

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE GOLD SICKLE; OR,
HENA, THE VIRGIN OF
THE ISLE OF SEN. A TALE
OF DRUID GAUL

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Eugène Sue

The Gold Sickle; Or, Hena, The Virgin of The Isle of Sen. A Tale of Druid Gaul

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The Gold Sickle; or, Hena the Virgin of the Isle of Sen, is the initial story of the series that Eugene Sue wrote under the collective title of *The Mysteries of the People; or, History of a Proletarian Family Across the Ages.*

The scheme of this great work of Sue's was stupendously ambitious – and the author did not fall below the ideal that he pursued. His was the purpose of producing a comprehensive "universal history," dating from the beginning of the present era down to his own days. But the history that he proposed to sketch was not to be a work for closet study. It was to be a companion in the stream of actual, every-day life and struggle, with an eye especially to the successive struggles of the successively ruled with the successively ruling classes. In the execution of his design, Sue conceived a plan that was as brilliant as it was poetic – withal profoundly philosophic. One

family, the descendants of a Gallic chief named Joel, typifies the oppressed; one family, the descendants of a Frankish chief and conqueror named Neroweg, typifies the oppressor; and across and adown the ages, the successive struggles between oppressors and oppressed – the history of civilization – is thus represented in a majestic allegory. In the execution of this superb plan a thread was necessary to connect the several epochs with one another, to preserve the continuity requisite for historic accuracy, and, above all, to give unity and point to the silent lesson taught by the unfolding drama. Sue solved the problem by an ingenious scheme – a series of stories, supposedly written from age to age, sometimes at shorter, other times at longer intervals, by the descendants of the ancestral type of the oppressed, narrating their special experience and handing the supplemented chronicle down to their successors from generation to generation, always accompanied with some emblematic relic, that constitutes the first name of each story. The series, accordingly, though a work presented in the garb of "fiction," is the best universal history extant: Better than any work, avowedly on history, it graphically traces the special features of class-rule as they have succeeded one another from epoch to epoch, together with the special character of the struggle between the contending classes. The "Law," "Order," "Patriotism," "Religion," "Family," etc., etc., that each successive tyrant class, despite its change of form, fraudulently sought refuge in to justify its criminal existence whenever threatened; the varying economic causes of

the oppression of the toilers; the mistakes incurred by these in their struggles for redress; the varying fortunes of the conflict; – all these social dramas are therein reproduced in a majestic series of "novels" covering leading and successive episodes in the history of the race – an inestimable gift, above all to our own generation, above all to the American working class, the short history of whose country deprives it of historic back-ground.

It is not until the fifth story is reached – the period of the Frankish conquest of Gaul, 486 of the present era – that the two distinct streams of the typical oppressed and typical oppressor meet. But the four preceding ones are necessary, and preparatory for the main drama, that starts with the fifth story and that, although carried down to the revolution of 1848 which overthrew Louis Philippe in France, reaches its grand climax in *The Sword of Honor; or, The Foundation of the French Republic*, that is, the French Revolution. These stories are nineteen in number, and their chronological order is the following:

1.	The Gold Sickle; or, Hena, the Virgin of the Isle of Sen;
2.	The Brass Bell; or, The Chariot of Death;
3.	The Iron Collar; or, Faustine and Syomara;
4.	The Silver Cross; or, The Carpenter of Nazareth;
5.	The Casque's Lark; or, Victoria, The Mother of the Fields;
6.	The Poniard's Hilt; or, Karadeucq and Ronan;
7.	The Branding Needle; or, The Monastery of Charolles;
8.	The Abbatial Crosier; or, Bonaik and Septimie;
9.	Carlovingian Coins; or, The Daughters of Charlemagne;
10.	The Iron Arrow-Head; or, The Maid of the Buckler;
11.	The Infant's Skull; or, The End of the World;
12.	The Pilgrim's Shell; or, Fergan the Quarryman;
13.	The Iron Pincers; or, Mylo and Karvel;
14.	The Iron Trevet; or, Jocehyn the Champion;
15.	The Executioner's Knife; or, Joan of Arc;
16.	The Pocket Bible; or, Christian the Printer;
17.	The Blacksmith's Hammer; or, The Peasant-Code;
18.	The Sword of Honor; or, The Foundation of the French Republic;
19.	The Galley-Slave's Ring; or, The Family of Lebrenn.

