! Thank you for being kind to me!"

While the apprentices were exchanging in a low voice their views on the looks of their new shopmate, Ricarik, who carried a little casket under his arm, said to the old man: "I bring you here the gold and silver with which to fashion the belt that you know of, and also the Greek vase. Our dame Meroflede is anxious to have the two articles."

"Ricarik, I told you before that the stuff that you brought me in bits and in gold and silver sous is not enough. It is all in that iron trunk whose key you hold. Moreover, in order to make one of those beautiful belts, similar to those that I saw manufactured in the workshops that the illustrious Eloi established, about

twenty pearls and as many other precious stones will be needed."

"I have in this purse and this casket all the gold, silver and precious stones that you will need," saying which, Ricarik emptied out the contents of a purse upon the old goldsmith's work-bench, and took out of the casket a sufficient number of gold sous, several twisted lumps also of gold, that looked as if they had been forcibly wrenched from some article that they had served as ornament to, and finally a gold reliquary studded with precious stones. "Have you now enough gold and stones?"

"I think so; these stones are superb; the reliquary is ornamented with matchless rubies."

"This reliquary was presented to our holy abbess; it contains a thumb of St. Loup, of the great St. Loup, and two teeth from his jaw."

"Ricarik, after I shall have detached the rubies and melted the gold of the reliquary, what am I then to do with the thumb and teeth?"

"The thumb and teeth?"

"The bones of the blessed St. Loup that are inside."

"Do with them what you like ... keep them as relics

to prolong your old age."

"I would then live at least two hundred years."

"What are you examining with so much attention?"

"I am examining the silver sous that you have just brought in. Some of them do not seem sound."

"Some colonist must have cheated me.... This is the day they pay their rents and imposts. When these people pay in money you would think they were having their teeth extracted. It is unfortunately too late now to discover the cheats who paid with false sous. But you shall come along with me so that you may examine the pieces that are now to be paid in. Woe to the thief who should then try to pass false coin upon me! His skin will boil for it!"

"I shall do as you order.... We shall lock these precious metals and stones in the iron chest, if you please, until I have time to start to work on them."

While the Frank was examining the contents of the chest, the old goldsmith approached his young apprentices and said to them in a low voice: "Now, lads, so far I have always taken your side against our masters, palliating or hiding your faults, to spare you the punishments that you sometimes did deserve."

"That is so, Father Bonaik."

"In return, I demand of you that you treat that poor girl that stands trembling there, as if she were your own sister. I am to go out with the intendant, and shall be away, perhaps, for an hour. Promise me that you will be decorous and reserved in your talk before her."

"Fear not, Father Bonaik; we shall say nothing that a nun may not hear."

"That is not enough; certain nuns can hear everything; promise me you will say nothing that you would not say before your own mothers."

"We promise you, Father Bonaik."

This whispered conversation took place at the other end of the workshop, while Ricarik was taking an inventory of the contents of the iron chest. The old man then returned to Septimine and said to her also in a low voice: "My child, I shall leave you for a little while; but I have recommended those lads to treat you as a sister. Be at ease. You will hear nothing to hurt your ears."

Septimine had hardly thanked the old jeweler with a look of gratitude, when the intendant closed the chest and said: "Have you heard any news of that runaway Eleuthere?"

The old goldsmith made a sign to the young slaves, all of whom had raised their heads at the name of Eleuthere; but catching Father Bonaik's eyes, all resumed work without answering a word to the intendant's question, and without even seeming to hear him.

"His disappearance must be a matter of surprise to you, is it not?" asked Ricarik, letting his penetrating eye wander over the apprentices.

"He must have found a way to escape," said the lad who believed he had recognized Eleuthere in the cloister. "He long went with the idea of escaping from the monastery."

"Yes, yes," answered two other apprentices; "Eleuthere told us he would run away from the monastery."

"And why did you not post me, you dogs?" cried the intendant. "You are his accomplices."

The lads remained quiet with their eyes down. The Frank proceeded:

"Oh! You kept the secret! Your backs will ring for it under the whip!"

"Ricarik," replied the old goldsmith, "these lads

chatter like jays, and have no more brains than fledgling birds. Eleuthere often said as so many others have: 'Oh, how I would like to roam over the fields, instead of being bound to the workshop from morning till evening!' That is what these lads call secrets. Pardon them. Then, you should remember that our holy dame Meroflede is impatient for her belt and vase. But if you have my apprentices whipped, they will spend more time rubbing their sores than plying the hammer and the file, and our work will make but slow progress. It would cause a great delay."

"Very well, then; they shall be punished later. All of you will have to work hard, not by day only, but also by night. By day you will work upon gold and silver. By night you shall furbish iron. There is a double task for you."

"What do you mean?"

"There will be a stack of arms brought here this evening--axes, swords, and lances that I have bought at Nantes."

"Arms!" cried the old man in astonishment. "Arms! Do the Arabs still threaten the heart of Gaul?"

"Old man, the arms will be brought to you this evening. See to it that the lances have good points, that the swords are well sharpened, the axes trenchant.

Never you mind the rest. But this is the hour when the colonists must bring their money taxes. Follow me, in order to ascertain whether the thieves try to pass false coin upon me. Come, Father Bonaik!"

## CHAPTER III.

### THE ABBESS MEROFLEDE.

Upon leaving the workshop, the intendant Ricarik, followed by the old goldsmith, proceeded to a vast shed located outside of the abbey. Almost all the slaves and colonists who had ground-rent to pay to the monastery were gathered at the place. There were four days in the year set aside for the payment of major rents. At these periods, the products of the land that was cultivated, and with so much labor, by the Gauls, flowed in a strong and steady stream into the abbey. Thus abundance and leisure reigned within the holy precincts of this, the same as of all the other monasteries, while the enslaved populations, barely sheltered in thatched hovels, lived in perpetual and atrocious misery, borne down by all manner of exactions. Few sights could be imagined, more lively and yet so sad, than those presented at the payment of the ground-rent. The peasants, barely clad, whether slaves outright or only colonists, whose leanness told of their trials, arrived carrying on their shoulders or pushing in carts provisions and products of all sorts. To the tumultuous noise of the crowd was added the bleating of sheep and calves, the grunting of

pigs, the lowing of cattle, the cackling of poultry-- animals that the rent payers had to bring alive. Some of the men bent under the weight of large baskets filled with eggs, cheese, butter and honeycombs; others rolled barrels of wine that were taken to the abbey's gate on a sort of sled; yonder, wagons were unloaded of their heavy bags of wheat, of barley, of spelt, of oats or of mustard grain; here, hay and straw were being heaped up in high piles; further away, kindling wood or building material, such as beams, planks, boards, vine poles, stakes; forester slaves brought in bucks, wild boars and venison to be smoked; colonists led by the leash hunting dogs that they had to train, or carried in cages falcons and sparrow-hawks that they had taken from their nests for falconry; others, taxed in a certain quantity of iron and lead, necessary articles in the construction of the buildings of the abbey, carried these metals, while others brought rolls of cloth and of linen, bales of wool or of hemp for spinning, large pieces of woven serge, packages of cured hides, ready for use. There were also tenants whose rent consisted in certain quantities of wax, of oil, of soap and even resinous torches; baskets, osier, twisted rope, hatchets, hoes, spades and other agricultural implements. Finally, others had to pay with articles of furniture, and household utensils.

Ricarik sat down at one of the corners of the shed near a table to receive the money tax of the colonists

who were in arrears, while several turning-box sisters of the convent, dressed in their long black robes and white veils, went from group to group with a parchment scroll on which they entered the rent in kind. The old goldsmith stood behind Ricarik and examined one after another the sous and the silver and copper deniers that were being paid in. He approved them all. The venerable old man feared to expose the poor people to bad treatment if he rejected any coin, seeing the intendant was merciless. The colonists who were unable to pay on that day made a considerable group, and anxiously awaited their names to be called. Many of them were accompanied by their wives and children. Those who had the money to pay having acquitted themselves, Ricarik called in a loud voice: "Sebastian!" The colonist advanced all in a tremble with his wife and two children at his side, all of them as miserably dressed as himself.

"Not only have you not paid your rent of twenty-six sous," said the intendant, "but last week you refused to cart to the abbey the woolen and linen goods that the abbess sent to Rennes. A bad payer, a detestable servant."

"Alack, seigneur! If I have not paid my rent it is because shortly before harvest time the storm destroyed my ripe wheat. I might still have saved something if I could have attended to the crop immediately, but the

slaves who work the field with me were requisitioned away five out of seven days in order to work at the enclosures of the new park of the abbey and in draining one of the ponds. Left alone, I could not take in the remnants of the harvest; then came the heavy rains; the wheat rotted on the ground and the whole harvest was lost. All I had left was one field of spelt; it had not been badly treated by the storm; but the field is contiguous to the forest of the abbey, and the deer ravaged the crops as they did the year before."

Ricarik shrugged his shoulders and proceeded: "You owe besides, six cart-loads of hay; you did not fetch them in, yet the meadows that you cultivate are excellent. With the surplus of six cart-loads you could easily get money and fulfill your engagements."

"Alack, seigneur! I never get to see the first cut of those meadows. The herds of the abbey come to pasture on my lands from early spring. If I set slaves to keep them off, a fight breaks out between my slaves and those of the abbey; one day mine are beaten, the next mine beat the others. But however it be, I am deprived of the help of their arms. Besides, seigneur, almost every day has its special duties; one day we have to prune the vines of the abbey, another we have to plow, harrow and plant its fields; yet another, we have its crops to cart away; another day it is the fences that have to be repaired. We have lately also had ditches to dig

when the abbess feared that the convent was to be attacked by some bands of marauders. At that time we also had to mount guard.... If out of three nights one is compelled to spend two on his feet, and then to work from early dawn, strength fails and the work is neglected."

"What about the cartage that you refused?"

"No, seigneur, I did not refuse to make the cartage. But one of my horses was foundered with too heavy a load and too long a stretch for the abbey. It was not possible to execute your orders for the last cartage."

"If you have only one foundered horse, how do you expect to cultivate your fields? How will you pay your back rent and the rent of next year?"

"Alack, seigneur! I am in a cruel fix. I have brought with me my wife and children. Here they are. They join me in beseeching you to remit what I owe. Perhaps in the future I shall not meet so many disasters one after another."

At a sign from the unhappy Gaul, his wife and children threw themselves at the feet of the intendant and with tears in their eyes implored him to remit the debt. Ricarik answered the colonist: "You have done wisely in bringing your wife and children with you; you have saved me the trouble of sending for them. I know

of a certain Jew of Nantes called Mordecai, who loans money on bodily security. He will advance at least ten gold sous on your wife and two children, both of whom are old enough to work. You will be able to invest the money in the purchase of a horse to replace the one that was foundered. Later, after you shall have reimbursed the Jew his loan, he will return you your wife and children."

The colonist and his family heard with stupor the words of the intendant, and broke out into sobs and prayers. "Seigneur," said the Gaul, "sell me if you like as a slave; my condition will not be worse than it is now; but do not separate me from my wife and children.... I never shall be able to pay my back rent and reimburse the Jew; I prefer slavery to my present life as a colonist. Have pity upon us!"

"That will do!" said Ricarik. "You have too numerous a family to feed; that is what is ruining you.... When you will have only your own needs to attend to, you will be able to pay your rent, and with Mordecai's loan you will be enabled to continue to work." Turning thereupon to one of his men: "Take the wife and children of Sebastian to the Jew Mordecai, he happens to be here now."

Bonaik sought to mollify the Frank, but in vain, and Ricarik proceeded to call up by their names other

colonists who were in arrears with their rent. The intendant was at this work when a lad of from seventeen to eighteen was dragged before him. The lad offered violent resistance to his captors and cried: "Let me go! I have brought three falcons and two goshawks for the abbess' perch as my father's rent.... I took them from their nests at the risk of breaking my bones.... What is it you want?"

"Ricarik," said one of the slaves of the abbey who was dragging the lad, "we were near the fence of the abbey's perch when we saw a sparrow-hawk, still hooded, that had escaped from the falconer's hand. The bird flew only a little distance. Being impeded by its hood, it fell down close to the fence. This lad immediately threw his cap upon the bird and put it into his bag. We caught the thief in the act. Here is the bag. The sparrow-hawk is inside with its hood still on."

"What have you to say?" asked Ricarik of the young lad who remained somber and silent. "Do you know how the law punishes the theft of a sparrow-hawk? It condemns the thief to pay three silver sous or to allow the bird to eat six ounces of flesh from his breast. I have a good mind to apply the law to you as a salutary example to other hawk thieves.... What have you to say?"

"If our abbess," the lad answered boldly, "gives our

flesh for pasture to her hunting birds, as true as my name is Broute-Saule, sooner or later I shall have my revenge on her and you!"

"Seize him!" cried Ricarik. "Let him be tied down to a bench outside of the shed so that his punishment be public.... Let the flesh on his breast be offered to the sparrow-hawk for pasture!"

"Butcher!" cried the lad. "If I ever catch you or your abbess of the devil alone, you will make the acquaintance of my knife!"

The crowd of slaves who witnessed the scene broke out into violent shouts against Broute-Saule, who was impious enough to express himself in such terms on the abbess Meroflede, and the wretches crowded each other in their curiosity to witness the punishment. The young Gaul was stripped of his clothes to the waist and tied down, face up, to a stout bench that stood outside of the shed. Ricarik then made a slight incision on the right breast of the lad so as to whet the hawk's appetite. Attracted by the blood, the bird pounced upon the breast of Broute-Saule, into whose flesh it stuck its beak.

At this moment the tramp of several horses was heard, and immediately the slaves and colonists who stood near the bench on which Broute-Saule lay, and with a greedy gap watched his punishment, fell upon their knees. The abbess Meroflede had ridden in among

them, mounted upon a vigorous grey stallion. Curious to ascertain the cause of the excited crowd that stood outside of the shed, the abbess reined in her horse with a sudden tug at the reins. Meroflede was dressed in a long black robe; a white veil, fastened under her chin, framed in her face. Clasped at the height of her neck, a sort of caped red cloak floated in the breeze over her monastic garb. Slender, tall and graceful, the woman was about thirty years of age. Her features would have been handsome but for their combined expression that was alternately sensuous, haughty or savage. Her face, wan from excess, rivaled by its pallor the whiteness of the veil that surrounded it, the same as the color of her cloak vied with her red and lascivious lips that were shaded by a light moustache of reddish gold. Her hooked nose terminated in palpitating and inflated nostrils. Her large eyes of sea-green color glistened under thick and reddish eyebrows. Meroflede reined in her horse near the crowd, which knelt down, and in doing so discovered to her sight the half-naked youth, whose breast the sparrow-hawk had begun to peg into. Broute-Saule turned towards her his face that nestled in his black and wavy hair, and despite the pain that the bird's beak gave him, the young Gaul, whose features were expressive of involuntary admiration, cried: "How beautiful she is!"

Motionless, with the gloved hand that held her whip reclining upon her thigh, Meroflede looked steadily

upon the slave whose flesh the hawk was eating up; on the other hand, insensible to his own pain, Broute-Saule contemplated the abbess and repeated in a low voice as if in a rapture: "How beautiful she is! Oh, madam, the Queen Mary and mother of God is not more beautiful!"

