

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE CARLOVINGIAN
COINS; OR, THE
DAUGHTERS OF
CHARLEMAGNE

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**The Carolingian Coins; Or,
The Daughters of Charlemagne**

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Eugène Sue

The Carolingian Coins; Or, The Daughters of Charlemagne / A Tale of the Ninth Century

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The Age of Charlemagne is the watershed of the history of the present era. The rough barbarian flood that poured over Western Europe reaches in that age a turning point of which Charlemagne is eminently the incarnation. The primitive physical features of the barbarian begin to be blunted, or toned down by a new force that has lain latent in him, but that only then begins to step into activity – the spiritual, the intellectual powers. The Age of Charlemagne is the age of the first conflict between the intellectual and the brute in the principal branches of the races that occupied Europe. The conflict raged on a national scale, and it raged in each particular individual. The colossal stature, physical and mental, of Charlemagne himself typifies the epoch. Brute instincts of the most primitive and savage, intellectual aspirations of the loftiest are intermingled, each contends for supremacy – and alternately wins it, in the monarch, in his court and in his people.

The Carolingian Coins; or, The Daughters of Charlemagne is the ninth of the brilliant series of historical novels written by Eugene Sue under the title, *The Mysteries of the People; or, History of a Proletarian Family Across the Ages*. The age and its people are portrayed in a charming and chaste narrative, that is fittingly and artistically brought to a close by a veritable epopee – the Frankish conquest of Brittany, and, as fittingly, serves to introduce the next epopee – the Northman's invasion of Gaul – dealt with in the following story, *The Iron Arrow Head; or, The Buckler Maiden*.

Daniel de Leon.

New York, May, 1905.

PART I.

AIX-LA-CHAPELLE

CHAPTER I.

AMAEI AND VORTIGERN

Towards the commencement of the month of November of the year 811, a numerous cavalcade was one afternoon wending its way to the city of Aix-la-Chapelle, the capital of the Empire of Charles the Great – an Empire that had been so rapidly increased by rapidly succeeding conquests over Germany, Saxony, Bavaria, Bohemia, Hungary, Italy and Spain, that Gaul, as formerly during the days of the Roman Emperors, was again but a province among the vast domains. The ambitious designs of Charles Martel had been realized. Childeric, the last scion of the Merovingian dynasty, had been got rid of. Martel's descendants took his seat, and now the Hammerer's grandson wielded the sceptre of Clovis over an immensely wider territory.

Eight or ten cavalry soldiers rode in advance of the cavalcade. A little apart from the smaller escort, four cavaliers ambled leisurely. Two of them wore brilliant armor after the German fashion. One of these was accompanied by a venerable old man of a martial and open countenance. His long beard, snow white as his hair that was half hidden under a fur cap, fell over his chest. He wore a Gallic blouse of grey wool, held around his waist by a belt, from which hung a long sword with an iron hilt. His ample hose of rough white fabric reached slightly below his knees and left exposed his tightly laced leather leggings, that ended in his boots whose heels were armed with spurs. The old man was Amael, who under the assumed Frankish name of Berthoald had, eighty years before, saved the life of Charles Martel at the battle of Poitiers against the Arabs, had declined the post offered him by Charles, as jailer of the last descendant of Clovis, and, finally, smitten by conscience, had renounced wealth and dignity under the Frankish enslavers of Gaul, and returned to his people and country of Brittany, or Armorica, as the Romans named it. Amael now touched his hundredth year. His great age and his somewhat portly stature notwithstanding, he still looked full of vigor. He handled with dexterity the black horse that he rode and whose spirit seemed no wise abated by the long road it had traveled. From time to time, Amael turned round upon his saddle in order to cast a look of paternal solicitude upon his grandson Vortigern, a lad of hardly eighteen years, who was accompanied by the other of the two Frankish warriors. The face of Vortigern, of exceptional beauty for a man, was framed in long chestnut ringlets, that, escaping from his scarlet coif, tumbled down below a chin that was as dainty as a woman's. His large blue eyes, fringed with lashes black as his bold arched eyebrows, had an air at once ingenuous and resolute. His red lips, shaded by the down of adolescence, revealed at every smile two rows of teeth white as enamel. A slightly aquiline nose, a fresh and pure complexion somewhat tanned by the sun, completed the harmonious make-up of the youth's charming visage. His clothes, made after the fashion of his grandfather's, differed from them only in a touch of elegance that bespoke a mother's hand, tenderly proud of her son's comely appearance. Accordingly, the blue blouse of the lad was ornamented around the neck, over the shoulders and at the extremities of the sleeves with embroideries of white wool, while a calfskin belt, from which hung a sword with polished hilt, encircled his supple waist. His linen hose half hid his deerskin leggings, that were tightly laced to his nervy limbs and rejoined his boots, made of tanned skin and equipped with large copper spurs that glistened like gold. Although his right arm was held in a scarf of some black material, Vortigern handled his horse with his left hand with as much ease as skill. For traveling companion he had a young warrior of agreeable mien, bold and mercurial, alert and frolicsome. The mobility of his face recalled in nothing the stolidity of the German. His

name was Octave. Roman by birth, in appearance and character, his inexhaustible Southern wit often succeeded in unwrinkling the brow of his young companion. The latter, however, would soon again relapse into a sort of silent and somber reverie. Thus for some time absorbed in sadness, he walked his horse slowly, when Octave broke in gaily in a tone of friendly reproach:

"By Bacchus! You still are preoccupied and silent."

"I am thinking of my mother," answered the youth, smothering a sigh. "I am thinking of my mother, of my sister and of my country."

"Come now; you should, on the contrary, chase away, such saddening thoughts. To the devil with sadness. Long live joy."

"Octave, gayness ill beseems a prisoner. I cannot share your light-heartedness."

"You are no prisoner, only a hostage. No bond binds you but your own word; prisoners, on the contrary, are led firmly pinioned to the slave market. Your grandfather and yourself ride freely, with us for your companions, and we are escorting you, not to a slave market, but to the palace of the Emperor Charles the Great, the mightiest monarch of the whole world. Finally, prisoners are disarmed; your grandfather as well as yourself carry your swords."

"Of what use are our swords now to us?" replied Vortigern with painful bitterness. "Brittany is vanquished."

"Such are the chances of war. You bravely did your duty as a soldier. You fought like a demon at the side of your grandfather. He was not wounded, and you only received a lance-thrust. By Mars, the valiant god of war, your blows were so heavy in the melee that you should have been hacked to pieces."