Long and effectually has the influence of the usurping class in the English-speaking world succeeded in keeping this brilliant torch that Eugene Sue lighted, from casting its rays across the path of the English-speaking peoples. Several English translations were attempted before this, in England and this country, some fifty years ago. They were all fractional: they are all out of print now: most of them are not to be found even in public libraries of either England or America, not a wrack being left to them, little more than a faint tradition. Only two of the translations are not wholly obliterated. One of them was

published by Trübner & Co. jointly with David Nutt, both of London, in 1863; the other was published by Clark, 448 Broome street, New York, in 1867. The former was anonymous, the translator's identity being indicated only with the initials "K. R. H. M." It contains only eight of the nineteen stories of the original, and even these are avowedly abridgments. The latter was translated by Mary L. Booth, and it broke off before well under way – extinguished as if snuffed off by a gale. Even these two luckier fragmentary translations, now surviving only as curios in a few libraries, attest the vehemence and concertedness of the effort to suppress this great gift of Sue's intellect to the human race. It will be thus no longer. *The Mysteries of the People; or, History of a Proletarian Family Across the Ages* will henceforth enlighten the English-speaking toiling masses as well.

DANIEL DE LEON.

New York, May 1, 1904.

CHAPTER I

THE GUEST

He who writes this account is called Joel, the brenn[A] of the tribe of Karnak; he is the son of Marik, who was the son of Kirio, the son of Tiras, the son of Gomer, the son of Vorr, the son of Glenan, the son of Erer, the son of Roderik chosen chief of the Gallic army that, now two hundred and seventy-seven years ago, levied tribute upon Rome.

[A] Gallic word for chief.

Joel (why should I not say so?) feared the gods, he was of a right heart, a steady courage and a cheerful mind. He loved to laugh, to tell stories, and above all to hear them told, like the genuine Gaul that he was.

At the time when Cæsar invaded Gaul (may his name be accursed!), Joel lived two leagues from Alrè, not far from the sea and the isle of Roswallan, near the edge of the forest of Karnak, the most celebrated forest of Breton Gaul.

One evening towards nightfall – the evening before the anniversary of the day when Hena, his daughter, his well-beloved daughter was born unto him – it is now eighteen years ago – Joel and his eldest son Guilhern were returning home in a chariot

drawn by four of those fine little Breton oxen whose horns are smaller than their ears. Joel and his son had been laying marl on their lands, as is usually done in the autumn, so that the lands may be in good condition for seed-time in the spring. The chariot was slowly climbing up the hill of Craig'h at a place where that mountainous road is narrowed between two rocks, and from where the sea is seen at a distance, and still farther away the Isle of Sen – the mysterious and sacred isle.

"Father," Guilhern said to Joel, "look down there below on the flank of the hill. There is a rider coming this way. Despite the steepness of the descent, he has put his horse to a gallop."

"As sure as the good Elldud invented the plow, that man will break his neck."

"Where can he be riding to in such a hurry? The sun is going down; the wind blows high and threatens a storm; and that road that leads to the desert strand – "

"Son, that man is not of Breton Gaul. He wears a furred cap and a shaggy coat, and his tanned-skin hose are fastened with red bands."

"A short axe hangs at his right and he has a long knife in a sheath at his left."

"His large black horse does not seem to stumble in the descent... Where can he be going in such a hurry?"

"Father, the man must have lost his way."

"Oh, my son, may Teutates hear you! We shall tender our hospitality to the rider. His dress tells he is a stranger. What

beautiful stories will he not be able to tell us of his country and his travels!"

"May the divine Ogmi, whose words bind men in golden chains, be propitious to us, father! It is long since any strange story-teller has sat at our hearth."

"Besides, we have had no news of what is going on elsewhere in Gaul."

"Unfortunately so!"

"Oh, my son, if I were all-powerful as Hesus, I would have a new story-teller every evening at supper."

"I would send men traveling everywhere, and have them return and tell their adventures."

"And if I had the power of Hesus, what wonderful adventures would I not provide for my travelers so as to increase the interest in their stories on their return."

"Father, the rider is coming close to us!"