For a few seconds Meroflede contemplated the spectacle; she then called Ricarik, leaned down over her saddle, whispered a few words to him, and casting a last look at Broute-Saule she departed at a gallop without bestowing upon the kneeling slaves and colonists the benediction that the poor wretches expected from their abbess.

## CHAPTER IV.

### IN SIGHT OF THE ABBEY.

Upon leaving the convent of St. Saturnine, Berthoald took with his men the road to the abbey of Meriadek. The march of the troop was delayed by the condition in which they found two of the bridges on their route; the roads, moreover, were in such a state that the carts containing the booty of the warriors, together with the Arabian and Gallic women whom they had captured in the environs of Narbonne, frequently sank to the axles of the wheels in the mud.

Two days after Broute-Saule had been delivered to the claws and beak of the sparrow-hawk, Berthoald and his men arrived near Nantes. The sun was going down, night was near. The young chief on horseback rode a few paces ahead of his companions, among whom were several fresh recruits raised by Charles from the other side of the Rhine--men as savage and fierce as the first soldiers of Clovis, and, like them, dressed in skins and wearing their hair tied at the top of their heads--just as, more than two centuries before, Neroweg, one of the leudes of the Frankish king, had worn his. The other

warriors were casqued and cuirassed. Berthoald was reserved, almost haughty towards the men of his band. They grumbled at his coolness and general bearing towards them. But the ascendancy of his courage, his redoubtable physical strength, his rare dexterity in arms, the promptitude of his war expedients, finally, the high favor that he enjoyed with Charles held the savage men of war in control. Accordingly, Berthoald rode alone at the head of his troop. Often, since his departure from the abbey of St. Saturnine, he had dropped into a reverie at the thought of the charming Septimine. He was thinking of the young girl when Richulf, one of his men, rode up to his chief and said to him:

"According to the information that we gathered on the way, our abbey must lie hereabouts. If you will, let us interrogate the slaves that we see on the fields."

Awakening from his reverie, Berthoald made an affirmative sign with his head, and the two hastened the pace of their horses.

"As for me," said Richulf, a sort of German giant of an enormous girth, "I am enjoying in advance the face that our abbot will make when we shall tell him: 'We are here by the grace of Charles Martel. Vacate the place, priest of Satan, and give us the key of the cellar and pantry for us to eat and drink our fill!'"

Being now near the slaves towards whom they had

ridden, Berthoald asked one of them where the abbey of Meriadek was.

"Not far from here, seigneur; the crossroad that you see there down below, bordered with poplars, leads straight to the abbey."

"Is an abbot or an abbess at the head of the abbey of Meriadek?"

"It is our holy abbess Meroflede."

"An abbess!" repeated Berthoald in surprise. And laughing he asked again: "Is she young and handsome, this abbess Meroflede?"

"Seigneur, I could not answer your question, never having seen her but from a distance and enveloped in her veils."

"If she envelops herself in her veils she must be ugly," put in Richulf, shaking his head doubtfully. "Are the lands of the abbey fertile? Has it many herds of swine? Does it gather in good wine?"

"The lands of the abbey are very fertile, seigneur ... the herds of swine and sheep are very large. Two days ago we carried our rent to the abbey and the colonists their money. It was with difficulty that the large shed of the monastery could contain all the cattle and provisions

taken there."

"Berthoald," said Richulf, "Charles Martel has dealt generously by us. But we arrive two days too late. The rents are paid, perhaps also consumed by the abbess and her nuns. We will find neither pork nor wine left."

The young chief did not seem to share the apprehensions of his companion, and said to the slave: "Well, my poor fellow, that road lined with poplars, there ahead of us, leads to the abbey of Meriadek?"

"Yes, seigneur; you can reach the place in half an hour."

"Thank you for the information."

Berthoald and Richulf were about to turn their horses' heads and rejoin their troop when the latter, breaking out into a loud guffaw, observed: "By my beard, I have never seen anyone so kind and civil towards these dogs as you, Berthoald."

"It pleases me to be so--"

"And that makes you an odd man in everything that concerns these slaves. One would think that it hurts you to see them... We have about twenty female slaves in the carts that we are dragging after us as part of the booty. Some of them are very beautiful. You never as

much as had the curiosity of looking at them ... yet they belong to you as much as to the rest of us."

"I have told you that I lay no claim whatever to my share of human flesh," impatiently answered Berthoald. "The sight of those poor creatures is painful to me. You refused to give them their freedom.... Have your way.... But do not mention them again to me."

"Well, it is no loss to us. After having amused ourselves with them on the road we can sell them for at least from fifteen to twenty gold sous each, according to what a Jew, who looked at them, said to us."

"Enough!... I have heard enough about the Jew and the slaves!" and wishing to put an end to a conversation that was painful to him, he touched the flanks of his horse with his spurs to join his Frankish companions whom he hailed from afar. "Friends, good news! Our abbey is rich, well stocked with cattle, and fertile; and we are to succeed an abbess; whether she be young or old, handsome or ugly, I do not yet know. We shall see her within an hour and shall be able to judge."

"Long live Charles Martel!" cried one of the warriors. "There's no abbess without nuns.... We shall have a good laugh with the nuns!"

"I would have preferred to have dispossessed some fighting abbot. But I console myself with the thought

that we are to be masters of numerous herds of swine."

"Richulf, you can think of nothing but loins of beef and ham!"

Thus gaily conversing, the warriors followed the avenue bordered with poplars. The abbey was presently descried from the distance, rising in the center of a sort of peninsula, and reached from this side by a narrow road that was built between two ponds.

"Hurrah for Charles Martel!"

"What a magnificent building! Look at it, Berthoald!"

"Vast domains! And that grand forest in the horizon--it surely all belongs to our abbey. We shall be able to hunt at our ease."

"It must be full of game. We shall hunt deer, bucks and wild boars.... Long live Charles Martel!"

"And the ponds that extend down there on either side of the road, they must be full of fish.... We shall fish carp, tench and pike that I like so well!... Long live Charles!"

"Do you not find, comrades, that this abbey has a certain martial aspect, with its high battlements, its

counter forts, its ramparts, its few and narrow windows and its ponds that surround it like a natural defence?"

"So much the better! Within its walls we shall be entrenched as within a fortress; and should it please the successors of our good Charles, or the phantom kings, to dispossess us in turn, as we are about to dispossess this abbess, we shall be able to prove that we wear hose and not skirts."

"Our tapers are lances, our benedictions sabre cuts."

"Let us hasten our horses; it will soon be night and I am hungry.... Upon the word of Richulf, two whole hams, four pikes and a whole mountain of cabbage will barely suffice to appease my hunger."

"Sharpen your teeth, glutton! As to me, I propose to invite the abbess and her nuns. The feast will then be complete."

"I shall invite the young and handsome ones to share our lodgings at the abbey. What say you, comrades?"

"What! Invite them, Sigewald!... They must, by my beard! They shall be forced to remain with us.... The good Charles will laugh at the move. If the Bishop of Nantes should raise a howl, we shall tell him to come and take his sheep from the wolves."

"The devil take the Bishop of Nantes! The day of these tonsured people has gone by, that of the soldier has come!... We are masters in our house!"

While his companions were delivering themselves of these gross jokes, Berthoald preceded them silent and pensive. Charles had invested him with the high dignity of count; he dragged a rich booty behind him in his carts; the donation of the abbey insured to him the possession of a large income; all notwithstanding, the young chief seemed troubled in mind; at times a bitter and painful smile curled his lips. The Frankish riders were presently on the narrow road at either side of which an immense pond extended as far as the eye could reach. Richulf presently said to the young chief: "I do not know whether it is the dusk that impedes my sight, but it looks to me as if this road is cut off by a mound of earth a little distance ahead of us."

"Let us look at that a little closer," said Berthoald, putting his horse to a gallop. Richulf and Sigewald followed him. Soon the three found their advance intercepted by a deep and wide moat cut into the road and filled with water that flowed into it from two ponds. On the other side of the moat rose a kind of breastwork of earth protected with enormous piles. The obstacle was serious. Night drew near, and on either side the ponds extended as far as the eye could reach. Berthoald turned around to his companions who were no less

surprised than himself: "The breastwork, like the abbey, has a decidedly martial mien."

"This ground has been recently thrown up. The bark of the piles is still fresh, as also the leaves of the hedge that crowns the parapet.... What the devil can these precautions of defence mean?"

"By the hammer of Charles!" said Berthoald. "Here we have an abbess who is well up in the art of entrenchment! But there must be some other route to reach the abbey and--" Berthoald did not finish the sentence. A volley of stones thrown by slingers hid behind the hedge that crowned the parapet, reached the three warriors. Their casques and cuirasses broke the shock, but the young chief was rudely struck in the shoulder, while the horse of Richulf, that was near the edge of the road and was hit in the head, reared so violently that it fell over upon its rider and both rolled into the pond, which was so deep at that spot that horse and rider disappeared completely. The Frank soon rose back to the surface and managed with great difficulty to clamber up the bank, while his horse swam away frightened towards the center of the pond, where, finally exhausted, it rolled over and sank.

"Treason!" cried Berthoald.

The deep moat filled with water was thirty feet wide. In order to cross it, according to the art of war, it

would have been necessary to fetch lumber from a great distance and commence a regular siege. Night, moreover, was on. While the young chief consulted with his companions upon the unexpected occurrence, a voice from behind the hedge called out: "This first volley of stones is but a shower of roses to what is in store for you if you attempt to force a passage."

"Whoever you be, you shall pay dearly for this assault," cried Berthoald. "We are come by orders of Charles, chief of the Franks, who made a gift of the abbey of Meriadek to me and my men. I command here. It is for you to obey."

"And I," replied the voice, "make you a gift, preparatory to something better, of that volley of stones that you just got."

"We can not to-night force a passage; but we shall encamp on this road. To-morrow, at break of day, we shall storm your entrenchment. So, I warn you, the abbess of this convent and her nuns will be treated like women of conquered towns. The young ones will be distributed among us, the old ones will be whipped, and the men will be slaughtered."

"Our holy abbess, Dame Meroflede, minds not such threats," answered the voice. "The abbess consents to admit the chief of those bandits, but alone, into the convent.... His companions will camp for the night on

the causeway. To-morrow at break of day he shall rejoin his troop. And when he shall have reported to them what he saw in the monastery, and in what style preparations are making to receive them, they will realize that the very best thing for them to do will be to return and fight near Charles, the heathen who dares to dispose of the goods of the Church! By the horns of Satan, we shall know how to chase you hence!"

"I shall punish your insolence!"

"My horse is drowned," added Richulf in a rage; "the water streams from my armor; I am chilled through; my stomach is empty; and yet we are condemned to spend the night in the open!"

"Enough words! Decide!" replied the voice. "From the top of this breastwork a long plank will be lowered over to you. However unsteady of foot your chief may be, he will be able to cross the moat in safety. I shall take him to the abbey; to-morrow he shall rejoin his companions, and may the devil, who brought you here, lead you back to hell!"

During this debate the other Franks of Berthoald's troop and presently also the carts and baggages, all of which entered without mistrust upon the narrow causeway, had come up to where the young chief stood. He explained what had happened, and showed them the moat and the opposite breastwork, which, under the

circumstances, could neither be cleared nor taken. The straggling beneficiaries of the abbey, no less nonplussed and no less furious than Berthoald himself, broke out into threats and imprecations against the abbeſs. Nevertheless, night having now fallen, there was no choice but to camp upon the road. It was alſo decided that Berthoald ſhould proceed alone to the abbey, and that early the next morning they were to conſider what to do, according to his report; but whatever their decision might be upon Berthoald's report, it was determined that if Berthoald ſhould fall a victim to treaſon and not return in the morning, force would be immediately reſorted to. As to himſelf, wholly diſregarding any danger that might threaten, Berthoald inſiſted upon accepting the offer of admitting him to the monaſtery. The young chief yielded in this as much to the ſpirit of adventure as to an overpowering curioſity to ſee the fighting abbeſs. Agreeable to the tender made by Ricarik, who guarded the breaſtwork, a plank was pushed out horizontally from within the parapet, it ſwayed to the right and left for a moment and then dropped ſo that one end reſted on the ſide of the ditch where Berthoald ſtood and the other remained firmly faſtened to the parapet. Berthoald left his horſe in charge of one of his companions, and with a firm and light ſtep walked over the plank, quickly reaching the parapet, into which the plank was immediately drawn back.

## CHAPTER V.

### ASYLUM.

Berthoald was received by the intendant, whom, controlling his own anger, he followed to a near spot where two horses stood saddled. Ricarik left about a dozen slaves and colonists behind to watch the trench under the starry sky, and motioning Berthoald to one of the horses, leaped upon the other and galloped ahead. The young chief rode in the wake of his guide, rage alternating in his breast with curiosity concerning the fighting abbess who gave such unsatisfactory tokens of resignation to the decree that dispossessed her of her benefice. In the course of the ride towards the abbey, Berthoald encountered two other protected ditches, like the first, but crossable by means of drawbridges that were let down to allow him and his guide to pass. A short while after crossing the second of these two ditches, Berthoald stood near the outer enclosure of the abbey. The enclosure consisted of thick joists well fastened together and planted from bank to bank of the two ponds that lay on both sides. The buildings of the abbey rose upon a vast peninsular field, accessible only from the side of the causeway that had just been put in a

state of defence. Behind the monastery, a tongue of land connected with the forest, whose crest bordered the horizon, thus offering another passage. Berthoald noticed many lights inside of the enclosure, projected, no doubt, by torches. The intendant took a copper horn that hung from the pommel of his saddle and blew a call. An iron-barbed door facing the jetty opened slowly. Preceded by his guide, Berthoald entered the first courtyard of the abbey, and found himself face to face with the abbess on horseback, surrounded by several torch-bearing slaves. Meroflede had lowered the cape of her scarlet cloak half over her forehead. At her side hung a gold-handled hunting knife in a steel sheath. Berthoald was seized with astonishment at the sight of the woman as she sat in the light of the torches. Her costume, at once monastic and martial, set off the supple and easy frame of the abbess. The young chief found her handsome as far as he could judge across the shadow projected upon her face by her half-drawn cowl.

"I know that you are Berthoald," said Meroflede in a vibrating and sonorous voice; "and so you have come to take possession of my abbey?"

"This abbey has been given me and my companions of war by Charles, the chief of the Franks. Yes, I have come to take possession."

Meroflede indulged in a laugh of disdain, and

despite the shadow that veiled her face, her laughter exposed to the eyes of Berthoald two rows of pearly white teeth. The abbess gave her horse a slight touch of her heel and bade the young man follow.

At the moment when Meroflede's horse was put on the march, Broute-Saule--now healed of the peckings of the sparrow-hawk, and no longer clad in rags, but wearing on the contrary an elegant green jacket, buckskin hose, neat leather shoes and a rich fur cap--placed himself at the horse's head with his hands on the reins. Thus walking between the abbess and Berthoald, the young hawk thief watched attentively the slightest motion of Meroflede and covered her with ardent and jealous eyes. From time to time he cast an uneasy glance at the young chief. The torch-bearing slaves followed close behind the abbess and Berthoald to the inner courtyard. Meroflede entered with Berthoald and indicated to him fifty colonists in martial order and armed with bows and slings.

"Do you think these premises are sufficiently protected, my valiant captain?" asked Meroflede.

"For me and my men, a slinger or an archer is no more dangerous than a dog that barks at a distance. We let the arrows whiz, the stones fly and get within our sword's length. To-morrow at break of day you will know what you have to expect, dame abbess ... should

you insist upon defending the abbey."