"We would not then have survived the disgrace of Armorica."

"There is no disgrace in being overcome when one has defended himself bravely – above all when the forces that one resisted and decimated, were the veteran bands of the great Charles."

"Not one of your Emperor's soldiers should have escaped."

"Not one?" merrily rejoined the young Roman. "What, not even myself? Not even I, who take such pains to be a pleasant traveling companion, and who tax my eloquence to entertain you? Verily, you are not at all grateful!"

"Octave, I do not hate you personally; I hate your race; they have, without provocation, carried war and desolation into my country."

"First of all, my young friend, I am not of the Frankish race. I am a Roman. Gladly do I relinquish to you those gross Germans, who are as savage as the bears of their forests. But, let it be said among ourselves, this war against Brittany was not without reason. Did not you Bretons, possessed of the very devil as you are, attack last year and exterminate the Frankish garrison posted at Vannes?"

"And by what right did Charles cause our frontiers to be invaded by his troops twenty-five years ago? His whim stood him instead of right."

The conversation between Vortigern and Octave was interrupted by the voice of Arael, who, turning in his saddle, called his grandson to him. The latter, anxious to hasten to his grandfather, and also yielding to an impulse of anger that the discussion with the young Roman had provoked, brusquely clapped his spurs to the flanks of his charger. The animal, thus suddenly urged, leaped forward so violently that in two or three bounds it would have left Arael behind, had not Vortigern, restraining his mount with a firm hand, made the animal rear on its haunches. The youth then resumed his walk abreast of his grandfather and the other Frankish warrior, who, turning to the old man, remarked:

"I do not marvel at the superiority of your Breton cavalry, when a lad of the age of your grandson, and despite the wound that must smart him, can handle his horse in such a manner. You yourself, for a centenarian, are as firm in your saddle as the lad himself. Horns of the devil!"

"The lad was barely five years old when his father and I used to place him on the back of the colts raised on our meadows," answered the old man. The recollection of those peaceful happy days

now ended, cast a shadow of sorrow upon Amael's face. He remained silent for a moment. Thereupon, addressing Vortigern, he said:

"I called you to inquire whether your wound had ceased smarting."

"Grandfather, I hardly feel it any longer. If you allow me, I would free my arm of the embarrassing scarf."

"No; your wound might open again. No imprudence. Remember your mother, and also your sister and her husband, both of whom love you like a brother."

"Alas! Will I never see that mother, that sister, that brother whom I love so dearly?"

"Patience!" answered Amael in an undertone, so as not to be heard by the Frankish warrior at his side. "You may see Brittany again a good deal sooner than you expect – prudence and patience!"

"Truly?" inquired the youth impetuously. "Oh, grandfather, what happiness!"

The old man made a sign to Vortigern to control himself, and then proceeded aloud: "I am always afraid lest the fatigue of traveling inflame your wound anew. Fortunately, we must be approaching the end of our journey. Not so, Hildebrad?" he added, turning to the warrior.

"Before sunset we shall be at Aix-la-Chapelle," answered the Frank. "But for the hill that we are about to ascend, you could see the city at a distance."

"Return to your companion, my child," said Amael; "above all, place your arm back in its scarf, and be careful how you manage your horse. A too-sudden lurch might re-open the wound that is barely closed."

The young man obeyed and gently walked his horse back to Octave. Thanks to the mobility of the impressions of youth, Vortigern felt appeased and comforted by the words of his grandfather that had made him look forward to a speedy return to his family and country. The soothing thought was so visibly reflected in his candid features that Octave met him with the merry remark:

"What a magician that grandfather of yours must be! You rode off preoccupied and fretful, angrily burying your spurs into the flanks of your horse, who, poor animal, had done nothing to excite your wrath. Now, behold! You return as placid as a bishop astride of his mule."

"The magic of my grandfather has chased away my sadness. You speak truly, Octave."

"So much the better. I shall now be free, without fear of reviving your chagrin, to give a loose to the increasing joy that I feel at every step."

"Why does your joy increase at every step, my dear companion?"

"Because even the dullest horse becomes livelier and more spirited in the measure that he approaches the house where he knows that he will find provender."

"Octave, I did not know you for such a glutton!"

"In that case, my looks are deceptive, because a glutton, that am I – terribly gluttonous of those delicate dainties that are found only at court, and that constitute my provender."

"What!" exclaimed Vortigern ingenuously. "Is that great Emperor, whose name fills the world, surrounded by a court where nothing is thought of but dainties and gluttony?"

"Why, of course," answered Octave gravely and hardly able to refrain from laughing outright at the innocence of the young Breton. "Why, of course. And what is more, more so than any of the counts, of the dukes, of the men of learning, and of the bishops at court, does the Emperor himself lust after the dainties that I have in mind. He always keeps a room contiguous to his own full of them. Because in the stillness of the night –"

"He rises to eat cakes and, perhaps, even sweetmeats!" exclaimed the lad with disdain, while Octave, unable longer to contain himself, was laughing in his face. "I can think of nothing more unbecoming than guzzling on the part of one who governs empires!"

"What's to be done, Vortigern? Great princes must be pardoned for some peccadillos. Moreover, with them it is a family failing – the daughters of the Emperor –"

"His daughters also are given to this ugly passion for gormandizing?"

"Alas! They are no less gluttonous than their father. They have six or seven dainties of their own – most appetizing and most appetized."

"Oh, fie!" cried Vortigern. "Fie. Have they perhaps, also next to their bed-chambers, whole rooms stocked with dainties?"

"Calm your legitimate indignation, my boiling-over friend. Young girls can not allow themselves quite so much comfort. That's good enough for the Emperor Charles, who is no longer nimble on his legs. He is getting along in years. He has the gout in his left foot, and his girth is enormous."

"That is not to be wondered at. Bound is the stomach to protrude with such a gourmand!"

"You will understand that being so heavy on his feet, this mighty Emperor is not able, like his daughters, to snatch at a stray dainty on the wing, like birdies in an orchard, who nibble lovingly here at a red cherry, there at a blushing apple, yonder at a bunch of gilded grapes. No, no; with his august paunch and his gouty foot, the august Charles would be wholly unable to snap the dainties on the wing. The attention due to his empire would lose too much. Hence the Emperor keeps near at hand, within easy reach, a room full of dainties, where, at night, he finds his provender – "

"Octave!" exclaimed Vortigern, interrupting the young Roman with a haughty mien. "I do not wish to be trifled with. At first, I took your words seriously. The laughter that you are hardly able to repress, and that despite yourself breaks out at frequent intervals, shows me that you are trifling with me."