"Yes, he reins in because the road is here narrow, and we bar his passage with our chariot. Come, Guilhern, the moment is favorable; the passenger must have lost his way; let us offer him hospitality for to-night. We shall then keep him to-morrow, and perhaps several other days. We shall have done him a good turn, and he will give us the news from Gaul and of the other countries that he has visited."

"Besides, it will be a great joy to my sister Hena who is to come home to-morrow for the feast of her birthday."

"Oh, Guilhern, I never thought of the pleasure that my beloved

daughter will have listening to the stranger! He must be our guest!"

"That he shall be, father! Indeed, he shall!" answered Guilhern resolutely.

Joel and his son alighted from the chariot, and advanced towards the rider. Once close to him, both were struck with the majesty of the stranger's looks. Nothing haughtier than his eyes, more masculine than his face, more worthy than his bearing. On his forehead and on one cheek were visible the traces of two wounds only freshly healed. To judge by his dauntless appearance, the rider must have been one of those chiefs whom the tribes elect from time to time to lead them in battle. Joel and his son were all the more anxious to have him accept their hospitality.

"Friend traveler," said Joel, "night is upon us; you have lost your way; the road you are on leads nowhere but to the desert strands; the tide will soon be washing over them because the wind is blowing high. To keep on your route by night would be dangerous. Come to my house. You may resume your journey to-morrow."

"I have not lost my way; I know where I am going to; and I am in a hurry. Turn your oxen aside; make room for me to pass," was the brusque answer of the rider, whose forehead was wet with perspiration from the hurry of his course. By his accent he seemed to be from central Gaul, towards the Loire. After having thus addressed Joel, he struck his large black horse with both

heels in the flanks and tried to draw still nearer to the oxen that now completely barred his passage.

"Friend traveler, did you not hear me?" rejoined Joel. "I told you that this road led only to the seashore, that night was on, and that I offer you my house."

The stranger, however, beginning to wax angry, replied: "I do not need your hospitality... Draw your oxen aside... Do you not see that the rocks leave me no passage either way?.. Hurry up; I am in haste – "

"Friend," said Joel, "you are a stranger; I am of this country; it is my duty to prevent you from going astray... I shall do my duty – "

"By Ritha-Gaür, who made himself a blouse out of the beard of the kings he shaved!" cried the stranger, now in towering rage. "I have traveled a deal since my beard began to grow, have seen many countries, many peoples and many strange customs, but never yet have I come across two fools like these!"

Learning from the mouth of the stranger himself that he had seen many countries, many peoples and many strange customs, Joel and his son, both of whom were passionately fond of hearing stories, concluded that many and charming must be the ones the stranger could tell, and they felt all the more desirous of securing such a guest. Accordingly, so far from turning the chariot aside, Joel advanced close to the rider, and said to him with the sweetest voice that he could master, his natural voice being rather rough:

"Friend, you shall go no further! I wish to be respectful to

the gods, above all to Teutates, the god of travelers, and shall therefore keep you from going astray by making you spend a good night under a good roof, instead of allowing you to wander about the strand, where you would run the risk of being drowned in the rising tide."

"Take care!" replied the unknown rider carrying his hand to the axe that hung from his belt. "Take care!.. If you do not forthwith turn your oxen aside, I shall make a sacrifice to the gods, and shall join you to the offering!"

"The gods cannot choose but protect such a worshipper as yourself," answered Joel, who, smiling, had passed a few words in a low voice to his son. "The gods will prevent you from spending the night on the strand... You'll see – "

Father and son precipitated themselves unexpectedly upon the traveler. Each took him by a leg, and both being large and robust men, raised him erect over his saddle, giving at the same time a thump with their knees to his horse's belly. The animal ran ahead, and Joel and Guilhern respectfully lowered the rider on his feet to the ground. Now in a wild rage, the traveler tried to resist, but before he could draw his knife he was held fast by Joel and Guilhern, one of whom produced a strong rope with which they firmly tied the stranger's feet and hands – all of which was done with great mildness and affability on the part of the story-greedy father and son, who despite the furious wrestling of the stranger, deposited him on the chariot with increasing respect and politeness, seeing they were increasingly struck by the virile

dignity of his face.