Meroflede again laughed and said: "If you love a fight at close quarters your taste will be suited tomorrow."

"Not tomorrow!" cried Broute-Saule, casting upon Berthoald a look of concentrated hatred and mistrust; "if you wish to fight, fight on the spot ... right here in this yard, by the light of the torches and under the eyes of our holy abbess; although I have neither casque nor cuirass, I am your man!"

Meroflede playfully struck Broute-Saule's cap with her whip and said smiling: "Hold your tongue, slave!"

Berthoald made no answer to the challenge of the hot-headed lad, and silently followed the abbess, who, riding out of this second yard, moved towards a spacious building from which confused cries were heard to proceed. She leaned over her horse, and said a few words in the ear of Broute-Saule. The latter seemed to hesitate before obeying. Seeing this, she added imperiously:

"Did you hear me?"

"Holy dame--"

"Will you obey!" cried Meroflede impetuously,

striking Broute-Saule with her whip. "Do as you are told, slave!"

The face of Broute-Saule became livid and his furious eyes fell not upon Meroflede but upon Berthoald. But the lad made a violent effort to control himself; he obeyed, and ran forward to execute his mistress' orders. Immediately after, about a hundred men of sinister and determined mien and dressed in rags came out of the building, drew up in line and brandished their lances, swords and axes, shouting: "Long live our holy abbess, Meroflede!" Several women who were among the men cried no less noisily: "Long live our abbess! Long live our holy dame!"

"Do you, who have come to take possession of this monastery," said Meroflede to the young chief with a caustic smile, "know what the right of asylum imports?"

"A criminal who takes refuge in a church is protected from the justice of men."

"You are a treasure of science, worthy of carrying the crosier and the mitre! Well, these good folks that you see there are the flower of the bandits of this region; the least guilty of them has committed one or two murders. Apprised of your approach, I offered them to leave the asylum of the basilica of Nantes by night, and promised them asylum in the chapel of the abbey, and the indulgence of the good old times. If they leave this

place the gibbet awaits them. That will give you an idea of the fury with which they will defend the monastery against your men, who would not be Christian enough to extend to them a similar protection. It is easy enough to accept the gift of an abbey, it is more difficult to take possession of it. You now know what forces I have at my command. Let us enter the monastery. After so long a journey, you must feel tired. I extend hospitality to you. You shall sup with me.... To-morrow, at daybreak, you shall rejoin your companions. You surely are a prudent councilor. You will induce your band to look for some other abbey, and you will lead them in the search."

"I see with pleasure, holy abbess, that solitude and the austerities of the cloister have not impaired the joviality of your temper."

"Ah! You think I am jovial?"

"You suggest with an amusing seriousness that I and my men who have been fighting the Arabs, Frisians and Saxons since the battle of Poitiers, shall now turn tail to this handful of murderers and robbers, reinforced by poor colonists who have left the plow for the lance, and the hoe for the sling!"

"You braggart!" cried Broute-Saule, who had returned to his place at the head of Meroflede's horse. "Will you have us two take an axe? We shall strip to the waist, and you will find out whether the men of this

place are cowards!"

"You look to me to be a brave lad," answered Berthoald smiling. "If you would like to remain with us at the abbey, you will find a place in the ranks of my companions."

"We must have a truce from now till to-morrow.... You are surely tired. You shall be taken to a bath. That will refresh you. After that we shall sup. I can not treat you to a feast such as St. Agnes and St. Radegonde treated their favorite poet, Bishop Fortunat, to at their abbey of Poitiers, in short skirts. But you will not starve." Meroflede then turned to Ricarik: "You have my orders, obey them!"

While speaking, Meroflede had drawn near the interior door of the abbey. With a light leap she alighted from her horse and disappeared within the cloister, after throwing the bridle to Broute-Saule. The lad followed the fascinating woman with looks of despair, and he then slowly returned to the stables, after shaking his fist at Berthoald. The latter, who was more and more struck by the oddities of the abbess, did not notice Broute-Saule's threatening gesture but was steeped in thought when Ricarik recalled him to his surroundings, saying: "Alight; the slaves will conduct you to the bath; they will help you take off your armor, and as your baggage is not here they will furnish you with proper vestments--

they are a new hose and coat that I never used. You may put them on should you prefer them to your iron shell. I shall later come for you to sup with our holy dame."

## CHAPTER VI.

### WARRIOR AND ABBESS.

Refreshed by his bath and daintily dressed, Berthoald was half an hour later led by Ricarik to the apartment of the abbess. When he appeared in the hall where Meroflede awaited him, he found her alone. The abbess had doffed her black vestments to array herself in a long white robe. A light veil half hid the tresses of her thick and reddish hair. A necklace and bracelets of precious stones ornamented her neck and bare arms. The Franks, having preserved the custom, introduced before them in Gaul by the Romans, of surrounding their banquet tables with couches, the abbess, extended almost at full length upon a long and wide lounge furnished with cushions, made a sign to the young chief to sit down near her. Berthoald obeyed, increasingly taken with the unusual beauty of Meroflede. A large fire flamed in the hearth. Rich vessels of silver glistened on the table, which was covered with embroidered linen; daintily carved flagons stood near gold cups; the plates held toothsome dishes; a candelabrum, on which two little wax candles were burning, barely lighted the spacious apartment, which was thrown into semi-

obscurity a few paces away from Meroflede and her guest, and into complete darkness at its further ends. The lounge stood against a wainscoted wall from which hung two portraits, one of them, coarsely painted on an oak panel in Byzantine style, representing a Frankish warrior barbarously accoutred after the fashion of the leudes of Clovis three centuries earlier. Below the painting was the inscription: "Gonthram Neroweg." Beside this picture was one of the abbess Meroflede herself, draped in her long black and white veils; in one hand she held her abbatial crosier, in the other a naked sword. The second picture was much smaller than the first; it was painted on parchment, in the style of the miniatures that sacred books were then commonly illuminated with. Berthoald's eyes fell upon the two pictures at the moment when he was about to sit down beside his hostess. At their sight a tremor ran through him, and he remained as if thunder-struck. Presently he looked from Gonthram Neroweg to Meroflede, and from the abbess back to the former. He seemed to compare the resemblance between the two, an obvious resemblance; like Neroweg, Meroflede's hair was reddish, her nose beaked, her eyes green. The young chief could not conceal his astonishment.

"You seem to contemplate with deep interest the portrait of one of my ancestors, deceased several centuries ago!"

"You are of the race of Neroweg!"

"Yes, and my family still inhabits its vast domains of Auvergne, conquered by my ancestors' swords, or bestowed upon them by royal gifts.... But that is quite enough for the past. Glory to the dead, joy to the living! Sit down here near me, and let us take supper.... I am an odd abbess. But by Venus, I live like the other abbots and bishops of my time, with the only difference that these mitred folks sup with young girls, while I shall spend the night with a handsome soldier.... Will that be to your taste?" and raising one of the heavy silver flagons with a virile hand, she filled to the brim the gold cup that was placed near her guest. After merely moistening her own red lips in the cup, she reached it to the young chief and said resolutely:

"Let us drink your welcome to this convent!"

Berthoald held the cup for a moment between his two hands, and casting one more look at the portrait of Neroweg, he smiled caustically, fixed upon the abbess a look as bold as that which she cast at him, and replied: "Let us drink, beautiful abbess!" and emptying the cup at one draught, he added: "Let us drink to love!... which overpowers the abbesses as it does the simple maids!"

"Aye! Let us drink to love, the god of the world, as the pagans used to say!" answered Meroflede, and filling her own cup from a little red flagon, and

replenishing the cup of the young chief, who fixedly gazed at her with eyes that shot fire, she added: "I have drunk to your toast; now drink to mine!"

"Whatever it be, holy abbess, and even though this cup be filled with poison, I shall empty it to your toast, I swear by your snow-white arms!--by your beautiful eyes!--by your voluptuous lips! I drink to Venus Callipyge!"

"Well, then," said the abbess, fixing a penetrating look upon the young man, "let us drink to the Jew Mordecai!"

Berthoald had his cup at his lips, but at the name of the Jew he shivered, laid his cup down abruptly, his face grew dark and he cried in terror:

"Drink to the Jew Mordecai?"

"Come, by Venus, the patroness of lovers, do not tremble like that, my brave friend!"

"Drink to the Jew Mordecai!... I----"

"You said to me: 'Let us drink to Love!'" replied the abbess, without losing the effect of her words upon Berthoald; "you swore by the whiteness of this arm," and she raised her sleeves, "you swore to drink my toast. Fulfill your promise!"

"Woman!" cried Berthoald with impatience and embarrassment, "what whim is that? Why do you wish me to drink to the Jew Mordecai, to a merchant of human flesh?"

"I shall satisfy your curiosity.... Had not Mordecai sold you as a slave to the Seigneur Bodegesil, you would not have stolen your master's horse and armor to go in search of adventures, and palmed yourself off upon that devil of a Charles Martel--you, a Gaul of the subject race--for a noble of the Frankish race and son of a dispossessed beneficiary, and finally, Charles, one of whose best captains you have become, would not have presented you with this abbey. Consequently, you would not be here now, at my side, at this table, where we are together drinking to Love.... That is the reason why, my valiant warrior, I empty this cup to the memory of that filthy Jew! And now, will you drink to the Jew Mordecai?"

While Meroflede was uttering these words, Berthoald contemplated her with increased astonishment, now mixed with fear, and could find not one word in answer.

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" said the abbess laughing, "see how dumb he has become. Why grow alternately pale and red? What does it matter whether you are of Gallic or Frankish race? Does that render your eyes less blue,

your hair less black, your shape less comely? Come, shame upon you, my warrior! Must I teach a soldier how cups are emptied, and how love is made?"

Berthoald felt as if in a dream. Meroflede did not seem to despise him; she did not seem to triumph at the advantage that she had gained over him by the knowledge of his secret. Frank in her cynicism, she contemplated the young chief with mild and ardent eyes. Her looks that at once troubled his mind and fired his veins; the strangeness of the adventure; the effect of the large cup that he had just drained at one draught, either a heady wine or perchance mixed with some philtre, and that began to throw his brain into disorder;-- all these thoughts crowded upon Berthoald's mind. He took a sudden resolve--to vie with the abbess in audacity, and said resolutely to her: "You are of the race of Neroweg, I of that of Joel!"

"We shall drink to Joel ... he has raised a breed of handsome soldiers."

"Are you acquainted with the death of the son of Gonthram Neroweg, whose portrait I see there on the wall?"

"A tradition in my family has it that he was killed in his domain of Auvergne by the chief of a troop of bandits and revolted slaves. May the devil keep his soul!"

"The chief of those bandits was named Karadeucq ... he was the great grandfather of my grandfather!"

"By heaven! That is a singular coincidence! And how did the bandit kill Neroweg?"

"Your ancestor and mine fought valiantly with axes, and the count succumbed. The Gaul triumphed over the Frank!"

"Indeed ... you refresh the recollections of my childhood. Did not your ancestor cut some words in the trunk of a tree with the point of a dagger after the combat?"

"Yes--'*Karadeucq, a descendant of Joel, killed Count Neroweg!*'"

"A few months after her husband's death, the count's wife, Godegisele, gave birth to a son, who was the grandfather of my grandfather."

"Strange coincidence, indeed ... and you, my beautiful abbess, listen to the story with great calmness!"

"What are those combats of our ancestors and of our races to me? By Venus! By her beautiful hips! I know but one race in all the world--the race of lovers!"

Empty your cup, my valiant warrior, and let us sup merrily. To-night there is a truce between us two.... War to-morrow!"

"Shame! Remorse! Reason! Duty!--let them all be drowned in wine!... I know not whether I am awake or dreaming on this strange night!" cried the young chief, and taking up his full cup, he rose and proceeded with an air of feverish defiance while turning towards the somber and savage portrait of the Frankish warrior: "To you, Neroweg!" Having emptied his cup, Berthoald felt seized with a vertigo and threw himself upon the lounge, saying to Meroflede: "Long live Love, abbess of the devil! Let us love each other to-night, and fight to-morrow!"

"We shall fight on the spot!" cried a hoarse and strangling voice, that seemed to proceed from the extremity of the large hall that lay in utter darkness, and, the curtains of one of the doors being thrust aside, Broute-Saule, who, without the knowledge of the abbess and driven by savage jealousy, had managed to penetrate into the apartment, rushed forward agile like a tiger. With two bounds he reached Berthoald, seized him by the hair with one hand and raised a dagger over him with the other, determined to plunge the weapon into the young chief's throat. The latter, however, although taken by surprise, quickly drew his sword, held with his iron grip the armed hand of Broute-Saule, and ran his

weapon through the unfortunate lad. Deadly wounded, Broute-Saule staggered about for a few seconds and then dropped, crying: "Meroflede ... my beautiful mistress ... I die under your eyes!"

Still holding his bloody sword in his hand, and aware that the powerful wine was making further inroads upon his senses, Berthoald mechanically fell back upon the lounge. The dazed chief for a moment scrutinized the darkness of the apartment, apprehensive of further attempts upon his life, when he saw the abbess knock over with her fist the candelabrum which alone lighted the room, and in the midst of the total darkness that now pervaded the place he felt himself in the close embrace of the monster. Hardly any recollection remained to him of what happened during the rest of that night of drunkenness and debauchery.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE MOUSE-TRAP.

Dawn was about to succeed the night in which Broute-Saule was killed by Berthoald. Profoundly asleep and with his hands pinioned behind his back, the young chief lay upon the floor of Meroflede's bedchamber. Wrapped in a black cloak, her face pale and half veiled by her now loose thick red hair that almost reached the floor, the abbess proceeded to the window, holding in her hand a lighted torch of rosin. Leaning over the sill whence the horizon could be seen at a distance, the abbess waved her torch three times, while intently looking towards the east which began to be tinted with the approaching day. After a few minutes, the light of a large flame, that rose from a distance behind the retreating shades of night, responded to Meroflede's signal. Her features beamed with sinister joy. She dropped her torch into the moat that surrounded the monastery, and then proceeded to awaken Berthoald by shaking him rudely. Berthoald was with difficulty drawn from his lethargy. He sought to take his hand to his forehead, but found that he was pinioned. He raised himself painfully upon his leaden feet, and still unclear

of mind he contemplated Meroflede in silence. The abbess extended her bare arms towards the horizon, that dawn was feebly lighting, and said: "Do you see yonder, far away, the narrow road that crosses the pond and prolongs itself as far as the outer works of the abbey?"

"Yes," said Berthoald, struggling against the strange torpor that still paralyzed his mind and will, without thereby wholly clouding his intellect; "yes, I see the road surrounded by water on all sides."

"Did not your companions in arms camp on that road during the night?"

"I think so," replied the young chief, seeking to collect his confused thoughts; "last evening ... my companions--"

"Listen!" put in the abbess nervously and placing her hand upon the young man's shoulder. "Listen ... what do you hear from the side on which the sun is about to rise?"

"I hear a great rumbling noise ... that seems to draw nearer towards us. It sounds like the rush of waters."

"Your ear does not deceive you, my valiant warrior;" and leaning upon Berthoald's shoulder: "Yonder, towards the east, lies an immense lake held in by dikes and locks."

"A lake? What of it?"

"The level of its waters is eight to ten feet above those of the ponds.... Do you understand what will follow?"