"Come, my brave lad, do not wax angry. I am not bantering. Only that, out of respect for the candor of your age, I have used a figure of speech to tell the truth. In short, the dainty that I, Charles, his daughters, and, by Venus! everybody at court lusts after more or less greedily is – love!"

"Love," echoed Vortigern, blushing and for the first time dropping his eyes before Octave; but as his uneasiness increased, he proceeded to inquire: "But, in order to enjoy love, the daughters of Charles are surely married?"

"Oh, innocence of the Golden Age! Oh, Armorican naïveness! Oh, Gallic chastity!" cried Octave. But noticing that the young Breton frowned at hearing his native land ridiculed, the Roman proceeded: "Far be it from me to jest about your brave country. I shall tell you without further circumlocution – I shall tell you that Charles' daughters are not married; for reasons that he has never cared to explain to anyone, he never has wanted them to have a husband."¹

"Out of pride, no doubt!"

"Oh, oh, on that subject many things are said. The long and short of it is that he does not wish to part with them. He adores them, and, except he goes to war, he always has them near him during his journeys, along with his concubines – or, if you prefer the term, his 'dainties.' The word may be less shocking to your prudery. You must know that after having successively married and discarded his five wives, Desiderata, Hildegard, Frustrade, Himiltrude and Luitgarde, the Emperor provided himself with an assortment of dainties, from which assortment I shall mention to you incidentally the juicy Mathalgarde, the sugary Gerswinthe, the tart Regina, the toothsome Adalinde – not to mention many other saints on this calendar of love. For you must know that the great Charles resembles the great Solomon not in wisdom only; he resembles him also in his love for *seraglios*, as the Arabs call them. But, by the way of the Emperor's daughters. Listen to a little tale. Imma, one of these young princesses, was a charming girl. One fine day she became smitten with Charles' archchaplain, named Eginhard. An archchaplain being, of course, arch-amorous, Imma received Eginhard every night secretly in her chamber – to discuss chapel affairs, I surmise. Now, then, it so happened that during one winter's night there fell so very much snow that the ground was all covered. A little before

¹ "The daughters of the Emperor Charles always accompanied him on his trips into the interior of Gaul. They were handsome beauties; he loved them passionately; he never allowed them to marry, and kept them all with him till his death. Although happy in everything else, Charles experienced in them the malignity of adverse fortune; but he buried his chagrin, and behaved towards them as if they had never given cause for evil suspicions, and as if rumor had never been busy with their names." —*Chronicles of Eginhard*, p. 145, *Collected History of France*.

dawn, Eginhard takes his departure from his lady-love; but just as he is about to climb down from the window – an ordinary route with lovers – he beholds by the light of a superb full moon that the ground is one sheet of white snow. To himself he thinks: 'Imma and I are lost! I cannot get out without leaving the imprint of my steps in the snow' – "

"And what did he do?" asked Vortigern, more and more interested in the story that threw an undefined sense of uneasiness in his heart. "How did the two escape from their perilous plight, the poor lovers!"

"Imma, a robustious doxy, a girl both of head and resolution, descends by the window, bravely takes the archchaplain on her back, and, without tripping under the beloved burden, crosses a wide courtyard that separates her quarters from one of the corridors of the palace. Although weighted down by an archchaplain, Imma had such small feet that the traces left by them could not choose but keep suspicion away from Eginhard. Unfortunately, however, as you will discover when you arrive at Aix-la-Chapelle, the Emperor is possessed of a demon of curiosity, and has had his palace so constructed that, from a kind of terrace, contiguous to his own room and which dominates the rest of the buildings, he is able to discover as from an observatory, all who enter, go out, or cross the open space. Now, then, the Emperor, who frequently rises at night, saw, thanks to the brilliant moonlight, his daughter crossing the yard with the amorous fardel."

"Charles' anger must have been terrible!"

"Yes, terrible for an instant. Soon, however, no doubt greatly elated at having procreated a maid who was able to carry an archchaplain on her back, the august Emperor pardoned the guilty couple. After that they lived lovingly in peace and joy."

"And yet that archchaplain was a priest? What of the sanctity of the clergy!"

"Ho, ho! my young friend. The Emperor's daughters are far from failing in esteem for priests. Bertha, another of his daughters, desperately esteems Enghilbert, the handsome Abbot of St. Riquier. Fairness, nevertheless, compels me to admit that one of Bertha's sisters, named Adeltrude, esteemed with no less vehemence Count Lambert, one of the most intrepid officers of the imperial army. As to little Rothilde, another of the Emperor's daughters, she did not withhold her lively esteem from Romuald, who made his name glorious in our wars against Bohemia. I shall not speak of the other princesses. It is fully six months that I have been away from court. I would be afraid to do them injustice. Nevertheless, I am free to say that the Crosier and the Sword have generally contended with each other for the amorous tenderness of the daughters of Charles. Yet I must except Thetralde, the youngest of the set. She is still too much of a novice to esteem any one. She is barely fifteen. She is a flower, or rather, the bud of a flower that is about to blossom. I never have seen anything more charming. When I last departed from the court Thetralde gave promise of eclipsing all her sisters and nieces with the sweetness and freshness of her beauty, because, and I had forgotten this detail, my dear friend, the daughters of Charles' sons are brought up with his own daughters; and are no less charming than their aunts. You will see them all. Your admiration will have but to choose between Adelaid, Atula, Gonarade, Bertha or Theodora."

"What! Do all these young girls inhabit the Emperor's palace?"

"Certainly, without counting their servants, their governesses, their chambermaids, their readers, their singers and innumerable other women of their retinue. By Venus! My Adonis, there are more petticoats to be seen in the imperial palace than cuirasses or priests' gowns. The Emperor loves as much to be surrounded by women as by soldiers and abbots, without forgetting the learned men, the rhetoricians, the dialecticians, the instructors, the peripatetic pedagogues and the grammarians. The great Charles, as you must know, is as passionately fond of grammar as of love, war, the chase, or choir chants. In his grammarian's ardor, the Emperor invents words – "

"What!"

