

**The Project Gutenberg eBook of A Struggle for Rome, v. 2, by
Felix Dahn**

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: A Struggle for Rome, v. 2

Author: Felix Dahn

Translator: Lily Wolffsohn

Release Date: May 11, 2010 [EBook #32330]

Language: English

**Credits: Produced by Charles Bowen, from page scans provided by the
Web Archive**

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A STRUGGLE FOR
ROME, V. 2 *****

Transcriber's Notes:

1. Page scan source:

<http://www.archive.org/details/astruggleforrom01dahngoog>

A STRUGGLE FOR ROME.

BY

FELIX DAHN.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

LILY WOLFFSOHN.

"If there be anything more powerful than

**Fate,
It is the courage which bears it
undismayed."**

GEIBEL.

**IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.**

**LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.**

1878.

[All Rights Reserved.]

A STRUGGLE FOR ROME.

BOOK III.--*Continued.*

THEODAHAD.

CHAPTER X.

On the evening of the third day after the arrival of the Gothic escort sent by Totila, Valerius had terminated his arrangements and fixed the next morning for his departure from the villa.

He was sitting with Valeria and Julius at the evening meal, and speaking of the prospect of preserving peace, which was no doubt undervalued by the young hero, Totila, who was filled with the ardour of war. The old Roman could not endure the thought of seeing armed Greeks enter his beloved country.

"I, too, wish for peace," said Valeria reflectively, "and yet----"

"Well?" asked Valerius.

"I am certain," continued the girl, "that if war broke out you would then learn to love Totila as he deserves. He would defend me and Italy----"

"Yes," said Julius, "he has an heroic nature, and something still greater than that----"

"I know of nothing greater!" cried Valerius.

At that moment clattering footsteps were heard in the atrium, and young Thorismuth, the leader of the Gothic escort, and Totila's shield-bearer, entered abruptly.

"Valerius," he said, "let the carriages be harnessed, the litters brought out; you must go at once."

They all started from their seats.

"What has happened? Have they landed?"

"Speak," said Julius, "what do you fear?"

"Nothing for myself," answered the Goth, smiling.

"I did not wish to startle you sooner than was necessary. But now I dare no longer be silent. Yesterday early, the waves washed a corpse ashore----"

"A corpse!"

"A Goth, one of our sailors; it was Alb, the steersman of Totila's ship."

Valeria grew pale, but did not tremble.

"It may be an accident--the man was drowned."

"No," said the Goth, "he was not drowned; his breast was pierced by an arrow."

"That means a naval combat, nothing more," said Valerius.

"But to-day----"

"To-day?" cried Julius.

"To-day none of the country people who usually pass on their way from Regium to Colum, made their appearance, and a trooper, whom I sent to Regium for news, has never returned.

"That still proves nothing," said Valerius obstinately. His heart rebelled against the thought of a landing of his hated enemies. "The waves have often before rendered the way impassable."

"But just now I have been some distance on the road to Regium, and when I laid my ear to the ground, I felt it tremble under the tramp of many horses approaching in mad haste. You must fly!"

Valerius and Julius now took down their weapons, which hung upon the pillars of the room. Valeria sighed deeply, and pressed her hand to her heart.

"What is to be done?" she asked.

"Man the Pass of Jugum," cried Valerius, "through which the coast-road runs. It is very narrow, and can be held for some time."

"Eight of my men are already there; I will join them as soon as you are mounted. The other half of my troop shall escort you on your journey. Haste!"

But ere they could leave the room, a Gothic soldier, covered with blood and mire, rushed in.

"Fly!" he cried, "they are there!"

"Who is there, Gelaris!" asked Thorismuth.

"The Greeks! Belisarius! the devil!"

"Speak," ordered Thorismuth.

"I got to the pine-wood before Regium without seeing anything suspicious, but also without meeting with a soul upon the way. As, looking eagerly forward, I rode past a thick tree, I felt a pull at my neck as if my head would be torn from my shoulders, and the next minute I lay on the road under my horse."

"Badly sat, Gelaris," scolded Thorismuth.

"Oh yes, of course! A noose of horse-hair round his neck, and an arrow whistling past his head, and a better rider would fall than Gelaris, son of Genzo! Two demons--wood-devils or goblins they seemed to me--rushed out of the bushes and over the ditch, tied me upon my horse, took me between their little shaggy ponies, and ho!----"

"Those are Belisarius's Huns!" cried Valerius.

"Away they went with me. When I came to myself again, I was in Regium in the midst of the enemy, and there I learned everything. The Queen-regent is murdered, war is declared, the enemy has taken Sicily by surprise, the whole island has gone over to the Emperor----"

"And the fortress, Panormus?"

"Was taken by the fleet, which made its way into the harbour. The mast-heads were higher than the walls of the town. From thence they shot their arrows, and jumped on to the walls."

"And Syracusæ?" asked Valerius.

"Fell through the treachery of the Sicilians; the Gothic garrison is murdered. Belisarius rode into Syracusæ amidst a shower of flowers, and--for it was the last days of his consulate--threw gold coins about him, amidst the applause of the population."

"And where is the commodore: where is Totila?"

"Two of his ships were sent to the bottom by the pointed prows of the triremes; his own and one other. He sprang into the sea in full armour--and is--not yet--fished up again."

Valeria sank speechless upon a couch.

"The Greek general," continued the messenger, "landed yesterday, in the dark and stormy night, near Regium. The town received him with acclamation. He will only halt until he has re-ordered his army, and will then march at once to Neapolis. His vanguard--the yellow-skinned troopers who caught me--were to advance at once and take the Pass of Jugum. I was to be their guide. But I led them far away--to the west--into the sea-swamps--and escaped--in the darkness of evening. But--they shot--arrows after me--and one hit--I can speak--no more----" and he fell clattering to the ground.

"He is a dead man," cried Valerius, "they carry poisoned arrows! Up! Julius and Thorismuth! take my child to Neapolis. I myself will go to the pass, and cover your retreat."

In vain were Valeria's prayers; the face and mien of the old man assumed an expression of iron resolve.

"Obey!" he cried, "I am the master of this place, and the son of this soil, and I will ask the Huns of Belisarius what they have to do in my

fatherland! No, Julius! I must know that you are with Valeria. Farewell!"

While Valeria and Julius, with their Gothic escort and most of the slaves, fled at full speed on the road to Neapolis, Valerius hurried, at the head of half-a-dozen slaves, out of the garden of the villa, towards the pass, which--not far from the beginning of his estates--formed an arch over the road to Regium. The rock on the left hand, to the north, was inaccessible, and on the right, to the south, it fell abruptly into the sea, whose waves often overflowed the road. But the mouth of the pass was so narrow, that two men, standing side by side with their shields, could close it like a door. Thus Valerius might hope to keep the pass, even against a much superior force, long enough to afford the swift horses of the fugitives a sufficient start.

As the old man was hastening through the moonless night along the narrow path which led between the sea and his vineyards to the pass, he remarked to the right hand, on the sea, at a considerable distance from the land, the bright beam of a little light, which unmistakably shone from the mast-head of some vessel. Valerius started. Were the Byzantines pushing forward to Neapolis by sea? Were they about to land soldiers at his back? But if so, would not more lights be visible?

He turned to question the slaves, who, at his order, but with visible reluctance, had followed him from the villa. In vain; they had disappeared into the darkness of the night. They had deserted their master as soon as they were unobserved.

So Valerius arrived alone at the pass, the nether or western end of which was guarded by two Goths, while two more filled the eastern entrance towards the enemy, and the other four kept the inner space.

Scarcely had Valerius joined the two in front, when suddenly the tramp of horses was heard close at hand, and soon, round the next turning of the road, there appeared two horsemen, advancing at full trot.

Each carried a torch in his right hand; and these torches alone threw light upon the midnight scene, for the Goths avoided everything that could betray their small number.

"By Belisarius's beard!" cried the foremost rider, checking his horse to a walk, "this hen-ladder is here so narrow, that an honest horse has scarcely room in it; and there is a hollow way or---- Halt! What moves there?"

He stopped his horse, and bent carefully forward, holding the torch far out before him. In this position, close before the entrance of the pass, he presented an easy aim.

"Who is there!" he again asked.

For all reply a Gothic spear pierced through the mail of his breast-plate and into his heart.

"Enemies!" screamed the dying man, and fell backwards from his saddle.

"Enemies! enemies!" cried the man behind him, and, hurling his treacherous torch far from him, turned his animal and galloped back; while the horse of the fallen man remained quietly standing at his master's side.

Nothing was heard in the stillness of the night but the tramp of the fleeing charger, and the gentle splash of the waves at the foot of the rocks.

The hearts of the men in the pass beat with expectation.

"Now be cool, men," said Valerius; "let none be tempted out of the pass. You in the first row will press your shields firmly together; we in the middle will throw; you three in the rear will hand us the spears, and be attentive to all that takes place."

"Sir! sir!" cried the Goth who stood in the road behind the pass, "the light! the ship approaches ever nearer!"

"Be wary, and challenge it, if----"

But the enemy was already at hand. It was a troop of fifty mounted Huns, carrying a few torches. As they turned round the corner of the road, the scene was illuminated with patches of glaring light, contrasted with deep gloom.

"It was here, sir!" said the horseman who had escaped. "Be cautious."

"Take back the dead man and the horse," commanded a rough voice, and the leader, lifting his torch, rode slowly towards the entrance of the pass.

"Halt!" cried Valerius in Latin; "who are you, and what do you want?"

"I have to ask that!" returned the leader of the horsemen in the same language.

"I am a Roman citizen, and defend my fatherland against all invaders!" cried Valerius.

Meanwhile the leader had examined the scene by the light of his torch. His practised eye recognised the impossibility of avoiding the pass, either to the right or to the left; and, at the same time, the extreme straitness of its entrance.

"Then, friend," he said, retreating a little, "we are allies. We are Romans too, and will free Italy from its oppressors. Therefore give way and let us through."

Valerius, who wished to gain time by all possible means, spoke again.

"Who are you, and who sent you?"

"My name is Johannes. The enemies of Justinian call me 'the bloody,' and I lead Belisarius's light horse. The whole country, from Regium till here, has received us with rejoicing; this is the first hindrance. We should have got much farther long ago had not a dog of a Goth led us into the vilest swamp that ever swallowed up a good horse. Valuable time was lost. So do not hinder us! Life and property will be spared to you, and you will receive a rich reward into the bargain, if you will, guide us. Speed is victory! The enemy is bewildered; they must not have time to recover themselves before we stand before Neapolis, yea, even before Rome. 'Johannes,' said Belisarius to me, 'as I cannot order the storm-wind to sweep the land before me, I order *you* to do it!' So get away and let us through!"

And he spurred his horse.

"Tell Belisarius--so long as Cnejus Valerius lives, he shall not advance one step in Italy! Back, you robbers!"

"Madman! would you stand by the Goths and oppose us?"

"By hell, if against you!"

The leader again cast searching glances to the right and left.

"Listen," he said; "you can really stop us here for a time. But not for long. If you yield, you shall live. If not, I will first have you skinned alive, and then impaled!"

He lifted his torch, looking for a weak point.

"Back!" cried Valerius; "shoot, friend!"

"The twang of a bow-string was heard, and an arrow struck the helm of the horseman.

"The devil!" he exclaimed, and spurred his horse back.

"Dismount!" he ordered, "every man of you!"

But the Huns did not like to part with their horses.

"What, sir? Dismount?" asked one of the nearest.

Johannes struck him in the face. The man did not move.

"Dismount!" thundered Johannes again. "Would you go into that mouse-hole on horseback!" and he flung himself out of the saddle. "Six climb the trees and shoot from above. Six lie down and creep forward on each side of this road, shooting as they lie. Ten shoot standing; breast high. Ten guard the horses. You others follow me with the spear as soon as the strings twang. Forwards!"

He handed his torch to one of the men and took a lance.

While the Huns were carrying out his orders, Johannes again examined the pass as well as he could.

"Yield!" he cried.

"Come on!" shouted the Goths.

Johannes gave a sign and twenty arrows whistled at once.

A cry, and the foremost Goth on the right fell. He had been struck in the forehead by one of the men on the trees. Valerius, under shelter of his shield, sprang into his place. He came just at the right moment to repulse the furious attack of Johannes, who ran at the gap with his lance in rest. Valerius received the thrust on his shield, and struck at the Byzantine, who stumbled and fell, close to the entrance. The Huns behind him fell back.

The Goth who stood at Valerius's side could not resist the temptation to render the leader harmless. He sprang a step forward out of the pass with up-lifted spear. But this was just what Johannes wanted. Up he started with lightning swiftness, thrust the surprised Goth over the low wall of the road on the right of the pass, and the next moment he stood on the exposed side of Valerius--who was defending himself against the renewed attack of the Huns--and stabbed him with all his might in the groin with his long Persian knife.

Valerius fell; but the three Goths who stood behind him succeeded in pushing Johannes--who had already pressed forward into the middle of the pass--back and out with the beaks of their shields.

Johannes retired to his men, in order to command a new salvo of arrows. Two of the Goths silently placed themselves in the entrance of the pass; the third held the bleeding Valerius in his arms.

Just then the guard at the rear of the pass rushed in: "The ship, sir! the ship! They have landed! they take us in the rear! Fly! we will carry you--a hiding-place in the rocks----"

"No," said Valerius, raising himself, "I will die here; rest my sword against the wall and----"

But a loud flourish of Gothic horns was heard in the rear. Torches shone, and a troop of thirty Goths hurried into the pass, Totila at their head. His first glance fell upon Valerius.

"Too late! too late!" he cried in deep grief. "Revenge! Follow me! Forwards!" And he rushed furiously through the pass, followed by his spear-bearing foot-soldiers.

Fearful was the shock of meeting upon the narrow road between sea and rocks. The torches were extinguished in the skirmish; and the dawning day gave but a faint grey light.

The Huns, although superior in numbers to their bold adversaries, were completely taken by surprise. They thought that a whole army of Goths was on the march. They hastened to join their horses and fly. But the Goths reached the place where the animals stood at the same moment as their owners, and, in confused heaps, men and horses were driven off the road into the sea. In vain Johannes himself struck at his flying people; their rush threw him to the ground; he sprang up immediately and attacked the nearest Goth. But he had fallen into bad hands. It was Totila; he recognised him.

"Cursed Flax-head!" he cried, "so you are not drowned?"

"No, as you see!" cried Totila, and struck a blow at the other's helm, which cleft it through and entered slightly into his skull, so that he staggered and fell.

With this all resistance was at an end. The nearest of the horsemen just managed to lift Johannes into a saddle, and galloped off with him.

The scene of action was deserted.

Totila hurried back to the pass. He found Valerius, pale, with closed eyes, his head resting on his shield. He threw himself on his knees beside him, and pressed his stiffening hand to his heart.

"Valerius!" he cried, "father! do not, do not leave me so. Speak to me once more!"

The dying man faintly opened his eyes.

"Where are they?" he asked.

"Beaten and fled!"

"Ah! victory!" cried Valerius, breathing anew. "I die happy! And Valeria--my child--is she saved?"

"She is. Escaped from the naval combat, and from the sea itself, I hastened to warn Neapolis and save you. I had landed near the high-road between your house and Neapolis; there I met Valeria and learned your danger. One of my boats received her and her companions on board to take them to Neapolis; with the other I came here to save you--oh! only to revenge you!" and he laid his head upon the breast of the dying man.

"Do not weep for me; I die victorious! And to you, my son, I owe it."

He stroked the long fair locks of the sorrowing youth.

"And Valeria's safety too! Oh! to you also, I hope, I shall owe the salvation of Italy. You are hero enough to save this country--in spite of Belisarius and Narses! You can--and you will--and your reward is the hand of my beloved child."

"Valerius! my father!"

"She is yours! But swear to me"--and Valerius raised himself with an effort and looked into Totila's eyes--"swear to me by the genius of Valeria that she shall not become your wife until Italy is free, and not a sod of her sacred soil is pressed by the foot of a Byzantine."

"I swear it," cried Totila, enthusiastically pressing Valerius's hand, "by the genius of Valeria I swear it!"

"Thanks, thanks, my son. Now I can die in peace--greet Valeria--in your hand is her fate--and that of Italia!"

He laid his head back upon his shield, crossed his arms over his breast, and expired.

Totila silently laid his hand upon the dead man's heart, and remained in this position for some time.

A dazzling light suddenly roused him from his sad reverie; it was the sun, whose golden disk rose gloriously over the summit of the rocks.

Totila stood up, and looked at the rising luminary. The sea glittered in the bright rays, and a golden light spread over the land.

"By the genius of Valeria!" repeated Totila in a low voice, and stretched out his hand towards the glorious sun.

Like the dead man he felt strengthened and comforted by his weighty oath; the sense of having a noble duty to perform elevated his feelings. He turned back, and ordered that the corpse should be carried to his ship, that it might be taken and deposited in the tomb of the Valerians at Neapolis.

CHAPTER XI.

During these portentous events the Goths had been by no means idle. But all measures of vigorous defence were paralysed, and, indeed, intentionally frustrated, by the cowardly treachery of the King.

Theodahad had soon recovered from his consternation at the declaration of war on the part of Petros, for he could not and would not part with the conviction that it had only been made in order to keep up appearances and save the honour of the imperial government.

He had not again spoken with Petros in private, and the latter must necessarily have some plausible reason for the appearance of Belisarius in Italy. No doubt the act of Petros had been a long-determined means for the accomplishment of the secret plans of the Emperor.

The thought of carrying on a war--of all thoughts the most unbearable to Theodahad--he very well understood how to keep at a distance, for he wisely reflected that it takes two to fight.

"If I do not defend myself," he thought, "the attack will soon be over. Belisarius may come--I will do all in my power to prevent any resistance

being made, for that would only embitter the Emperor against me. If, on the contrary, the general reports to Byzantium that I have furthered his success in all possible ways, Justinian will not refuse to fulfil the old contract, if not wholly, at least in part."

In this sense he acted. He called all the active land and sea forces of the Goths away from South Italy, where he expected the landing of Belisarius, and sent them eastwards to Liburnia, Dalmatia, Istria, and westwards to South Gaul, pretending--supported by the fact that Belisarius had sent a small detachment of troops to Dalmatia against Salona, and had exchanged ambassadors with the Frankish King--that the principal attack of the Byzantines was to be expected by land from Istria, aided by the allied Franks on the Rhodanus and Padus. The feigned movements of Belisarius gave colour to this pretext, so that what is almost incredible took place. The troops of the Goths, their ships, weapons, and war munition, in great quantities, were led away in all haste just before the invasion; South Italy, as far as Rome, and even to Ravenna, was exposed; and all measures of defence were neglected in the very parts where the first blow was to fall.

The Dravus, Rhodanus, and Padus were crowded with Gothic sails and arms, while towards Sicily, as we have seen, even the most necessary guard-ships were wanting.

And the turbulent urgency of the Gothic patriots did not do much good.

The King had got rid of Witichis and Hildebad, by sending them with troops to Istria and Gaul; and old Hildebrand, who would not quite give up his belief in the last of the Amelungs, opposed a tough resistance to the suspicions of Teja.

But the courage of Theodahad was most strengthened by the return of his Queen.

Shortly after the declaration of war, Witichis had marched with a Gothic troop before the Castle of Feretri, where Gothelindis had taken refuge with her Pannonian mercenaries, and had persuaded her to return voluntarily to Ravenna, assuring her of safety, until her cause should be formally examined into and decided before the approaching National Assembly of the people and the army near Rome.

These conditions were agreeable to all; for the Gothic patriots wished, above everything, to avoid being split into parties at the outbreak of the war.

And while Earl Witichis, in his great sense of justice, desired that the right of defence against all accusations should be granted, Teja also acknowledged that, as the enemy had hurled the terrible accusation of regicide at the Gothic nation, the national honour could only be upheld by a strict and formal inquiry, and not by tumultuous popular justice founded on blind suspicion.

Gothelindis looked forward with confidence to her trial; though the voice of moral conviction might be against her, she firmly believed that no sufficient proof of her guilt could be advanced. Had not her eye alone seen the end of her enemy? And she knew that she would not be condemned without a full conviction. So she willingly returned to Ravenna, encouraged the coward heart of her husband, and hoped, when the day of trial had passed, to find security from all further molestation in the camp of Belisarius and the court of Byzantium.

The confidence of the royal couple as to the result of the trial was heightened by the circumstance that the arming of the Franks had given

them a pretext for despatching, besides Witichis and Hildebad, the dangerous Earl Teja with a third detachment to the north-west of the peninsula. With him went many thousands of the most zealous adherents of the National Party, so that the assembly near Rome would not be overcrowded by adversaries.

And they were ceaselessly employed in gathering together their personal adherents, as well as the old opponents of Amalasintha, and the mighty kindred of the Balthes in all its far-spread branches, in order to secure friendly voices for the important day.

In this way they had gained composure and confidence. Theodahad had been persuaded by Gothelindis to appear himself as the advocate of his wife, in order that such a show of courage and the respect imposed by his royal person might perhaps, from the very commencement, intimidate all opponents.

Surrounded by their adherents and a small bodyguard, Theodahad and Gothelindis left Ravenna and hastened to Rome, where they arrived a few days before the time appointed for the Assembly, and took up their quarters in the old imperial palace.

Not immediately before the walls, but in the vicinity of Rome, upon an open plain called Regeta, between Anagni and Terracina, was the Assembly to be held.

Early on the morning of the day on which Theodahad was about to set forth alone on his journey thither, and while he was taking leave of Gothelindis, an unexpected and unwelcome visitor was announced--Cethegus, who had never before made his appearance during their stay of some days in Rome. He had been fully occupied by the completion of the fortifications.

As he entered, Gothelindis, struck by his gloomy aspect, cried:

"For God's sake, what evil news do you bring?"

The Prefect only knit his brows, and answered quietly:

"Evil news? For him whom it hurts! I come from a meeting of my friends, where I first learned what all Rome will soon know. Belisarius has landed!"

"At last!" exclaimed Theodahad.

And the Queen also could not conceal an expression of triumph.

"Do not rejoice too soon; you may repent it. I do not come to call you and your friend Petros to account; he who treats with traitors must be prepared for lies. I only come to tell you that you are now most certainly lost."

"Lost?"

"We are saved!"

"No, Queen. Belisarius, on landing, published a manifesto. He says that he comes to punish the murderers of Amalasintha. A high price and his favour are assured to those who give you up, alive or dead."

Theodahad grew pale.

"Impossible!" cried Gothelindis.

"And the Goths will soon learn to whose treachery they owe the

unresisted entrance of the enemy into the country. Still more. I am charged by the city of Rome, as its Prefect, to care for its well-being in this stormy time. I shall arrest you in the name of Rome, and deliver you into the hands of Belisarius."

"That you dare not do!" cried Gothelindis, laying her hand upon her dagger.

"Peace, Gothelindis! Here there is no helpless woman to be murdered in a bath. But I will let you free--what to me matters your life or death?--at a moderate price."

"I will grant anything!" stammered Theodahad.

"You will deliver up to me the documents of your contract with Silverius--be silent! Do not lie! I know that you have treated with him long and secretly. Once again you have carried on a fine trade with land and people. I should like to have the bill of sale."

"The sale is now null; the documents without effect. Take them! They are deposited in the Basilica of St. Martin, in the sarcophagus on the left of the crypt."

Theodahad's terror proved that he spoke the truth.

"It is well," said Cethegus. "All the exits of the palace are guarded by my legionaries. I will first get the documents. If I find them in the stated place, I shall give orders to let you pass. If you then wish to fly, go to the Porta Marcus Aurelius, and name my name to the tribune of the guard, Piso; he will let you depart."

He turned and went out, leaving the pair in a state of helpless alarm.

"What shall we do?" said Gothelindis, more to herself than to her husband. "Shall we yield or defy them?"

"What shall we do?" repeated Theodahad impatiently. "Defy them? that means stay here? Nonsense! Away as soon as possible. There is no safety but in flight!"

"Whither will you fly?"

"First to Ravenna--it is strong! There I will take the royal treasure. From thence, if it must be, to the Franks. Oh, what a pity that I must leave all the moneys hidden here--many millions of solidi!"

"Here? Here, too?" asked Gothelindis, her attention suddenly aroused. "You have treasures hidden in Rome? Where? And are they safe?"

"Ah, far too safe! In the Catacombs! I myself should be hours in finding them all in those dark labyrinths; and minutes are now death or life, and life is more than solidis! Follow me, Gothelindis, so that we may not lose a moment. I hasten to the Porta Marcus Aurelius."

And he left the chamber. But Gothelindis remained motionless. A thought, a plan had crossed her mind at his words. She contemplated the possibility of resistance. Her pride could not endure to renounce the government.

"Gold is power," she said to herself, "and power alone is life."

Her resolution was firmly fixed. She thought of the Cappadocian mercenaries, whom the avarice of the King had driven from his service; they still remained in Rome, masterless, waiting to embark.

She heard Theodahad hastily descend the staircase, and call for his litter.

"Fly, fly! thou miserable coward!" she cried, "I will remain here!"

CHAPTER XII.

Splendidly rose the sun out of the sea the next morning. Its beams glittered upon the shining weapons of many thousand Gothic warriors, who crowded the wide levels of Regeta.

From all the provinces of the kingdom they had hastened by groups, in families, often with wife and child, to be present at the great muster which took place every autumn.

Such an Assembly was at once a splendid feast, and the highest national solemnity. Originally, in heathen times, its immediate intention had been the grand feast of sacrifice, which, twice a year, at the winter and the summer solstice, had united all branches of the nation in honour of their common gods; to this were added a market and exchange of goods, exercises of arms, and the review of the army. The Assembly had the power of the highest jurisdiction, and the final decision as to peace, war, and political relations with other states.

And even now, in the Christian time, when the King had acquired many a right which once belonged to the people, the National Assembly possessed a high solemnity, although its ancient heathen significance was forgotten.

The remains of the old liberties of the people, which even the powerful Theodoric had not contested, revived under his weak descendants.

A majority of free Goths had still to pronounce sentence, and to award punishment, even though the King's Earl conducted the proceedings in his name, and fulfilled the sentence.

Often already had Germanic nations themselves accused, judged, and executed their kings, on account of treachery, murder, or other heavy crimes, before a Free Assembly of the people.

In the proud consciousness that he was his own master, and served none, not even the King, beyond the limit of freedom, the German went in full armour to the "Ting," where he felt himself safe and strong in union with his fellows, and saw the liberties, strength, and honour of himself and his countrymen represented in living pictures before his eyes.

To the Assembly of which we now speak, the Goths had been attracted by peculiarly strong reasons. When the summons to meet at Regeta was published, the war with Byzantium was expected or already declared; the nation rejoiced at the coming struggle with their hated enemy, and were glad to muster their forces beforehand. This time the Assembly was to be, more than ever, a grand review.

Besides this, most of the Goths in the adjacent places knew that judgment was to be passed on the murderers of the daughter of Theodoric, and the great excitement caused by this treacherous act had also contributed to draw the people to Regeta.

While a portion of those assembled had been received by friends and relatives in the nearest villages, great numbers had--already some days before the formal opening of the Assembly--encamped in light tents and huts upon the wide plain, two hundred and eighty stadii distant from

Rome.

At the earliest dawn of day these groups were already in noisy movement, and employed the time during which they were yet masters of the place, in various games and pastimes.

Some swam and bathed in the clear waters of the rapid river Ufen (or "Decemnovius," thus named because it flowed into the sea at Terracina, nineteen miles off), which crossed the plain. Others displayed their skill in leaping over whole rows of outstretched spears, or, almost naked, in dancing amid brandished swords, while others again--and these the fleetest-footed--clinging to the manes of their horses, kept step with their swiftest gallop, and when arrived at the goal, securely swung themselves upon their unsaddled backs.

"What a pity," cried young Gudila, who was the first to arrive at the goal in one of these races, and now stroked his yellow locks out of his eyes, "what a pity that Totila is not present! He is the best rider in the nation, and has always beaten me. But now, with this horse, I would try again with him."

"I am glad that he is not here," said Gunthamund, who had arrived second, "else I had scarcely won the first prize in hurling the lance yesterday."

"Yes," said Hilderich, a stately young warrior in a jingling suit of mail, "Totila is clever at the lance. But black Teja throws still better; he can tell you beforehand which rib he will hit."

"Pshaw!" grumbled Hunibad, an elderly man, who had looked critically at the performance of the youths, "all that is only play. In bloody earnest the sword is the only weapon that serves a man at the last, when death so presses on him from all sides that he has no space for throwing. And for that I praise Earl Witichis, of Fæsulæ! He is *my* man! What a breaking of skulls was there in the war with the Gepidæ! The man cleaved through steel and leather as if it were dry straw! He is still more valiant than my own duke, Guntharis the Wölfung, in Florentia. But what do you youngsters know about it?--Look! the first arrivals are coming down the hill. Up! let us go to meet them!"

And now people came streaming in on all the roads; on foot, on horseback, and in wagons. A noisy and turbulent crowd filled all the plain.

On the shores of the river, where stood most of the tents, the horses were unharnessed, and the wagons pushed together to form a barricade. Through the lanes of the camp the ever-increasing crowd now streamed. There friends and acquaintances, who had not met for years, sought and greeted each other.

It was a gay and chequered scene, for the old Germanic equality had long since disappeared from the kingdom.

There stood near the aristocratic noble, who had settled in one of the rich Italian towns, who lived in the palaces of senatorial families, and had adopted the more luxuriant and polite customs of the Italians; near the duke or earl from Mediolanum or Ticinum, who wore a shoulder-belt of purple silk across his richly-gilt armour; near such a dainty lord towered some rough, gigantic Gothic peasant, who lived in the thick oak-forests on the Margus in Mœsia, or who had fought the wolf in the forests by the rushing Cœnus for the ragged skin which he carried over his bear-like shoulders, and whose harsh-sounding speech struck strangely on the ear of his half-Romanised companion.

There came strong and war-hardened men from the distant Augusta

Vindelicorum on the Licus, who day and night defended the rotten walls of that outermost northern fortress of the Gothic kingdom against the wild Suēvi.

And here were peaceful shepherds from Dacia, who, possessing neither field nor house, wandered with their flocks from pasture to pasture, still living in the manner introduced into the West by their ancestors from Asia a thousand years ago.

There was a rich Goth, who, in Rome or Ravenna, had married the daughter of some Italian moneychanger, and had soon learned to do business like his father-in-law, and reckon his profits by thousands.

And here stood a poor Alpine shepherd, who drove his meagre goats on to the meagre pastures near the noisy Isarcus, and who erected his hut of planks close to the den of the bear.

So differently had the die been cast for the thousands who were here met together, since their fathers had followed the call of the great Theodoric to the West, away from the valleys of the Hæmus.

But still they felt that they were brothers, the sons of one nation; they spoke the same proud language, they had the same golden locks, the same snowy skins, the same light and sparkling eyes, and--above all--the same feeling in their hearts: "We stand as victors on the ground that our fathers forced from the Roman Empire, and which we will defend to the death."

Like an immense swarm of bees the masses hummed and buzzed, greeting each other, seeking old acquaintances and concluding new friendships; and the chaotic tumult seemed as if it would never end.

But suddenly the peculiar long-drawn tones of the Gothic horn were heard from the crown of the hill, and at once the storm of the thousand voices was laid.

All eyes were eagerly turned in the direction of the hill, from which a procession of venerable men now approached.

It was formed of half a hundred men in white and flowing mantles, their heads crowned with ivy, carrying white staffs and ancient stone axes. They were the sajones or soldiers of the tribunal, whose office it was to carry out the ceremonial forms of opening, warding, and closing the "Ting."

Arrived on the plain, they greeted with a triple long-drawn flourish the assembly of free warriors; who, after a solemn silence, answered with the clash and clang of their arms.

The ban-officers shortly began their work.

They divided to the right and left, and enclosed the whole wide field with red woollen cords, which they wound round hazel staffs fixed into the earth at every twenty steps; accompanying this action with the repetition of ancient songs and sayings.

Exactly opposite the rising and setting of the sun, the woollen cords were raised over the shafts of tall lances, so that they formed the two gates of the now completely enclosed "Ting-place;" and these entrances were guarded by soldiers with drawn swords, in order to keep all strangers and women at a distance.

When all was arranged, the two oldest of the men stepped beneath the spear-gates and called in a loud voice:

**"According to ancient Gothic custom
Is the fence erected.
Now, with God's help,
The judgment may begin."**

After the pause which ensued, there arose a low murmur amongst the crowd, which gradually grew into a loud, and, at last, almost deafening uproar of questioning, disputing, and doubting voices.

It had been already remarked, as the procession advanced, that it was not, as usual, led by the Earl who was accustomed to hold and conduct the "Ting" in the name and ban of the King. But it had been expected that this representative of the King would make his appearance during the ceremony of enclosing the place. When, therefore, this work was accomplished, and the sentence of the old men called for the commencement of the tribunal, and still no earl or officer had appeared, who alone could pronounce the opening speech, the attention of all present was directed to this deficiency, so difficult to be supplied.

While everywhere the people asked and sought for the Earl, or some representative of the King, it was remembered that the King himself had announced that he would appear in person before his people, to defend himself and his Queen against the heavy accusation brought against them.

But when the leaders of the people now sought for the friends and partisans of the King, to question them concerning him, they discovered the suspicious fact--which, till now, had been overlooked in the confusion of general greetings--that not one of the numerous relations, friends or servants of the royal family, whose duty, privilege, and interest it was to appear in support of the accused, were present at the meeting, although they had been seen in numbers, a few days ago, in the streets and neighbourhood of Rome.

This circumstance excited surprise and suspicion; and for some time it seemed as if, in consequence of the tumult caused by this singular fact and the absence of the Earl, the formal commencement of the whole proceedings would be rendered impossible.

Many speakers had already tried in vain to gain a hearing.

All at once, from the middle of the crowd, a sound was heard, similar to the battle-cry of some fearful monster, which drowned all other noises.

All eyes were turned in the direction whence the sound proceeded, and in the middle of the place, leaning against a lofty ilex-tree, was seen the tall form of a man, who shouted the Gothic war-cry into the hollow of his bronze shield, which he held before his mouth.

As the shield dropped, it discovered the powerful face of old Hildebrand, whose eyes seemed to flash fire.

Enthusiastic applause greeted the appearance of the old and well-known master-at-arms of the great Theodoric, who, like his master, had, by means of song and proverb, become a mythic figure amongst the Goths while still living.

As the applause died away the old man commenced:

"Good Goths! my brave brothers! It troubles and surprises you that you see no Earl, and no representative of the man who wears your crown. Do not let it disturb you! If the King thinks thereby to interrupt this meeting, he is mistaken. I still remember old times, and I tell you, the people can judgewhat is right without the King, and hold the tribunal without the

King's Earl. You are all grown up amongst new manners and customs, but there stands old Haduswinth, scarcely a few winters younger than myself; he will bear me witness that power is with the people alone; the Gothic nation is free!"

"Yes! we are free!" cried a thousand voices.

"If the King does not send his Earl, we will choose our 'Ting-Earl' ourselves," cried the grey-haired Haduswinth; "right and justice existed before King and Earl! And who knows the old customs of the nation better than Hildebrand, son of Hilding? Hildebrand shall be our Ting-Earl!"

"Yes!" was echoed on all sides; "Hildebrand shall be our Ting-Earl!"

"You have chosen me," now said Hildebrand, "and I count myself as well elected as if King Theodahad had given me a warrant in letter and parchment. And my ancestors for centuries have often held tribunals for the Goths. Come, sajones, help me to open the Assembly."

In front of the oak there still lay the ruins of an ancient fane of the wood-god Picus; the sajones cleared the place, piled up the broadest stones, and leaned two square slabs to the right and left against the trunks of the oak, so that a stately seat of justice was thus formed. And so before the altar of the old Italic sylvan god, the Gothic Earl held a tribunal.

Other sajones threw a wide blue woollen mantle with a broad white collar over Hildebrand's shoulders, and gave him an ashen staff, curved at the top. At his left hand, on the branches of the oak, they hung a shining shield of burnished steel, and then placed themselves in two groups on his right and on his left. The old man struck the shield with his staff till it rung loudly. Then he seated himself with his face to the east and began:

"I enjoin silence, ban, and peace! I enjoin right and forbid wrong, quick anger, biting words, ready blows, and everything which can offend the peace of the Ting. And I ask: is it the year and day, the time and hour, the place and spot in which to hold a free tribunal of Gothic men?"

The Goths who stood the nearest stepped forward and answered in chorus:

"Here is the right place, under the wide sky, under the rustling oak; now is the right time, with a climbing sun, to hold a free tribunal of Gothic men on the sword-won soil of our Gothic inheritance."

"We are assembled," continued old Hildebrand, "to decide upon two cases: an accusation of murder against Gothelindis the Queen, and of cowardice and negligence, in this time of great danger, against Theodahad our King. I ask----"

But his speech was interrupted by the loud flourish of horns, which sounded nearer and nearer from the west.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Goths turned in astonishment, and saw a troop of horsemen hurrying down the hill in the direction of the place of justice.

The sun flashed upon the armed figures with such dazzling brilliancy that they could not be recognised, although they approached rapidly.

But old Hildebrand rose up in his elevated seat, shaded his eagle eyes

with his hand, and at once exclaimed:

"Those are Gothic weapons! The waving banner bears the figure of the scales: that is the crest of Earl Witichis! and there he is himself at the head of the troop! and the tall figure on his left is the sturdy Hildebad! What brings the generals back? Their troops should be far on their way to Gaul and Dalmatia."

There ensued an uproar of excited voices. Meanwhile the riders had reached the place and sprang from their smoking horses. Received with enthusiasm, the two generals, Witichis and Hildebad, went through the crowd up to Hildebrand's judgment-seat.

"What?" cried Hildebad, still out of breath; "you sit here and hold a tribunal as if in time of peace, and the enemy Belisarius has landed!"

"We know it," answered Hildebrand quietly, "and would have held counsel with the King how best to check him."

"With the King!" laughed Hildebad bitterly.

"He is not here," said Witichis, looking round; "that confirms our suspicion. We returned because we had cause for grave mistrust. But of that later. Continue where you were interrupted. Everything according to right and order! Peace, friend!"

And, pushing the impatient Hildebad back, he modestly placed himself on the left of the judgment-seat amongst the others.

After all had become still, the old man continued:

"Gothelindis, our Queen, is accused of the murder of Amalasintha, the daughter of Theodoric. I ask: are we a tribunal to judge such a cause?"

Old Haduswinth, leaning upon his club, advanced a step and said:

"Red are the cords which enclose this place of execution. The National Assembly has the right to judge red-handed crime; warm life and cold death. If it has been ordered otherwise in late times, it has been by force and not by right. We *are* a tribunal to judge such a cause."

"Through all the nation," resumed Hildebrand, "a heavy reproach is made against Gothelindis; in the depths of our hearts we accuse her. But who will accuse her here, in open assembly, in audible words, of this murder?"

"I," cried a loud voice, and a handsome young Goth in shining armour stepped forward, on the right of the judge, laying his hand upon his heart.

A murmur of approbation ran through the crowd.

"He loves the beautiful Matasintha!"

"He is the brother of Duke Guntharis of Tuscany, who holds Florentia."

"He is her wooer."

"He comes forward as the avenger of her mother."

"I, Earl Aarahad of Asta, the son of Aramuth, of the noble race of the Wölfungs," continued the young Goth with an engaging blush. "It is true, I am not akin to the murdered Princess; but the men of her family, Theodahad foremost, her cousin and her King, do not fulfil their duty as blood-avengers. Is not Theodahad himself abettor and hider of the murder? I, then, a free and unblemished Goth of noble blood, a friend of

the late unhappy Princess, complain on behalf of her daughter, Mataswintha. I appeal against murder! I appeal against blood!"

And, amidst the loud applause of the Assembly, the stately youth drew his sword and laid it straight before him upon the seat of justice.

"And thy proofs? Speak!"

"Hold, Ting-Earl," cried a grave voice, and Witichis stepped forward opposite to the complainant. "Art thou so old, and knowest so well what is just, Master Hildebrand, and allowest thyself to be carried away by the pressure of the multitude? Must I remind thee, I, the younger man, of the first law of all justice? I hear the complainant, but not the accused."

"No woman may enter the Ting of the Goths," said Hildebrand quietly.

"I know it; but where is Theodahad, her husband and defender?"

"He has not appeared."

"Is he invited?"

"He is invited, upon my oath and that of these messengers," cried Aarahad. "Step forth, sajones!"

Two of the officers came forward and touched the judgment-seat with their staffs.

"Well," continued Witichis, "it shall never be said that a woman was judged by the people of the Goths unheard and undefended. However she may be hated, she has a right to be heard and protected. I will be her defender and pleader."

And he went towards the youthful complainant, likewise drawing his sword.

A pause of respectful admiration followed.

"So thou deniest the deed?"

"I say it is not proven."

"Prove it!" said the judge, turning to Aarahad.

The latter, unprepared for a formal proceedings and not ready to cope with an opponent of Witichis's weight and steady composure, was somewhat embarrassed.

"Prove?" he cried impatiently. "What need of proof? Thou, I, all the Goths know that Gothelindis hated the Princess long and bitterly. The Princess disappears from Ravenna; at the same time her murderess also. The victim is discovered in a house belonging to Gothelindis--dead; and the murderess escapes to a fortified castle. What need, then, of proof?"

And he looked with impatience at the Goths near him.

"And on this argument thou wilt accuse the Queen of murder before the open Ting?" asked Witichis quietly. "Truly may the day be far distant when a verdict is founded upon such evidence! Justice, my men, is light and air. Woe, woe to the nation which makes its hatred its justice! I myself hate this woman and her husband; but where I hate I am doubly strict."

He said this in so simple and noble a manner, that the hearts of all present were touched.

"Where are the proofs!" now asked Hildebrand. "Hast thou a palpable act? Hast thou a visible appearance? Hast thou an important word? Hast thou a true oath? Dost thou claim the oath of innocence from the accused?"

"Proof!" again repeated Arahad angrily. "I have none but the conviction within my heart!"

"Then," said Hildebrand----

But at this moment a soldier made his way to him from the gate, and said:

"Romans stand at the entrance. They beg for a hearing. They say they know all about the death of the Princess."

"I demand that they be heard!" cried Arahad eagerly. "Not as complainants, but as witnesses of the complainant."

Hildebrand made a sign, and the soldier hastened to bring up the Romans through the curious throng.

Foremost came a man, bent with years, wearing a hair shirt, and a rope tied round his loins; the cowl of his mantle hid his features. Two men in the habit of slaves followed. Questioning looks were fixed upon the old man, whose bearing, in spite of simplicity and even poverty, was full of dignity and nobility.

When he reached Hildebrand's seat, Arahad looked closely into his face, and started back in surprise.

"Who is it," asked the judge, "whom thou callest as a witness to thy words? An unknown stranger?"

"No," cried Arahad, and threw back the old man's mantle. "A man whom you all know and honour--Marcus Aurelius Cassiodorus."

A cry of general surprise arose from the Ting-place.

"Such was my name," said the witness, "during the time of my worldly existence; now only Brother Marcus."

An expression of holy resignation beamed from his features.

"Well, Brother Marcus," responded Hildebrand, "what hast thou to tell us of Amalasintha's death? Tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"I will. Know, first, that it is not the striving after human requital which brings me here. I do not come to avenge the murder. 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay,' saith the Lord. No; I am here to fulfil the last wish of the unhappy woman, the daughter of my great King."

He took a roll of papyrus out of his dress.

"Shortly before her flight from Ravenna, Amalasintha directed these lines to me, which I have to communicate to you as her legacy to the nation of the Goths. These are her words:

"The thanks of a contrite heart for thy friendship. Still more than the hope of safety, I am comforted by the feeling that I have not lost thy attachment. Yes, I will hasten to thy villa in the Lake of Bolsena. Does not the road lead thence to Rome, to Regeta, where I will confess before my Goths, and atone for my crime? I will die, if it must be; but not by the hands of my enemies. No; by the verdict of my people, whom I, blind fool,

have ruined! I have deserved death, not only for the murder of the three dukes--who, let it be known to all, died through me--but still more for the madness with which I repulsed my people for the sake of Byzantium. If I reach Regeta alive, I will warn my people with my last breath, and cry: Fear Byzantium! Justinian is false as hell, and there can be no peace between him and us! But I will warn them also of inner enemies. King Theodahad plots treason; he has sold Italy and the Gothic crown to the ambassador of Byzantium; he has done I refused to do. Be cautious, strong, and united! Would that' dying, I could expiate the crimes committed while living."

The people had listened in deep silence to these words, read by Cassiodorus in a trembling voice, and which seemed to come to them from the other side of the grave.

When he ceased, compassion and sorrow prolonged this silence.

At last old Hildebrand rose and said:

"She has erred; she has made atonement. Daughter of Theodoric, the nation of the Goths forgives thy crime, and thanks thee for thy fidelity."

"So may God forgive her; amen!" said Cassiodorus.

He then continued:

"I never invited her to my villa; I could not do so. Fourteen days before I had sold all my property to Queen Gothelindis."

"Therefore her enemy," interrupted Arahad, "misusing his name, decoyed Amalasintha into that house. Canst thou deny this. Earl Witichis?"

"No," answered he. "But," he continued, turning to Cassiodorus, "hast thou also proof that the Princess did not die an accidental death there? that Gothelindis caused her death!"

"Come forth, Syrus, and speak!" said Cassiodorus. "I answer for the truth of this man."

The slave advanced, bent his head reverently, and said:

"For twenty years I have had the superintendence of the sluices of the lake and the waterworks of the baths in the villa; none beside me knew the secret. When Queen Gothelindis bought the estate, all the slaves and personal servants of Cassiodorus were sent away; I alone remained. Early one morning, the Princess Amalasintha landed at the island, and the Queen soon followed. The latter at once sent for me, said she would take a bath, and ordered me to give her the keys of all the sluices of the lake and the pipes of the baths, and to explain to her the whole plan of the works. I obeyed; gave her the keys and the plan drawn upon parchment, but warned her seriously not to open all the sluices, nor to let all the pipes play, for it might cost her her life. But she angrily rebuked me, and I heard that she ordered her slave to fill the kettles, not with warm, but with hot water. I went away; but, anxious for her safety, I remained in the vicinity of the baths. After some time, I heard, by the violent roaring and rushing, that notwithstanding, and in spite of, my advice, the Queen had let in the whole water of the lake. At the same time I heard the steaming water rise hissing through all the pipes in the walls; and, as it seemed to me, I heard, dulled by the marble walls, fearful cries for help. I hurried to the outer gallery of the baths to save the Queen. But what was my surprise when, at the central point of the works, at the Medusa's head, I saw the Queen, whom I thought in danger of death in the bath, standing quietly outside, completely clothed. She pressed the springs, and exchanged

angry words with some one who was calling for help within. Horrified, and partly guessing what was going forward, I crept away, happily unobserved."

"What, coward?" cried Witichis, "thou couldst guess what was passing and creep away!"

"I am only a slave, sir, no hero, and if the Queen had noticed me, I should certainly not be standing here to bear witness against her. Shortly afterwards a report was spread that the Princess Amalasintha was drowned in the bath."

Loud murmurs and angry cries rang through the assembled crowd.

Arahad cried triumphantly: "Now, Earl Witichis, wilt thou still defend her?"

"No," answered Witichis, and sheathed his sword, "I defend no murderess! My office is at an end."

With this he went over from the left to the right, amongst the accusers.

"You, ye free Goths, have now to find the verdict, and administer justice," said Hildebrand. "I have only to execute what you pronounce; so I ask you, ye men of judgment, what think ye of this accusation, which Earl Arahad, son of Aramuth the Wölfung, has brought against Gothelindis, the Queen? Speak! is she guilty of murder?"

"Guilty! guilty!" shouted many thousand voices, and not a voice said "no."

"She is guilty," said the old man, rising. "Speak, complainant, what punishment dost thou demand for this crime?"

Arahad lifted his sword towards heaven.

"I appealed against murder, I appealed against blood! She shall die the death!"

And before Hildebrand could put his question to the people, the crowd was filled with angry emotion, every man's sword flew from its sheath and flashed in the sun, and every voice shouted, "She shall die the death!"

The words rolled like a terrible thunder, bearing the people's judgment over the wide plain till the echo died away in the distance.

"She dies the death," said Hildebrand, "by the axe. Up, soldiers, and search for her."

"Hold," cried Hildebad, coming forward, "our sentence will be hard to fulfil, so long as this woman is the wife of our King. Therefore I demand that the Assembly at once examine into the accusation that we carry in our hearts against Theodahad, who governs a people of heroes so unheroically. I will give words to this accusation. Mark well, I accuse him of treachery, not only of incapability to lead and save us. I will be silent on the fact that, without his knowledge, his Queen could scarcely have cooled her hate in Amalasintha's blood; I will not speak of the warning which the latter sent to us, in her last words, against Theodahad's treachery; but is it not true that he deprived the whole southern portion of the realm of men, weapons, horses, and ships? that he sent all the forces to the Alps, so that the degenerate Greeks won Sicily, and entered Italy without a blow? My poor brother, Totila, stands alone against them, with a mere handful of soldiers. Instead of defending his rear, the King sent Witichis, Teja and me to the north. We obeyed with heavy hearts, for we guessed

where Belisarius would land. We advanced slowly, expecting to be recalled at every moment. In vain. Already there ran a report through the places which we passed that Sicily was lost, and the Italians, who saw us march to the north, pulled mocking faces. We had accomplished a few days' march along the coast, when a letter from my brother Totila reached me: 'Has then, like the King, the whole nation, and my brother also, forsaken and forgotten me?' it said. 'Belisarius has taken Sicily by surprise. He has landed in Italy. The population join him. He presses forward to Neapolis. I have written four letters to King Theodahad for help. All in vain. Received not a single sail. Neapolis is in great danger. Save, save Neapolis and the kingdom!'"

A cry of dismay and anger ran through the listening crowd.

"I wanted," continued Hildebad, "to return immediately with all our thousands, but Earl Witichis, my commander, would not suffer it. I could only persuade him to halt the troops, and hasten here with a few horsemen to warn, to save, to revenge! For I cry for revenge, revenge upon King Theodahad. It was not only folly and weakness, it was knavery, to expose the south to the enemy. This letter proves it. My brother warned him four times in vain. He delivered him and the realm into the enemy's hands. Woe to us if Neapolis falls, or has already fallen! Ha! he who is guilty of this shall reign no longer, no longer live! Tear the crown of the Goths, which he has dishonoured, from his head! Down with him! Let him die!"

"Down with him! Let him die!" thundered the people, in a mighty echo.

The storm of their fury seemed irresistible, and capable of destroying whatever opposed it.

Only one man remained quiet and composed in the midst of the turbulent crowd. It was Earl Witichis. He sprang upon one of the old stones beneath the oak, and waited till the tumult was somewhat appeased.

Then he lifted his voice, and spoke with the clear simplicity which so well became him.

"Countrymen! companions! hear me! You are wrong in your sentence. Woe to us if, in the Gothic nation, by whom, since the days of our forefathers, right has been ever honoured, hate and force should sit on the throne of justice! Theodahad is a bad and weak King. He shall no longer hold the reins of the kingdom alone. Give him a guardian, as if to a minor! Depose him if you like; but you may not demand his death, his blood! Where is the proof of his treachery? or that Totila's message reached him? See, you are silent! Be wary of injustice! It destroys nations!"

As he stood on his elevated place in the full blaze of the sun, he looked great and noble, full of power and dignity. The eyes of the multitude rested with admiration upon him who seemed so superior to them all in nobility, temperance, and clear-sighted composure. A solemn pause followed.

Before Hildebad and the people could find an answer to the man who seemed to be Justice personified, the general attention was drawn away to the thick forest which bounded the view to the south, and which suddenly seemed to become alive.

CHAPTER XIV.

For the quick trampling of approaching horses and the jingling of armour was heard in the wood, and soon a little group of horsemen appeared issuing from under the trees, and far in front galloped a man on a coal-black charger, which sped on as if rivalling the rushing of the wind.

The long black locks of the rider waved in the air, as well as the thick black mane which formed the crest of his helmet. Bending forwards, he urged his foaming horse to greater speed, and as he reached the southern entrance to the Ting, sprang from his saddle with a clash.

All gave way as they met the furious glance of his eye. His handsome face was ghastly pale.

He rushed up the incline, sprang upon a stone near Witichis, held on high a roll of parchment, cried with a last effort, "Treachery! treachery!" and fell prone, as if struck by lightning.

Witichis and Hildebad ran to him; they had barely recognised their friend.

"Teja! Teja!" they cried, "what has happened? Speak!"

"Speak," repeated Witichis once more, "it concerns the kingdom!"

At this word the steel-clad man raised himself with a superhuman effort, looked about him for a moment, and then said in a hollow voice:

"We are betrayed, Goths! betrayed by our King! Six days ago I received orders to go to Istria, not to Neapolis, as I had begged. I felt suspicious, but I obeyed, and embarked with my thousands. A violent storm drove numerous small vessels towards us from the west. Amongst them was the *Mercurius*, the swift-sailing post-boat of Theodahad. I knew the vessel well; she once belonged to my father. As soon as she caught sight of our ships, she tried to evade us. I, mistrustful, chased her and overtook her. Her captain carried a letter to Byzantium, in the handwriting of the King. 'You will be content with me, great general,' it said, 'all the Gothic forces are at this moment on the north-east of Rome; you can land without danger. I have destroyed four letters from the Count of the Harbour of Neapolis, and thrown his messengers into a dungeon. In requital, I expect that you will punctually fulfil our contract, and shortly pay me the price fixed.'"

Teja let the letter fall; his voice died away.

The people uttered deep groans of rage.

"I at once turned and landed, and have galloped here for three days and nights without pause. I can no more."

And, staggering, he sank into the arms of Witichis.

Then old Hildebrand sprang upon the highest stone of his seat, so that he towered above the crowd. He tore a lance, which bore a small marble bust of the King upon its cross-stick, out of the hands of the bearer, and held it aloft in his left hand. In his right he raised his stone-axe.

"Sold!" he cried. "He has sold his people for yellow gold! Down with him! Down, down!"

And with a stroke of his axe he shattered the bust.

This action was the first thunder-clap that unchained the brooding tempest. Only to be compared to the strife of the elements was the wild storm which now arose amongst the multitude.

"Down with him! down with Theodahad!" was repeated a thousand times, accompanied by the deafening clash of arms.

Amidst this tumult the old master-at-arms again lifted up his metallic voice, silence once more ensued, and he said solemnly:

"Hear it, God in heaven, and men on earth: all-seeing sun and blowing wind, hear it! Whereas King Theodahad, the son of Theodis, has betrayed people and kingdom to the enemy; the nation of the Goths, free and full of ancient fame and born to bear arms, depose him from the throne. We deprive thee, Theodahad, of the golden crown and of the kingdom; of Gothic right and of life. And we do this not wrongly, but rightly. For under all our kings we have been ever free, and we would rather want kings than want freedom. No king stands so high, that he may not be judged by his people for murder, treachery, and perjury. So I deprive thee of crown, kingdom, right, and life. Outlawed shalt thou be, contemned, dishonoured. As far as Christians pray in their churches, and heathens sacrifice on their altars; as far as fire burns and earth grows green; as far as the falcon can fly a whole day when the wind supports his wings; as far as ships sail and shields shine; as far as heaven spreads its vault and the world extends; house and hall, and the companionship of good people, and all dwelling shall be denied thee, except hell alone. Thy inheritance I divide amongst the Gothic people. Thy flesh and blood I give to the ravens of the air. And whoever findeth thee, in hall or court, in a house or on the high-road, shall slay thee unpunished, and shall be thanked for his deed by the good Goths, and blessed by God. I ask you, men of justice, shall it be thus?"

"It shall be thus!" answered the crowd, and struck their swords upon their shields.

Hildebrand had scarcely descended from the stone, when old Haduswinth took his place, threw back his shaggy bear-skin, and spoke:

"We are rid of the perjured king! He will meet with an avenger. But now, true men, we must choose another king. For we have never been without one. As far back as legend and story reach, our forefathers have lifted a king upon the shield, the living symbol of the power, glory, and fortune of the good Goths. So long as Goths exist, they will have kings; and as long as a king can be found, the nation will endure. And now it is more than ever necessary that we should have a head, a leader. The race of the Amelungs rose like the sun in glory--Theodoric, its brightest star, shone for a long time; but this sun has been shamefully extinguished in Theodahad. Up! people of the Goths, ye are free! Freely choose a rightful king, who will lead you to victory and glory! The throne is vacant. Goths, I call upon you to choose a king!"

"Let us choose a king!" was the answer, in a solemn and mighty chorus.

Then Witichis mounted the Ting-seat, took off his helmet, and raised his right hand.

"Thou, God, who rulest the stars, knowest that we are not moved by unwise delight in disobedience, or by wantonness. We use the sacred right of necessity. We honour the right of royalty, the glory which beams from the crown; but this glory is dimmed. And in the great need of the nation, we exercise a people's highest right. Heralds shall go forth to all the peoples of the earth, and announce that, not because we despise, but because we honour, the crown, have we acted thus. But, for God's sake, no disputes, no quarrels now; now, when the enemy is in the land! Therefore let us first solemnly swear, that he who has the majority, were it only of *one* voice, we will all honour as our king--him and no other. I swear it--swear with me."

"We swear!" cried the Goths,

But young Aarahad did not join in the oath. Ambition and love flamed in his heart. He remembered that after the fall of the Balthes and the Amelungs, his house was the oldest in the nation. He hoped to win Mataswintha's hand, if he could offer her a crown; and scarcely had the voices of the people died away, than he advanced and cried:

"Whom shall we choose, Goths? Reflect well! Above all, it is clear, we need a man with a young and powerful arm to lead us against the enemy. But that alone is not sufficient. Why did our ancestors elevate the Amelungs? Because they were the noblest and most ancient race, descended from the gods. The first star is extinguished; remember the second, remember the Balthes!"

"Now there lived only one male descendant of that family, a not yet adult grandchild of Duke Pitz--for Alaric, the brother of the Dukes Thulun and Ibba, had not been heard of for years. Aarahad was confident that this boy would not be chosen, and that then the people would think of the third star of nobility. But he erred. Old Haduswinth came forward angrily and exclaimed:

"Nobility and race! Are we serfs or freemen? By the Thunderer! shall we count ancestors when Belidarius is in the land? I will tell thee, boy, what a king needs. A brave arm, it is true, but not that alone. The King shall be a rock of justice, a bulwark of peace, not only a leader in the battle. The King shall have an ever-quiet and ever-clear mind, as clear as the blue sky; and, like stars, just thoughts shall rise and set therein. The King shall have an ever-equal power, but still more an ever-equal measure; he shall never lose and forget himself in love or hate, as we may, who stand below in the crowd. He shall not only be mild to friends, but just to enemies. He, in whose heart serenity is paired with bold courage, and true moderation with true strength--that man, Aarahad, is kingly, even though the humblest peasant had begotten him."