Guilhern then mounted the traveler's horse and followed the chariot that Joel led, urging on the oxen with his goad. They were in earnest haste to reach the shelter of their house: the gale increased; the roar of the waves was heard dashing upon the rocks along the coast; streaks of lightning glistened through the darkening clouds; all the signs portended a stormy night.

All these threatening signs notwithstanding, the unknown rider seemed nowise thankful for the hospitality that Joel and his son had pressed upon him. Extended on the bottom of the chariot he was pale with rage. He ground his teeth and puffed at his mouth. But keeping his anger to himself he said not a word. Joel (it must be admitted) passionately loved a story, but he also passionately loved to talk. He turned to the stranger:

"My guest, for such you are now, I give thanks to Teutates, the god of travelers, for having sent me a guest. You should know who I am. Yes, I must tell you who I am, seeing you are to sit down at my hearth;" and unaffected by the stranger's gesture of anger, which seemed to say he cared not to know who Joel was, the latter proceeded:

"My name is Joel ... I am the son of Marik, who was the son of Kirio ... Kirio was the son of Tiras ... Tiras was the son of Gomer ... Gomer was the son of Vorr ... Vorr was the son of Glenan ... Glenan, son of Erer, who was the son of Roderik, chosen brenn of the confederated Gallic army, who two hundred and seventy-six years ago levied tribute upon Rome in order to

punish the Romans for their treachery. I have been chosen brenn of my tribe, which is the tribe of Karnak. From father to son we have been peasants; we cultivate our fields as best we can, following the example left by Coll to our ancestors... We sow more wheat and barley than rye and oats."

The stranger continued nursing his rage rather than paying any attention to these details. Joel continued imperturbably:

"Thirty-two years ago, I married Margarid, the daughter of Dorlern. I have from her three sons and a daughter. The elder boy is there behind us, leading your good black horse, friend guest ... his name is Guilhern. He and several other relatives help me in the cultivation of our field. I raise a good many black sheep that pasture on our meadows, as well as half-wild hogs, as vicious as wolves and who never sleep under a roof... We have some fine meadows in this valley of Alrè... I also raise horses, colts of my spirited stallion Tom-Bras.[B] My son amuses himself raising war and hunting dogs. The hunting dogs are of the breed of a greyhound named Tyntammar; the ones destined for war are the whelps of a large mastiff named Deber-Trud.[C] Our horses and our dogs are so renowned that people come more than twenty leagues from here to buy them. So you see, my guest, that you might have fallen into a worse house."

[B] Ardent.

[C] Man-eater.

The stranger emitted a sigh of suppressed rage, bit what he could reach of his long blonde mustache and raised his eyes to

heaven.

Joel proceeded while pricking his oxen:

"Mikael, my second son, is an armorer at Alrè, four leagues from here... He does not fashion war implements only, but also plow-coulters and long Gallic scythes and axes that are highly prized, because he draws his iron from the mountains of Arres... But there is more, friend traveler... Mikael does other things besides. Before establishing himself at Alrè, he was at Bourges and worked with one of our parents who is a descendant of the first artisan who ever conceived the idea of alloying iron and copper with block-tin, a composition in which the artisans of Bourges excel... Thus my son Mikael came away a worthy pupil of his masters. Oh, if you only saw the things he turns out! You would think the horse's bits, the chariot ornaments, the superb casques of war that Mikael manufactures to be of silver! He has just finished a casque the point of which represents an elk's head with its horns... There is nothing more magnificent!"

"O!" murmured the stranger between his teeth, "how true is the saying: 'The Sword of a Gaul kills but once, his tongue massacres you without end!'"

"Friend guest, so far I can bestow no praise upon your tongue, which is as silent as a fish's. But I shall await your leisure, when it will be your turn to tell me who you are, whence you come, where you are going to, what you have seen in your travels, what wonderful people you have met, and the latest news from the sections of Gaul that you have traversed. While waiting for your

narratives, I shall finish informing you about myself and family."

At this threat the stranger contorted his members in an effort to snap his bonds; he failed; the rope was staunch, and Joel as well as his son made perfect knots.