"Just as I am telling you. For instance: How do you call in the Gallic tongue the month in which we now are?"

"The month of November."

"So do we Italians, barbarians that we are! But the Emperor has changed all that by virtue of his own sovereign and grammatical will. His peoples, provided they can obey him without the words strangling them, are to say, instead of November, 'Herbismanoth'; instead of October, Windumnermanoth."

"Octave, you are trying to make merry at my expense."

"Instead of March, 'Lenzhimanoth'; instead of May – "

"Enough! enough! for pity's sake!" cried Vortigern. "Those barbarous names make me shiver. What! can there be throats in existence able to articulate such sounds?"

"My young friend, Frankish throats are capable of everything. I warn you, prepare your ears for the most uncouth concert of raucous, guttural, savage words that you ever heard, unless you have ever heard frogs croaking, tom-cats squalling, bulls bellowing, asses braying, stags belling and wolves howling – all at once! Excepting the Emperor himself and his family, who can somewhat handle the Roman and the Gallic languages, the only two languages, in short, that are human, you will hear nothing spoken but Frankish at that German court where everything is German, that is to say, barbarous; the language, the customs, the manners, the meals, the dress. In short, Aix-la-Chapelle is no longer in Gaul. It now lies in Germany absolutely."

"And yet Charles reigns over Gaul! – is not that enough of a disgrace for my country? The Emperor who governs us by no right other than conquest, is surrounded with a Frankish court, and with officers and generals of the same stock, who do not deign even to speak our tongue. Shame and disgrace to us!"

"There you are at it again, plunging anew into sadness. Vortigern! By Bacchus! Why do you not imitate my philosophy of indifference? Does, perchance, my race not descend from that haughty Roman stock that made the world to tremble only a few centuries ago? Have I not seen the throne of the Caesars occupied by hypocritical, ambitious, greedy and debauched Popes, with their black-gowned and tonsured militia? Have not the descendants of our haughty Roman Emperors gone in their imbecile idleness to vegetate in Constantinople, where they still indulge the dreams of Universal Empire? Have not the Catholic priests chased from their Olympus the charming deities of our fathers? Have they not torn down, mutilated and ravished the temples, statues, altars – the master-works of the divine art of Rome and Greece? Go to, Vortigern, and follow my example! Instead of fretting over a ship-wrecked past, let's drink and forget! Let our fair mistresses be our Saints, and their couches our altars! Let our Eucharist be a flower-decked cup, and for liturgy, let's sing the amorous couplets of Tibullus, of Ovid, and of Horace. Yes, indeed, and take my advice: let's drink, love and enjoy life! That's truly to live! You will never again come across such an opportunity. The gods of joy are sending you to the Emperor's court."

"What do you mean?" queried Vortigern almost mechanically, and feeling his inexperienced sense, though not perverted, yet dazzled by the facile and sensuous philosophy of Octave. "What would you have one become in the midst of that court so strange to me, who have been brought up in our rustic Brittany?"

"Child that you are! A swarm of beautiful eyes will be focused upon you!"

"Octave, you are mocking again. Am I to be taken notice of? I, a field laborer's son? I, a poor Breton prisoner on parole?"

"And do you think your reputation for a bedevilled Breton goes for nothing? More than once have I heard told of the furious curiosity with which, about twenty-five years ago, the hostages taken to Aix-la-Chapelle, at the time of the first war against your country, inspired everyone at court. The most charming women wished to behold those indomitable Bretons whom only the great Charles had been able to vanquish. Their haughty and rude mien, the interest centred in their defeat, everything, down to their strange costumes, drew upon them the looks and the sympathy of the women, who, in Germany, are ever strongly prone to love. The fascinating enthusiasts of then are now become

mothers and grandfathers. But, happily, they have daughters and grand-daughters who are fully able to appreciate you. I can assure you that I, who know the court and its ways, had I only your youth, your good looks, your wound, your graceful horsemanship and your renown as a Breton, would guarantee myself the lover of all those beauties, and that within a week."

CHAPTER II.

THE COURTYARD OF THE PALACE

The conversation between the young Roman and Vortigern was at this point interrupted by Amael, who, turning back to his grandson and extending his arm towards the horizon said to him:

"Look yonder, my child; that is the Queen of the cities of the Empire of Charles the Great – the city of Aix-la-Chapelle."

Vortigern hastened to join his grandfather, whose eyes he now, perhaps for the first time, sought to avoid with not a little embarrassment. Octave's words sounded wrong on his ears, even dangerous; and he reproached himself for having listened to them with some pleasure. Having reached Amael, Vortigern cast his eyes in the direction pointed out by the old man, and saw at still a great distance an imposing mass of buildings, close to which rose the high steeple of a basilica. Presently, he distinguished the roofs and terraces of a cluster of houses dimly visible through the evening mist and stretching out along the horizon. It was the Emperor's palace and the basilica of Aix-la-Chapelle. Vortigern contemplated with curiosity the, to him, new panorama, while Hildebrad, who had cantered ahead to make some inquiries from a cartman coming from the city, now returned to the Bretons, saying:

"The Emperor is hourly expected at the palace. The forerunners have announced his approach. He is coming from a journey in the north of Gaul. Let's hasten to ride in ahead of him so that we may salute him on his arrival."

The riders quickened their horses' steps, and before sunset they were entering the outer court of the palace – a vast space surrounded by many lodges of variously shaped roofs and architecture, and furnished with innumerable windows. Agreeable to a unique plan, with many of these structures the ground floor was wholly open and had the appearance of a shed whose massive stone pillars supported the masonry of the upper tiers of floors. A crowd of subaltern officers, of servants, and slaves of the palace, lived and lodged under these sheds, open to the four winds of heaven and heated in winter by means of large furnaces that were kept lighted night and day. This bizarre architecture was conceived by the ingenuity of the Emperor. It enabled him, from his observatory, to see with all the greater ease all that happened in these wall-less apartments. Several long corridors, profusely ornamented with richly sculptured columns and porticos after the fashion of Rome, connected with another set of buildings. A square pavilion, raised considerably above ground, dominated the system of structures. Octave called Vortigern's attention to a sort of balcony located in front of the pavilion. It was the Emperor's observatory. Everywhere a general stir announced the approaching arrival of Charles. Clerks, soldiers, women, officers, rhetoricians, monks and slaves crossed one another in great haste, while several bishops, anxious to present the first homages to the Emperor, were speeding towards the peristyle of the palace. So instantly was the Emperor expected and such was the hurly at the event, that when the cavalcade, of which Vortigern and his grandfather were a part, entered the court, several people, deceived by the martial appearance of the troupe, began to cry: "The Emperor!" "Here is the Emperor's escort!" The cry flew from mouth to mouth, and in an instant the spacious court was filled with a compact mass of servitors and pursuivants, through which the escort of the two Bretons was hardly able to break its way in order to reach a place near the principal portico. Hildebrad had chosen the spot in order to be among the first to meet Charles and to present to him the hostages whom he brought from Brittany. The crowd discovered its mistake in acclaiming the Emperor, but the false rumor had penetrated the palace and immediately the concubines of Charles, his daughters and grand-daughters, their servants and attendants, rushed out and grouped themselves on a spacious terrace above the portico, near which the two Bretons, together with their escort, had taken their stand.