Loud applause followed the words of the old man, and Aarahad fell back abashed. But Haduswinth continued:

"Good Goths, I think we have such a man! I will not name him: you shall name him to me. I came here from the distant Alps of our boundary, towards the Karathans, where the wild Turbidus rushes foaming down the rocks. There I have lived for more than the usual days of man, free, proud and lonely. I heard little of the acts of men, even of the great deeds of my own nation, unless a pack-horse laden with salt happened to stray my way. And yet the warlike frame of *one* of our heroes penetrated even to that desolate height. One who never drew his sword in an unjust cause, and who never sheathed it without victory. His name I heard again and again when I asked: Who will protect our kingdom when Theodoric dies? His name I heard in every victory that we gained, and in every work of peace that was accomplished. I had never seen him. I longed to see him. To-day I have both seen and heard him. I have looked into his eyes, that are clear and mild as the sun. I have heard his words. I heard how he pleaded for right and justice, even for a hated enemy. I heard how he alone, when blind passion carried us away, remained serene and quiet and just. Then I thought in my heart: that man is kingly; strong in war and just in peace; true as steel and pure as gold. Goths! that man shall be our king. Name the man!"

"Earl Witichis! yes, Witichis! Hail, King Witichis!"

As the unanimous acclamation rang across the plain, a sudden fear fell upon the modest man, who had eagerly listened to the speech of the old orator, and only towards the close suspected that he himself was the man

so praised.

And as he heard his name ring in this thousand-voiced shout, his only feeling was: "No! this cannot, must not be!"

He tore himself away from Teja and Hildebad, who were joyfully pressing his hands, and sprang forward, shaking his head, and, as if to protect himself, stretching forth his arm.

"No!" he cried; "no, friends! not that to me! I am a simple soldier, no king. I am perhaps a good tool, but no master! Choose another, a worthier!"

And, as if beseeching them, he held out both hands to the people. But the thundering cry, "Hail, King Witichis!" was the only answer he received.

And now old Hildebrand advanced, seized his hand, and said in a loud voice:

"Cease to resist, Witichis! Who was it who first swore to acknowledge, without hesitation, the man who gained a majority even of one voice? See, thou hast all voices; and wilt thou refuse!"

But Witichis shook his head.

Then the old man went up to him and whispered:

"What? Must I urge thee more strongly? Must I remind thee of that midnight oath and bond; to sacrifice all for the well-being of thy people? I know--I see through thy transparent soul--that the crown is more a burthen to thee than an honour. I suspect that this crown will bring thee great and bitter pain, perhaps more pain than joy; and therefore I ask of thee, that thou accept it."

Witichis was still silent and pressed both hands over his eyes.

This by-play had lasted far too long for the enthusiasm of the people. They already prepared the broad shield on which to lift him; they already pressed up the eminence; and, almost impatiently, the cry sounded anew, "Hail, King Witichis!"

"Think of thy oath! wilt thou keep it or break it!" whispered Hildebrand.

"Keep it!" said Witichis, and resolutely looked up. He now, without false shame or vanity, came forward a step and said: "You have chosen me, O Goths! well, then take me; I will be your king."

At this each man's sword flashed in the light, and a louder cry arose: "All hail, King Witichis!"

Old Hildebrand now descended from his place and said:

"I leave this high seat, for the place now belongs to our king. Only once again let me perform the office of the Ting-Earl. If I cannot hang the purple on thy shoulders, O King, which the Amelungs have worn; nor reach to thee their golden sceptre--take, at least, my judge's mantle and the staff of justice for a sceptre; as a sign that thou wert chosen for thy justice' sake. I cannot press Theodoric's golden circlet, the old Gothic crown, upon thy brow, then take the first leaves of the oak which thou resemblest in trustiness and strength."

With these words he broke a tender shoot of the oak and bound it round Witichis' brow.

"Up, Gothic warriors! fulfil your office with the shield!"

Haduswinth, Teja, and Hildebad took the ancient Ting-shield, lifted the King, who was now crowned with wreath, staff, and mantle, and raised him on their shoulders in sight of all the people.

"Behold, O Goths, your King, whom you yourselves have chosen, and swear allegiance to him!"

And they swore--standing upright, not kneeling--to true to him till death.

Witichis sprang from the shield, ascended the Ting-seat and cried:

"As you swear fidelity to me, so do I to you. I will be a mild and just king; I will do right and prevent wrong. I will remember that you are free, like me, and not my slaves. And I dedicate my life, my happiness, all that is mine, to you, to the people of the good Goths! I swear it by the God of Heaven, and by my throne."

And taking the Ting-shield from the tree, he cried:

"The Ting is over. I dissolve the Assembly."

The sajones at once knocked down the hazel staffs with the cords, and in disorderly confusion the masses mingled over the wide plain.

The Romans, who, curiously but shyly, had observed from a distance this custom of a free people, such as Italy had not witnessed for more than five hundred years, now also mixed freely with the Gothic soldiers, to whom they sold wine and meat.

Witichis prepared to go with his friends and the leaders of the army to one of the tents which were erected on the bank of the river.

There a man in Roman costume--as it seemed, a well-to-do citizen--pressed among his followers, and asked eagerly for Earl Teja, the son of Tagila.

"I am he. What would you, Roman?" asked Teja, turning.

"Nought, sir, except to deliver this vase to you. See, the seal, the scorpion, is intact."

"What shall I do with the vase? I buy no such things."

"The vase is yours, sir. It is full of documents and rolls which belong to you. My guest desired me to give it to you. I beg you, take it."

And he pressed the vase into Teja's hand, and disappeared amid the crowd.

Teja broke the seal indifferently, and took the documents out. Indifferently he looked at them.

But suddenly a vivid flush overspread his pale cheeks, his eyes flashed, and he convulsively bit his lip. The vase fell to the ground as he rushed up to Witichis, and said, in an almost toneless voice:

"My King! King Witichis, a favour!"

"What is it, Teja? For God's sake, what wilt thou?"

"Leave of absence! for six--three days! I must go!"

"Go? Where?"

"To revenge myself! Read--the devil who accused my parents, who drove them to desperation, madness, and death--it is he--whom I long since suspected. Here is his accusation, addressed to the Bishop of Florentia, in his own handwriting--it is Theodahad!"

"It is, it is Theodahad," said Witichis, looking up from the letter. "Go, then! But, doubt it not, thou wilt not find him in Rome. He has certainly fled long since. He has had a great start. Thou canst not overtake him!"

"I will overtake him, even if he rides on the wings of the storm-eagle!"

"Thou wilt not find him!"

"I will find him, if I must pluck him from hell's deepest abyss, or from out of the midst of the angels!"

"He will have fled with a strong escort," warned Witichis.

"I will reach him in the midst of a thousand demons! Hildebad, thy horse! Farewell, King of the Goths. I go to fulfil the ban!"

BOOK IV.

WITICHIS.

"And the Goths chose Witichis for their King, a man of humble origin, but a famous warrior."--*Procopius: Wars of the Goths*, i. 11.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

Slowly sank the sun behind the green hills of Fæsulæ, and gilded the columns in front of the simple country-house of which Rauthgundis was the mistress.

The Gothic servants and Italian slaves were busy concluding the day's work.

The stable-man was fetching the young horses from the pasture; two other servants were bringing a herd of fine cattle home from the fields to the stable; while the goatherd, with Roman invectives, was driving forward his *protégés*, which stopped here and there to nibble the salty saxifrage which grew upon the broken walls of the road.

Other labourers were housing the agricultural implements in the large yard, and a Roman freedman, a very learned and superior personage, the upper gardener himself, left, with a contented look, the place where he practised his blooming and sweet-scented science.

Our little friend Athalwin, with his crown of bright golden hair, was just issuing from the stables.

"Don't forget, Kakus," he cried, "to throw a rusty nail into the water-bucket. Wachis spoke of it particularly. Then he need not beat thee when he comes home."

And he banged the door to.

"Nothing but trouble with these Italian servants," said the little master, with an air of importance. "Since father went away, and Wachis joined him in the camp, everything lies upon my shoulders; for mother is enough for the maids, but the men need a master."

And the little lad marched with great gravity across the yard.

"And they have no proper respect for me," he continued, pouting his cherry lips and ruffing his white forehead. "How should they? At the next equinox I shall be fully nine years old, and they still let me go about with a thing like a kitchen spoon;" and he pulled contemptuously at the little wooden sword hanging to his belt.

"They ought to give me a hunting-knife, a real weapon. With this I can do nothing, and I look like nothing!"

Yet he looked very lovely, like an angry Cupid, in his short sleeveless coat of the finest white linen, which the loving hand of his mother had spun, sewed, and embroidered with an ornamental red stripe.

"I should like very much to run into the fields and get the wild flowers for mother which she loves so much, far more than our finest garden flowers; but I must look round before they shut the doors, for, 'Athalwin,' said father, as he left us, 'take good care of the place, and protect thy mother. I rely upon thee;' and I shook hands upon it, so I must keep my word."

So saying, he went across the yard, past the front of the dwelling-house, looked into all the offices on the left, and was just about to turn to the back of the square court, when he was attracted by the loud barking of some young dogs at a noise which was heard behind the wooden fence which enclosed the whole.

He went towards the corner, and started back in surprise; for on the fence sat, or rather climbed, a strange figure.

It was a tall, haggard old man in a coarse doublet of rough cloth, such as was worn by mountain shepherds; instead of a mantle, an immense undressed wolfskin hung over his shoulders, and in his right hand he carried a long staff with a steel point, with which he warded off the dogs, who angrily sprang at the fence.

The boy ran up.

"Stop, thou strange man! What art thou doing at my fence? Wilt get down at once!"

The old man started, and looked keenly at the handsome boy.

"Down, I say!" repeated the lad.

"Is this the way one greets a tired wanderer at this house!" asked the intruder.

"Yes, when the tired wanderer climbs over the back fence. Art thou honest and meanest honestly--in front stands the great yard-gate wide open; come in there!"

"I know that very well."

And the man prepared to climb down into the courtyard.

"Stop!" cried the boy angrily; "thou shalt not come down there. At him,

Gruffo! At him, Wulfo! And if thou art not afraid of the two young ones, I will call the old one! Then take care! Hey! Thursa! Thursa! stop him!"

At this cry an immense bristly grey wolf-hound darted round the corner of the stable with a furious bark, and was about to spring at the intruder's throat. But she had scarcely reached the fence, when her rage was suddenly changed into joy; she ceased to bark, and, wagging her tail, sprang up to the old man, who now climbed leisurely down.

"Yes, yes, Thursa, faithful bitch, we remember each other," he said. "Now tell me, little man, what is thy name?"

"I am called Athalwin," answered the boy, retreating shyly; "but thou--I believe thou hast bewitched the dog--what art thou called?"

"Like thee," said the old man, in a more friendly manner; "I am glad thou hast my name. But be quiet; I am no robber! Lead me to thy mother, that I may tell her how bravely thou hast defended thy home."

And so the two adversaries walked peacefully into the house, Thursa leaping on in front with joyful barks.

The Gothic housewife had changed, with slight alteration, the Corinthian atrium of this Roman villa, with its rows of pillars on four sides, into the hall of the Germanic dwelling.

In the absence of her husband it was not wanted for gay hospitality, and Rauthgundis had brought her maids here from the women's room, to enjoy the larger space and fresher air.

There sat a long row of Gothic maidens with their noisy spindles; opposite to them a few Roman women slaves, occupied in finer work.

In the middle of the hall walked Rauthgundis, and let her own swiftly-turning spindle dance upon the smooth mosaic pavement, at the same time turning frequently to look at the maids.

Her dark-blue dress of home manufacture was gathered up above one knee, and puffed out over a belt of steel rings, which, her only ornament, bore a bunch of keys.

Her auburn hair was combed, back from the brow and temples, and twined into a simple knot at the back of the head.

There was much simple dignity in her aspect as she paced the room with grave and examining looks. She went up to one of the youngest of the maids, who sat lowest in the row, and bent over her.

"Well done, Liuta," she said; "thy thread is smooth, and thou hast not so often looked up at the door to-day. Certainly," she added with a smile, "there is not much merit in that, as Wachis cannot enter."

The young girl blushed.

Rauthgundis laid her hand kindly upon her smooth hair.

"I know," she said, "that thou art angry with me in secret, because I made thee, the betrothed, work all this year an hour longer, morning and evening, than the other maids. It was cruel, was it not? Well, see! it was for thine own good. All that thou hast spun this year of my best flax is thine; I give it thee for thy new household. Then thou wilt not need to spin next year, the first of thy married life."

The girl took her hand, and looked up gratefully, with tearful eyes.

"And *you* they call hard and severe!" was all that she could say.

"Mild with the good, severe with the bad, Liuta. All that is under my care is the property of my husband, and the inheritance of my boy. Therefore I must be strict."

Just then the old man and Athalwin appeared at the door. The boy wanted to call out, but the old man held his hand over his mouth, and, for a while, observed unremarked the actions of Rauthgundis as she examined the maids' work, praised, scolded, and arranged new tasks.

"Yes," at last said the old man to himself, **"she looks very stately, and seems to be mistress in the house--yet, who knows all!"**

And now it was no more possible to hold Athalwin back.

"Mother!" he cried, **"a strange man! who has bewitched Thursa, and climbed over the fence, and wants to come to thee! I cannot understand it!"**

The stately woman turned to the door with dignity, holding her hand over her eyes, to shade them from the dazzling evening sun, which shone full into the doorway.

"Why dost thou lead the guest here? Thou knowest that thy father is not at home. Take him into the men's hall; his place is not here with me."

"But it is, Rauthgundis! Here, with thee, is my place!" cried the old man, coming forward.

"Father!" cried Rauthgundis, and threw herself into the stranger's arms.

Puzzled, and not without displeasure, Athalwin looked on at this meeting.

"So thou art grandfather, who lives up in the northern mountains? God be with thee, grandfather! But why didst thou not tell me at once? And why didst thou not come through the gate, like other honest folk?"

The old man held his daughter by both hands, and looked inquiringly into her eyes.

"She looks happy and blooming," he murmured to himself.

Rauthgundis composed herself. She cast a quick look round the hall.

All the spindles had ceased whirling--except Liuta's--all eyes were curiously fixed upon the old man.

"Will you spin directly, curious girls!" cried Rauthgundis reprovingly. **"Thou, Marcia, hast let the flax fell with thy staring; thou knowest the custom--thou wilt spin another spoolful. You others can leave your work. Come, father! Liuta, prepare a tepid bath, and meat and wine----"**

"No," said the old man; **"the old peasant in the mountains has only the waterfall for bath and drink. And as to eating--outside the fence, near the boundary-stone, lies my knapsack; fetch it for me. There I have my wheaten bread and my sheep's-milk cheese.--What cattle hast thou in the stall, and horses in the pasture?"**

It was his first question.

An hour after--it was already dark, and little Athalwin had gone to bed, shaking his head over his grandfather--father and daughter wandered into

the open air in the light of the rising moon.

"I have not air enough inside," the old man had said.

They spoke much and earnestly as they walked up and down the courtyard and garden. Between whiles, the old man put questions about the household, such as were suggested by the implements or buildings near him; and in his tone lay no tenderness; only sometimes he secretly examined the countenance of his child with a loving look.

"Do cease talking about rye and horses," at last said Rauthgundis, "and tell me how it has gone with thee these long years? And what has at last brought thee down from the mountains to thy children?"

"How has it gone with me? pretty lonely! lonely! and cold winters! Yes, it is not so pleasant and warm up there as here in the Italian valley."

He spoke as if in reproach.

"Why did I come down? Well, last year the breeding-bull fell down from the *Firn-joch*, and so I wanted to buy another here."

Rauthgundis could no longer contain herself; she affectionately embraced the old man and cried:

"And no bull was to be found nearer than here? Do not lie, father, to thine own heart and to thine own child. Thou art come because thou couldst not help it, because thou couldst no more endure thy longing for thy child!"

The old man stroked her hair.

"How dost thou know that? Well, yes, I wanted to see how it went with thee, and how *he* keeps thee--the Gothic Earl!"

"Like the apple of his eye!" cried Rauthgundis joyfully.

"Indeed? Why, then, is he not at home with wife and child in his house and farm?"

"He serves in the King's army."

"Yes, that is just it! What has he to do with service and a king? But, tell me, why dost not wear a golden bracelet? A Gothic woman once came our way from the Italian valleys, five years ago; she had gold a hand broad. Then I thought, such thy daughter wears. And I was pleased, and now----"

Rauthgundis smiled.

"Shall I wear gold to please my maids? I only put on ornaments when Witichis sees me."

"Indeed! May he deserve it! But thou *hast* golden brooches and rings, like other Gothic wives down here?"

"More than others--chests full. Witichis brought a great booty from the wars."

"So thou art quite happy?"

"Quite, father, but not because of the gold bracelets."

"Hast thou nothing to complain of? Only tell me, child! Whatever it may be, tell it to thy old father, and he will see thee righted."

Rauthgundis stopped short in her walk.

"Father, speak not thus! Thou art wrong to speak so, nor is it right for me to listen. Cast it off, this unhappy delusion, as if I must necessarily be unhappy because I came into the valley. I verily believe this fear alone has brought thee down."

"That alone!" cried the old man, striking his staff upon the ground. "And thou callest thy father's deepest conviction a delusion! Last night I saw thee and Witichis in a dream. He banqueted in a gilded hall, among proud men and lovely women, richly clothed; but thou wert standing outside the door in a beggar's dress, and wept bitter tears and called to him. But he said, 'Who is this woman? I know her not!' And I could no longer rest upon the mountains. Something drew me down; I felt obliged to come and see if my child was well cared for in the valley; and I wished to surprise him, therefore I would not enter thy house by the gate."

"Father," said Rauthgundis angrily, "one should not think such things, even in a dream. Thy mistrust----"

"Mistrust? I trust no one but myself, and the dream told me distinctly that a misfortune threatens thee! Avoid it! Take thy boy and go back with me; only for a short time. Believe me, thou wilt quickly love again the free air up there, where one can overlook all the land."

"I leave my husband? Never!"

"Has he not left thee? The court, and the service of kings, is more to him than wife and child! Then let him have his will."

"Father," said Rauthgundis, grasping his hand, "not a word more. Didst thou, then, not love my mother, that thou canst speak so to a wedded wife? My Witichis is all in all to me; the air and light of life. And he loves me with all his faithful heart; we are one. And if he thinks it right to work and act apart from me, then it *is* right. He serves the cause of his people, and between me and him there shall not be a word, not a shadow, not even a father!"

The old man was silent, but his doubts were not removed.

"Why," he re-commenced after a pause, "why does he not take thee with him, if he has such important affairs at court? Is he ashamed of the peasant's daughter?" and he struck his staff angrily on the ground.

"Anger blinds thee! Thou art vexed because he has taken me away from the mountain into the Italian valley, and art equally vexed because he does not take me to Rome, amongst the Italians!"

"And thou shalt not go there! But he ought to wish it; he ought not to be able to live without thee. But the King's general is no doubt ashamed of the peasant's child."

Just then, before Rauthgundis could answer, a horseman galloped up to the closed gate, before which they happened to be standing.

"Up! open!" he cried, striking the gate-post with his war-club.

"Who is there!" asked the old man cautiously.

"Open! A king's messenger should not be kept waiting so!"

"It is Wachis!" exclaimed Rauthgundis, pushing back the heavy bolt. "What brings thee back so unexpectedly!"

"It is you who open to me!" cried the faithful man. "Oh, hail! all hail, Queen of the Goths! Your lord is chosen King. With my own eyes I saw him lifted upon the shield! He greets you, and calls you and Athalwin to Rome."

In three days you must depart."

In the midst of all her fright and surprise and joy and questioning, Rauthgundis could not help casting a joyful and proud look at her father. Then she threw herself upon his neck and wept.

"Well, father," she asked, when she had again composed herself, "what sayest thou now?"

"What do I say? The misfortune that I foresaw has come! Even to-night will I return to my mountains!"

CHAPTER II.

While the Goths were assembling at Regeta, the powerful army of Belisarius had invested the hard-pressed city of Neapolis in a wide semicircle.

Rapid and irresistible as a fire in dry heather, the army of the Byzantines had advanced from the southernmost point of Italy to the walls of the Parthenopeian town, meeting with no resistance, for, thanks to Theodahad's manœuvres, not a thousand Goths were to be found in all these parts. The short skirmish at the Pass of Jugum was the only hindrance with which the Greeks had met.

The Roman inhabitants of Bruttia, with its towns, Regium, Vibo and Squillacium, Tempsa and Croton, Ruscia and Thurii; of Calabria, with Gallipolis, Tarentum, and Brundusium; of Lucania, with Velia and Buxentum; of Apulia, with Acheruntia and Canusium, Salernum, Nuceria, and Campsæ, and many other towns, had received Belisarius with joy, when, in the name of the Emperor, he promised them deliverance from the yoke of the heretics and barbarians.

To the Aufidus on the east and the Sarnus on the south-west, Italy was wrested from the Goths; and the walls of Neapolis was the first obstacle which broke the rush of the inimical flood which was threatening to overwhelm all Italy.

The camp of Belisarius was worthy of the name of a splendid spectacle. In the north, before the Porta Nolana, stood the camp of the "bloody" Johannes. To his care was entrusted the Via Nolana, and the task of forcing the way to Rome. There, on the wide levels, in the corn-fields of the industrious Goths, the Massagetæ and the yellow-skinned Huns exercised their small rough horses.

Near them were encamped the light-foot of the Persian mercenaries, dressed in linen coats, and armed with bows and arrows; heavy Armenian shield-bearers; Macedonians with lances ten feet long, called sarrissi; and large troops of Thessalian, Thracian and Saracen horsemen, who, condemned to a hated inactivity during the siege, did their best to occupy their leisure time by inroads into the neighbouring country.

The camp in the centre, exactly on the east of the city, was occupied by the main army; Belisarius's large tent of blue Sidonian silk, with its purple standard, towered in the middle. Here strutted the body-guard which Belisarius himself had armed and paid, and which only those who had distinguished themselves by valiant deeds were allowed to join, gay in richly-gilded breast-plates and greaves, bronze shields, broad-swords, and halberd-like lances. These men were frequently promoted to the highest rank.

The kernel of the foot-soldiers was formed by eight thousand Illyrians,

the only worthy troop sent by Greece itself; and here, too, were encamped, under the command of their native chiefs, the Avari, Bulgarians, Sarmatians, and even Germans, as well as Herulians and Gepidæ, whom Belisarius was obliged to enlist at a heavy price, in order to cover the want of native soldiery. Here, too, were the Italian emigrants and many deserters.

Finally, the south-western camp, which stretched along the coast, was commanded by Martinus, who superintended the service of the implements of siege. Here stood, stored up, the catapults and balistæ, the rams and slings; here mingled Isaurian allies and the contingents sent by newly-recovered Africa; Moorish and Numidian horsemen and Libyan slingers. And almost all the barbaric races of three-quarters of the globe had here their representatives; Bajuvars from the Donau, Alemanni from the Rhine, Franks from the Maas, Burgundians from the Rhone, Antæ from the Dniester, Lazians from the Phasis, and the Abasgi, Siberians, Lebanthians and Lycaonians from Asia and Africa, all well skilled in archery.

Out of such heterogeneous materials was the army composed, with which Justinian hoped to drive away the Gothic barbarians and liberate Italy.

The command of the outposts, always and everywhere, was entrusted to the body-guard; and the chain of stations extended round the city from the Porta Capuana almost to the waves of the sea.

Neapolis was badly fortified and weakly garrisoned. Less than a thousand Goths were there to defend the extensive ramparts against an army of forty thousand Byzantines and Italians.

Earl Uliaris, the commander of the city, was a brave man, and had sworn by his beard not to deliver up the fortress. But even he would not have been long able to withstand the far superior force and generalship of Belisarius, had not a fortunate circumstance come to his assistance. This was the premature return of the Grecian fleet to Byzantium. When, namely, Belisarius, after having rested his troops and re-ordered his army in Regium, had given the command for a general advance of the land and sea forces to Neapolis, his navarchus Konon had showed him an order from the Emperor, till then kept secret, according to which the fleet was to sail, immediately after landing the troops, to Nicopolis on the Grecian coast, under the pretext of fetching reinforcements, but in reality to fetch Prince Germanus, the nephew of Justinian, with his imperial lancers, to Italy, where he was to observe, control, and, in case of need, check the victorious steps of Belisarius, and, as commander-in-chief, to protect the interests of the suspicious Emperor.

With deep vexation Belisarius saw his fleet set sail just at the moment when he needed it most, and he only succeeded, after much urgency, in gaining the promise of the navarchus to send him four war-triremes, which were still cruising off Sicily. So Belisarius, when he prepared to besiege Neapolis, was, indeed, able to enclose the city to the north-east, east, and north-west with his land forces--the western road to Rome, defended by the castellum Tiberii, was successfully kept by Earl Uliaris--but he was not able to blockade the harbour nor prevent free communication by sea.

At first he comforted himself with the fact that the besieged likewise had no fleet, and could therefore derive little benefit from this freedom of movement; but now he was, for the first time, baffled by the talent and temerity of an adversary whom he afterwards learned to fear.

This was Totila, who had scarcely reached Neapolis after the fight at the

pass, had scarcely aided Julius in showing the last honours to the remains of Valerius, and in drying Valeria's first tears, than he began, with restless activity, to create a fleet out of nothing. He was commodore of the squadron at Neapolis, but King Theodahad, as we know, had, in spite of his remonstrances, ordered the whole fleet out of the way of Belisarius to Pisa, where it was appointed to guard the mouth of the Arnus. So, from the very beginning, Totila had nothing under his command but three small guard-ships, two of which he had later lost off Sicily; and he had returned to Neapolis despairing of every possibility of defending the city towards the sea. But when he heard the incredible news of the return home of the Byzantine fleet his hopes revived, and he did not rest until he had--out of fishing-boats, merchant-craft, harbour-boats, and the hastily-repaired disabled ships on the wharves--formed a little fleet of about twelve sail, which could neither defy a storm at sea nor cope with a single man-of-war, but could still do good service, such as to provide Baiaë, Cumæ and other towns to the north-west, which would otherwise have been completely cut off, with victuals; to observe the movements of the enemy on the coast, and plague them with repeated attacks; in which Totila himself often landed in the south at the rear of the Grecian camp, surprised--now here, now there--some troop of the enemy, and spread such insecurity, that the Byzantines at last only ventured to leave the camp in strong detachments, and never dared to stray far, while Totila's success gave fresh courage to the hard-pressed garrison of Neapolis, who were wearied by incessant watching and frequent combats.

Notwithstanding this partial success, Totila could not hide from himself that his position was very grave and that as soon as a few Grecian ships should appear before the city it would be desperate.

He therefore used a portion of his boats to convoy a number of the unarmed inhabitants of Neapolis to Baiaë and Cumæ, angrily repelling the demand of the rich, that this means of safety should be granted only to those who paid for it; and taking rich and poor, without distinction, into his saving vessels.

In vain had Totila repeatedly and earnestly begged Valeria to fly in one of these ships, under the protection of Julius; she would not yet leave the tomb of her father; she would not part from her lover, whose praise as protector of the city she was only too much delighted to hear proclaimed by all voices.

So she continued to reside in her old home in the city, indulging in her sorrow and in her love.

CHAPTER III.

It was at this time that Miriam experienced the greatest joy and the keenest sorrow that she had ever known.

She could sun herself more frequently than ever in the presence of the man she loved, for the Porta Capuana was an important point of the fortifications, and Totila was obliged to visit it often. He daily held conferences with Earl Uliaris in old Isaac's tower.

At such times Miriam, when she had greeted the guests, and served the simple meal of fruit and wine, used to slip into the narrow little garden which lay close under the walls of the tower.

This place had been, originally, a small court belonging to an ancient Temple of Minerva, the "wall-protectress," to whom altars had been gratefully erected at the principal gates of various towns.

The altar had disappeared centuries ago, but the gigantic olive-tree, which had once shaded the statue dedicated to the goddess, still stretched its boughs aloft, while flowers, cherished by Miriam's loving hand, and which she had often plucked for the bride of the man whom she hopelessly loved, filled the air with perfume.

Exactly opposite the tree, whose knotted roots protruded from the earth, disclosing a dark opening in the ground-floor of the old temple, there had been placed a large black cross, and below it a little praying stool, which was made out of one of the marble steps of the temple.

The Christians loved to subject the remains of the ancient worship to the service of the new, and to drive out the old gods, now become demons, by the symbols of their victorious faith.

The beautiful Jewess often sat for hours under this cross with old Arria, the half-blind widow of the under doorkeeper, who, after the early death of Isaac's wife, had, with motherly love, watched little Miriam bloom together with her flowers amid the desolate ruins of the old walls.

Twice a day did Uliaris and Totila thus meet; reporting their losses or successes and examining the probability of saving the city.

But on the tenth day of the siege, before dawn, Uliaris hastened on board Totila's "admiral" ship, a rotten fishing-boat, and found the commander sleeping on deck, covered by a ragged sail.

"What is it!" cried Totila, starting up and still dreaming; "the enemy? where?"

"No, my boy; this time it is again Uliaris, and not Belisarius, who awakens thee. But, by the Thunderer! this cannot last much longer!"

"Uliaris, thou bleedest! thy head is bandaged!"

"Bah! 'twas but a stray arrow! Fortunately no poisoned one. I got it last night. Thou must know that things are at a bad pass; much worse than ever before. The bloody Johannes--may God slay him!--digs under our Castle Tiberius like a badger, and if he gets *that*--then farewell, Neapolis! Yester even he finished a battery upon the hill above us, and now he throws burning arrows upon our heads. I tried last night to drive him out of his works, but it was no use. They were seven to one against us, and I gained nothing by it but this wound on my grey head."

"The battery must come down," said Totila reflectively.

"The devil it must! but it will not! I have still more to tell. The citizens begin to get unruly. Belisarius daily shoots a hundred blunt arrows into the city, to which is tied the inscription: 'Rebel for freedom!' They have more effect than a thousand pointed darts. Already, here and there, stones are cast from the roofs upon my poor fellows. If this goes on--we cannot, with a thousand men, keep off forty thousand Greeks outside and thirty thousand Neapolitans inside. Therefore I think--" and his eyes looked very gloomy.

"What thinkest thou?"

"We will burn down a portion of the city--at least the suburbs----"

"So that the inhabitants may like us all the better? No, Uliaris, they shall not have cause to call us 'barbarians.' I know of better means--they are starving; yesterday I brought in four shiploads of oil, com, and wine; this I will divide amongst them."

"Oil and corn if thou wilt! But not the wine! That I claim for my Goths. They have drunk cistern-water long enough, the nasty stuff!"

"Good, thirsty hero, you shall have the wine for yourselves."

"Well? and still no news from Ravenna, or from Rome?"

"None! Yesterday I sent off my fifth messenger."

"May God destroy our King! Listen, Totila, I don't believe we shall ever get alive out of these worm-eaten walls."

"Nor I either," said Totila quietly, and offered his guest a cup of wine.

Uliaris looked at him; then he drank and said:

"Dear fellow! thou art pure as gold, and thy Cæcubian too. And if I must die here, like an old bear amongst the dogs--I am at least glad that I have learned to know thee so well; thee and thy Cæcubian."

With this rough but friendly speech the grey old Goth left the ship.

Totila sent corn and wine to the garrison in the castle, with which the soldiers regaled themselves far into the night.

But the next morning, when Uliaris looked forth from the tower of the castle, he rubbed his eyes. For on the battery upon the hill waved the blue flag of the Goths.

Totila had landed in the night in the rear of the enemy, and had taken the works by storm.

But this new act of audacity only increased the anger of Belisarius. He swore to make an end of the troublesome boats at any price. To his great joy the four triremes from Sicily just then appeared in the offing. Belisarius ordered that they should at once force their way into the harbour of Neapolis, and spoil the handiwork of "those pirates." On the evening of the same day the four immense ships cast anchor at the entrance of the harbour. Belisarius himself visited the coast with his followers, and rejoiced at the sight of the sails, gilded by the evening sun.

"The rising sun shall see them inside the harbour, in spite of that bold youth," he said to Antonina, who accompanied him, and turned his dappled-greys back to the camp.

The next morning he had not yet left his camp-bed--Procopius was standing near him, reading the sketch of a report to Justinian--when Chanaranzes, the Persian, the leader of the body-guard, entered the tent, and cried: "The ships, general! the ships are taken!"

Belisarius sprang from his couch in a rage.

"He dies who says it!"

"It would be better," observed Procopius, "that he should die who did it!"

"Who was it?"

"Oh, sir, the young Goth with the sparkling eyes and shining hair!"

"Totila!" exclaimed Belisarius, "Totila, again!"

"The crew were lying, partly on shore with my outposts, partly on deck, sound asleep. Suddenly, at midnight, all around became as lively as if a

hundred ships had risen out of the sea."

"A hundred ships! Ten nutshells!"

"In a moment, long before we could come to their help from the shore, the ships were boarded, the crews taken prisoners, one of the triremes, whose cable could not be cut quickly enough, set on fire, and the others towed off to Neapolis!"

"Your ships have entered the harbour sooner than you expected, O Belisarius," observed Procopius.

But Belisarius had recovered his self-control.

"Now that the bold boy has ships of war, he will become unbearable! There must be an end to this."

He pressed his helmet upon his majestic head.

"I would willingly have spared the city and the Roman inhabitants; but I can wait no longer. Procopius, go and summon the generals; Magnus, Demetrius and Constantinus, Bessas and Ennes, and Martinus, the master of artillery; I will give them enough to do. The barbarians shall not rejoice in their victory; they shall learn to know Belisarius."

Shortly there appeared in the tent of the commander a man who, in spite of the breast-plate which he wore, had more the air of a scholar than of a warrior.

Martinus, the great mathematician, was of a gentle, peaceful nature, which had long found its sole happiness in the quiet study of Euclid. He could not bear to see blood flow, and was even sorry to pluck a flower. But his mathematical and mechanical studies had one day accidentally led him to invent a new projectile of fearful power. He showed the plan to Belisarius, and he, delighted, would not let him alone, but dragged him before the Emperor, and obliged him to become "master of artillery to the *magister militum*, for the East"--namely, the assistant of Belisarius himself. He received a splendid salary, and was obliged by contract to invent one new machine of war yearly.

Then the gentle mathematician, with many sighs, invented those terrible tools of destruction which overthrew the walls of fortresses, shattered the gates of castles, hurled inextinguishable fire into the towns of Justinian's enemies, and destroyed human lives by thousands.

Every year Martinus delighted in the mathematical problems which he set himself to do; but as soon as the riddle was solved and the work completed, he thought with horror of the effects of his inventions. Therefore he now appeared before Belisarius with a sorrowful countenance.

"Martinus! circle-turner!" cried Belisarius as he entered, "now show your art! How many catapults, balistæ, and sling-machines have we in all?"

"Three hundred and fifty, general."

"'Tis well! Divide them along our whole line of siege. In the north, before the Porta Capuana and the castle, set the rams against the walls; down they must come, were they made of diamonds! From the central camp direct the projectiles in a curve, so that they may fall into the streets of the city. Make every effort; do not cease a moment for twenty-four hours; let the troops relieve each other; let all the machines play!"

"All, general?" asked Martinus. "The new ones too? The pyrobalistæ, the hot projectiles?"

"Those too; those most of all!"

"General, they are horrible! You do not yet know their effect."

"Well, I shall now see what it is, and put them to the proof."

"Upon this splendid city? On the Emperor's city? Will you win for Justinian a heap of ashes?"

Belisarius had a great and noble soul. He was angry with himself, with Martinus, and with the Goths.

"Can I do otherwise?" he asked impatiently. "These stiff-necked Goths, this foolhardy Totila, force me to it. Five times have I offered capitulation. It is madness! Not three thousand men stand behind these walls! By the head of Justinian! why do not the fifty thousand Neapolitans rise and disarm the barbarians?"

"No doubt they fear your Huns more than their Goths," observed Procopius.

"They are bad patriots! Forward, Martinus! In an hour Neapolis must burn!"

"In a shorter time," sighed the mathematician, "if it must be so. I have brought with me a man who is well-informed; who can help us much, and simplify the work. He is a living plan of the city. May I bring him in?"

Belisarius nodded, and the sentry called in a little Jewish-looking man.

"Ah! Jochem, the architect!" said Belisarius. "I knew you at Byzantium. You were to rebuild the church of St. Sophia. What became of that project?"

"By your leave, general, nothing."

"Why not?"

"My plan only amounted to a million centenaria of gold; that was too little for his Imperial Majesty. For the more a Christian church costs, the more holy and pleasing to God. A Christian asked double the amount, and got the order."

"But still I saw you building in Byzantium?"

"Yes, general, my plan pleased the Emperor. I changed it a little, took out the altar-place, and afterwards built from it a riding-school."

"You know Neapolis thoroughly--outside and inside?"

"Outside and inside--as well as my moneybag."

"Tis well. You will direct the machines for the strategist against the walls and into the city. The houses of the friends of the Goths must come down first. Forward! Mind and do your business well, or else you will be impaled! Away!"

"The poor city!" sighed Martinus. "But you will see, Jochem, how exact are the pyrobalistæ; and they work so easily, a child could manage them. And they act so splendidly!"

And now in all the camp began a monstrous and danger-pregnant

activity.

The Gothic sentinels upon the ramparts saw how the heavy machines, drawn by twenty to thirty horses, camels, asses, or oxen, were brought before the walls, and divided along the whole line.

Totila and Uliaris went anxiously to the walls and tried to meet this new danger with effectual means of defence.

Sacks filled with earth were let down before the places threatened by the rams; firebrands were laid ready to set the machines on fire as they approached; boiling water, arrows, and stones were to be directed against the teams and drivers; and already the Goths laughed at the cowardly enemy when they noticed that the machines halted far out of the usual range of shot, and completely out of the reach of the besieged.

But Totila did not laugh.

He was alarmed to see the Byzantines quietly unharness the teams and arrange their machines. Not a projectile had yet been hurled.

"Well," mocked young Agila, who stood near Totila, "do they mean to shoot at us from *that* distance? They had better do it at once from Byzantium, across the sea! That would be still safer!"

He had not ceased to speak, when a forty-pound stone knocked him, and a portion of the rampart upon which he stood, to pieces.

Martinus had increased the range threefold.

Totila saw that they were completely without defence against these terrible projectiles.

The Goths sprang horrified from the walls, and sought shelter in the streets, houses, and churches. In vain! Thousands and thousands of arrows, spears, heavy beams, and stones hurtled and hissed in infallible curves upon their heads; whole blocks of rock came flying through the air, and fell crashing through the woodwork and slabs of the strongest roofs; while in the north the rams thundered unceasingly against the castle with ponderous strokes.

While the thick hail of projectiles literally darkened the air, the noise of breaking beams, the rattling fall of stones, the shattering of the ramparts, and the cries of the wounded deafened the ear.

The trembling inhabitants fled terrified into the cellars and vaults of their houses, cursing both Belisarius and the Goths.

But the horrified city had not yet experienced the worst.

In the market-place, the Forum of Trajan, near the harbour, stood an uncovered building, a sort of ship's arsenal, heaped up with old, well-dried timber, tow, flax, tar, and other combustible materials. Into this building came, hissing and steaming, a strange projectile, and immediately a flame shot high into the air, and, fed by the inflammable materials, spread with the speed of the wind.

The besiegers outside greeted the pillars of smoke which now arose with cries of exultation, and directed arrows and darts upon the place, to prevent the inhabitants from extinguishing the fire.

Belisarius rode up to Martinus.

"Capital, man of the circle!" he cried. "Capital! Who aimed the shot?"

"I," said Jochem. "Oh! you will be satisfied with me, general. Now, pay attention. Do you see that large house with the statues upon the flat roof, to the right of the fire? That is the house of the Valerians, the greatest enemies of the people of Edom. Attention! It shall burn."

The fiery projectile flew hissing through the air, and immediately a second flame rose out of the city.

Just then Procopius galloped up and cried:

"Belisarius, your general, Johannes, greets you. The Castle of Tiberius burns, and the first wall is down!"

And such was the fact; and soon, in all parts of the city, four, six, ten houses were in flames.

"Water!" cried Totila, galloping through a burning street near the harbour. "Come out, you citizens of Neapolis! Extinguish your houses! I can spare no Goths from the walls. Get barrels of water from the harbour into all the streets! The women into the houses!--What do you want, girl? leave me.--Is it you, Miriam? You here--among the flames and arrows? Away! whom do you seek?"

"You," said the girl. "Do not be alarmed. Her house burns, but she is saved."

"Valeria! For God's sake, where is she?"

"With me. In our strong tower--there she is safe. I saw the flames. I hastened to the house. Your friend with the soft voice was carrying her out of the ruins; he wanted to take her into the church. I called to him, and persuaded him to bring her to the tower. She bleeds. A stone wounded her upon the shoulder, but there is no danger. She wishes to see you, and I came to seek you!"

"Thanks, child! But come, come away;" and he took hold of her arm, and swung her up to his saddle.

Trembling, she wound both arms about his neck. He held his broad shield over her head with his left hand, and galloped off with her through the smoking streets to the Porta Capuana.

"Oh! would that I might die now," murmured Miriam to herself; "now, upon his breast, if not with him!"

In the tower Totila found Valeria, stretched upon Miriam's bed, under the care of Julius and her female slaves. She was pale and weak from loss of blood, but composed and quiet.

Totila flew to her side. Miriam stood at the window with a beating heart, and looked silently at the burning city.

Totila had scarcely convinced himself that the wound was very slight, than he again sprang up and cried:

"You must go! Immediately! This very moment! In another hour Belisarius may storm the city. I have once more filled my ships with fugitives. They will take you to Cajeta, and thence to Rome. Afterwards you must hasten to Taginæ to your estate. Julius will accompany you."

"Yes," said Julius, "for we go the same way."

"The same way? Whither art thou bound?"

"To Gaul, to my home. I cannot bear to see this terrible struggle any

longer. You know well that all Italy has risen against you. My fellow-countrymen fight under Belisarius. Shall I raise my hand against them, or against you? I will go."

Totila turned silently to Valeria.

"My friend," she said, "it seems to me that our star has set for ever! Scarcely has my father gone to lay your oath at the throne of God, than Neapolis, the third city of the realm, falls."

"So you have no faith in our swords?"

"I have faith in your swords, but not in your good fortune! With the falling rafters of my father's house fall all my hopes. Farewell, for a long, long time! I obey you; I will go to Taginæ."

Totila and Julius now went out with the slaves to secure places in one of the triremes.

Valeria rose from the bed; Miriam hurried to her to fasten the shining sandals upon her feet.

"Let it alone, maiden; you must not serve me!" said Valeria.

"I do it gladly," whispered Miriam; "but permit me a question." Her sparkling eyes were fixed upon Valeria's composed features. "You are beautiful and clever and proud--but tell me, do you love him? You are able to leave him at such a moment. Do you love him with devouring, irresistible ardour? do you love him with such a love as----"

"As yours?" Valeria pressed the lovely girl's glowing face to her bosom, as if in protection. "No, my sweet sister! Do not be startled. I guessed it long ago from his accounts of you. And I saw it at once in your first look at him to-day. Do not be anxious; your secret is safe with me. No one shall learn it. Do not weep, do not tremble, you sweet child. I love you the better for the sake of your love. I quite understand it. He is happy who, like you, can indulge his feelings at such a moment. But an inimical God has bestowed upon me a mind that ever looks forward, and so I see before us unknown pain and a long dark path which ends not in light. But I cannot allow you to think your love the more noble because it is hopeless. My hopes, too, are ashes! Perhaps it would have been happier for him had he discovered the scented rose of your love--for Valeria, I fear, will never be his! But farewell, Miriam. They come. Remember our meeting! Remember me as a sister, and take my warmest thanks. Thanks for your faithful love!"

Miriam had trembled like a child found out in a fault, and would have gladly run out of Valeria's sight, who seemed to see through everything. But these noble sentiments overcame her timidity, and tears flowed plentifully over her glowing cheeks. Trembling with shame and weeping, she leaned her head upon her new friend's breast. They heard Julius coming to call Valeria. They were obliged to part.

Miriam cast a rapid glance at the face of the Roman lady; and then she threw herself on the ground before her, embraced her knees, pressed a burning kiss upon her cold hand, and disappeared into the next room.

Valeria rose as if from a dream, and looked about her. In a vase on the window-sill stood a dark-red rose. Valeria kissed it, and put it into the bosom of her dress, blessed, with the motion of her hand, the place which had afforded her an asylum, and then followed Julius, who took her in a closed litter to the harbour, where she had time to take a short leave of Totila, before she went on board with Julius. Shortly afterwards the ship set sail, and moved proudly out of the harbour.

Totila looked after it. He saw Valeria's white hand signing a farewell. He looked and looked at the lessening sail, little heeding the projectiles which now began to fall thicker into the harbour. He leaned against a pillar, and, for a moment, forgot the burning town and everything around him.

Thorismuth roused him from his reverie.

"Come, commodore!" he cried. "I have been seeking thee everywhere. Uliaris wishes to speak to thee.--Come, why dost thou stand here, gazing at the sea among all these whizzing arrows?"

Totila slowly raised himself.

"Seest thou," he said, "seest thou yonder ship? There they leave me----"

"Who?" asked Thorismuth.

"My good-fortune and my youth," said Totila, and turned to seek Uliaris.

Uliaris told him that, in order to gain time, he had proposed an armistice of three hours, which Belisarius, who wished for a parley, had accepted.

"I will never capitulate! But we must have time to repair and strengthen our walls. Will reinforcements never come? Hast thou still no news from the King by sea?"

"None."

"The devil! Above six hundred of my Goths have fallen under these hellish projectiles. I cannot even fill the most important posts. If I had but four hundred men more!"

"Well," said Totila, reflecting, "I think I can procure thee these. In the Castellum Aurelium, on the road to Rome, lie four hundred and fifty men. Until now they have declared that they received from King Theodahad the unreasonable but strict order, on no account to aid in defending Neapolis. But in this, great necessity--I will go myself, during the armistice, and do all I can to bring them."

"Do not go! The truce will have ended before thy return, and then the road will be no longer safe. Thou canst not get through."

"I will get through by force or by cunning. Only keep firm until I am back. Up! Thorismuth, to horse!"

While Totila, with Thorismuth and a few horsemen, galloped out of the Porta Capuana, old Isaac, who had remained bravely on the walls without tiring, took advantage of the armistice to return to his house, see his daughter, and refresh himself with meat and wine.

As Miriam was bringing these, and anxiously listening to Isaac's report of the progress of the siege, a hasty and unsteady foot was heard upon the steps, and Jochem appeared before the astonished pair.

"Son of Rachel, whence comest thou in an evil hour, like a raven before misfortune? How couldst thou enter? By what door?"

"That is my affair. I come, Father Isaac, once more to demand thy daughter's hand--for the last time in my life."

"Is this a time for wooing and wedding?" asked Isaac indignantly. "The city burns, and the streets are full of corpses."

"Why does the city burn? Why are the streets full of corpses? Because the people of Neapolis hold by the people of Edom. Yes, this *is* the time to woo. Give me thy child. Father Isaac, and I will save thee and her. I alone can do so."

And he attempted to take Miriam's hand.

"Thou save *me!*" she cried, starting back in disgust. "Rather would I die!"

"Ha, proud girl!" cried the angry wooer; "thou wouldst be saved by the fair-haired Christian? Let us see if he can save thee--the cursed fellow!--from Belisarius and me. Ha! I will drag him through the streets by his long yellow hair, and spit in his pale face!"

"Get thee away, son of Rachel!" said Isaac, rising and taking up his spear. "I see thou art a friend of those who lie outside--the horn sounds the recall; I must go down. But this I tell thee: many amongst you will fall back dead before they can climb over these rotten walls."

"Perhaps," growled Jochem, "we shall fly over them, like the birds of the air. For the last time, Miriam, I ask thee: Wilt thou leave this old man and the cursed Christian? I tell thee the ruins of these walls will soon cover them. I know that thou hast taken the Goth to thy heart; but that I will forgive thee if only thou wilt be my wife."

And again he tried to take her hand.

"Thou wilt forgive me my love? Forgive what stands as high above thee as the sun above the creeping worm? Should I be worthy to look upon his face if I could become thy wife? Away! begone!"

"Ha!" cried Jochem, "too much! too much! My wife! Never shalt thou be my wife; but thou shalt struggle in my arms, and I will tear the Christian out of thy bleeding heart as it withers in despair! Thou shalt see me again!"

And he left the room, and soon disappeared from the precincts of the city.

Miriam, oppressed by anxious thoughts, hurried into the open air. She felt that she must pray; but not in the close synagogue. She would pray for *him*, and she would pray to *his* God. She shyly ventured into the neighbouring Basilica of St. Maria, whence, in peaceful times, the Jewess had often been driven with curses.

But now the Christians had no time to curse.

She crouched in a dark corner of the chancel, and soon forgot herself, the city, and the world, in fervent prayer.

She was alone with *him* and with God.

Meanwhile, the last hour of the armistice was drawing to a close. The sun already declined to the surface of the sea.

The Goths repaired and filled up the breaches of the walls with all diligence, carried away the rubbish and the dead, and extinguished the fires.

For the third time the sands of the hour-glass ran out, while Belisarius, in front of his tent and surrounded by his generals, was awaiting the signal of capitulation from the Castle of Tiberius.

"I don't believe in it," whispered Johannes to Procopius. "He who gives

such blows as I have seen given by that old man will never surrender. And it is better so; then there will be a famous storming, and afterwards a famous plundering."

Earl Uliaris now appeared upon the ramparts of the castle, and hurled his spear defiantly among the waiting sentries.

Belisarius sprang up.

"The fools desire their own destruction! Well, they shall be gratified. Up, generals! to the attack! Whoever is the first to plant our standard on the walls shall have a tenth part of the booty!"

The leaders hurried away on all sides, spurred by avarice and ambition.

Johannes was just turning the ruined arch of an aqueduct, which Belisarius had destroyed in order to deprive the besieged of water, when he heard a low voice calling his name.

It was already so dark that he with difficulty recognised the man who had spoken.

"What do you want, Jew!" asked Johannes. "I have no time to lose. There is hard work to be done. I must be the first into the city."

"That you shall be, and without hard work, if you will follow me."

"Follow you? Do you know a way through the air over the walls?"

"No; but through the earth *under* the walls. And I will show it you if you give me a thousand solidi, and promise me a certain girl as booty."

Johannes stood still.

"You shall have what you like! Where is this way?"

"Here!" said Jochem, and struck the masonry with his hand.

"What? The aqueduct? How do you know?"

"I built it. A man can creep through it; there is no more water in it. I have just come this way out of the city. The passage leads into an old temple at the Porta Capuana. Take thirty men and follow me!"

Johannes looked sharply at him.

"And if you deceive me?"

"I will walk between your drawn swords. If I lie, kill me."

"Wait," cried Johannes, and hurried away.

CHAPTER IV.

Shortly afterwards Johannes again appeared, accompanied by his brother Perseus and about thirty brave Armenian mercenaries, who carried, besides their swords, short battle-axes.

"As soon as we are inside, Perseus," said Johannes, "you must break open the sally-port to the right of the Porta Capuana at the moment when the others unfold our flag upon the walls. At this signal my Huns, who wait outside, will rush into the sally-port. But who keeps the tower at the gate? Him we must have."

"Isaac, a great friend of the Edomites. He must die!"

"He dies!" said Johannes, and drew his sword. "Forward!"

He was the first to enter the passage of the aqueduct.

"Paukares and Gubazes, take the Jew between you. At the first suspicion, down with him!"

And so, now creeping on all fours, now stooping and cautiously feeling their way, in complete obscurity, the Armenians slid and crept after Johannes, taking care not to make any noise with their weapons.

All at once Johannes cried in a low voice:

"Hold the Jew! down with him! Enemies! Arms! No, no; let him alone!" he added quickly. "It was only a snake that rustled past me. Forward!"

"Now to the right," said the Jew; "here the passage leads into the temple."

"What lies here?--bones?--a skeleton! I can bear it no longer! The mouldy smell suffocates me! Help!" sighed one of the men.

"Let him lie! Forward!" ordered Johannes. "I see a star!"

"It is the daylight in Neapolis," said Jochem; "only a few steps more."

Johannes's helmet struck against the roots of a tall olive-tree, which spread over the mouth of the passage in the atrium of the temple. We know this tree. As he avoided the roots, Johannes struck his helmet with a loud jingle against the side wall; he stopped short in alarm. But he only heard the rapid flutter of the wings of numerous pigeons which flew startled out of the branches of the olive-tree.

"What was that?" said a hoarse voice above him. "How the wind howls in the old ruins!"

It was the widow Arria.

"O God!" she cried, kneeling before the cross, "deliver us from evil! Let not the city fall until my Jucundus returns! Alas! if he does not find his mother! Oh, let him again come the way he went that unhappy day, when he descended into the secret labyrinth to seek the hidden treasure! Show him to me as I saw him last night in my dream, rising up from below the roots of the tree!"

And she turned to look at the hole.

"O dark passage! into which my happiness disappeared, give it up to me again! God! by this way lead him back to me."

She stood exactly before the opening with folded hands, her eyes piously raised to heaven.

Johannes hesitated as he issued from the hole and perceived her.

"She prays," he murmured. "Shall I kill her whilst praying!"

He waited; he hoped that she would turn away.

"It lasts too long! God knows I cannot help it!"

And he got quickly out from among the roots.

The old woman now raised her half-blind eyes; she saw a glittering form

rise from the earth. A ray of ecstasy flashed across her features. She spread out her arms.

"Jucundus!" she cried.

It was her last breath.

The sword of the Byzantine had pierced her heart.

Without a cry, a smile upon her lips, she sank down amid the flowers; Miriam's flowers.

Johannes turned and quickly helped up his brother Perseus, and then the Jew and the first three soldiers.

"Where is the sally-port?"

"Here to the left. I will go and open it!"

Perseus directed the soldiers.

"Where are the steps to the tower?"

"Here on the right," answered Jochem--it was the staircase which led to Miriam's chamber--how often had Totila slipped in there! "Be quiet! I hear the old man."

It was really Isaac.

He had heard the noise from above; he came to the top of the steps with his torch and spear.

"Who is it down there? is it thou, Miriam? who comes?" he asked.

"I, Father Isaac," answered Jochem; "I wished once more to ask----" and he stealthily went up another step.

But Isaac heard the rattle of arms.

"Who is with thee!" he asked, advancing and holding out his torch. He now saw the armed men crouching behind Jochem.

"Treachery! treachery!" he screamed; "die, thou blot upon the Hebrews!" and he furiously struck his broad partisan into Jochem's heart, who could not retreat.

Jochem fell dead among the soldiers.

"Treachery!" again cried Isaac.

But the next moment Johannes struck him down, sprang over his corpse, hurried to the ramparts, and unfolded the flag of Byzantium.

Below the axes were busy; the sally-port fell, beaten down from within, and with shrill cries--it was already quite dark--the Huns rushed by thousands into the city.

All was over.

A portion filled the streets with carnage; one troop broke open the nearest gates, letting in their comrades from outside.

Old Uliaris, with his little troop, hurried from the castle; he hoped to drive the intruders out; in vain; a spear was hurled which felled him to the ground.

And round his corpse fell, fighting bravely, the two hundred faithful Goths who yet surrounded him.

Then, when they saw the imperial banner waving on the walls, the citizens of Neapolis arose. Led by old friends to the Romans, such as Stephanus and Antiochus the Syrian--Castor, a zealous friend of the Goths, had lost his life in attempting to hold them back--they disarmed the single Goths in the streets, and sent an embassy with thanks, congratulations, and petitions for mercy on the city to Belisarius, who, surrounded by his brilliant staff, now rode into the Porta Capuana.

But he bent his majestic brow gloomily, and, without checking his charger, answered:

"Neapolis has checked my progress for fifteen days, else I had already been before Rome, even before Ravenna. How much do you think this delay has robbed the Emperor of his right, and me of fame? For fifteen days your cowardice and ill-will has caused you to be governed by a handful of barbarians. The punishment for these fifteen days shall be only fifteen hours of--pillage. Without murder; the inhabitants are the Emperor's prisoners of war; without fire, for the city is a fortress of Byzantium. Where is the leader of the Goths? Dead?"

"Yes," answered Johannes, "here is his sword. Earl Ularis fell."

"I do not mean him!" said Belisarius; "I mean the young one; Totila. What has become of him? I must have him."

"Sir," said one of the Neapolitans, a rich merchant named Asklepidot, "if you will exempt my house and magazines from pillage, I will tell you where he is."

But Belisarius made a sign, and two Moorish lancers took hold of the trembling man.

"Rebel, do you make conditions to me? Speak! or torture shall unloose your tongue!"

"Have pity! mercy!" cried the man. "During the armistice, Totila went out with a few horsemen to fetch reinforcements from the Castle of Aurelian. They may return at any moment."

"Johannes," cried Belisarius, "that man is worth all Neapolis. We must take him! Have you, as I ordered, blocked the way to Rome, and manned the gate?"

"In that direction no one can have left the city," said Johannes.

"Away! At once! We must entice him in! Let the Gothic banner fly from the Castle of Tiberius and from the Porta Capuana. Send armed Neapolitans upon the walls; he who warns Totila, even were it only with a wink of his eye, dies! Arm my bodyguard with Gothic weapons. I will be there myself. Place three hundred men in the neighbourhood of the gate. Let Totila quietly in. As soon as he has passed the portcullis, let it fall. I will have him alive. He shall not be wanting at the triumph in Byzantium!"

"Give me the office, general," begged Johannes; "I owe him a return for an ill stroke."

And he rushed back to the Porta Capuana, ordered the corpses and all trace of combat to be removed, and took his further measures.

As the men were busy obeying his orders, a veiled figure forced its way among them.

"For the good God's sake," begged a sweet voice, "let me get to him! I will only see his body--oh, take care! Oh, my father! my father!"

It was Miriam, who had hastened home terrified by the noise made by the plundering Huns. With the strength of despair she pushed back the spears and took Isaac's grey head into her arms.

"Get away, girl!" said the soldier next to her, a very tall Bajuvar, a mercenary of Byzantium; his name was Garizo. "Do not hinder us! we must make the way clear. Into the grave with the Jew!"

"No, no!" cried Miriam, and pushed the man back.

"Woman!" he cried angrily, and lifted his axe.

But, spreading her arms protectingly over her father's body, and with sparkling eyes, the girl fearlessly stood her ground. The soldier suddenly fell back as if paralysed.

"Thou hast a bold heart, girl!" he cried, dropping his axe, "and thou art as beautiful as the wood-nymph of the Liusacha! What can I do for thee? Thou art wonderful to look at."

"If the God of my fathers has touched thy heart," said Miriam in her pathetic voice, "help me to hide the body in the garden there--he has long since dug his own grave near Sarah, my mother--with his face to the east."

"It shall be done," said the Bajuvar, and obeyed her.

She carried the head, he the knees of the corpse. A few steps took them into the little garden; there, under a weeping-willow, lay a stone; the man pushed it away, and they laid the corpse in the grave, with its face to the east.

Miriam looked into the grave without a word, without a tear; she felt so forsaken, so lonely. The Bajuvar softly pushed the stone back into its place, filled with compassion.

"Come!" he said.

"Whither?" asked Miriam in a low voice.

"Well, whither wilt thou go?"

"I do not know. I thank thee," she said, and took an amulet from her neck and gave it to him. It was made of gold, a coin from the Jordan, from the Temple.