"No, my mind is heavy ... I hardly remember ... our charming night ... but why am I pinioned?"

"For the purpose of checking your joy when, as will soon be the case, you will have recovered your senses.... Now, let us continue our confidential chat. You will understand that the moment the dikes are broken through and the locks opened, the water will rise in these ponds to the extent that they will submerge the narrow road on which your companions encamped for the night with their horses and the carts that held their booty and slaves.... Now, watch.... Do you notice how the water is rising? It is now up to the very edge of the jetty.... Within an hour, the jetty itself will be entirely submerged. Not one of your companions will have escaped death.... If they seek to flee, a deep trench, cut at my orders over night, will stop their progress.... Not one will escape death.... Do you hear, my handsome prisoner?"

"All drowned!" murmured Berthoald, still under the dominion of a dull stupor; "all my companions drowned----"

"Oh, does not yet that new piece of confidential news wake you up?... Let us pass to another thing," and the abbess proceeded with a voice of ringing triumph: "Among the female slaves, taken from Languedoc, that your band brought in its train, there was a woman ... who will drown with the rest, and that woman," said Meroflede, emphasizing each word in the hope of each being a dagger in Berthoald's heart, "is--your--mother!"

Berthoald trembled violently, leaped up in his bonds, and vainly sought to snap them. He uttered a piercing cry, cast a look of despair and terror upon the immense sheet of water that, tinted with the first rays of the rising sun, now extended in every direction. The wretched man called aloud: "Oh, my mother!"

"Now," said Meroflede with savage joy, "the water has almost completely invaded the causeway. The tent-cloths that cover the carts can hardly be seen. The flood still rises, and at this very hour your mother is undergoing the agonies of death ... agonies that are more horrible than death itself."

"Oh, demon!" cried the young man, writhing in his bonds. "You lie! My mother is not there!"

"Your mother's name is Rosen-Aër, she is forty years of age; she lived one time in the valley of Charolles in Burgundy."

"Woe! Woe is me!"

"Fallen into the hands of the Arabs at the time of their invasion of Burgundy, she was taken to Languedoc as a slave. After the last siege of Narbonne by Charles, your mother was captured in the vicinity of the town together with other women. When the division of the booty took place, Rosen-Aër having fallen to the lot of your band was brought as far as here.... If still you should doubt, I shall give you one more token. That woman carries on her arm, like you, traced in indelible letters the two words: '*Brenn*' and '*Karnak*'.... Are these details accurate enough?"

"Oh, my mother!" cried the unfortunate Berthoald casting upon the waters of the pond a look of most poignant pain.

"Your mother is now dead.... The jetty has disappeared under the waters, and still they rise.... Aye, your mother was drowned in the covered cart, where she was held confined with the other slaves."

"My heart breaks," murmured Berthoald, crushed by the weight of pain and despair: "My suffering is beyond endurance!"

"Are you so soon at the end of your strength?" cried Meroflede with a peal of infernal laughter. "Oh! no, no! You have not yet suffered enough. What! You stupid

slave! You Gallic renegade! Cowardly liar, who brazenly deck yourself with the name of a noble Frank! What, did you imagine vengeance did not boil in my veins because you saw me smile last evening at the death of my ancestor, who was killed by a bandit of your race! Aye! I smiled because I thought how at daybreak I would have you witness from a distance the death agonies of your own mother! I was but preparing my vengeance."

"Monster of lewdness and ferocity!" cried Berthoald, making superhuman efforts to break his bonds. "I must punish you for your crimes!... Yes, by Hesus, I shall throttle you with my own hands!"

The abbess realized the impotence of Berthoald's fury, shrugged her shoulders and continued: "Your ancestor, the bandit, set fire a century and a half ago to the castle of my ancestor, Count Neroweg, and killed him with an axe. I reply to the fire with the inundation, and I drown your mother! As to the fate that awaits you, it will be terrible!"

"Did my mother know that I was the chief of the Franks who took her prisoner?"

"My vengeance lacked only that!"

"But who, miserable woman, could have told you what you know about my mother?"

"The Jew Mordecai."

"How did he know her? Where did he see her?"

"At the halt that you made at the convent of St. Saturnine with Charles Martel; it was there that the Jew recognized you."

"God was merciful to me! My mother did not live to know my shame. Her death would have been doubly terrible.... And now, monster, deliver me of your presence and of life. I am in a hurry to die!"

"Have patience! I have prepared for you a refined punishment, and a prolonged agony."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MIRACLE OF ST. LOUP'S TEETH.

On the morning of the fateful day when the abbess Meroflede drowned, as in a mouse-trap, the troop of Frankish warriors that had presumed to dispossess her, the goldsmith Bonaik entered his workshop at the accustomed hour. He was soon joined by his slave apprentices. After lighting the fire in the forge, the old man opened the window that looked over the fosse, to let the smoke escape. With no little astonishment Bonaik observed that the water in the moat had risen so high as to be within a foot of the window sill. "Oh, my lads," said he to the apprentices, "I fear some great calamity happened last night! For very many years the water of this moat did not reach the height of to-day, and then it happened when the dike of the upper lake broke, and caused widespread disasters. Look yonder at the other end of the moat. The water is almost up to the air-hole cut into the cavern under the building opposite us."

"And it looks as if the water were still rising, Father Bonaik."

"Alack, yes, my lad! It is still rising. Oh, the bursting of the dikes will bring on great calamities. There will be many victims!"

While Bonaik and his apprentices were looking at the rising water in the moat, the voice of Septimine was heard calling on the outside: "Father Bonaik, open the door of the workshop!" One of the apprentices ran to the door and the girl entered, supporting a woman whose long hair streamed with water; her clothes were drenched, her face livid; she was barely able to drag herself along; so weak was she that after taking a few steps in the shop she fell fainting in the arms of the old goldsmith and Septimine.

"Poor woman! She is cold as ice!" exclaimed the old man, and turning to his apprentices: "Quick, quick boys! Fetch some coal from the vault, ply the bellows and raise the fire in the forge to warm up this unfortunate woman. I thought so! This inundation must have caused much damage."

At the words of the goldsmith, two apprentices ran down into the vault behind the forge for charcoal, and the other blew upon the fire, while the old man approached Septimine, who, on her knees before the unconscious woman, wept and said: "Oh, she is going to die!"

"Reassure yourself," the old man said; "this poor

woman's hands, icy cold a minute ago, are becoming warmer. But what has happened? Your clothes also are drenched. You look strangely shocked."

"Good father, at daybreak this morning, the girls who sleep in my room and I woke up and went into the courtyard. There we heard other slaves crying that the dikes had burst. The girls all ran to see the progress of the inundation. I went along without knowing why. They dispersed. I advanced to a tongue of land that is washed by the water of the pond. A large willow stands near the spot. I presently saw a half-submerged cart floating a little way off. It was being turned around by the opposite currents, and it was covered by a tent-cloth."

"Thanks be to God! The spreading tent-cloth acted like a balloon and kept the cart from sinking."

"The wind blew into this sort of a sail, driving the cart towards the shore where I stood. I then saw this unfortunate woman, holding to the tent-cloth, the rest of her body in the water."

"And what happened then, my daughter?"

"There was not a second to lose. The failing hands of the poor woman, whose strength was exhausted, were about to drop. I fastened one end of my belt to one of the branches of the willow-tree and the other to my

wrist and I leaned forward towards the poor woman calling out to her: 'Courage!' She heard me, and seized my right hand convulsively. The sudden pull caused my feet to slip from the edge and I fell into the water."

"Fortunately your left wrist was tied to one of the ends of the belt that you had fastened to the tree!"

"Yes, good father. But the shock was violent. I thought my arm was wrenched from its socket. Fortunately the poor woman took hold of the edge of my dress. My first pain having passed I did my best, and with the aid of my belt that remained fastened to the tree and on which I tugged away, I succeeded in reaching the shore and pulling out this woman, on the point of drowning. Our workshop being the nearest place that I could think of, I brought her here; she could hardly support herself; but, alack!" added the girl at the sight of the still inanimate face of Rosen-Aër, for it was Berthoald's mother that Septimine had just saved, "I may only have retarded the supreme moment for a few seconds!"

"Do not lose hope," answered the old man, "her hands are growing warmer."

With the aid of the apprentices, who were no less compassionate than Septimine and the old man, Rosen-Aër was drawn sitting on a stool near the forge. Little by little she felt the salutary effect of the penetrating heat,

she gradually recovered her senses, and finally awoke. Gathering her thoughts, she stretched out her arms to Septimine and said in a feeble voice: "Dear child, you saved me!"

Septimine threw herself around Rosen-Aër's neck, shedding glad tears, and answered: "We have done what we could; we are only poor slaves."

"Oh! my child, I am a slave like yourselves, brought to this country from the center of Languedoc. We spent the night on the road between the two ponds of this monastery. The oxen had been unhitched from the carts. We were caught in the inundation that began at daybreak----" But Rosen-Aër suddenly broke off and rose to her feet. Her face was at first expressive of stupor, but immediately a delirious joy seized her, and precipitating herself towards the open window, she passed her arm through the thick iron bars, crying: "My son! I see my son Amael yonder!"

For a moment both Septimine and Bonaik believed the unhappy woman had become demented, but when they approached the window the young girl joined her hands and cried out: "The Frankish Chief, he in an underground passage of the abbey?"

Rosen-Aër and Septimine saw on the other side of the moat Berthoald holding himself up with both hands by the iron bars of the air-hole of the cavern. He

suddenly saw and as quickly recognized his mother, and, delirious with joy, he cried in a thrilling voice that, despite the distance, reached the workshop: "Mother!... My dear mother!"

"Septimine," Bonaik said anxiously to the girl, "do you know that young man?"

"Oh, yes! He was as good to me as an angel from Heaven! I saw him at the convent of St. Saturnine. It is to that warrior that Charles donated this abbey."

"To him!" replied the old man, bewildered. "How, then, comes he in that cavern?"

"Master Bonaik," one of the apprentices ran by saying, "I hear outside the voice of the intendant Ricarik. He stopped under the vault to scold some one. He will be here in a minute. He is coming on his morning round, as is his habit. What is best to be done?"

"Good God!" cried the old man in terror. "He will find this woman here, and will question her. She may betray herself and acknowledge that she is the mother of that young man--undoubtedly a victim of the abbess." And the old man, running to the window, seized Rosen-Aër by the arm and said to her while he dragged her away: "In the name of your son's life, come! Come quick!"

"What threatens my son's life?"

"Follow me, or he is lost, and you also." And Bonaik, without further explanations to Rosen-Aër, pointed out to her the vault behind the forge, saying: "Hide there, do not stir," and turning to his apprentices while he put on his apron: "You, boys, hammer away as loud as you can, and sing at the top of your voices! You, Septimine, sit down and polish this vase. May God prevent that poor young man from remaining at the air-hole or from being seen by Ricarik!" Saying this the old goldsmith started to hammer upon his anvil, striking with a sonorous voice the old and well-known goldsmith's song in honor of the good Eloi:

"From the station of artisan He was raised to that of bishop,-- With his duties of pastor, Eloi purified the goldsmith. His hammer is the authority for his word, His furnace the constancy of zeal, His bellows the inspirer, His anvil, obedience!"

Ricarik entered the workshop. The goldsmith seemed not to notice him, and proceeded with his song while flattening with hammer blows a silver leaf into which the abbatial cross terminated. "You are a jolly set," remarked the intendant stepping to the center of the workshop; "stop your singing ... you dogs ... you deafen my ears!"

"I have not a drop of blood in my veins," Septimine

whispered to Bonaik. "That wicked man is drawing near the window.... If he were to see the Frankish chief--"

"Why have you so much fire in the forge?" the intendant proceeded to say, taking a step towards the fireplace, behind which was the cave that Rosen-Aër was concealed in. "Do you amuse yourself burning coal uselessly?"

"No, indeed! This very morning I shall melt the silver that you brought me yesterday."

"Metal is melted in crucibles, not in forges--"

"Ricarik, everyone to his trade. I have worked in the workshops of the great Eloi. I know my profession, seigneur intendant. I shall first subject my metal to the strong fire of the forge, then hammer it, and only after that will it be ready for the crucible. The cast will then be more solid."

"You never lack for an answer."

"Because I always have good ones to give. But there are several necessary things that I shall want from you for this work, the most important of any that I shall have made for the monastery, seeing the silver vase is to be two feet high, as you may judge from the cast on the table."

"What do you need, dotard?"

"I shall need a barrel that I shall fill with sand, and in the middle of which I shall place my mold.... That is not all.... I have often found that, despite the hoops that hold the staves of the barrel, where molds are placed inside of the sand, the barrel bursts when the molten metal is poured into the hollow. I shall need a long rope to wind tightly around the barrel. If the hoops snap, the rope will hold. I shall also need a long thin string to hold the sides of the mold."

"You shall have the barrel, the rope and string."

"These young folks and I shall be forced to spend part of the night at the work. The days are short at this season. Order a pouch of wine for us, who otherwise drink only water. The good cheer will keep up our strength during our hard night's work. On casting days, at the workshops of the great Eloi, the slaves were always treated to something extra.... Eatables were not spared."

"You shall have your pouch of wine ... seeing that this is a holy-day at the convent. A miracle has taken place--"

"A miracle! Tell us about it!"

"Yes.... A just punishment of heaven has struck a

band of adventurers upon whom Charles the accursed had the audacity of bestowing this abbey that is consecrated to the Church. They camped last night upon the jetty, expecting to attack the monastery at daybreak. But the Lord, by means of a redoubtable and astonishing prodigy opened the cataracts of heaven. The ponds swelled and the whole band of criminals was drowned!"

"Glory be to the Lord!" cried the old goldsmith, making a sign to his apprentices to imitate him. "Glory be to the Lord, who drowns impious wretches in the cataracts of his wrath!"

"Glory be to the Lord!" repeated the young slaves in chorus at the top of their voices. "Glory be to the Lord, who drowns impious wretches in the cataracts of his wrath! Amen!"

"It is a miracle that does not at all surprise me, Ricarik," added the goldsmith; "it is surely due to the teeth of St. Loup, to the holy relic that you brought me yesterday."

"That's probable ... it is certain.... You do not need anything else?"

"No," answered the old man, rising and looking into several boxes; "I have here for the mold enough sulphur and bitumen, there is also enough charcoal; one of my apprentices shall go with you, Ricarik, and bring the

barrel, rope and cord, and do not forget the pouch of wine and the victuals, seigneur intendant!"

"You will get them later, together with your pittances at double rations."

"Ricarik, we shall not be able to leave the workshop one instant, on account of the mold. Let us have our daily pittance this morning, if you please, so that the work may not be interrupted. We shall lock the door to keep out intruders."

"Let one of your apprentices come with me; he shall bring all the things, but be sure and have the vase cast to-morrow so as to please our holy abbess; if you fail your backs will have to pay for it."

"You may assure our holy and venerable abbess that when the vase shall come out of the mold it will be worthy of an artisan who saw the great Eloi handle the file and burin." Bonaik then said in a low voice to one of the apprentices, while Ricarik was moving towards the door: "Pick up on your way a dozen stones of the size of walnuts; keep them in your pockets, and bring them to me." He then said aloud: "Accompany the seigneur intendant, my boy; and be sure not to loiter on the way back."