"Raise your eyes, Vortigern," Octave said to his companion. "Look and see what a bevy of beauties the Emperor's palace contains."

Blushing, the young Breton glanced towards the terrace and remained struck with astonishment at the sight of some twenty-five or thirty women, all of whom were either daughters or grand-daughters of Charles, together with his concubines. They were clad in the Frankish fashion, and presented the most seductive variety of faces, color of hair, shapes and beauty imaginable. There were among them brunettes and blondes, women of reddish and of auburn hair, some tall, others stout, and yet others thin and slender. It was a complete display of Germanic feminine types – from the tender maid up to the stately matron of forty years. The eyes of Vortigern fell with preference upon a girl of not more than fifteen, clad in a tunic of pale green embroidered with silver. Nothing sweeter could be imagined than her rosy and fresh face crowned and set off by long and thick strands of blonde hair; her delicate neck, white as a swan's, seemed to undulate under the weight of her magnificent head of hair. Another maid of about twenty years – a pronounced brunette, robust, with challenging eyes, black hair, and clad in a tunic of orange – leaned on the balustrade, supporting her chin in one hand, close to the younger blonde, on whose shoulders she familiarly rested her right arm. Each held in her hand a nose-gay of rosemary, whose fragrance they inhaled from time to time, all the while conversing in a low voice and contemplating the group of riders with increasing curiosity. They had learned that the escort was not the Emperor's, but that it brought the Breton hostages.

"Give thanks to my friendship, Vortigern," Octave whispered to the lad. "I am going to place you in evidence, and to display you at your true worth." Saying this, Octave covertly gave Vortigern's horse such a sharp touch of his whip under the animal's belly that, had the Breton been less of a horseman, he had been thrown by the violence of the bound made by his mount. Thus unexpectedly stung, the animal reared, poised himself dangerously for a moment and then leaped so high that Vortigern's coif grazed the bottom of the terrace where the group of women stood. The blonde young girl grew pale with terror, and hiding her face in her hands, exclaimed: "Unhappy lad! He is killed! Poor young man!"

Yielding to the impulse of his age as well as to a sense of pride at finding himself the object of the attention of the crowd that was gathered around him, Vortigern severely chastised his horse, whose leaps and bounds threatened to become dangerous. But the lad, preserving his presence of mind and drawing upon his skill, displayed so much grace and vigor in the struggle, despite his right arm's being held in the scarf, that the crowd wildly clapped its hands and cried: "Glory to the Breton!" "Honor to the Breton!" Two bouquets of rosemary fell, at that moment, at the feet of the horse that, brought at last under control, champed his bit and pawed the ground with his hoofs. Vortigern raised his head towards the terrace whence the bouquets had just been thrown at him, when a formidable din arose from a distance, followed immediately by the cry, echoed and re-echoed: "The Emperor!" "The Emperor!"

At the announcement, all the women forthwith left the balcony to descend and receive the monarch under the portico of the palace.

While the crowd swayed back and forward, crying: "Long live Charles!" "Long live Charles the Great!" the grandson of Amael saw a troop of riders approaching at a gallop. They might have been taken for equestrian statues of iron. Mounted upon chargers caparisoned in iron, their own iron casques hid their faces; cuirassed in iron and gloved in iron, they wore leggings of iron, and bucklers of the same metal. The last rays of the westering sun shone from the points of their iron lances. In short, nothing was heard but the clash of iron. At the head of these cavaliers, whom he preceded, and, like them, cased in iron from head to foot, rode a man of colossal stature. Hardly arrived before the principal portico, he alighted slowly from his horse and ran limping towards the group of women who there awaited him, calling out to them, as he ran, in a little shrill and squeaky voice that contrasted strangely with his enormous build:

"Good-day, little ones. Good-day, dear daughters. Good-day to all of you, my darlings." Without giving any heed to the cheers of the crowd and to the respectful salutations of the bishops and other dignitaries, who hurried to meet him, the Emperor Charles, that giant in iron, disappeared within the palace, followed by his feminine cohort.

CHAPTER III. IN THE GALLERIES OF THE PALACE

Amael and his grandson were lodged in one of the upper chambers of the palace, whither they were conducted by Hildebrad to rest after the fatigue of their recent journey. Supper was served to them and they were left to retire for the night.

At break of day the next morning, Octave knocked at the door of the two Bretons and informed them that the Emperor wished to see them. The Roman urged Vortigern to clothe himself at his best. The Breton lad had not much to choose from. He had with him only two suits of clothes, the one he wore on the journey, another, green of color and embroidered with orange wool. This notwithstanding, thanks to the fresh and new clothes, in which the colors were harmoniously blended and which enhanced the attractiveness of the charming face as well as the gracefulness of his supple stature, Vortigern seemed to the critical eyes of Octave worthy of making an honorable appearance before the mightiest Emperor in the world. The centenarian could not restrain a smile at hearing the praises bestowed upon the figure of his grandson by the young Roman, who advised him to draw tighter the belt of his sword, claiming that, if one's figure is good, it was but right to exhibit it. While giving his advices to Vortigern in his wonted good humor, Octave whispered in his friend's ear:

"Did you notice yesterday the nose-gays that fell at the feet of your horse? Did you notice who the girls were from whom the bouquets came?"

"I think I did," stammered the young Breton in answer, and he blushed to the roots of his hair, while despite himself, his thoughts flew to the charming young blonde. "It seems to me," he added, "that I saw the two bouquets fall."

