

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE IRON ARROW HEAD
OR THE BUCKLER
MAIDEN: A TALE OF THE
NORTHMAN INVASION

Эжен Сю

**The Iron Arrow Head or
The Buckler Maiden: A Tale
of the Northman Invasion**

«Public Domain»

Сю Э. Ж.

The Iron Arrow Head or The Buckler Maiden: A Tale of the Northman
Invasion / Э. Ж. Сю — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	15
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	19

Eugène Sue

The Iron Arrow Head or The Buckler Maiden: A Tale of the Northman Invasion

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The invasion of the Normans, or Northmen, or Norsemen – called throughout this brilliant story the Northmans – bears characteristics that distinguish it markedly from all the other European invasions. With all the others the migrations were brought on by home changes of soil and waterways that drove the invaders westward. War was only a means, the goal was bread. With the Northman invasion it was otherwise. The goal was war and adventure. This simple circumstance places a wholly different stamp upon the Northman invaders. It explains the impulse they gave to oratory, poetry, music and the fine arts. Their rush from the frozen north through Europe – conquering and transforming England; carving for themselves large domains out of the French territory, then held in the imbecile hands of the imbecile successors of Charlemagne; startling the populations of southern Italy and Sicily – acted like a leaven through all the territories that they traversed. And they traversed none without raising its tone with their poetic-barbarian spirit.

This story, the tenth of the Eugene Sue series "*The Mysteries of the People; or, History of a Proletarian Family Across the Ages*," is a matchless sketch of the Northman. It reproduces his uncouthness illumined with his brilliant latent qualities. The characteristics of the Northman invader have for their setting the physical and intellectual dullness of the Frankish conquerors of Gaul. The clash of the two reproduces a historic picture, or a page of history, that is unique.

The fears entertained by Charlemagne and expressed in the preceding story – "*The Carolingian Coins; or, The Daughters of Charlemagne*" – are verified in this. A race of bold and adventurous invaders steps upon the scene of France, shocking the ruling class, arousing the ruled, and introducing a fresh breath into the land.

The Northman invasion of France reads, even in the driest work of history, like a rollicking Norse tale. That spirit is preserved in this charming historic novel, which is as instructive as it is entertaining, and in which again a descendant of the conquered race of Joel witnesses the degradation of the second royal house of France preparatorily to the witnessing, a few generations later, by another descendant of Joel, of the downfall of that second dynasty and the rise of the third, narrated in the following story, "*The Infant's Skull; or, The End of the World*."

DANIEL DE LEON.

New York, July, 1908.

CHAPTER I

ROTHBERT, COUNT OF PARIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What remedy?"

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

"You are always talking about Rustic the Gay."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anne and her mother rose and hastened to the narrow window, through which Martha quickly put her head, while her daughter, leaning on her shoulder, hesitated to look out. Happily for the tender-hearted child it was not one of those savage hunts in which the good Christians took delight against the penitents whom they regarded as unclean animals. The narrow street, bordered with thatched wooden houses, like the one of Eidiol, offered but a strait passage. A severe rainfall on the previous day had so soaked the earth that a heavy wagon, driven by two teams of oxen and loaded high with lumber, sank into the mud up to the hub of one of the wheels. Too heavy to be pulled out of the deep mud, the outfit completely blocked the passage, and stood in the way of several knights, who were riding from the opposite direction, with Rothbert, the Count of Paris and Duke of France, and brother of Eudes, who had himself proclaimed King, in prejudice of Charles the Simple, the weak descendant of Charles the Great, who now, in the year 912, reigned over France. Escorted by five or six knights Rothbert found his way blocked by the wagon which, despite all that its driver could do, remained motionless where it had stuck fast. The count, a man of haughty and flinty countenance, always armed with casque and cuirass, together with iron leggings, thigh-pieces and gloves, as if marching to war, now rode a black horse. He hurled imprecations upon the wagon, the teams of oxen and the poor serf who drove them, and who, frightened by the threats of the seigneur, hid himself under the wagon. More and more enraged at the obstacle in his path, the Count of Paris called out to one of his men:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The sensible words of the old skipper did not seem to allay the rage of the Count of Paris. The latter continued to speak in angry tones and in a low voice to his men, while, thanks to the efforts of Eidiol, Guyrion and several of their neighbors, the wheel was raised from the deep rut into which it had sunk, and the wagon was finally drawn to one side of the street. The passage was now open to Rothbert and his knights. But while one of them held the bridles of his companions' horses, the others, instead of remounting, rushed upon Eidiol and his son. Both, taken by surprise, and before their neighbors could bring them help, were speedily overpowered, thrown to the ground, and to the utter dismay of Martha and Anne, were held prisoners by the count's men. Upon beholding the old

skipper and his son thus maltreated, the two women left their window precipitately, and rushing out of the house threw themselves at the feet of Rothbert, imploring his mercy for the two prisoners. Eidiol saw the action of his wife and daughter, and frowning with indignation, cried out to them:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER II

FATHER FULTRADE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Rise, good woman," answered Fultrade, "I have only obeyed Christian charity. Your son has been very imprudent. Let him be wiser hereafter." Saying this the monk moved towards the wooden staircase that led to the upper rooms, and said to Eidiol's wife: "Martha, let us go upstairs with your daughter, I want to speak to you both on holy matters."