"Rest assured, master," said the apprentice with a significant gesture to the old man while following the

intendant out of the shop; "your orders will be obeyed to the letter."

## CHAPTER IX.

### BRENN--KARNAK.

The goldsmith remained a few moments at the threshold of the workshop listening to the retreating steps of the intendant; he then closed and bolted the door and went to the vault where Rosen-Aër was in hiding, while Septimine ran to the window to see whether Berthoald was still in sight. But the sight that presented itself to her eyes made her exclaim with terror: "Great God, the young chief is lost!... The water has reached the air-hole!"

"Lost!... My son!" cried Rosen-Aër in despair, rushing to the window despite the old man's efforts to restrain her. "Oh, my son! To have seen you again only to lose you.... Amael, Amael!... Answer your mother!"

"The woman will betray us ... if she is heard outside!" said the fear-stricken old man, vainly endeavoring to drag Rosen-Aër from the window bars to which the distracted woman clung, hysterically calling out to her son. But Amael did not reappear. The flood had gained the opening of the air-hole, and despite the width of the moat that separated the two buildings, the

muffled sound of the water was heard pouring through the opening and falling into the cavern. Pale as death, Septimine could not utter a word. In the frenzy of her despair, Rosen-Aër sought to break the stout iron bars of the window, while she sobbed aloud: "To know that he is there ... in agony ... dying ... and we unable to save him!"

"Have hope!" cried the old man with tears in his eyes at the sight of the mother's anguish; "hope!... I have been watching the moss-covered stone at the corner of the air-hole. The water does not rise to it.... It has stopped rising.... See for yourselves!"

Septimine and Rosen-Aër dried their tears and looked at the stone that Bonaik pointed out. In fact it was not submerged. Presently even the noise of the water flowing down through the air-hole sounded with less distinctness, and finally ceased altogether. The flood seemed checked.

"He is saved!" cried Septimine. "Thank God, the young chief will not drown!"

"Saved!" stammered Rosen-Aër in a heart-rending tone of doubt. "And if enough water has poured into the cavern to drown him.... Oh! If he were still alive he would have answered my voice.... No, no! He is dying! He is dead!"

"Master Bonaik, some one knocks," an apprentice said. "What shall I do? Open?"

"Return to your hiding place," the old man said to Rosen-Aër, and as she did not seem to hear, he added: "Are you determined to perish and have us all perish with you, we who are ready to sacrifice ourselves for you and your son?" Rosen-Aër left the window and returned to the vault, while the old man walked to the door and inquired: "Who is there?"

"I," answered from the outside the voice of the apprentice who had gone out with Ricarik; "I, Justin, I have executed your commissions, Father Bonaik."

"Come in, quick," said the goldsmith to the lad who carried an empty barrel on his shoulders and had in his hand a basket of provisions, the wine pouch, and a large roll of rope and cord. Re-bolting the door, the old man took the wine pouch out of the basket and going to the vault where Rosen-Aër was hiding said to her: "Take a little wine to comfort you."

But Amael's mother pushed the pouch aside, crying in despair: "My son! My son! What has become of my son Amael?"

"Justin," the old man said to the apprentice, "give me the stones I told you to pick up."

"Here, Master Bonaik, are they. I filled my pockets with them."

The old man picked out a small stone and went to the window, saying: "If the unfortunate man is not drowned, he will understand, when he sees this stone drop into the cave, that it is a signal." Father Bonaik took accurate aim and threw the stone through the air-hole. Rosen-Aër and Septimine awaited the result of Bonaik's attempt in mortal anguish. Even the apprentices observed profound silence. A few seconds of intense anxiety passed. "Nothing," murmured the old goldsmith with his eyes fixed upon the air-hole.

"He is dead!" cried Rosen-Aër, held by Septimine in her arms. "I shall never more see my son!"

The old man threw a second stone. Another interval of anxiety ensued. All held their breath. A few seconds later, as Rosen-Aër raised herself on tip-toe, she cried: "His hands! I see his hands! He is holding to the bar of the air-hole. Thanks, Hesus! Thanks! You have saved my son!" and the woman fell upon her knees in an attitude of prayer.

Bonaik thereupon saw the pale face of Amael, framed in his long black hair that now streamed with water, rise between the iron bars of the air-hole. The old man made him a sign to withdraw quickly, while saying in a low voice as if he expected to be heard by the

prisoner: "Now, hide yourself, disappear and wait!" and turning to Rosen-Aër: "Your son has understood me. No imprudence. Be calm." Bonaik then went to his workbench, took a piece of parchment from a little roll that he used to trace his models on, and wrote these words:

\* \* \* \* \*

"If the water has not invaded the cavern so that you cannot stay there without danger until night, then give three pulls to the string at the end of which will be attached the stone tied in this note. This cord can then serve as a means of communicating. When you see it shake get ready for further information. Until then do not show yourself at the air-hole. Courage!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Having written these words, the goldsmith rolled the stone in the parchment, happily impermeable to water, and tied both in a knot to one end of the string, at about the middle of which he attached a piece of iron in order that the body of the rope might be held under water, and thus the means of communication between the workshop and the cavern remain invisible. Bonaik slung the stone through the air-hole, retaining in his hand the other end of the string. Almost immediately after, three pulls given to the string announced to Bonaik that Amael could remain until evening without danger in his prison, and that he would follow the orders

of the old man. Hope revived the spirits of Rosen-Aër. In the fulness of her thanks she took the goldsmith's hands and said to him: "Good father, you will save him, will you not? You will save my son?"

"I hope so, poor woman! But let me collect my thoughts.... At my age, you know, such experiences are trying. In order to succeed, we must be prudent. The task is difficult.... We cannot be too cautious."

While the goldsmith, leaning on his elbows at his work-bench, held his head in his hands, and the apprentices remained silent and uneasy, Rosen-Aër, struck by a sudden recollection, said to Septimine: "My child, you said my son had been good to you, like an angel from heaven.... All that concerns you interests me. Where did you meet him?"

"Near Poitiers, at the convent of St. Saturnine.... My family and I, touched with pity for a young prince, a boy, who was kept confined in the monastery, wished to help him to escape; all was discovered, they meant to punish me in a shameful, infamous manner," Septimine said blushing; "and they decided to sell me and separate me from my father and mother.... It was at that moment that your son, a favorite of Charles, the Chief of the Franks, interceded in my behalf and took me under his protection--"

"My son, say you, dear child?"

"Yes, madam, the seigneur Berthoald."

"You call him Berthoald?"

"That is the name of the young Frankish chief who is locked up in that cavern--"

"My son Amael with the name of Berthoald! My son a favorite of the Frankish chief!" cried Rosen-Aër struck with amazement. "My son, who was raised in horror for the conquerors of Gaul, those oppressors of our race! My son one of their favorites! No, no.... It is impossible!"

"Live a hundred years, and never shall I forget what happened at the convent of St. Saturnine--the touching kindness of the seigneur Berthoald towards me, whom he had never seen before. Did he not obtain my liberty from Charles, and also the liberty of my father and mother? Was he not generous enough to give me gold to meet my family's wants?"

"I am lost in the attempt to penetrate this mystery. The troop of warriors, that brought us slaves in their train, did indeed stop at the abbey of St. Saturnine," replied Rosen-Aër in great agony, and she added: "but if he whom you call Berthoald obtained your freedom from the chief of the Franks, how come you to be a slave here, my poor child?"

"The seigneur Berthoald trusted the word of Charles, and Charles trusted the word of the abbot of the convent. But after the departure of the chief of the Franks and your son, the abbot, who had previously sold me to a Jew named Mordecai, kept his bargain with the Jew.... In vain did I beseech the warriors whom Charles left behind in possession of the monastery, and as a guard over the little prince, to stand by me. I was torn away from my family. The Jew kept the gold that your son had generously given me, and brought me to this country. He sold me to the intendant of this abbey that was donated by Charles to the seigneur Berthoald, as I learned at the convent of St. Saturnine."

"This abbey was donated to my son!... He a companion in arms of these accursed Franks!... He a traitor! a renegade! Oh, if you speak truly, shame and perdition upon my son!"

"A traitor! A renegade!... The seigneur Berthoald! The most generous of men! You judge your son too severely!"

"Listen, poor child, and you will understand my sorrow.... After a great battle, delivered near Narbonne against the Arabs, I was taken by the warriors of Charles. The booty and slaves were divided by lot. I and my female fellow prisoners were told that we belonged to the chief Berthoald and his men."

"You, a slave of your own son!... But, God, he did not know it!"

"Yes, the same as I did not know that my new master, the young Frankish chief Berthoald, was my son Amael."

"And probably your son, who marched at the head of his troop, did not see you on the journey."

"We were eight or ten female slaves in a covered cart. We followed the army of Charles. Occasionally the men of chief Berthoald visited us, and ... but I shall spare your blushes, poor child, and shall not dilate upon their infamous conduct!" added Rosen-Aër shuddering at the disgusting and horrible recollection. "My age protected me from a shame that, however, I was determined to escape by death.... My son never joined in those orgies, frequently stained with blood and moistened in tears--the men beat the girls to the point of shedding their blood when they sought to resist being outraged. In that way we arrived in the vicinity of the convent of St. Saturnine. We stopped there several hours. The Jew Mordecai happened to be at the monastery. Learning, no doubt, that there were slaves to buy in the train of the army, he came to us accompanied by some men of the band of Berthoald. You were sold, poor child; you know the disgraceful examination that these dealers in Gallic flesh submit the slaves to."

"Yes, yes; I had to undergo the shame before the monks of the abbey of St. Saturnine when they sold me to the Jew," answered Septimine, hiding her face, purple with shame.

Rosen-Aër proceeded:

"Women and young girls, despite their prayers and resistance, were stripped of their clothes, profaned and spoiled by the looks of the men who wanted either to sell or to buy us. My age could not spare me this general disgrace--" and breaking out into tears and wringing her arms in despair, the mother of Amael added amidst moans: "Such are the Franks whose companion of war my son is!"

"It is horrible!"

"The baseness confounds my senses and makes my heart to sicken. At the age of fifteen my son disappeared from the valley of Charolles, where he lived free and happy ... before the Saracen invasion. What happened since? I do not know."

Hearing the name of the valley of Charolles, Bonaik, who had remained steeped in thought, trembled and listened to the conversation between Septimine and the mother of Amael, who proceeded to say: "Perhaps the Jew holds the secret of my son's life."

"That Jew?... How?"

"When, despite the pain it gave me, the Jew came to inspect me, I had to undergo the fate of the rest. I was stripped of my clothes.... Oh, may my son never know of my shame! The thought alone would haunt him as a perpetual remorse through life, if he should live," Rosen-Aër interjected in a low voice. "While I underwent the fate of my companions in slavery ... the Jew observed with a start on my left arm these two words traced in indelible letters: '*Brenn*,' '*Karnak*.'"

"'*Brenn*,' '*Karnak*!'" cried the old goldsmith.

"The custom of doing so was adopted in my family several generations back, because, alack, in those troubled days of continuous war, families were exposed to being rent apart and dispersed far and wide. 'Twas an indelible sign which might help them to recognize one another."

Rosen-Aër had hardly pronounced these words when, drawing near her in deep emotion, Bonaik cried: "Are you of the family of Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak?"

"Yes, father!"

"Did you live in Burgundy in the valley of Charolles, once ceded to Loysik, the brother of Ronan,

by King Clotaire I?"

"But, good father, how do you know all that?"

For only answer, the old man rolled up the sleeve of his blouse and pointed with his finger to two words indelibly traced on his left arm: "*Brenn*," "*Karnak*."

Rosen-Aër remained stupified, and recovering said: "You also?... You also.... You, good father.... Are you of the family of Joel?"

"One of my ancestors was Kervan, the uncle of Ronan. That is my affiliation."

"Does your family live in Brittany, near Karnak?"

"My brother Allan or his children remained at the cradle of our stock."

"And how did you fall into slavery?"

"Our tribe crossed the frontier and came, according to their custom from time immemorial, to trade arms for the vines of the Franks near the county of Rennes. I was then fifteen, and accompanied my father on his journey. A troop of Franks attacked us. I was separated during the fight from my father, was captured and taken far away into bondage. Sold from one master to another, accident brought me to this country where I am now

twelve years. Alack! Often have my eyes wandered towards the frontier of our old Brittany, ever free! My advanced age coupled to the habit of a profession that I love and that consoles me, have kept me from thinking of escape. And so we are relatives!... The unhappy young man yonder, near us, imprisoned in the cavern, is of our blood?... But how did he become chief of this Frankish troop that the inundation has just swallowed up?"

"I was telling this poor child that a Jew, a dealer in slaves, having noticed these two words--'*Brenn*,' '*Karnak*'--on my arm seemed astonished, and said to me: 'Have you not a son who must be about twenty-five years old, and who carries like you, those two words traced on his arm?' But despite the horror that the Jew inspired me with, his words revived in me the hope of finding my son again. 'Yes,' I answered him, 'ten years ago my son disappeared from the place where we lived.' 'And you lived in the valley of Charolles?' the Jew asked. 'Do you know my son?' I cried. But the infamous man refused to answer me, and he walked away casting a cruel look upon me."

"And you have seen him since?" asked Septimie.

"Never again. The carts resumed their march to this country, where I arrived with my fellow female slaves. All the women must have perished this morning ... and

without the efforts of this brave girl I would have perished also."

"The Jew Mordecai," replied the goldsmith reflecting, "that dealer in the flesh of Gauls, a great friend of the intendant Ricarik, arrived here a few days ago. He was at the convent of St. Saturnine when the donation of this abbey was made to your son and his band. He must, undoubtedly, have run ahead to warn the abbess, and she, accordingly, made her preparations of defence against the warriors who came to dispossess her."

"The Jew was in a great hurry to arrive here after his departure from the convent of St. Saturnine, where he took me from," replied Septimine. "We were only three slaves and he packed us on his light wagon that was drawn by two horses. He must have arrived here two or three days ahead of the troop of the seigneur Berthoald, who must have been delayed on his march by his large baggage."

"So that the Jew must have notified Meroflede in advance, and must also have revealed to her the secret of the alleged Frankish chief being of the Gallic race," observed Bonaik. "Hence the terrible vengeance of the abbess, who must have had your son cast into that subterranean prison, expecting to expose him to certain death. The thing now is how to save him, and to protect

ourselves from the vengeance of Meroflede. To remain here after your son's escape would be to expose these poor apprentices and Septimine to death."

"Oh, good father! What shall we do?" put in Septimine, joining her hands. "No one can penetrate into the building under which the seigneur Berthoald is imprisoned."

"Call him Amael, my child," said Rosen-Aër bitterly. "The name of Berthoald constantly reminds me of a shame that I would forget."

"To extricate Amael out of the cavern is not an impossible feat," said the old goldsmith, raising his head. "I have just been thinking it over. We have a fair chance of success."

"But, good father," asked Rosen-Aër, "what about the iron bars at the window of this workshop, and those at the air-hole of the cave in which my son is confined? And then that large and deep moat? What obstacles!"

"These are not the most difficult obstacles to surmount. Suppose night has set in and Amael is with us, free. What then?"

"Leave the abbey," said Septimine; "escape ... we shall all flee--"

"And how, my child? Do you forget that with nightfall the gate of the jetty is locked? A watchman is there on guard. But, even if we cleared the gate, the inundation covers the road. It will take two or three days for the waters to withdraw. Until then this abbey will remain surrounded by water like an island."