"Oh, it seems to you, hypocrite! Nevertheless, it was my whip that brought down the two bouquets! And do you know what imperial hands it was that threw them down in homage to your address and courage?"

"Were the bouquets thrown down by imperial hands?"

"Yes, indeed, seeing that Thetralde, the timid blonde child and Hildrude, the tall and bold brunette, are both daughters of Charles. One of them was dressed in a green robe of the color of your blouse, the other in orange of the color of your embroidery. By Venus! Are you not a favored mortal? Two conquests at one clap!"

Engaged at the other end of the chamber, Amael did not overhear the words of Octave that were turning Vortigern's face as scarlet as the color of his chaperon's cloak. The preparations for the presentation being concluded, the two hostages followed their guide to appear before the Emperor. After crossing an infinite number of passages and mounting and descending an equal number of stairs, in all of which they encountered more women than men, the number of women lodged in the Imperial Palace being prodigious, the Bretons were led through vast halls. To describe the sumptuous magnificence of these galleries would be no less impossible than to enumerate the pictures with which their halls were ornamented. Artisans, brought from Constantinople, where, at the time, the school of Byzantine painting flourished, had covered the walls with gigantic designs. In one place the conquests of Cyrus over the Persians were displayed; at another, the atrocities of the tyrant Phalaris, witnessing the agonies of his victims, who were led to be burned alive in a brass caldron red with heat; at still another place, the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus was reproduced; the conquests of Alexander and Hannibal, and many other heroic subjects. One of the galleries of the palace was consecrated wholly to the battles of Charles Martel. He was seen triumphing over Saxons and Arabs, who, chained at his feet, implored his clemency. So striking was the resemblance that while crossing the hall Amael cried out:

"It is he! Those are his features! That was his bearing! He lives again! It is Charles!"

"One would think you recognize an old acquaintance," observed the young Roman, smiling. "Are you renewing your acquaintance with Charles Martel?"

"Octave," answered the old man melancholically, "I am one hundred years old – I fought at the battle of Poitiers against the Arabs."

"Among the troops of Charles Martel?"

"I saved his life," answered Amael, contemplating the gigantic picture; and speaking to himself, he proceeded with a sigh: "Oh, how many recollections, sweet and sad, do not those days bring back to me! My beloved mother, my sweet Septimine!"

Octave regarded the old man with increasing astonishment, but, suddenly collecting himself, he grew pensive and hastened his steps, followed by the two hostages. Dazzled by the sights before him Vortigern examined with the curiosity of his age the riches of all kinds that were heaped up all around him. He could not refrain from stopping before two objects that attracted his attention above all others. The first was a piece of furniture of precious wood enriched with gilt mouldings. Pipes of copper, brass and tin, of different thicknesses rose above each other in tiers on one side of the wooden structure. "Octave," asked the young Breton, "what kind of furniture is this?"

"It is a Greek organ that was recently sent to Charles by the Emperor of Constantinople. The instrument is truly marvelous. With the aid of brass vessels and of bellows made of ox-hides, which are concealed from view, the air enters these tubes, and, when they are played upon, one time you think you hear the rumbling of thunder, another time, the gentle notes of the lyre or of cymbals. But look yonder, near that large table of massive gold where the city of Constantinople is drawn in relief, there you see no less ingenious an object. It is a Persian clock, sent to the Emperor only four years ago by Abdhallah, the King of Persia." Saying this, Octave pointed out to the young Breton and his grandfather, who became no less interested than Vortigern himself, a large time-piece of gilt bronze. Figures denoting the twelve hours surrounded the dial, which was placed in the centre of a miniature palace made of bronze, and likewise gilt. Twelve gates built in arcades were seen at the foot of the monumental imitation. "When the hour strikes," Octave explained to the Bretons, "a certain number of brass balls, equal in number to the hour, drop upon a little cymbal. At the same moment, these gates fly open, as many of them as the corresponding hour, and out of each a cavalier, armed with lance and shield, rides forth. If it strikes one, two or three o'clock, one, two or three gates open, the cavaliers ride out, salute with their lances, return within, and the gates close upon them."

"This is truly a marvelous contrivance!" exclaimed Amael. "And are the names of the men known who fashioned these prodigies around us, these magnificent paintings, that gold table where a whole city is reproduced in relief, this organ, this clock, in short, all these marvels! Surely their authors must have been glorified!"

"By Bacchus, Amael, your question is droll," answered Octave smiling. "Who cares for the names of the obscure slaves who have produced these articles?"

"But the names of Clovis, of Brunhild, of Clotaire, of Charles Martel will survive the ages!" murmured the centenarian bitterly to himself, while the young Roman remarked to Vortigern:

"Let us hurry; the Emperor is waiting for us. It will take whole days, months and years to admire in detail the treasures that this palace is full of. It is the favorite resort of the Emperor. And yet, as much as his residence at Aix-la-Chapelle, he loves his old castle of Heristal, the cradle of his mighty stock of mayors of the palace, where he has heaped miracles of art."

CHAPTER IV. CHARLEMAGNE

Following their guide, the two hostages left the sumptuous and vast galleries, and ascended, closely behind Octave, a spiral staircase that led to the private apartment of the Emperor, the apartment around which wound the balcony that served as observatory to Charles. Two richly dressed chamberlains stood in the outer vestibule. "Stay for me here," Octave said to the Bretons; "I shall notify the Emperor that you await his pleasure, and learn whether he wishes to receive you at this moment."

Despite his race and family hatred for the Frankish Kings or Emperors, the conquerors and oppressors of Gaul, Vortigern experienced a thrill of emotion at the thought of finding himself face to face with the mighty Charles, the sovereign of almost all Europe. This first emotion was speedily joined by a second – that mighty Emperor was the father of Thetralde, the entrancing maid, who, the evening before, had thrown her bouquet to the youth. Vortigern's thoughts never a moment fell upon the brunette Hildrude. An instant later Octave reappeared and beckoned to Amael and his grandson to step in, while in an undertone he warned them: "Crook your knees low before the Emperor; it is the custom."

The centenarian cast a look at Vortigern with a negative sign of the head. The youth understood, and the Bretons stepped into the bed-chamber of Charles, whom they found in the company of his favorite Eginhard, the archchaplain whom Imma had one night bravely carried on her back. A servitor of the imperial chamber awaited the orders of his master.