"I have not yet spoken to you of my third son Albinik the sailor," continued Joel. "He traffics with the island of Great Brittany, as well as all the ports of Gaul, and he goes as far as Spain carrying Gascony wines and salted provisions from Aquitaine... Unfortunately he has been at sea a long time with his lovely wife Meroë; so you will not see them this evening at my house. I told you that besides three sons I had a daughter ... as to her! Oh, as to her!.. See here," added Joel with an air that was at once boastful and tender, "she is the pearl of the family... It is not I only who say so, my wife also, my sons, my whole tribe says the same thing. There is but one voice to sing the praises of Hena, the daughter of Joel ... of Hena, one of the virgins of the Isle of Sen."

"What!" cried the traveler sitting up with a start, the only motion allowed to him by his bonds, that held his feet tied and his arms pinioned behind him. "What? Your daughter? Is she one of the virgins of the Isle of Sen?"

"That seems to astonish and somewhat mollify you, friend guest!"

"Your daughter?" the stranger proceeded, as if unable to believe what he heard. "Your daughter?.. Is she one of the nine druid priestesses of the Isle of Sen?"

"As true as that to-morrow it will be eighteen years since she was born! We have been preparing to celebrate her birthday, and you may attend the feast. The guest seated at our hearth is of our family... You will see my daughter. She is the most beautiful, the sweetest, the wisest of her companions, without thereby detracting from any of them."

"Very well, then," brusquely replied the unknown, "I shall pardon you the violence you committed upon me."

"Hospitable violence, friend."

"Hospitable, or not, you prevented me by force from proceeding to the wharf of Erer, where a boat awaited me until sunset, to take me to the Isle of Sen."

At these words Joel broke out laughing.

"What are you laughing about?" asked the stranger.

"If you were to tell me that a boat with the head of a dog, the wings of a bird and the tail of a fish was waiting for you to take you to the sun, I would laugh as loud, and for the same reason. You are my guest; I shall not insult you by telling you that you lie. But I will tell you, friend, you are joking when you talk of a boat that is to take you to the Isle of Sen. No man, excepting the very oldest druids, have ever or ever will set foot on the Isle of Sen."

"And when you go there to see your daughter?"

"I do not step on the isle. I stop at the little island of Kellor. There I wait for my daughter, and she goes there to meet me."

"Friend Joel," said the traveler, "you have so willed it that I be your guest; I am that, and, as such, I ask a service of you. Take

me to-morrow in your boat to the little island of Kellor."

"Do you know that the ewaghs watch day and night?"

"I know it. It was one of them who was to come for me this evening at the wharf of Erer to conduct me to Talyessin the oldest of the druids, who, at this hour, is at the Isle of Sen with his wife Auria."

"That is true!" exclaimed Joel much surprised. "The last time my daughter came home she said that Talyessin was on the isle since the new year, and that the wife of Talyessin tendered her a mother's care."

"You see, you may believe me, friend Joel. Take me to-morrow to the island of Kellor; I shall see one of the ewaghs."

"I consent. I shall take you to the island of Kellor."

"And now you may loosen my bonds. I swear by Hesus that I shall not seek to elude your hospitality."

"Very well," responded Joel, loosening the stranger's bonds; "I trust my guest's promise."

While this conversation proceeded it had grown pitch dark. But the darkness notwithstanding and the difficulties of the road, the chariot, conducted by the sure hand of Joel, rolled up before his house. His son, Guilhern, who, mounted on the stranger's horse, had followed the van, took an ox-horn that was opened at both ends, and using it for a trumpet blew three times. The signal was speedily answered by a great barking of dogs.

"Here we are at home!" said Joel to the stranger. "Be not alarmed at the barking of the dogs. Listen! That loud voice that

dominates all the others is Deber-Trud's, from whom descends the valiant breed of war dogs that you will see to-morrow. My son Guilhern will take your horse to the stable. The animal will find a good shelter and plenty of provender."

At the sound of Guilhern's trump, one of the family came out of the house holding a resin torch. Guided by the light, Joel led his oxen and the chariot entered the yard.

CHAPTER II

A GALLIC HOMESTEAD

Like all other rural homes, Joel's was spacious and round of shape. The walls consisted of two rows of hurdles, the space between which was filled with a mixture of beaten clay and straw; the inside and outside of the thick wall was plastered over with a layer of fine and fattish earth, which, when dry, was hard as sandstone. The roofing was large and projecting. It consisted of oaken joists joined together and covered with a layer of seaweed laid so thick that it was proof against water.