"No!" said the man, and shook his head.

He took her hand, and pressed it to his eyes.

"So," he said, "that will do me good all my life long. Now I must go; we must catch the Earl Totila. Farewell."

That name went to Miriam's heart. She cast one more look at the quiet grave, and then slipped quickly out of the garden.

She wished to go through the gate on to the highroad, but the portcullis was down, and at the gate stood men with Gothic helmets and shields. She looked about her in surprise.

"Is all ready, Chanaranzes?" said a voice.

"All; he is as good as taken!"

"Hark! before the walls! horses trampling! It is they! Back, woman!"

Outside, a few horsemen were seen trotting towards the gate.

"Open, open the gate!" cried Totila from a distance.

Thorismuth rode up to him.

"I don't know how it is, I have no confidence," he cried. "The road was so quiet, and so was the enemy's camp out there; scarcely a few watch-fires were burning."

From the ramparts came a flourish of the Gothic horn.

"How horribly the fellow blows!" cried Thorismuth angrily.

"It must be an Italian," said Totila.

"Give the watch-word," was called from the walls in Latin.

"Neapolis!" cried Totila. "Dost thou hear? Uliaris has been obliged to arm the citizens. Open the gate! I bring good news," he called to the men above. "Four hundred Goths follow at my heels, and Italy has a new king."

"Which is he!" asked some one inside, in a low voice.

"He on the white horse, the first one."

The gate was flung wide open; Gothic helmets filled the entrance; torches shone; voices whispered.

"Up with the portcullis!" cried Totila, riding up. Thorismuth looked anxiously before him, shading his eyes with his hand.

"They assembled yesterday at Regeta," Totila began again. "Theodahad is deposed, and Earl Witichis----"

The portcullis was slowly raised, and Totila was just about to give his horse the spur, when a woman rushed from the row of soldiers, and cast herself before the animal's hoofs.

"Fly!" she cried. "The enemy is before you! the city is taken!"

But she could not finish; a lance penetrated her heart.

"Miriam!" cried Totila, horrified, and checked his horse.

But Thorismuth, who was close behind, and who had long been suspicious, now reached his arm past the grating, and separated the rope which held the portcullis up with his sword, so that the portcullis fell with a loud crash just in front of Totila.

A hail of spears and arrows flew through the portcullis.

"Up with the portcullis!" cried Johannes from within. "Out! Upon them!"

But Totila did not move.

"Miriam! Miriam!" he cried in great grief.

Once more she opened her eyes, with a dying look of love and pain. That look told everything; it pierced Totila's heart.

"For thee!" she sighed, and fell back.

He forgot Neapolis, danger, and death.

"Miriam!" he cried again, and stretched out both his hands.

An arrow touched his horse's flank; the noble animal reared. The portcullis began to rise. Thorismuth caught Totila's bridle, wrenched his horse round, and gave it such a stroke with the flat of his sword, that it galloped away like the wind.

"Up and away, sir!" he cried, rushing after Totila. "They must be speedy who would overtake us!"

And the riders flew back on the Via Capuana, the way that they had come. Not far behind followed Johannes, ignorant of the way, and confused by the darkness of the night.

Totila's party presently met with the garrison of the Castle of Aurelian, which was marching towards Neapolis.

They all halted together upon a hill, whence they could see the city and the ramparts, partially illuminated by the Byzantine watch-fires on the walls.

Only then did Totila recover from his grief and consternation.

"Farewell, Miriam!" he sighed. "Farewell, Uliaris! Neapolis, I shall see thee again!"

And he gave orders to march forward to Rome.

But from this hour a shadow fell upon the soul of the young Goth. Miriam, with the holy right of suffering, had buried herself in his heart for ever.

When Johannes returned from his fruitless pursuit, and sprang from his horse, he cried in a furious voice: "Where is the girl who warned him? Throw her to the dogs!" And he hurried away to Belisarius, to report the mishap.

But no one could tell how the lovely corpse had disappeared. The horses had trampled it beyond recognition, thought the crowd.

But *one* knew better--Garizo, the Bajuvar.

He had borne her away from the tumult in his strong arms like a sleeping child; had carried her into the little garden, had lifted the stone from the scarcely-covered grave, and had laid the daughter carefully by her father's side.

Then he stood still and contemplated her features. In the distance sounded the tumult from the plundered town, in which the Huns of Belisarius, in spite of his command, burned and murdered, and did not even spare the churches, until the general himself, rushing amongst them with his drawn sword, put a stop to the cruel work of destruction.

Such a noble expression lay upon Miriam's dead face, that Garizo did not dare to kiss it, as he so much longed to do. So he placed her with her face to the east, gathered a rose which was blooming near the grave, and laid it upon her breast.

He wished to take part in the pillage, but he could not leave the place; he turned back again. And all the night long, leaning on his sword, he kept watch over the grave of the beautiful girl.

He looked up at the stars and repeated an ancient blessing on the dead, which his mother had taught him in his home on the Liusacha. But that did not satisfy him; he added a Christian paternoster.

And when the sun rose, he carefully placed the stone over the grave and went away.

Thus Miriam had disappeared without leaving a trace behind.

But in Neapolis the people, who in secret were faithful to Totila, told how his guardian angel had descended to save him, and had then reascended to heaven.

CHAPTER V.

The fall of Neapolis had occurred a few days after the meeting at Regeta, and Totila, on his march thither, met at Formiæ with his brother Hildebad, whom King Witichis had at once sent off with a few thousands to strengthen the garrison at Neapolis, until he himself could follow with a larger force.

As things stood at present, the brothers could do nothing but fall back upon the main army at Regeta, where Totila reported the sad events of the last few days in Neapolis.

The loss of the third city of the realm--one of the main bulwarks of Italy--changed the whole plan of the Gothic campaign.

Witichis had reviewed the troops assembled at Regeta; they amounted to about twenty thousand men. These, with the little troop brought back by Earl Teja on his own account, were, for the moment, the whole available force. Before the strong divisions which Theodahad had sent away to southern Gaul and Noricum, to Istria and Dalmatia--although they had been summoned in all haste--could return, all Italy might be lost.

Notwithstanding, the King had resolved to throw himself, with these twenty thousand, into the fortress of Neapolis, and there oppose the superior forces of the enemy, until reinforcements should arrive.

But now that the strong city had fallen into Belisarius's hand, Witichis gave up this plan. His composed courage was as far from foolhardiness as from timidity. And the King was obliged to force himself to a far more painful resolve.

While, during the days following Totila's arrival in the camp before Rome, the grief and anger of the Goths sought relief in cursing the traitor Theodahad, Belisarius, and the Italians; while the bold youth here and there began to grumble at the King's delay, who would not lead them against these degenerate Greeks, four of whom it took to stand against one Goth; while the impatience of the army already began to rebel against inactivity, the King acknowledged to himself, with a heavy heart, that it was necessary to retreat still farther, and even give up Rome.

Day by day news came of the increase of the army of Belisarius. At Neapolis alone he had gained ten thousand men--at once hostages and comrades. From all sides the Italians joined his flag; from Neapolis to Rome, no place was strong enough to oppose such a force, and the smaller towns on the coast opened their gates to the enemy with rejoicing.

The Gothic families dwelling in those parts fled to the camp of the King, and told how, the very day after the fall of Neapolis, Cumæ and Atilla had succumbed; then followed Capua, Cajeta, and even the fortified Benevento.

The vanguard of Belisarius--Huns, Saracens, and Moorish horsemen--was already stationed before Formiæ.

The Goths expected and desired a battle before the gates of Rome. But Witichis had long since seen the impossibility, with an army of only twenty thousand men, of encountering Belisarius, who, by that time, would be able to muster a hundred thousand in the open field.

For a time he entertained the idea of being able to hold the mighty fortifications of Rome--Cethegus's proud work--against the Byzantine incursion; but he was soon obliged to renounce even this hope.

The population of Rome now counted--thanks to the Prefect--more armed and practised men than they had possessed for many a century, and the King daily convinced himself of the spirit which animated them.

Even now the Romans could scarcely restrain their hatred of the barbarians; it was not only evinced by unfriendly and mocking gestures; already the Goths dared not venture into the streets except in well-armed numbers, and every day single Gothic sentries were found dead, stabbed from behind.

Witichis could not conceal from himself that the different elements of the popular feeling were organised and guided by cunning and powerful leaders: the heads of the Roman aristocracy and the Roman clergy. He was obliged to confess that, so soon as Belisarius should appear before the walls, the Roman population would rise, and, together with the besiegers, would overcome the weak Gothic garrison.

So Witichis had unwillingly resolved to give up Rome and all central Italy; to throw himself into the strong and faithful city of Ravenna; there to complete the very incomplete armament of the troops, to unite all the Gothic forces, and then to seek the enemy with an equally powerful army.

This resolution was a great sacrifice. For Witichis had his full share of the Germanic love of fight, and it was a hard blow to his pride to retreat and seek for means of defence, instead of striking at once.

But there was still more.

It was inglorious for a king who had been raised to the throne of the cowardly Theodahad because of his known courage, to begin his rule with a shameful retreat. He had lost Neapolis during the first days of his reign; should he now voluntarily give up Rome, the city of splendours? Should he give up more than the half of Italy? And if he thus controlled his pride for the sake of his people--what would that people think of him?

These Goths, with their impetuosity, their contempt of the enemy! Could he be sure of enforcing their obedience?

For the office of a Germanic king was more to advise and propose, than to order and compel. Already many a ruler of this people had been forced against his will to engage in war and suffer defeat. He feared a similar thing.

With a heavy heart, he one night paced to and fro his tent in the camp at Regeta.

All at once hasty steps drew near, and the curtain of the tent was pulled open.

"Up! King of the Goths!" cried a passionate voice. "It is no time now to sleep!"

"I do not sleep, Teja," said Witichis; "since when art thou returned? What bringest thou?"

"I have just entered the camp; the dews of night are still upon me. First know that they are dead!"

"Who?"

"The traitor and the murderess!"

"What! hast thou killed them both?"

"I kill no woman. I followed Theodahad, the traitor-king, for two days and two nights. He was on the way to Ravenna; he had a fair start. But my hatred was swifter than his cowardice. I overtook him near Narnia; twelve slaves accompanied his litter. They had no desire to die for the miserable man; they threw away their torches and fled. I tore him out of his litter, and put my own sword into his hand. But he fell upon his knees, begged for his life, and, at the same moment, aimed a treacherous stroke at me. Then I slew him like an ox at the altar; with three strokes--one for the realm, two for my parents. And I hung him up by his belt to a withered yew-tree on the high-road, a prey to the birds of the air, and a warning to the kings of the earth."

"And what became of her?"

"Her end was terrible," said Teja, shuddering. "When I first passed through Rome, nothing was known of her but that she had refused to follow the coward-king. He fled alone. Gothelindis called her Cappadocian mercenaries together, and promised them heaps of gold, if they would keep by her, go with her to Dalmatia, and occupy the fortress of Salona. The men hesitated and wished to see the gold. Then Gothelindis promised to bring it, and left them. Since then she had disappeared. When I passed through Rome the second time, she had been found----"

"Well?"

"She had ventured into the Catacombs alone, without a guide, to fetch the treasure which had been hidden there. She must have lost herself in the labyrinth; she could not find the way out. Mercenaries who were sent to seek her, found her still alive; her torch was not burnt down, but was almost entire; it must have gone out soon after she had entered the Catacombs. Madness shone from her eyes; fear of death and a long despair had overcome this bad woman; she died as soon as she was brought to the light."

"Horrible!" cried Witichis.

"A just punishment!" said Teja. "But listen!"

Before he could continue, Totila, Hildebad, Hildebrand, and several other Goths rushed into the tent.

"Does he know!" asked Totila.

"Not yet," said Teja.

"Rebellion!" cried Hildebad, "rebellion! Up, King Witichis! Defend thy crown! Off with the boy's head!"

"What has happened?" asked Witichis quietly.

"Earl Aarahad of Asta, the vain fool! has rebelled. Immediately after you had been chosen King, he rode off to Florentia, where his elder brother, Guntharis, the proud Duke of Tuscany, lives and rules. There the Wölfungs have found many adherents. Aarahad called upon the Goths everywhere to protect the 'Royal Lily,' as they call her, Mataswintha, the true heir to the throne! They have proclaimed her Queen. She was in

Florentia at the time, and therefore fell at once into their hands. It is not known if she be the prisoner of Guntharis or the wife of Arahad. It is only known that they have enlisted Avarian and Gepidian mercenaries, and armed all the adherents of the Amelungs and their kith and kindred, together with the numerous adherents of the Wölfungs. Thee they call the 'Peasant-King;' they intend to take Ravenna!"

"Oh, send me to Florentia, with only three thousand," cried Hildebad angrily; "I will bring you this Queen of the Goths, together with her aristocratic lover, imprisoned in a bird-cage!"

But the others looked anxious.

"Things look bad," said Hildebrand. "Belisarius with his hundred thousands before us--at our backs the wily Rome--our main forces still fifty miles off--and now civil war and rebellion in the heart of the nation!"

But Witichis was as quiet and composed as ever.

"It is perhaps better so," he said. "We have now no choice. We *must* retreat."

"Retreat!" asked Hildebad angrily.

"Yes; we dare not leave an enemy at our backs. To-morrow we break up the camp and go----"

"Forward to Neapolis!" asked Hildebad.

"No. Back to Rome. And farther! To Florentia, to Ravenna! The spark of rebellion must be trampled out ere it burst into a flame."

"What? Thou wilt retreat before Belisarius?"

"Yes, to advance all the more irresistibly, Hildebad. The string of the bow is also stretched backward to hurl the deadly arrow with the greater force."

"Never," cried Hildebad; "thou canst not--thou darest not do that!"

But Witichis stepped quietly up to him and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"I am thy King. Thou thyself hast chosen me. Loud above all the others sounded *thy* cry: 'Hail, King Witichis!' Thou knowest--God knows--that I did not stretch forth my hand for the crown. You yourselves have pressed it upon my brow. Take it off, if you can entrust it to me no longer. But as long as I wear it, trust me and obey. Otherwise you and I are lost!"

"Thou art right," said sturdy Hildebad, and bent his head. "Forgive me; I will make it good in the next fight."

"Up, my generals," concluded Witichis, putting on his helmet. "Thou, Totila, wilt hasten to the Frank Kings in Gaul, on an important embassy. You others hasten to your troops; break up the camp; at sunrise we march to Rome."

CHAPTER VI.

A few days later, on the eve of the entry of the Goths into Rome, we find the young "knights," Lucius and Marcus Licinius, Piso the poet, Balbus the corpulent, and Julianus the young advocate, assembled in confidential talk at the Prefect's house.

"So this is the list of the blind partisans of the future Pope Silverius--of my envious enemies? Is it complete?"

"It is. I have made a great sacrifice for you, general," cried Lucius Licinius, "If, as my heart impelled me, I had at once joined Belisarius, I should have already shared in the taking of Neapolis, instead of watching here the stealthy footsteps of the priests, and teaching the plebeians to march and manoeuvre."

"They will never learn it again," observed Marcus.

"Be patient," said Cethegus quietly, and without looking up from a roll of papyrus which he held in his hand. "You will be able, soon enough and long enough, to wrestle with these Gothic bears. Do not forget that fighting is only a means, and not an end."

"I don't know that," said Lucius doubtfully.

"Freedom is our aim, and freedom demands power," said Cethegus. "We must first again accustom these Romans to shield and sword, or else----"

He was interrupted by the entrance of the ostiarius, who announced a Gothic warrior.

The young Romans exchanged indignant looks.

"Let him in," said Cethegus, putting his writings into a casket.

There entered hastily a young man, clad in the brown mantle of the Gothic soldier, a Gothic helmet on his head, who threw himself on the Prefect's neck.

"Julius!" exclaimed Cethegus, coldly repulsing him. "Do we meet again thus? Have you, then, become a complete barbarian? How did you come to Rome?"

"My father, I accompanied Valeria, under Gothic protection. I come from smouldering Neapolis."

"Aha!" cried Cethegus. "Have you fought with your blond friend against Italy? That becomes a Roman well! Does it not, Lucius?"

"I have neither fought nor will fight in this unhappy war. Woe to those who have kindled it!"

Cethegus measured him with cold looks.

"It is beneath my dignity, and beyond my patience, to represent to a Roman the infamy of such sentiments. Alas! that my Julius should be such a renegade! Shame upon you, before these your compatriots! Look, Roman knights, here is a Roman without love of freedom, without anger against the barbarians!"

But Julius quietly shook his head.

"You have not yet seen the Huns and Massagetæ of Belisarius, who are to bring you freedom. Where, then, are the Romans of whom you speak? Has Italy risen to throw off her fetters? Can she still rise? Justinian fights with the Goths, not we. Woe to the people which is liberated by a tyrant!"

In secret Cethegus confessed that Julius was right; but he would not suffer such words to be spoken before his friends.

"I must dispute with this philosopher in private," he said. "Let me know if anything occur among the priesthood."

And the tribunes went, casting contemptuous looks at Julius.

"I should not like to hear what my friends say of you," said Cethegus, looking after them.

"It is quite indifferent to me. I listen to my own thoughts, and not to those of others," responded Julius.

"He has become a man!" said Cethegus to himself.

"My deepest and best feelings have brought me here," continued Julius. "I feel that this war is accursed. I come to save you, and take you from this sultry air, from this world of deceit and lies. I beseech you, my friend, my father, follow me to Gaul!"

"I leave Italy at the moment of the liberators' approach! You must know that it was I who called them; I kindled this war, which you call accursed!"

"I feared it," said Julius sadly. "But who will deliver us from our deliverers? Who will end the struggle?"

"I!" said Cethegus, with quiet majesty. "And you, my son, shall help me. Yes, Julius, your fatherly friend, whom you think so cold and indifferent, can also be enthusiastic, though not for girls' eyes and Gothic friendships. Leave these boys' pastimes; you are now a man. Give me the last joy of my desolate life, and be the sharer of my battles and the inheritor of my victories! It is for Rome, freedom, power! Boy, can my words not move you? Imagine," he continued, more warmly--"imagine these Goths, these Byzantines--I hate them as heartily as you do--exhausted by each other and overcome. On the ruins of their power Italy--Rome--will rise in all its ancient splendour! Again the ruler of the East and West will sit enthroned upon the Capitoline Hill. A new Roman Emperor, prouder than ever your Cæsar-forefather dreamed of, will extend order, blessing, and awe over all the earth----"

"And the ruler of this Empire will be called--Cethegus Cæsius!"

"Yes; and after him, Julius Montanus! Up, Julius! you are no man if this goal does not tempt you!"

"I am dizzy," said Julius admiringly. "The goal is high as the stars; but your ways--are crooked. Ah! if they were straight, by God! I would share your steps! Yes; call the Roman youth to arms; cry to both the barbarian forces, 'Out of our holy Latium!' make open war against the barbarians and against the tyrants, and I will stand or fall at your side."

"You know well that this is impossible."

"And, therefore--it is your aim!"

"Fool! do you not see that it is common to form a structure from good material, but that it is divine by one's own strength to create a new world out of nothing?"

"Divine? By cunning and lies? No!"

"Julius!"

"Let me speak plainly; for that purpose am I come. Oh that I could call you back from the demoniac path, which will only lead you to destruction! You know that I ever loved and honoured you. But what I hear whispered of you by Greeks, Goths, and Romans, is not in tune with this reverence."

"What do they whisper?" asked Cethegus proudly.

"I do not like to think of it. But everything terrible that has happened lately--the death of Athalaric, Camilla, and Amalasintha, the landing of the Byzantines--is named as the work of a demon, who is the author of all evil; and this demon--is you! Tell me, simply and truly, that you are free from this dark----"

"Boy," exclaimed Cethegus, "are you my confessor, and would call me to account? First learn to understand the aim before you blame the means. Do you think that history is built of roses and lilies? Who wills what is great must do great things, whether the small call it good or bad."

"No, no, I repeat. Cursed be the aim which only leads to crime! Here our paths divide."

"Julius, do not go. You despise what was never before offered to mortal man. Let me have a son, for whom I can strive, to whom I can bequeath the inheritance of my life."

"Curses and blood stick to it! And even if I could enter at once upon this inheritance, I should reject it. I will go, so that I may not see your image grow still darker. But I beg one thing: when the day comes--and it will come--when you are weary of all this bloodshed and crime, and of the aim itself which necessitated such deeds, then call me. I will come to you, wherever I may be, and I will wrest you from the demoniac power which enthalls you, were it at the price of my own life."

At first a smile of mockery passed across the Prefect's lips, but he thought, "He still loves me. 'Tis good; I will call him when the work is finished. Let us see if he can then resist--if he will refuse the Empire of the world."

"Well," he said aloud, "I will call you when I need you. Farewell."

And, with a cold gesture, he dismissed the youth, who was overcome with emotion.

But as the door closed behind Julius, the Prefect took a small medal of embossed bronze from a box, and contemplated it for some time.

He was about to kiss it.

But suddenly the sarcastic expression again passed across his lips.

"Shame on thee, Cethegus!" he exclaimed, "before Cæsar's face!"

And he put the medal back into the box.

It was the head of a woman, and very like Julius.

CHAPTER VII.

Meanwhile it had become quite dark. The slave brought the pretty bronze lamp of Corinthian workmanship--an eagle, which carried the ball of the sun in its beak, filled with scented Persian oil.

"A Gothic warrior waits outside, sir; he wishes to speak with you alone. He looks very insignificant. Shall he lay down his arms?"

"No," answered Cethegus. "We do not fear the barbarians. Let him in."

The slave went, and Cethegus laid his right hand upon the dagger in the bosom of his tunic.

A stately Goth entered, the cowl of his brown mantle drawn over his head. He now threw it back.

Cethegus started forward in astonishment.

"What leads the King of the Goths to me?"

"Softly!" said Witichis. "No one need know what we two transact. You know that yesterday and to-day my army has entered Rome from Regeta. You do not know that we leave Rome to-morrow!"

Cethegus looked amazed.

"It surprises you?"

"The city is secure," said Cethegus quietly.

"Yes; but not the fidelity of the Romans. Benevento has already gone over to Belisarius. I have no wish to allow myself to be crushed between Belisarius and you."

Cethegus was prudently silent; he did not know to what this would lead. At last he asked:

"Wherefore are you come. King of the Goths?"

"Not to ask you how far the Romans may be trusted; and also not to complain that we can trust you so little--you, whom Theodoric and his daughter overwhelmed with benefits--but honestly and simply to arrange a few things with you, for our mutual well-being."

Cethegus was surprised. In the proud frankness of this man lay something which he envied. He would gladly have despised it.

"We shall leave Rome," continued Witichis, "and shortly afterwards the Romans will admit Belisarius. It is sure to be so; I cannot hinder it. I have been advised to take the heads of the aristocracy as hostages."

Cethegus started, and with difficulty hid the movement.

"You before all, the Princeps Senatus."

"Me?" said Cethegus, smiling.

"I shall leave you here. I know well that you are the soul of Rome."

Cethegus cast down his eyes, "I accept the oracle," he thought.

"But for that very reason I leave you here," Witichis continued. "Hundreds who call themselves Romans would like the Byzantines for masters. You--you would not have it."

Cethegus looked inquiringly at him.

"Do not deceive me. Do not try to deceive me. I am no man of craft or cunning! but my eye penetrates men's natures. You are too proud to serve Justinian, and I know that you hate us. But neither do you love these Greeks, and you will suffer them no longer than is necessary. Therefore I leave you here; I know you love this city."

There was something about this man which compelled Cethegus to admiration.

"King of the Goths," he said, "you speak plainly and nobly, like a king. I thank you. It shall not be said of Cethegus that he does not understand magnanimous words. It is as you say. I shall keep my Rome Roman with

all my might."

"Good!" said Witichis. "See, I have been warned against your wiles; I know much of your secret plans; I guess still more; and I know that I have no weapon against deceit. But you are no liar. I knew that a manly word would touch you; and trust disarms every enemy who is worthy of being called a man."

"You honour me. King of the Goths. That I may deserve your trust, let me warn you. Do you know who are the warmest friends of Belisarius?"

"I know it: Silverius and the priests."

"Right! And do you know that, as soon as the old Pope, Agapetus, is dead, Silverius will ascend the Bishop's Chair?"

"So I hear. I was advised to take him as a hostage too. I shall not do so. The Italians hate us enough already. I will not meddle with the wasps' nest of the priests. I fear martyrs."

But Cethegus would gladly have been rid of the priest, "He will be dangerous in the Chair of Peter," he said warningly.

"Let him alone! The possession of this country will not be decided by the schemes of the priesthood."

"Well," said Cethegus, taking the roll of papyrus, "I have here, accidentally, the names of his warmest friends; there are men of importance amongst them."

He would have pressed the list upon Witichis, hoping that then the Goths would take his most dangerous enemies away with them.

But Witichis refused the list.

"'Tis no matter! I shall take no hostages at all. Of what use is it to take off their heads? *You*, shall answer to me for Rome."

"What do you mean by that? I cannot keep Belisarius away."

"You shall not. Belisarius is sure to come, but, rely upon it, he will go away again. We Goths will overcome this enemy; perhaps only after a hard fight, but most certainly. And then there will be a second fight for Rome!"

"A second?" asked Cethegus quietly. "With whom?"

Witichis laid his hand upon the Prefect's shoulder, and looked into his face with eyes as clear as sunshine.

"With you, Prefect of Rome!"

"With me?" and Cethegus tried to smile, but could not.

"Do not deny what is dearest to you, man. It is not worthy of you. I know for whom you have built the gates and ramparts round this city; not for us and not for the Greeks! for yourself! Be quiet! I know you meditate, or I guess it. Not a word! Be it so. Shall Greek and Goth struggle for Rome, and no Roman? But listen: let not a second wearing war carry off our people. When we have overcome the Byzantines and driven them out of our Italy--then, Cethegus, I will expect you before the walls of Rome. Not for a battle between our people, but for single combat. Man against man, you and I will lose or win Rome."

In the King's look and tone lay such dignity, magnanimity, and sublimity, that the Prefect was confused.

In secret he would have mocked at the simplicity of the barbarian, but it seemed to him as if he could never more respect himself, if he were incapable of esteeming, honouring, and responding to such greatness.

So he spoke without sarcasm.

"You dream, Witichis, like a Gothic boy."

"No, I think and act like a Gothic man. Cethegus, you are the only Roman whom I would honour thus. I have seen you fight in the wars with the Gepidæ. You are worthy of my sword. You are older than I; well, I will give you the advantage of the shield!"

"You Germans are very singular," said Cethegus involuntarily. "What fancies!"

But now Witichis frowned.

"Fancies! Woe to you, if you are not able to feel what speaks in me. Woe to you, if Teja be right! He laughed at my plan and said, 'The Roman will not understand that!' And *he* advised me to take you with me a prisoner. I thought more highly of you and Rome. But know: Teja has surrounded your house; and are you so mean or so cowardly as not to comprehend me, we shall take you from your Rome in chains. Shame upon you, that you must be forced to do what is honourable!"

But now it was Cethegus's turn to get angry.

He felt abashed. The chivalry of Witichis was strange to him, and it vexed him that he could not mock at it. It vexed him to be compelled; that his free choice had been mistrusted. A furious hatred in return for Teja's contempt, and anger at the King's brutal frankness, flamed up in his soul. He would gladly have thrust his dagger into the Goth's broad breast.

He had been almost on the point of giving his word in good earnest from a soldierly feeling of honour.

But now a very different, hateful feeling of malignant joy flashed across his mind. The barbarians had mistrusted him, they had despised him; now they should certainly be deceived!

Coming forward with a keen look, he grasped the King's hand.

"Be it so!" he said.

"Be it so!" repeated Witichis, giving his hand a strong pressure. "I am glad that I was right and not Teja. Farewell! Guard our Rome! From you I will demand her again in honourable combat."

And he left the house.

"Well!" said Teja, who waited outside with the other Goths. "Shall I storm the house?"

"No," said Witichis; "he has given his word."

"If he will only keep it!"

Witichis started back in indignation.

"Teja! thy gloomy mind renders thee too unjust! Thou hast no right to doubt a hero's honour. Cethegus is a hero!"

"He is a Roman! Good-night!" said Teja, sheathing his sword. And he turned another way with his Goths.

But Cethegus tossed all night upon his couch. He was at variance with himself.

He was vexed with Julius.

He was bitterly vexed with Witichis, more bitterly still with Teja.

But most with himself.

The next day Witichis once again assembled people. Senate, and the clergy of the city, at the Thermæ of Titus. From the highest step of the marble staircase of the handsome building, which was filled with the leaders of the army, the King made a simple speech to the Romans.

He declared that he must leave the city for a short time, but that he would soon return. He reminded them of the mildness of the Gothic government, of the benefits of Theodoric and Amalasintha, and called upon them courageously to oppose Belisarius, in case of his advance, until the Goths returned to reinforce them. The newly-drilled legionaries and the strong fortifications made a long resistance possible.

Finally he demanded the oath of allegiance, and asked them once more to defend their city to the death against Belisarius. The Romans hesitated; for their thoughts were already in Belisarius's camp, and they disliked to perjure themselves.

Just at this crisis a solemn hymn was heard in the direction of the Via Sacra; and past the Flavian Amphitheatre came a long procession of priests, swinging censers, and singing psalms.

In the night Pope Agapetus had died, and, in all haste, Silverius, the archdeacon, had been appointed as his successor.

Solemnly and slowly the crowd of priests advanced; the insignia of the Bishop of Rome were carried in front; choristers with silvery voices sang sweet and sacred airs. At last the Pope's litter appeared open, richly gilt, and shaped like a boat.

The bearers walked slowly, step by step, in time to the music; pressed upon by crowds of people, who were eager to receive the blessing of their new Bishop.

Silverius bent his head to the right and left, and blessed the people repeatedly.

A number of priests and a troop of mercenaries, armed with spears, closed the procession.

It halted in the middle of the square. The Arian and Gothic warriors, who stood sentry at all the entrances of the place, silently watched the solemn and splendid procession, the symbol of a church which was their enemy; while the Romans greeted the appearance of their Apostolic Father all the more joyfully, because his voice could calm their scruples of conscience as to the oath to be given.

Silverius was just about to begin his address to the people, when the arm of a gigantic Goth, stretched over the side of his litter, pulled him by his gold-brocaded mantle.

Indignant at this very irreverent interruption, Silverius turned his face with a severe frown; but the Goth, unabashed, repeated the pull, and said:

"Come, priest, thou must go up to the King!"

Silverius thought it would have been more becoming if the King had come down to him, and Hildebad seemed to read something of this feeling on his features, for he cried:

"It cannot be helped! Stoop, priest!"

And herewith he pressed his hand upon the shoulder of one of the priests who carried the litter. The bearers now set the litter down; Silverius left it with a sigh, and followed Hildebad up the steps.

When the priest reached Witichis, the latter took his hand, advanced with him to the edge of the steps, and said:

"Roman citizens, your priest has been chosen for your Bishop; I ratify the choice; he shall become Pope, as soon as he has sworn the oath of allegiance, and has taken for me your oaths of fealty. Swear, priest!"

For one moment Silverius was confounded.

But immediately recovering himself, he turned with an unctuous smile to Witichis.

"You command?" he asked.

"Swear," said Witichis, "that in our absence you will do all that you can to keep this city of Rome faithful to the Goths, to whom you owe so much, to further us in all things, and to hinder the progress of our enemies. Swear fidelity to the Goths!"

"I swear," said Silverius, turning to the people. "And thus I, who have power to bind and to loose, call upon you, Romans, surrounded as you are by Gothic weapons, to swear in the same spirit in which I myself have taken the oath."

The priests and some of the nobility appeared to have understood, and lifted their hands to swear without delay.

Then the mass hesitated no longer, and the place echoed with the loud shout: "We swear fidelity to the Goths!"

"It is well, Bishop of Rome," said the King, "we count upon your oath. Farewell, Romans! We shall soon meet again."

And he descended the broad flight of steps. Teja and Hildebad followed him.

"Now I am only curious--" said Earl Teja.

"Whether they will keep their oath?" interposed Hildebad.

"No; not at all. But how they will break it. Well, the priest will find out the way."

With flying standards the Goths marched out of the Porta Flaminia, leaving the city to its Pope and the Prefect. Meanwhile Belisarius approached by forced marches upon the Via Latina.

CHAPTER VIII.

The city of Florentia was full of eager and warlike activity. The gates were closed; on the ramparts and bastions paced numerous sentinels; the streets rang with the clatter of mounted Goths and armed mercenaries; for Guntharis and Arahad had thrown themselves into this fortress, and,

for the present, had made it the main stronghold of the rebellion against Witichis.

The two brothers lived in a handsome villa which Theodoric had built on the shores of the Arnus, in the suburb but still within the enclosure of the walls.

Duke Guntharis of Tuscany, the elder, was a far-famed warrior, and had been for years the commander of the city of Florentia. Within this district lay the estates of his powerful family, cultivated by thousands of farmers and vassals; his power in this city and district was unlimited, and Duke Guntharis was resolved to use it to the utmost.

In full armour, his helmet upon his head, Guntharis walked impatiently to and fro his marble-wainscoted room, while his younger brother, in festive garments and unarmed, leaned silently and thoughtfully against a table, which was covered with letters and parchments.

"Decide; make haste, my boy!" cried Guntharis, "it is my last word. To-day thou wilt obtain the consent of the obstinate child, or I--dost thou hear?--I will go myself to fetch it. But then, woe be to her. I know better than thou how to manage a capricious girl."

"Brother, thou wilt not do that?"

"By the Thunderer! but I will. Dost think I will risk my head, and delay the good-fortune of my house, for the sake of thy sentimental consideration? Now is the time to procure the first place in the nation for the Wölfungs; the place which by right belongs to them, and from which the Amelungs and Balthes have ousted them for centuries. The last daughter of the Amelungs, once thy wife, no one can dispute thy possession of the throne; and my sword will protect it against the Peasant-King, Witichis. But we must not delay too long. I have yet no news from Ravenna, but I fear the city will only acknowledge Mataswintha, and not us; that is, not us alone. And whoever has Ravenna, has Italy, since Neapolis and Rome are lost; therefore that strong fortress must be ours. To insure this, Mataswintha must become thy wife before we reach the walls of Ravenna; else it will be reported that she is more our prisoner than our Queen."

"Who desires it more ardently than I? But yet I cannot use compulsion!"

"No? Why not? Seek her and win her, well or ill. I go to strengthen the guard upon the walls. When I return I must have an answer."

Duke Guntharis went; and his brother made his way, sighing, into the garden to seek Mataswintha.

This garden had been laid out by a skilled freedman from Asia Minor. In the background he had formed a kind of park, the glades of which, free from flowerbeds or terraces, were luxuriantly green. Through the flowery grass and amongst the thick oleanders flowed a clear brook.

Close to the edge of the brook lay, stretched upon the turf, a youthful female figure. She had thrown her mantle back from her right arm, and seemed to be playing, now with the murmuring ripples, now with the nodding flowers on the brink. She was buried in thought, and at intervals threw a violet or a crocus dreamily into the water, watching the blossoms with slightly opened lips, as they were swiftly borne away by the running stream.

Close behind her kneeled a young girl in the dress of a Moorish slave, busily weaving a wreath of flowers, which only wanted the finishing touches. Every now and then she looked at her meditative mistress, to see

if she noticed her secret occupation. But the lady seemed quite lost in reverie.

At last the pretty wreath was finished; with laughing eyes the slave placed it lightly upon the splendid auburn hair of her mistress, and bent forward over her shoulder to meet her eyes. But the lady had not felt the flowers touch her head. Then the little slave became impatient, and, pouting, said:

"But, mistress, by the palms of the Auras! of what art thou thinking? With whom art thou?"

"With him!" whispered her mistress.

"By the white goddess! I can bear it no longer," cried the little slave-girl, springing up; "it is too bad; I shall die of jealousy! Thou not only forgettest me, thy gay gazelle, but also thine own beauty--and all for this invisible man! Only look into the water and see how beautifully thy bright hair contrasts with the dark violets and white anemones."

"Thy wreath is pretty!" said Mataswintha, taking it off and throwing it gently into the water. "What sweet flowers! Greet him from me!"

"Oh, my poor flowers!" cried the slave, looking after them; but she did not dare to scold. "Only tell me," she cried, sitting down again beside her mistress, "how all this is to end? We have been here now for many days, we do not rightly know if as Queen or prisoner? In any case we are in the power of strangers. We have never set our feet out of thy apartments or of this well-walled garden, and know nothing of the outside world. But thou art ever still and happy, as if it must be so!"

"And it must be so!"

"Indeed? and how will it end?"

"*He* will come and set me free."

"Truly, White Lily, thou hast strong faith. If we were at home in Mauretania, and I saw thee looking at night at the stars, I should say that thou hadst read everything there. But in this way I do not understand it," and she shook her black locks, "and I shall never understand it."

"But thou shalt and wilt, Aspa!" said Mataswintha, raising herself, and putting her white arm tenderly round the girl's brown neck; "thy faithful love has long since deserved this reward, the best that I can give thee."

A tear rose in the slave's dark eye.

"Reward?" she said. "Aspa was stolen by wild men with long red locks. Aspa is a slave. Every one has scolded and beaten her. Thou boughtest me as a flower is bought. But thou strokest my cheek and my hair. Thou art as beautiful as the Goddess of the Sun, and thou speakest of reward?"

And she nestled her head upon the bosom of her mistress.

"Thou art my gazelle!" said Mataswintha; "thou hast a heart of gold. Thou shalt know all; thou shalt hear what is known to none but myself. Listen; my childhood was without love, without joy; and yet my young soul needed both. My poor mother had ardently longed for a boy, for an heir to the throne--and she treated the girl who was born to her with dislike, coldness, and severity. When Athalaric was born, she became less harsh but more cold; all her love and care went to the heir to the throne. I should not have felt it, had I not seen just the contrary in my tender father. I felt that he also suffered under the coldness of his wife, and the

sick man often pressed me to his heart with tears and sighs. And when he was dead and buried, all the love in the world was dead for me. I saw little of Athalaric; he was educated by other teachers in another part of the palace. I saw my mother still less; scarcely ever, unless she had to punish me. And yet I loved her so much! And I saw how my nurses and teachers loved their own children, and kissed and petted them; and my heart longed with all its might for similar warmth and affection. So I grew up like a pale flower without sunshine! My favourite place in all the world was the grave of my father Eutharic, in the large palace garden at Ravenna. There, with the dead, I sought the love which I did not find in the living; and whenever I could escape my attendants, I hurried there to indulge in my longing and to weep. The older I grew, the more this longing increased. In the presence of my mother I was forced to hide all my feelings; she despised me if I showed them. As I grew up I saw very well that people's eyes were fixed upon me as if in admiration; but I thought that they pitied me, and that pained me.

"And more and more frequently I took refuge by the grave of my father, until they told my mother that I always wept there and returned quite disordered. My mother angrily forbade me to go to the grave, and spoke of contemptible weakness. But I revolted against this prohibition. Then one day she surprised me there, and struck at me, and yet I was no longer a child. She took me back to the palace and scolded me violently, threatening to send me away; and, as she left me, she said angrily: why had heaven punished her with such a child! That was too much. Unspeakably miserable, I resolved to run away from this mother, to whom I was a punishment, and to go where no one knew me, I did not know whither. I would most gladly have joined my father in his quiet tomb. When evening came, I stole out of the palace, and hurried once more to the grave to take a long farewell. The stars were already out. I slipped out of the garden and the palace, and hastened through the dark streets to the Faventinian Gate. I managed to slip past the sentinel, and ran a little way along the high-road, into the night; straight to misery. But a man in armour came along the road towards me. As I tried to pass him, he suddenly came up to me, looked into my face, and gently laid his hand upon my shoulder, saying 'Whither, Lady Mataswintha, whither goest thou alone, and so late at night?' I trembled under his hand, tears burst from my eyes, and I cried, sobbing, 'I am desperate!' Then the man took hold of both my hands and looked at me; so kindly, so mildly, so sadly! He dried my tears with his mantle, and said, in a tone of the warmest kindness, 'Wherefore? what troubles thee so?' I felt both happy and miserable at the sound of his voice. And as I looked into his kind eyes, I could no longer control myself. 'Because my mother hates me,' I cried; 'because there is no love for me on earth!' 'Child, child, thou art sick,' he said, 'and ravest! Come, come back with me. Thou! only wait. Thou wilt yet be a queen of love.' I did not understand him. But I loved him, oh so much! for these words, for this kindness. Helplessly, inquiringly, and with astonishment I looked into his face. My trembling aspect must have touched him, or he thought it was the cold. He took off his warm mantle, folded it round me, and led me slowly back through the gate and little frequented streets to the palace. Helpless, and tottering like a sick child, I followed him, my head, which he carefully concealed, resting on his breast. He was silent, and only sometimes dried the tears from my eyes. Unremarked, as I believed, we reached the door of the palace staircase. He opened it and gently pushed me in. Then he pressed my hand. 'Be good,' he said, 'and quiet. Happiness will come to thee, be sure; and love enough.' And he gently laid his hand upon my head, pulled the door to behind him, and descended the steps. But I leaned against the half-closed door, and could not go away. My feet denied their service; my heart beat. Then I heard a rough voice below addressing him. 'Whom dost thou smuggle at night into the palace, my friend?' it asked. But he answered, 'Is it thou, Hildebrand? Thou wilt not betray her! It was the child Mataswintha; she had strayed

into the city in the dark, and feared the anger of her mother.' 'Mataswintha!' said the other. 'She daily becomes more beautiful.' And my protector said----

Mataswintha hesitated, and a vivid flush overspread her cheeks.

"Well!" asked Aspa, looking at her with open eyes, "what did he say?"

But Mataswintha drew Aspa's small head down upon her bosom.

"He said," she whispered--"he said, 'She will become the most beautiful woman on earth.'"

"He said truly," cried the little slave; "why shouldst thou become red? It is so. But go on. What didst thou do next?"

"I crept up to my bed and wept; wept tears of sorrow, delight, and love, all at once. That night a whole world, a heaven, was opened to me. He liked me, I felt it; and he called me beautiful. Yes, now I knew it. I was beautiful, and I was glad; for I wished to be so for *his* sake. Oh, how happy was I! Meeting with him had brought light into my darkness, and a blessing to my life. I knew now that I might be liked and loved. I took care of my person, which *he* had praised. The sweet power in my heart spread a mild warmth over my whole being; I became softer and more earnest. Even my mother's severity relaxed when I met her harshness with gentleness; and daily all hearts were turned to me more kindly, as I became more tender. And for all this I had to thank him. He had saved me from rushing into shame and misery, and had won for me a whole world of love. Since then I have lived, and live, only for him."

And she ceased, and laid her hand upon her beating heart.

"But, mistress, when did you see or speak to him again? Does your love live on such scanty nourishment?"

"I have never spoken to him again, and have only seen him once. On the day of Theodoric's death, he commanded the guards of the palace, and Athalaric told me his name; for I had never dared to inquire about him, lest my flight, and ah! my secret, should be discovered. He was not at court; and if he sometimes came there, I was away."

"So thou knowest nothing further of him? of his life; of his past?"

"How could I inquire! My blushes would have betrayed me. Love is the child of silence and of longing. But I know all about his--about *our* future."

"About his future?" laughed Aspa.

"Yes. At every solstice there used to come to the court an old woman named Radrun, and she received from King Theodoric strange herbs and roots, which he sent for from Asia and the Nile purposely for her. She had asked for this as the sole reward for having foretold his fortune when a boy, and everything had been fulfilled. She brewed potions and mixed salves; they called her in public 'the woman of the woods,' but in private, 'the Wala, the witch.' And we at court knew--all except the priests, who would have forbidden it--that every summer solstice, when she came, the King let her prophesy to him the events of the coming year. And when she left him, I knew that my mother, Theodahad, and Gothelindis, called her and questioned her, and what she foretold always came to pass. So the next solstice I took heart, watched for the old woman, and when I found her alone, enticed her into my room, and offered her gold and shining stones if she would tell me my fortune. But she laughed, and drew forth a little flask made of amber. 'Not for gold, but for blood!' she said, 'the pure

blood of a king's child.' And she opened a vein in my left arm, and received the blood into her amber flask. Then she looked at both my hands, and said, 'He whom thou holdest in thy heart will give thee glory and good fortune, will bring thee paralysing pain, will be thy consort, but not thy husband!' And with this she went away."

"That is of little comfort as far as I can make it out."

"Thou dost not understand the old wife's sayings; they are all so dark. She adds a threat to every promise, so as to be safe in all cases. But I hold fast to the bright and not to the dark side. I know that he will be mine, and give me glory and good fortune; I will bear the accompanying pain. Pain for his sake is delight."

"I admire thee and thy faith, mistress. And for the saying of the witch thou hast refused all the kings and princes. Vandals and Ostrogoths, from Gaul and Burgondia, who have ever wooed thee? Even Germanus, the imperial prince of Byzantium? And you wait for him?"

"And I wait for him! But not only because of this saying. In my heart lives a little bird, which sings to me every day, 'He will be thine, he must be thine.' I know it for a certainty," she concluded, raising her eyes to the sky, and relapsing into her former reverie.

Steps were heard approaching from the villa.

"Ah!" cried Aspa, "thy dainty suitor! Poor Arahad! his trouble is in vain."

"I will make an end to it," said Mataswintha, rising, and on her brow and in her young eyes there now lay an angry severity, which told of the Amelung blood in her veins. There was a strange mixture of burning passion and melting tenderness in the girl. Aspa had often been astonished by the repressed fire which her mistress sometimes betrayed. "Thou art like the divine mountains of my home," she said, "snow on the summit, roses round the middle, but consuming fire in the interior, which often streams over snow and roses."

Meanwhile Earl Arahad turned out of the shady path, and approached the lovely girl with a blush which became him well.

"I come, Queen----" he began.

But she harshly interrupted him.

"I hope, Earl of Asta, that at last thou comest to put an end to this despicable game of force and lies. I will bear it no longer. Thy bold brother surprises me--me, the helpless orphan, lost in sorrow for her mother--in my apartments, calls me in one breath his Queen and his prisoner, and keeps me for weeks in unworthy confinement. He gives me the purple, and deprives me of liberty. Then thou comest and tormentest me with thy vain pursuit, which will never succeed. I refused thee when at liberty. Dost thou believe, thou fool, that, a prisoner in thy power, the child of the Amelungs will listen to thee? Thou swearest that thou lovest me; well, then, respect me! Honour my will and set me free, or tremble when my liberator comes."

And she advanced threateningly towards Arahad, who, confused, could find no words with which to answer her.

Just then Duke Guntharis hurried up with a hot and angry face.

"Up, Arahad!" he cried, "make an end. We must away at once! He approaches; he presses forward with a strong force."

"Who?" asked Arahad hastily.

"He says he comes to set her free. He has gained a victory--the Peasant-King! He has beaten our outposts at Castrum Sivium."

"Who?" now asked Mataswintha eagerly.

"Well," cried Guntharis angrily, "thou mayest as well know it; it can be no longer concealed--Earl Witichis of Fæsulæ!"

"Witichis!" cried Mataswintha with beaming eyes and a beating heart.

"Yes; the rebels at Regeta, forgetting the rights of the nobility, have chosen him King of the Goths."

"He! he my King!" said Mataswintha, as if in a dream.

"I should have told thee when I greeted thee as Queen, but in thy chamber stood his bust, crowned with laurel. That seemed to me suspicious. I saw it later more closely; it was an accidental resemblance; it was a head of Ares."

Mataswintha was silent, and tried to hide the blushes which rose into her cheeks.

"Well," cried Arahad, "what is to be done now?"

"We must away. We must reach Ravenna before him, Florentia will hinder him for a time. Meanwhile we shall take Ravenna, and when thou hast consummated thy marriage with Mataswintha in the palace of Theodoric, all the people of the Goths will turn to us. Up, Queen! I will order thy carriage to be prepared; in an hour thou wilt go to Ravenna, guarded by my troops."

And the brothers hurried away.

Mataswintha looked after them with flashing eyes.

"Yes! lead me away, bound and a prisoner. Like an eagle from the height my King will swoop upon you, and save me from your cruel clutches. Come, Aspa, the liberator approaches!"

CHAPTER IX.

Scarcely had the Goths turned their backs upon the walls of Rome, when Pope Silverius--the very day after taking the oath--summoned the heads of the priesthood and nobility, the officials and citizens, to a council in the *Thermæ* of Caracalla.

Cethegus was also invited, and appeared.

Without the least embarrassment, Silverius moved that, as at last the hour was come in which to cast off the yoke of the heretics, an embassy should be sent to Belisarius, the commander-in-chief of the orthodox Emperor--the only rightful master of Italy--to deliver up the keys of the Eternal City, and to recommend the Church and the faithful to his protection against the vengeance of the barbarians.

The scruples of a very young priest and of an honest smith, on account of their yesterday's oath, he dismissed with a smile, appealing to his Apostolic power to bind and to loose, and pointing to the evident force put upon them while taking the oath, by the presence of Gothic arms.

Upon this the motion was carried unanimously, and the Pope himself, Scaevola, Albinus, and Cethegus, appointed as ambassadors.

But Cethegus put in a protest. He had silently listened to the motion and had not joined in the vote. Now he rose and said:

"I am against the motion; not on account of the oath. I need not appeal to the Apostolic power, for I did not swear. But on account of the city. That is, we must not unnecessarily arouse the just anger of the Goths, who may very easily return, and who would not then take the Apostolic dispensation as an excuse for such open perjury. Let Belisarius either beg us or compel us. Who throws himself away is ever trampled on."

Silverius and Scaevola exchanged significant glances.

"Such sentiments," said the jurist, "will doubtless be very pleasing to the Emperor's general, but can alter nothing in our decision. So you will not go with us to Belisarius?"

"I will go to Belisarius, but not with you," said Cethegus, and left the place.

As the others were leaving the Thermæ, the Pope said to Scaevola:

"That will finish him! He has declared against the surrender before witnesses!"

"And he goes himself into the lion's den!"

"He shall not leave it again. You have drawn up the act of accusation?"

"Long ago. I feared that he would take the mastery of the city into his own hands, and now he goes himself to Belisarius! That proud man is lost."

"Amen," said Silverius. "And so may all fall who in their worldly endeavours oppose the holy Petrus.--The day after to-morrow, at the fourth hour, we will set forth."

But the Holy Father erred; the proud man was not yet to fall.

Cethegus had hastened immediately to his house, where his Gallic chariot awaited him.

"We start at once," he called to the slave who sat on the foremost horse; "I will only fetch my sword."

In the vestibule he met the two Licinii, who were watching for him impatiently.

"To-day is the day," cried Lucius, "with the prospect of which you have so long comforted us!"

"Where is the proof of your trust in our courage, our skill, and our fidelity!" asked Marcus.

"Patience!" said Cethegus, lifting his forefinger; and he went into his study.

He shortly reappeared, his sword and many papers under his left arm, a sealed roll in his right hand. His eyes flashed.

"Is the outermost gate of the Moles Hadriani ready?" he asked.

"Ready," answered Lucius Licinius.

"Is the grain from Sicily stored in the Capitol?"

"All stored."

"Are the weapons distributed, and the ramparts of the Capitol completed as I ordered?"

"All complete," answered Marcus.

"Good. Take this roll. Break the seal as soon as Silverius has left the city, and punctually execute every word therein. It concerns not only my life and yours--but Rome! The city of Cæsar will be witness of your actions. Go. Farewell till we meet again!"

And the fire in his eyes kindled an answering fire in the hearts of the young Romans.

"You shall be content!"

"You and Cæsar!" they said, and hurried away.

With a smile that seldom illumined his features with such radiance, Cethegus sprang into his carriage.

"Holy Father," he said to himself, "I am still in your debt for that last meeting in the Catacombs. I will repay it well!"

"Down the Via Latina!" he cried to the slaves; "and let the horses gallop as hard as they can!"

The Prefect had more than a day's start of the embassy. And he used his advantage well.

He had, with unchecked energy, thought of a plan by which he would remain master of Rome in spite of the landing of Belisarius. And he set about its execution with all his habitual caution.

He had been scarcely able to control his impatience during the journey. At last he reached the outposts of the Byzantines at Capua, where Johannes, the commander, sent his younger brother Perseus and a few horsemen to lead him to the head-quarters.

Arrived in the camp, Cethegus did not ask for the commander-in-chief, but caused himself to be conducted at once to the tent of the privy-councillor, Procopius of Cæsarea.

Procopius had been his fellow-student in the Schools of Law at Berytus; and the two gifted men had attracted each other greatly.

But not the warmth of friendship led the Prefect first of all to this man. Procopius knew the whole political past of Belisarius, and was probably the confidant of his future plans.

The privy-councillor greeted the friend of his youth with great pleasure. He was a man of sound commonsense, one of the few men of science of that time, whose capability of healthy feeling and simple apprehension had not been suffocated by the artificial ornaments of Byzantine knowledge in the Schools of Rhetoric.

Clear sense was expressed on his open brow, and in his still youthfully bright eyes shone delight in all that was good.

When Cethegus had washed off the dust and heat of travel in a carefully-prepared bath, his host, before inviting him to the evening meal in his tent, led him round the camp, and showed him the quarters of the

principal divisions, pointing out the most famous generals, and, in a few words, describing their peculiarities, their services, and the often singular contrasts of their past lives.

There were the sons of rude Thracia, Constantinus and Bessas, who had worked their way up from the rank of rough hirelings; brave soldiers, but without culture, and filled with the presumption of self-made men. They considered themselves to be the indispensable supports and equally capable successors of Belisarius.

There was the aristocratic Iberian Peranius, of the royal family of the Iberians, the hostile neighbours of Persia, who had given up his fatherland and hope of the crown out of hatred to the Persian conqueror, and had taken service in the Emperor's army.

Then Valentinus, Magnus, and Innocentius, daring, leaders of the horsemen; Paulus, Demetrius, Ursicinus, the leaders of the foot-soldiers; Ennes, the Isaurian chief and commander of the Isaurians of Belisarius; Aigan and Askan, the leaders of the Massagetæ; Alamundarus and King Abocharabus, the Saracens; Ambazuch and Bleda, the Huns; Arsakes, Amazaspes, and Artabanes, the Armenians (the Arsakide Phaza had been left behind in Neapolis with the rest of the Armenians); Azarethas and Barasmanes, the Persians; and Antallas and Cabaon, the Moors.

All these Procopius knew and named, praising sparingly, but expressing his blame with great enjoyment, in biting but witty phrases.

They had just turned towards the quarters of Martinus, the peaceful town-burner, on the right, when Cethegus, standing still, asked:

"And whose is the silken tent there on the hill, with the golden stars and purple ensign? The guards carry golden shields!"

"There," said Procopius, "dwells his Invincible Daintiness, the Upper Purple-Snail Intendant of the Roman Empire, Prince Areobindos, whom may God enlighten!"

"The Emperor's nephew, is he not?"

"Yes; he married the Emperor's niece, Projecta; his highest and only merit. He was sent here with the Imperial Guard to vex us, and to take care that we do not win too easily. He has been made of equal rank with Belisarius, understands as little of warfare as Belisarius does of purple-snails, and is to be Governor of Italy."

"Indeed!" said Cethegus.

"When we encamped he insisted upon having his tent placed to the right of Belisarius. But we would not consent. Fortunately God, in His wisdom, had created that hill centuries ago for the solving of our dispute as to rank, and now the Prince is indeed placed to the left, but higher than Belisarius."

"And whose are the gay tents yonder, behind the quarters of Belisarius? Who dwells there?"

"There?" answered Procopius, with a sigh. "A very unhappy woman; Antonina, the wife of Belisarius."

"She unhappy? The celebrated Antonina, the second empress? Why?"

"It is not well to speak of that in the open camp. Come with me to my tent, the wine will be sufficiently cooled."

CHAPTER X.

In the tent they found the handsome cushions of the camp-bed placed round a low bronze table of perforated work, which Cethegus admired.

"It is a piece of booty from the wars of the Vandals; I took it with me from Carthage. And these soft cushions once lay upon the bed of the Persian King; I gained them in the battle of Dara."

"You are a fine practical scholar!" said Cethegus, smiling. "Are you so changed since the days of Athens?"

"I should hope so!" said Procopius, and began carving (for he had dismissed the attendant slaves) the smoking haunch of venison before him. "You must know that I wished to make philosophy my calling, to become a sage. For three years I listened to the Platonists, Stoics, and Academicians at Athens; and studied till I was sick and stupid. And I did not stop at philosophy; according to the praiseworthy custom of our pious century, theology must also be grappled with, and for another year I had to reflect upon the mysteries of the Holy Trinity. Well, with studying so hard, my reason, which was not at all contemptible by nature, threatened to fail me. Fortunately, I became seriously ill, and the physicians forbade me Athens and all books. They sent me to Asia Minor. I only saved a 'Thucydides' from my books, and took it with me in my travelling-bag. And then 'Thucydides' saved me. In the tedium of the journey I read and re-read his splendid history of the deeds of the Hellenes in war and peace; and now I found with astonishment that the acts and manners of men, their passions, their vices and virtues, were really much more attractive and remarkable than all forms and figures of heathen logic--not to speak of Christian logic. I arrived at Ephesus, and was one day strolling through the streets, when my mind suddenly became wonderfully enlightened. I was walking across a great place; there stood before me a church of the Holy Spirit; it was built upon the ruins of the old Temple of Diana. On the left stood a ruined altar of Isis, and on the right the praying-house of the Jews. Then the thought flashed across me: Each one of these believed, and believed firmly, that he alone knew the truth about the highest Being. And yet that is impossible; the highest Being has, it seems to me, no need of being known by us--neither should I, in His place--and He has created mankind, that they may live, act rightly and strive honestly here on earth. And this living, acting, enjoying and striving is really all that concerns us. If any one will search and think, he should search the lives and acts of men. As I stood so thinking, all at once I heard the flourish of trumpets. A brilliant troop of horsemen came trotting up; at their head a splendid man on a bay horse, beautiful and strong as the God of War. Their weapons glittered, the flags waved, and the horses pranced. And I thought: These know wherefore they live, and do not need to inquire of a philosopher! And while I was admiring the horsemen, a citizen of Ephesus clapped me on the shoulder and said: 'You seem not to know who that was, nor whither these men are bent? That is the hero Belisarius, who is off for the wars in Persia!' 'Good, friend!' I said, 'then I will go with him!' And so I did, the very same hour. And Belisarius soon appointed me his privy-councillor and secretary. Since then I have a double calling; by day I make, or help to make, history, and by night I write it."

"And which is your best work?"

"Alas! friend, the writing! And the writing would be better if the history were better. For generally I do not at all approve of what we do, and I only help to do it because it is better than doing nothing, or putting up with philosophy. Bring the 'Tacitus,' slave," he called out of the opening of the tent.

"The 'Tacitus?'" asked Cethegus.

"Yes, friend, we have drunk enough of the 'Livius.' You must know that I name my wines according to their historical character. For example, to return to what I was saying, this piece of history which we are about just now, this Gothic war, is quite against my taste. Narses is right, we ought first to repel the Persians before we attack the Goths."

"Narses! What is my wise friend doing?"