When the two hostages entered the room, the monarch, whose stature, though now unarmed, preserved its colossal dimensions, was seated on the edge of his couch clad only in a shirt and hose that set off the pre-eminence of his paunch. He had just put on one shoe and held the other in his hand. His hair was almost white, his eyes were large and sparkling, his nose was long, his neck short and thick like a bull's. His physiognomy, of an open cast and instinct with joviality, recalled the features of his grandfather, Charles Martel. At the sight of the two Bretons the Emperor rose from the edge of the couch, and keeping his one shoe in his hand, took two steps forward, limping on his left foot. As he thus approached Amael he seemed a prey to a concealed emotion somewhat mingled with a lively curiosity.

"Old man!" cried out Charles in his shrill voice that contrasted so singularly with his giant stature, "Octave tells me you fought under Charles Martel, my grandfather, nearly eighty years ago, and that you saved his life at the battle of Poitiers."

"It is true," and carrying his hand to his forehead where the traces of a deep wound were still visible, the aged Breton added: "I received this wound at the battle of Poitiers."

The Emperor sat down again on the edge of his bed, put on the other shoe and said to his archchaplain: "Eginhard, you who compiled in your chronicle the history and acts of my grandfather, you whose memory is ever faithful, do you remember ever to have heard told what the old man says?"

Eginhard remained thoughtful for a moment, and then answered slowly: "I remember to have read in some parchment scrolls, inscribed by the hand of the glorious Charles and now preserved in your august archives, that, indeed, at the battle of Poitiers" – but interrupting himself and turning to the centenarian he asked: "Your name? How are you called?"

"Amael is my name."

The archchaplain reflected for a moment, and shaking his head observed: "While I can not now recall it, that was not the name of the warrior who saved the life of Charles Martel at the battle of Poitiers – it was a Frankish name, it is not the name which you mentioned."

"That name," rejoined the aged Amael, "was Berthoald."

"Yes!" put in Eginhard quickly. "That is the name – Berthoald. And in a few lines written in his own hand, the glorious Charles Martel commended the said Berthoald to his children; he wrote that he owed him his life and recommended him to their gratitude if he ever should turn to them."

During the exchange of these words between the aged Breton and the archchaplain, the Emperor had continued and finished his toilet with the aid of his servitor of the chamber. His costume, the old Frankish costume to which Charles remained faithful, consisted in the first place of a pair of leggings made of thick linen material closely fastened to the nether limbs by means of red wool bandelets that wound criss-cross from below upwards; next of a tunic of Frisian cloth, sapphire-blue, and held together by a silk belt. In the winter and the fall of the year the Emperor also wore over his shoulders a heavy and large otter or lamb-skin coat. Thus clad, Charles sat down in a large armchair placed near a curtain that was meant to conceal one of the doors that opened upon the balcony which served him for observatory. At a sign from Charles the servitor stepped out of the chamber. Left alone with Eginhard, Vortigern, Amael and Octave, Charles said to the elder Breton: "Old man, if I understood my chaplain correctly, a Frank named Berthoald saved my grandfather's life. How does it happen that the said Berthoald and you are the same personage?"

"When fifteen years of age, driven by the spirit of adventure, I ran away from my family of the Gallic race, and then located in Burgundy. After many untoward events, I joined a band of determined men. I then was twenty years of age. I took a Frankish name and claimed to be of that race in order to secure the protection of Charles Martel.² To the end of interesting him all the more in my lot I offered him my own sword and the swords of all my men, just a few days before the battle of Poitiers. At that battle I saved his life. After that, loaded with his favors, I fought under his orders five years longer."

"And what happened then?"

"Then – ashamed of my imposition, and still more ashamed of fighting on the side of the Franks, I left Charles Martel to return into Brittany, the cradle of my family. There I became a field laborer."

"By the cape of St. Martin, you then turned rebel!" exclaimed the Emperor in his squeaky voice, which then assumed the tone of a penetrating treble. "I now see the wisdom of those who chose you for an hostage, you, the instigator and the soul of the uprisings and even wars that broke out in Brittany during the reign of Pepin, my father, and even under my own reign, when your devil-possessed countrymen decimated my veteran bands!"

"I fought as well as I could in our wars."

"Traitor! Loaded with favors by my grandfather, yet were you not afraid to rise in arms against his son and me?"

"I felt remorse for only one thing – and that was to have merited the favor of your grandfather. I shall ever reproach myself for having fought on his side instead of against him."

"Old man," cried the Emperor, purple with rage, "you have even more audacity than years!"

"Charles – let us stop here. You look upon yourself as the sovereign of Gaul. We Bretons do not recognize your claims. These claims you hold, like all other conquerors, from force. To you might means right –"

"I hold them from God!" again cried the Emperor, this time stamping the floor with his foot and breaking in upon Amael. "Yes! I hold my rights over Gaul from God, and from my good sword."

"From your sword, from violence, yes, indeed. From God, not at all. God does not consecrate theft, whether a purse or an empire be involved. Clovis captured Gaul. Your father and grandfather plundered of his crown the last scion of that Clovis. Little does that matter to us, Bretons, who refuse to obey either the stock of Clovis or that of Charles Martel. You dispose over an innumerable army; already have you ravished and vanquished Brittany. You may ravage and vanquish her over again – but subjugate her, never. And now, Charles, I have spoken. You shall hear not another word from me on that subject. I am your prisoner, your hostage. Dispose of me."

² For Amael's story, see "The Abbatial Crosier," the preceding book of the series.

The Emperor, who more than once was on the point of allowing his indignation to break loose, turned to Eginhard and, after a moment of silence, said to him in a calm voice: "You, who are engaged in writing the history and deeds of Charles, the august Emperor of Gaul, Caesar of Germany, Patrician of Rome, Protector of the Suevians, the Bulgarians and the Hungarians, I command you to write down that an old man held to Charles a language of unheard-of audacity, and that Charles could not prevent himself from esteeming the frankness and the courage of the man who had thus spoken to him." And suddenly changing his tone, the Emperor, whose features, for a moment stern in anger, now assumed an expression of joviality shaded with shrewdness, said to Amael: "So, then, Breton seigneurs of Armorica, whatever I may do, you want none of me at any price for your Emperor. Do you so much as know me?"

"Charles, we know you in Brittany by the unjust wars that your father and yourself have waged against us."

"So that, to you, gentlemen of Armorica, Charles is only a man of conquest, of violence, and of battle?"