"Master Bonaik," said one of the young apprentices, "there are the fishing boats."

"Where are they usually fastened, my boy, at what part of the pond?"

"On the side of the chapel."

"To reach them we would have to cross the interior court of the cloister, and its door is every evening bolted and barred from within!"

"Alack!" exclaimed Rosen-Aër, "must we renounce all hope of escape?"

"Never give up hope. Let us first think of Amael. Whatever may happen, once he is out of the cavern, his fate will not be worse. Now, my lads," the goldsmith added, addressing the apprentices, "what we are about to attempt is grave ... your lives and ours are at stake. You have no choice but to help us or betray us. To betray us would be a base act. Nevertheless your only interest in this flight is the uncertain hope of recovering your

freedom. Do you prefer to betray us? Say so frankly, and now.... In that event I shall not undertake anything, and the fate of the worthy woman and her son is sealed.... If, on the contrary, we succeed with your help to save Amael and leave this abbey, this is my plan: I am told it is about four days' march from here to Armorica, the only territory in all Gaul that is still free. Arrived in Brittany, we shall take the road to Karnak. There we shall find my brother or his descendants. My tribe will receive us all as children of its own family. From goldsmith's apprentices you will become apprentices in field-labor, unless you should prefer to pursue your trade in some town of Brittany, only no longer as slaves but as free artisans. Reflect ripely, and decide. The day is slipping by. Time is precious."

Justin, one of the apprentices, consulted with his companions in a low voice, and then answered: "Our choice is not doubtful, Master Bonaik. We shall join you in restoring a son to his mother; hap what hap may, we shall share your fate."

"Thank you, my generous boys!" said Rosen-Aër, with her eyes full of tears. "Alack! All I can offer you in exchange for your noble conduct is the gratitude of a mother!"

"Now," said the goldsmith, who seemed to have regained the agility and vivacity of his youth, "no more

words! To work! Two of you will see to the sawing of the bars of the window. But do it so that they remain in position."

"We understand, Father Bonaik," said Justin; "the bars will remain in position; all that will be needed to throw them down will be a slight tap of the hammer when you tell us."

"There is no fear of being seen from without. The opposite building has no windows facing us."

"But how are the bars of the air-hole to be sawed?"

"The prisoner will do that himself with the aid of this file that I shall throw over to him wrapped in another note directing him what to do." Saying this the old man sat down upon his work-bench and wrote the following lines which Septimine, leaning over his shoulders, read aloud as fast as he wrote:

\* \* \* \* \*

"Saw off with this file the iron bars of the air-hole, keeping them, however, in position. When it is dark remove them. Three pulls given to the string, one end of which you hold, will announce to us that you are ready. You will then draw towards the air-hole an empty barrel that we shall have tied to the end of the string."

\* \* \* \* \*

"What! Good father! You had so much presence of mind as to think of all these means of escape and prepare for them? How grateful my heart is to you!"

"We must find means of escape," answered the old man, starting to write; "the lives of us all are now at stake----"

"And we who are of the trade, we really believed you were preparing these articles for the cast," said Justin. "This is a fine trick! The wicked Ricarik will himself have furnished us the barrel and ropes."

Septimine continued to read as Bonaik wrote:

\* \* \* \* \*

"When the barrel is near enough to the air-hole, you will take firm hold of a rope that is wound around the barrel and throw yourself into the water. You will push the barrel, and we will pull it gently toward the window, which you will then be able to scale easily with our help. We shall consider the rest."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh, good father," exclaimed Rosen-Aër tenderly, "thanks to you, my son is saved!"

"Alack! Not so fast, poor woman! I told you before, to take him out of the cavern is possible; but after that the need will be to get out of this accursed convent.... Well, we shall try!" and he proceeded to write these last lines:

\* \* \* \* \*

"Perhaps you can swim; no imprudence! The best swimmers get drowned. Reserve your strength so as to be able to help your mother to escape from this abbey. When you receive this parchment tear it up in little bits; the same with the first, throw them into the darkest corner of your prison because it is possible that you may be sent for and taken from there before evening."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh, God!" exclaimed Rosen-Aër joining her hands in terror. "We never thought of that. Such a misfortune is possible."

"We must foresee every eventuality," replied the old man closing his letter with these words:

"Do not despair, and place your hope in Hesus, the God of our fathers!"

"Oh!" murmured Rosen-Aër in distress, "the faith of his fathers, the teachings of his family, the sufferings

of his race, and the hatred for the stranger--he has forgotten it all!"

"But the sight of his mother will have brought all back again to him," answered the old man. Saying this he gave a pull to the string to notify Amael. The latter answered the signal in the same way. Bonaik then wrapped the file in the parchment and threw it to the other side of the moat. The aim was again accurate. The missive, together with the file, flew through the air-hole and dropped on the floor of the cavern. After having informed himself on these further instructions from the old man, Amael showed himself behind the bars. His eager eyes seemed to ask for his mother.

"He is looking for you," said Septimine to Rosen-Aër; "show yourself to him; do not deny him this consolation."

The Gallic matron sighed, and leaning upon Septimine took two steps towards the window. There, with a solemn and resigned mien, she raised a finger to heaven, as if to say to her son to trust the God of his fathers. At the sight of his mother and Septimine, the sweet image of whom had never left him since he first saw her at the convent of St. Saturnine, Amael joined his hands, and raised them above his head. His face indicated at once resignation, respect and happiness.

"And now, my boys," the goldsmith said to the

young apprentices, "take your files and start filing off the bars of the window; I and one of you shall place the crucible on the brasier and melt the metal. Ricarik may come back. He must be made to believe that we are busy at the cast. The door is bolted inside. You, Rosen-Aër, remain near the entrance of the vault so as to escape into it quickly should that accursed intendant take it into his head to return here, a probable thing. His early morning round being done, we hardly ever see him again, thanks to God! But the least imprudence may be fatal."

## CHAPTER X.

### MISTRESS AND MAN.

Night has returned. Clad in her monastic vestments, the abbess Meroflede reclines on the lounge in the banquet hall where the evening before Amael was seated near her. The woman's pale face has a sinister aspect. Seated opposite her at the table lighted by a wax taper, Ricarik had been writing under the dictation of the abbess.

"Madam," said Ricarik, "you need only to attach your signature to the letter for the Bishop of Nantes," and seeing that, absorbed in her own thoughts, Meroflede did not answer, the intendant repeated in a louder voice: "Madam, I am waiting for your signature."

Her forehead resting on her hand, her eye fixed, her bosom heaving, Meroflede said to her intendant in a slow and hollow voice: "What did Berthoald have to say this morning when you went to see him in his prison?"

"He remained silent and somber."

The abbess rose brusquely and paced the hall in

great agitation. Overpowering the storm within her breast she said to the intendant:

"Go and bring me Berthoald."

"Madam!... Is it you who issue such an order?"

"I have commanded; obey without delay."

"But the messenger whom you sent for is waiting for this letter to the Bishop of Nantes. The boat is ready with its oarsmen."

"The Bishop of Nantes will receive my missive a day later. Fetch me Berthoald!"

"I obey the orders of my noble mistress."

Ricarik walked slowly towards the entrance of the hall and was about to disappear behind the curtain when, after another equally violent struggle, Meroflede called to him: "No ... come back!" and letting herself heavily down upon the lounge, the abbess covered her face with her hands, uttering prolonged and woeful moans that resembled the howlings of a wounded she-wolf. The intendant drew near and waited in silence for the crisis that was convulsing his mistress to spend itself. A few seconds later the abbess rose again. Her cheeks were inflamed; her eyes shot fire, her lips curled disdainfully. "I am too weak!" she cried. "Oh, that man!

that man! He shall pay dearly for what he makes me suffer!" Again Meroflede paced the hall in violent agitation, but presently she grew calmer, sat down upon the lounge and said to the intendant: "Read me the letter over again.... I was temporarily insane!"

The intendant read:

\* \* \* \* \*

"Meroflede, the maid-servant of the maid-servants of the Lord, to her beloved father in Christ, Arsene, Bishop of the diocese of Nantes, respectful greeting. Very beloved father, the Lord has shown by a wonderful miracle what terrible punishment he reserves for the wicked who wrong him in the person of his poor hand-maids. Charles, the chief of the Franks, contemner of all divine laws, desolator of the Church, devastator of faithful women, had the sacrilegious audacity of bestowing upon a band of his warriors the possession of this abbey, a patrimony of God. The chief of these adventurers summoned me outrageously to vacate this monastery, adding that if I did not obey, he would attack us by main force at daybreak. In order to be nearer to their damnable work, these accursed men camped over night behind one of the approaches of the abbey. But the eye of the Lord watched over us. The Almighty has known how to defend us against the ravishing wolf. During the night the cataracts of heaven opened with a

frightful crash. The waters of the ponds, miraculously swollen, swallowed up the sacrilegious warriors. Not one of them escaped the punishment of heaven! It was a terrible prodigy! Red lights shimmered at the bottom of the waves as if a mouth of hell had opened to recover its detestable prey. The justice of the Lord being accomplished, the waters again became calm and limpid, and peacefully returned to their bed. So that, after the deluge the white dove of peace and hope winged its flight out of the holy ark. This letter, oh, my venerable father in Christ, is to notify you of the miracle. This fresh proof of the omnipotence of the Lord will serve to edify, comfort, console and delight all pious, and terrify the impious. I close asking your apostolic benediction."

\* \* \* \* \*

After Ricarik had finished reading this pious letter he again said to the abbess: "Madam, may it please you to sign."

Meroflede took the pen and wrote at the bottom, "MEROFLEDE, ABBESS OF MERIADEK," after which she said with a satanic leer: "The Bishop of Nantes is a skilful man; he will know how to make the miracle tell; a century hence people will speak of the prodigy to which the virgins of the convent of Meriadek owed their deliverance." An instant later she said

distractedly: "The fires of hell are burning in my veins!"

"What, madam, are you still thinking of Berthoald? How strong an impression must he have made upon you!"

"What I feel for that man is a mixture of contempt, hatred and amorous frenzy.... I am frightened at my own feelings.... No other man ever inspired me with such a passion!"

"There is a very simple method of ridding yourself of these agonies.... I proposed the method to you.... I am ready to apply it."

"Take care! No violence upon him! Your life answers to me for his!"

"What are your intentions?"

"I do not know what to decide upon.... One moment I wish him to undergo a thousand deaths ... the next I am ready to fall at his knees, and ask pardon.... I am out of my mind ... out of my mind with love!" And the abbess wrung her hands, bit into the cushions of the lounge, and tore them with her nails in savage fury. Suddenly rising, her eyes wet with tears and glistening with passion, she cried: "Give me the key of Berthoald's prison!"

"It is on this bunch," answered the intendant pointing to several keys that hung from his belt.

"Give me that one quick!"

"Here it is," said the intendant, detaching a large iron key from the bunch. Meroflede took the key, contemplated it in silence, and fell into a revery.

"Madam," said Ricarik, "I shall order the messenger in waiting to depart with your letter to the Bishop of Nantes."

"Go.... Go.... Take the letter and return!"

"I shall also take a look at the old goldsmith's shop.... He is to cast the large silver vase to-day!"

"Oh! What do I care!"

"There is a vague suspicion in my mind. I imagined this morning I noticed a sign of embarrassment on the face of the wily old man. He told me he was to lock himself in the whole day. I suspect he has a plot with his apprentices to pilfer a portion of the metal. He also notified me the casting would not commence until night. I wish to see how it is done. I shall then come back, madam. Have you any other orders for me, my abbess?"

Meroflede remained plunged in revery, holding in

her hand the key of Amael's prison. After a few seconds of silence, and without raising her eyes that remained fixed upon the floor, she said to the intendant:

"When you go out, tell Madeleine to bring me my cloak and a lighted lamp."

"Your cloak, madam? Do you expect to go out? Do you need it to go to Berthoald in his prison----?"

Meroflede interrupted the intendant by stamping her foot in a rage, and pointed him to the door with an imperious gesture, saying:

"Begone, vile slave!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE FLIGHT.

Bonaik, his apprentices, Rosen-Aër, and Septimine, confined since morning in the workshop, had impatiently waited for night. Everything was in readiness for the escape of Amael from the cavern when darkness should set in. The glare of the brasier in the forge and the furnace alone lighted the workshop.

"You are young and strong," said the old man to his apprentices; "for want of better weapons, the iron bars that have been removed from the window may serve you to defend us. Deposit them in a corner. Now pass the barrel out of the window, and fasten to one of the hoops this string, the other end of which is in Amael's hands. He is ready. He has just answered my signal."

Their hearts beating with hope and anxiety, Rosen-Aër and Septimine stood near the window in a close embrace. The apprentices pushed out the barrel. The darkness was thick. Not even the whiteness of the building in whose lower part lay Amael's prison, was distinguishable. Drawn towards himself by the latter, the barrel soon disappeared in the dark. In the measure that

it went, one of the apprentices paid out the rope attached to it. The rope was to help pull the barrel back as soon as Arael had seized it. At that critical moment a profound silence reigned in the workshop. All seemed to hold their breath. Despite the pitchy darkness of the night that prevented anything being seen without, the eyes of all sought to penetrate the obscurity. Finally, after a few minutes of anxiety, the apprentice, who, leaning out of the window, held the cord that was to pull the barrel back, said to the old man: "Master Bonaik, the prisoner is out of the cavern; he is holding the barrel; I feel the cord tighten."

"Then, you pull, my boy!... Pull gently.... Do not jerk!"

"He is coming," replied the apprentice joyfully; "the prisoner's weight is upon the barrel."

"Great God!" suddenly cried Rosen-Aër, pointing out of the window. "Look in the cavern! There is a light!... All is lost!"

Indeed, a strong light, shed by a lamp, suddenly appeared in the subterranean prison. The semi-circular opening of the air-hole was luminously marked across the darkness. The reverberation of the light projected itself upon the water in the moat--and revealed the fugitive, who, half submerged, held himself up with his two hands on the floating barrel. Immediately after,

Meroflede appeared at the air-hole wrapped in her scarlet cloak with its hood thrown back, and leaning against the remaining bars which Amael had not had time to remove. At the sight of the fugitive, the abbess uttered a scream of rage and cried twice, "Berthoald! Berthoald!" She then disappeared, taking her lamp with her, so that again all was left in thickest darkness without. Frightened at the appearance of the abbess, the apprentice who drew the barrel threw himself back and dropped the cord. Fortunately the goldsmith seized it as soon, and amidst the mortal fear of all, drew the barrel close to the window, saying: "Let us first save Amael."

Thanks to the barrel, which floated almost on a level with the window sill, the latter was easily scaled by the prisoner. His first movement upon stepping into the workshop was to throw himself on his mother's neck. Mother and son for a moment forgot their common danger and were holding each other in a passionate embrace when a rap was heard at the door.

"Woe is us!" muttered one of the apprentices. "It is the abbess!"

"Impossible!" said the goldsmith. "To ascend from the prison, pass the cloister, cross the courtyard, and come as far as our workshop she would need more than ten minutes."

"Bonaik!" cried from the outside the rough voice of

Ricarik, "open the door instantly."

"Oh! what shall we do! The coal vault is too narrow to conceal Rosen-Aër and her son," muttered the old man; then raising his voice, he answered: "Seigneur intendant, we are just at the cast, we cannot leave it----"

"That is the very operation I want to witness," cried back the intendant. "Open immediately."