"He envies Belisarius, and will not confess it even to himself. Besides that, he makes plans of wars and battles. I will bet that he had already conquered Italy before we had even landed."

"You are not his friend. Yet he is a man of genius. Why do you prefer Belisarius?"

"I will tell you," said Procopius, pouring out the "Tacitus," "It is my misfortune that I was not the historian of Alexander or Scipio. Since I recovered from philosophy and theology, my whole nature has longed for men, for real men of flesh and blood. So these spindle-shanked emperors and bishops and generals, who subtilise everything with their reason, disgust me. We have become a crippled generation; the hero time lies far behind us! Only honest Belisarius is a hero like those of the olden time. He might have encamped with Agamemnon before Troy! He is not stupid; he has good sense; but only the natural sense of a noble wild animal for its prey, for his vocation. Belisarius's vocation is heroism! And I delight in his broad chest and his flashing eyes and mighty thighs with which he masters the strongest stallion. And I am glad when, sometimes, his blind delight in blows upsets all his fine plans. I love to see him rush amongst the enemy and fight like an infuriated boar. But I dare not tell him so; for then all would be over; in three days he would be cut to pieces. On the contrary, I keep him back. I am his 'reason,' as he calls me. And he puts up with my prudence because he knows that it is not cowardice. More than once I have been obliged to save him from a difficulty into which the frowardness of his heroism had brought him! The most amusing of these stories is that of the horn and tuba."

"Which of the two do you blow, O my Procopius?"

"Neither; only the trumpet of fame and the pipe of mockery!"

"But what about the horn and trumpet?"

"Oh, we were lying before a rocky nest in Persia, which we were obliged to take, because it commanded the high-road. But we had already, many times, damaged our heroic heads against its hard walls; and my master, becoming angry, swore 'by the slumber of Justinian'--that is his biggest oath--that he would never blow the signal of retreat before this Castle of Anglon. Now our outposts were very often surprised by sallies from the fortress; we, in the highly-situated camp, could see the assaulters as they issued from the fortress, but our outposts, lying at the foot of the hill, could not. I now advised that we should give our people the signal of retreat from the camp whenever we saw the danger approaching. But I met with a fine reception! The slumber of Justinian was such a sacred thing that no one dare meddle with an oath sworn by it. And so our poor fellows were obliged to let themselves be taken unawares by the Persians, until I hit upon the ingenious expedient of proposing to my master that we should give the signal of retreat to our men not with the trumpet but with the horn. The idea pleased my honest Belisarius. And so when we merrily blew the horn to the attack, our men ran away like frightened hares. It was enough to make one die with laughing to see those belligerent sounds produce such a despicable effect! But it availed.

Justinian's slumber and Belisarius's oath remained intact, our outposts were no more butchered, and at last the rocky fortress fell. Thus I always scold and laugh at Belisarius for his heroic acts, but in reality my heart is warmed and gladdened: he is the last hero."

"Well," observed Cethegus, "amongst the Goths you will find many such sturdy fellows."

Procopius nodded reflectively:

"Can't deny that I have great pleasure in these Goths. But they are too stupid."

"How? Why?"

"They are stupid because, instead of pressing upon us slowly, step by step, in union with their yellow-haired brethren (they would be irresistible!) they have planted themselves singly in the midst of Italy, without right or reason, like a piece of wood in the centre of a glimmering hearth. They will be ruined by this; they will be burnt, you will see!"

"I hope to see it. And what then?" asked Cethegus quietly.

"Yes," answered Procopius peevishly, "what then? That is the vexation. Then Belisarius will be Governor of Italy--for it will not last a year with the purple Prince--and he will wear away his fine strength here in idleness, when there is work enough to do in Persia. And then, as his court-historian, I shall only have to write down how many skins of wine we empty yearly."

"So you would like, when the Goths are done with, to have Belisarius out of Italy?"

"Certainly. In the Persian land bloom his and my laurels. I have thought already of many a plan to get him away from here."

Cethegus was silent. He was glad to have found such an important ally for his plans. At last he said:

"And so his 'reason' Procopius, rules the lion Belisarius?"

"No," sighed Procopius; "rather his *un*reason, his wife!"

"Antonina! Tell me, why did you call her unhappy?"

"Because she is half-hearted and a contradiction. Nature intended her for a good and faithful wife; and Belisarius loves her with all his heroic heart. But she came to the court of the Empress. Theodora, the beautiful she-devil, is intended by nature as much for vice as is Antonina for virtue. The circus-girl has certainly never felt the sting of conscience. But I believe she cannot endure to have an honest woman near her, because an honest woman would despise her. She did not rest until she had succeeded in arousing Antonina's coquetry by her hellish example. Now Antonina suffers tortures of remorse on account of her dalliance with her adorers; for she loves, she worships her husband."

"And yet? How is it possible that a hero like Belisarius cannot content her?"

"Just because he is a hero. He does not flatter her, with all his love. She could not bear to see the Empress's lovers exhaust themselves in verses, flowers, and gifts, and to live herself without such homage. Vanity was her snare. But she does not feel at all at ease amidst her trifling."

"And has Belisarius any suspicion?"

"Not a shadow. He is the only one in all the Roman Empire who does not know what most concerns him. I believe it would be his death. For this reason alone he must not remain here in peace, as Governor of Italy. In the camp, in the tumult of battle, flatterers are wanting to the coquettish woman and also the leisure to listen to them. For, as if in voluntary atonement for the sweet crimes of secret verses and flowers--she is certainly incapable of greater guilt--Antonina outdoes all other women in the severe performance of her duty. She is Belisarius's friend, his co-commander; she shares with him the difficulties and dangers of sea, desert, and battle. She works with him day and night, if she does not happen to be reading the verses of others on her lovely eyes! She has often saved him from the snares of his enemies at the court of Byzantium. In short, she is only good during war-time and in the camp, there, where also his greatness can alone flourish."

"Well," said Cethegus, "now I know well enough how things stand here. Let me speak plainly with you. You would like to have Belisarius out of Italy immediately after his victory: so would I. You for Belisarius's sake, I for that of Italy's. You know that I was always a Republican----"

At this Procopius pushed his cup to one side and looked significantly at Cethegus.

"All young people are so between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one," said he. "But that you are still so--I find--very--very--unhistorical. Out of these Italian vagabonds, our very amiable allies against the Goths, you will make citizens of a republic? They are good for nothing but a tyrant!"

"I will not dispute about that," answered Cethegus with a smile; "only I should like to preserve my fatherland from *your* tyrant."

"I don't blame you for it," said Procopius, smiling also; "the blessings of our rule are--stifling."

"A native governor under the protection of Byzantium will suffice at first."

"To be sure. And his name would be--Cethegus!"

"If it must be so--that too."

"Listen," said Procopius earnestly, "I would only advise you against *one* thing. The air of Rome engenders proud plans. There, as master of Rome, a man is not willing to be only the second in the world. And believe the historian--nothing more can come of the universal Empire of Rome."

Cethegus felt annoyed. He thought of King Theodoric's warning.

"Historicus of Byzantium, I know my Roman affairs better than you. First let me initiate you into our Roman secrets; then, early to-morrow, before the embassy arrives from Rome, procure me an interview with Belisarius, and--be sure of a great success."

And he now began to unfold to the astonished Procopius, in rapid outlines, the secret history of the latest times and his plans for the future, wisely veiling his ultimate aim.

"By the manes of Romulus!" cried Procopius, when he had finished, "you still make history on the Tiber. Well, here is my hand. You shall have my assistance. Belisarius shall win, but not rule in Italy. Let us empty a flask of dry 'Sallustius' upon it!"

Early the next day Procopius brought about an interview with Belisarius, from which his friend returned well contented.

"Have you told him everything?" asked the historian.

"Not quite everything," said Cethegus with a sly smile; "one must always keep something to say in reserve."

CHAPTER XI.

Shortly afterwards the whole camp was full of strange excitement.

The report of the approach of the Holy Father, which outsped his gilded litter, aroused thousands of soldiers, attracted by feelings of reverence, piety, superstition, or curiosity, from sleep, feasting, or gaming. The captains could scarcely keep the sentries at their posts or the soldiers at their drill.

The faithful had hurried to meet the Pope from places miles distant, and now, mixed with groups of country people from the neighbourhood, accompanied the procession into the camp. The peasants and soldiers had already harnessed themselves to the litter instead of the mules which drew it--in vain had the Pope modestly remonstrated--and shouting in exultation: "Hail to the Bishop of Rome, hail to the holy Petros!" the crowd, upon whom Silverius continually bestowed blessings, entered the camp. No one noticed his two colleagues, Scævola and Albinus.

Belisarius gravely observed the imposing spectacle from his tent.

"The Prefect is right!" he cried; "this priest is more dangerous than the Goths! Procopius, dismiss the Byzantine body-guard at my tent, as soon as the interview begins. Let the Huns and the heathen Gepidæ take their place."

So saying, he re-entered his tent, where, surrounded by his generals, he shortly afterwards received the Roman embassy.

Procopius had convinced Prince Areobindos of the necessity of leaving the camp on an expedition of reconnaissance, an office which could only be performed by him, and which could not be put off.

Surrounded by a brilliant train of clergy, the Pope approached the tent of the commander-in-chief. Great crowds of people pressed after him; but as soon as he, with Scævola and Albinus, had entered the narrow passage between the tents which led up to that of Belisarius, the guards stopped the way with their levelled lances, and would allow neither priest nor soldier to follow.

Silverius turned with a smile to the captain of the guard, and preached him a fine sermon on the text, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not."

But the German shook his shaggy locks and turned his back. The Gepidian did not understand a word of Latin beyond the words of command.

Silverius smiled again, once more blessed the crowd, and then walked quietly to the tent. Belisarius was seated upon a camp-stool, over which was spread a lion's skin; on his right hand sat Antonina, enthroned on a seat covered with the skin of a leopard. Her troubled soul had hoped to find a physician and comforter in the holy Petrus; but she shrank when she saw the worldly expression on the features of Silverius.

As the Pope entered, Belisarius rose.

Silverius, without the slightest inclination, went straight up to him, and laid both hands--he was obliged to stretch his arms uncomfortably to do so--as if in blessing, on his shoulders. He wished to press Belisarius gently down upon his knees; but the general stood as stiffly erect as an oak, and Silverius was obliged to complete his benediction.

"You come as ambassadors from the Romans?" began Belisarius.

"I come," interrupted Silverius, "in the name of St. Peter, as Bishop of Rome, to deliver to you and the Emperor the city of Rome. These good people," he added, pointing to Scævola and Albinus, "have attached themselves to me as the members to the head."

Scævola was about to interfere indignantly--he had not thus understood his relation to the Church--but Belisarius signed to him to be silent.

"And," continued Silverius, "I welcome you to Italy and Rome in the name of the Lord. Enter the walls of the Eternal City for the protection of the Church and the faithful against the heretics! There exalt the name of the Lord and the Cross of Christ, and never forget that your path thither was smoothed by Holy Church. God chose me for His minister, to lull the Goths into blind security, and lead them out of the city. It was I who won over the wavering citizens to your cause, and frustrated the designs of your enemies. It is St. Peter who, by my hand, delivers up to you the keys of his city, and entrusts it to your protection. Never forget my words!"

With this he handed to Belisarius the keys of the Asinarian Gate.

"I will never forget them," said Belisarius, and signed to Procopius, who took the keys from the hand of the Pope. "You spoke of the designs of my enemies. Has the Emperor enemies in Rome?"

Silverius answered, with a sigh:

"Cease to question me, general. Their nets are torn; they are now harmless, and it does not become the Church to inculcate, but to *exculpate*."

"It is your duty, Holy Father, to discover to the orthodox Emperor the traitors who hide themselves amongst his Roman subjects, and I call upon you to unmask his enemies."

Silverius sighed.

"The Church does not thirst for blood."

"But she may not prevent justice," said Scævola. And the jurist stepped forward, and handed a roll of parchment to Belisarius, saying, "I accuse Cornelius Cethegus Cæsarius, the Prefect of Rome, of treachery and rebellion against Emperor Justinian. He has called the Emperor's government a tyranny; he opposed the landing of the imperial army with all his might; finally, a few days ago he, and he alone, voted that we should not open to you the gates of Rome."

"And what punishment do you propose?" asked Belisarius, looking at the roll.

"Death, according to the law," said Scævola.

"And his estates," added Albinus, "are lawfully forfeited, partly to the fiscus, partly to his accusers."

"And may his soul be recommended to the mercy of God!" concluded the Bishop of Rome.

"Where is the accused?" asked Belisarius.

"He intended to come to you; but I fear that his bad conscience will prevent him from fulfilling his intention."

"You err. Bishop of Rome," said Belisarius; "he is already here."

At these words a curtain in the background of the tent dropped, and before his astonished accusers stood Cethegus the Prefect.

They could not conceal their surprise. With a look of contempt, Cethegus silently advanced until he stood at Belisarius's right hand.

"Cethegus sought me earlier than you," said the commander-in-chief, after a pause, "and he has been beforehand with you also--in accusations. You stand before me gravely accused, Silverius. Defend yourself before you attack others."

"I defend myself!" cried the Pope. "Who can be accuser or judge of the successor of St. Peter?"

"The judge am I; in the place of your master, the Emperor."

"And the accuser?" asked Silverius.

Cethegus half turned to Belisarius, and said:

"I am the accuser! I accuse Silverius, the Bishop of Rome, of the crime of lese-majesty and treachery to the Roman Empire. I will at once prove my accusation. Silverius intends to wrest the government of the city of Rome and a great part of Italy from the Emperor Justinian, and, ridiculous to say, to form a State of the Church in the fatherland of the Cæsars. And he has already taken the first step in the execution of this--shall I say madness or crime? Here is a contract with his signature, which he concluded with Theodahad, the last of the barbarian princes. Thereby the King sells, for the sum of one thousand pounds' weight of gold, the government of the city and district of Rome, and of thirty miles of country round, in case of Silverius becoming Bishop of Rome, to St. Peter and his successors. All the prerogatives of royalty are enumerated--jurisdiction, legislation, administration, customs, taxes, and even military power. According to the date, this document is three months old. Therefore, at the very moment that the pious archdeacon, behind Theodahad's back, was summoning the Emperor's army, he also, behind the Emperor's back, signed a contract which would rob the latter of all the fruits of his efforts, and insure the Pope under all circumstances. I leave it to the representative of the Emperor to decide in what manner such wisdom should be appreciated. By the chosen of the Lord the morals of the serpent are looked upon as high wisdom; amongst us laymen such acts are----"

"The most shameful treachery!" thundered Belisarius, as he sprang from his seat and took the document from the Prefect.

"Look here, priest, your name! Can you deny it?"

The impression made upon all present by this accusation and proof was overpowering.

Suspicion and indignation, mixed with eager expectation of the Pope's defence, was written upon each man's countenance; and Scævola, the short-sighted republican, was the most taken by surprise at this revelation of the ambitious plan of his dangerous colleague. He hoped that Silverius would victoriously refute the calumny. The position of the Pope was indeed highly dangerous; the accusation appeared to be undeniable, and

the angry countenance of Belisarius would have intimidated many a bolder heart.

But Silverius showed that he was no unworthy adversary of the Prefect and the hero of Byzantium.

He had not lost his presence of mind for a moment; only when Cethegus had taken the document from the folds of his dress, had he closed his eyes as if in pain. But he met the thundering voice and flashing eyes of Belisarius with a composed and steady countenance.

He felt that he must now fight for the ideal of his life, and this feeling nerved him; not a muscle of his face twitched.

"How long will you keep me waiting?" asked Belisarius angrily.

"Until you are capable and worthy of listening to me. You are possessed by Urchitophel, the demon of anger."

"Speak! Defend yourself!" cried Belisarius, reseating himself.

"The accusation of this godless man," began Silverius, "only asserts, sooner than I had intended, a right of the Holy Church, which I did not wish to insist upon during these unquiet times. It is true that I concluded this contract with the barbarian King."

A movement of indignation escaped the Byzantines present.

"Not from love of worldly power, not to acquire any new privileges, did I treat with the King of the Goths, at that time master of this country. No! the saints be my witness! I did it merely because it was my duty to prevent the lapse of an ancient right of the Church."

"An ancient right?" asked Belisarius impatiently.

"An ancient right!" repeated Silverius, "which the Church has neglected to assert until now. Her enemies oblige her to declare it at this moment. Know then, representative of the Emperor! hear it, generals and soldiers! that which the Church demanded of Theodahad has been her right for two centuries; the Goth only confirmed it. In the same place whence the Prefect, with sacrilegious hand, took this document, he might also have found that which originally established our right. The pious Emperor Constantinus--who, first of all the predecessors of Justinian, received the teaching of the Gospel--moved by the prayers of his blessed mother, Helena, and after having trampled his enemies under foot by the help of the saints, and particularly by that of St. Peter, did, in thankful acknowledgment of such help, and to prove to all the world that crown and sword should bow before the Cross of Christ, bestow the city of Rome and its district, with all the neighbouring towns and their boundaries, with jurisdiction and police, taxes and duties, and all the royal prerogatives of earthly government, upon St. Peter and his successors for all time, so that his Church might have a secular foundation for the furtherance of her secular tasks. This donation is conferred in all form by a legal document; the curse of Gehenna is laid upon all who dispute it. And I ask the Emperor Justinian, in the name of the Trinity, whether he will acknowledge this legal act of his predecessor, the blessed Emperor Constantinus, or if, in worldly avarice, he will overthrow it, and thereby call down upon his head the curse of Gehenna and eternal damnation?"

This speech of the Bishop of Rome, spoken with all the power of ecclesiastical dignity and all the art of worldly rhetoric, was of irresistible effect.

Belisarius, Procopius, and the generals, who, a moment before, would

willingly have passed an angry judgment upon the treacherous priest, now felt as if they themselves were judged. The heart of Italy seemed to be irrecoverably lost to the Emperor, and delivered into the power of the Church.

An anxious silence overcame the lately so masterful Byzantines, and the priest stood triumphantly as victor in their midst.

At last Belisarius, who wished to avoid a dispute and the shame of defeat, said:

"Prefect of Rome, what have you to reply?"

With a scarcely visible quiver of mockery upon his fine lips, Cethegus bowed and began:

"The accused refers to a document. I believe I could embarrass him greatly if I denied its existence, and demanded the immediate production of the original. However, I will not meet the man who calls himself the head of Christendom, with the wiles of a spiteful advocate. I admit that the document exists."

Belisarius made a movement of helpless vexation.

"Still more! I have saved the Holy Father the trouble of producing it, which would have been very difficult for him to do, and have brought the document itself with my own sacrilegious hands."

He drew forth a yellow old parchment from his bosom, and looked smilingly now at the lines thereon, now at the Pope, and now at Belisarius, evidently enjoying their suspense.

"Yes, still more! I have examined the document for many days with hostile eyes, and, with the help of still greater jurists than I can boast of being--such as my young friend, Salvius Julianus--have tried to invalidate every letter. In vain. Even the penetration of my learned and honourable friend, Scævola, could have found no flaw. All legal forms, all the clauses in the act of donation, are sharply defined with indisputable accuracy; and indeed I should like to have been acquainted with the protonotary of Emperor Constantinus, for he must have been a jurist of the first rank."

He paused--his eyes rested sarcastically upon the countenance of Silverius, who wiped the sweat off his brow.

"Therefore," asked Belisarius, in great excitement, "the document is formally quite correct, and can be proved?"

"Yes, certainly," sighed Cethegus, "the act of donation is faultlessly drawn up. It is only a pity that----"

"Well!" interrupted Belisarius.

"It is only a pity that it is false."

A general cry arose. Belisarius and Antonina sprang from their seats; all present pressed nearer to Cethegus. Silverius alone fell back a step.

"False!" cried Belisarius in a tone that sounded like a shout of joy. "Prefect--friend--can you prove that?"

"I should otherwise have taken care not to assert it. The parchment upon which the act of donation is written shows all the signs of great age: worm-eaten, cracked, spots of every kind--everything that one can expect

from such an ancient document, so that, sometimes, it is difficult to decipher the letters. Notwithstanding, the document only *appears* to be old; with as much art as many women employ to give themselves the appearance of youth does it ape the sanctity of great age. It is real parchment from the old and still existing parchment manufactory at Byzantium, founded by Constantinus."

"Keep to the matter!" cried Belisarius.

"But it is not known to every one--and it appears, unfortunately for him, to have escaped the notice of the Bishop--that these parchments, on the lower edge to the left, are always marked with the stamp of the year of their manufacture, by the names of the then consuls, in, certainly, almost invisible characters. Now pay attention, general. The document pretends, as it says in the text, to have been prepared in the sixteenth year of the reign of Constantinus, the same year that he closed the heathen temples, as the pious document observes, and a year after the naming of Constantinopolis as the capital city; and it rightly names the right consuls of that year, Dalmatius and Xenophilos. Now it can only be explained by a miracle--but in this case it would be a miracle *against* the Church--that, in that year, therefore in the year three hundred and thirty-five after the birth of Christ, it was already known who would be consul in the year after the death of Emperor Justinus and King Theodoric; for look, here on the lower edge the stamp says--the writer had not noticed it--it is really very difficult to make out, unless one holds the parchment against the lights so--do you see, Belisarius?--and had blindly painted the cross upon it; but I, with my--what did he call it?--sacrilegious, but clever, hand have wiped it off; do you see? there stand stamped the words, 'VI. Indiction: Justinianus Augustus, sole consul in the first year of his reign.'"

Silverius staggered, and was obliged to support himself by the chair which had been placed for him.

"The parchment of the document," continued Cethegus, "upon which the protonotary of Emperor Constantinus had written down the act of donation two hundred years ago, has therefore been taken from the ribs of an ass only a year ago at Byzantium! Confess, O general, that the reign of the conceivable ends here and the supernatural begins; that here a miracle has happened; and revere the mysterious ways of Heaven."

He gave the document to Belisarius.

"This is also a famous piece of history, holy and profane, which we are now experiencing," said Procopius aside.

"It is so, by the slumber of Justinian!" cried Belisarius. "Bishop of Rome, what have you to say?"

Silverius had with difficulty composed himself.

He saw the edifice which he had been constructing his whole life, sink into the ground before him.

With a voice half choked by despair, he answered:

"I found the document in the archives of the Church a few months ago. If it is as you say, I have been deceived as well as you."

"But we are not deceived," said Cethegus, smiling.

"I knew nothing of that stamp, I swear it by the wounds of Christ!"

"I believe it without an oath. Holy Father," interposed Cethegus.

"You will acknowledge, priest," said Belisarius, "that the strictest examination into this affair----"

"I demand it as my right," cried Silverius.

"You shall have it, doubt it not! But I will not venture to judge in this case. Only the wisdom of Emperor Justinian himself can here decide upon what is right. Vulkaris, my faithful Herulian! I herewith deliver into your keeping the person of the Bishop of Some. You will at once take him on board a vessel, and conduct him to Byzantium!"

"I put in a protest!" cried Silverius. "No one on earth can try me but a council of the orthodox Church. I demand to be taken to Rome."

"Rome you will never see again. And Emperor Justinian, who is justice itself, will decide upon your protest with Trebonianus. But I think your companions, Scævola and Albinus, the false accusers of the Prefect (who has proved himself to be the best and warmest friend of the Emperor), highly suspicious. Let Justinian decide how far they are innocent. Take them too, Vulkaris, take them in chains to Byzantium. By sea. Now take them out by the back door of the tent, not through the camp. Vulkaris, this priest is the Emperor's *worst* enemy. You will answer for him with your head!"

"I will answer for him," said the gigantic Herulian, coming forward and laying his mailed hand upon the Bishop's shoulder.--"Away with you, priest! On board! He shall die, ere I will let him escape."

Silverius saw that further resistance would only excite compulsion dangerous to his dignity. He submitted, and walked beside the German, who did not withdraw his hand, towards the door in the back of the tent, which was opened by a sentry.

The Bishop was obliged to pass close to Cethegus. He lowered his head and did not look at him, but he heard a voice whisper:

"Silverius, this moment repays me for your victory in the Catacombs. Now we are quits!"

CHAPTER XII.

As soon as the Bishop had left the tent, Belisarius rose eagerly from his seat, hurried to the Prefect, and embraced him.

"Accept my thanks, Cethegus Cæsarius! Your reward will not be wanting. I will tell the Emperor that for him you have to-day saved Rome."

But Cethegus smiled.

"My acts reward themselves."

The intellectual struggle, the rapid alternation of anger, fear, anxiety, and triumph had exhausted the hero Belisarius more than half a day of battle. He longed for rest and refreshment, and dismissed his generals, none of whom left the tent without speaking a word of acknowledgment to the Prefect.

The latter saw that his superiority was felt by all, even by Belisarius. It pleased him that, in one and the same hour, he had ruined the scheming Bishop and humbled the proud Byzantines.

But he did not idly revel in the feeling of victory. He knew the danger of

sleeping upon laurels; laurel stupefies.

He decided to follow up his victory, to use at once the intellectual superiority over the hero of Byzantium which he undoubtedly possessed at this moment, and to strike his long-prepared and principal blow.

As, full of this thought, he was looking after the generals who were just leaving the tent, he did not notice that two eyes were fixed upon him with a peculiar expression.

They were the eyes of Antonina.

The incidents which she had just witnessed had produced a strangely mixed impression on her mind. For the first time in her life she had seen her idol, her husband, entangled in the nets of a priest without the least power to extricate or help himself, and saved only by the superior strength of this terrible Roman.

At first the shock to her pride in her husband had filled her with dislike of the victor. But this feeling did not last, and involuntarily, as the great superiority of Cethegus unfolded itself before her, admiration took the place of vexation. She felt only one thing: Belisarius had eclipsed the Church, and Cethegus had eclipsed Belisarius. To this feeling was added the anxious desire that this man might never become the enemy, but always remain the ally of her husband.

In short, Cethegus had made a serious intellectual conquest of the wife of Belisarius; and not only that, but he was at once made aware of it.

The beautiful and usually so confident woman came towards him with downcast eyes. He looked up; she blushed violently and offered him a trembling hand.

"Prefect of Rome," she said, "Antonina thanks you. You have rendered great services to Belisarius and the Emperor. We will be good friends."

Procopius, who had remained in the tent, beheld this proceeding with astonishment.

"My Odysseus out-charms the sorceress Circe," he thought.

But Cethegus saw in a moment that the soul of Antonina humbled itself before him, and what power he thus gained over Belisarius.

"Beautiful *magistra militum*," he said, drawing himself up, "your friendship is the proudest laurel in my wreath of victory. I will at once put it to the proof. I beg you and Procopius to be my witnesses, my allies, in the conversation which I must now hold with Belisarius."

"Now?" asked Belisarius impatiently. "Come, let us first to table, and celebrate the fall of the priest in fiery Cæcubian."

And he walked towards the door.

But Cethegus remained quietly standing in the middle of the tent, and Antonina and Procopius were so completely under his influence, that they did not dare to follow their master.

Even Belisarius turned and asked:

"Must it absolutely take place now?"

"It must," said Cethegus, and he took Antonina's hand and led her back to her seat.

Then Belisarius also retraced his steps.

"Well," he said, "speak; but briefly. As briefly as possible."

"I have ever found," began Cethegus, "that with great friends or great enemies, sincerity is the strongest bond and the best weapon. According to this maxim I will act. When I said my acts reward themselves, I wished to express thereby that I did not wrest the mastery of Rome from the false priest exactly for the sake of the Emperor."

Belisarius grew attentive.

Procopius, alarmed at the too bold sincerity of his friend, made a sign of warning.

Antonina's quick eye remarked it, and she started; the intelligence between the two men aroused her suspicion.

This did not escape Cethegus.

"No, Procopius," he said, to the astonishment of Belisarius; "our friends here will far too soon acknowledge that Cethegus is not a man whose ambition can be satisfied by a smile from Justinian. I have not saved Rome for the Emperor."

"For whom else!" asked Belisarius gravely.

"First for Rome herself. I am a Roman. I love my Eternal City. She shall not become the servant of the priests, but also not the slave of the Emperor. I am a republican," he said, tossing his head defiantly.

A smile passed across the countenance of Belisarius; the Prefect seemed to him of less importance than before.

Procopius, shrugging his shoulders, said:

"Incomprehensible!"

But this candour pleased Antonina.

"I certainly saw," continued Cethegus, "that we could only beat the barbarians by the sword of Belisarius. And also, alas! that the time is not ripe to realise my dreams of republican freedom. The Romans must first again become Catos; this generation must die out; and I acknowledge that, meantime, Rome can only find protection against the barbarians under the shield of Justinian. Therefore we will bow to this shield--for the present."

"Not bad!" thought Procopius; "the Emperor is to protect them until they are strong enough to run away from him, in proof of gratitude."

"These are but dreams, my Prefect," said Belisarius compassionately. "What practical results can they have?"

"These: that Rome shall not be delivered up to the caprice of the Emperor with bound hands and without conditions. Belisarius is not the only servant of Justinian. Only think, if the heartless Narses were to become your successor!" The hero frowned. "Therefore I will tell you the conditions under which the city of Cæsar will open her gates to you and your army."

But this was too much for Belisarius.

He sprang up in a rage; his face glowed; his eyes flashed.

"Prefect of Rome," he cried in his loudest voice, "you forget yourself and your position! To-morrow I start with my army of seventy thousand men for Rome. Who will hinder me from entering the city without conditions?"

"I," said Cethegus quietly. "No, Belisarius, I do not rave. Look at this plan of the city and its fortifications. Your experienced eye will recognise its strength better and more quickly than mine."

He drew forth a parchment and spread it open upon the table.

Belisarius cast an indifferent look at it, but immediately cried out:

"The plan is incorrect! Procopius, give me our plan out of that casket.-- Look here, those moats are now filled up; those towers are ruined; the wall here is broken down, those gates defenceless.--Your plan represents them as of terrible strength. It is obsolete, Prefect of Rome!"

"No, Belisarius, *yours* is obsolete. These walls, moats, and gates are reconstructed."

"Since when?"

"A year ago."

"By whom?"

"By me."

Belisarius looked at the plan in perplexity.

Antonina's eyes rested anxiously on the features of her husband.

"Prefect," he said at last, "if this be so, you understand warfare well--the warfare of fortresses. But to wage war there must be an army, and your empty walls will not arrest my progress."

"You will not find them empty. You must acknowledge that a force of more than twenty thousand men is capable of holding Rome--namely, this my Rome upon the plan--for days and years, even against Belisarius. Good. Then, know that these fortifications are held by thirty-five thousand armed men."

"Have the Goths returned?" asked Belisarius.

Procopius drew nearer, astonished.

"No; these thirty-five thousand men are under my command. For some years I have recalled the long enervated Romans to arms, and have unceasingly practised them in the use of their weapons. So at present I have thirty cohorts ready for battle, each consisting of almost a thousand men."

Belisarius struggled to repress his vexation, and shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"I acknowledge," continued Cethegus, "that these troops could not oppose the army of Belisarius in the open field. But I assure you that they will fight famously behind these walls. Besides that, I have, out of my private means, enrolled seven thousand picked Isaurian and Abasgian mercenaries, and have brought them, gradually and unobserved, in small divisions to Ostia, Rome, and the neighbourhood. You doubt it? Here are the lists of the thirty cohorts, and the contract with the Isaurians. You now see distinctly how matters stand. Either you accept my conditions--and then these thirty-five thousands are yours: yours is Rome, my Rome,

this Rome on the plan, of which you say that it is of fearful strength, and yours is Cethegus--or you refuse my conditions.--Then your victorious march, whose success depends on the rapidity of your movements, is arrested. You will be obliged to besiege Rome for many months. The Goths will have plenty of time to re-collect their forces. We ourselves will call them back. They will come to relieve the city in threefold superiority, and nothing can save you from destruction but a miracle!"

"Or your death at this moment! thou devil!" thundered Belisarius, and, no longer master of himself, he drew his sword.

"Up, Procopius, in the Emperor's name! Take the traitor! He dies in this hour!"

Horrified and undecided, Procopius rushed between the two men, while Antonina caught her husband's arm, and tried to take his right hand.

"Are you his allies!" cried Belisarius furiously.

"Guards! guards! here!"

From each of the two doors two lancers entered the tent.

But Belisarius had already torn himself from Antonina's hold, and had hurled Procopius to one side as if he were a child. Raising his sword, he rushed at the Prefect. But he suddenly stopped short and lowered his weapon, the point of which already touched the breast of Cethegus; for, immovable, like a statue, without the least change of countenance, and fixing his cold eyes penetratingly upon his furious assailer, Cethegus had remained standing, a smile of unspeakable contempt upon his lips.

"What means this look and smile?" asked Belisarius.

Procopius quietly signed to the guards to leave the tent.

"Pity for your reputation, which a moment of rage might destroy for ever. If you had killed me, you would have been lost!"

"I!" laughed Belisarius; "I should think *you* would have been lost."

"And you with me. Do you believe that I put my head into the lion's mouth like a fool? It was not difficult to foresee that a hero of your sort would first of all try to put an end to his embarrassment with his sword. Against this I have protected myself. Know that since this morning, in consequence of a sealed order which I left behind me, Rome is in the hands of my blindly-devoted friends. The Mausoleum of Hadrian, the Capitol, and all the gates and towers of the ramparts, are garrisoned by Isaurians and legionaries. I left the order with my war-tribunes, who are youths fearless of death, in case of your reaching Rome before me."

He handed a roll of papyrus to Procopius.

Procopius read: "To Lucius and Marcus, the Licinii, Cethegus the Prefect. I have fallen a victim to the tyranny of the Byzantines. Revenge me! Recall the Goths at once. I demand it of you by your oath. Better the barbarians than the police of Justinian. Hold out to the last man! Rather give the city to the flames than to the army of the tyrant!"

"So you see," continued Cethegus, "that my death will not open to you the gates of Rome, but shut them upon you for ever. You must besiege the city, or agree with me."

Belisarius cast a look of anger, not unmixed with admiration, at the bold man who put conditions to him in the midst of his thousands.

Then he sheathed his sword, threw himself impatiently upon his stool, and asked:

"What are your conditions for the surrender?"

"Only two. First, you will give me the command of a small part of your army. I must be no stranger to your Byzantines."

"Granted. You will have under your command two thousand Illyrian footmen and one thousand Saracen and Moorish horsemen. Is that sufficient?"

"Perfectly. Secondly, my independence rests entirely upon my dominion of Rome. This must not cease during your presence. Therefore, the whole right shore of the Tiber, with the Mausoleum of Hadrian; and on the left the Capitol, including the walls on the south as far as the Gate of St. Peter, must remain, until the end of the war, in the hands of my Romans and Isaurians. The rest of the city on the left shore of the Tiber, from the Flavian Amphitheatre in the north to the Appian Gate in the south, will be occupied by you."

Belisarius cast a glance at the plan.

"Not badly arranged! From those points you can at any moment drive me out of the city or blockade the river. That will not do!"

"Then prepare for a fight with the Goths and Cethegus together before the walls of Rome!"

Belisarius sprang from his seat.

"Go! leave me alone with Procopius, Cethegus. Wait for my decision."

"Till to-morrow!" cried Cethegus. "At sunrise I return to Rome, either with your army or--alone."

A few days later Belisarius, with his army, entered the Eternal City through the Asinarian Gate.

Endless acclamation greeted the liberator; a rain of flowers covered him and his wife, who rode at his left hand on a beautiful palfrey.

All the houses were decorated with gay draperies and wreaths. But the object of these rejoicings did not appear happy; he gloomily bent his head, and cast dark looks at the walls and the Capitol, from which floated, not the dragon flags of Byzantium, but the banners and ensigns of the municipal legions, formed after the model of the Roman eagles and standards.

At the Asinarian Gate young Lucius Licinius had sent back the vanguard of the imperial army, and the heavy portcullis did not rise until, at the side of Belisarius on his bay horse, appeared Cethegus the Prefect, mounted on his splendid charger.

Lucius was astonished at the change which had taken place in his admired friend.

The Prefect's cold and severe reserve seemed to have disappeared; he looked taller, younger; the glory of victory illumined his features. He wore a richly-gilded helmet, from which the crimson mane flowed down to his mail-coat. This last was a costly work of art from Athens, and showed upon every one of its round plates a finely-worked relief in chased silver, each representing a victory of the Romans. The victorious expression of his beaming face, his proud carriage, and scintillating armour, outshone Belisarius, the imperial magister militum himself, and all his glittering

staff, which, led by Johannes and Procopius, followed close behind.

And this superiority was so striking, that by the time the procession had passed through several streets, the impression was shared by the mob, and the cry, "Cethegus!" was soon heard more loudly and frequently than the name of "Belisarius!"

Antonina's fine ear soon began to remark this circumstance; she listened uneasily at every pause of the procession to the cries and remarks of the by-standers.

When they had left the Thermæ of Titus behind them, and had reached the Via Sacra, near the Flavian Amphitheatre, they were obliged to stop on account of the crowd. A narrow triumphal arch had been erected here, which could only be passed at a slow pace. "Victory, to the Emperor Justinian and his general, Belisarius," was inscribed thereon.

As Antonina was reading this inscription, she heard an old man, who appeared to be but scantily initiated into the course of events, questioning his son, one of the legionaries of Cethegus.

"Then, my Gazus, the gloomy man with the angry-looking face, on the bay horse----"

"Yes, that is Belisarius, as I told you."

"Indeed? Well--then the stately hero on his left hand, with the triumphant look--he on the charger, must be his master, the Emperor Justinian."

"Not at all, father. *He* sits quietly in his golden palace at Byzantium and writes laws. No; that is Cethegus, *our* Cethegus, *my* Cethegus, the Prefect, who gave me my sword. Yes, that *is* a man! Lucius, my tribune, said lately, 'If he did not allow it, Belisarius would never see a Roman Gate from the inside.'"

Antonina gave her grey palfrey a smart stroke with her silver rod, and galloped quickly through the triumphal arch.

Cethegus accompanied the commander-in-chief and his wife to the Pincian Palace, which had been sumptuously prepared for their reception.

Then he took leave, in order to assist the Byzantine generals in quartering the troops, partly on the citizens; partly in the public buildings, and partly before the gates of the city in tents.

"When you have recovered from the fatigues and honours of the day, Belisarius, I shall expect you and Antonina, with your staff, at a banquet in my house," he had said before leaving them.

After some hours, Marcus Licinius, Piso, and Balbus appeared to fetch the invited guests.

They accompanied the litters in which Antonina and Belisarius were carried. The generals went on foot.

"Where does the Prefect live?" asked Belisarius, as he entered his litter.

"As long as you are here, by day in the Mausoleum of Hadrian, by night in the Capitol."

Belisarius started.

The little procession approached the Capitol.

The commander-in-chief saw with astonishment all the walls and works, which had lain in ruins for more than two centuries, restored to immense strength.

When they had wound their way through the long, dark, and zigzag passage which led into the fortress, they arrived at a massive iron door, which was fast shut, as if in time of war.

Marcus Licinius called to the sentinel.

"Give the watch-word!" cried a voice from within.

"Cæsar and Cethegus!" answered the war-tribune. Then the wings of the door sprang open; a long lane formed by Roman legionaries and Isaurian mercenaries became visible, the last clad in iron up to their very eyes, and armed with double-bladed battle-axes.

Lucius Licinius stood at the head of the Romans with drawn sword; Sandil, the Isaurian chief, at the head of his countrymen.

For one moment the Byzantines hesitated, overpowered by the impression of this display of granite and iron.

Suddenly the faintly-illuminated space became bright with light, and, accompanied by torch-bearers and flute-players, without armour, a wreath upon his brow, such as was generally worn by the giver of a feast, and dressed in a magnificent indoor garment of purple silk, appeared Cethegus.

He came forward smiling, and said:

"Welcome! Let flutes and trumpets loudly proclaim that the happiest hour of my life has arrived--Belisarius is *my* guest in the Capitol!"

And, amid a tremendous flourish of trumpets, he led his silent guests into the fortress.

CHAPTER XIII.

During these occurrences among the Romans and Byzantines, decisive events were in preparation on the part of the Goths.

Duke Guntharis and Earl Arahad, leaving a small garrison behind them, and taking their Queen with them as prisoner, had left Florentia and gone, by forced marches to Ravenna.

If they could reach and win this fortress, which was considered impregnable, before Witichis, who pressed forward after them, they would be able to make any conditions with the King.

They had a capital start, and hoped that their enemies would be stopped for some time before Florentia. But they lost almost all the advantages of their start; for the towns and castles bordering the nearest road to Ravenna had declared for Witichis, and this circumstance obliged the rebels to take a circuitous route northwards to Bononia (Bologna), whose inhabitants had embraced their cause, and thence march eastwards to Ravenna.

Notwithstanding this delay, when they reached the marshy land surrounding that fortified city, and were only half a day's march from its gates, nothing could be seen of the King's army.

Guntharis allowed his greatly-fatigued troops to rest for the remainder

of the day, which was already drawing to a close, and sent a small troop of horsemen under the command of his brother, to announce their arrival to the Goths in the fortress.

But at dawn the next day Earl Aarahad came flying back into the camp with a greatly diminished troop.

"By the sword of God!" exclaimed Guntharis, "whence comest thou?"

"We come from Ravenna. We reached the outermost ramparts of the city and demanded admittance; but were roughly repulsed, although I showed myself and called for old Grippa the commander. He insolently declared that to-morrow we should learn the decision of the city; we, as well as the army of the King, whose vanguard is already approaching the city from the south-east."

"Impossible!" cried Guntharis angrily. "I could do nothing but withdraw, although I could not understand the behaviour of our friend. Besides, I held the report of the approach of the King to be an empty threat, until some of my horsemen, who were seeking for a dry place on which to bivouac, were suddenly attacked by a troop of the enemy under the command of Earl Teja, with the cry, 'Hail, King Witichis!' After a sharp combat they were worsted."

"Thou ravest!" cried Guntharis. "Have they wings? Has Florentia been blown away out of their path?"

"No! but I learned from Picentinian peasants that Witichis marched to Ravenna by the coast-road, past Auximum and Ariminum."

"And he left Florentia in his rear unconquered? He shall repent of that!"

"Florentia has fallen! He sent Hildebad against it, who took it by storm. He broke in the Gate of Mars with his own hand, the furious bull!"

Duke Guntharis listened to these evil tidings with a gloomy face; but he quickly came to a decision.

He at once set forth with all his troops, intending to take the city of Ravenna by surprise.

His attack failed.

But the rebels had the consolation of seeing that the fortress, whose possession would determine the result of the civil war, had at least refused to open its gates to the enemy.

The King had encamped to the south-east, before the harbour town of Classis.

Duke Guntharis's experienced eye soon perceived that the marshes on the north-west would also afford a secure position, and there he shortly afterwards pitched his well-protected camp.

So the rival parties, like two impetuous lovers of a coy maiden, pressed from opposite sides upon the royal residence, which seemed disinclined to lend an ear to either.

The day following two embassies, consisting of Ravennese and Goths, issued from the Gates of Honorius and of Theodoric, on the north-west and south-east, and brought to the camp of the rebels, as well as to that of the King, the fateful decision of the city.

This decision must have been a strange one.

For the two commanders, Guntharis and Witichis, kept it, in singular conformity, strictly secret, and took great care that not a word should become known to their troops.

The ambassadors were immediately conducted from the tents of the commanders of either camp to the very gates of the fortress, escorted by generals who forbade any communication with the troops.

And in other ways the effect of the embassy in both camps was singular enough.

In the rebel camp it led to a violent altercation between the two brothers, and afterwards to a very animated interview between Duke Guntharis and his fair prisoner, who, it was said, had only been saved from his rage by the intervention of Earl Arahad. Finally, the rebel camp sank into the repose of helpless indecision.

More important consequences ensued in the opposite camp. The first answer which King Witichis gave the embassy was the order for a general attack upon the city.

Hildebrand and Teja and the whole army received this order with astonishment. They had hoped that the strong fortress would voluntarily open its gates.

Contrary to all Gothic custom and his own usually frank manner, King Witichis imparted to no one, not even to his friends, the object of the embassy, or the reason of his angry attack.

Silently, but with doubting shakes of the head and little hope of success, the army prepared for the assault.

They were repulsed with great loss.

In vain the King urged his Goths again and again to storm the precipitous and rocky walls.

In vain he himself was the first, three several times, to climb the scaling-ladders. From early morning to sunset the assaulters stormed the place without making the least progress; the fortress well preserved its old reputation of invincibility.

And when at last the King, stunned by a stone, was carried out of the turmoil, Teja and Hildebrand ceased their efforts and led the weary troops back to the camp.

The temper of the army during the following night was very sad and depressed. They had to complain of great losses, and had now nothing but the conviction that the city could not be taken by force.

The Gothic garrison of Ravenna had fought side by side with the citizens on the walls. The King of the Goths lay encamped before his own residence, before the stronghold of his kingdom, in which he had hoped to find protection and the time to arm against Belisarius!

But the worst was, that the army laid the whole blame of the unhappy struggle and the necessity of civil war upon the King. Why had the negotiations with the city been so abruptly broken off? Why was not the cause of this breach, if it were a just one, made known to the troops? Why did the King shun the light?

The soldiers sat dejected by their watch-fires, or lay in their tents nursing their wounds and mending their weapons; no ancient heroic songs sounded, as usual, from the mess-tables of the camp; and when the

leaders walked through the lanes of tents, they heard many a word of anger and vexation directed against the King.

Towards morning Hildebad arrived in the camp from Florentia with his thousands. He heard with indignation of the news of the bloody defeat, and wished to go at once to the King; but as the latter still lay unconscious under Hildebrand's care. Earl Teja took Hildebad into his tent to answer his impatient questions.

Some time after the old master-at-arms joined them; with such an expression on his features that Hildebad sprang affrighted from the bear-skin which served him for a couch, and even Teja asked hastily:

"How is the King? What of his wound? Is he dying?"

The old man shook his head sadly.

"No; but if I guess rightly, judging him by his honest heart, it would be far better for him to die."

"What meanest thou? What dost thou suspect?"

"Peace, peace," said Hildebrand sadly, and seating himself, "poor Witichis! it will be spoken of soon enough, I fear."

And he was silent.

"Well," said Teja, "how didst thou leave him?"

"The fever has left him, thanks to my herbs. He will be able to mount his horse to-morrow. But he spoke of strange things in his confused dreams--I hope that they are but dreams--else, woe to the faithful man!"

Nothing more could be got out of the taciturn old man.

Some hours after, Witichis sent for the three leaders. To their astonishment, they found him in full armour, although he was obliged, while standing, to support himself on his sword. On a table near him lay his crown-shaped helmet and a sceptre of white ivory, surmounted with a golden ball.

The friends were startled by the impaired look of his usually so composed, handsome, and manly features.

He must have gone through some fearful inward struggle. His sound, simple nature, which seemed to be all of one piece, could not endure the strife of doubtful duties and contradictory feelings.

"I have summoned you," he said with great effort, "to hear and support my decision in our grave position. How heavy have been our losses in this attack?"

"Three thousand dead," said Earl Teja, very gravely.

"And about six thousand wounded," added Hildebrand.

Witichis closed his eyes as if in pain. Then he said:

"It cannot be helped, Teja. Give at once the command for a second attack!"

"How! what!" cried the three leaders like one man.

"It cannot be helped," repeated the King. "How many thousands hast thou brought us, Hildebad?"

"Three; but they are dead tired from the march. They cannot fight to-day."

"Then we will storm alone again," said Witichis, taking his spear.

"King," said Teja, "we did not win a single stone of the fortress yesterday, and to-day we have nine thousand men less----"

"And those not wounded are faint, their weapons and their courage broken."

"We *must* have Ravenna!" repeated Witichis.

"We shall never take it by force," said Earl Teja.

"We will see about that!" retorted Witichis.

"I besieged the city with the great King," said Hildebrand warningly. "He stormed it in vain seventy times. We only took it by starving it--after three years."

"We must attack!" cried Witichis. "Give the command."

Teja was about to leave the tent.

Hildebrand stopped him.

"Remain," he said; "we dare not hide it from him any longer. King! the Goths murmur. To-day they would not obey thee; the attack is impossible."

"Stand things so?" said Witichis bitterly. "The attack is impossible? Then only one thing remains: the course which I should have taken yesterday--then those three thousand would have been still living. Go, Hildebad, take that crown and sceptre! Go to the rebels' camp; lay them at the feet of young Arahad; tell him that he may woo Mataswintha; I and my army will greet him as our King."

And, so speaking, he threw himself exhausted upon his couch.

"Thou speakest feverishly again," cried Hildebrand.

"That is impossible!" cried Teja.

"Impossible!" repeated Witichis. "Everything is impossible? The fight impossible? and the renunciation? I tell thee, old man, there is nothing else to be done, after that message from Ravenna."

He ceased.

His three companions looked at each other significantly.

At last the old man said:

"What was that message? Perhaps an expedient may be found? Eight eyes see more than two."

"No," said Witichis, "not in this case. Here there is nothing to see, otherwise I would have asked your advice long since. But it could have led to nothing. There lies the parchment from Ravenna; but be silent before the army."

The old man took the roll and read:

"The Gothic warriors and the citizens of Ravenna, to Earl Witichis of Fæsulæ----"

"What insolence!" cried Hildebad.

"And to Duke Guntharis of Florentia, and Earl Arahad of Asta. The Goths and the citizens of this city declare to the two armies encamped before their gates, that they, faithful to the distinguished House of Amelung, and remembering the benefits of the great King Theodoric, will firmly cling to his royal line as long as a scion of it lives. Therefore we acknowledge Mataswintha as sole mistress of the Goths and Italians; only to her will we open our gates, and we will defend them against any other to the utmost."

"What madness!" said Earl Teja.

"Incomprehensible!" cried Hildebad.

But Hildebrand folded the parchment and said:

"I understand it very well. As to the Goths, you must know that the garrison is formed of the followers of Theodoric, and these followers have sworn to him never to prefer a strange king to one of his line. I, too, swore this oath, but, in doing so, I ever thought of the spear and not of the spindle. It was this oath which obliged me to adhere to Theodahad, and only after his treachery was I free to do homage to Witichis. But old Earl Grippa, of Ravenna, and his companions, believe that they are equally bound to the females of the royal line. And, be sure of it, these grey-headed heroes--the oldest in the nation, and Theodoric's brothers-at-arms--will let themselves be hewn in pieces, man for man, rather than break that oath as they understand it. And, by Theodoric, they are right! But the Ravennese are not only grateful, they are cunning; they hope that Goths and Byzantines will fight out their affair before their walls. If Belisarius win--who, as he says, comes to avenge Amalasintha--he cannot then be angry with the city which has remained faithful to her daughter; and if we win, then it was they who obliged the garrison to close their gates."

"However that may be," interposed the King, "you will now understand my silence. If the army knew the contents of that parchment, they might be discouraged, and go over to the rebels, who hold the Princess in their power. There remain to me only two courses: either to take the city by storm--and that we tried yesterday in vain--or, to yield. You say the first course cannot be repeated, so there only remains the last--to yield. Arahad may woo the Princess and wear the crown; I will be the first to do him homage and protect the kingdom, in concert with his brave brother."

"Never!" cried Hildebad. "Thou art our King, and shall remain so. Never will I bow my head to that young coxcomb! Let us march to-morrow against the rebels; I alone will drive them out of their camp, and carry the royal child--at the touch of whose hands those fast-shut gates will fly open as if by magic--into *our* tents."

"And when we have her," asked Earl Teja, "what then? She is of no use to us if we do not make her our Queen. Wilt thou do so? Hast thou not had enough with Amalasintha and Gothelindis? Once more the rule of a woman?"

"God forbid!" laughed Hildebad.

"I think so too," said the King, "otherwise I should have taken this course long since."

"Well, then, let us remain here and wait until the city is wearied out."

"It is impossible." said Witichis, "we cannot wait. In a few days Belisarius may descend from yonder mountains and conquer us, Duke

Guntharis, and the city; then the kingdom and people of the Goths are lost for ever! There are only two ways--to storm--"

"Impossible!" said Hildebrand.

"Or to yield. Go, Teja, take the crown. I see no other expedient."

The two young men hesitated.

Then old Hildebrand, with a sad and earnest and loving look at the King, said:

"I know of another course to take; a painful, but the only one. Thou must take this course, my Witichis, even if thy heart should break."

Witichis looked at him inquiringly. Even Teja and Hildebad were struck by the tender manner of the old man.

"Go out," continued Hildebrand, turning to Hildebad and Teja. "I must speak to the King alone."

CHAPTER XIV.

Silently the two Goths left the tent, and walked up and down, awaiting the result.

From the tent they now and then heard Hildebrand's voice, who appeared to warn and argue with the King; and now and then an outcry from the latter.

"What can the old man be thinking of?" asked Hildebad, stopping in his walk. "Dost thou not know?"

"I guess," sighed Teja; "poor Witichis!"

"What the devil dost thou mean?"

"Let me alone," said Teja; "it will all come out soon enough."

A considerable time elapsed thus. Ever more violent and more full of pain sounded the voice of the King, who seemed to defend himself desperately against Hildebrand's arguments.

"Why does the greybeard so torture the brave hero?" cried Hildebad angrily. "It is just as if he would murder him! I will go in and help him!"

But Teja held him fast by the shoulder.

"Remain!" he cried, "he cannot be helped."

As Hildebad was struggling to get loose, the noise of voices was heard from the other end of the lane of tents; two sentries were trying in vain to stop a strong Goth, who, covered with all the signs of a long and hard ride, tried to get to the King's tent.

"Let me go, good friend," he cried, "or I will strike thee down!"

And he threateningly lifted a heavy club.

"It cannot be. Thou must wait. The leaders are with him in his tent."

"And if all the gods of Walhalla, together with the Lord Christ, were in his tent, I must go to him!"

"I know that voice," cried Earl Teja, advancing, "and the man. Wachis! what seekest thou here?"

"Oh, master!" cried the faithful servant, "happy am I to find you. Tell these good folks to let me loose, then I need not knock them down."

"Let him loose, or he will keep his word. I know him. Well, what wouldest thou then with the King?"

"Pray lead me to him at once. I have sad and terrible news to tell him of his wife and child."

"Wife and child?" asked Hildebad in astonishment. "What, has he a wife?"

"Very few know it," answered Teja. "She has scarcely ever left their estate, and has never been to court. Scarcely any one knows her, but all who do, honour her highly. I know no one like her."

"There you are right, master, if ever any one was!" said Wachis in a suffocated voice. "The poor, poor mother! and, alas, the poor father! But let me go. Mistress Rauthgundis follows close behind. I must prepare him."

Earl Teja, without more questioning, pushed the man into the tent, and followed with Hildebad.

They found old Hildebrand sitting calmly, like inevitable fate itself, upon the King's couch, his chin resting on his hand, and his hand upon his stone battle-axe.

Thus he sat immovable, fixing his eyes upon the King, who, in the greatest excitement, was pacing to and fro with rapid steps, and so absorbed in the terrible conflict of his soul, that he did not remark those who entered.

"No, no; never!" he cried, "it is cruel! criminal! impossible!"

"It must be," said Hildebrand, without moving.

"No, I say!" cried the King; and turned.

Wachis was standing close before him.

Witichis looked at him wildly; then the servant threw himself at his feet, weeping loudly.

"Wachis!" cried the King, in terror; "what is it? Thou comest from her? Stand up--what has happened?"

"Alas! master," cried Wachis, still kneeling, "it breaks my heart to see you! I could not help it. I have repaid and avenged with all my might!"

Witichis pulled him up to his feet by the shoulders.

"Speak, man! What is there to revenge? My wife----"

"She lives, she is coming; but your child!"

"My child!" cried Witichis, turning pale, "Athalwin? What of him?"

"Dead, master--murdered!"

A cry as of one wounded to death broke from the tortured father's lips. He covered his face with both hands; Teja and Hildebad stepped forward compassionately. Only Hildebrand remained motionless, and looked

fixedly at the group.

Wachis could not bear the long and painful pause; he tried to take his master's hands. They fell of their own accord; two great tears rolled down the hero's brown cheeks; he was not ashamed of them.

"Murdered!" he cried, "my innocent child! By the Romans?" he asked.

"The cowardly devils!" cried Hildebad.

Teja clenched his fist, and his lips worked silently.

"Calpurnius?" asked Witichis, looking at Wachis.

"Yes, Calpurnius. The report of your election had reached the estate, and your wife and child were summoned to the camp. How young Athalwin rejoiced that he was now a King's son, like Siegfried who killed the dragon! He said he would soon go to seek adventures, and also kill dragons and giants. Just then our neighbour returned from Rome. I noticed that he looked gloomy and more envious than ever, and I watched well over house and stalls. But to watch the child--who could have thought that children were no longer safe!"

Witichis shook his head sadly.

"The boy could hardly wait until he should see his father in the camp, and all the thousands of Gothic warriors, and battles close at hand. He threw away his wooden sword directly, and said a King's son must wear a steel one, especially in time of war. And I was obliged to find a hunting-knife, and sharpen it into the bargain. And with this famous sword he escaped from Mistress Rauthgundis early every morning. And when she asked, 'Whither?' he laughed, 'To seek adventures!' and sprang into the woods. Then he came home at noon, tired out and with torn clothes; wild with merriment and exultation. But he would not tell us anything, and only hinted that he had played at being Siegfried. But when I found spots of blood upon his sword, I crept after him into the woods. It was exactly as I suspected. I had once shown him a hole in some steep and rugged rocks, which hung over a running brook, and warned him that there lay poisonous vipers by dozens. At that time he had questioned me about everything, and when I said that every bite was deadly, and that a poor berry-gatherer, who had been bitten by a snake in her naked foot, had died immediately, he drew his wooden sword in a minute, and wanted to jump into the hole. Much frightened, I with difficulty kept him back. And now I remembered the vipers, and trembled because I had given him a steel weapon. I soon found him in the wood in the middle of the rocks, down among the thorns and brushwood. He was just taking out a tremendous wooden shield which he had made for himself and hidden there. A crown was freshly painted upon it. And he drew his sword and sprang with a joyous cry into the hole. I looked round. There lay strewn about dozens of the big snakes, with shattered heads, the victims of his former battles. I followed the boy, and though I was so anxious, I could not bear to disturb him as he stood there fighting like a hero! He drove a swelling viper from her hole with stones; she erected herself with hissing tongue, but just as she darted at him, he threw his great shield before him and cut her in two with a mighty stroke. Then I called him, and scolded him well. But he looked very brave, bold, and disobedient, and cried, 'Do not tell my mother, for I shall still do it. Until the last dragon is dead!' I said I would take his sword away. Then I will fight with the wooden one, if that please thee better,' he cried. 'And what a shame for a King's son!' For the next few days I took him with me to catch the horses in the uncultivated pastures. That pleased him very much; and shortly, I thought, we shall go away. But one morning he escaped me again, and I went alone to my work. I returned along the brook, sure that I should find

him among the rocks. But I did not find him. I found only the belt of his sword lying torn on the thorns and his shield broken on the ground. I looked round alarmed, and sought, but----"

"Quicker, go on!" cried the King.

"But?" asked Hildebad.

"But there was nothing else to be seen on the rocks. Then I noticed the large footprints of a man in some soft sand. I followed them. They led to a place where the rock fell steeply to the brook. I looked over, and below----"

Witichis staggered.