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

While he was making the announcement of his speedy departure, Eidiol observed, without however taking any particular notice of the circumstance, that the monk, otherwise impassible,

seemed slightly to thrill with joy. The old man's attention was immediately drawn away from Fultrade by his daughter's caresses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Good God! What a divine treasure!"

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

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

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

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

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

"For the like of us, poor women!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"May the Lord prosper your voyage, Eidiol."

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

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

"By the wine of Argenteuil, which you sold to us at such dear prices in the church of Notre Dame, when we used to go there and play dice, Father Fultrade, how like a sage you are now talking!" cried Rustic the Gay, whose name well fitted his looks. The worthy lad, having learned at the Port of St. Landry about the arrest of the dean of the Skippers' or Mariners' Guild of Paris, had hastened to the spot, greatly alarmed about Martha and her daughter, to whom he came to offer his services. "Oh, Father Fultrade!" the young and merry fellow went on to say, "what good broiled steaks, what delicate sausages did you not use to sell us in the rear of the little chapel of St. Gratien where you kept your tap-room! How often have I not seen monks, vagabonds and soldiers wassailing there with the gay lassies of Four-Banal street! What giddy whirls did they not use to dance in front of your hermitage!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Anne," answered the young skipper in his usual merry voice and yet in a penetrating tone: "I love your father like my own; Guyrion like a brother; I have a stout heart and equally stout arms; I would die for all of you. I can tell you no more."

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

CHAPTER III

GAELO AND SHIGNE

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

Fierce people were these pirates! Sailing over the main from the shores of Sweden, Norway and Denmark, they arrived only after some days' journey at the coasts of Gaul. They boasted in their "sagas," or popular songs, of "never having slept under a board roof, or having emptied their cups near a sheltered fireplace." Pillaging churches, castles and abbeys, turning chapels into stables, cutting shirts and breeches for themselves out of altar-cloths, ravaging everything that they encountered – in this style, as they expressed themselves, they "sang the mass of the lances, beginning at dawn with the matins and closing at dusk with the vespers." To conduct his vessel as a skilful knight manages his horse, to be able to run over its oars while in motion, and to be able to hurl three successive javelins at the plate on the top of the mast, receive them back in his own hands and hurl them up again without once missing his aim – such were some of the essential accomplishments for an able pirate.

"Let us then
Defy the weather,"

so ran their sea song,

"For the tempest
Is our servant,
Helps our oars and
Fills our sails,
Wafts us where we
Wish to go.

"Where we land we

Eat the repast
 There prepared for
 Us by others;
 Slay our host and
 Fire his dwelling,
 And resume the
 Azure swan route."

These Northmans had for their divinity Odin, the God of the North, who promised to the brave, killed in battle, a home in Walhalla, the brilliant residence of the celestial heroes. Nevertheless, relying more on their own intrepidity than upon the aid of their God, they never invoked him. "My brother in arms and myself," thus did Gunkator, a famous sea-king who frequently ravaged the castles and churches of Gaul, speak of himself and his fellow pirates; "my brother in arms and myself never sacrifice to the Gods; we place our faith only upon our oars and our own strength; we get along very well in that way." Several of the chiefs of these pirates claimed to have issued from the embraces of Trolls, sea sprites, and the Ases and Dwalines, gentle fairies, who delighted in dancing by the light of the moon on the ice of the northern lakes, or in disporting themselves among the snow-covered branches of the tall fir-trees.

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

Indeed, never before did pirate vessel present to a mariner's eyes a more charming sight! Constructed in the same proportions as Gaëlo's, only finer and more dashing, the second *holker* was painted white. The spare oars and the bucklers ranged in a row like those of the black *holker* were of azure blue. A gilded swan ornamented its prow. On the top of its mast a swan with outspread wings and engraved upon a sheet of polished copper, responded to the rising evening breeze, which also raised a streamer of azure blue embroidered with a white swan. Within-board, swords, pikes and axes, symmetrically ranked, hung within easy reach of the rowers, who were clad in flexible armor, not of scales, but of iron mail, with casques with short visors on their heads.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

one of the islets of the Seine when the two craft were speeding forward abreast of each other and with equal swiftness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.