"You, Septimine, and your son remain near the window, lean out your heads; you will otherwise be suffocated," hastily said the old man to Rosen-Aër, taking a swift resolution. And pushing Arael, his mother and Septimine to the casement, he whispered to one of the apprentices: "Pour the full contents of the box of sulphur and bitumen upon the forge brasier.... We shall fill the workshop with smoke."

The young slave obeyed mechanically. At the moment when Ricarik began again to knock at the door with redoubled force, a sulphurous and bituminous smoke began to spread in the workshop, and soon was so intense that one could hardly see his hand before his eyes. Thus, when the old man finally proceeded to open the door to the intendant, the latter, blinded and suffocated by a puff of the pungent and thick vapor, instead of stepping in, jumped back.

"Walk in, seigneur intendant," said Bonaik, "this is

the effect of the casting after the fashion of the great Eloi.... We could not open to you sooner out of fear of chilling the liquid metal, which we were pouring into the mold.... Step forward, seigneur intendant; come and see the casting."

"Go to the devil!" answered Ricarik, coughing fit to strangle and stepping further away from the threshold. "I am suffocated ... blinded!"

"It is the effect of the casting, dear seigneur," and watching the bunch of keys at the belt of the intendant, who was rubbing his smarting eyelids with both hands, Bonaik seized him by the throat and cried: "This way, boys! He has the keys of the gates!"

At the call of the old man, the apprentices and Amael rushed forward, precipitated themselves upon the intendant and smothered his cries by holding his throat tight, while Bonaik, seizing the bunch of keys, said: "Drag this fellow into the workshop and throw him out of the window into the moat. That will settle him quickly, and he will no longer punish and kill poor slaves!"

The old man's orders were immediately executed. Despite the resistance of the Frank, the noise of his body was soon heard, dropping into the water.

"Now," cried the old man, "all come here! Follow

me and let us run!"

Hardly had the old man taken a few steps in the alley when he saw the slave who watched the gate approaching from a distance with a lighted lantern in his hand. "Remain hidden in the shadow," the goldsmith said in a low voice to the fugitives, and he walked briskly toward the gateman, who met him with a look of surprise:

"Helloa, old Bonaik! Is not the intendant in your workshop? I do not know what the man is thinking about. It is two hours since the boat and oarsmen are waiting for his messenger.... They are growing impatient and want to go."

"They will not have long to wait; I am the messenger."

"Are you going to fill the functions of messenger?"

"Do you know this bunch of keys?"

"Surely I know this bunch of keys. It is the one the intendant always carries at his belt."

"He confided it to me so that I could get out of the abbey yard in case you were not at your lodge. Let us go quick to the boat. Walk ahead."

Convinced by the sincerity of the old man, whose presence of mind seemed to grow with the difficulties that arose in his way, the gateman marched ahead of him. Bonaik, however, slackened his pace, and, calling to one of the apprentices, in a low voice said: "Justin, you and the others follow me at a distance; the night is dark, the light of the gateman's lantern will guide us, but the moment you hear me whistle, all run up to me." Having attended to that, Bonaik addressed the gateman who had gone far ahead: "Helloa, Bernard! Do not walk so fast; you forget that at my age one's legs are not as nimble as yours." Thus, preceded by the gateman and followed at a distance in the dark by the rest of the fugitives, Bonaik arrived at the outer court of the monastery. Bernard stopped and seemed to listen.

"What's the matter?" asked the goldsmith. "Why do you halt?"

"Do you not see the flare of torches lighting the top of the wall of the inside court? Do you not hear voices?"

"March, man! March! I have other business in hand than to stop to look at torches, or listen to noises. I must obey our holy abbess and deliver Ricarik's message as soon as possible. I have not a second to lose. Quick, let's hurry."

"But something out of the usual order is going on in the monastery!"

"It is for that very reason that the intendant sent me off with so much haste on this message.... Hurry up! Time presses!"

"Oh, that is something else, old Bonaik," answered Bernard, quickening his steps. The gateman hurried on, arrived in a minute at the outside enclosure, and opened the gate. Immediately the old man whistled. Greatly surprised at this, the gateman asked him: "What are you whistling for? The door is open. Go out, if you are in such a hurry. But I hear steps. They seem to be running this way. Who are these people?" and he raised his lantern in order to obtain a better view. "There are two women; who may they be?"

Bonaik cut short the gateman's observations with the peremptory order to the fugitives: "Take the key out of the lock and close it after you. That will keep the gateman locked in." Hardly had the old man pronounced these words when Amael, the apprentices, Rosen-Aër and Septimine rushed through the opening. One of the apprentices pushed Bernard roughly back into the court, took out the key, pulled the door after him and locked it on the outside. Bonaik took up the lantern and cried: "Helloa, there! The boat! Come here for us to embark!"

"Come this way!" answered several voices. "This way! The boat is tied to the large willow tree."

"Master Bonaik," said one of the apprentices in

great trepidation, "we are pursued. The porter is calling for help. Look at the glimmer of approaching torches! They seem to be in the garden that we have just left."

"There is now nothing to fear, my lads, the gate is studded with iron and locked from without. Before they can have time to break it down, we shall have embarked," saying which the old man proceeded at a rapid pace towards the willow tree. Observing on his way a full bag on Justin's shoulder, Bonaik said to him: "What have you got in that bag?"

"Master Bonaik, while you were talking to the intendant, Gervais and I, fearing some oversight on your part, took, out of precaution, I, my bag in which I stowed away the rest of our provisions, and Gervais the wine pouch which is still half full."

"You are wise lads; we have a long tramp before us after we shall have disembarked."

A few minutes later and the old man, together with his companions, arrived at the old willow tree. A boat stood ready. Four slave oarsmen sat on the benches, with the steersman at the rudder. "At last!" said the steersman in a peevish tone. "Here we have been waiting over three hours; we are chilled through, and have more than two hours to row--"

"I am going to give you a piece of good news, my

friends," answered the goldsmith to the boatmen. "I have brought oarsmen with me to relieve you. You can go back to the monastery. The steersman alone will have to remain to pilot the boat."

Glad and quickly the slaves jumped out of the boat. The steersman resigned himself not without a murmur. Bonaik let Rosen-Aër and Septimine enter first. Amael and the apprentices took hold of the oars, the steersman the rudder, and the boat swiftly left the bank behind, while Bonaik, wiping the sweat from his brow, said with a sigh of relief and joy:

"Oh, my boys, this was a casting day such as I never saw in the workshop of the great Eloi!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### MOTHER AND SON.

At noon of the day following the exciting night in which the fugitives left the abbey, they halted for rest after having been uninterruptedly on the march from the time that they disembarked at the other shore of the abbey's pond. Thanks to the precaution of the apprentices, one of whom had brought provisions and another a pouch of wine, their strength was speedily restored. The travelers had sat down upon the grass under a wide-spreading oak whose foliage was yellowed by the late season. At their feet flowed a stream of limpid water, behind them rose a hill that they had just traveled over, following the track of an old Roman road that had fallen into decay. The road continued for a long distance until the turning of a wooded headland behind which it disappeared. Far away in the distant horizon stood outlined the dark blue mountain-tops that form the boundaries and frontier of Brittany. Guided by one of the apprentices who was familiar with the surroundings of the abbey, the fugitives had struck the old Roman road. It led to Nantes, at the boundary line of Armorica, and in the neighborhood of which, seven centuries

earlier, Julius Cæsar established several entrenched camps in order to protect his military colonies. Accustomed through his profession of war to measure distances, Amael calculated that by marching until sunset, resting an hour, and then resuming their tramp, it would be possible to reach Brittany at the end of the next day. Septimine sat near Rosen-Aër and Amael, and the apprentices, spread out upon the grass, had just finished their frugal meal. The old goldsmith having also repaired his forces, pulled out of the pocket of his blouse a little packet that was carefully wrapped up in a piece of smooth skin. The young folks followed the old man's movements with curiosity, and to their great surprise they saw him take from its wrapping the little abbatial crosier of silver, at which he had for some time been chiseling. There were also two burins in the package. Noticing the look of astonishment on the faces of the apprentices, he said to them:

"You seem surprised, my children, to see that I carried this jewel from the abbey. It is not the value of the metal that tempted me."

"I believe that, Master Bonaik; the little crosier has but little silver in it. But we still wonder why you brought it along."

"Well, my boys, I love my trade.... I shall have no further opportunities to exercise it during the remaining

days of my life.... I preserved my two best burins.... I mean to chisel this crosier so nicely that by working upon it a little every day I shall consume the rest of my life at it. It will be the masterpiece of my long career."

"You congratulated us upon our foresight, Master Bonaik, because we thought of the pouch of wine and the provisions. But we must admit that your foresight exceeds ours."

"Good father, and you, my friends," said Amael, addressing himself to the goldsmith and his apprentices, "please draw near; I wish you to hear what I have to say to my mother. I have committed a wrong, I should now have courage to make a public confession ... and beseech forgiveness."

Rosen-Aër sighed and listened with sad and severe curiosity to her son's account of his conduct and career since she saw him as a boy. Looking at her with a surprised face Septimine seemed to beseech the indulgence of the mother, of this Gallic mother who felt so justly and so painfully mortified at her son.

"From the moment that all peril to me was over," Amael began, "my mother has not spoken to me during this long journey, either by day or night; she has refused the support of my arm, preferring that of this poor girl, who saved her life. My mother's severity is just, I cannot complain of it, though it pains me.... May the truthful

account of my faults, the confession of my errors, and my sincere repentance merit her pardon."

"A mother always forgives," said Septimine timidly, looking at Rosen-Aër, but the latter answered in a tremulous and grave voice, without deigning to look at Amael:

"My son's abandonment has torn my heart; a prey to unceasing and ever renewing anxieties on his behalf, I gave myself up alternately to despair and to insane hope.... These torments have lasted long years. I can pardon my son for having caused them; but what is not in my power to pardon is his criminal alliance with the oppressors of our race, with those accursed Franks, who enslaved our fathers, outraged our mothers, and who continue to hold our children in bondage!"

"My crime is great. But I swear to you, mother, that long before I saw you again remorse gnawed at my heart. It is ten years since I left the valley of Charolles, where I lived happily with my family. But I yielded to curiosity, to an overpowering thirst for adventure. I believed that beyond our own confines I was to see an entirely new world. One evening I left, but not without shedding many a tear, not without turning more than once to take a parting look at our valley."

"In my youth," said the old man, "my father often told me how Karadeucq, one of our ancestors, also left

his family to run what then was called the 'Bagaudy'--to tramp free through the woods and lie in ambush for our oppressors. May, Rosen-Aër, the remembrance of our ancestor soften your heart towards your son."

"The Bagauders and the Vagres warred against the Romans and then against the Franks; they did not ally themselves with our oppressors, and fight on their side, as my son has done."

"Your reproaches are merited, mother! You will see in the course of my account that I often made them to myself. Almost immediately upon quitting the valley I fell into the hands of a band of Franks. They were on their way back from Auvergne and were traveling north. They made me a slave. Their chief kept me for a time to oversee and tend his horse, and to furbish his weapons. I had the instinct of war. The sight of arms or of a fine horse always fascinated me since childhood. You know it, mother."

"Yes, your holidays were those on which the colonists of the valley exercised themselves in arms ... or ran races on horseback."

"Led a slave by that Frankish chief, I never sought to flee. He treated me kindly. Besides, it was to me a pleasure to polish armors and to ride on the march. At least, and at last, I was seeing a new country.... Alas, quite new! The fields were ravaged, the harvest was

neglected, the frightful distress of the subjugated populations of the districts that we traversed contrasted cruelly with the independent and happy life of the inhabitants of our valley. It was on such occasions that, thinking of our happy region, of you, and of my father, tears dropped from my eyes, and my heart felt like breaking. Occasionally, the thought came to me of running away from the Franks and returning to you. But the fear of a severe reprimand held me back."

"I would have felt the same way, had I committed the same fault," said Septimine, who listened to Amael's report with tender interest. "I never would have dared to return to my family."

"After being more than a year with the Frankish chief, I had become a good groom, and I could master the most spirited horses. By cleaning the weapons I had learned to handle them. The Frank died. I was to be sold with all his other slaves. A Jew named Mordecai, who traveled over Gaul as a trafficker in slaves, happened to be in Amiens at the time; he inspected my deceased master's slaves. He bought me and told me in advance that he was to sell me to a rich Frankish seigneur named Bodegesil, Duke of the country of Poitiers. The seigneur, said the Jew, owned the finest horses and the finest armors imaginable. 'If you flee' said the Jew to me, 'I would lose a fat sum of money, because I bought you for a large amount, knowing I could dispose of you

to the seigneur Bodegesil at a good profit. If you run away you will lose a chance of making your fortune. Bodegesil is a generous seigneur. Serve him faithfully and he will take you to war with him whenever he is called to take the field with his men, and we have seen in these days of war more than one manumitted slave become a count.' The Jew's words fired my ambition, pride intoxicated me, I believed what he said, and did not try to run away. He himself, in order to confirm my purpose, treated me at his best; he even promised me to have a letter that I wrote to you reach you through another Jew who was to go to Burgundy."

"The man did not keep his promise," said Rosen-Aër. "No tidings from you ever reached me."

"I am not surprised at his breach of promise. That Jew was greedy and faithless. He took me to Duke Bodegesil. That Frank did indeed raise superb horses on the immense meadows of his domain, and one of the halls of his burg, an ancient Roman castle, was fitted out with splendid armors. But the Jew had lied to me on the duke's character. He was a violent, cruel man. Still, struck almost immediately after my arrival at the manner in which I broke in a savage colt that had until then been the terror of the stable slaves, he treated me with less severity than he did my Gallic or Frankish companions, because, you know, mother, that, thanks to the ups and downs of the times, a large number of the

descendants of the conquerors of the Gauls have fallen into poverty, and from poverty into slavery. Bodegesil was as cruel towards his slaves of his own German extraction as towards those of the Gallic race. Always on horseback, always busy furbishing and handling weapons, I now steadily pursued an idea that was destined to be realized. The renown of Charles, the steward of the palace, had reached my ears; I had heard some of the Frankish friends of Bodegesil say that Charles, being compelled to defend Gaul in the north against the Frisians and in the south against the Arabs, and finding himself ill-supported by the old lay and clerical seigneurs, who furnished him little money and only small forces, gave a friendly reception to adventurers, several of whom by bravely fighting under his orders, had arrived at unexpected wealth. I was twenty years old when I learned that Charles was approaching Poitiers for the purpose of driving back the Arabians, who then threatened to invade the region. The moment, long dreamed of by my ambition, had arrived. One day I took the handsomest suit of armor from Bodegesil's racks, I sequestered a sword, a battle-axe, a lance and a buckler. When night fell I picked out of the stable the finest and most spirited horse. I put on the armor, and rode rapidly away from the castle. I wished to join Charles and decided to conceal my extraction and pass for the son of a Frankish seigneur so as to interest Charles in my fortunes. About five or six leagues from the castle, I was attacked early the next

morning by bandits who infested the roads. I defended myself vigorously. I killed two of the robbers and said to the others: Charles needs brave men. He leaves a large part of the booty to them. Come with me. It is better to fight in an army than to attack travelers on the road. The danger is the same, but the profit is larger! The bandits took my advice and followed me. Our little troop was increased on the route by other idle but determined men. We arrived at the camp of Charles on the eve of the battle of Poitiers. I claimed to be the son of a noble Frank who died poor and left me his horse and arms as only inheritance. Charles received me with his habitual roughness. 'There will be a fight to-morrow,' he answered me, 'if you and your men behave well you will be pleased with me.' Accident willed it that at that battle against the Arabs I saved the life of the Frankish chief by helping him to defend himself against a group of Berbery riders who attacked him furiously. I was wounded in several places. That day secured the affection of Charles to me. I shall not tell you, mother, of the many proofs of favor that he gave me. My great fortune was ever poisoned by the thought ever present in my mind: 'I have lied; I have denied my race; I have allied myself to the oppressors of Gaul; I have given them the aid of my sword in repelling the Saxons and Arabs, who are neither more nor less barbarous than our accursed Frankish conquerors.' More than once, during the incessant struggles between the seigneurs of Austrasia and those of Neustria or Aquitaine--impious

wars in which the counts, the dukes, and the bishops drafted their Gallic colonists as soldiers--I fought against the men of my own race.... I reddened my sword with their blood. These are crimes."