"Alas! my poor master! There on the shore of the brook lay the little figure! How I got down the rocks, I know not. I was below in an instant. There he lay, cut and torn by the points of the rocks, his little hand still holding fast his sword, his bright hair covered with blood---"

"Cease!" cried Teja, laying his hand upon the man's shoulder, while Hildebad grasped the poor father's hand, who sank groaning upon his couch.

"My child, my sweet child! my wife!" he cried.

"I felt that the little heart still beat," continued Wachis; "water from the brook brought him to his senses. He opened his eyes and recognised me. 'Thou hast fallen down, my poor child?' I asked. 'No,' he said, 'not fallen. I was thrown down.' I was horrified. 'Calpurnius,' he went on, 'suddenly came round the corner of the rocks, as I was striking at the vipers. 'Come with me,' he said, 'or I will bind thee.' 'Bind me!' I cried, 'my father is King of the Goths, and thine also. Dare to touch me!' Then he got angry and struck at me with his stick and came nearer; but I knew that near me our servants were felling trees, and I cried for help and retreated to the edge of the rock. He looked about him in terror, for the people must have heard me; the strokes of their axes ceased. But suddenly he sprang forward, cried, 'Die, little viper!' and pushed me over the rock.'"

Teja bit his lips.

"Oh, the devil!" cried Hildebad.

And Witichis, with a cry of pain, tore his hand from Hildebad's grasp.

"Cut it short," said Teja.

"He lost his senses again," Wachis continued; "I carried him in my arms home to his mother. Once again he opened his eyes while lying on her lap. A greeting to you was his last breath."

"And my wife? Is she not desperate?"

"No, master; that she is not. She is of gold, but also of steel. When the boy had closed his eyes, she silently pointed out of the window to the right. I understood her. There stood the neighbour's house. And I armed all your servants and led them there to take revenge. We laid the murdered boy on your shield and bore him in our midst. And Rauthgundis went with us, a sword in her hand, following the corpse. We laid the boy down before the gates of the villa. Calpurnius had fled on his swiftest horse to Belisarius. But his brother and his son and twenty slaves stood in the courtyard. They were just about to mount and follow him. We uplifted the cry of murder three times. Then we attacked them. We killed them *all, all*, and burnt the house down over the inhabitants. Meantime

Rauthgundis looked on without a word, keeping watch by the little corpse and leaning on her sword; and the next day she sent me on beforehand to tell you. Shortly after, as soon as she had burnt the little corpse, she followed me. And as I have lost a day, being hindered by the rebels from taking the shortest road, she may arrive at any hour."

"My child, my child! my poor wife! This is the first produce of this unhappy crown! And now," he cried to the old man, with all the impetuosity of pain, "wilt thou still demand that cruel sacrifice? that unbearable sacrifice?"

Hildebrand slowly rose.

"Nothing is unbearable that is necessary. Winter is bearable, and age, and death. They come, and we bear it. Because we must. But I hear the voices of women, and rustling garments. Let us go."

Witichis turned from him to the door.

There, under the lifted curtain of the tent, stood Rauthgundis, his wife, dressed in grey garments and a black veil, and pressing a small black urn to her bosom.

A cry of loving pain and painful love; and the husband and wife were locked in a close embrace.

Silently the witnesses left the tent.

CHAPTER XV.

Outside Teja held the old man back by his mantle.

"Thou torturest the King in vain," he said. "He will never consent. Now least of all!"

"How dost thou know?" interrupted the old man.

"Peace; I guess it. As I guess all misfortune."

"Then thou wilt also acknowledge that he *must* consent."

"He--*he* will not do it."

"But--thou meanest her?"

"Perhaps!"

"She will!" cried Hildebrand.

"Yes, she is a wonder of a woman," answered Teja.

While, during the next few days, the now childless pair lived in quiet seclusion, and Witichis scarcely ever left his tent, it happened that the outposts of the royal besiegers and the sentries of the Gothic garrison of Ravenna--taking advantage of the armistice which, as a matter of fact, had ensued--entered into frequent communication.

Scolding and disputing, they reproached each other with being the cause of the civil war.

The besiegers complained that the garrison had closed the gates of his royal fortress upon the King during the greatest distress of the nation. The Ravennese blamed Witichis for depriving the daughter of the

Amelungs of her rights.

As old Earl Grippa was making the round of the walls, he listened, unobserved, to one of these conversations.

He suddenly came forward, and called to Witichis's soldiers who were standing below, praising their King.

"Indeed?" he cried; "is it acting nobly and rightly to attack us like a madman, instead of giving an answer to our moderate demand? And he could so easily spare the blood of the Goths! We only want Mataswintha for our Queen! Well, can he not remain King? Is it so hard to share throne and couch with the most beautiful woman in the world, with the Princess Beautiful-hair,' of whose charms the singers sing in the streets? Must so many thousand brave Goths die, rather than that? Well then, let him continue to attack. We will see which breaks down first; his obstinacy or these walls!"

These words of the old commander made an immense impression on all the Goths before the walls. They knew of nothing to say in defence of their King. They also knew as little of his marriage as the rest of the army. In this the presence of Rauthgundis in the camp had altered little, for truly she had not come like a queen.

They hastened back to the camp in great excitement, and told what they had heard; how that the obstinacy of the King had sacrificed their brethren.

"'Twas for this reason he kept the object of the embassy a secret!" they cried.

Soon groups were formed in every lane of the camp, all much excited, speaking of the affair, and blaming the King in tones which grew ever louder.

The Germans of those times treated their kings with a freedom of speech which horrified the Byzantines.

In this case, vexation at the retreat from Rome; the shame of the defeat before Ravenna; regret for their sacrificed comrades, and anger at this secrecy; all worked together to excite the Goths to a storm of indignation against the King, which was not the less violent, because it was still restrained.

This temper of the army did not escape the notice of the leaders. As they passed through the camp, the words of blame were scarcely restrained. But they would only have let loose the mischief if they had angrily rebuked it.

And often, when Earl Teja or Hildebad would have interposed a word in mitigation, old Hildebrand kept them back.

"Let the tide swell a little more," he said; "when it is high enough I will control it. The only danger would be--" he added, half to himself.

"If those in the rebel camp opposite were beforehand with us," said Teja.

"Right, thou guesser of riddles! But things go well for us there. Deserters relate that the princess steadfastly refuses. She threatens to kill herself rather than give her hand to Arahad."

"Bah!" said Hildebad; "I would risk that!"

"Because thou knowest not that passionate creature, that child of the

Amelungs! She inherits the fiery blood of Theodoric, and will, after all, play us, too, a bad trick."

"Witichis is another kind of wooer than that boy of Asta," whispered Teja.

"I trust to that also," answered Hildebrand. "Leave him in peace a few days longer," added the old man; "his grief must have its way. Till it is assuaged he can be brought to do nothing. Do not disturb him. Let him remain quietly in his tent with his wife. I shall be obliged to disturb him soon enough."

But the old man was compelled to rouse the King from his grief sooner and in a different way from what he had intended.

The Assembly at Regeta had made a law against all Goths who deserted to the Byzantines, condemning [them] to an ignominious death.

On the whole, such desertions occurred very rarely, but still, in parts of the country where a few Goths lived among a crowded Italian population, and many intermarriages had taken place, they were more frequent.

The old master-at-arms was especially wroth with these renegades, who dishonoured themselves and their nation. It was he who had introduced this law against deserters from the army and the national flag.

Its application had not yet been necessary, and its intention was almost forgotten.

Suddenly it was brought to mind gravely enough.

Belisarius had not yet left Rome with his main army. For more than one reason he wished at present to make that city the principal support of all his movements in Italy; But he had sent numerous parties of skirmishers after the retreating Goths, to tease and disquiet them, and particularly to take possession of the many castles, strongholds and towns from which the barbarian garrison had been driven out and beaten by the Italians, or, hindered by no garrison, had simply gone over to the Emperor of the "Romani," as he called himself in Greek.

Such occurrences took place--particularly as, since the Gothic King was in full retreat, and, after the outbreak of the rebellion, the Gothic cause seemed half lost--almost daily.

Partly under the influence of the appearance of Belisarius's troops before the gates, partly without such pressure, many towns and castles surrendered.

As, however, most of them preferred to wait until they could plead the excuse of necessity, in case of an unhoped-for victory of the Goths, Belisarius had all the more reason to send forth against them small troops of skirmishers, under the command of the deserters, who were well acquainted with the country and the condition of things.

And these troops, encouraged by the continued retreat of the Goths, ventured far into the land; every newly-taken castle became a point of departure for further operations.

Such a party of skirmishers had lately won Castellum Marcianum, which crowned a rocky height above an extensive pine-wood near Cæsena, close to the royal camp.

Old Hildebrand, into whose hands Witichis had given the supreme command since receiving his wound, observed with indignation this

dangerous success of the enemy and the treachery of the Italians.

And as he did not wish to occupy his troops against Duke Guntharis or Ravenna--always hoping for a peaceable solution of the difficulty--he decided to play these bold skirmishers a famous trick.

Spies had related that, on the day after Rauthgundis's arrival in the camp, the new Byzantine garrison of Castellum Marcianum had dared to threaten Cæsena itself, the important town in the rear of the Gothic camp.

The old master-at-arms furiously swore destruction to the insolent enemy. He put himself at the head of a thousand horsemen, and started in the stillness of the night, with straw twisted round the hoofs of the horses, in the direction of Cæsena.

The surprise succeeded perfectly. Unobserved they entered the wood at the foot of the rock upon which the castle was situated.

Hildebrand divided his men into two parties, one of which he ordered to surround the wood on all sides; the other to dismount and follow him silently up to the castle.

The sentinels at the gate were taken by surprise, and the Byzantines, finding that they were attacked by superior numbers, fled on all sides into the wood, where the greater part of those on horseback were taken prisoners.

The flames from the burning castle illuminated the scene.

But a small group retreated, fighting, over the little river at the foot of the rock, which was crossed by a narrow bridge.

Here Hildebrand's pursuing horsemen were checked by a single man--a leader, as it seemed from the splendour of his armour.

This tall, slender, and seemingly young man--his visor was down--fought as if in desperation, covered the retreat of his men, and had already overthrown four Goths.

Then up came the old master-at-arms, and looked on for a while at the unequal combat.

"Yield, brave man!" he cried to the lonely combatant. "I will guarantee thy life."

At this call the Byzantine started; for an instant he lowered his sword, and looked at the old man.

But the next moment he had leaped forward and back again; he had cut off the arm of his nearest adversary at one powerful stroke.

The Goths fell back a little.

Hildebrand became furious.

"Forward!" he cried. "No more pity! Aim at him with your spears!"

"He is proof against iron!" cried one of the Goths, a cousin of Teja. "I hit him three times; he cannot be wounded."

"Thinkest thou so, Aligern?" laughed the old man grimly. "Let me see if he be proof against stone."

And he hurled his stone battle-axe--he was almost the only one who still carried this ancient heathen weapon--at the Byzantine.

The heavy axe crashed upon the glittering helmet of the brave defender of the bridge, who fell as if struck by lightning.

Two men sprang towards him and raised his visor.

"Master Hildebrand," cried Aligern in astonishment, "it is no Byzantine!"

"And no Italian!" added Gunthamund.

"Look at his golden locks--it is a Goth!" observed Hunibad.

Hildebrand came forward--and started violently.

"Torches!" he cried; "light! Yes," he added gloomily, taking up his stone axe, "it is a Goth! And I--I have slain him," he concluded, with icy calmness.

But his hand trembled on the shaft of his axe.

"No, master," cried Aligern, "he lives. He was only stunned; he opens his eyes."

"He lives?" asked the old man, shuddering. "May the gods forbid!"

"Yes, he lives!" repeated the Goths, raising their prisoner.

"Then woe to him, and to me! But no! The gods of the Goths have delivered him into my power. Bind him upon thy horse, Gunthamund; but firmly. If he escape, it is at the peril of *thy* head, not his. Forward! To horse, and home!"

When they arrived at the camp, the escort asked the master-at-arms what they should prepare for their prisoner.

"A bundle of straw for to-night," he answered, "and for to-morrow early--a gallows."

With these words he entered the King's tent, and reported the result of his excursion.

"We have a Gothic deserter among our prisoners," he concluded grimly. "He must hang before sunset to-morrow."

"That is very sad," said Witichis, sighing.

"Yes; but necessary. I shall summon the court-martial for to-morrow. Wilt thou preside?"

"No," said Witichis, "exempt me from that. I will appoint Hildebad in my place."

"No," cried the old man, "that will not do. I am commander-in-chief as long as thou keepest thy tent. I demand the presidency as my right."

Witichis looked at him.

"Thou art so grim and cold! Is it an enemy of thy kindred?"

"No," said Hildebrand.

"What is the name of the prisoner?"

"Hildebrand--like mine."

"Meseems thou hatest him--this Hildebrand. Thou mayst judge; but

beware of exaggerated severity. Do not forget that I pardon gladly."

"The well-being of the Goths demands his death," said Hildebrand quietly; "and he will die!"

CHAPTER XVI.

Early the next morning the prisoner, with his head covered, was led to a meadow on the north, the "cold corner" of the camp, where were assembled the leaders of the army and a great part of the troops.

"Listen," said the prisoner to one of his escort; "is old Hildebrand on the Ting-place?"

"He is the head of the Ting."

"They are and will ever remain barbarians! Do me a favour, friend--I will give thee this purple belt for it. Go to the old man; tell him that I know that I must die, but I beg him to spare me, and still more my family--dost thou hear? my *family*--the shame of the gallows. Beg him to send me a weapon secretly."

The Goth, Gunthamund, went to seek Hildebrand, who had already opened the court.

The proceedings were very simple. The old man first caused the law of Regeta to be read aloud; then witnesses proved the taking of the prisoner, and afterwards he was led forward. A woosack still covered his head and shoulders.

It was just about to be taken off, when Gunthamund reached Hildebrand and whispered in his ear.

"No," cried Hildebrand, frowning; "tell him that the shame of his family is his *deed*, not his punishment," And he called aloud: "Show the face of the traitor! It is Hildebrand, son of Hildegis!"

A cry of astonishment and horror ran through the crowd.

"His own grandchild!"

"Old man, thou shalt not preside! Thou art cruel to thy flesh and blood!" cried Hildebad, starting up.

"Only just; but to every one alike," answered Hildebrand, striking his staff upon the ground.

"Poor Witichis!" whispered Earl Teja.

But Hildebad hurried away to the camp.

"What canst thou say for thyself, son of Hildegis?" asked Hildebrand.

The young man hastily stepped forward; his face was red, but with anger, not with shame. He showed not a trace of fear. His long yellow hair waved in the wind.

The crowd was moved with compassion.

The mere report of his brave resistance, the discovery of his name, and now his youth and beauty, spoke powerfully in his favour.

With flashing eyes, he looked around at the crowd, and then fixed them

with a proud expression on the old man's face.

"I protest against this court-martial!" he cried, "Your laws do not concern me. I am a Roman--no Goth! My father died before my birth; my mother was a Roman, the noble Cloelia. I have never felt as if this barbarous old man was my kinsman. I despised his severity as I did his love. He forced his name upon me, the child, and took me away from my mother. But I ran away from him as soon as I could. I have always called myself Flavius Cloelius, never Hildebrand. My friends were Romans; Roman was my every thought; Roman my life! All my friends joined Belisarius and Cethegus; could I remain behind? Kill me--you can and you will! But confess that it is a murder, and not an act of justice! You judge no Goth; you murder a conquered Roman, for Roman is my soul!"

The crowd had listened to his defence silently and with mixed feelings.

But the old man rose furiously from his seat; his eyes flashed fire; his hands trembled with rage.

"Miserable boy," he cried, "thou hast confessed that thou art the son of a Goth! Then art thou a Goth thyself; and if thy heart is Roman, thou deservest death for that alone. Soldiers, away with him to the gallows!"

Once more the prisoner advanced to the foot of the judgment-seat.

"Then be accursed," he cried, "you rude and savage people! May your nation be accursed! And, most of all, thou, old man with the wolf's heart! Do not think that your savagery and cruelty will do you any service! You shall be wiped away from the surface of this lovely land, and not a trace of you shall be left behind!"

At a sign from Hildebrand, the ban-officers again threw the cover over the prisoner's head, and led him away to a hill upon which stood a sturdy yew-tree, deprived of its boughs and leaves.

At this moment the eyes of the crowd were diverted towards the camp, whence the sound of horses' hoofs were heard. Soon a troop of riders with the royal banner was seen approaching, Witichis and Hildebad at their head.

"Stop!" cried the King from a distance. "Spare the grandchild of Hildebrand! Pardon, pardon!"

But the old man pointed to the hill.

"Too late, King," he cried; "it is all over with the traitor. So may all perish who forget their nation! The kingdom comes first. King Witichis, and afterwards wife and child and grandchild!"

This act of Hildebrand made a great impression upon the army, and a still greater one upon the King. He felt the weight which was given to any demand of the old man by his sacrifice. And with the conviction that resistance had now become much more difficult, he returned to his tent.

Hildebrand did not fail to take advantage of the King's humour.

In the evening he entered the royal tent with Teja.

The husband and wife were sitting silent, hand in hand, on the camp bed; upon a table before them stood the black urn; near it lay a small golden locket, something like an amulet, appended to a blue ribbon; a bronze lamp shed a faint light.

As Hildebrand gave his hand to the King, the latter looked into his face, and saw at one glance that he had entered the tent with the fixed resolve

to carry out his intentions at whatever cost.

All present seemed silently moved by the impending conflict of feeling.

"Mistress Rauthgundis," began the old man, "I have to speak of sad things with the King. It will hurt thee to hear them!"

Rauthgundis rose, but not to go. Deep pain and earnest love for her husband gave to her fair and regular features a noble and elevated expression.

Without removing her right hand from that of her husband, she laid her left gently upon his shoulder.

"Speak freely, Hildebrand. I am his wife, and demand the half of these sad words!"

"Mistress," the old man repeated.

"Let her remain," said the King. "Dost thou fear to tell thy thoughts before her face?"

"Fear? no! And though I were forced to tell a god that the people of the Goths was dearer to me than he, I should do it without fear. Know then----"

"What! Thou wilt? Spare her, spare her!" cried Witichis, throwing his arms around his wife.

But Rauthgundis looked at him quietly and said:

"I know all, my Witichis. Yesterday, as I was walking through the camp, unrecognised, in the twilight, I heard the soldiers by the watch-fires blaming thee, and praising this old man to the skies. I listened and heard all. What he demands and what thou refusest!"

"And thou didst not tell me?"

"There was no danger. Do I not know that thou wouldst never put away thy wife? Not for a crown, and not for that wonderfully beautiful maiden. Who can part us? Let this old man threaten; I know that no star hangs more safely in heaven than I in thy heart."

This security made an impression on the old man. He frowned.

"I have not to argue with thee! Witichis, I ask thee before Teja--thou knowest how things stand: without Ravenna we are lost: Mataswintha's hand alone can open its gates--wilt thou take this hand or not?"

Witichis sprang from his seat.

"Yes, our enemies are right! We are barbarians! Before this heartless old man stands a splendid woman, unparalleled for her griefs as for her fidelity; here stand the ashes of her murdered child; and he would drag her husband away from this wife and these ashes to form another union! Never--nevermore!"

"An hour ago representatives of all the thousands of the army were on their way to this tent," said the old man. "They would have forced thee to do that which I only ask. I kept them back with difficulty."

"Let them come!" cried Witichis. "They can only deprive me of my crown--not of my wife!"

"Who wears the crown belongs to his people--not to himself!"

"Here"--Witichis took the coroneted helmet and laid it upon the table before Hildebrand--"once more and for the last time I give thee back the crown. I did not desire it, God knows! It has brought me nothing but this urn of ashes. Take it back; let who will be King, and woo Mataswintha."

But Hildebrand shook his head.

"Thou knowest that that would lead to certain destruction. We are already split into three parties. Many thousands would never acknowledge Arahad. Thou alone canst still uphold the kingdom. Wert thou gone, we should be dissolved. We shall become a bundle of separate sticks, which Belisarius will break as if in sport. Wouldst thou have that?"

"Mistress Rauthgundis, canst thou make no sacrifice for thy people?" asked Teja, drawing nearer.

"Thou too, haughty Teja, against me? Is this thy friendship!" cried Rauthgundis.

"Mistress Rauthgundis," replied Teja quietly, "I honour thee more than any other woman on earth, and therefore I ask of thee the greatest of sacrifices----"

But Hildebrand interrupted him.

"Thou art the Queen of this nation. I know of a Gothic Queen who lived in the heathen times of our forefathers. Hunger and plague lay heavy on her people. Their swords were useless. The gods were angry with the Goths. Then Swanhilde asked counsel of the oaks of the woods, and the waves of the sea, and they answered: 'If Swanhilde dies, the Goths will live. If Swanhilde lives, her people die.' And Swanhilde never returned home. She thanked the gods, and sprang into the flood. But truly, that was in the hero-time."

Rauthgundis was not unmoved.

"I love my people," she said; "and since these golden locks are all that remain of my Athalwin"--she pointed to the locket--"I believe I could gladly give my life for my people. I will die--yes!" she cried; "but to live and know the man of my heart loving another--no!"

"Loving another!" cried Witichis; "how canst speak thus? Knowest thou not, that my tortured heart beats ever and only at the sound of thy name? Hast thou then never felt, never yet, not even at the sight of this urn, that we are eternally one? What am I without thy love? Tear my heart out of my bosom, place another in its place; then perhaps I could forget thee! Yes, truly," he cried, turning to the two men, "you know not what you do; you little know your own interest. You know not that my love for this woman and this woman's love for me is the best that poor Witichis possesses. She is my good genius. You know not that you have to thank her, and her alone, if in anything I please you. I think of her in the tumult of battle, and the thought strengthens my arm. Of her I think when noble decisions must be made in the council; of her clear and serene soul, of her unblemished fidelity! Oh, this wife is the soul of my life! Deprive me of her, and your King is a shadow, without fortune and without strength!"

And he passionately folded Rauthgundis in his arms.

She was surprised and startled; overcome with a world of bliss. Never yet had the calm and reserved man, who habitually controlled his feelings, spoken so of her or of his love.

Never even when he had wooed her, had he spoken with such passion as now, when he was asked to leave her. Overpowered, she sank upon his

breast.

"Thanks, thanks, O God, for this hour of pain," she whispered. "Yes, now I know that thy heart and soul are mine for ever!"

"And will remain thine," said Teja in a low tone, "even if another is called his Queen. She would only share his crown, never his heart!"

These words penetrated Rauthgundis's soul. She looked at Teja, moved by his words, with wide eyes.

Hildebrand saw it, and now considered how he should strike his final blow.

"Who would, who could, tamper with your hearts!" he said. "A shadow without fortune or strength! That thou wilt only become if thou refusest to listen to my words, or break thy sacred, solemn oath. For a *perjurer* is more hollow than a shadow!"

"His oath?" asked Rauthgundis hastily. "What hast thou sworn?"

But Witichis sank down upon his seat and buried his face in his hands.

"What has he sworn?" repeated Rauthgundis.

Then Hildebrand, aiming every word at the hearts of the husband and wife, spoke:

"A few years ago a man concluded a mighty bond with four friends at the midnight hour. The sod was raised under a sacred oak, and they swore by the ancient earth and welling water, by the flickering flame and ethereal air. They mixed their living blood and swore a solemn oath; to sacrifice all that they possessed, son and kindred, life, weapons and wives and glory, to the welfare of the Goths! And if any one of them should refuse to keep the oath, when reminded by a brother in time of necessity, his red blood should run unavenged, like the water under the wood-sod. Upon his head heaven should fall and crush him, and he should be for ever subject to all the dark powers under the earth. His soul should be condemned to eternal torture; good men should trample over his grave, and his memory be dishonoured and covered with curses wherever Christians ring bells or heathens offer sacrifices; wherever the wind blows over the wide world, and mothers caress their children. This oath was sworn by five men: by Hildebrand and Hildebad, by Teja and Totila. But who was the fifth? Witichis, son of Waltaris."

And he suddenly drew back Witichis's left-hand sleeve.

"Look here, Rauthgundis, the scar has not yet vanished. But the oath has vanished from his soul. Thus he swore before he was made King. And when the thousands of Goths, on the field of Regeta, lifted him on the shield, he swore a second oath: 'My life, my happiness, all that I have, do I dedicate to you, the people of the Goths. I swear it by the God of heaven and by my faith.' Well, Witichis, son of Waltaris, King of the Goths, I now remind thee of that double oath. I ask thee whether thou wilt sacrifice, as thou hast sworn to do, thy wife and thy happiness to the people of the Goths? See, I too have lost three sons for this people, and, without shrinking, I have sacrificed and condemned my grandchild, the last scion of my race. Speak, wilt thou do the like? Wilt thou keep thine oath? or wilt thou break it and live accursed? cursed by the living and cursed amongst the dead?"

Witichis was convulsed with pain at the words of the old man.

Then Rauthgundis rose. She laid her left hand on her husband's breast,

and stretched forth her right as if to protect him from Hildebrand.

"Cease," she said, "leave, him alone. It is enough! He will do what thou desirest. He will not dishonour and perjure himself for the sake of his wife."

But Witichis sprang up, and held her fast in both his arms as if they were about to tear her from him at once.

"Now go," she said to the two men; "leave me alone with him."

Teja turned to go; Hildebrand hesitated.

"Go, go!" she cried, laying her hand upon the marble urn; "I swear to thee by the ashes of my child, that at sunrise he shall be free!"

"No," cried Witichis, "I will not put away my wife! never!"

"Thou shalt not. It is not thou who sendest me away--I turn away from thee. Rauthgundis goes to save her people and her husband's honour. Thou canst never tear away thy heart from me; I know that mine it will remain, now more than ever! Go, Hildebrand and Teja, what we two have now to go through, will admit of no witness."

The two men silently left the place; silently they went together down the lane of tents; at the corner the old man stopped.

"Good-night, Teja," he said; "it is now done!"

"Yes; who knows if well done? A noble, noble sacrifice! Many more will follow, and, meseems there, in the stars, it stands written--in vain! But for honour then, if not for victory! Farewell."

He drew his dark mantle closely round his shoulders, and disappeared like a shadow into the night.

CHAPTER XVII.

The next morning, before cockcrow, a veiled woman rode out of the camp. A man in a brown war-mantle walked beside her, holding her horse's bridle, and ever and again looking into her veiled face.

At an arrow's length behind them rode a servant, with a bundle at his back, where hung a heavy club.

They went on their way for some time in silence.

At last they reached a woody eminence; behind them lay the broad plain where stood the Gothic camp and the city of Ravenna; before them, to the north-west, the road which led to the Via Æmilia.

The woman checked her horse.

"The sun is just rising. I have sworn that it shall find thee free. Farewell, my Witichis!"

"Hurry not so away from me," he said, pressing her hand.

"I must keep my word if my heart breaks! It must be!"

"Thou goest more easily than I remain!"

She smiled painfully.

"I leave my life behind me; thou hast yet a life before thee."

"And what a life!"

"The life of a King for his people, as thine oath demands."

"Fatal oath!"

"It was right to swear it; it is a duty to keep it. And thou wilt think of me in the gilded halls of Rome, as I of thee in my hut, deep in the ravine. Thou wilt not forget thy wife, nor the ten years of our faith and love, nor our sweet boy."

"Oh, my wife, my wife!" cried the tortured man, pressing his face against the saddle-bow, and putting both arms around her.

She bent over him and laid her hand upon his head.

Meanwhile Wachis had overtaken them; he looked at the group for a short time, and then he could bear it no longer.

He pulled his master gently by the mantle.

"Master, listen; I can give you good advice. Do you not hear me?"

"What canst thou advise?"

"Come with us! Up, away! Mount my horse and ride away with Mistress Rauthgundis. I will follow afterwards. Leave those who torture you till the bright drops stand in your eyes; leave them, and all the rubbish of crown and kingdom. It has brought you no happiness. They do not mean well by you. Who would part man and wife for a dead crown? Up and away, I say! And I know a rocky nest where no one can find you but an eagle or a chamois."

"Shall thy master run away from his kingdom, like a bad slave from the mill?"

"Farewell, Witichis. Here, take the locket with the blue ribbon; the ringlet of our boy is in it, and one," she whispered, kissing him on the forehead, and hanging the locket round his neck, **"one of Rauthgundis'. Farewell, thou, my heart's life!"**

He raised himself to look into her eyes.

She suddenly struck her horse--"Forward, Wallada!"--and galloped away. Wachis followed.

Witichis stood motionless, and looked after her.

She stopped before the road turned into the wood--once more she waved her hand, and the next minute had disappeared.

Witichis listened to the tramp of the horses as if in a dream. When the sound ceased he turned.

But he could not leave the place.

He stepped out of the road. At the other side of the ditch lay a large mossy block of stone. There the King of the Goths seated himself, rested his arms upon his knees, and buried his face in his hands. He pressed them hard against his eyes, to shut out the whole world from his grief.

Tears trickled through his fingers. He did not notice them.

Horsemen galloped past. He scarcely heard them.

So he sat motionless for hours; so motionless, that the birds of the wood hopped close to him.

The sun stood in the south.

At last--he heard some one call his name.

He looked up. Earl Teja stood before him.

"I knew well," said Teja, "that thou hadst not fled like a coward. Come back with me, and save thy kingdom. When, this morning, thou wert not found in thy tent, the report spread through the camp that, despairing of kingdom and happiness, thou hadst fled. It soon reached the city of Ravenna and Guntharis. The Ravennese threaten a sally, and that they will go over to Belisarius. Arahad tempts the army to give him the crown. Two, three opposing Kings arise. Everything will fall to pieces if thou comest not to save us!"

"I come!" cried Witichis. "Let them take care! The best heart in the world has been broken for the sake of this crown; it is sacred, and they shall not desecrate it. Come, Teja, back to the camp!"

BOOK IV.--*Continued.*

WITICHIS.

"But the Goths chose Witichis for their king, a man, not indeed of noble birth, but of great fame as a warrior."--*Procopius: Wars of the Goths*, i. 11.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

When King Witichis readied the camp, he found it almost in a state of anarchy.

The pressing need of the moment forcibly roused him from his grief, and gave him sufficient occupation.

He found the army split into numerous parties, and on the point of dissolution. He acknowledged to himself that, if he had abdicated, or abandoned the camp, the complete ruin of the Gothic cause would have been the consequence. He found many of the troops already on the point of departure. Some were about to join Earl Grippa in Ravenna; others to go over to the rebels; others again to fly across the Alps. Many spoke of the choice of a new king, and here, too, the different parties opposed each other with threats of violence.

Hildebrand and Hildebad still kept together those who did not believe in the flight of the King. The old master-at-arms had declared that if Witichis had really deserted them, he would not rest until he had dealt to him the punishment of Theodoric, while Hildebad rated at those who could believe Witichis capable of such baseness.

They had guarded the roads to the city and to the rebel camp, and threatened to oppose force to every movement in those directions; while

Duke Guntharis, having heard a report of the confusion, was already advancing against the royal camp.

Everywhere Witichis found discontented groups of troops on the point of departure; everywhere he heard words of blame and beheld uplifted weapons. At any moment the camp might become a scene of bloodshed.

Quickly resolved, he hurried to his tent, adorned himself with the coroneted helmet and the golden sceptre, mounted Boreas, his powerful charger, and galloped through the lines of tents, followed by Teja, who bore the blue banner of Theodoric.

In the middle of the camp they met with a crowd of men, women, and children--for the latter generally accompanied a Gothic army--who, murmuring and threatening, were moving towards the western gate.

Hildebad had sent his soldiers to bar this gate with levelled lances.

"Let us go out," cried the people. "The King has fled, the war is over, all is lost. We will save our lives."

"The King is no coward like thee!" cried Hildebad, pushing back the nearest man.

"Yes, he is a traitor!" cried the latter. "He has forsaken and betrayed us for the sake of a woman's tears."

"Yes," said another, "he has killed three thousand of our brothers and has fled."

"Thou liest!" said a quiet voice. Witichis had turned the corner of a tent.

"Hail, King Witichis!" cried Hildebad. "Do you see him, you rabble? Did I not tell you? But it was high time thou camest--things were getting to a desperate pass."

Just then Hildebrand came galloping up with a few horsemen.

"Hail, King Witichis!" he cried, and turning to his companions--"Hasten, heralds, through the camp," said he, "and tell what you have seen; and all the people will cry: 'Hail, Witichis, our faithful King!'"

But Witichis turned from him with a look of anguish.

The heralds galloped away in all directions, and shortly there arose through the whole camp the thundering shout, "Hail, King Witichis!" Even those who had just been murmuring joined unanimously in the cry.

Witichis listened to these acclamations with a look full of pride and pain, and Teja whispered to him: "Now thou seest that thou hast saved the kingdom."

"Up! lead us to victory!" cried Hildebad, "for Guntharis and Arahad approach! They think to surprise us without a chief and in complete disorder. At them! They shall find themselves mistaken. At them! and down with the rebels!"

"Down with the rebels!" thundered the soldiers, glad to find an outlet for their excited passions.

But the King made a sign.

"Peace! No more shall Gothic blood flow from wounds made by Gothic weapons. Wait patiently here. Thou, Hildebad, open the gate for me. None shall follow me. I alone go to the rebels. Thou, Earl Teja, control the

troops until I return. But thou, Hildebrand," he cried, raising his voice, "ride to the gates of Ravenna, and loudly bid them open. Their desire is fulfilled, and, before evening, we will enter: King Witichis and Queen Mataswintha."

He spoke these words with such sorrowful dignity, that the hearers received them in reverent silence.

Hildebad opened the gate of the camp. Without could be discerned the rebels, approaching at a quick march; loudly sounded their war-cry as the gate opened.

King Witichis gave his sword to Earl Teja, and rode slowly to meet them. The gate closed behind him.

"He seeks death," whispered Hildebad.

"No," said Teja, "he seeks the salvation of the Goths."

On recognising the solitary horseman, the rebels were amazed. Near the brothers--who marched at the head of the troops--rode the chief of the Avarian archers. He held his hand over his small and twinkling eyes and cried:

"By the horse of the war-god, that is the King himself! Now, my boys, sons of the steppes, aim well, and the war is over!" and he quickly took his bow from his shoulder.

"Stop, Chan Warchun," cried Duke Guntharis, laying his mailed hand upon the other's shoulder. "Thou hast sadly erred twice in the same breath. Thou hast called Earl Witichis the King: that may be forgiven thee. Thou wouldst murder him who comes as a messenger of peace. That may be Avarian, but is not Gothic custom. Away with thee and thy troop out of my camp!"

The Chan started and looked at Guntharis in astonishment.

"Away, at once!" repeated Duke Guntharis.

The Avarian laughed and signed to his horsemen.

"'Tis all one to me. Children, we go to Belisarius. Queer people, these Goths! Giant bodies with children's hearts!"

Meanwhile Witichis had ridden up.

Guntharis and Aarahad looked at him inquiringly.

Unusual solemnity was added to the customary simple dignity of his manner; the majesty of deep grief.

"I come to speak with you of the welfare of the Goths. Brother shall slay brother no more. Let us enter Ravenna together, and together conquer Belisarius. I shall wed Mataswintha, and you two shall stand nearest to my throne."

"Never!" cried Aarahad passionately.

"Thou forgettest," said Duke Guntharis proudly, "that thy bride is in **our** tents."

"Duke Guntharis of Tuscany, I might answer that shortly **we** shall be in your tents. We are more numerous and not less brave than you, and, Duke, we have right on our side. I will not speak of that, but only warn you of the fate of the Goths. Should you conquer **us**, you are too weak to

conquer Belisarius. Even united, we are scarcely strong enough for that. Give way!"

"It is for thee to give way," said the Wölfung. "If thou lovest the Goths, lay down thy crown. Canst thou make no sacrifice for thy people?"

"I can. I have done so. Hast thou a wife, O Guntharis?"

"I have a dear wife."

"I too! I *had* a dear wife. I have sacrificed her to my people. I have sent her away, in order to woo Mataswintha."

Duke Guntharis was silent.

But Aarahad cried: "Then thou hast never loved her!"

Witichis started; the force of his grief and his love redoubled. His cheeks flushed, and casting an annihilating look at the alarmed youth, he cried:

"Talk not to me of love! Blaspheme not, thou foolish boy! Because red lips and white limbs flash before thee in thy dreams, darest thou to speak of love? What knowest thou of what I have lost in this wife, the mother of my sweet child? A world of love and faith! Irritate me not. My heart is sore. I control my pain and despair with difficulty. Do not exasperate them, or they will break loose!"

Duke Guntharis had become very thoughtful.

"I knew thee, Witichis, in the wars with the Gepidæ. Never saw I ignoble man deal such noble strokes. I know that there is nought false in thee. I know the love which binds a man to a good wife. And thou hast sacrificed such a wife to thy people? That is much!"

"Brother, of what thinkest thou?" cried Aarahad. "What dost thou intend to do?"

"I intend not to allow the House of the Wölfungs to be outdone in generosity. Noble blood, Aarahad, demands noble acts! Tell me one thing more, Witichis. Wherefore hast thou not rather sacrificed thy crown, even thy life, than thy wife?"

"Because it would have been the certain destruction of the kingdom. Twice I would have yielded the crown to Earl Aarahad; twice the leaders of my army swore that they would never acknowledge him. Three, four Gothic kings might have been chosen, but, by my honour, Earl Aarahad would never have been acknowledged. Then I tore my wife from my bleeding heart; and now, Duke Guntharis, remember thou also the people of the Goths. The House of the Wölfungs is lost if the Goths are lost. If Belisarius lay the axe to the roots of the trunk, the noblest branches will fall too. I have renounced my wife, the crown of my life; renounce thou the hope of a crown!"

"It shall not be sung in the halls of the Goths that the freedman Witichis was more self-sacrificing than the chief of the nobility! The strife is at an end; I greet thee, my King."

And the proud Duke bent his knee to Witichis, who raised him and pressed him to his heart.

"Brother! brother! what shame thou dost me!" cried Aarahad.

"I look upon it as an honour," said Guntharis quietly. "And as a sign that my King sees no cowardice, but rather nobleness, in my homage, I

beg a favour. Amelungs and Balthes have ousted my family from the place which belonged to it among the people of the Goths."

"At this moment," answered Witichis, "thou hast redeemed that place. The Goths shall never forget that the generosity of the Wölfungs has saved them from a civil war."

"And, as a sign of this, thou wilt give us the right to bear the standard of the Goths before the troops in every battle?"

"Be it so," said the King, giving him his right hand; "and none can be more worthy."

"Thanks, O King! Let us now go to Mataswintha."

"Mataswintha!" cried Arahad, who had looked on at this reconciliation, which buried all his hopes, in dismay. "Ha! you remind me at the right time. You can take the crown from me--let it go--but not my love, and not the duty of protecting my beloved. She has refused me, but I shall love her until death! I have protected her from my brother, who would have forced her to wed me. No less faithfully will I protect her now if you two attempt to force her to give her hand to my hated enemy. That hand, which is dearer to me than all the crowns of the world, shall be free!"

And he quickly mounted his horse, and galloped off to the camp.

Witichis looked after him anxiously.

"Let him go," said Duke Guntharis; "we two, united, have nothing to fear. Let us now reconcile the troops, since the leaders are friends."

While Guntharis first led the King through his lines of troops, and called upon them at once to do him homage, which they did with joy, and afterwards Witichis took the Wölfung and his leaders with him into his camp, where the victory so peacefully gained was looked upon as miraculous, Arahad collected together a small troop of about a hundred horsemen, who were faithfully attached to him, and galloped back with them to his camp.

He soon reached the tent of Mataswintha, who indignantly rose at his entrance.

"Be not angry. Princess. This time thou hast no right to be so. Arahad comes to fulfil his last duty. Fly! thou must follow me!" And, in the impetuosity of his excitement, he grasped her small white hand.

Mataswintha receded a step, and laid her hand upon the broad golden girdle which confined her white under-garment.

"Fly?" she asked. "Fly whither?"

"Over the sea! over the Alps! Anywhere for liberty; for thy liberty is endangered."

"Only by thee!"

"By me no longer; and I can protect thee no more. So long as only my happiness was at stake, I could be cruel to myself and honour thy will. But now----"

"But now?" repeated Mataswintha, turning pale.

"They intend thee for another. My brother, the army, and our enemies in Ravenna and the opposite camp, are all agreed. Soon a thousand voices will call thee, the victim, to the bridal altar. I cannot bear to think of it!"

Such a soul, such beauty, a sacrifice to an unloved marriage bond!"

"Let them come!" said Mataswintha. "We will see if they can force me!" And she pressed the dagger which she carried in her girdle to her heart. "Who is the new despot who threatens me?"

"Do not ask!" cried Arahad. "Thy enemy, who is not worthy of thee; who does not love thee; he--but follow me--fly! They already approach!"

Horses' hoofs were heard outside.

"I remain! Who can force the will of the grandchild of Theodoric?"

"No; thou shalt not, must not, fall into the hands of those heartless men, who value neither thee nor thy beauty, but only thy right to the crown. Follow me----"

At this moment the curtain at the entrance of the tent was pushed aside. Earl Teja entered. Two Gothic boys, dressed in festive garments of white silk, followed him; they bore a purple cushion, covered with a veil.

Teja advanced to the middle of the tent, and kneeled before Mataswintha. He, like the boys, wore a green spray of rue round his helmet. But his eyes and brow were gloomy, as he said:

"I greet thee. Queen of the Goths and Italians!"

Mataswintha looked at him amazed.

Teja rose, went up to the boys, took a golden circlet and a green wreath of rue from the cushion, and said:

"I give thee the bridal wreath and the crown, Mataswintha, and invite thee to the wedding and coronation; the litter awaits thee."

Arahad laid his hand on his sword.

"Who sends thee?" asked Mataswintha, with a beating heart, but her hand upon her dagger.

"Who but Witichis, the King of the Goths?"

On hearing this a ray of ineffable joy shone from Mataswintha's beautiful eyes. She raised both hands to heaven and cried:

"Thanks, O heaven! Thy stars and my true heart are not belied. I knew it!"

She took the coronet into her white hands and pressed it firmly upon her golden hair.

"I am ready," she said. "Lead me to thy master and mine."

And she majestically held out her hand to Earl Teja, who reverently led her out of the tent.

But Arahad looked after her in speechless wonder as she disappeared, his hand still upon his sword.

He was roused by the entrance of Eurich, one of his followers, who came up to him, and laying his hand upon his shoulder, asked:

"What now? The horses stand and wait. Whither?"

"Whither?" exclaimed Arahad, starting; "whither? There is only one way, and that we will take. To the Byzantines and death!"

CHAPTER II.

In the peaceful light of late afternoon shone the chapel and convent which Valerius had built in order to release his daughter from the service of the Church. It was situated at the foot of the Apennines, to the northeast of Perugia and Asisum, and to the south of Petra and Eugubium, upon a rocky precipice above the little town of Taginæ.

The cloister, built of the dark red stone of the neighbourhood, enclosed in its quadrangle a quiet garden, green with shrubberies.

A cool arched passage ran round all its four sides, decorated in the grave Byzantine style, with statues of the apostles, mosaics, and frescoes on a golden background.

This ornamentation consisted in symbolic pictures from the sacred writings, especially from the Revelations of St. John, the favourite Gospel of that time.

Solemn stillness reigned over the place. Life seemed excluded from within these high and strong walls.

Cypresses and arbor-vitæ predominated in the groups of trees in the garden, where the song of a bird was never heard. The strict conventual order suffered no bird, lest the sweet song of the nightingale might disturb the pious souls in their devotions.

It was Cassiodorus who, already inclined to a severe monastic rule when minister of Theodoric, and full of Biblical learning, had sketched for his friend Valerius the plan for the outer and inner government of this convent--similar to the rules of the monastery which he himself had founded at Squillacium--and had watched over its execution. His pious but severe mind, so alienated from the flesh and the world, was expressed in the smallest details.

The twenty widows and maidens who lived here as nuns passed their days in prayer and psalm-singing, chastisement and penitence, and also in works of Christian charity; for they visited the sick and the poor of the neighbourhood, comforting and nursing body and soul.

It made a solemn, poetical, but very sad impression upon the beholder when one of these pious nuns came walking through the dark avenue of cypresses, clad in a flowing dark-grey garment, which trailed on the ground, and a white close-fitting kalantika upon her head, a costume which Christendom had received from the Egyptian priests of Isis.

Before every cross of the many which were cut in the box-trees the nuns stood still and folded their hands in adoration. They always walked alone, and dumb as shadows they glided past each other when they chanced to meet; for communication was reduced to the absolutely necessary.

In the middle of the garden a spring flowed from beneath a dark-coloured rock, surrounded by cypresses; marble seats were fixed in the rock.

It was a retired, lovely spot; wild roses formed a sort of arbour, and almost entirely concealed a rough bas-relief sculptured in the rock, representing the martyrdom of St. Stephen.

Near this spring sat, eagerly reading in a roll of papyrus, a beautiful maiden, clad in a snow-white garment, held up on the left shoulder by a golden clasp. A spray of ivy was twined in the dark brown hair, which

flowed back from the brow in soft waves. It was Valeria.

When the columns of her home at Neapolis had been overthrown, she had found an asylum within these strong walls. She had become paler and graver in this lonely dwelling, but her eyes still beamed with all their former beauty.

She read with avidity; the contents of the papyrus seemed to entrance her; her finely-cut lips moved involuntarily, and at last she began to read aloud in a low voice:

"His child to Hector of the brazen helm
Was given in marriage; she it was who now
Met him, and by her side the nurse, who bore
Clasped to her breast, his all-unconscious child,
Hector's loved infant, fair as morning star;
Silent he smiled as on his boy he gazed,
But at his side, Andromache in tears,
Hung on his arm, and thus the chief addressed:
'Dear lord, thy dauntless spirit will work thy doom;
Nor hast thou pity on this thy helpless child,
Or me, forlorn to lie thy widow soon:
For thee will all the Greeks with force combined
Assail and slay: for me, 'twere better far,
Of thee bereft, to lie beneath the sod;
Nor comfort shall be mine, if thou be lost,
But endless grief: to me nor sire is left,
Nor honoured mother;
But, Hector, thou to me art all in one,
Sire, mother, brethren! thou, my wedded love!'"

She read no further; her large eyes grew moist; her voice died away; her head sank upon her bosom.

"Valeria!" said a mild voice, and Cassiodorus bent forward over her shoulder; "tears upon the book of comfort! But what do I see--the 'Iliad?' Child, I gave you the Evangelists!"

"Pardon me, Cassiodorus; my heart clings to other gods than yours. You cannot imagine how, the more the shadow of earnest self-denial presses upon me since I entered these walls, the more tenaciously my resisting heart holds fast to the last ties that bind me to the world. And my mind vacillates between disgust and love."

At this moment a loud and cheerful sound broke the silence; a strange tone in these quiet precincts, which usually echoed only the low choral of the nuns.

Trumpets sounded the merry signal of the Gothic horsemen. The tones penetrated Valeria's heart with a life-giving feeling. The gatekeeper came running from the dwelling-house.

"Master," he cried, "bold horsemen are outside the gate. They make a noise and demand meat and drink. They will not be refused, and their leader--there he is!"

"Totila!" cried Valeria, and flew to meet her lover, who appeared in his glittering armour and white mantle. "Oh, you bring me air and life!"

"And new hope and old love!" said Totila, and held her in a fast embrace.

"Whence come you? How long you have been away!"

"I come straightway from Paris and Aurelianum, from the courts of the Frank kings. Oh, Cassiodorus, how well off are those on the other side of the mountains! What an easy life have they! There heaven and earth and tradition do not fight against their German spirit. The Rhenu and Danubius are near, and uncounted Germanic races dwell there in old and unbroken strength; we, on the contrary, are like an advanced outpost, a forlorn hope, a single block of rock, worn away by the envious elements. But all the greater fame," he continued, drawing himself up, "if we can create and uphold a kingdom for the Germans in the centre of the country of the Romans! And what a magic lies in your fatherland, Valeria! And we have made it ours. How my heart rejoiced when olives and laurels and the deep deep blue of heaven again greeted my eyes! I felt that if my people can victoriously sustain themselves in this wondrous land, mankind will see its noblest ideal realised."

Valeria pressed his hand.

"And what have you accomplished?" asked Cassiodorus.

"Much! Everything! At the court of the Merovingian, Childebert, I met with ambassadors from Byzantium, who had already half persuaded him to invade Italy as their allies. The gods--forgive me, pious father--Heaven was with me and my words. I succeeded in altering Childebert's sentiments. In the worst case, his weapons will remain neutral. But I hope he will send an army to our assistance."

"Where did you leave Julius?"

"I accompanied him to his lovely home, Avenio. There I left him among blooming almond-trees and oleanders; there he wanders, no more with 'Plato.' but almost always with 'Augustinus' in his hand; and dreams and dreams of eternal peace between the nations, of perfect goodness, and of the kingdom of God! It is indeed lovely in those green vales; but I do not envy him his leisure. My ideal is folk and fatherland. And my only desire is to fight for this people of the Goths. Everywhere in my backward journey I drove the people to arms. I already met three strong troops on the way to Ravenna. I myself lead a fourth to our brave King. At last we shall advance against these Greeks, and then revenge for Neapolis!" and with flashing eyes he raised his spear. He was very beautiful to look upon.

Valeria threw herself into his arms.

"Oh see, Cassiodorus!" she cried; "this is *my* world! *my* joy! my heaven! Manly courage and the glitter of arms and love of one's people, and the soul moved with love and hate--does not this satisfy the human soul?"

"Yes; while happy and young! It is pain which leads the mind to heaven."

"My pious father," said Totila, laying his right hand upon the shoulder of Cassiodorus, and drawing Valeria close to him with his left, "it ill becomes me to argue with you, who are older, wiser, and better. But I feel just the contrary. If I could ever doubt the goodness of God, it is when I see pain and undeserved suffering. When I saw my noble Miriam's eyes extinguished in death, my doubting heart asked: 'Does there then exist no God?' In happiness and the sunshine of life is the grace of the Supreme Being revealed to me. He certainly wills the happiness of mankind--pain is His sacred secret; I trust that also this riddle will be made clear to us. But meanwhile let us joyfully do our best upon earth, and allow no shadow to darken our minds too long. In this belief, Valeria, let us part. For I must go to King Witichis with my troop."

"You leave me? Already? Ah, when and where shall I see you again?"

"You shall see me again; take my word in pledge. I know the day will come when I shall have the right to take you from these gloomy walls and lead you to life and sunshine. Meanwhile, do not allow yourself to give way to sad thoughts. The day of victory and happiness will come; and I rejoice that I draw my sword at once for my people and my love."

While he was speaking the gatekeeper had brought a letter for Cassiodorus.

"I too must leave you, Valeria," said the latter. "Rusticiana, the widow of Boëthius, calls me to her death-bed. She wishes to ease her mind of old guilt. I go to Tifernum."

"My way leads thither also; we will go together, Cassiodorus. Farewell, my Valeria!"

After a brief leave-taking, the maiden watched her lover set forth.

She climbed a small tower on the garden wall, and looked after him.

She saw him swing himself into the saddle; she saw his horsemen gallop after him.

Their helmets glittered in the evening light; the blue flag fluttered merrily in the wind; it was a picture of life, strength, and youth.

She looked after the troop for some time with intense longing.

But as it disappeared more and more into the distance, the joyous courage with which her lover's visit had imbued her, gradually forsook her. Sad forebodings arose in her heart, and she unconsciously expressed her feelings in the words of her beloved Homer:

"Achilles, too, thou see'st; how stalwart, tall, and fair! Yet must he yield to death and stubborn fate, Whene'er at morn, or noon, or eve, the spear Or arrow from the bow may reach his life."

Sighing painfully, she left the quickly darkening garden, and entered the damp walls of the convent.

CHAPTER III.

Meanwhile King Witichis, in his armed city of Ravenna, displayed all the arts and activity of an experienced general.

As, week by week, and day by day, larger or smaller divisions of the Gothic troops which had been treacherously sent to the frontiers by Theodahad, returned to the city, the King was unceasingly occupied in arming, training, and regulating the whole army, which was gradually to be brought to the number of a hundred and fifty thousand.

For Theodoric's reign had been extremely peaceful; the garrisons of the frontier provinces had alone seen active service against the Gepidæ, Bulgarians, and Avarians; and during a peace of more than thirty years the regulations of the army had become somewhat rusty.

Therefore the King, supported by his friends and generals, had work enough on his hands.

The arsenals and docks were emptied; immense magazines were built in the city, and, between the threefold walls, endless rows of workshops were erected for smiths and armourers of all kinds, who were obliged to labour day and night, in order to satisfy the demands of the ever increasing army,

and the eager exigence of the King.

All Ravenna had become a camp.

Nothing was heard but the hammers of the smiths, the neighing of horses, the rattle of arms, and the war-cry of manœuvring troops.

In this turmoil and restless activity Witichis sought to deaden his grief as well as he could, and looked eagerly forward to the day when he might lead his brave army to meet the enemy.

But though his first impulse was to lose himself in the vortex of a fierce struggle, he did not forget his duty as King, but sent Duke Guntharis and Hildebad to Belisarius with a proposal of peace on the most moderate conditions.

His time thus completely claimed by affairs of state, Witichis had scarcely a thought or look to spare for his Queen, upon whom, as he also imagined, he could bestow no greater favour than the undisturbed enjoyment of liberty.

But since the fatal marriage feast of Witichis and Mataswintha, at the end of which she had learned in the bridal chamber, from his lips, that he did not, could never love her, and had but called her wife to save the nation, Mataswintha had been possessed by a demon: the demon of insatiable revenge.

The most deadly hatred is that of revolted love.

From her childhood Witichis had been Mataswintha's ideal. Her pride, her hope, and her love were all centred in him; and she had as little doubted that the sun would rise on the morrow, as that her longing for him would be satisfied. And now she was forced to confess to herself that he had discovered her passion, and did not reciprocate it; and that, although she was his Queen, her love for him appeared criminal, with regard to his banished wife, who yet alone reigned in his heart.

He, whom she had looked upon as her destined liberator from unworthy bondage, had done her the greatest injury; he had caused her to enter into a marriage bond without love. He had deprived her of her liberty, and had refused his heart in exchange.

And wherefore? What had been the cause of this sin? The Gothic kingdom, and the Gothic crown; for, to uphold these, he had not hesitated a moment to blast her whole life.

"If he had merely failed to reciprocate my love," she said to herself, "I should have been too proud to hate him. But he draws me to him, bestows upon me, as if in mockery, the name of wife, leads me to the very brink of happiness, and then contemptuously thrusts me down into the night of unspeakable humiliation! And why all this? For the sake of an empty sound the Gothic kingdom! For a circlet of gold! Woe to him, and woe to his idol, to which he has sacrificed me! He shall repent it. Without mercy he has destroyed my idol--his own image. Well, then, idol for idol! He shall live to see his kingdom destroyed, his crown broken. I will shatter his ideal, for whose sake he has sacrificed the bloom of my life; and when he stands despairing and wringing his hands before the fragments, I will say: See! thus my idol, too, was shattered!"

So, with the unstable sophistry of passion, Mataswintha accused the unhappy man, who suffered more than herself; who had sacrificed not only her happiness, but that of his well-beloved wife, to his fatherland.

Fatherland!--Gothic kingdom! The words fell chilly upon the ear of the

woman who, from her childhood upward, had connected all her sufferings with these names.

She had lived solely absorbed in the egoism of her *one* feeling, the poetry of her passionate love, and her whole soul was now possessed with the desire of revenge for the loss of her happiness. She wished that she had the power to destroy the kingdom at one blow.

But the very madness of her passion endowed her with demoniac cunning.

She understood how to hide her deadly hatred and her secret thoughts of revenge from the King--to hide them as deeply as the love which she still entertained for him. She was also able to show an interest in the Gothic kingdom, which seemed to form the only tie between herself and the King; and indeed she really took a deep interest in it, although in an inimical sense. For she well knew that she could only injure the kingdom and ruin the King's cause if she were initiated into all its secrets, and intimately acquainted with its strength and weakness.

Her high position made it easy for her to learn all that she wished to know; out of consideration for her powerful party, the knowledge of the situation of the kingdom and army could not be withheld from the daughter of the Amelungs. Old Earl Grippa furnished her with all the information which he himself possessed. In more important cases she was present at the councils which were held in the King's apartments.

Thus she was perfectly well acquainted with the position of the kingdom; the strength, quality, and divisions of the army; the hopes and fears of the Goths, and the plans of attack formed by the generals. And she longed with impatience for a speedy opportunity of using her knowledge as destructively as possible.

She could not hope to enter into relations with Belisarius himself, therefore her eyes were naturally directed to the Italians in her vicinity, with whom she could easily and unsuspectedly communicate; and who, though neutral in the presence of the Goths, were, without exception, secretly favourable to the Byzantines.

But on recalling their names to her memory, she found that there was not one to whose wisdom and discretion she could entrust the deadly secret: that the Queen of the Goths desired the destruction of her kingdom.

These cowardly and insignificant men--for all the best had long since joined Cethegus or Belisarius were neither worthy of trust nor capable of dealing with Witichis and his friends.

Mataswintha cunningly tried to learn from the King and the Goths themselves, which of the Romans they held to be their most dangerous and powerful enemy; but in answer to such questions, she only heard one name, repeated again and again, and he who owned this name was beyond her reach in the Capitol of Rome--Cethegus the Prefect.

It was impossible for her to enter into communication with him. She could trust none of her Roman slaves with such an important mission as the bearing of a letter to Rome.

The clever and courageous Numidian, who fully shared the hatred of her beloved mistress to the rude barbarians, from whom she had always experienced contempt, had, in truth, offered, with much zeal, to find her way to Cethegus; but Mataswintha would not expose the girl to the perils of a journey through Italy during war-time. Therefore she was already reconciled to the thought that she must postpone her revenge until the

march to Rome. But not the less zealously did she continue to inquire into the plans and stratagems of the Goths.

One day she was returning from the council of war, which had been held in the camp without the walls, in the King's tent; for, since the armament had approached its completion, and the Goths had been daily expecting the order to march, Witichis--partly to avoid Mataswintha--had left his rooms in the palace and taken up his abode among his warriors.

The Queen, accompanied only by Aspa, was walking slowly forward, pondering upon what she had just heard. She had avoided the press and noise of the inner camp, and pursued her way between a marshy arm of the river Padus to the left and the rows of white tents to the right. While she wandered on, noticing nothing, Aspa's sharp eyes were watching a group of Goths and Italians which surrounded the platform of a conjurer, who appeared, from the astonishment and laughter of the spectators, to be performing new and marvellous tricks.

Aspa lingered a little to see something of these wonders. The conjurer was a slender youth, a Celt, to judge by the dazzling white skin of his face and bare arms, and by his long yellow hair; but this supposition was belied by his coal-black eyes. And he really performed wonders in the eyes of his simple audience. Now he sprang up, turned over and over in the air, and fell, now on his hands, now on his feet. Then he seemed to devour glowing coals with great appetite, and in their place, to spit out coins; then he swallowed a dagger a foot long and afterwards drew it out of the back of his head, throwing it up in the air together with three or four others, and catching them in turn by the handle, to the great enjoyment of the spectators, who rewarded him with laughter and cries of admiration.