"Yes, you reign only through terror."

"Well, then, follow me. I may perhaps cause you to change your mind," said the Emperor after a moment's reflection. He rose, took his cane and put on his cap. His eyes then fell upon Vortigern, whom, standing silently at a distance, he had not noticed before. "Who is that young and handsome lad?" he asked.

"My grandson."

"Octave," the Emperor remarked, turning to the young Roman, "this is rather a young hostage."

"August Prince, this lad was chosen for several reasons. His sister married Morvan, a common field laborer, but one of the most intrepid of the Breton chieftains. During this last war he commanded the cavalry."

"And why, then, was not that Morvan brought here? That would have been an excellent hostage."

"August Prince, in order to bring him we would have first had to catch him. Although severely wounded, Morvan, thanks to his heroine of a wife, succeeded in making his escape with her. It has been impossible to reach them in the inaccessible mountains whither they both fled. For that reason two other chiefs and influential men of the tribe were chosen for hostages; we left them on the road on account of their wounds, and proceeded only with this old man, who was the soul of the last wars, and also this youth, who, through his family connections, is related to one of the most dangerous chieftains of Armorica. I must admit that in taking him, we yielded also to the prayers of his mother. She was very anxious that he should accompany his grandfather on this long journey, which is very trying to a centenarian."

"And you," resumed the Emperor, addressing Vortigern, whom, during the account given by Octave, he had been examining with attention and interest, "no doubt also hate inveterately that Charles, the conqueror and devastator?"

"The Emperor Charles has white hair; I am only eighteen years old," retorted the young Breton, blushing. "I can not answer."

"Old man," observed Charles, visibly affected by the lad's self-respecting yet becoming modesty, "the mother of your grandson must be a happy woman. But coming to think of it, my lad, was it not you who yesterday evening, shortly before my arrival, came near breaking your neck with a fall from your horse?"

"I!" cried Vortigern, blushing with pride; "I, fall from my horse! Who dared to say so!"

"Oh! Oh! my lad. You are red up to your ears," the Emperor exclaimed, laughing aloud. "But, never mind. Be tranquil. I do not mean to wound your pride of horsemanship. Far from it. Before I saw you to-day my ears have rung with the interminable praises of your gracefulness and daring on horseback. My dear daughters, especially little Thetralde and the tall Hildrude, told me at least ten

times at supper that they had seen a savage young Breton, although wounded in one arm, manage his horse like the most skilful of my equerries."

"If I deserve any praise, it must be addressed to my grandfather," modestly answered Vortigern. "It was he who taught me to ride on horseback."

"I like that answer, my lad. It shows your modesty and a proper respect for your elders. Are you lettered? Can you read and write?"

"Yes, thanks to the instruction of my mother."

"Can you sing mass in the choir?"

"I!" cried Vortigern in great astonishment. "I sing mass! No, no, by Hesus! We do not sing mass in my country."

"There they are, the Breton pagans!" exclaimed Charles. "Oh, my bishops are right, they are a devil-possessioned people, those folks of Armorica. What a pity that so handsome and so modest a lad should not be able to sing mass in the choir." Saying this, the Emperor pulled his thick cap close over his head and leaning heavily on his cane, said to the aged Breton: "Come, follow me, seigneur Breton. Ah, you only know of Charles the Fighter; I shall now make you acquainted with another Charles whom you do not yet know. Come, follow me." Limping, and leaning on his cane, the Emperor moved towards the door, making a sign to the others to follow; but stopping short at the threshold, he turned to Octave: "You, go to Hugh, my Master of the Hounds, and notify him that I shall hunt deer in the forest of Oppenheim. Let him send there the hounds, horses and all other equipments of the chase."

"August Prince, your orders will be executed."

"You will also say to the Grand Nomenclator of my table that I may take dinner in the pavilion of the forest, especially if the hunt lasts long. My suite will dine there also. Let the repast be sumptuous. You will tell the Nomenclator that my taste has not changed. A good large joint of roast venison, served piping hot, is now, as ever, my favorite treat."

The young Roman again bowed low; Charles stepped out first from the chamber. He was followed by Eginhard, then by Amael. As Vortigern was about to follow his grandfather, he was retained for an instant by Octave, who, approaching his mouth to the lad's ear, whispered to him:

"I shall carry to the apartments of the Emperor's daughters the news that he intends to hunt to-day. By Venus! The mother of love has you under her protecting wings, my young Breton."

The lad blushed anew, and was about to answer the Roman when he heard Amael's voice calling out to him: "Come, my child, the Emperor wishes to lean on your arm in order to descend the stairs and walk through the palace."

More and more disturbed in mind, Vortigern stepped towards Charles as the latter was saying to the chamberlains: "No, nobody is to accompany me except the two Bretons and Eginhard;" and nodding to the lad he proceeded: "Your arm will be a better support to me than my cane; these stairs are steep; step carefully."

Supported by Vortigern's arm the Emperor slowly descended the steps of a staircase that ran out at one of the porticos of an interior courtyard. When the bottom was reached Charles dropped the young man's arm, and resuming his cane, said: "You stepped cleverly; you are a good guide. What a pity that you do not know how to sing mass in the choir!" While thus chattering, Charles followed a gallery that ran along the courtyard. The men who accompanied him marched a few steps behind. Presently the Emperor noticed a slave crossing the courtyard with a large hamper on his shoulders. "Halloa! You, there, with the basket!" the Emperor called out in his piercing voice. "You, there, with the basket! Come here! What have you in that basket?"

"Eggs, seigneur."

"Where are you taking them to?"

"To the kitchen of the august Emperor."

"Where do those eggs come from?"

"From the Muhlsheim farm, seigneur."

"From the Muhlsheim farm?" the Emperor repeated thoughtfully, and almost immediately added: "There must be three hundred and twenty-five eggs in that basket. Are there not?"

"Yes, seigneur; that's the exact rent brought in every month from the farm."

"You can go – and be careful you do not break the eggs." The Emperor stopped for a moment, leaned heavily upon his cane, and turning to Amael, called out to him: "Halla, seigneur Breton, come here, draw near me." Amael obeyed, and the Emperor resuming his walk proceeded to say: "Charles the Fighter, the conqueror, is at least a good husbander – does it not strike you that way? He knows to an egg how many are laid by the hens on his farms. If you ever return to Brittany, you must not fail to narrate the incident to the housekeepers of your country."

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