"Oh, shame and sorrow," murmured Rosen-Aër, covering her face with her hands, "to be the mother of such a son!"

"Yes, shame and sorrow ... not for you only, but also for me. Alack! I yielded to the consequence of a first false step; I fought the men of my race, out of fear to be taken for a coward by Charles, out of fear to betray my extraction. Pride intoxicated me when I saw myself admiringly surrounded by the proudest of our conquerors--I, the son of that conquered and subjugated people. But after such moments of vertigo were over, I often envied the fate of the most miserable slave. They at least were entitled to the respect that undeserved misfortune inspires. Vainly did I look for death in battle. I was condemned to live. Only in the intoxication of battle, in perilous undertakings did I find temporary relief from the remorse that haunted me. Oh, how often did I not think with sorrow of our valley of Charolles, where my family lived! When I afterward learned of the ravages of the region by the Arabs, of the desperate resistance that its inhabitants had offered ... my relatives, my friends; when I thought that my sword might have defended you, or at least avenged you,

mother, from that time forward remorse embittered my life. I never since had one instant of happiness."

"Your father fought up to his last breath for freedom and for the freedom of his kin. I saw him fall at my feet riddled with wounds! Where were you when your father was defending his hearth, his freedom and his family?... Near the Frankish chief, fawning for his favor! Perchance even fighting your own brothers!"

Amael covered his face with his hands and answered only with a smothered sob.

"Oh, for pity's sake, do not overwhelm him!" said Septimine to Rosen-Aër. "See how wretched he feels ... how contrite he is!"

"Rosen-Aër," added the old man, "remember that yesterday your son was still the favorite of the sovereign chief of Gaul, and that to-day he renounces the favors that intoxicated him. He is no less wretched than we, and has no other wish than to live a poor and hard but free life in the old Armorica that is the cradle of our family."

"By Hesus!" cried Rosen-Aër. "Did my son voluntarily renounce those goods, those lands, those favors, the accursed gifts of Charles? Did you not extract him from a prison, where, without you, he would have perished? Oh! The gods are just. My son owed his

fortune to an impious ambition ... and the fortune came near being fatal to him. Glorified and enriched by the Franks, he has been shamefully punished and stripped of all by a woman of their race."

"Oh!" cried Septimine, breaking down in tears, "do you believe that Amael, even if in full possession, would not have renounced all to follow you, his mother?"

"The man who falls away from his duty to his country and his race can also fall away from his duty to his mother! I am justified to question the goodness of my son's heart!"

"Master Bonaik," suddenly cried one of the apprentices in an accent of fear, "look down below there, at the turning of the road ... there are soldiers. They are approaching rapidly. They will be here within short!"

At these words of the lad the fugitives jumped to their feet. Amael himself, forgetting for a moment the sorrow into which his mother's just severity plunged him, dried his face that was moist with tears and took a few steps forward to reconnoiter.

"Great God!" cried Septimine. "They may be in pursuit of Amael.... Good father Bonaik, let us hide in this thicket----"

"My child, that would be to expose ourselves to being pursued. The riders have seen us.... Our flight would awaken their suspicion. Besides, they come from the side opposite to Nantes; they cannot have been sent in our pursuit."

"Master Bonaik," said one of the apprentices, "three of the riders are hastening their horses' steps, and motion us with their hands to come to them."

"Perhaps a new danger now threatens us!" said Septimine, drawing close to Rosen-Aër, who had alone remained seated, and seemed indifferent to what went on around her. "Alack, what is to become of us!"

"Oh, poor child!" said Rosen-Aër, "I care little for life at this moment!... And yet the mere hope of some day finding again my son, served to sustain my sad life!"

"But you have found again that son whose loss you so tenderly regretted. He is here, near you!"

"No!" answered the Gallic mother with sorrow, "no, that is not my son!"

Feeling not a little uneasy, Amael had walked toward the three Frankish horsemen, who rode at the head of a more numerous troop. One of them reined in his steed, and said to Rosen-Aër's son: "Does this road

lead to Nantes?"

"Yes; it is the nearest road."

"Does it also lead to the abbey of Meriadek?"

"Yes," answered Amael, as much surprised at the meeting as at the questions.

"Arnulf," said the rider to one of his companions, "ride back and tell Count Bertchram that we are on the right road; while waiting for your return to us, I shall let my horse drink at this stream."

The rider departed, and while his two companions were allowing their horses to take a few throatfuls of water, Amael, who had not been able to overcome the growing curiosity that seized him at hearing the name of Count Bertchram, asked the two riders: "What brings Count Bertchram to this country?"

"He comes as a messenger of Charles, the chief of the Franks. Tell us, young man, whether we still have a long way to ride before we reach the abbey of Meriadek."

"You could not reach the place until late to-night."

"Is that abbey as rich as they claim?"

"It is rich.... But why do you ask?"

"Why?" said the soldier with a merry smile, "because Bertchram and we are to take possession of the abbey, which the good Charles has bestowed upon us."

"But I heard it said that Charles had bestowed the monastery and all its dependencies upon one Berthoald."

During this conversation the other riders had joined their vanguard, followed by several carts drawn by mules and a few horses led by the bridle. The carts were loaded with baggage. Bertchram rode at the head of the main body. He was an elderly warrior of rude and stupid physiognomy. Amael took a few steps toward the count. The latter suddenly stopped his horse, dropped the reins, and rubbed his eyes as if he could not believe the evidence of their sense. He contemplated the son of Rosen-Aër for a few seconds in utter amazement, and then cried: "Berthoald! Count Berthoald!"

"Yes, it is I.... Good-day to you, Bertchram!"

Bertchram alighted from his horse and ran toward the young man to contemplate him closer. "It is he ... and no mistake! And what are you doing here, valiant count, in the company of these beggars?"

"Speak not so loud. I am on a mission from

Charles."

"Bareheaded in that way? Without arms, your clothes soiled with mud and almost in rags?"

"It is a disguise that I have assumed."

"You are a wily customer! Whenever the good Charles had some delicate matter in hand, it was always you he charged with it, because you are more subtle than any of us others. Charles always said to me: 'Bertchram, you would be a terrible man if your brain were as powerful as your fist!' You probably do not know that I am the bearer of a message to you?"

"What is the message about?"

"Simply this, that I come to replace you as abbot at the abbey of Meriadek."

"Charles is master, he can give and take back again."

"Do not look upon the substitution as a disgrace, Berthoald! Far from it! Charles raises you to the rank of duke, and he reserves for you the command of his vanguard in the war he is about to undertake against the Frisians. 'Upon the word of the Hammerer,' he said to us, 'I was a fool in confining to an abbey one of my youngest captains, and at this season when wars break

out so unexpectedly; it is now, when I have not Berthoald at my side, that I feel how much I need him. The post I gave him is good for an aged soldier; it fits you better than him, old Bertchram, go and take the place of Berthoald and his men; you shall give him this letter from me, and as a pledge of my constant friendship, take to him two of my best horses; besides that, take to him from me a magnificent armor of Bordeaux. He loves fine armor and fine horses. It will please him.' And there they are with me," added Bertchram. "The horses are led by the bridle. They are beautiful, one is as black as a raven, the other white as a swan. As to the armor, it is carefully packed up in my baggage, I cannot show it to you now. It is a masterpiece of the most famous armorer of Bordeaux. It is enriched with gold and silver ornaments. The casque is a marvel."

"I am truly touched with this fresh proof of Charles' affection," answered Arael, "I shall report to him as soon as I have fulfilled his mission."

"But he wishes you to join him immediately, as you will see by the letter that I have carefully put away in my cuirass," said the warrior hunting for the parchment.

"Charles will not regret to see me arrive a day or two later if I return to him after successfully attending to the mission that he confided to me. I shall find the

horses and the armor at the abbey, where I shall see you again, and now I shall move on with my men. But you must have made a wide circuit, to judge by the road you are on!"

"Charles gave me the command of a large troop that he has cantoned on the frontiers of Brittany."

"Does he expect to attack Armorica?"

"I do not know. I left the troops entrenched in two old Roman camps, one to the right, the other to the left of a long road that winds up there."

"Is the troop large?"

"About two thousand men distributed in two camps."

"Charles can undertake nothing against Brittany with so small a number of soldiers."

"All he expects to do is to reconnoiter the frontier of the country until after the war with the Frisians is ended, when he will be able to give his attention in person to the accursed Armorica. This province has resisted our arms for more than three centuries, since the glorious Clovis conquered Gaul. Indeed it is a shame to us!"

"Yes, the independence of Armorica is a shame to the arms of the Franks."

"Here is Charles' letter," said Bertchram pulling from under his cuirass a scroll of parchment that he delivered to Amael, and ordering the two horses which his slaves had unsaddled to be brought forward, he added: "Look at them! Are there any nobler or more spirited animals in the world?"

"No," answered Amael unable to avoid admiring the two superb stallions, that were with difficulty held by the slaves. The horses reared and caracoled, daintily striking the ground with their hoofs; one was ebony black, with a bluish tinge; the other, white as snow, shone like silver. Their nostrils were inflated, their eyes sparkled under their long manes, and they lashed the air with their flowing tails.

"These are noble horses!" said Amael smothering a sigh; and motioning to the slaves to re-cover the animals with their housings, he muttered: "Adieu, fine battle horses! Adieu magnificent armors!" Turning to the Frank, Amael said: "I wish you a happy journey.... I shall see you again at the abbey of Meriadek where I hope you may enjoy yourself."

"Adieu, Berthoald; but ... a thought strikes me. Should your men refuse to admit me during your absence, what shall I do?"

"Keep Charles' letter; it will notify my men of Charles' pleasure. You may break the seal before them."

"I shall do it that way. Adieu, I shall take your place at the abbey, where I expect to have a dull time until your return. Adieu, and come back soon."

"One more question.... Who are the chiefs of the troops that are cantoned near the frontiers of Brittany?"

"Two friends of yours, Hermann and Gondulf. They asked me to remember them to you."

"Now, good-bye."

"Good-bye, Berthoald."

The chief of the Frankish troops, having resumed his march, followed by his troops and train, soon disappeared before the eyes of the fugitives. Amael returned to the tree under which his traveling companions were assembled. Hardly had he taken a few steps towards them when his mother opened her arms to him: "Come, my son; I have heard every word. Now, at least, your renunciation of a brilliant career, that might have dazzled you, is voluntary!"

"You were near me, mother, and yonder I saw the frontiers of Brittany. Could I be dazzled by any favors from Charles against my mother and my country?"

"Oh!" cried the matron tenderly pressing Arael to her breast. "This day makes me forget all that I have suffered!"

"And this, mother, is the first happy day that I have had in years--a day of unalloyed happiness."

"You see I was right, your son's heart remained true," said Septimine to Rosen-Aër with touching kindness.

"Septimine!" replied Arael with a look of tenderness, "would you doubt my heart in the future?"

"No, Arael," she answered naïvely, looking at the young man with an expression of timidity and surprise. "I shall never doubt you."

"Mother, this sweet and brave girl saved your life; she is now a fugitive, forever separated from her family. If she should consent to give me her hand, would you accept her as a daughter?"

"Oh, with joy! With thankfulness!" said Rosen-Aër. "But would you consent to the union, Septimine?"

Blushing with surprise, with happiness and confusion, the girl threw herself on the neck of Arael's mother, and holding her face on the matron's breast, murmured:

"I loved him since the day he showed himself so generous toward me at the convent of St. Saturnine. Did he not there protect me?"

"Oh, Rosen-Aër!" now exclaimed the old man who had stood near wrapped in thought, "the gods have blessed my old age, seeing they reserved such a day for me." And after a few seconds of silent emotion, shared in by the young apprentices, the old man proceeded, saying: "My friends, if you will take my advice, let us resume our march. We shall have to walk briskly in order to arrive to-morrow evening at the frontier of Armorica."

"Mother," said Arael, "lean upon me; you will not now refuse the support of my arm?"

"No, oh, no! my child!" answered the matron with tenderness, and brimful of happiness, taking her son's arm.

"And you, good father," said Septimine to the old goldsmith, "you lean on me."

The fugitives resumed their march. After having traveled without accident until night and the following day, they arrived at moon-rise not far from the first spurs of the wild and high mountains that serve both as boundary and as ramparts to Armorica. The sight of his native soil awoke in Bonaik the recollections of his

boyhood days as if by enchantment. Having before now crossed the frontiers with his father in order to attend the Breton fairs, he remembered that four druid stones of colossal size rose not far from a path that was cut between the rocks, and that was so closely hemmed in, that it allowed only one person to march abreast. The fugitives entered the path one after the other and began climbing the steep ascent. Amael marched first. Presently they arrived at a little clearing or platform, surrounded by precipices and beetled over by huge rocks.

Suddenly the fugitives heard from a far distance above their heads a sonorous voice, that, quivering through the surrounding and profound silence of the night, melancholically chanted these words:

"She was young, She was fair, And holy was she;  
Hena her name, Hena, the Maid of the Island of Sen."

Rosen-Aër, Bonaik and Amael, the three descendants of Joel, remained for a moment transfixed with exaltation, and yielding to an irresistible impulse all three fell upon their knees. Tears ran down their cheeks. Septimine and the apprentices, sharing the emotion which they were unable to account for, also fell upon their knees, and all listened, while the sonorous voice which seemed to descend from the skies, concluded the Gallic chant now eight centuries old.

"Oh, Hesus!" finally exclaimed Rosen-Aër, raising her tear-stained face toward the starry vault where the sacred luminary of Gaul was shining in its splendor, "Oh, Hesus! I see a divine omen in this chant, so dear to the descendants of Joel... Blessed be the chant! It salutes us at this solemn hour when, at last setting foot on this free soil, we return to the ancient cradle of our family!"

Guided by the old goldsmith, Amael, his mother, Septimine and the apprentices, arrived in the vicinity of the sacred stones of Karnak, and were tenderly received by the sons of Bonaik's brother. Amael became a field laborer, the young apprentices followed his example and settled in the tribe. At the death of Bonaik, the abbatial crosier, which he had finished at his leisure, was joined to the relics of the family of Joel accompanied by this narrative which I, Amael, the son of Guen-Ael, who was the son of Wanoch, who was the son of Alan a grandson of Ronan the Vagre through Ronan's son Gregory, wrote shortly after our return to Brittany.

THE END