But Aspa had already lingered too long.

She looked after her mistress, and observed that her path was intercepted by a troop of Italian carriers and livery-servants, who evidently had not recognised the Queen, and who passed straight before her on their way to the river, joking and making a great disturbance. They appeared to be pointing and throwing stones at some object which Aspa could not distinguish.

She was just about to hurry after her mistress, when the conjurer upon the platform near her suddenly uttered a shrill cry. Aspa turned in affright, and saw the youth take an immense leap over the heads of the spectators, and rush at the Italians.

He was already in their midst, and, bending down, disappeared for a moment.

But he quickly rose to his feet, and one and then another of the Italians fell prone under his blows.

In a moment Aspa stood at the Queen's side, who had quietly withdrawn from the turmoil, but, to her surprise, stopped short at a little distance, pointing at the group with her finger.

And indeed the sight was a strange one.

With incredible strength and still greater agility the conjurer held his assailants off. Springing at his adversaries, turning and bending, retreating and then suddenly darting forward to pull the nearest down by his foot, or to overthrow him with a powerful blow, he defended himself bravely, and that without any weapon, with his right hand alone; for in the left he held something close to his breast, as if hiding and protecting it.

This unequal combat lasted several minutes.

The conjurer was pushed nearer and nearer to the water by the angry and noisy crowd. Suddenly a naked blade glittered. One of the livery servants, enraged at receiving a severe blow, drew his knife and sprang at the conjurer from behind. With a cry the latter fell; his enemies rushed upon him.

"Help! drag them away! help the poor man!" cried Mataswintha to the soldiers, who now approached from the forsaken platform; "I, your Queen, command you!"

The Goths hurried to the knot of struggling men; but before they could reach them, the conjurer, who had broken from his adversaries, sprang out of the tumbling group, and, with a last effort, darted straight off in the direction of the two women--followed by the Italians.

What a sight!

The Gallic tunic of the poor conjurer hung in rags from his body; his false yellow hair was torn off his head, and beneath appeared locks of glossy black; the white hue of his neck ended in a chest the colour of bronze.

With a last exertion of strength he reached the women, and recognised Mataswintha.

"Protect me, save me, white goddess!" he cried, and fell at her feet.

The Italians had already reached him, and the nearest raised his knife.

But Mataswintha spread her blue mantle over the fallen man.

"Back!" she cried with majesty. "Leave him. He is under the protection of the Queen of the Goths!"

The livery-servants fell back abashed.

"Indeed!" at last said the one with the dagger, "is this dog and son of a dog to go unpunished? and five of us lie half dead on the ground, and I have three teeth too few? Is there to be no punishment?"

"He is punished enough," said Mataswintha, pointing to the deep gash on the neck of the conjurer.

"And all this fuss about a worm!" cried another. "About a snake that escaped from his knapsack, which we tried to kill with stones."

"See, he has hidden the viper in his bosom. Take it from him!"

"Kill him!" screamed the others.

But now a number of soldiers came up, and procured respect for their Queen, pushing back the Italians, and forming a circle round the wounded man.

Aspa looked at the latter attentively, and suddenly cast herself down beside him, crossing her arms on her bosom.

"What is the matter, Aspa? Rise!" said her mistress, much astonished.

"Oh, mistress!" stammered Aspa, "the man is no Gaul! He is one of my people. He prays to the Snake-God. Look at his brown skin--as brown as Aspa's! And here--here is writing; letters are tattooed upon his breast; the sacred hieroglyphics of my country!" she cried with delight.

And, pointing with her finger, she began to read.

"Why this disguise?" asked Mataswintha. "It is suspicious. He must be arrested."

"No, no, mistress," whispered Aspa; "dost thou know what these letters mean? No other eye than mine can decipher them for thee."

"Well?" asked Mataswintha.

"They say," whispered Aspa, "Syphax owes a life to his master, Cethegus the Prefect.' Yes, yes, I know him; it is Syphax, the son of Hiempsal, a friend of my family. The gods have sent him to us."

"Yes, Aspa," said Mataswintha, "the gods have sent him: the gods of revenge! Goths, lay this wounded man upon a bier, and follow my slave to the palace. Henceforward he shall be employed in my service."

CHAPTER IV.

A few days later Mataswintha again repaired to the camp, this time unaccompanied by Aspa, for the latter never stirred, by day or night, from the bedside of her wounded countryman, who was rapidly recovering under her careful nursing.

King Witichis himself came to fetch the Queen with all his court, for a most important council of war was to be held in his tent. The arrival of the last reinforcements had been reported, and Guntharis and Hildebad were also expected to return with the reply of Belisarius to the proposal of peace.

"This will be a fateful day," said Witichis to his consort. "Pray to Heaven for peace."

"I pray for war," said Mataswintha, with a fixed stare.

"Does thy woman's heart so long for revenge?"

"For revenge alone, and it will be mine!"

They entered the tent, which was already crowded with Gothic leaders.

Mataswintha returned their reverent greetings with a haughty bend of her neck.

"Are the ambassadors here?" the King asked old Hildebrand, as he seated himself. "Then bring them in."

At a sign from the old man, the curtains at the side of the tent were withdrawn, and Duke Guntharis and Hildebad entered, bowing low.

"What bring you, peace or war?" Witichis asked eagerly.

"War! war, King Witichis!" cried both men with one voice.

"What! Belisarius refuses the sacrifice I offered him? Hast thou communicated my proposal to him in a friendly and earnest manner?"

Duke Guntharis stepped forward and answered:

"I met the commander in the Capitol, as the guest of the Prefect, and I said to him: 'The Gothic King, Witichis, sends thee greeting. In thirty days he will march before these walls with a hundred and fifty thousand valiant Goths, and there will be a strife and struggle for this venerable city, such as her bloodstained soil has not witnessed for a thousand years. The King

of the Goths loves peace even more than victory, and he swears to yield the island of Sicilia to the Emperor Justinian, and stand by him in every war with thirty thousand Goths, if you will at once evacuate Rome and Italy, which belong to us by right of conquest, as well as according to the treaty with Emperor Zeno, who conceded them to Theodoric when he had overthrown Odoacer.' Thus I spoke, according to thy command. But Belisarius laughed, and cried: 'Witichis is very kind to yield to me the island of Sicilia, which belongs to me already, and is no more his. I will give him instead the island of Thule! No. The treaty of Theodoric with Zeno was a forced one, and as to the right of conquest--well, that speaks now for us. No peace except upon these conditions: that the whole Gothic army lay down their arms, and the entire nation march over the Alps, sending their King and Queen as hostages to Byzantium.'

A murmur of indignation ran through the tent.

"Without making any reply to such a proposition," continued Guntharis, "we turned our backs angrily and departed. 'We shall meet again in Ravenna!' Belisarius cried after us."

"Then I turned," added Hildebad, "and cried: 'We shall meet again before Rome!' Up, King Witichis! to arms! Thou hast done thine utmost for peace, and hast only reaped humiliation. Up, then! Long enough hast thou lingered and prepared; lead us now to battle!"

Just then a flourish of trumpets was heard in the camp, followed by the sound of the hoof-beats of approaching horses.

Presently the curtain of the tent was lifted, and Totila entered in his shining armour, his white mantle floating round him.

"Hail, my King and my Queen!" he said, bowing, "My mission is fulfilled, I bring you the friendly greeting of the Frank King. He had an army ready for the service of Byzantium, and prepared to attack thee. I succeeded in changing his intentions. His army will not enter Italy against the Goths. Duke Markja of Mediolanum, who, until now, has defended the Cottian Alps against the Franks, is therefore free. He follows me in haste with all his thousands. On my way hither I gathered together whatever men I found capable of bearing arms, and also the garrisons of the fortresses. Further: until now we were short of cavalry. Be comforted, my King! I bring thee six thousand horsemen, splendidly mounted. They long to caper upon the plains of Rome. *One* wish alone dwells in all our hearts: lead us to battle, to Rome!"

"Thanks, my friend, to thee and to thy horsemen! Speak, Hildebrand, how is the army now divided? Tell me, generals, how many men does each one of you command? Notaries, write the numbers down."

"I command three thousand foot-soldiers," cried Hildebad.

"And I forty thousand foot and horse with shield and spear," said Duke Guntharis.

"I lead forty thousand foot: archers, slingers, and spear-bearers," said Earl Grippa of Ravenna.

"I seven thousand with knives and clubs," counted Hildebrand.

"Then come Totila's six thousand horse, and fourteen selected thousands led by Teja, with battle-axes--where is he? I miss him here--and I have raised the number of my troops, foot and horse, to fifty thousand," concluded the King.

"Altogether that makes a hundred and sixty thousand," said the

protonotary, writing down the numbers, and handing the parchment to the King.

A ray of warlike joy and exultation spread over the face of Witichis.

"A hundred and sixty thousand Gothic warriors! Belisarius, shall they lay down their arms before thee without a struggle?--What repose do you need before the march?"

Just then Teja hurried into the tent. As he entered he caught the last question. His eyes flashed; he trembled with rage.

"Repose? not an hour longer; up! revenge, King Witichis! a monstrous crime has been committed, which cries to Heaven for vengeance. Lead us at once to battle!"

"What has happened?"

"One of Belisarius's generals, the Hun Ambazuch, besieged, as thou knowest, the fortress of Petra with his Huns and Armenians. There was no relief for the garrison far and near. Only young Earl Arahad--he surely sought death--attacked the superior force with his small troop; he fell in brave combat. The little company of armed Goths in the fortress resisted desperately, for all the helpless people of the Goths, the Aged, the sick, women and children, coming from the plains of Tuscany, Valeria, and Picenum, and amounting to some thousands, had taken refuge in the fortress from the enemy. At last famine compelled them to open the gates, with the stipulation that they should be allowed to leave unhurt. The Hun swore that he would not allow a drop of Gothic blood to be shed. He entered, and ordered the Goths to assemble in the Great Basilica of St. Zeno. This they did, above five thousand people and a few hundred warriors. And when they were all assembled----"

Teja paused with a shudder.

"Well?" asked Mataswintha, turning pale.

"The Hun closed the doors, surrounded the church with his troops--and burnt all the five thousand, together with the church."

"And his promise!" cried Witichis.

"Yes, so cried the desperate people amidst the smoke and flames! 'My promise?' laughed the Hun, 'it will be fulfilled: not a drop of blood will be shed. The Goths must be burnt out of Italy, like field-mice and vermin.' And so the Byzantines looked on, while five thousand Goths, aged men, women, sick people, and children--King Witichis, dost thou hear?--*children*! were miserably suffocated and burnt to death! Such things happen, and thou--thou sendest offers of peace! Up, King Witichis!" cried the enraged man, drawing his sword. "If thou be a man, set forth at once to revenge thy people! The spirits of the murdered will march before us. Lead us to battle! Lead us to revenge!"

"Lead us to battle! lead us to revenge!" echoed the Goths with a shout.

Witichis rose with quiet majesty.

"So be it! the extremity has been reached. And our best armour is our right. To arms!"

And he gave the parchment, which he held in his hand, to Mataswintha, in order to take up the blue banner which hung over his chair.

"You see this old banner of Theodoric; he has carried it from victory to victory. It is now, alas, in weaker hands than his; but do not be

discouraged. You know well that a foolish confidence is not in my nature, but this time I tell you beforehand that a present victory rustles in the folds of this flag--a great, proud, and avenging victory! Follow me! The army will march at once. Generals, order your troops. To Rome!"

"To Rome!" was echoed through the tent. "To Rome!"

CHAPTER V.

In the meantime Belisarius prepared to leave the city of Rome with his main army, and during his absence he entrusted his command to Johannes.

He had resolved to attack the Goths in Ravenna.

His unchecked and victorious march, and the successes of his advanced troops of skirmishers--who, through the revolt of the Italians, had won all the fortresses, castles, and towns till within a short distance of Ravenna--had awakened in Belisarius the conviction that the campaign would soon be ended, and that the only thing left to do was to crush the helpless barbarians in their last strongholds.

For after Belisarius himself had won the whole southern part of the peninsula--Bruttia, Lucania, Calabria, Apulia, and Campania--and had afterwards occupied Rome and marched through Samnium and the Valeria, his lieutenant-generals, Bessas and Constantinus, with his own body-guard, commanded by the Armenian Zanter, the Persian Chanaranges, and the Massagetian Æschman, had been sent forward to conquer Tuscany.

Bessas advanced upon the strong fortress of Narnia. For the means of assault available at that time, this castled town was almost impregnable. It was situated upon a high mountain, at the foot of which runs the deep river Nar. The only two approaches to this fortress from the east and west are a narrow pass and the old lofty and fortified bridge erected by the Emperor Augustus.

But the Roman population overpowered the half-Gothic garrison which lay there, and opened the gates to the Thracians of Bessas.

In the same manner, Spoletium and Perugia succumbed to Constantinus without striking a blow.

Meanwhile another general, the Comes Sacri Stabuli Constantinus, had, on the east coast of the Ionian Gulf, avenged the death of two Byzantine leaders--the magister militum for Illyrium, Mundus, and his son Mauricius, who had fallen at the beginning of the war at Solona, in Dalmatia--had occupied Solona, and forced the scanty Gothic troops to retreat to Ravenna.

So all Dalmatia and Liburnia had fallen into the hands of the Byzantines.

From Tuscany, as we have seen, the Huns of Justinian were already devastating Picenum and the country as far as the Æmilia.

Therefore Belisarius held the peace proposals of the Gothic King to be a sign of weakness. It never occurred to him that the barbarians would advance to the attack. At the same time, he was eager to leave Rome; for he felt a strong repugnance to being called the guest of the Prefect. In the open field his superiority would soon be fully displayed.

The Prefect left the Capitol to the charge of his faithful tribune, Lucius Licinius, and followed the march of Belisarius.

In vain he warned the latter against too great confidence.

"Remain behind the rock of the Capitol if you fear the barbarians," Belisarius had answered sarcastically.

"No," retorted Cethegus; "a defeat of Belisarius is too rare a spectacle. I must not miss it."

In truth, Cethegus would have been glad to witness the humiliation of the great general, whose fame inspired the Italians with too great admiration.

Belisarius had led his troops out of the northern gate of the city, and had pitched a camp at a few miles distant, in order to hold a review and make a new division of the army, which was the more necessary as the influx of Italians who hastened to join his flag was very great.

He had also recalled Bessas, Constantinus, and Ambazuch, with the greater part of their troops. They had only left a small portion behind them to garrison the towns which they had conquered.

Vague rumours of the approach of a Gothic army had spread in the camp. But Belisarius would not believe them.

"They dare not come," he replied to Procopius's warnings; "they lie in Ravenna and tremble before Belisarius."

Late at night Cethegus lay sleepless upon his coach in his tent. He had left the lamp burning.

"I cannot sleep," he said to himself. "There is a sound of clashing arms in the air, and an odour of blood. The Goths are coming; they are most surely marching down through the Sabine mountains, on the Via Casperia and Salara."

On a sudden the curtain of his tent was pushed back, and Syphax rushed up to his couch breathless.

"I know," cried Cethegus, springing up, "what you come to announce--the Goths are coming!"

"Yes, master; to-morrow they will be here. They advance upon the Salarian Gate. I had the Queen's best horse; but this Totila, who leads the vanguard, rushes like the wind over the desert, and here in the camp no one has any suspicion."

"The great general," laughed Cethegus, "has placed no outposts on the watch."

"He relied upon the solid tower on the bridge over the Anius,¹ but----"

"Well, the tower is safe?"

"Yes; but the garrison--Roman citizens from Neapolis--at once went over to the Goths when young Totila appeared. The body-guards of Belisarius, who tried to stop them, were taken prisoners and delivered up to Totila; the tower and the bridge are in the hands of the Goths."

"Things are going on well! Have you any idea of the strength of the enemy?"

"Not merely an idea; I know it as exactly as Witichis himself. Here is the

list of their troops; Mataswintha, their Queen, sends it to you."

Cethegus looked at him inquiringly.

"Do miracles take place to further the ruin of the Goths?"

"Yes, master, miracles! This lovely woman desires the ruin of her people, to revenge herself on one man. And this man is her husband!"

"You are mistaken," cried Cethegus. "She loved him from childhood, and even bought his bust."

"Yes, and she loves him still. But he loves not her; and the bust of Mars was shattered on the night of her marriage."

"She cannot have told you all this herself?"

"No; but Aspa, my countrywoman and her slave, told me all. She loves me; and she loves her mistress almost as much as I my master. Mataswintha wishes you to aid in the destruction of the kingdom of the Goths. She will write, through Aspa, in the secret cypher of my race. And if I were Cethegus, I would take this sun-like Queen to my wife."

"I too, if I were Syphax. But your message deserves a crown! A revengeful and cunning woman is worth more than legions! Now I defy you, Belisarius, Witichis, and Justinian! Ask a favour, Syphax--anything except your freedom, for I need you yet."

"My freedom is--to serve you. *One* favour--let me fight at your side tomorrow?"

"No, my beautiful panther; I do not need your claws--only your stealthy step. You will keep silence about the vicinity and strength of the Goths. Help me on with my armour, and give me the plan of the Salarian road out of that casket. Now call Marcus Licinius, and the leader of my Isaurians, Sandil."

Syphax disappeared.

Cethegus cast a look at the plan.

"So they come from the north-west, down the hill. Woe to him who shall try to stop them there. Then comes the deep valley in which we are encamped. Here the battle will be fought and lost. Behind us, to the south-east, our position lies along a deep brook; into this we shall be inevitably thrown--the bridges cannot be defended. Then a stretch of flat country. What a fine field for the horsemen to pursue us! Finally, still farther back, a dense wood and a narrow pass with the ruined Castle of Hadrian. Marcus," he cried, as the latter entered the tent, "my troops will march at once. We shall go down along the brook into the wood; and you will tell whoever questions you that we march back to Rome."

"March home, without fighting!" asked Marcus, astonished. "You surely know that a battle is pending?"

"Just for that very reason!"

And with these words Cethegus departed to wake Belisarius in his tent.

But he found him already up. Procopius stood near him.

"Do you know already. Prefect?" said Belisarius. "Fugitive country people say that a troop of horsemen approaches. The fools ride to their destruction; they think the road is open as far as Rome."

And he continued to don his armour.

"But the peasants also say that the horsemen are only the vanguard. A terrible army of barbarians follows," warned Procopius.

"Vain rumours! These Goths are afraid; Witichis dare not meet me. I have protected the bridge over the Anio with a tower, fourteen miles this side Rome; Martinus has built it after my plan. That alone will hinder the barbarian foot-soldiers for more than a week, even should a few hacks manage to swim across the water."

"You err, Belisarius. I know for a fact that the whole Gothic army approaches!" said Cethegus.

"Then go home, if you fear it."

"I will take advantage of this permission. I have had fever these last few days. And my Isaurians suffer from it also. With your leave, I will go back to Rome."

"I know this fever," said Belisarius; "that is, I know it in others. It passes as soon as ditches and walls are between the patient and the enemy. Go, if you will; we need you as little as your Isaurians."

Cethegus bowed, and left the tent.

"We shall meet again, O Belisarius!" he said. "Give the signal for the march of my Isaurians," he called loudly to Marcus; "and to my Byzantines also," he added in a low voice.

"But Belisarius has----"

"*I* am their Belisarius. Syphax, my horse."

As he mounted, a troop of Roman horsemen galloped up; torches were carried before the leader.

"Who goes there? Ah! you, Cethegus! What? you ride away? Your people march towards the river! You surely will not leave us now, in this time of imminent danger?"

Cethegus bent forward.

"Hoho! it is you, Calpurnius? I did not recognise you; you look so pale. What news from the front?"

"Fugitive peasants say," answered Calpurnius anxiously, "that there are certainly more than a party of skirmishers. The King of the barbarians, Witichis himself, is on the march through the Sabine mountains. They have already reached the left bank of the Tiber. Resistance, then, is madness--destruction. I follow you; I will join your march."

"No," said Cethegus harshly; "you know that I am superstitious. I do not like to ride with men who are doomed to the Furies. The punishment for your cowardly murder of that boy will surely overtake you. I have no desire to share it with you."

"Yet voices in Rome whisper that Cethegus, too, does not shun an opportune murder," answered Calpurnius angrily.

"Calpurnius is not Cethegus," retorted the Prefect, as he proudly pranced away. "Meanwhile, greet Hades for me," he added.

CHAPTER VI.

"Cursed omen!" growled Calpurnius.

And he hastened to join Belisarius.

"Command the retreat, quick, magister militum!"

"Why, excellent Calpurnius?"

"It is the King of the Goths himself!"

"And I am Belisarius himself," answered the latter, as he donned his splendid helmet with its crest of white horse-hair. "How dare you leave your post in the vanguard?"

"I wished to bring you the news, general."

"Could no other messenger do that? Listen, Roman, you are unworthy of being liberated. You tremble, you coward heart! Return at once to the front. You will lead our horsemen to the first attack. You, Antallas and Kuturgur, take him between you. He *must* be brave; do you hear? If he shrink--down with him. Thus Romans must be taught courage! The watchman has just announced the last hour of night. In another hour the sun will rise. Its first beams must find the whole army on yonder hills. Up! Ambuzach, Bessas, Constantinus, Demetrius, advance to meet the enemy!"

"General, it is as they say," announced Maxentius, the most faithful of the lifeguards; "innumerable Goths are advancing."

"There are two armies against us," reported Salomo, the leader of the hypaspistes of Belisarius.

"I reckon Belisarius alone to be a whole army."

"And the plan of attack?" asked Bessas.

"That I will decide upon when in sight of the enemy, while Calpurnius arrests their progress with his horsemen. Forward! Give the signal. Bring Phalion out!"

He left the tent. His generals, hypaspistes, pretorians, captains and lifeguards dispersed in all directions, in order to muster their men.

In a quarter of an hour the whole army was in motion towards the hills.

No time was lost in breaking up the camp, and the sudden movement caused endless confusion.

Foot and horse got mingled together in the dark and moonless night. And rumours of the superiority of the advancing barbarians had also spread discouragement among the soldiers.

Two rather narrow roads alone led to the hills, which circumstance caused much hindrance, and blocking of the way.

Far later than the hour appointed by Belisarius, the army arrived in sight of the hills; and when the first beams of the sun shone upon them, Calpurnius, the leader of the vanguard, saw Gothic weapons glittering upon all the heights. The barbarians had been beforehand with Belisarius.

Alarmed, Calpurnius halted, and sent word to the commander-in-chief.

Belisarius plainly saw that Calpurnius and his horsemen could not storm the hills. He therefore gave orders that Ambuzach and Bessas, with

the best of the Armenian foot-soldiers, should advance upon the broader road. The right and left wings of the army were led by Constantinus and Demetrius; he himself led up his body-guard as a reserve for the centre.

Calpurnius, rejoiced at the change of plan, placed his horsemen below the steepest part of a hill, where he thought himself safe from an attack, and waited for the result of the movements of Ambazuch and Bessas, in order to pursue the flying Goths or support the retreating Armenians according to circumstances.

On the summit of the heights the Goths placed themselves in an extended line of battle.

Totila's horsemen had arrived the first; he was soon joined by Teja, mounted and feverish with thirst for battle. The axe-bearing foot were far behind, for Teja had begged permission to join in the hand-to-hand fight when and where he pleased.

Hildebrand followed later; and lastly the King with the main army.

Duke Guntharis, with his own and Teja's men, was expected to arrive shortly.

Swift as an arrow Teja flew back to the King.

"King," he cried, "beneath yonder hill stands Belisarius. By the God of Revenge, he is lost! He has been mad enough to advance. Do not suffer him to be beforehand with us in the attack."

"Forward!" cried King Witichis; "the Goths to the front!"

In a moment he had reached the edge of the hill and overlooked the valley at his feet.

"Hildebad--the left wing! Thou, Totila, wilt charge in the centre with thy horsemen down that road. I shall keep the right, ready to follow or cover thee."

"That will be needless," said Totila, drawing his sword. "I warrant that they will not be able to withstand my charge down that hill."

"We shall drive the enemy back to the camp, take it, and force them into that shining brook just behind. Those who still remain, Totila and Teja, you will drive over the plain to Rome."

"Yes, when we have won the pass in those wood-crowned hills just beyond the river," said Teja, pointing with his sword as he spoke.

"It appears to be unoccupied; you must reach it before the fugitives," said Witichis.

Just then the standard-bearer. Earl Wisand of Vulsinii, rode up to the King.

"King, thou hast promised to grant me a request."

"Yes, because at Solona, thou overthrewest the magister militum for Illyrium, Mundus, and his son."

"I have a grudge against all magistri militum. I should like to try the same spear on Belisarius. Relieve me of my banner to-day, and allow me to seek the magister militum. He has a celebrated charger, Phalion or Balion, and my horse is getting stiff. And thou knowest the ancient right of a Gothic horseman. 'Throw the rider and take his horse.'"

"A good old Gothic right," cried old Hildebrand.

"I cannot refuse thy request," said Witichis, taking the flag from the hand of Wisand, who at once galloped away.

"Guntharis is not here. Totila, thou shalt bear the banner to-day."

"King," said Totila, "I cannot carry it if I am to show my horsemen the way to the enemy."

Witichis signed to Teja.

"Forgive me," said Teja, "to-day I need both hands."

"Well then, Hildebad!"

"Many thanks for the honour; but I do not intend to do worse than the others."

"What?" cried Witichis, almost angry; "must I be my own standard-bearer? Will none of my friends honour my trust?"

"Give me the flag of Theodoric," said old Hildebrand, grasping the mighty shaft. "It pleases me that the youths so thirst for fame. Give me the banner, I will defend it to-day as I did forty summers ago."

And from that moment he rode at the King's right hand.

"The enemy's foot are advancing up the hill," said Witichis, raising himself in the saddle.

"They are Huns and Armenians," said Teja, looking forward with his eagle-eyes, "I recognise their long shields!" And spurring his horse, he cried: "And Ambazuch, the perjured murderer of Petra, leads them."

"Forward, Totila!" cried the King; "and of *these* troops--make no prisoners!"

Totila rapidly galloped off to his horsemen, who were placed at the top of the steep road which led down the hill. He carefully examined the armour of the Armenians, who were slowly advancing up the ascent in close columns. They carried very long and heavy shields, and short spears for thrusting and throwing.

"They must not have time to hurl their spears," cried Totila.

He then ordered his horsemen, at the moment of encountering the enemy, to change their lances from their right hand to their left, letting their bridles hang loosely from the wrist, and passing their lances across the manes of their horses into the bridle hand. In this way they would hit the enemy on their unprotected side.

"As soon as the encounter has taken place--they will not be able to withstand it--throw your lances back into the arm-strap, draw your swords, and kill whoever still stands."

He now placed his men in the shape of a wedge on the road and on each side of it, outflanking the enemy's column. He himself led the thin edge of the wedge. He determined to allow the enemy to ascend halfway up the hill.

Both parties looked forward to the shock in breathless expectation.

Ambazuch, an experienced warrior, quietly marched forward.

"Let them come on," he said to his people, "until you feel their horses' breath upon your faces. Then, and not before, hurl your lances. Aim low, at the breasts of the horses, and immediately after draw your swords. In this way I have always succeeded in overthrowing horsemen."

But it turned out otherwise.

For when Totila gave the order to charge, it seemed as if a thundering avalanche were descending the hill upon the terrified enemy. The shining, clattering, snorting, threatening mass rushed on like a hurricane, and before the first row of the Armenians had found time even to raise their spears, they lay upon the ground, pierced through by the long lances. They had been swept away as if they had never stood there.

All this had taken place in a moment of time; and when Ambazuch was about to order his second line, in which he himself stood, to kneel and shorten their spears, he found it already ridden over; the third rank dispersed; and the fourth, under Bessas, able to offer but a faint resistance to the terrible horsemen, who now began to draw their swords.

He tried to rally his men; he flew back and called to his wavering lines to stand and fight; but just then Totila's sword reached him; a mighty stroke crushed in his helmet.

He fell on his knees, and held the hilt of his sword towards the Goth.

"Take a ransom!" he cried. "I am yours!"

Totila was about to stretch forth his hand to take the sword, when Teja cried:

"Remember Petra!"

A weapon flashed, and Ambazuch sank dead on the ground.

At this the last lines of the Armenians, carrying Bessas away with them, fled in terror. Belisarius's vanguard was annihilated.

With loud cries of joy King Witichis and his followers had witnessed Totila's victory.

"Look! now the Hunnish horsemen, who stand just below us, advance against Totila," said the King to the old standard-bearer. "Totila turns to meet them. They are much more numerous. Up, Hildebad! Hasten down the road to his aid."

"Ha!" cried old Hildebrand, bending forward in his saddle, and looking over the edge of the rocks, "who is that tribune between the two body-guards of Belisarius?"

Witichis bent forward also.

"Calpurnius!" he exclaimed with a sharp cry.

And suddenly, seeking no path, just from where he stood, the King galloped down the hill towards his deadly enemy. The fear that Calpurnius might escape him overpowered every other thought.

As if on wings, as if the God of Revenge were guiding him over bush and crevice and ditch and pointed rock, the King galloped madly on.

For an instant the old master-at-arms was horrified; such a ride he had never beheld. But the next moment he waved his blue flag and cried:

"Forward! follow your King!"

And, the horsemen first, the foot after, the centre of the Gothic army, leaping, jumping, and sliding down upon their shields, suddenly descended the steep side of the hill upon the Hunnish cavalry.

Calpurnius had looked up. It had seemed to him as if he heard his name, and the cry sounded like the last trump of judgment.

He turned, and would have fled.

But the grim soldiers on his right and left caught his bridle.

"Halt, tribune!" said Antallas, pointing to Totila's horsemen--"*there* is the enemy!"

A cry of pain to the left caused him and Calpurnius to turn. The Hun Kuturgur, the second of the body-guards, sank with a crash from his saddle, felled by the sword-stroke of a Goth who appeared to have dropped from the sky. And behind this Goth, the rocky steep, which yet seemed inaccessible, was filled with climbing and leaping men, and the Huns were suddenly taken in the flank by this enemy from above, while at the same time they were attacked in front by Totila.

Calpurnius recognised the Goth.

"Witichis!" he cried in terror, and his arm fell powerless at his side.

But his horse saved him. Wounded and startled by the fall of Kuturgur, it galloped wildly away. Antallas threw himself furiously upon the King of the Goths, who was far in advance of his men.

"Down, madman!" he cried.

But the next moment he was slain by Witichis, who irresistibly, trampled down all those who stood in his path.

Through the crowd of Hunnish cavalry, who, terrified at his look, yielded to right and left, Witichis pursued Calpurnius.

The latter had recovered the mastery of his horse, and now sought protection in the thickest press of his soldiers.

In vain.

Witichis did not lose sight of him for a moment, but followed him closely.

However he might hide himself among his men, however rapidly he rode, Calpurnius could not escape the King, who beat down all who stood between him and the murderer of his son.

Group after group, knot after knot, dissolved before the terrible sword of the revengeful father. The lines of the Huns were broken through by the fugitive and his pursuer. They were not able to close again, for, even before Totila could come up, the old standard-bearer, with horse and foot, had broken their right flank, dividing it into two parts.

When Totila galloped up, he found only flying foes. The portion to the right was soon taken between Totila and Hildebrand, and destroyed. The greater part on the left fled back to Belisarius.

Meantime Calpurnius galloped over the field as if pursued by the Furies.

He had a good start, for Witichis had been seven times obliged to hew his way through the enemy.

But Boreas galloped bravely on, and carried Witichis ever nearer to his victim.

The fugitive heard the call to stand and fight. He only spurred his horse the faster.

All at once it fell beneath him, and before he could rise, Witichis stood over him.

Springing from his saddle, Witichis now silently pushed the sword of the fallen man, which had dropped from the latter's hand, towards him.

Then Calpurnius took courage--the courage of despair.

He rose to his feet, took up his sword, and sprang at the Goth with a leap like that of a tiger.

But in the middle of his leap he fell prone to the ground; the sword of Witichis had split his forehead open.

The King set his foot upon the breast of the corpse, and looked into the distorted face. He sighed deeply.

"Revenge is sweet, but it will not bring back my child!"

With deep ire Belisarius had witnessed this unhappy commencement of the battle. But his confidence and composure did not abandon him, even when he saw the Armenians swept away, and the horsemen of Calpurnius overthrown and scattered.

He was now convinced of the strength and superiority of the enemy. But he determined to advance upon his whole line, leaving a gap in which to receive his fugitive horsemen.

But this the Goths were quick to perceive; and, Witichis foremost, they followed Totila and Hildebrand--who had annihilated the surrounded Huns--and pressed forward so furiously that they threatened to reach and break through the lines of Belisarius at the same moment with the fugitives.

This could not be permitted.

Belisarius himself filled the gap with his bodyguard on foot, and shouted to the fugitive horsemen to halt and turn.

But it seemed as if the terror which had possessed their cowardly and fallen leader had entered their hearts. They dreaded the sword of the Gothic King behind them even more than their thundering chief before them, and without pause or stay they rushed on at a gallop, as if they intended to ride down their own comrades.

For one moment a fearful shock--a thousand-voiced cry of fear and rage--a confused turmoil of mingled horse and foot--among them slaughtering Goths--and suddenly a dispersal to all sides, amid shrill cries of victory from the enemy.

The body-guard of Belisarius was ridden down; his main line of battle broken.

He ordered the retreat to the camp.

But it was no longer a retreat, it was a rout. The footmen of Hildebad, Guntharis, and Teja had now arrived upon the field of battle. The Byzantines saw their order of attack broken, they despaired of further resistance and fled in great confusion to the camp.

Notwithstanding, they would still have been able to reach it a long time before their pursuers, had not an unforeseen occurrence stopped the way.

Belisarius had set forth with such certainty of victory, that he had ordered all the carriages and baggage of the army, and even the herds of cattle--which, according to the custom of the time, were driven after--to follow the troops upon the high-roads.

The retreating masses now encountered this slowly advancing body, difficult to move and difficult to disperse, and indescribable confusion ensued.

Soldiers and drivers came to blows; the order of march was broken against the wagons, carriages, and chests. The lust of booty was awakened, and many of the soldiers began to plunder the wagons, before they should fall into the hands of the enemy.

On all sides arose altercations, curses, laments, and throats, accompanied by the crash of broken wagons, and the bleating and bellowing of the terrified herds.

"Sacrifice the baggage! Fire the wagons! Gallop through the herds!" cried Belisarius, who, sword in hand, now broke a path through the turmoil with the remnant of his body-guard.

But it was all in vain.

Ever thicker, ever more entangled became the coil; it seemed impossible to unravel it.

Despair at length tore it asunder.

The cry, "The barbarians are upon us!" sounded from the rear.

And it was no idle rumour.

Hildebad, with his foot-soldiers, had descended to the plain, and his foremost ranks now attacked the defenceless mass. There ensued a fearful press to the front; cries of terror--of rage from the body-guard, who, mindful of their former valour, attempted to fight, but could not--of anguish from those trampled and crushed; and suddenly the greater part of the wagons, with their teams and the thousands who were crowded upon them or jammed between them, fell with a thundering crash into the ditches on the right and left of the high-road.

So at last the way was open--and impetuously, all discipline at an end, the stream of fugitives rushed on to the camp.

With loud cries of victory the Gothic foot-soldiers followed, slaying their easy prey with arrows, slings, and spears; while Belisarius, in the rear, resisted with difficulty the unceasing attacks of Totila and the King.

"Help, Belisarius!" cried Aigan, the leader of the Massagetian mercenaries, as he rode up from among the scattered groups, wiping the blood from his face. "My countrymen swear they see the devil amidst the enemy. They will not stand. Help me! Usually they fear you much more than the devil!"

Grinding his teeth, Belisarius looked across at his right wing, which was flying in disorder over the fallows, pursued by the Goths.

"O Justinian, my imperial master," he exclaimed, "how badly I keep my word!"

And, entrusting the further defence of the retreat to the camp to

Demetrius--for the uneven ground upon which they had now entered embarrassed the pursuit of the enemy's horse---he galloped across country with Aigan and his mounted guard to join the mercenaries.

"Halt!" he thundered; "halt, you cowardly dogs! Who flies, when Belisarius stands? I am with you; turn and win!" And he raised his visor, and showed them his majestic countenance.

And such was the power of his personality, so great the belief in his invincibility, that all who recognised the tall form of the commander on his roan, hesitated, halted, and with a cry of encouragement, turned once more to face the pursuing Goths.

Here, at least, the flight was at an end.

Up came a tremendous Goth, easily forcing his way.

"Ha, ha! I am glad you are tired of running, you swift-footed Greeks! I could no longer pant after you! Your legs are superior to ours; let us see if your arms be so too. Ha! why do you fall back, my lads? Because of him on the roan? What of him?"

"Sir, that must be a King among the southerners; one can hardly bear the glance of his angry eye."

"That would indeed be curious. Ah! that must be Belisarius! I am glad to meet thee, thou bold hero!" he cried across to Belisarius. "Dismount, and let us measure the strength of our arms. Look, I too am on foot. Thou wilt not?" he cried angrily. "Must I fetch thee down from thy hack?"

And he swung his immense spear in his right hand.

"Turn, sir, avoid him!" cried Aigan: "that giant hurls small masts!"

"Turn, general," repeated the hypaspistes anxiously.

But Belisarius, raising his short sword, rode quietly a horse's length nearer to the Goth. Whizzing came the mighty spear, straight at his breast.

But just before it touched, a swift stroke of his short Roman sword, and the spear fell harmless on one side.

"Hail to Belisarius, hail!" cried the Byzantines, and they pressed forward anew.

"A famous stroke!" laughed Hildebad angrily. "Let us see if thy fence can parry *this*!"

And, bending forward, he lifted from the ploughed field an old jagged boundary-stone, swung it in both hands backward and forward, lifted it above his head, and hurled it with all his might at the advancing hero.

A cry from the Byzantines--Belisarius fell backwards from his horse.

All was over.

"Belisarius down! Woe, woe! All is lost!" cried the Byzantines, as the tall form disappeared, and fled madly towards the camp.

A few ran on without pause until they reached the gates of Rome.

It was in vain that the lance and spear-bearers threw themselves desperately against the Goths; they could only save their chief, but not the battle.

The first sword-stroke of Hildebad, who now rushed up to Belisarius, was received on the faithful breast of Maxentius. But also a Gothic horseman, who was the next to reach the place, and who had killed seven men before he could make his way to the magister militum, fell from his horse. His followers found him pierced by thirteen wounds. But he was still alive, and he was one of the few who fought through and outlived the whole war--Wisand, the bandelarius.

Belisarius, who, lifted on to his horse by Aigan and Valentinus, his groom, had quickly recovered his senses, raised his general's staff in vain, and cried to the fugitives to stand. They could not and would not hear. In vain he struck at them right and left; he was irresistibly carried away by the press to the very camp.

There, behind the solid gates, he at last succeeded in arresting the pursuit of the Goths.

"All honour is lost," he said indignantly; "let us at least save our lives."

With these words he closed the gates, without any regard to the large masses of people still outside.

An attempt of Hildebad to enter the camp without more ado was frustrated by the strong oaken palisades, which defied the spears and stones hurled at them.

Leaning on his sword, Hildebad cooled himself for a moment. Just then Teja, who, like the King and Totila, had long since dismounted, turned the corner of the wall, which he had been examining and measuring.

"This confounded wooden fortress!" cried Hildebad, as Teja came up. "Neither stone nor iron can do any good here."

"No," said Teja; "but fire can!"

He stirred with his foot a heap of ashes which lay near.

"These are from last night's watch-fires. Here are still some sparks, and brushwood lies near. Come, my men, put up your swords and kindle the brushwood. Set the camp on fire!"

"Splendid fellow!" cried Hildebad rejoicingly. "Quick, lads! burn them out as you would a fox in his hole! The brisk north wind will help us!"

The dying watch-fires were speedily fanned into flame; hundreds of fire-brands flew into the dry planks of the palisading.

Very soon bright flames rose to the sky.

The thick smoke, driven into the camp by the wind, blinded the Byzantines, and rendered the defence of the walls impossible. They retreated to the centre of the camp.

"Oh that I were dead!" sighed Belisarius. "Evacuate the camp! Out by the Porta Decumana! Retreat in good order to the bridges behind us!"

But the command to leave the camp broke the last ties of discipline and order.

While the charred beams of the gate fell under the thundering strokes of Teja's axe, and the Black Earl was the first to spring into the camp through the flames and smoke, the fugitives tore open all the gates which led to Rome, and hastened in confused masses to the river.

The first comers reached the two bridges unhindered and unfollowed.

They had some time to spare before Hildebad and Teja could compel Belisarius to leave the burning camp.

But suddenly--oh, horror!--the Gothic horns sounded close at hand.

Witichis and Totila, as soon as they knew that the camp was taken, had mounted at once, and now led their horsemen from the right and left, to attack the fugitives in the flank.

Belisarius had just galloped out of the camp by the Decumanian Gate, and was hurrying to one of the bridges, when he saw the threatening troops of horsemen rushing up on both sides.

The great general still preserved his composure.

"Forwards at a gallop to the bridges!" he commanded his Saracens; "defend them!"

It was too late. A dull crash; then a second--the two narrow bridges had broken beneath the weight of the crowding fugitives, and by hundreds the Hunnish horsemen and the Illyrian lance-bearers--Justinian's pride--fell into the marshy waters.

Without reflecting, Belisarius, who had just reached the steep bank, spurred his horse into the foaming blood-flecked river, and swam to the other side.

"Salomo," he said to one of his pretorians, as soon as he had landed, "take a handful of my guards and gallop as hard as you can to the pass. Ride over the fugitives; you must reach it before the Goths! Do you hear? You *must*! It is our last plank of salvation!"

Salomo and Dagisthæos obeyed, and galloped away as swift as the wind.

Belisarius collected together all whom he could reach. The Goths, as well as the Byzantines, were detained for a time by the river.

But suddenly Aigan cried:

"Salomo is returning!"

"General," cried Salomo, as he galloped up, "all is lost! Weapons glitter in the pass! It is already occupied by the Goths!"

For the first time on this unhappy day Belisarius started.

"The pass lost? Then not a man of my Emperor's army will escape. Then farewell fame, Antonina, and life! Come, Aigan, draw your sword; let me not fall living into the hands of the barbarians."

"General," said Aigan, "I have never heard you speak thus!"

"I have never before felt thus. Let us dismount and die!"

He was taking his left foot out of the stirrup, in order to spring from his horse, when Dagisthæos galloped up.

"Be comforted, my general! The pass is ours--it is Roman weapons that we saw there. It is Cethegus, the Prefect; he occupied the pass in secret!"

"Cethegus?" cried Belisarius. "Is it possible? Is it certain?"

"Yes, my general. Look! It was high time!"

It was indeed. For a troop of Gothic horsemen, sent by King Witichis, had arrived at the pass, crossing the river by a ford, before the fugitives.

But just as they were about to enter it, Cethegus, at the head of his Illyrians, broke out of his ambush, and, after a short combat, drove back the surprised Goths.

"The first gleam of victory on this black day!" cried Belisarius. "Up! to the pass!"

And, in better order than before, the commander led his newly-rallied troops to the woody hill.

"Welcome to safety, Belisarius," cried Cethegus, as he cleansed the blade of his sword. "I have waited for you here since daybreak. I was sure that you would come."

"Prefect of Rome," said Belisarius, reaching out his hand, as he sat on his horse, "you have saved the Emperor's army, which I had lost. I thank you!"

The Prefect's fresh troops stood in the pass like an impenetrable wall, allowing the scattered Byzantines to pass, and repelling without difficulty the attacks of the first fatigued pursuers, who pressed forward over the river.

At the close of day. King Witichis withdrew his troops to pass the night on the conquered field, while Belisarius and his generals, at the back of the pass, mustered, as well as they could, the scattered remnants of the army as they arrived, singly or in groups.

As soon as Belisarius had once more a few thousand men together, he rode up to Cethegus, and said:

"What think you, Prefect of Rome? Your men are still fresh, and mine have yet to blunt their weapons. Let us sally forth once more, and turn the fortune of this day. The sun will not set yet awhile."

Cethegus looked at him with astonishment, and quoted Homer's words:

"'Truly thou hast spoken a terrible word, thou mighty one!' You never-to-be-satisfied man! Is it so hard for you to leave a battle-field without victory? No, Belisarius. There beckon the ramparts of Rome. Thither lead your harassed men. I will keep the pass until you have reached the city; and I shall be glad if I can succeed in doing so."

And so it was arranged. Under such circumstances Belisarius was less than ever able to oppose the will of the Prefect. So he yielded, and led his army back to Rome, where he arrived at nightfall.

For a long time he was refused admittance; for, covered with dust and blood, it was difficult to recognise him, and many fugitives had brought word from the field of battle that the commander had fallen, and that all was lost.

At last Antonina, who waited anxiously upon the walls, recognised her husband.

He was admitted at the Pincian Gate, which was afterwards named Porta Belisaria.

Beacons on the walls, between the Flaminian and Pincian Gates, announced his entrance to Cethegus, who then, under cover of night, accomplished his retreat in good order, scarcely followed by the wearied victors.

Teja alone, with a few of his horsemen, pressed forward to the hilly country, where the Villa Borghese is now situated, and as far as the Aqua

CHAPTER VII.

The following day the immense army of the Goths appeared before the walls of the Eternal City, which it surrounded in seven camps.

And now began that memorable siege, which was to develop the military talent and inventive genius of Belisarius no less than the courage of the besiegers.

The citizens of Rome had with consternation beheld from the walls the interminable march of the Goths.

"Look, Prefect, they outflank all your walls."

"Yes, in breadth! but in height? They cannot get over them without wings."

Witichis had left only two thousand men behind in Ravenna; eight thousand he had sent, under Earl Uligis of Urbssalvia, and Earl Ansa of Asculum, to Dalmatia, to wrest that province and Liburnia from the Byzantines, and to reconquer the strong fortress of Salona. These troops were to be reinforced by mercenaries recruited in Savia.

The Gothic fleet--against Teja's advice--was also to repair thither, and not to Portus, the harbour of Rome.

But the King now surrounded, with a hundred and fifty thousand warriors, the city of Rome and its far-stretching ramparts, the walls of Aurelian and the Prefect.

Rome had at that time fifteen principal gates and a few smaller ones.

The weaker part of the ramparts--the space between the Flaminian Gate in the north (on the east of the present Porta del Popolo) to the Prænestinian Gate--was completely surrounded by six camps, thus: the walls from the Flaminian Gate eastwards as far as the Pincian and Salarian Gates; then to the Nomentanian Gate (south-east of Porta Pia); farther towards the "closed gate," or Porta Clausa; and finally southwards, the Tiburtinian (now Porta San Lorenzo), the Asinarian, Metronian, and Latin Gates (on the Via Latina), the Appian Gate (on the Via Appia), and the St. Paul's Gate, which lay close to the Tiber.

These six camps were erected on the left bank of the river.

But in order to prevent the besieged from destroying the Milvian Bridge, and thus cutting off the way across the river and the whole district from the right bank as far as the sea, the Goths erected a seventh camp upon the right bank of the Tiber, on the "field of Nero," which reached from the Vatican Hill nearly to the Milvian Bridge (under Monte Mario).

So this bridge was dominated, and that of Hadrian threatened, by a Gothic camp, as well as the road to the city through the "Porta Sancti Petri," as the inner Aurelian Gate, according to Procopius, was already called at that time.

It was the entrance nearest to the Mausoleum of Hadrian.

But also the gate of St. Pancratius, on the right bank of the river, was especially watched by the Goths.

This camp upon the field of Nero, between the Pancratian and Peter's Gates, had been assigned to Earl Markja of Mediolanum, who had been recalled from the Cottian Alps. But the King himself often repaired thither in order to examine the Mausoleum. He had undertaken the command of no particular camp, reserving to himself the general supervision; and he had divided the other six camps between Hildebrand, Totila, Hildebad, Teja, Guntharis, and Grippa.

He caused each of the seven camps to be surrounded with a deep moat, throwing up the excavated earth in high banks between the moat and camp, and strengthening them with stout palisades, as a protection against sallies from the city.

Belisarius and Cethegus also divided their generals and their men according to the sections and gates of Rome.

Belisarius confided the defence of the Prænestinian Gate in the eastern quarter (now Porta Maggiore) to Bessas, and the important Flaminian Gate, close to which lay the camp of Totila, to Constantinus, who caused it to be almost closed with blocks of marble, taken from ancient temples and palaces.

The Prefect jealously kept the western and southern quarters of the city under his own strict surveillance, but in the north Belisarius settled down between the Flaminian and Pincian--or now "Belisarian"--Gates (the weakest part of the ramparts), and formed plans of sallies against the barbarians.

The remaining gates were entrusted to the leaders of the foot-soldiers: Piranius, Magnus, Ennes, Artabanus, Azarethas, and Chilbudius.

The Prefect had undertaken the defence of all the gates on the right bank of the Tiber; the new Porta Aurelia on the Ælisian Bridge near the Mausoleum, the Porta Septimiana, the old Aurelian Gate, which was now named the Pancratian; and on the left bank, that of St. Paul.

The next gate to the east, the Ardeatinian, was again under the protection of a Byzantine garrison, commanded by Chilbudius.

The besiegers and the besieged proved themselves equally indefatigable and equally inventive in plans of attack and defence.

For a long time the only thing the Goths could attempt was to harass the Romans before storming the walls. On their side, the Romans prepared to defend them when attacked. The Goths--lords and masters in the Campagna--sought to distress the besieged by cutting off all the fourteen splendid aqueducts which supplied the city with water.

As soon as Belisarius learned this fact, he hastened to block the mouths of the aqueducts within the city.

"For," Procopius had said to him, "since you, O great hero, Belisarius, have crept into Neapolis through such a water-runnel, the same idea might occur to the barbarians, and they would scarcely think it a shame to crawl into Rome by a similar hero-path."

The besieged were now obliged to deny themselves the luxury of their baths; the wells in the quarters of the city at a distance from the river scarcely sufficed for drinking water.

But by cutting off the supply of water, the barbarians had also deprived the Romans of bread.

At least it seemed so, for all the water-mills of Rome were stopped.

The garnered grain bought in Sicily by Cethegus, and that which Belisarius had, by force, caused to be brought into Rome from all the neighbouring country, in spite of the outcry of farmers and husbandmen, could no longer be ground.

"Let the mills be turned by asses and oxen!" cried Belisarius.

"Most of the asses and oxen were too wise to allow themselves to be shut up with us here, O Belisarius," said Procopius; "we have only as many as we shall want for the shambles, and it is impossible that they should first drive the mills and then be still fat enough to afford meat to eat with the bread thus gained."

"Then call Martinus. Yesterday, as I stood by the Tiber counting the Gothic tents, I had an idea----"

"Which Martinus must translate from the Belisarian into the possible! Poor man! But I will go and fetch him."

But when, on the evening of the same day, Belisarius and Martinus caused the first boat-mills that the world had ever known to be erected in the Tiber, by means of boats ranged one near the other, Procopius said admiringly:

"The bread of these boat-mills will rejoice men longer than your greatest deeds. Flour, ground in this wise, savours of immortality."

And indeed these boat-mills, imagined by Belisarius and practically carried out by Martinus, fully compensated to the besieged, during the whole siege, for the loss of the powerless water-mills.

Behind the bridge which is now called Ponte San Sisto, on the flat of the Janiculum, Belisarius caused two boats to be fastened with ropes, and laid mills over their flat decks, so that the wheels were driven by the river, which streamed from between the arches of the bridge with increased force.

The besiegers, who were informed of these arrangements by deserters from the city, soon attempted to destroy them.

They threw beams, rafts, and trees into the river above the bridge, and in a single night all the mills were destroyed.

But Belisarius caused them to be reconstructed, and ordered strong chains to be drawn across the river above the bridge, which caught and arrested everything that floated down.

These iron river-bolts were not only intended to protect the mills, but also to prevent the Goths from reaching the city on boats or rafts.

For now Witichis began to make preparations for storming the city.

He caused wooden towers, higher than the ramparts, to be built, which, placed upon four wheels, could be drawn by oxen. Then he caused storming-ladders to be prepared in great numbers, and four tremendous rams or wall-breakers, which were each pushed and served by fifty men.

The deep moats were to be filled up with countless bundles of brushwood and reeds.

To defeat these plans, Belisarius and Cethegus, the first defending the city in the north and east, the latter in the west and south, planted catapults and other projectile machines on the walls, which were able to cast immense spears to a great distance, with such force that they could pierce the strongest coat of mail.

They protected the gates by means of "wolves," that is, cross-beams set with iron spikes, which were let crashing down upon the assaulters as soon as the latter approached the gate.

And, lastly, they strewed innumerable caltrops and steel-traps upon the space between the town-moats and the camp of the besiegers.

CHAPTER VIII.

In spite of all this, it was said by the Romans that the Goths would long since have climbed the walls, had it not been for the Prefect's "Egeria."

For, strange to say, each time the barbarians prepared an assault, Cethegus went to Belisarius and warned him of the day and hour.

Whenever Teja or Hildebad attempted to carry a gate by storm or sweep away a redoubt--Cethegus foretold their coming, and the assaulters met with double the usual number of defenders at that particular point.

Whenever the chains across the Tiber were to be broken in a night surprise--Cethegus seemed to have guessed it, and sent fire-brands and fire-ships against the boats of the enemy.

So passed many months.

The Goths could not hide from themselves the fact that, in spite of continual assaults, they had made no progress since the commencement of the siege.

For a long time they bore with patience the betrayal and frustration of their plans.

But by degrees discontent not only began to spread in the army, especially as now the scarcity of provisions made itself felt, but also the King's mind was darkened with deep melancholy when he found all his strength, perseverance, and military science rendered vain. And when he returned to his royal tent from some thwarted undertaking, some abortive assault, the haughty eyes of his Queen rested on him with a mysterious and terrible expression, from which he turned away with a shudder.

"All has happened as I foretold," Witichis said gloomily to Teja; "with Rauthgundis my good-fortune has forsaken me, as joy has forsaken my heart. It is if a curse rested upon my crown. And this daughter of the Amelungs, silent and gloomy, follows me like misfortune personified."

"Thou mayst be right," answered Teja; "perhaps I can break the spell. Grant me leave of absence to-night."

On the same day, almost at the same hour, Johannes, in Rome, asked Belisarius for leave of absence for that night. Belisarius refused to grant it.

"It is no time for midnight pleasures," said he.

"It will be small pleasure to spy amongst damp old walls and Gothic lances for a fox who is ten times slyer than either of us."

"What do you think of doing?" asked Belisarius, becoming attentive.

"What do I intend to do? To make an end of the cursed position in which we are all placed, and you, O General, not the least. All goes well. For months the barbarians have been encamped before these walls, and have accomplished nothing. We shoot them as easily as boys shoot crows

from behind a hedge, and can laugh at them and all their efforts. But who has accomplished all this? Not, as would be right, you, the Emperor's commander-in-chief, not the Emperor's army, but this icy Roman, who can only laugh when he scoffs. He sits up there in the Capitol and mocks at the Emperor, the Goths and us, and most of all, give me leave to say, at you. How does this Ulysses and Ajax in one person know so exactly all the plans of the Goths? By means of his demons, say some. Through his Egeria, say others. And some maintain that he has a raven which can speak and understand like a human being, and that he sends it every night into the Gothic camp. Old women and Romans may believe such things, but not the son of my mother! I think I know both the raven and the demons. It is certain that the Prefect can only learn what he knows in the Gothic camp; let us see if we cannot use that source as well as he."

"I thought of this long since, but I saw no possibility of carrying out my idea."

"My Huns have watched all the Prefect's movements. It is cursedly difficult, for his brown Moor follows him like his shadow. But sometimes Syphax is absent for days together, and then it is easier: so I have found out that Cethegus often leaves the city at night, sometimes by the Gate of Portuensis, sometimes by the Gate of St. Paul. He commands the guard of both these gates. Farther my spies dared not follow him. But to-night--for to-night the time has come again--I have a mind to stick to his heels. But I must wait for him *outside* the gate, for his Isaurians would never let me pass. I shall make a round of the walls, and remain behind in one of the trenches."

"'Tis well. But, as you say, there are two gates to be watched."

"Yes; and so I have engaged Perseus, my brother, to be my fellow-spy. He will watch the Gate of St. Paul, I the Portuensian Gate. You may depend upon it, that before sunrise to-morrow one or other of us will know who is the Prefect's Egeria."

Exactly opposite the Gate of St. Paul, at about three arrow-shots, distance from the outermost trench of the city, lay a large and ancient building, the Basilica Sancti Pauli extra muros, or St. Paul's outside the walls, which only completely disappeared at the time of the siege of Rome by the Connétable of Bourbon.

Originally a temple dedicated to Jupiter Stator, it had been consecrated to the Apostle two centuries before the time of which we speak, but the bronze colossal statue of the bearded god still stood erect; only the flaming thunderbolts had been taken from its right hand, and a crucifix put in their place; otherwise the sturdy and bearded figure was well suited to its new name.

It was the sixth hour of the night.

The moon shone brightly above the Eternal City, and shed her silver light upon the battlements and the plain between the Roman ramparts and the Basilica, the black shadow of which fell towards the Gothic camp.

The guard at the Gate of St. Paul had just been relieved. But seven men had gone out, and only six re-entered.

The seventh turned his back to the gate and walked out into the open field.

Cautiously he chose his path: cautiously he avoided the numerous steel-traps, covered pits and self-shooting poisoned arrows which were strewn everywhere about, and which had already brought destruction to many a Goth while assaulting the city.

This man appeared to know them all, and easily avoided them. He also carefully shunned the moonlight, seeking the shade of the jutting bastions, and springing from one tree to another.

After crossing the outermost trench, he remained standing in the shadow of a cypress, the boughs of which, had been shattered by a catapult, and looked about him.

He could see nothing far and near, and at once hurried with rapid steps towards the church.

Had he looked round once more, he surely would not have done so.

For, as soon as he left the tree, a second figure rose from the trench, and reached the shade of the cypress in three leaps.

"I have won, Johannes! This time fortune favours the younger brother!" said this personage.

And he cautiously followed the man, who was rapidly walking on.

But suddenly he lost sight of him; it seemed as if the earth had swallowed him up.

And when he had reached the outer wall of the church, where the man had disappeared, the Armenian (for it was Perseus) could discover neither door nor any other opening.

"No doubt about it," he said to himself, "the appointment has been made within the temple. I must follow."

But at that place the wall could not be climbed.

The spy turned a corner, feeling the stones.

In vain. The wall was of the same height everywhere.

He lost about a quarter of an hour in this search.

At last he found a gap; with difficulty he squeezed himself through.

And now he found himself in the outer court of the old temple, across which the thick Doric columns threw broad shadows, under cover of which he succeeded in reaching the centre and principal building.

He peeped through a chink in the wall, which a current of air had betrayed to him. Within all was dark.

But suddenly he was blinded by a dazzling light.

When he again opened his eyes, he saw a bright stripe amid the darkness; it issued from a dark lantern, the light of which had been suddenly uncovered.

He could distinctly see whatever stood in the line of light; but not the bearer of the lantern.