On either side of the house stood the barns destined for the storage of the harvest, and also for the stables, the sheepfolds, the kennels, the storerooms and the washrooms.

These several structures formed an oblong square that surrounded a large yard, closed up at night with a massive gate. On the outside, a strong palisade, raised on the brow of a deep ditch, enclosed the system of buildings, leaving between it and them an alley about four feet wide. Two large and ferocious war mastiffs were let loose during the night in the vacant space. The palisade had an exterior door that corresponded with an interior one. All were locked at night.

The number of men, women and children – all more or less near relatives of Joel – who cultivated fields in common with him, was considerable. These lodged in the houses attached to the principal building, where they met at noon and in the evening to take their joint meals.

Other homesteads, similarly constructed and occupied by numerous families who cultivated lands in common, lay scattered here and there over the landscape and composed the *ligniez*, or tribe of Karnak, of which Joel was chosen chief.

Upon his entrance in the yard of his homestead, Joel was received with the caresses of his old war dog Deber-Trud, an animal of an iron grey color streaked with black, an enormous head, blood-shot eyes, and of such a high stature that in standing up to caress his master he placed his front paws upon Joel's shoulders. He was a dog of such boldness that he once fought a monstrous bear of the mountains of Arres, and killed him. As to his war qualities, Deber-Trud would have been worthy of figuring with the war pack of Bithert, the Gallic chieftain who at sight of a small hostile troop said disdainfully: "They are not enough for a meal for my dogs."

As Deber-Trud looked over and smelled the traveler with a doubtful air, Joel said to the animal: "Do you not see he is a guest whom I bring home?"

As if he understood the words, Deber-Trud ceased showing any uneasiness about the stranger, and gamboled clumsily ahead of his master into the house. The house was partitioned into

three sections of unequal size. The two smaller ones, separated from each other and from the main hall by oaken panels, were destined, one for Joel and his wife, the other for Hena, their daughter, when she came to visit the family. The vast hall between the two served as a dining-room, and in it were performed the noon and evening in-door labors.

When the stranger entered the hall, a large fire of beech wood, enlivened with dry brush wood and seaweed burned in the hearth, and with its brilliancy rendered superfluous the light of a handsome lamp of burnished copper that hung from three chains of the same metal. The lamp was a present from Mikael the armorer.

Two whole sheep, impaled in long iron spits broiled before the hearth, while salmon and other sea fish boiled in a large pewter pot filled with water, seasoned with vinegar, salt and caraway.

The panels were ornamented with heads of wolves, boars, cerfs and of two wild bulls called *urok*, an animal that began to be rare in the region; beside them hung hunting weapons, such as bows, arrows and slings, and weapons of war, such as the *sparr* and the *matag*, axes, sabres of copper, bucklers of wood covered with the tough skin of seals, and long lances with iron heads, sharpened and barbed and provided with little brass bells, intended to notify the enemy from afar that the Gallic warrior approached, seeing that the latter disdains ambuscades, and loves to fight in the open. There were also fishing nets and harpoons to harpoon the salmon in the shallows when the tide goes out.

To the right of the main door stood a kind of altar, consisting of a block of granite, surmounted and covered by large oak branches freshly cut. A little copper bowl lay on the stone in which seven twigs of mistletoe stood. From above, on the wall, the following inscription looked down:

Abundance and Heaven
Are for the Just and the Pure.
He is Pure and Holy
Who Performs Celestial Works and Pure.

When Joel stepped into the house, he approached the copper basin in which stood the seven branches of mistletoe and reverently put his lips to each. His guest followed his example, and then both walked towards the hearth.

At the hearth was Mamm' Margarid, Joel's wife, with a distaff. She was tall of stature, and wore a short, sleeveless tunic of brown wool over a long robe of grey with narrow sleeves, both tunic and robe being fastened around her waist with her apron string. A white cap, cut square, left exposed her grey hair, that parted over her forehead. Like many other women of her kin, she wore a coral necklace round her neck, bracelets inwrought with garnets and other trinkets of gold and silver fashioned at Autun.