He saw Cethegus the Prefect, who stood close to the statue of the Apostle, and appeared to be leaning against it. In front of him stood a second form, that of a slender woman, upon whose auburn hair fell the glittering light of the lantern.

"The lovely Queen of the Goths, by Eros and Anteros!" said the spy to himself. "No disagreeable meeting, be it for love or politics! Hark! she speaks. What a pity that I came too late to hear the beginning of the

conversation!"

"Therefore, mark well," he heard the Queen say, "the day after tomorrow some great danger is planned to take place on the road before the Tiburtinian Gate."

"Good; but what!" asked the voice of the Prefect.

"I could learn nothing more exactly. And I can communicate nothing more to you, even if I should hear anything. I dare not meet you here again, for----"

She now spoke in a lower tone.

Perseus pressed his ear hard against the chink; his sword rattled against the stone, and immediately a ray of the lantern fell upon him.

"Hark!" cried a third voice--it was a female voice, that of the bearer of the lantern, who now showed herself in its rays as she quickly turned in the direction of the wall where stood the spy.

Perseus recognised a slave in Moorish costume.

For one moment all in the temple were silent.

Perseus held his breath. He felt that his life was at stake. For Cethegus grasped his sword.

"All is quiet," said the slave; "it must have been a stone falling on the iron-work outside."

"I can also go no more into the grave outside the Portuensian Gate. I fear that we have been followed."

"By whom?"

"By one who, as it seems, never sleeps--Earl Teja."

The Prefect's lips twitched.

"And he is also one of a secret company who have sworn an oath against the life of Belisarius; the attack on the Gate of St. Paul will be only a feint."

"'Tis well," said Cethegus reflectively.

"Belisarius could never escape, if he were not warned," continued the Queen. "They lie somewhere, I fear--but I do not know where--in ambush. They have a superior force, Earl Totila commands them."

"I will take care to warn him!" said Cethegus slowly.

"If the plan should succeed!"

"Be not anxious. Queen. Rome is not less dear to me than to you. And if the next assault fail--they must renounce the siege, be they never so tough. And this Queen, is your doing. Let me this night--perhaps the last on which we meet--reveal to you my wonder and admiration. Cethegus does not easily admire, and where he must, he does not easily confess it. But--I admire you, Queen! With what death-despising temerity, with what demoniac cunning you have frustrated all the plots of the barbarians! Truly, Belisarius has done much--Cethegus more--but Mataswintha most."

"Would that you spoke truth!" said Mataswintha with sparkling eyes. "And if the crown falls from the head of this culprit----"

"It is *your* hand which has decided the fate of Rome. But, Queen, you cannot be satisfied with this alone. I have learned to know you these last few months--you must not be taken, a conquered Gothic Queen, to Byzantium. Such beauty, such a mind, such force of will must rule, and not serve, in Byzantium. Therefore reflect--when your tyrant is overthrown--will you not then follow the course which I have pointed out to you?"

"I have never yet thought of what will follow," she answered gloomily.

"But I have thought for you. Truly, Mataswintha"--and his eyes rested upon her with fervent admiration--"you are marvellously beautiful. I consider it as my greatest merit that even your beauty is not able to kindle my passions and seduce me from my plans. But you are too beautiful, too charming, to live alone for hatred and revenge. When our aim is reached, then to Byzantium! You will then be more than Empress--you will be the vanquisher of the Empress!"

"When my aim is reached, my life is completed. Do you think I could bear the thought of having destroyed my people for mere ambition, for prudent ends? No--I did it only because I could no other. Revenge is now all to me, and----"

Just then there sounded loud and shrill from the front of the building, but yet within the walls, the cry of the screech-owl; once--twice--in rapid succession.

How amazed was Perseus to see the Prefect hurriedly press his finger upon the throat of the statue against which he was leaning, and to see it immediately and noiselessly divide into two parts.

Cethegus slipped, into the opening, which slowly closed again.

Mataswintha and Aspa sank upon the steps of the altar, as if in prayer.

"So it was a signal! Danger is near," thought the spy. "But where is the danger? and where the warner?"

And he turned and stepped from beneath the wall, looking to the left, on which side the Gothic camp was situated.

But in doing so he stepped into the moonlight, and in sight of Syphax, the Moor, who stood in an empty niche before the entrance of the building, and who, until now, had also been looking sharply in the direction of the camp.

From thence a man walked slowly forward.

His battle-axe glittered in the moonlight.

But Perseus saw a second weapon flash; it was the sword of the Moor, as he softly drew it from its sheath.

"Ha!" laughed Perseus; "before those two have done with each other, I shall be in Rome with my secret."

And he ran towards the gap in the wall of the court by which he had entered.

For a moment Syphax looked doubtfully to right and left. To the right he saw a man escaping, whom he had only now discovered; to the left a Gothic warrior, who was just entering the court of the temple. It was impossible to reach and kill both.

He suddenly called aloud:

"Teja, Earl Teja! Help, help! A Roman! Save the Queen! There, near the wall on the right--a Roman!"

In a moment Teja stood at Syphax's side.

"There!" cried Syphax. "I will protect the women in the church!" and he rushed into the temple.

"Stand, Roman!" cried Teja, and rushed after Perseus.

But Perseus would not stand. He ran along the wall; he reached the gap, but in his hurry he could not force himself through. With the strength of despair he swung himself up upon the wall, and was already drawing up his feet to jump down on the other side, when Teja cast his battle-axe, and struck him on the head.

Perseus, together with his secret, fell back dead.

Teja bent over him; he could distinctly see the features of the dead man.

"The Archon Perseus," he said, "the brother of Johannes."

He left the corpse, and at once ascended the steps which led into the church.

On the threshold he was met by Mataswintha. Behind her came Syphax, and Aspa with the lantern.

For a moment Teja and Mataswintha measured each other with distrustful looks.

"I must thank thee, Earl Teja of Tarentum," at last the Princess said. "I was in danger while pursuing my lonely devotions."

"A strange place and time for thee to choose for thy prayers. Let us see if this Roman was the only enemy."

He took the light from Aspa's hand, and went into the chapel.

Presently he returned, a leathern shoe, inlaid with gold, in his hand.

"I found nothing--but this sandal by the altar, close to the statue of the Apostle. It is a man's shoe."

"A votive offering of mine," said Syphax quickly. "The Apostle healed my foot, which a thorn had wounded."

"I thought the Snake-god was thine only god?"

"I worship whatever can help me."

"In which foot did the thorn wound thee?"

For a moment Syphax hesitated.

"In the right foot," he then answered.

"It is a pity," said Teja, "the sandal is for the left foot." And he put it into his belt. "I warn thee, Queen, against such midnight devotions."

"I shall do my duty," answered Mataswintha harshly.

"And I mine!"

With these words Teja turned, and led the way to the camp. Silently the

Queen and her slaves followed.

At sunrise Teja stood before the King and told him everything.

"What thou sayest is no proof," said Witichis.

"But a strong cause of suspicion. And thou thyself hast told me that the conduct of the Queen was mysterious."

"Just for that reason I must guard myself against acting on mere suspicion. I often fear that we have acted wrongly by her, almost as much so as by Rauthgundis."

"Possibly. But these midnight walks?"

"I shall put an end to them, were it only for her own sake."

"And the Moor? I mistrust him. I know that he is often absent for days together; afterwards appearing again in the camp. He is a spy."

"Yes, friend," said Witichis, with a smile; "but he is my spy. He goes in and out of Rome with my knowledge. It is he who betrays all their plans to me."

"And yet it has done no good? And the false sandal?"

"It is really a votive offering. Before thou camest, Syphax confessed all to me. Once, as he was waiting for the Queen, he got weary, and began to rummage in a vault of the church; and there he found, amongst all sorts of things, some priestly garments and hidden treasures, which he stole. Later, fearing the wrath of the saint, he wished to atone, and offered up in his heathen manner this golden sandal from his booty. He described it to me exactly. With golden side-stripes, and an agate button engraved with the letter C. Thou seest that it is so. Therefore he knew it well, and it cannot have been dropped by a fugitive. He has promised to bring the fellow-shoe as a proof. But, more than all, he has discovered to me a new plan, which will put an end to all our trouble, and deliver Belisarius himself into our hands."

CHAPTER IX.

While the King of the Goths communicated this plan to his friends, Cethegus, in the early morning, was summoned to speak with Belisarius and Johannes.

"Prefect of Rome," cried the general in a severe tone, as Cethegus entered his quarters, "where were you last night?"

"At my post, as was my duty. At the Gate of St. Paul."

"Do you know that, last night, one of my best leaders, Perseus the archon and the brother of Johannes here, left the city and has not been seen since?"

"I am sorry for it. But you know that it is forbidden to leave the walls without permission."

"But I have reason to believe," interposed Johannes, "that you very well know what has become of my brother; that his blood is on your hands."

"And by the slumber of Justinian," cried Belisarius angrily, "you shall answer for it! You shall no longer tyrannise over the Emperor's army and

the Emperor's generals. The hour of reckoning has come. The barbarians are almost defeated, and we shall see if, when *your* head falls, the Capitol will still stand!"

"Do matters stand thus?" thought Cethegus. "Then take care, Belisarius!" But he remained silent.

"Speak!" cried Johannes; "where did you kill my brother?"

But before Cethegus could reply, Artasines, one of Belisarius's bodyguards, entered the room.

"Sir," he said, "outside are six Gothic warriors. They have brought the corpse of Perseus the archon. King Witichis sends you word that Perseus fell last night without the walls, struck by Earl Teja's axe. He sends the body, that you may inter it with all honour."

"Heaven itself," said Cethegus, as he left the room with haughty steps, "gives the lie to your malice!"

But slowly and reflectively he passed the Quirinal and went across the Forum of Trajan to his dwelling.

"You threaten, Belisarius? Thanks for the hint! Let us see if we cannot do without you!"

Arrived at his house, he found Syphax, who had been waiting for him impatiently.

Syphax quickly made his report, and concluded:

"But first of all, sir, let the slaves who tie your sandals be whipped! You see how badly you are served when Syphax is absent. And be so kind as to give me your right shoe."

"Properly I should refuse to do so, and let you remain in suspense, to punish you for your impudent lies," laughed the Prefect. "This piece of leather is worth your life, my panther! How will you ransom it?"

"With important news. I now know all the particulars of the plan against the life of Belisarius; the place and time, and the names of the confederates. They are--Teja, Totila, and Hildebad."

"Each one of whom is a match for the magister militum," remarked Cethegus, with evident pleasure.

"I think, sir, that you have prepared another nice trap for the barbarians! According to your order, I have told them that Belisarius himself will sally out from the Tiburtinian Gate to-morrow, in order to forage for supplies."

"Yes; he goes himself because the Huns, who have so often been beaten, will not again venture out alone. He will take only four hundred men."

"And the three confederates will place an ambush of a thousand men in order to surprise Belisarius."

"This news is really worth the shoe!" said Cethegus, and threw it to Syphax.

"Meanwhile King Witichis will make a feigned assault upon the Gate of St. Paul, in order to divert attention from Belisarius. So I will now hasten to the latter, as you ordered, and tell him to take three thousand men with him, and destroy the confederates and their band."

"Stop," said Cethegus quietly; "do not be in such a hurry. You will tell him nothing."

"What?" asked Syphax in surprise. "If he be not warned, he will be lost!"

"One must not always interfere with the commander's guardian angel. To-morrow Belisarius may prove his good fortune."

"Aye, aye," said Syphax, with a cunning smile, "is such your pleasure? Then I would rather be Syphax the slave than Belisarius the magister militum. Poor widowed Antonina!"

Cethegus was just about to stretch himself upon his couch for a short rest, when Fidus, the ostiarius, announced:

"Kallistratos, of Corinth!"

"Always welcome!"

The young Greek with the gentle countenance entered. A flush of shame or pleasure coloured his cheeks; it was evident that some special cause had led him to the Prefect.

"What of beauty do you bring besides yourself?" asked Cethegus in the Grecian tongue.

The Greek looked up with sparkling eyes.

"A heart full of admiration for you, and the wish to prove it to you. I beg for permission to fight for you and Rome, like the two Licinii and Piso."

"My Kallistratos! What have you, our peaceful guest, the most amiable of Greeks, to do with our bloody business with the Goths? Leave such hard work alone, and cherish your bright inheritance--beauty!"

"I know well that the days of Salamis have become a myth, and that you iron Romans have never believed in our strength. That is hard; but yet it is easier to bear, because it is you who defend our world of art and noble customs against the dull barbarians; you--that is, Rome, and to me Cethegus is Rome. As such, I understand this struggle, and, understanding it thus, you see that it also concerns the Hellenes."

The Prefect smiled with pleasure.

"Well, if to you Cethegus is Rome, then Rome gladly accepts the help of the Hellenes. Henceforward you are a tribune of the Milites Romani, like Licinius."

"My deeds shall thank you. But I must confess one thing more; for I know that you do not love to be surprised. I have often seen how dear to you is the Mausoleum of Hadrian, with its treasure of statues. Lately I counted these marble gods, and found that there were two hundred and ninety-eight. I have made the third hundred complete by placing amongst them my two Letoides, Apollo and Artemis, which you praised so highly. They are a votive offering to you and Rome."

"Dear, extravagant youth!" said Cethegus. "What have you done?"

"That which is right and beautiful," answered Kallistratos simply.

"But reflect; the Mausoleum is now a fortress. If the Goths storm----"

"The Letoides stand upon the second and inner wall; and how can I fear that the barbarians will ever again conquer the favourite place of Cethegus? Where can the beautiful gods be more secure than in your

citadel? Your fortress is their best, because safest, temple. My offering shall be at the same time a happy omen."

"It shall!" cried Cethegus with animation. "And I myself believe that your gift is well protected. But allow me, in return----"

"In return you have allowed me to fight for you. Chaire!" laughed the Greek, and was gone.

"The boy loves me dearly," said Cethegus. "And I am like other human fools--it does me good; and that not merely because I can thereby rule him."

Heavy footsteps were now heard upon the marble of the vestibule, and a tribune of the army entered.

It was a young Roman with noble features, but of a graver expression than his years warranted. His cheek-bones made a right angle with his straight and severe brow, in true Roman outline; in the deep-sunk eyes lay Roman strength and--at this moment--resolute earnestness, and a self-will regardless of all but itself.

"Aha! Severinus, son of Boëthius! Welcome, my young hero and philosopher! I have not seen you for many months. Whence come you?"

"From the grave of my mother!" answered Severinus, with a fixed look at the questioner.

Cethegus sprang from his seat.

"What! Rusticiana? The friend of my youth? The wife of my Boëthius?"

"She is dead," said the son shortly.

The Prefect would have taken his hand, but Severinus withdrew it.

"My son! my poor Severinus! And did she die--without a word for me?"

"I bring you her last words--they concern you!"

"How did she die? Of what illness?"

"Of grief and remorse."

"Grief!" sighed Cethegus; "that I understand. But why should she feel remorse? And her last word was for me? Tell me, what did she say?"

Severinus approached the Prefect so closely that he touched his knee, and looking piercingly into his eyes, he answered:

"She said, 'A curse, a curse upon Cethegus, who poisoned my child!'"

Cethegus looked at him quietly.

"Did she die delirious?" he coldly asked.

"No, murderer! Her delirium was to trust in you! In the hour of her death she confessed to Cassiodorus and to me that it was her hand which administered the poison--with which you had furnished her--to the young tyrant. She told us all the circumstances. She was supported as she spoke by old Corbulo and his daughter, Daphnidion. 'Too late I learned,' she concluded, 'that my child had drunk of the deadly cup. And there was no one to hold Camilla's hand as she took it; for I was still in the boat upon the sea, and Cethegus was in the plantain-alley.' Then old Corbulo called out, turning pale, 'What! did the Prefect know that the cup contained

poison?' 'Certainly,' answered my mother; 'for, as I left the garden, I had told him that the deed was done.' Corbulo was dumb with horror; but Daphnidion cried out in violent grief, 'Alas! my poor mistress! Then Cethegus murdered your child; for he stood near, close to me, and watched her drink.' 'He watched her drink?' asked my mother, in a voice which will ring in my ears for ever. 'He watched her as she drank,' repeated the freedman and his daughter. 'Oh! then may his cursed soul be delivered to the devils in hell!' cried my mother. 'Revenge, O God! revenge hereafter! Revenge upon earth, my sons, for Camilla! A curse upon Cethegus!' And she fell back and expired."

The Prefect preserved his composure. But he secretly grasped the dagger which was hidden in the breast-folds of his tunic.

"But you," he asked after a pause, "what did you do?"

"I knelt down by the corpse of my mother and kissed her cold hand. And I swore to fulfil her dying behest. Woe to you, Prefect of Rome, poisoner and murderer of my sister! You shall not live!"

"Son of Boëthius, will you become a murderer for the mad words of a stupid slave and his daughter? It would be worthy of a hero and a philosopher."

"I do not think of murder. If I were a German, I should, according to their barbaric custom--and just now I think it excellent--challenge you to mortal combat. But I am a Roman, and will lawfully seek my revenge. Take care. Prefect, there are still just judges in Italy. For many months the enemy has prevented me from reaching the city. I only arrived here to-day by sea, and to-morrow I shall accuse you before the Senate, who will be your judges. Then we shall meet again."

Cethegus suddenly placed himself between the youth and the door.

But Severinus cried:

"Softly! I am prudent where a murderer is concerned. Three of my friends accompanied me to your house. If I do not return immediately, they will come with the lictors to search for me."

"I only wish," said Cethegus, again fully composed, "to warn you against a shameful course. If you like to prosecute the oldest friend of your family, in consequence of the feverish words of a dying woman, then do so; I cannot prevent you. But first a commission. You will become my accuser, but you still remain a soldier and my tribune. You will obey when your general commands."

"I shall obey."

"To-morrow Belisarius will make a sally, and the barbarians intend to attack one of the gates. I must protect the city. But I fear danger for the lion-hearted Belisarius. I must be sure that he is faithfully guarded. Therefore I order you to accompany the general to-morrow, and to defend his life with your own."

"With mine own."

"'Tis good, tribune, I depend upon your word."

"Depend upon my first word too! Farewell, till we meet again, after the fight, before the Senate. With what ardour do I long for both contests! Farewell--until we meet in the Senate!"

"We shall never meet again!" said Cethegus, as the steps of his visitor

died away. "Syphax!" he called aloud, "bring wine and dinner. We must strengthen ourselves for to-morrow's work!"

CHAPTER X.

Early next morning Rome and the Gothic encampment were equally full of life and movement.

Mataswintha and Syphax had learned somewhat, and had imparted it to Cethegus; but they had not known all.

They had heard of the plot of the three Goths against the life of Belisarius, and of the earlier plan of a sham assault upon the Gate of St. Paul.

But they had not heard that the King, changing his plan, had determined to take advantage of the absence of the great general, in order to try if Gothic heroism were not yet able to conquer the fortifications and the genius of Belisarius.

In the council of war, no one had deceived himself as to the importance and risk of the undertaking upon which they had determined; for if, like all former ones--and Procopius had already counted sixty battles, sallies, assaults and skirmishes--this last attempt failed, no further exertion could be demanded from the harassed and greatly diminished army.

For this reason they had, at Teja's advice, taken an oath to keep their plan a profound secret, and thus Mataswintha had learned nothing from the King.

Even the keen senses of the Moor had been unable to scent out that anything of importance was in preparation for that day--the Gothic troops themselves knew not what.

Totila, Hildebad, and Teja had started with their horsemen during the night, and had placed themselves in ambush on the south of the Valerian Way, in a hollow near the tomb of the Fulvias, through which Belisarius would necessarily pass. They hoped to have finished their task soon enough to be able to take an important part in the events which were impending against the city.

While the King, with Hildebrand, Guntharis, and Markja, was mustering the troops within the camp, Belisarius marched at daybreak out of the Tiburtinian Gate, surrounded by part of his body-guard.

Procopius and Severinus rode on his right and left; Aigan, the Massagetian, bore his banner, which accompanied the magister militum on all occasions.

Constantinus, to whom he had entrusted the care of the "Belisarian" part of Rome during his absence, doubled all the posts along the walls, and placed his troops under arms close to the ramparts. He sent word to the Prefect to do the same with the Byzantines under his command.

His messenger met Cethegus upon the walls between the Appian Gate and the Gate of St. Paul.

"So Belisarius thinks," said Cethegus sarcastically, as he obeyed the order, "that Rome cannot be safe unless he guard it! But I think that Belisarius would be in evil plight, had I not protected my Rome. Come, Lucius Licinius," he whispered to the latter, "we must decide upon what we must do should Belisarius fail to return from his ride. In that case, a

firm hand must be laid upon the Byzantine army."

"I know whose hand will do it."

"It may perhaps lead to a short struggle with those of the body-guard still in Rome; either in the Baths of Diocletian or at the Tiburtinian Gate. They must be crushed before they have time to reflect. Take three thousand of my Isaurians, and divide them, without attracting attention, round about the Baths, and, above all things, occupy the Tiburtinian Gate."

"But whence shall I withdraw the men?"

"From the Mausoleum of Hadrian," said Cethegus after a moment's reflection.

"And the Goths?"

"Bah! the Mausoleum is strong; it will protect itself, for the assaulters must first get over the river to the south, and then climb those smooth walls of Parian marble, in which the Greek and I take such pride. And besides," he added with a smile, "look up! There stands a host of marble gods and heroes; they may themselves protect their temple against the barbarians. Do you see? I told you it would be so. The Goths only think of attacking the Gate of St. Paul," he concluded, pointing towards the Gothic camp, whence, just at that moment, a strong division marched out in the direction he mentioned.

Licinius obeyed his orders, and soon led three thousand Isaurians--perhaps the half of the garrison of the Mausoleum--over the river and the Viminalian Hill in the direction of the Baths of Diocletian. He then replaced Belisarius's Armenians at the Tiburtinian Gate by three hundred Isaurians and legionaries.

But Cethegus turned to the Salarian Gate, where Constantinus now remained as the representative of Belisarius.

"I must have him out of the way," said Cethegus to himself, "when the news arrives.--When you have repulsed the barbarians," he said aloud to Constantinus, "no doubt you will make a sally. What an opportunity to gather laurels while your commander is yet at a distance!"

"Yes," said Constantinus, "they shall see that we can fight, even without Belisarius."

"But you must aim with more composure," said Cethegus, turning to a Persian archer and taking his bow. "Do you see that Goth, the leader on horseback? He shall fall."

Cethegus drew the bow. The Goth fell from his horse, pierced through the neck by the arrow.

"And you use my shooting-machines clumsily too! Do you see that oak-tree? A leader of one of the Gothic thousands is standing beneath it, clad in a coat of mail. Pay attention!"

He directed the machine; aimed and shot. The mailed Goth was pierced through and through, and nailed to the tree.

Just then a Saracen horseman rode quickly up below the wall.

"Archon," he cried to Constantinus, "Bessas begs for reinforcements for the Prænestinian Gate! The Goths are advancing."

Constantinus looked doubtfully at Cethegus.

"Pshaw!" said the latter; "the only attack to be feared will be made upon the Gate of St. Paul, and that is well defended, I am certain. Tell Bessas that he is scared too soon. Besides, I have six lions, ten tigers and twelve bears in the Vivarium waiting for the next feast at the Circus. Let them loose upon the barbarians for the present. It will afford a spectacle for the Romans."

But now one of the body-guard hurried up from Mons Pincius.

"Help, sir. Help, Constantinus! your own gate, the Flaminian, is in danger! Countless barbarians! Ursicinus begs for assistance!"

"There too?" asked Cethegus incredulously.

"Reinforcements for the broken walls between the Flaminian and the Pincian Gates!" cried a second messenger, also sent by Ursicinus.

"You need not defend that part. You know that it stands under the special protection of St. Peter; that will suffice," said Constantinus encouragingly.

Cethegus smiled.

"Yes, to-day most surely; for it will not be attacked at all."

"Prefect!" cried Marcus Licinius, who just then hurried up, out of breath; "quick to the Capitol! I have just come thence. All the seven camps of the enemy are vomiting Goths from every exit. A general storm is intended upon all the gates of Rome."

"That can hardly be," said Cethegus with a smile. "But I will go up. You, Marcus Licinius, will answer to me for the Tiburtinian Gate. It *must* be mine. Away with you! Take your two hundred legionaries."

With these words he mounted his horse and rode towards the Capitol round the foot of the Viminalian Hill. There he met with Lucius Licinius and his Isaurians.

"General," said Lucius, "things look grave, very grave! What about the Isaurians? Do you persist in your order?"

"Have I retracted it?" said Cethegus severely. "Lucius, you and the other tribunes must follow me. Isaurians, you, under your chief, Asgares, will march between the Baths and the Tiburtinian Gate."

He did not believe there was danger for Rome. He thought he knew what the barbarians really intended at this moment.

"The feint of a general attack," he argued, "is only meant to prevent the Byzantines from thinking of the danger of their commander outside the walls."

He soon reached and ascended a tower of the Capitol, whence he could overlook the whole plain.

It was filled with Gothic weapons.

It was a splendid spectacle.

From all the gates of the encampment poured the Gothic troops, encircling the whole circumference of the city.

It was evident that the assault was intended to be carried on simultaneously against all the gates of Rome.

Foremost came the archers and slingers, in light groups of skirmishers, whose business it was to rid the ramparts of their defenders.

Then followed battering-rams and wall-breakers, taken from Roman arsenals or constructed on Roman models, though often clumsily enough; harnessed with horses and oxen and served by soldiers without weapons of attack, whose sole business it was to protect themselves and their teams against the projectiles of the enemy by means of their shields.

Close behind, in thick ranks and fully armed, furnished with battle-axes and strong knives for the hand-to-hand struggle, and dragging heavy ladders, came the warriors who were to undertake the assault.

These three separate lines of attack advanced steadily, in good order, and with an even step. The sun glittered upon their helmets; at intervals of equal lengths sounded the long-drawn summons of the Gothic horns.

"They have learned something of us," cried Cethegus, with a soldier's pride in the fine array. "The man who has ordered these ranks understands war."

"Who is it?" asked Kallistratos, who, in splendid armour, stood near Lucius Licinius.

"King Witichis, without doubt," answered Cethegus.

"I should not have thought that simple man, with his modest expression, capable of such generalship."

"These barbarians are often unfathomable," remarked Cethegus.

And now he rode away from the Capitol, over the river to the ramparts at the Pancratian Gate, where the first attack seemed to threaten.

There he ascended the corner tower with his followers.

"Who is the old man with the flowing beard, marching before his troop and carrying a stone axe? He looks as if the lightning of Zeus had missed him in the battle with the Titans."

"It is Theodoric's old master-at-arms; he marches against this gate," answered the Prefect.

"And who is the richly-accoutred man upon the brown charger, with the wolf's head upon his helmet? He is marching towards the Porta Portuensis."

"That is Duke Guntharis, the Wölfung," said Lucius Licinius.

"And see there, too, on the eastern side of the city, away over the river, as far as the eye can reach, the ranks of the enemy advance against all the gates," cried Piso.

"But where is the King himself!" asked Kallistratos.

"Look! there in the middle you see the Gothic standard. There he is, opposite the Pancratian Gate," answered the Prefect.

"He alone, with his strong division, stands motionless far behind the lines," said Salvius Julianus, the young jurist.

"Will he not join in the fight!" asked Massurius.

"It would be against his habit not to do so. But let us go down upon the ramparts; the fight begins," said Cethegus.

"Hildebrand has reached the trench."

"There stand my Byzantines, under Gregorius. The Gothic archers aim well. The ramparts become thinned. Massurius, bring up my Abasgian archers, and the best archers of the legions. They must aim at the oxen and horses of the battering-rams."

Very soon the battle was kindled upon all sides, and Cethegus remarked with rage that the Goths progressed everywhere.

The Byzantines seemed to miss their leader; they shot at random and fell back from the walls, against which the Goths pressed with unusual daring.

They had already crossed the trenches at many points, and Duke Guntharis had even erected ladders against the walls near the Portuensian Gate; while the old master-at-arms had dragged a strong battering-ram to the Pancratian Gate, and had caused it to be protected by a penthouse against the fiery darts from above.

Already the first strokes of the ram thundered through the uproar of the battle against the beams of the gate.

This well-known sound gave the Prefect a shock.

"It is evident," he said to himself, "that they are in good earnest."

Again a thundering stroke,

Gregorius, the Byzantine, looked at him inquiringly.

"This must not continue any longer," cried Cethegus angrily; and he tore a bow and quiver from an archer who stood near him, and hurried to the battlements over the gate.

"Here, archers and slingers! Follow me!" he cried. "Bring heavy stones. Where is the next balista? Where the scorpions? That penthouse must come down!"

But under it stood Gothic archers, who eagerly looked through the apertures at the pinnacles of the battlements.

"It is useless, Haduswinth," grumbled young Gunthamund; "for the third time I have aimed in vain. Not one of them will venture even his nose above the battlements."

"Patience!" answered the old man; "only keep thy bow ready bent. Some curious body will be sure to show himself. Lay a bow ready for me too, and have patience."

"Patience! That is easier for thee with thy seventy years, than for me with my twenty," grumbled Gunthamund.

Meanwhile Cethegus reached the wall over the gate, and cast a look across the plain.

There he saw the King standing motionless in the distance with his centre, upon the right bank of the Tiber.

This sight disturbed him.

"What does he intend? Has he learned that the commander-in-chief ought not to fight? Come, Gajus," he cried to a young archer, who had boldly followed him, "your young eyes are sharp. Look over the battlements. What is the King doing there?"

And he bent over the bulwarks. Gajus followed his example, and both looked out eagerly.

"Now, Gunthamund!" cried Haduswinth below.

Two strings twanged, and the two Romans started back.

Gajus fell, shot in the forehead; and an arrow fell rattling from the Prefect's helmet.

Cethegus passed his hand across his brow.

"You live, my general!" cried Piso, springing towards him.

"Yes, friend. It was well aimed, but the gods need me yet. Only the skin is scratched," said Cethegus, and set his helmet straight.

CHAPTER XI.

Just then Syphax appeared upon the wall.

His master had strictly forbidden him to take part in the fight. He could not spare him.

"Woe--woe!" cried Syphax, so loudly, that it struck Cethegus--who knew the Moor's usual self-control--strangely.

"What has happened?"

"A great misfortune! Constantinus is severely wounded. He led a sortie from the Salarian Gate, and at once stumbled upon the Gothic ranks. A stone from a sling hit him on the brow. With difficulty his people saved him, and bore him back within the walls. There I received the fainting man--he named you, the Prefect, as his successor. Here is his general's staff."

"That is not possible!" shouted Bessas, who had followed at Syphax's heels. He had come in person to demand reinforcements from the Prefect, and arrived just in time to hear this news. "That is not possible," he repeated, "or Constantinus was raving when he said it."

"If he had appointed you he might have been so," said Cethegus quietly, taking the staff, and thanking the cunning slave with a rapid motion of his hand.

With a furious look Bessas left the ramparts and hurried away.

"Follow him, and watch him carefully, Syphax," whispered the Prefect.

An Isaurian mercenary hastily approached.

"Reinforcements, Prefect, for the Porta Portuensis! Duke Guntharis has stormed the wall!"

He was followed by Cabao, the leader of the Moorish mounted archers, who cried:

"Constantinus is dead! You must represent him."

"I represent Belisarius," said Cethegus proudly. "Take five hundred Armenians from the Appian Gate, and send them to the Porta Portuensis."

"Help--help for the Appian Gate! All the men on the ramparts are shot

dead!" cried a Persian horseman, galloping up. "The farthest outwork is nearly lost; it may yet be saved, but with difficulty. It would be impossible to retake it!"

Cethegus called his young jurisconsult, Salvius Julianus, now his war-tribune.

"Up, my jurist! '*Beati possidentes!*' Take a hundred legionaries and keep the outwork at all costs until further assistance arrive." And again he looked over the breastwork.

Under his feet the fight raged; the battering-rams thundered. But he was more troubled by the mysterious inaction which the King preserved in the background than by the turmoil close at hand.

"Of what can he be thinking?"

Just then a fearful crash and a loud shout of joy from the barbarians sounded from below. Cethegus had no need to ask what it was; in a moment he had reached the gate.

"The gate is broken!" cried his people.

"I know it. *We* now must be the bolts of Rome!"

And pressing his shield more firmly to his side, he went up to the right wing of the gate, in which yawned a broad fissure. And again the battering-ram struck the shattered planks near the crevice.

"Another such stroke and the gate will fall!" said Gregorius, the Byzantine.

"Quite right; therefore we must not let it be repeated. Here--to me--Gregorius and Lucius! Form, milites! Spears lowered! Torches and firebrands! Make ready to sally. When I raise my sword, open the gate, and cast ram and penthouse and all into the trench."

"You are very daring, my general!" cried Lucius Licinius, taking his stand close to Cethegus with delight.

"Yes, now there is cause to be daring, my friend."

The column was formed; the Prefect was just about to give the sign, when, from behind, there arose a noise still greater than that made by the storming Goths; screams of pain and the tramp of horses. Bessas came up in great agitation; he caught the Prefect's arm--his voice failed him.

"Why do you hinder me at this moment?" asked. Cethegus, pushing him aside.

"Belisarius's troops," at last panted the Thracian, "stand sorely wounded outside the Tiburtinian Gate they beg for admittance--furious Goths are at their heels--Belisarius has fallen into an ambush--he is dead."

"Belisarius is taken!" cried a gate-keeper, who hurried up breathless.

"The Goths--the Goths are upon us! at the Nomentanian and Tiburtinian Gates!" was shouted from the streets.

"Belisarius's flag is taken! Procopius is defending the corpse of Belisarius!"

"Give orders for the Tiburtinian Gate to be opened," persisted Bessas. "Your Isaurians are there. Who sent them?"

"I," answered Cethegus reflectively.

"They will not open without your orders. Save at least the corpse of our noble commander!"

Cethegus lingered--he held his hand half raised--he hesitated.

"I would gladly save his *corpse!*" he thought.

Just then Syphax rushed up to him, and whispered:

"No, he still lives! I saw him from the ramparts. He moves; but he will be taken prisoner directly. The Gothic horsemen are close upon him. Totila and Teja will be up with him immediately!"

"Give the order; let the Tiburtinian Gate be opened," insisted Bessas.

But the Prefect's eyes flashed; over his countenance spread an expression of proud and bold decision, and illumined it with demoniac beauty. He struck his sword against the shattered wing of the gate before him and cried:

"Sally! First Rome; then Belisarius! Rome and triumph!"

The gate flew open. The storming Goths, already sure of victory, had expected anything rather than such a bold attack from the Byzantines, whom they believed to be completely cowed. They were crowded about the gate without order. They were completely taken by surprise, and were soon pushed into the yawning ditch behind them by the sudden and irresistible attack.

Old Hildebrand would not leave his battering-ram. Raising himself to his full height, he shattered Gregorius's tall helmet with his stone-axe. But almost at the same moment Lucius Licinius pushed him into the trench with the spike of his shield. Cethegus cut the ropes which held the battering-ram, and it fell crashing down over the old man.

"Now fire all the wooden machines!" cried Cethegus.

Quickly the flames caught the beams.

The victorious Romans immediately retired within the walls.

But then Syphax, meeting the Prefect, cried:

"Mutiny, master! Mutiny and rebellion! The Byzantines will no longer obey you! Bessas calls upon them to open the Tiburtinian Gate by force. His body-guard threaten to attack Marcus Licinius, and the Huns to slaughter your legionaries and Isaurians!"

"They shall repent it!" cried Cethegus furiously. "Woe to Bessas! I will remember this! Up, Lucius Licinius! take half the remaining Isaurians. No take them all--*all!* You know where they stand. Attack the body-guard of the Thracian from behind, and if they will not yield, strike them down without mercy. Help your brother! I will follow immediately."

Lucius Licinius lingered.

"And the Tiburtinian Gate?"

"Must remain closed."

"And Belisarius?"

"Must remain outside."

"Teja and Totila have almost reached him!"

"So much the less dare we open! First Rome; then the rest! Obey, tribune!"

Cethegus remained behind to order the reparation of the damaged gate. It took a considerable time.

"How was it, Syphax!" he asked his slave. "Was he really alive?"

"He still lives."

"How stupid these Goths are!"

A messenger arrived from Lucius.

"Your tribune sends word that Bessas will not yield. The blood of your legionaries has already been shed at the Tiburtinian Gate. And Asgares and the Isaurians hesitate to strike; they doubt that you are in earnest."

"I will show them that I am in earnest!" cried Cethegus, as he mounted his horse and galloped away like the wind.

He had to go a long way. Over the bridge of the Janiculum, past the Capitol, across the Forum Romanum, through the Via Sacra and the Arch of Titus, leaving the Baths of Titus to the right; out over the Esquiline Hill, and, lastly, through the Esquiline Gate to the outer Tiburtinian Gate--a distance which extended from the extreme western to the extreme eastern limit of the immense city.

When he reached the gate, he found the bodyguard of Bessas and Belisarius showing a double front.

One line prepared to overpower the legionaries and Isaurians under Marcus Licinius at the gate, and to open the latter by force; while the second line stood opposed to the rest of the Isaurians, to whom Lucius gave the order to advance in vain.

"Mercenaries!" cried Cethegus, checking his foaming horse close before them; "to whom have you sworn obedience--to me or to Belisarius?"

"To you, general," said Asgares, the leader, stepping forward; "but I thought----"

The sword of the Prefect flashed; and, struck to the heart, the man fell.

"Your duty is to obey, stupid rascal, and not to think!"

The Isaurians were horrified.

But Cethegus quickly gave the word of command.

"Lower your spears! Follow me! Charge!"

And the Isaurians now obeyed him. Another moment, and a fight would have commenced in the city itself.

But just then, from the west, in the direction of the Aurelian Gate, was heard a terrible, all-overpowering cry.

"Woe! woe! all is lost! The Goths are upon us! The city is taken!"

Cethegus turned pale, and looked behind him.

Kallistratos galloped up, blood flowing from his face and neck.

"Cethegus," he cried, "all is over! The barbarians are in Rome! The wall is forced!"

"Where?" asked the Prefect, in a hollow voice.

"At the Mausoleum!"

"Oh, my general!" cried Lucius, "I warned you!"

"That is Witichis!" said Cethegus, closing his eyes as if in pain.

"How do you know it?" asked Kallistratos, astonished.

"Enough! I do know it."

It was a fearful moment for the Prefect. He was obliged to confess to himself that, recklessly following his plan for the ruin of Belisarius, he had for a short period neglected Rome.

He ground his teeth.

"Cethegus has exposed the Mausoleum! Cethegus has ruined Rome!" cried Bessas, at the head of the body-guard.

"And Cethegus will save Rome!" cried the Prefect, raising himself in his saddle. "Follow me, Isaurians and legionaries!"

"And Belisarius?" whispered Syphax.

"He may enter. First Rome; then the rest! Follow me!"

And Cethegus galloped off the same way that he had come.

Only a few mounted men could keep up with him; his foot-soldiers and Isaurians followed at a run.

CHAPTER XII.

At the same time a pause ensued before the Tiburtinian Gate.

A messenger had recalled the Gothic horsemen from the useless fight.

They were to send all the men they could dispose of as fast as possible round the city to the Aurelian Gate, through which their comrades had just entered the city; there the greatest available force was necessary.

The horsemen, turning to the left, galloped towards the gate which had now become the centre of the struggle; but their own foot-soldiers, storming the five gates which lay between--the Porta Clausa, the Nomentanian, Salarian, Pincian, and Flaminian Gates--blocked their progress so long, that they arrived too late for the result of the attack upon the Mausoleum.

We recollect the position of this favourite resort of the Prefect. Opposite the Vatican Hill, at about a stone's throw from the Aurelian Gate, with which it was connected by side walls, and protected everywhere, except on the south, where ran the river, by new fortifications, towered the "Moles Hadriani," an immense round tower of the firmest masonry.

A sort of court surrounded the principal building. On the south, before the first and outer wall of defence, flowed the Tiber. The ramparts of this outer wall, and the court and battlements of the inner wall, were usually

occupied by the Isaurians, whom, in an evil hour, the Prefect had withdrawn in order to carry out his plot against Belisarius.

On the parapet of the inner wall stood the numerous statues of marble and bronze, which had been raised to the number of three hundred by the gift of Kallistratos.

The King of the Goths had chosen for himself a position far back in the middle of the wide semicircle which his army had drawn around the city to the west. He had stationed himself upon the "field of Nero," on the right bank of the Tiber, between the Pancratian (old Aurelian) and the (new) Aurelian Gates, a post usually occupied by Earl Markja, of Mediolanum.

Witichis founded his plan upon the fact that the general storming of all the gates would necessarily disperse the forces of the besieged; and as soon as some part of the ramparts should be more than usually exposed by the withdrawal of its defenders, he intended to make use of the circumstance, and attack at that point.

With this view, he had quietly remained immovable far behind the storming columns.

He had given orders to his leaders to call him at once should a gap in the line of defence be observed.

He had waited long--very long.

He had had to bear many a word of impatience from his troops, who were forced to remain idle while their comrades were advancing on all sides. Long, long they waited for a messenger to call them into action.

At last the King himself was the first to notice that the well-known flags and the thickly-crowded spears of the Isaurians had disappeared from the outer wall of the Mausoleum.

He observed the place attentively. The Isaurians could not have been relieved, for the gaps were not filled up.

Then he sprang from his saddle, gave his horse a stroke with the flat of his hand, and cried, "Home, Boreas!"

The clever animal galloped straight back to the camp.

"Now forward, my Goths! forward, Earl Markja!" cried the King. "Over the river there! Leave the wall-breakers behind: take only shields and storming-ladders, and the axes. Forward!"

And at a run he reached the steep bank at the southern bend of the river, and descended the hill.

"No bridge. King, and no ford!" asked a Goth behind him.

"No, friend Iffamer; we must swim!"

And the King sprang into the dirty yellow water, which splashed, hissing, high above his helmet.

In a few moments he had reached the opposite bank, the foremost of his people with him.

Soon they stood close before the lofty outer wall of the Mausoleum, and the warriors looked up inquiringly and anxiously.

"Bring the ladders!" cried Witichis. "Do you not see? There are no defenders! Are you afraid of mere stones?"

The ladders were quickly raised, and the outer wall scaled. The few soldiers who had remained to defend this wall were overcome, the ladders drawn up and let down on the inner side.

The King was the first in the court.

There, it is true, the progress of the Goths was for a time arrested.

For Quintus Piso and Kallistratos stood on the ramparts of the inner wall, with a hundred legionaries and a few Isaurians. They had hastened thither from the Pancratic Gate. They hurled a thick hail of spears and arrows at the Goths as they descended singly into the court. Their catapults were also not without effect.

"Send for assistance to Cethegus!" cried Piso, on the wall; and Kallistratos immediately rushed away.

Below in the court the Goths fell right and left at the side of Witichis.

"What shall we do?" asked Markja.

"Wait until they have exhausted their projectiles. It cannot last much longer. They shoot and hurl too hastily in their fright. Do you see? Already more stones are flying than arrows, and there are no more spears."

"But their balistas?"

"They will presently be able to hurt us no longer. Prepare to storm! See, the hail is much thinner; now be ready with the ladders and axes. Follow me quickly!"

And the Goths ran at a quick step across the court. Very few fell. The greater part reached the second and inner wall in safety, and a hundred ladders were raised.

And now all Procopius's balistas and machines were useless; for being directed for a wide range, they could not be placed in a perpendicular direction without great trouble and loss of time.

Piso observed this, and turned pale.

"Spears! spears! or all is lost!"

"They are all cast away," panted fat Balbus, who stood near him, with a look of despair.

"Then all is lost!" sighed Piso, letting fall his wearied arms.

"Come, Massurius, let us save ourselves," cried Balbus.

"No, let us stand and die," cried Piso.

Over the edge of the wall appeared the first Gothic helmet.

All at once a cry was heard upon the steps leading on to the wall citywards.

"Cethegus! Cethegus the Prefect!"

And he it was. He sprang upon the ramparts, and attacking the Goth, who had just laid his hand upon the breastwork before swinging himself over, he cut off hand and arm. The man screamed and fell.

"Oh, Cethegus!" cried Piso; "you come in the very nick of time!"

"I hope so," said Cethegus, and overturned the ladder which was raised

against the wall just in front of him.

Witichis had mounted it--he sprang down with agility.

"But I must have projectiles; spears, lances! else we can do nothing!" cried Cethegus.

"There is nothing left," answered Balbus; "we hoped that you would come with your Isaurians."

"They are still far, far behind me!" cried Kallistratos, who was the first to arrive after Cethegus.

And the number of ladders and the rising helmets increased. Ruin was imminent. Cethegus looked wildly round.

"Projectiles," he cried, stamping his foot; "we must have them!"

At that moment his eye fell upon a gigantic marble statue of Jupiter, which stood upon the ramparts to his left hand. A thought flashed across him. He sprang up, and with his axe struck off the right arm of the statue, together with the thunderbolt it held.

"Jupiter!" he cried, "lend me thy lightnings! Why dost thou hold them so idly? Up, my men! shatter the statues and hurl them at the enemy!"

Before he could finish his sentence, his example was followed.

The hard-pressed defenders fell upon the gods and heroes with hammers and axes, and in a moment the lovely forms were shattered.

It was a frightful sight. There lay a grand Hadrian, an equestrian statue, man and horse split in two; there a laughing Aphrodite fell upon its knees; there the beautiful head of an Antinous fell from the trunk, and hurled by two hands, fell crashing upon a Gothic shield of buffalo-hide. And far and wide upon the ramparts fell fragments and pieces of marble and bronze, of iron and gold.

Down from the ramparts, thundering and crashing, fell the mighty weight of metal and stone, and shattered the helms and shields, the armour and limbs of the attacking Goths, and the ladders which bore them.

Cethegus looked with horror at the work of destruction which his words had called into action.

But it had saved them.

Twelve, fifteen, twenty ladders stood empty, although a moment before they had swarmed with men like ants; just as many lay broken at the foot of the wall.

Surprised by this unexpected hail of bronze and marble, the Goths fell back for a space.

But presently Markja's horn called them to the attack. And again the tons of marble thundered through the air.

"Unhappy man, what have you done?" cried Kallistratos, full of grief, and staring at the ruin.

"What was necessary!" cried Cethegus, and hurled the trunk of the Jupiter-statue over the wall. "Did you see it strike? two barbarians at one blow." And he looked down with great content.

At that moment he heard the Corinthian cry:

"No, no; not this one. Not the Apollo!"

Cethegus turned and saw a gigantic Isaurian raising his axe over the head of the statue.

"Fool, shall the Goths come up?" asked the mercenary, and raised his arm again.

"Not my Apollo!" repeated the Greek, and embraced the statue with both arms, protecting it with his body.

Earl Markja saw this movement from his stand upon the nearest ladder, and believing that Kallistratos was about to hurl the statue at him, he cast his spear and hit the Greek in the breast.

"Ah--Cethegus!" gasped Kallistratos--and fell dead.

The Prefect saw him fall, and contracted his brows.

"Save the corpse, and spare his two gods!" he said briefly, and overthrew the ladder upon which Markja was standing; more he could neither say nor do, for already a new and more imminent danger attracted his attention.

Witichis, half thrown, half springing from his ladder, had remained standing close under the wall, amidst a hail of stone and metal, seeking for new means of attack.

For, since the first trial with the storming-ladders had been rendered futile by the unexpected and novel projectiles, he had scarcely any hope left of winning the wall.

While he was thus looking and waiting, the heavy marble pedestal of a "Mars Gradivus" fell close to his feet, rebounded and struck one of the slabs of the wall. And this slab, which seemed to be made of the hardest stone, broke into little pieces of lime and mortar.

In its place was revealed a small wooden door, which, loosely covered and concealed by the mortar, was used by the masons and workpeople as a means of exit and entrance when obliged to repair the immense edifice.

Witichis had scarcely caught sight of this wooden door, than he cried out exultingly:

"Here, Goths, here! Bring axes!" and he himself dealt a blow at the thin boards, which seemed anything but strong.

The new and singular sound struck the ear of the Prefect; he paused in his bloody work and listened.

"That is iron against wood, by Cæsar!" he said to himself, and sprang down the narrow stairway, which led on the inner side of the wall into the faintly illuminated interior of the Mausoleum.

There he heard a louder stroke than all which had preceded it; a dull crash; a sharp sound of splintered wood; and then an exultant cry from the Goths.

As he reached the last step of the stair, the door fell crashing inwards, and King Witichis was visible upon the threshold.

"Rome is mine!" cried Witichis, letting his axe fall and drawing his sword.

"You lie, Witichis! for the first time in your life!" cried Cethegus furiously, and, springing forward, he pressed the strong spike of his shield so firmly against the breastplate of the Goth, that the latter, surprised, fell back a step.

The Prefect took advantage of the movement and placed himself upon the threshold, completely blocking up the doorway.

"Where are my Isaurians!" he shouted. But the next moment Witichis had recognised him. "So we meet at last in single combat for Rome!" cried the King.

And now it was his turn to attack. Cethegus, who wished to close the passage, covered his left side with his shield; his right hand, armed only with a short sword, was insufficient for the protection of his right side.

The thrust of Witichis's long sword, weakly parried by Cethegus, cut through the latter's coat of mail and entered deeply into his right breast.

Cethegus staggered; he bent forward; but he did not fall.

"Rome! Rome!" he cried faintly; and convulsively kept himself upright.

Witichis had fallen back to gain space for a final thrust.

But at that moment he was recognised by Piso on the wall, who hurled a splendid sleeping Faun which lay near him down upon the King. It struck the King's shoulder, and he fell.

Earl Markja, Iffamer and Aligern bore him out of the fight.

Cethegus saw him fall, and then himself sank down upon the threshold of the door; the protecting arms of a friend received him--but he could recognise nothing; his senses failed him.

He was presently recalled to consciousness by a well-known sound, which rejoiced his soul; it was the tones of the tubas of his legionaries and the battle-cry of his Isaurians, who had at last arrived, and, led by the Licinii, fell upon the Goths, who were disheartened by the fall of their King.

The Isaurians, after a bloody fight, had issued through a breach in the outer wall (which had been broken outwards by the Goths who were inside).

The Prefect saw the last of the barbarians fly; then his eyes closed once more.

"Cethegus!" cried the friend who held him in his arms, "Belisarius is dying; and you, you too are lost!"

Cethegus recognised the voice of Procopius.

"I do not know," he said with a last effort, "but Rome--Rome is saved!"

And his senses completely forsook him.

CHAPTER XIII.

After the terrible exertion of strength in the general attack and its repulse, which had begun with the dawn of day, and had only ended at its close, a long pause of exhaustion ensued on the part of both Goths and Romans. The three commanders, Belisarius, Cethegus, and Witichis, lay

for weeks recovering from their wounds.

But the actual armistice was more the effect of the deep discouragement and oppression which had come over the Gothic army when, after striving for victory to the uttermost, it had been wrested from them at the moment of seeming success.

All day they had done their best; their heroes had outvied each other in deeds of valour; and yet both their plans, that against Belisarius and that against the city, were wrecked in the consummation.

And although King Witichis, with his constant mind, did not share in the depression of his troops, he all the more clearly discerned that, after that bloody day, he would be obliged to change the whole plan of the siege.

The loss of the Goths was enormous; Procopius valued it at thirty thousand dead and more than as many wounded. On every side of the city they had exposed themselves, with utter contempt of death, to the projectiles of the besieged, and had fallen by thousands at the Pancratan Gate and before the Mausoleum of Hadrian.

And as, on the sixty-eight earlier attacks, the besiegers had always suffered much more than the besieged, sheltered as were these last behind walls and towers, the great army which, a few months before, Witichis had led against the Eternal City had been fearfully reduced.

Besides all this, hunger and pestilence had raged in their tents for a considerable period.

In consequence of this discouragement and the decimation of his troops, Witichis was obliged to renounce the idea of taking the city by storm, and his last hope--he did not conceal from himself its weakness--lay in the possibility that famine would force the enemy to capitulate.

The country round Rome was completely exhausted, and all seemed now to depend upon which party would be longest able to bear privation, or which could first procure provisions from a distance.

The Goths felt severely the loss of their fleet, which had been damaged on the coast of Dalmatia.

The first to recover from his wounds was the Prefect.

When carried away insensible from the door which he had closed with his body, he had lain for a day and a half in a state which was half sleep, half swoon.

When, on the evening of the second day, he again opened his eyes, his first glance fell upon the faithful Moor, who was crouched at the foot of the bed, and who had never ceased to watch him. The snake was twined round his arm.

"The wooden door!" was the first scarcely audible word of the Prefect. "The wooden door must be replaced by--marble blocks----"

"Thanks, thanks, O Snake-god!" cried the slave; "now he is saved and thou too! And I, my master, have saved you." And he threw himself upon the ground and kissed his master's bedstead; his feet he did not dare to kiss.

"You have saved me? how?"

"When I laid you, as pale as death, upon this bed, I fetched my Snake-god and showed you to him; and I said, 'Thou seest, O Snake-god, that my

master's eyes are closed. Make them open. Until thou dost so, thou shalt not receive one drop of milk or crumb of bread. And if he never open his eyes again--then, on the day when they burn his corpse, Syphax will burn by his side, and thou, O great Snake-god, also. Thou hast the power to heal him, then do so--or burn!' Thus I spoke, and he has healed you."

"The city is safe--I feel it. Else I had never slept! Is Belisarius alive? Where is Procopius?"

"In the library with your tribunes. According to the physician's sentence, they expected to-day either your recovery, or your----"

"Death? This time your god has saved me, Syphax.--Let the tribunes enter."

Very soon Piso, the Licinii, Salvius Julianus, and some others stood before the Prefect; they would have hurried up to his couch with emotion, but he signed to them to compose themselves.

"Rome, through me, thanks you! You have fought like--like Romans! I can say nothing more, or more flattering."

He looked at the row of men before him reflectively, and then said:

"One is missing--ah, my Corinthian! His corpse is saved, for I recommended it, and the two statues, to Piso. Let a slab of black Corinthian marble be placed upon the spot where he fell; set the statue of Apollo above the urn, and inscribe on the latter, 'Here died, for Rome, Kallistratos of Corinth; he saved the god, and not the god him.' Now go. We shall soon meet again upon the walls.--Syphax, send Procopius to me. And bring a large cup of Falernian.--Friend," he cried to Procopius as the latter entered, "it seems to me as if, before I fell into this feverish sleep, I had heard some one whisper, 'Procopius has saved the great Belisarius!' A deed which will give you immortality. Posterity will thank you--therefore I need not. Sit by my side and tell me all. But wait--first arrange my cushions, so that I may see my Cæsar. The sight of that statue strengthens me more than medicine. Now speak."

Procopius looked sharply at the sick man.

"Cethegus," he then said, in a grave voice, "Belisarius knows everything."

"Everything?" said the Prefect with a smile. "That is much."

"Cease your mockery, and do not refuse admiration to nobleness of mind, you, who yourself are noble!"

"I? I know nothing of it."

"As soon as Belisarius recovered his senses," continued Procopius, "Bessas naturally informed him of all that had passed. He described to him minutely how you had ordered the Tiburtinian Gate to be kept closed, when Belisarius lay outside in his blood, with Teja raging at his heels. He told him that you commanded that his body-guard should be beaten down if they attempted to open the gate by force. He repeated your every word, also your cry: 'Rome first, then Belisarius!' And he demanded your head in the Council. I trembled; but Belisarius said: 'He did right! Here, Procopius, take him my sword, and the armour which I wore that day, as a sign that I thank him.' And in the report to the Emperor he dictated these words to me: 'Cethegus saved Rome, and Cethegus alone! Send him the patricianship of Byzantium.'"

"Many thanks! I did not save Rome for Byzantium!" observed Cethegus.

"You need not tell Belisarius that, you un-Attic Roman!"

"I am in no Attic humour, you life-preserver! What was your reward?"

"Peace. He knows nothing of it, and shall never learn it."

"Syphax, wine! I cannot bear so much magnanimity. It makes me weak. Well, what was the joke with the ambush?"

"Friend, it was no joke, but as terrible earnest as I have ever seen. Belisarius was saved by a hair's-breadth."

"Yes; it was one of those hairs which are always in the way of these Goths! They are clumsy fools, one and all!"

"You speak as if you were sorry that Belisarius was not killed!"

"It would have served him right. I had warned him thrice. He ought by this time to know what becomes an old general and what a young brawler."

"Listen," said Procopius, looking at him earnestly. "You have won the right to speak thus at the Mausoleum. Formerly, when you depreciated this man's heroism----"

"You thought I spoke in envy of the brave Belisarius? Hear it, ye immortal gods!"

"Yes; certainly your Gepidian laurels----"

"Leave those boyish deeds alone! Friend, if necessary, a man must despise death, but else he must cherish his life carefully. For only the living laugh and rule, not the dumb dead. This is my wisdom, call it cowardice if you will. Therefore--there was an ambush. Tell me briefly, how went the fight!"

"Briskly enough! After we had scoured the neighbourhood--it seemed free from enemies and safe for foraging--we gradually turned our horses' heads in the direction of the city, taking with us a few goats and half-starved sheep which we had found. Belisarius went foremost with young Severinus, Johannes, and myself. Suddenly, as we issued from the village *ad aras Bacchi*, there came galloping out of the trees on either side the Valerian Way a number of Gothic horsemen. I saw at once that they far outnumbered us, and advised that we should try to rush between them straight on the road to Rome. But Belisarius thought that though they were many, they were not too many, so he turned to the left to meet and break through one of their lines. But we were ill received. The Goths fought and rode better than our Mauretanian horsemen, and their leaders, Totila and Hildebad--I recognised the first by his flowing yellow locks, and the last by his enormous height--made straight at Belisarius. 'Where is Belisarius and his courage?' shouted tall Hildebad, audible through all the clash of arms. 'Here!' at once replied Belisarius, and before we could prevent him, he faced the giant. The latter lost no time, but struck the general's helmet so furiously with his heavy battle-axe, that the golden crest, with its plume of white horse-hair, fell to the earth, and the head of Belisarius was bowed to the saddle-bow. The giant immediately aimed a second and fatal blow, but young Severinus came up and received the stroke upon his round shield. The barbarian's axe pierced the shield, and entered deeply into the noble youth's neck. He fell----"

Procopius paused, lost in painful thought.

"Dead?" asked Cethegus quietly.

"An old freedman of his father, who accompanied him, bore him out of the fight, but I hear that he died before they could reach the village."

"A noble death!" said Cethegus. "Syphax, a cup of wine."

"Meanwhile," continued Procopius, "Belisarius had recovered himself, and now, thoroughly enraged, struck his spear full at Hildebad's breast-plate, hurling him from his horse. We shouted with joy, but young Totila---"

"Well?"

"Had scarcely seen his brother fall, than he broke furiously through the lances of the body-guard, and attacked Belisarius. Aigan, the standard-bearer, would have protected Belisarius, but the Goth's sword pierced his left arm. Totila caught the banner from his powerless hand, and threw it to the nearest Goth. Belisarius uttered a cry of rage and turned to meet his enemy; but young Totila is quick as lightning, and before Belisarius knew what he was about, two swift strokes fell on the latter's shoulders. He wavered in his saddle, and then sank slowly from his horse, which fell dead the next moment, pierced by a spear. 'Yield, Belisarius!' cried Totila. The general had just strength enough to shake his head, and then sank insensible. I had quickly dismounted, and now lifted him upon my own horse, and placed him under the care of Johannes, who rallied his body-guard about him, and carried him quickly out of the fight to the city."