Around Mamm' Margarid played the children of Guilhern and several other of her kin, while their young mothers busied themselves preparing supper.

"Margarid," said Joel to his wife, "I bring a guest to you."

"He is welcome," answered the woman without stopping to spin. "The gods send us a guest, our hearth is his own. The eve of my daughter's birth is propitious."

"May your children when they travel, be received as I am by you," answered the stranger respectfully.

"But you do not yet know what kind of a guest the gods have sent us, Margarid," rejoined Joel; "such a guest as one would request of Ogmi for the long autumn and winter nights; a guest who in the course of his travels has seen so many curious things and wonderful that a hundred evenings would not be too many to listen to his marvelous stories."

Hardly had Joel pronounced these words when, from Mamm' Margarid and the young mothers down to the little boys and girls, all looked at the stranger with the greed of curiosity, expectant of the marvelous stories he was to tell.

"Are we to have supper soon, Margarid?" asked Joel. "Our guest is probably as hungry as myself; I am hungry as a wolf."

"The folk have just gone out to fill the racks of the cattle," answered Margarid; "they will be back shortly. If our guest is willing we shall be pleased of his company at supper."

"I thank the wife of Joel, and shall wait," said the unknown.

"And while waiting," remarked Joel, "you can tell us a story —"

But the traveler interrupted his host and said smiling:

"Friend, as one cup serves for all, so does the same story serve for all... The cup will shortly circulate from lip to lip, and the

story from ear to ear... But now tell me, what is that brass belt for that I see hanging yonder?"

"Have you not also in your country the belt of agility?"

"Explain yourself, Joel."

"Here, with us, at every new moon, the lads of each tribe come to the chief and try on the belt, in order to prove that their girth has not broadened with self-indulgence, and that they have preserved themselves agile and nimble. Those who cannot hitch the belt around themselves, are hissed, are pointed at with derision, and must pay a fine. Accordingly, all see to their stomachs lest they come to look like a leathern bottle on two skittles."

"A good custom. I regret it fell into disuse in my province. And what is the purpose of that big old trunk? It is of precious wood and seems to have seen many years."

"Very many. That is the family trunk of triumph," answered Joel opening the trunk, in which the stranger saw many whitened skulls. One of them, sawn in two, was mounted on a brass foot like a cup.

"These are, no doubt, the heads of enemies who have been killed by your fathers, friend Joel? With us this sort of family charnel houses has long been abandoned."

"With us also. I preserve these heads only out of respect for my ancestors. Since more than two hundred years, the prisoners of war are no longer mutilated. The habit existed in the days of the kings whom Ritha-Gaür shaved of their hair, as you mentioned

before, to make himself a blouse out of their beards. Those were gay days of barbarism, were those days of royalty. I heard my grandfather Kirio say that even as late as in the days of his father, Tiras, the men who went to war returned to their tribes carrying the heads of their enemies stuck to the points of their lances, or trailed by the hair from the breast-plates of their horses. They were then nailed to the doors of the houses for trophies, just as you see yonder on the wall the heads of wild animals."

"With us, in olden days, friend Joel, these trophies were also preserved, but preserved in cedar oil when they were the heads of a hostile chieftain."

"By Hesus! Cedar oil!.. What magnificence!" exclaimed Joel smiling. "That is the way our wives reason: 'for good fish, good sauce.'"

"These relics were with us, as with you, the book from which the young Gaul learned of the exploits of his fathers. Often did the families of the vanquished offer to ransom these spoils; but to relinquish for money a head conquered by oneself or an ancestor was looked upon as an unpardonable crime of avarice and impiousness. I say with you, those barbarous customs passed away with royalty, and with them the days when our ancestors painted their bodies blue and scarlet, and dyed their hair and beard with lime water to impart to them a copper-red hue."

"Without wronging their memory, friend guest, our ancestors must have been unpleasant beings to look upon, and must have resembled the frightful red and blue dragons that ornament the

prows of the vessels of those savage pirates of the North that my son Albinik the sailor and his lovely wife Meroë have told us some curious tales about. But here are our men back from the stables; we shall not have to wait much longer for supper. I see Margarid unspitting the lambs. You shall taste them, friend, and see what a fine taste the salt meadows on which they browse impart to their flesh."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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