"And you?"

"I fought on foot, and I succeeded, with the aid of our rear-guard, who now came up--we had been obliged to sacrifice our forage--in resisting Totila. But not for long. For now the second troop of Gothic horsemen had arrived. Like a storm of wind, up rushed the black Teja, broke through our right wing--which stood nearest to him--then through the front rank, which faced Totila, and dispersed our whole array. I counted the battle lost, caught a riderless horse, and galloped after the general. But Teja also had observed the direction of his flight, and galloped after us. He overtook the escort at the Fulvian Bridge. Johannes and I had placed more than half of the rest of the body-guard on the bridge, to defend the crossing, under Principius, the brave Pisidian, and Tarmuth, the gigantic Isaurian. There, as I heard, all the thirty men, and, lastly, their two faithful leaders, fell by Teja's hand alone. There fell the flower of Belisarius's body-guard; amongst them many of my best friends: Alamundarus, the Saracen; Artasines, the Persian; Zanter, the Arminian, and many more. But their death bought our safety. At the other side of the bridge we overtook the foot-soldiers we had left behind, who now checked the enemy's horse until, late enough, the Tiburtinian Gate was opened to the wounded general. Then, as soon as we had sent him upon a litter to Antonina, I hastened to the Mausoleum of Hadrian--where, I had heard, the Goths had entered the city--and found you in danger of death."

"And what has Belisarius now decided?"

"His wounds are not so dangerous as yours, and yet they heal more slowly. He has granted to the Goths the armistice which they desired, in order to bury their numerous dead."

Cethegus started up from his cushions.

"He should have refused it; he should have suffered no useless delay of the final result. I know these Gothic bulls; they have blunted their horns; they are tired and done for. Now is the time to strike the blow which I have long contemplated. Their giant bodies can ill bear the heat outside in the glowing plains; less can they support hunger; still less thirst--for

the German must be drinking if he be not snoring or fighting. It is now only necessary to intimidate yet more their prudent King. Greet Belisarius from me, and my thanks for the sword is this advice: Send Johannes, with eight thousand men, through Picenum towards Ravenna; the Flaminian road is open, and will be but slightly defended, for Witichis has collected here the garrisons of all the forts, and we can now more easily win Ravenna than the barbarians can win Rome. And as soon as the King hears that Ravenna, his last refuge, is in danger, he will hurry thither to save it at any cost; he will take away his army from these impregnable walls, and will become the persecuted instead of the persecutor."

"Cethegus," said Procopius, springing up, "you are a great general!"

"Only by the way, Procopius! Now go, and take my homage to the great victor, Belisarius."

CHAPTER XIV.

On the last day of the armistice, Cethegus was again able to appear upon the walls of the Mausoleum, where his legionaries and Isaurians greeted him with loud cheers.

His first walk was to the monument of Kallistratos. He laid a wreath of laurels and roses upon the black marble slab.

While he was superintending the strengthening of the fortifications from this point, Syphax brought him a letter from Mataswintha.

The contents were laconic enough:

"Put an end to it. I cannot bear to see this misery any longer. The sight of the interment of forty thousand of my countrymen has broken my heart. The death-choruses all seem to accuse me. I shall succumb if this continue. Famine rages fearfully in the camp. The army's last hope is a large convoy of corn and cattle, which is on the way from South Gaul. In the next calends it is expected off Portus. Act accordingly; but make an end."

"Triumph!" said the Prefect. "The siege is over. Hitherto our little fleet lay idle at Populonium; but now it shall have work enough. This Queen is the Erinnys of the barbarians."

And he himself went to Belisarius, who received him with noble generosity.

The same night--the last of the armistice--Johannes marched out of the Pincian Gate, and wheeled to the left, towards the Flaminian high-road. Ravenna was his goal.

And swift messengers sped by sea to Populonium, where a small Roman squadron lay at anchor.

The fight for the city, in spite of the expiration of the armistice, was scarcely renewed.

About a week after this the King, who was only now able to leave his bed of pain, took his first walk through the lines of tents, accompanied by his friends.

Three of the seven camps, formerly crowded with soldiers, were completely desolated and abandoned; and the other four were but sparsely

populated.

Tired to death, without complaint, but also without hope, the famished soldiers lay before their tents.

No cheer, no greeting, rejoiced the ears of their brave King upon his painful way; the warriors scarcely raised their tired eyes at the sound of his approaching footsteps.

From the interior of the tents sounded the loud groaning of the sick and dying, who succumbed to wounds, hunger, and pestilence. Scarcely could healthy men enough be found to occupy the most necessary posts.

The sentries dragged their spears behind them, too weak to carry them upright or to lay them across their shoulders.

The leaders arrived at the outwork before the Aurelian Gate; in the trench lay a young archer, chewing the bitter grass.

Hildebad called to him:

"By the hammer, Gunthamund! what is this? Thy bow-string has sprung; why dost thou not bend another?"

"I cannot, sir. The string broke yesterday as I shot my last shot; and I and my three comrades have not strength enough to bend another."

Hildebad gave him a drink from his gourd-bottle.

"Didst thou shoot at a Roman?"

"Oh no, sir!" said the man. "A rat was gnawing at that corpse down there. I happily hit it, and we divided it between us."

"Iffaswinth, where is thine uncle Iffamer?" asked the King.

"Dead, sire. He fell behind you, as he was carrying you away from that cursed marble tomb."

"And thy father Iffamuth?"

"Dead too. He could no longer bear the poisonous water from the ditches. Thirst, King! burns more fiercely than hunger; and it will never, never rain from these leaden skies."

"Are you all from the Athesis valley?"

"Yes, sire; from the Iffinger mountains. Oh! what delicious spring water there is at home!"

Teja observed another warrior at some distance drinking from his helmet. His features grew darker and darker.

"Hey, thou, Arulf!" he cried to the warrior; "thou seem'st to suffer no thirst."

"No; I often drink," said the man.

"What dost thou drink?"

"Blood from the wounds of the newly-fallen. At first it disgusts one terribly; but in despair one gets used to it."

Witichis passed on with a shudder.

"Send all my wine into the camp, Hildebad; the sentries shall share it."

"All thy wine? O King! my office of cup-bearer has become very light. There are but one and a half skins left; and Hildebrand, thy physician, says that thou must strengthen thyself."

"And who will strengthen *these*, Hildebad? They are reduced to the state of wild animals!"

"Come back to thy tent," said Totila; "it is not good to be here." And he put his hand on the King's shoulder.

Arrived at the tent, the friends seated themselves silently round the beautiful marble table, upon which, in golden dishes, lay mouldy bread, as hard as stone, and a few pieces of meat.

"It was the last horse in the royal stables," said Hildebad, "except Boreas."

"Boreas must not be slaughtered. My wife, my child, have sat upon his back." And Witichis rested his weary head upon both his hands. A sad pause ensued. "Friends," the King at last began, "this cannot go on. Our people perish before these walls. After a hard struggle, I have come to a painful decision--"

"Do not pronounce it yet, O King!" cried Hildebad. "In a few days Earl Odoswinth, of Cremona, will arrive with the ships, and we shall luxuriate in good things."

"He is not yet here," said Teja.

"And will not our heavy loss of men be replaced by fresh troops when Earl Ulithis arrives from Urbinum with the garrisons which the King has summoned from all the forts of Ravenna, in order to fill our empty tents?"

"Ulithis also is not yet here," said Teja. "He is said to be still in Picenum; and if he happily arrive, then the greater will be the want."

"But the Roman city hungers too," said Hildebad, breaking the hard bread upon the table with his fist. "Let us see who can bear it the longest!"

"I have often wondered, during these heavy days and sleepless nights," the King slowly said, "why--why all this must be. I have ever conscientiously weighed right and wrong between our enemies and us, and I can come to no other conclusion but that we have right on our side. And, truly, we have never failed in strength and courage."

"Thou least of all," said Totila.

"And we have grudged no sacrifice," sighed the King. "And yet if, as we all say, there is a God in heaven, just and good and almighty, why does He permit this enormous and undeserved misery? Why must we succumb to Byzantium?"

"But we must not succumb!" cried Hildebad. "I have never speculated much, about our Almighty God; but if He permits *that* to happen, we ought to storm heaven and overthrow His throne!"

"Do not blaspheme, my brother," said Totila. "And thou, my noble King, take courage and trust. Yes, a good God reigns above the stars; therefore the just cause must win at last. Courage, my Witichis; hope till the end."

But the heart-broken man shook his head.

"I confess that I have been able to find but *one* way out of this error; one way to get rid of this terrible doubt of God's justice. It cannot be that

we suffer guiltless. And as our nation's cause is, without doubt, a just one, there must be hidden guilt in me, your King. Repeatedly, so say our heathen songs, has a King sacrificed himself for his people when defeat, pestilence, or scarcity had persecuted the nation for years. Then the King took upon himself the hidden sin which seemed to weigh upon his people, and atoned by his death, or by going sceptreless into exile, an outlawed fugitive. Let me put off the crown from my unfortunate head. Choose another King, with whom God is not angry; choose Totila, or----"

"Thou ravest still in the fever of thy wounds," interrupted the old master-at-arms. "**Thou** weighed down with guilt--thou, the most faithful of all? No! I tell you, you children of too young days, who have lost the old strength of your fathers with your fathers' old belief, and now know of no comfort for your hearts--I tell you, your distrustful speeches grieve me!" and his eyes flashed with a strange radiance as he continued, "All that rejoices or pains us here upon earth is scarcely worth our notice. Here below there is but one thing necessary, and that is, to have been a true man, and no perjurer, and to die on the battle-field, and not upon a straw bed. Then the Walkyri bear the faithful hero from the bloody field, and carry him on rosy clouds to Odin's halls, where the Einheriar greet him with full cups. There he daily rides forth at dawn to the hunting-field or the fencing-court, and at eve he returns to the banquet and the song in the golden halls. And lovely virgins caress the youths, and the elders chat about wise primeval times with the old primeval heroes. And there I shall meet again all the valiant companions of my youth; bold Winithar and Waltharis of Aquitania, and Guntharis of Burgundy. There I shall again behold him for whom I have so longed. Sir Beowulf; and I shall see the Cheruskians of ancient days, the first who ever beat the Romans, and of whom the singer of the Saxons still sings. And again I shall carry the shield and spear of my master, the King with the eagle eyes. And thus we shall live for all eternity in light and joy, the earth below and all its woes forgotten."

"A fine poem, old heathen!" said Totila, with a smile. "But if all this can no longer console us for actual and heart-rending suffering? Speak thou also, Teja, thou gloomy guest. What is thy opinion of our sorrows? Thy sword never fails us; why dost thou withhold thy words? What makes thy comforting harp dumb, thou singer of singers?"

"My words?" answered Teja, rising; "my words and my thoughts would be perhaps harder to bear than all our suffering. Let me yet be silent, my sun-bright Totila. Perhaps a day will come when I may answer thee. Perhaps, also, I may once more play on my harp, if but a string will vibrate."

And he left the tent; for outside in the camp a confused and inexplicable noise of calling and questioning voices arose. The friends looked silently after Teja.

"I guess his thoughts," at last said old Hildebrand, "for I have known him from his boyhood. He is not as other men. And in the Northland there are many who think like him, who do not believe in Thor and Odin, but only in necessity and in their own strength. It is almost too heavy a burden for a human heart to bear, and it makes no one happy to think as he does. I wonder that he can sing and play the harp notwithstanding."

Just then Teja, returning, tore open the curtain of the tent; his face was still paler than before; his dark eyes flashed; but his voice was as quiet as ever as he said:

"Break up the camp. King Witichis. Our ships have fallen into the enemy's hands at Ostia. They have sent the head of Earl Odoswinth into the camp. And upon the walls of Rome, before the very eyes of our

sentinels, they slaughter the cattle taken from the Goths. Large reinforcements from Byzantium, under Valerian and Euthalius--Huns, Slaves and Antians--have been brought into the Tiber by many ships. For Johannes has marched through Picenum."

"And Earl Ulithis?"

"Has been killed and his troops beaten. Ancona and Ariminum are taken, and----"

"Is that not yet all?" cried the King.

"No, Witichis. Johannes threatens Ravenna, He is only a few miles distant from that city. And urgent haste is necessary."

CHAPTER XV.

The day after the arrival of this news, so fateful for the Goths, King Witichis abandoned the siege of Rome and led his thoroughly disheartened troops out of the four remaining camps.

The siege had lasted a whole year and nine days. All courage and strength, exertion and sacrifice, had been unavailing.

Silently the Goths marched past the proud walls, against which their power and good-fortune had been wrecked. Silently they suffered the taunting words cast at them from the battlements by Romans and Byzantines.

They were too much absorbed by their grief and rage to feel hurt by such mockery. But when the horsemen of Belisarius, issuing from the Pincian Gate, would have pursued them, they were fiercely repulsed, for Earl Teja led the Gothic rearguard.

So the Gothic army, avoiding the strongholds occupied by the enemy--Narnia, Spoletium and Perugia--marched with expedition from Rome through Picenum to Ravenna, where they arrived in time to crush the dangerous symptoms of rebellion among the population, some of whom, upon hearing of the misfortunes of the barbarians, had already entered into secret negotiations with Johannes.

As the Goths approached the latter withdrew into the fortress of Ariminum, his last important conquest.

In Ancona lay Konon, the navarchus of Belisarius, with the Thracian spearmen and many ships of war.

The King, however, had not taken to Ravenna the whole of the army which had besieged Rome, but had, during the march, left several regiments to garrison the fortresses which he passed.

One thousand men he had left under Gibimer in Clusium; another thousand in Urbs Vetus, under Albila; five hundred men in Tudertum under Wulfgis; in Auximum four thousand men under Earl Wisand, the brave bandalarius; in Urbinum two thousand under Morra; and in Cæsena and Monsferetrus five hundred.

He sent Hildebrand to Verona, Totila to Tarvisium, and Teja to Ticinum, for the north-eastern part of the peninsula was also endangered by Byzantine troops, coming from Istria.

In acting thus he had been also influenced by other reasons. He wished

first of all to check Belisarius on his march to Ravenna. Secondly, he was afraid, in case of a siege, that if all his troops were with him, they would speedily be exposed to the evils of starvation, and, lastly, he wished to attack the besiegers in their rear from various sides.

His plan was to occupy his stronghold of Ravenna, limiting himself to defensive proceedings until the foreign troops which he expected, Longobardians and Franks, should place him in a position to take the open field.

But his hope of checking Belisarius on his way to Ravenna was disappointed, for the Byzantine contented himself with investing all the Gothic fortresses with a portion of his army, marching on with the main army to the capital city and last important refuge of the Goths.

"If I have mortally wounded the heart," he said, "the clenched fists will open of themselves."

And so, very soon, the tents of the Byzantines were seen stretching in a wide semicircle round the royal residence of Theodoric, from the harbour-town of Classis to the canals and branches of the Padus, which, particularly to the west, formed a natural line of defence.

The old aristocratic city had indeed, even at that time, lost much of the glory in which it had rejoiced for nearly two centuries as the residence of the Roman emperors; and the last rays which the splendid reign of Theodoric had shed over it, were extinguished since the breaking out of the war.

But even thus, what a different impression must the still thickly-populated city--similar to the present Venice--have made at that period, in comparison with its aspect at present; when the interior of the city, with its silent streets, its deserted squares and its lonely basilicas, appears to the beholder no less melancholy than the plain outside the walls, where the desolate and marshy levels of the Padus stretch far away, until they are lost in the mud of the receding sea.

Where once the harbour-town of Classis was filled with active life on land and sea; where the proud triremes of the royal fleet of Ravenna rocked on the blue waters, now lie swampy meadows, in whose tall reeds and grass the wild buffalo feeds; the streets foul with stagnant water; the harbour choked with sand; the once joyous population vanished; only one gigantic tower of the time of the Goths still stands near the sole remaining Basilica, of Saint Apollonaris in *Classe fuori*, which, commenced by Witichis and completed by Justinian, now rises sadly out of the marshy plain, far from any human abode.

In the time of which our story speaks the strong fortress was considered impregnable, and for that reason the emperors, when their power began to decay, had chosen it for their residence.

The south-eastern side was at that time protected by the sea, which rolled its waves to the very foot of the walls, and on the other three sides nature and art had spun a labyrinthine network of canals, ditches, and swamps, begotten by the many-armed Padus, among which all besiegers were hopelessly entangled.

And the walls! Even yet their mighty ruins fill the traveller with amazement. Their colossal width, and less their height than the number of strong round towers, which even now (1863) rise above the battlements, defied, before the invention of gunpowder, every means of attack.

It was only by starving the city that, after a resistance of nearly four

years, the great Theodoric won this, Odoacer's last place of refuge.

In vain had Belisarius attempted to take the city by storm, as soon as he had reached the walls.

His attack was bravely repulsed, and he was obliged to content himself with closely investing the fortress, in order by cutting off all supplies, as had formerly been done by Theodoric, to force that city to capitulate.

But Witichis was able to look upon this proceeding with composure, for, with the prudence which was peculiar to him, he had, before marching to Rome, heaped up provisions of all kinds, principally corn, in extraordinary quantities. He had stored them in granaries built of wood and erected within the walls of the immense marble Circus of Theodosius. These extensive wooden edifices, situated exactly opposite to the palace and the Basilica of Saint Apollonaris, were the pride, joy, and comfort of the King.

It had been impossible to convey much of the provisions to the army before Rome, and with reasonable economy these magazines would without doubt suffice for the wants of the population and the no longer formidable army for another two or three months.

By that time the Goths expected the arrival of an allied army, in consequence of the newly-opened negotiations with the Franks. On its arrival the siege would necessarily be raised.

But Belisarius and Cethegus knew or guessed this as well as Witichis, and they indefatigably sought on all sides for some means of hastening the fall of the city.

The Prefect, of course, tried to make use of his secret relations with the Queen for the furtherance of this end. But, on the one hand, communication with Mataswintha had become very difficult, for the Goths carefully guarded all the entrances to the city; and, on the other hand, Mataswintha herself seemed greatly changed, and no longer so ready and willing as before to allow herself to be used as a tool.

She had expected the speedy destruction or humiliation of the King. The long delay wearied her, and, at the same time, the immense suffering of her people had begun to shake her resolution. Lastly, the sad change in the manner of the usually strong and healthy King, the resigned but profound grief which he evidently felt, touched her heart.

Although she accused him, with all the injustice of pain and the bitter pride of insulted love, of having rejected her heart and yet forced her to give him her hand; although she believed that she hated him with all the passion of her nature, and did indeed in some sort hate him, yet this hatred was only love reversed.

And now, when she saw him humbled by the terrible misfortunes of the Gothic army and the failure of all his plans--to which failure she had so greatly contributed by her own treason--so humbled, that his mind had begun to be affected by sickly melancholy, and he tormented himself with reproaches; the sight powerfully affected her impulsive nature, strangely compounded as it was of the contradictory elements of tenderness and harshness.

In the first moment of angry grief, she would have seen his blood flow with delight. But to see him slowly devoured by self-reproach and gnawing pain that she could not endure.

This softer feeling on her part had, besides, been greatly brought about by her having noticed, since their arrival in Ravenna, a change in the King's behaviour towards herself.

She thought that she observed in him traces of remorse for having so forcibly encroached upon her life, and she involuntarily softened her harsh and blunt manner to him during their rare interviews, which always took place in the presence of witnesses.

Witichis considered the change as a sign that a step had been taken towards reconciliation, and silently acknowledged and rewarded it, on his part, by a more friendly manner.

All this was sufficient to induce Mataswintha, with her emotional nature, to repulse the overtures of the Prefect, even when they sometimes reached her by means of the clever Moor.

Now the Prefect had already learned from Syphax during the march to Ravenna, that which was known later by other means, namely, that the Goths expected assistance from the Franks.

He had therefore forthwith renewed his old and intimate relations with the aristocrats and great men who ruled in the name of the mock Kings of the Merovingians in the courts of Mettis (Metz), Aurelianum (Orleans) and Suessianum (Soissons), in order to induce the Franks--whose perfidy, even then become a proverb, gave good hope that his efforts would be successful--to renounce the Gothic alliance.

And when the affair had been properly introduced by these friends, he himself wrote to King Theudebald, who held his court in Mettis, impressively warning him of the risk he would run if he supported such a ruined cause as that of the Goths had undeniably become since their ill-success in the siege of Rome.

This letter had been accompanied by rich gifts to his old friend, the Major Domus of the weak-minded King, and the Prefect impatiently waited, day by day, for the reply; the more impatiently because the altered demeanour of Mataswintha had cut off all the hopes he had entertained of effecting a more speedy conquest of the Goths.

The answer came--at the same time with an imperial letter from Byzantium--on a day which was equally pregnant with the fate of the heroes both in and out of Ravenna.

CHAPTER XVI.

Hildebad, impatient at the long pause of idleness, had, one day at dawn, made a sudden sally upon the Byzantines from the Porta Faventina, which was under his special command. He had at first won great advantages, had burnt a portion of the enemies' implements of siege, and had spread terror all around.

He would, without doubt, have done still more mischief had not Belisarius, hurrying up, displayed at once all his heroism and generalship.

Without helmet or armour, just as he had hurried from his tent, he had first checked his own flying outposts, and had then thrown himself upon the Gothic pursuers, and by the utmost personal exertion had brought the fight to a standstill.

Afterwards he had manœuvred his two flanks so cleverly, that Hildebad's retreat was greatly endangered, and the Goths were obliged to retreat speedily into the city.

Cethegus, who lay encamped before the Porta Honorius with his Isaurians, had found, on hastening to the assistance of Belisarius, that

the fight was already over. He could not, therefore, avoid paying a visit to the commander-in-chief in his tent, in order to express his admiration of the heroes conduct, both as a general and a soldier; praise which was greedily listened to by Antonina.

"Really, Belisarius," concluded the Prefect, "Emperor Justinian can never requite your valour sufficiently."

"There you speak truly," answered Belisarius haughtily; "he can only requite me by his friendship. The mere honour of bearing his marshal's staff would never have induced me to do that which I have already done, and shall yet accomplish. I do it only because I really love him. With all his failings, he is a great man. If he could but learn one thing--to trust me! But patience--he will learn it in time."

Just then Procopius entered, bringing a letter for Belisarius, which had been delivered by an imperial messenger.

With a countenance beaming with delight, Belisarius, forgetting his fatigue, sprang from his cushions, kissed the letter, and with his dagger cut the purple cord which tied it. He unfolded the paper with the words:

"From my Emperor himself! Ah, now he will send me the gold and the rest of the body-guard!"

And he began to read.

Antonina, Procopius, and Cethegus observed him attentively. His features grew darker and darker; his broad chest began to heave; both the hands with which he held the letter trembled.

Antonina anxiously approached him, but before she could question him, Belisarius uttered a low cry of rage, cast the letter on the ground, and rushed madly out of the tent. His wife followed him.

"Antonina alone dare now approach him," said Procopius, as he picked up the letter. "Let us see; no doubt it is another piece of imperial gratitude." And he glanced over the letter. "The commencement is, as usual, mere phrases. Ah, now comes something better: 'Notwithstanding, we cannot deny that we expected, according to your own former boasts, a more speedy termination to the war against these barbarians; and we believe that, with greater exertion, this would not have been impossible. For this reason we cannot comply with your repeatedly-expressed wish to have the remaining five thousand body-guards sent from Persia, and the four thousand centenari of gold which lie in your palace at Byzantium. Certainly, both, as you rather superfluously remark in your letter, are your own property; and your offer to carry this war to a conclusion, paying the expenses out of your own purse, because of the existing exhaustion of the imperial exchequer, is worthy of all praise. As, however, all your property, as you more justly add in the aforesaid letter, is at the service of your Emperor, and as your Emperor considers the desired employment of your treasure and body-guard in Italy superfluous, we have decided to appropriate it otherwise, and have already sent troops and treasure to your colleague, Narses, to be used in the Persian wars.' Ha! this is unheard of!" cried Procopius, interrupting himself.

Cethegus smiled. "It is a tyrant's thanks for the services of a slave!"

"And the end seems to be just as pleasant," continued Procopius. "An increase of your power in Italy seems to us the less desirable, because we are daily warned against your boundless ambition. You are reported to have said lately, while sitting at wine, that the sceptre originated in the general's staff, and the general's staff in the stick. Dangerous thoughts and unseemly words! You see that we are faithfully informed of your

ambitious dreams. This time we will warn without punishing; but we have no desire to furnish you with more wood for your general's staff; and we would remind you that the tree, which most proudly tosses its summit, is nearest to the imperial lightning.' It is shameful!" cried Procopius.

"No, it is worse; it is silly!" said Cethegus. "It is whipping fidelity into rebellion."

"You are right!" cried Belisarius, who had caught these words as he again rushed into the tent. "Oh, he deserves that I should desert him, the base, ungrateful, wicked tyrant!"

"Be silent, for God's sake! You will ruin yourself!" cried Antonina, who had entered with her husband, and now tried to take his hand.

"No, I will not be silent!" cried the angry man, as he paced to and fro close to the open door of the tent, before which Bessas, Acacius, Demetrius, and many other leaders stood listening in astonishment. "All the world shall hear me! He is an ungrateful, malicious tyrant! He deserves that I should overthrow him! that I should confirm the suspicions of his false soul!"

Cethegus cast a look at those who stood outside; they had evidently heard all. Glancing at Antonina, he now went to the door and closed it carefully. Antonina thanked him by a look. She again drew near her husband, but he had thrown himself upon the ground before his couch, striking his clenched fist upon his brow and stammering:

"O Justinian! have I deserved this from you? It is too much, too much!"

And the strong man burst into tears.

At this Cethegus contemptuously turned away.

"Farewell," he said in a low voice to Procopius, "It disgusts me to see men blubber!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Lost in thought, the Prefect left the tent, and went round the camp to the rather distant outwork, where he had entrenched himself and his Isaurians before the Gate of Honorius.

It was situated on the south side of the city, near the harbour wall of Classis, and the way led partly along the sea-shore.

Although the lonely wanderer was at this moment preoccupied by the great thought which had become the pulse of his life, although he was oppressed by anxiety as to how Belisarius--that man of impulse--would act, and worried with impatience for the arrival of the answer from the Franks, his attention was yet involuntarily attracted by the singular appearance of the landscape, the sky, and the sea.

It was October; but the season had seemed for weeks to have altered its laws. For almost two months it had never rained. Not a cloud, not a stripe of mist had been seen in this usually so humid part of the country. But now, quite suddenly--it was towards sunset--Cethegus remarked in the east, above the sea horizon, a single, dense, and coal-black cloud.

The setting sun, although free from mist, shed no rays.

Not a breath of air rippled the leaden surface of the sea; not the

smallest wavelet played upon the strand.

Not an olive-leaf moved in all the wide plain; not even the easily-shaken reeds in the marshy ditches trembled.

No cry of an animal, no flight of a bird could be heard or perceived; and a strange choking smell, as if of sulphur, seemed to lie oppressively over land and sea, and to check respiration. The mules and horses in the camp kicked uneasily against the posts to which they were tied. A few camels and dromedaries, which Belisarius had brought with him from Africa, buried their heads in the sand.

The wanderer heaved a deep breath, and looked about him in surprise.

"How sultry! Just as it is before the 'wind of death' arises in the deserts of Egypt," he said to himself. "Sultry everywhere--outside and inside. Upon whose head will the long-withheld fury of Nature and Passion be let loose?"

He entered his tent.

Syphax accosted him.

"Sir, if I were at home, I should think that the poisonous breath of the God of the Desert was coming over us." And he handed a letter to the Prefect.

It was the answer of the King of the Franks. Hastily Cethegus tore open the great shining seal.

"Who brought it?"

"An ambassador, who, as he did not find you, immediately asked to be conducted to Belisarius. He desired to go the shortest way--through the camp."

So thus Cethegus had missed him.

He read eagerly:

"Theudebald, King of the Franks, to Cethegus, the Prefect of Rome.

"You have addressed to us wise words, and still wiser words you have not trusted to the letter, but have sent to us through our Major Domus. We are not disinclined to act accordingly. We accept your advice, and the gifts which accompany it. Their misfortunes have dissolved our treaty with the Goths. They may blame their evil fate and not our withdrawal. Whom Heaven forsakes, men, if they be pious and wise, should forsake also. It is true that the Goths have paid beforehand the price for the army of alliance. But, in our eyes, that is no hindrance. We will keep the treasure as a pledge, until such time as they shall cede to us the towns in South Gaul, which lie within the frontier formed by God and nature for the kingdom of the Franks. But, as we have prepared for a campaign, and our brave soldiers, who already scent the battle, would but impatiently bear the tedium of peace and might become dangerous, we are inclined, notwithstanding, to send our valiant troops over the Alps. Only, instead of fighting *for* the Goths, they will fight against them. However, we do not wish to serve the Emperor Justinian, who continually denies us the title of King, and inscribes himself on his coins, 'Master of Gaul;' who will not allow us to impress our own image on our own coins; and has offered other unbearable affronts to our dignity. We rather think of extending our own power in Italy. Now, as we well know that the whole strength of the Emperor in that country is embodied in his commander-in-chief, Belisarius, and that the latter has a great number of old and new injuries

to complain of, inflicted by his ungrateful master, we shall propose to the hero, Belisarius, to set himself up as Emperor of the West, to which end we will send him an army of a hundred thousand Frankish heroes. In return, we desire the cession of only a small part of Italy, extending from our frontier to Genoa. We hold it to be impossible that any mortal can refuse such an offer. In case you will co-operate with us, we promise you a sum of twelve centenari of gold; and, upon a return payment of two centenari, we shall place your name on the list of our messmates. The ambassador who brings you this letter--Duke Lintharis--has our order to communicate with Belisarius."

Cethegus had read to the end with difficulty. He now broke out:

"Such an offer at such a moment! In such a humour! He will accept it! Emperor of the West, with a hundred thousand Frankish warriors! He must not live!"

And he hurried to the door of his tent; but he suddenly checked himself.

"Fool that I am!" he laughed, "Still so hot-blooded? He is Belisarius, and not Cethegus! He will not accept. He can rebel as little as the moon can rebel against the earth, or a tame house-dog suddenly become a raging wolf. He will not accept! But now let us see to what purpose we can put the cupidity and falsity of this Merovingian. No, King of the Franks!" and he looked bitterly at the crumpled letter. "As long as Cethegus lives, not a foot of Italian soil shall you have!"

He paced rapidly through his tent.

Another turn--with a slower step.

And a third--then he stood still, and over his mighty brow came a flash of light.

"I have it!" he joyously cried. "Syphax," he called, "go and fetch Procopius."

As he again paced the tent, his eyes fell upon the fallen letter of the Merovingian.

"No," he laughed triumphantly, as he took it up from the ground. "No, King of the Franks, you shall not win as much of Italy's holy soil as is covered by this letter."

Procopius soon appeared. The two men sat talking earnestly through the whole night.

Procopius was startled at the bold and daring plans of the Prefect, and for some time refused to enter into them. But the genius of the man held him fast, overcame every objection before it was expressed, and at last he was so entangled in an inextricable network of argument, that he lost all power of resistance.

The stars were pale, and the dawn illumined the east with a grey stripe of light, when Procopius took leave of his friend.

"Cethegus," he said, rising, "I admire you. If I were not the historian of Belisarius, I should like to be yours."

"It would be more interesting," said the Prefect quietly, "but more difficult."

"But," continued Procopius, "I cannot help shuddering at the biting acrimony of your spirit. It is a sign of the times in which we live. It is like

a poisonous but brilliant flower in a swamp. When I recollect how you have ruined the Gothic King by means of his own wife----"

"I have something to tell you about that. Lately I have heard very little from my fair ally----"

"Your ally? Your ways are----"

"Always practical."

"But not always---- But never mind. I am with you--for yet a little while, for I wish to get my hero out of Italy as soon as possible. He shall gather laurels in Persia instead of thorns here. But I will only go with you as far--"

"As it suits you, of course."

"Enough! I will at once speak with Antonina. I do not doubt of success. She is tired to death here. She burns with desire, not only to see many an old friend in Byzantium, but also to ruin the enemies of her husband."

"A good bad wife!"

"But Witichis? Do you think he will believe a rebellion on the part of Belisarius possible?"

"King Witichis is a good soldier, but a poor psychologist. I know a much cleverer man, who yet, for a moment, believed it possible. Besides, you will bring proofs in writings and just now, forsaken as he is by the Franks--the water is up to his neck--he will snatch at any straw. Therefore I, also, do not doubt of success. Only make sure of Antonina----"

"That shall be my care. At mid-day I hope to enter Ravenna as an ambassador."

"Good--and do not forget to speak to the lovely Queen."

CHAPTER XVIII.

At mid-day Procopius rode into Ravenna.

He carried with him four letters: the letter of Justinian to Belisarius, the letters of the King of the Franks to Cethegus and Belisarius, and a letter from Belisarius to Witichis.

This last had been written by Procopius and dictated by Cethegus.

The ambassador had no suspicion of the mood in which he should find the King of the Goths and his beautiful Queen.

The healthy but simple mind of the King had begun to darken, if not to despair, under the pressure of continual misfortune. The murder of his only child, the terrible wrench of parting from his beloved wife, had shaken him to the very soul; but he had borne it all in the hope of securing victory to the Goths.

And now this victory obstinately tarried.

In spite of all efforts, the state of his people became more hopeless every month. With the single exception of the battle fought and won on the march to Rome, fortune had never smiled upon the Goths.

The siege of Rome, undertaken with such proud hopes, had ended in a

woeful retreat and the loss of three-fourths of the army. New strokes of fortune, bad news that followed each other like rapid blows, increased the King's depression, until it degenerated into a state of dull despair.

Almost all Italy, except Ravenna, was lost. Belisarius, while yet in Rome, had sent a fleet to Genoa, under the command of Mundila the Herulian, and Ennes the Isaurian. The troops had landed without resistance, had conquered the sea-ruling harbour of Genoa, and, from that point, almost all Liguria.

Datius, the Bishop of Mediolanum, himself invited the Byzantines to that important city. Thence they easily won Bergomum, Comum, and Novaria.

On the other side, the discouraged Goths in Clusium and the half-ruined Dertona surrendered to the besiegers and were led prisoners out of Italy.

Urbinum, after a brave resistance, was taken by the Byzantines; also Forum Cornelii and the whole district of Æmilia by Johannes. The Goths failed to retake Ancona, Ariminum, and Mediolanum.

Still worse news presently arrived to increase the despondency of the King. For meanwhile famine was making ravages in the wide districts of Æmilia, Picenum and Tuscany.

There were neither men, cattle, nor horses to serve the plough. The people fled into the woods and mountains, made bread of acorns, and devoured grass and weeds.

Devastating maladies were the consequence of insufficient or unwholesome nourishment.

In Picenum alone perished fifty thousand souls; a still greater number succumbed to hunger and pestilence on the other side of the Ionian Gulf, in Dalmatia, Pale and thin, those still living tottered to the grave; their skins became black and like leather; their glassy eyes started from the sockets; their intestines burned as if with fire.

The vultures despised the corpses of the victims of pestilence; but human flesh was devoured by men. Mothers killed and ate their newly-born children.

In a farm near Ariminum only two Roman women had remained alive. These women murdered and devoured, one after another, seventeen men, who, singly, had sought a shelter in their house. The eighteenth awoke as they were about to strangle him in his sleep. He killed the fiendish women, and discovered the fate of their earlier victims.

Lastly, the hopes placed in the Franks and Longobardians were utterly destroyed.

The Franks, who had already received large sums for the promised army of alliance, were silent. The messengers of the King, who were sent to urge the fulfilment of their promise, were detained at Mettis, Aurelianum, and Paris; no answer came from these courts.

The King of the Longobardians sent word that he could decide nothing without the consent of his warlike son Alboin. That the latter was absent in search of adventures. Perhaps he would at some time reach Italy; he was an intimate friend of Narses. Then he could observe the country for himself, and advise his father and his countrymen as to the course to be taken.

It is true that the important fortress of Auximum withstood, for months, all the efforts of the powerful army which besieged it under Belisarius, accompanied by Procopius. But it wrung the King's heart when a messenger (who had, with much difficulty, stolen his way through the two investing armies to Ravenna) brought him the following message from the heroic Earl Wisand:

"When Auximum was entrusted to my care, thou saidst that therewith I should hold the keys of Ravenna; yea, of the kingdom. Thou badest me resist manfully until thou camest thyself with thy whole army to my assistance. We have manfully resisted not only Belisarius, but famine. Where is thy relief? Woe to us if thy words are true, and with this fortress the keys of our kingdom fall into the enemy's hands! Come therefore, and help us; more for the kingdom's sake than for our own!"

This messenger was soon followed by a second: Burcentius, a soldier belonging to the besieging army, who had been bribed with much gold. His message ran--the short letter was written in blood:

"We have now only the weeds that grow between the stones to eat. We cannot hold out longer than four days more."

As this last messenger was returning with the King's reply, he fell into the hands of the besiegers, who burnt him alive in sight of the Goths before the walls of Auximum.

And the King could give no help.

The small party of Goths in Auximum still resisted, although Belisarius cut off the supply of water by destroying the aqueducts and poisoning the remaining wells with the corpses of men and animals, thrown in with lime.

Wisand still fiercely repelled every attack. On one of these occasions Belisarius only escaped death at the sacrifice of one of his body-guard.

Finally, Cæsena, the last of the Gothic towns on the Æmilia, was the first to fall; and then Fæsulæ, which was besieged by Cyprianus and Justinus.

"My poor Fæsulæ!" exclaimed the King, when he learned this last disaster, for he had been the Count of that town, and close to it lay the house where he had lived so happily with Rauthgundis;--"My poor Fæsulæ! the Huns will run riot in my deserted home!"

When, later, the garrison taken prisoner at Fæsulæ were led in chains before the eyes of the defenders of Auximum, and reported to the latter the hopelessness of any relief from Ravenna, the famished troops of Wisand compelled him to surrender.

He stipulated for himself a free escort to Ravenna. His men were led prisoners out of Italy.

And, so deeply sunk was the courage and patriotism of the conquered troops, that, led by Earl Sisifrid of Sarsina, they accepted service against their own countrymen under the flag of Belisarius.

The victor had strongly garrisoned Auximum and then led the army back to the camp before Ravenna, where he now again took the command, which had been entrusted to Cethegus during his absence.

It was as if a curse rested upon the head of the Gothic King, who so sorely felt the weight of his crown.

As he could not ascribe the cause of his failure to any weakness or

oversight on his own part; as he did not doubt in the justice of the Gothic cause, and as his simple piety could see nothing but the hand of Heaven in all his misfortunes, he conceived the torturing thought that God was punishing the Goths for some unforgiven sin committed by himself, a conviction imparted to his conscience by the then dominating doctrine of the Old Testament no less than by many features of the old Germanic legends.

Day and night the King was tortured by this idea, which undermined his strength and resolution. Now he tried to discover his secret guilt; now he reflected how he could at least turn aside the curse from his people.

He would long since have abdicated, but that such an act at such a moment would have been considered cowardly both by himself and others. So this escape from his misery--the quickest and best--was closed to him.

His soul was bowed to the very earth. He often sat motionless for hours, silent and staring at vacancy; at times shaking his head or sighing deeply.

The daily recurring sight of this resigned suffering, this dumb and hopeless bearing of an oppressive fate, was not, as we have said, without effect on Mataswintha. She thought that lately the eyes of Witichis rested upon her with an expression of sorrow and even of beneficence.

And vague hope--which is so difficult to destroy in a living heart--remorse and compassion, attracted her more powerfully than ever to the suffering King.

They were now often thrown together by some common errand of mercy.

For some weeks the inhabitants of Ravenna had begun to suffer want, while the besiegers ruled the sea from Ancona, and received plentiful provisions from Calabria and Sicily.

None but rich citizens could afford to pay the high price asked for corn.

The King's kind heart did not hesitate, when he had provided his troops, to share the wealth of his magazines--which, as we have seen, contained sufficient for the wants of all for more than double the time required for the arrival of the Franks--amongst the poor of the city. He also hoped for the arrival of many ships laden with corn, which the Goths had collected in the northern districts of the Padus, and which lay in that river, waiting for an opportunity to reach Ravenna.

In order to avoid any misuse of his bounty, or extravagance in the granting of rations, the King himself superintended the distribution; and Mataswintha, who one day met him among the groups of grateful people, placed herself near him upon the marble steps of the Basilica of Saint Apollonaris, and helped him to fill the baskets with bread.

It was a touching sight to see this royal pair standing before the church doors, distributing their gift to the people.

As they were standing thus, Mataswintha remarked among the crowd--for many country-people had fled to the city from all sides--sitting upon the lowest step of the Basilica, a woman in a simple brown mantle, which was half drawn over her head.

This woman did not press forward with the others to demand bread, but leaned against a high sarcophagus, with her head resting upon her hand, and, half concealed by the corner pillar of the Basilica, looked sharply and fixedly at the Queen.

Mataswintha thought that the woman was restrained by fear, pride, or shame, from mixing with the more importunate beggars who pushed and crowded each other upon the steps, and she gave Aspa a basket of bread, telling her to go down and give it to the woman. With care she heaped up the sweet-scented bread with both her hands.

As she looked up, she met the eye of the King, which rested upon her with a more soft and friendly expression than she had ever seen before.

She started slightly, and the blood rushed into her cheeks as she cast down her beautiful eyes.

When she again looked up and glanced towards the woman in the brown mantle, she perceived that the place by the sarcophagus was empty. The woman had disappeared.

She had not observed, while filling the basket, that a man, clad in a buffalo-skin and a steel cap, who had been standing behind the woman, had caught her arm and drawn her away with gentle violence.

"Come," he had said; "this is no place for thee."

And, as if in a dream, the woman had answered:

"By God, she is wonderfully lovely!"

"I thank thee, Mataswintha," said the King, in a friendly manner, when the rations for the day had been distributed.

The look, the tone, the words, penetrated her heart.

Never before had he called her by her name; he had ever met and spoken to her only as the "Queen."

How happy those few words from his mouth had made her; and yet how heavily his kindness weighed upon her guilty soul!

Evidently she had earned his more affectionate feeling by her active compassion for the poor.

"Oh, he is good!" she cried to herself, half weeping with emotion. "I also will be good!"

As, occupied by this thought, she entered the court of the left wing of the palace, which was assigned to her--the King inhabited the right wing--Aspa hurried to meet her.

"A messenger from the camp," she eagerly whispered. "He brings a secret message from the Prefect--a letter, in Syphax's handwriting--in our language. He waits for a reply."

"Leave me!" cried Mataswintha, frowning. "I will hear and read nothing.--But who are these?" And she pointed to the steps leading from the court to her apartments.

There, upon the cold stones, crouched women, children, and sick people, clothed in rags--a group of misery.

"Beggars," said Aspa; "poor people. They have lain there the whole morning. They will not be driven away."

"They shall not be driven away," said Mataswintha, drawing near.

"Bread, Queen! Bread, daughter of the Amelungs!" cried many voices.

"Give them gold, Aspa. All that thou hast with thee; and fetch----"

"Bread, bread. Queen--not gold! No more bread is to be had for money in all the city."

"It is dispensed freely outside the King's magazines. I have just come thence. Why were you not there?"

"Queen! we could not get through the crowd," said a haggard woman. "I am aged, and my daughter here is sick, and that old man is blind. The strong and young push us away. For three days we tried to go in vain. We could not get through."

"Yes, and we starve," grumbled the old man. "O Theodoric! my lord and King, where art thou? Under thy rule we had enough and to spare! Then the poor and sick were not deprived of bread. But this unhappy King----"

"Be silent," said Mataswintha. "The King, my husband"--and a lovely flush rose into her cheeks--"does more than you deserve. Wait here. I will bring you bread. Follow me, Aspa." And she hastened away.

"Whither goest thou?" asked the slave, astonished.

Mataswintha drew her veil closely over her face as she answered:

"To the King!"

When she reached the antechamber of the King's apartments, the door-keeper, who recognised her with amazement, begged her to wait a moment.

"An ambassador from Belisarius has been admitted to a private audience. He has been in the room already for some time, and no doubt will soon leave it."

Just then the door of the King's apartment was opened, and Procopius stood hesitating upon the threshold.

"King of the Goths," he said, as he once again turned round, "is that your last word?"

"My last; as it was my first," answered the King, with dignity.

"I will give you time--I will remain in Ravenna till to-morrow----"

"From this moment you are welcome as a guest, but not as an ambassador."

"I repeat: if the city be taken by storm, all the Goths who are taller than the sword of Belisarius--he has sworn it--will be killed! The women and children will be sold into slavery. You understand that Belisarius will suffer no barbarians in *his* Italy. The death of a hero may be tempting to you, but think of the helpless people--their blood will accuse you before the throne of God----"

"Ambassador, you, as well as we, are in God's hand. Farewell."

And these words were uttered with such majesty, that the Byzantine was obliged to go, however reluctantly.

The simple dignity of the King had had a strong effect upon him; but still more upon the listening Queen.

As Procopius slowly shut the door, he saw Mataswintha standing before him, and started back, dazzled by her great beauty. He greeted her

reverently.

"You are the Queen of the Goths!" he said. "You must be she."

"I am," said Mataswintha. "Would that I had never forgotten it!"

And she passed him with a haughty step.

"These Germans, both men and women," said Procopius, as he went out, "have eyes such as I have never seen before!"

CHAPTER XIX.

Meanwhile, Mataswintha had entered her husband's presence unannounced.

Witichis had left untouched all the rooms which had been occupied by the Amelungs--Theodoric, Athalaric, and Amalasintha--and had appropriated to his own use the apartments which he had formerly been accustomed to inhabit when on duty at court.

He had never assumed the gold and purple trappings of the Amelungs, and had banished from his chamber all the pomp of royalty.

A low camp-bed, upon which lay his helmet, sword, and various documents, a long wooden table, and a few wooden chairs and utensils, formed the simple furniture of the room.

When Procopius had taken leave, the King had thrown himself into a chair, and, supporting his weary head on his hands, leaned his elbows upon the table. Thus he had not noticed Mataswintha's light step.

She remained standing near the door, reluctant to advance. She had never before sought an interview with her husband. Her heart beat fast, and she could not muster courage to address him.

At last Witichis rose with a sigh, and, turning, saw the motionless figure at the door.

"Thou here, Queen!" he asked with surprise, as he approached her. "What can have led thee to me?"

"Duty--compassion--" Mataswintha answered quickly; "otherwise I had not---- I have a favour to ask of thee."

"It is the first," said Witichis.

"It does not concern me," she added hastily. "I beg for food for some poor people, who----"

The King silently stretched out his right hand.

It was the first time he had ever offered it. She did not dare to clasp it, and yet how gladly she would have done so.

Then the King took her hand himself, and pressed it gently.

"I thank thee, Mataswintha, and regret my injustice. I never believed that thou hadst a heart for thy people. I have thought unkindly of thee."

"If thy thoughts had been more just from the beginning, perhaps many things might be better now."

"Scarcely! Misfortune dogs my heels. Just now--thou hast a right to know it--my last hopes have been destroyed. The Franks, upon whose aid I depended, have betrayed us. Relief is impossible; the superiority of the enemy has become too great, by reason of the rebellion of the Italians. Only one thing remains to me--death!"

"Let me share it with thee," cried Mataswintha, her eyes sparkling.

"Thou? No. The granddaughter of Theodoric will be honourably received at the Court of Byzantium. It is known that she became my wife against her will. Thou canst appeal to that fact."

"Never!" exclaimed Mataswintha with enthusiasm.

Witichis, without noticing her, went on:

"But the others! The thousands, the tens of thousands of women and children! Belisarius will keep his word. There is only one hope for them, one single hope! For--all the powers of nature are in league against me. The Padus has suddenly become so shallow, that two hundred ships with grain, which I had expected, could not be brought down the river, and fell into the hands of the enemy. I have now written for assistance to the King of the Ostrogoths; I have asked him to send a fleet; for ours is lost. If the ships can force their way into the harbour, then all who cannot fight may take refuge in them. And, if thou wilt, thou canst fly to Spain."

"I will die with thee--with the others!"

"In a few weeks the Ostrogothic sails may appear off the city. Until then my magazines will not be exhausted. That is my only comfort. But that reminds me of thy wish. Here is the key to the great door of the granaries. I carry it with me day and night. Keep it carefully--it guards my last hope. Upon its safety depend the lives of many thousands. These granaries are the only thing that has not failed. I wonder," he added sadly, "that the earth has not opened, or fire fallen from Heaven, to destroy this my work!"

He took the heavy key from the bosom of his doublet.

"Guard it well, it is my last treasure, Mataswintha."

"I thank thee, Witichis--King Witichis," said she, and would have taken the key, but her hand trembled so much that it fell to the ground.

"What is the matter?" asked the King as he picked up the key and put it into her hand. "Thou tremblest? Art thou sick!" he added anxiously.

"No--it is nothing. But do not look at me so--do not look at me as thou didst this morning----"

"Forgive me, Queen," said Witichis, turning away, "my looks shall no more offend thee. I have had much, too much, to grieve me lately. And when I tried to find out for what hidden guilt I could have deserved all my misfortune--" his voice grew very tender.

"Then? Oh, speak!" cried Mataswintha; for she could not doubt the meaning of his unspoken thought.

"I often thought amid all my doubt, that it might be a punishment for the cruel, cruel wrong I did to a noble creature; a woman whom I have sacrificed to my people----"

And in the ardour of his speech he involuntarily looked at his listener.

Mataswintha's cheeks glowed. She was obliged, in order to keep herself

upright, to grasp the arm of the chair near her.

"At last," she thought, "at last his heart awakes, and I--how have I acted towards him! And he regrets----"

"A woman," continued Witichis, "who has suffered unspeakably on my account, more than words can express----"

"Cease," whispered Mataswintha so softly that he did not hear it.

"And when I lately saw thee so gentle, so mild, more womanly than ever before--it touched my heart, and tears came into my eyes!"

"O Witichis!" breathed Mataswintha.

"Every tone of thy voice penetrated deeply into my heart, for the sweet sound reminded me so vividly, so sadly----"

"Of whom?" asked Mataswintha, and she turned pale as death.

"Of her whom I have sacrificed! Who gave up all for me; of my wife Rauthgundis, the soul of my soul!"

For how long a time had he never uttered aloud that beloved name! At the sound of his own voice, grief and longing overcame him, and sinking into a chair, he buried his face in his hands.

It was well that he did so, for it spared him the sight of the Queen's sudden start, and the Medusa-like expression which convulsed her features.

But the sound of a fall made him spring from his seat.

Mataswintha lay upon the ground. Her left hand grasped the broken arm of the chair near which she had fallen, while her right was pressed convulsively upon the mosaic floor. Her pale face was bent down; her splendid golden hair, loosed from its bonds, flowed over her shoulders; her mobile nostrils quivered.

"Queen!" cried Witichis, bending to lift her up, "what ails thee?"

But before he could touch her, she started up, swift as a serpent, and stood erect.

"It was only a weakness--which is already over," she panted. "Farewell!"

She tottered to the door, and, closing it behind her, fell senseless into Aspa's arms.

During all this time, the mysteriously threatening appearance of the atmosphere had increased.

The little cloud which Cethegus had remarked the day before, had been the forerunner of an immense black wall of vapour which had arisen in the east during the night, and which, since morning, had hovered gloomily, as if brooding destruction, over the city and the greater part of the horizon.

In the south, however, the sun shone with an intolerable heat from a cloudless sky.

The Gothic sentries had doffed their helmets and armour; they preferred to expose themselves to the arrows of the enemy rather than suffer the unbearable heat.

There was not a breath of air. The east wind, which had brought up the wall of cloud, had dropped again.

The sea was grey and motionless; not a leaf of the poplars in the palace garden moved.

The animal world, silent the day before, was uneasy and terrified. Over the hot sands on the shore swallows, seagulls, and marsh-birds fluttered hither and thither, without cause or aim, flying low above the ground, and often uttering shrill cries.

In the city the dogs ran whining out of the houses; the horses tore themselves loose from their halters and, snorting impatiently, kicked and pranced; cats, asses, and mules uttered lamentable cries; and three of the dromedaries belonging to Belisarius killed themselves in their frantic efforts to get loose.

Evening was approaching. The sun was about to sink below the horizon.

In the Forum of Hercules a citizen was sitting upon the marble steps of his house. He was a vine-dresser, and, as the dry branch hung at his door indicated, himself sold the produce of his vines. He glanced at the threatening thundercloud.

"I wish it would rain," he sighed. "If it does not rain, it will hail, and then all the fruit that has not been trampled by the enemy's horses will be completely destroyed."

"Do you call the troops of our Emperor enemies?" whispered his son, a Roman patriot. But he said it very softly, for just then a Gothic patrol turned the corner of the Forum. "I wish Orcus would devour them all, Greeks and barbarians! The Goths at least are always thirsty. See, there comes that long Hildebadus; he is one of the thirstiest. I shall be surprised if he has no desire to drink to-day, when the very stones are cracking with heat!"

Hildebad had just set the nearest watch. He held his helmet in his left hand; his lance was carelessly laid across his shoulder.

He passed the wine-house--to the great astonishment of its owner--turned into the next street, and soon stood before a lofty massive round tower--it was called the Tower of Ætius.

A handsome young Goth was walking up and down upon the wall in the shadow of the tower. Long light locks curled upon his shoulders, and the delicate white and red of his complexion, as well as his mild blue eyes, gave him almost a girlish aspect.

"Hey! Fridugern," Hildebad called up to him. "Hey! How canst thou bear to stay up there on that gridiron? With shield and breastplate too! *Ouff!*"

"I have the watch, Hildebad," answered the youth gently.

"Bother the watch! Dost thou think that Belisarius will attack us in this blazing heat? I tell you he is glad if he can get air; to-day he will not thirst for blood. Come with me; I came to fetch thee. The fat Ravennese in the Forum of Hercules has old wine and young daughters--let us put both to our lips."

The young Goth shook his long ringlets and frowned.

"I have the watch, and no desire for girls. But thirsty I am, truly--send me a cup of wine up here."

"Aha! 'tis true, by Freia, Venus, and Maria! Thou hast a bride across the

mountains! And thou thinkest that she will find it out and break her promise if thou lookest too closely into a pair of black Roman eyes! Oh, dear friend, how young thou art! No, no; no malice! It is all right. Thou art nevertheless a very good fellow and wilt get older by-and-by. I will send thee some old Massikian--then thou canst drink to Allgunthis all alone."

Hildebad turned back, and soon disappeared into the wine-house.

Presently a slave brought a cup of wine to the young Goth, who whispered, "Here's to thee, Allgunthis!" and he emptied it at one draught. Then he took up his lance, and slowly paced to and fro on the wall.

"I can at least think of her," he said; "no duty can prevent that. When shall I see her again?"

He walked on, but presently stopped and stood, lost in thought, in the shadow of the great dark tower, which looked down upon him threateningly.

In a short time another troop of Goths passed the tower. In their midst they led a man blindfolded, and let him out at the Porta Honorii.

It was Procopius who had in vain waited for three hours, hoping that the King would change his mind. It was useless. No messenger came, and the ambassador left the city ill at ease.

Another hour passed. It had become darker, but not cooler.

Suddenly a strong blast of wind rose from the sea. It drove the black cloud toward the north with great rapidity. It now hung dense and heavy over the city. But the sea and the south-eastern horizon were not thereby rendered clear, for a second and similar wall of cloud closely followed the first.

The whole sky had now become one black vault.

Hildebad, drowsy with wine, went towards his night-watch at the Porta Honorii.

"Still at thy post, Fridugern?" he called to the young Goth in passing. "And still no rain. The poor earth, how thirsty it will be! I pity it! Goodnight!"

It was insufferably sultry in the houses, for the wind blew from the scorching deserts of Africa.

The people, alarmed by the threatening appearance of the heavens, came out of doors, walking in companies through the streets, or sitting in groups in the courtyards and under the colonnades of the churches.

A crowd of people sat upon the steps of Saint Apollonaris.

And, though the sun had scarcely set, it was already as black as night.

Upon her couch in her bed-chamber lay Mataswintha, the Queen, in a kind of heavy stupor, her cheeks pale as death. Her wide open eyes stared into the darkness. She refused to answer Aspa's anxious questions, and presently dismissed the weeping slave with a motion of her hand.

As she lay thinking, these names passed continuously and monotonously through her mind: Witichis--Rauthgundis--Mataswintha! Mataswintha--Rauthgundis--Witichis!

Thus she lay for a long, long time; and it seemed as if nothing could ever interrupt the unceasing circle of these words.

Suddenly a red light flashed into the room, and at the same moment a peal of thunder, louder than she had ever before heard, clattered over the trembling city.

A scream from her women caught her ear, and she started upright on her couch.

Aspa had divested her of her upper garment; she wore only her under-dress of white silk. Throwing the falling tresses of her splendid hair back over her shoulder, she leaned on her elbow and listened.

There was an awful stillness.

Then another flash and another peal.

A rush of wind tore open the window of feldspath which looked into the court.

Mataswintha stared out at the darkness, which was illuminated at every moment by a vivid flash of lightning. The thunder rolled incessantly, overpowering even the fearful howling of the wind.

Mataswintha felt relieved by this strife of the elements. She looked out eagerly.

Just then Aspa hurried in with a light. It was a torch, the flame of which was protected from the wind by a glass globe.

"Queen, thou--but, by all the gods! how dost thou look? Like a Lemure--like the Goddess of Revenge!"

"Would that I were!" said Mataswintha, without taking her eyes from the window.

They were the first words that she had spoken for hours.

Flash after flash, and peal after peal.

Aspa closed the window.

"O Queen! the Christian maids say that the end of the world has come, and that the Son of God will come down upon fiery clouds to judge the living and the dead. Oh! what a flash! And yet there is not a drop of rain. I have never seen such a storm. The gods are very angry."

"Woe to those with whom they are angry! Oh, I envy the gods! They can love and hate as they like. They can annihilate those who do not adore them."

"O mistress! I was in the streets; I have just returned. All the people stream into the churches, praying and singing. I pray to Kairu and Astarte. Mistress, dost thou not pray?"

"I curse. That, too, is a kind of prayer."

"Oh, what a peal!" screamed the slave, and fell trembling on her knees. The dark blue mantle which she wore slid from her shoulders.

The thunder and lightning had now become so violent, that Mataswintha sprang from her couch and ran to the window.

"Mercy, mercy!" prayed the slave. "Have pity upon us, ye great gods!"

"No, no mercy--a curse upon us miserable mortals! Ha! that was splendid! Dost thou hear how they scream with fear in the streets?"

Another, and yet another! Ha! ye gods--if there be a God or gods--I envy ye but one thing: the power of your hate and your deadly lightning. Ye hurl it with all the rage and lust of your hearts, and your enemies vanish. Then you laugh; the thunder is your laughter. Ha! what was that!"

A flash and a peal of thunder which outdid all that had gone before.

Aspa started from her knees.

"What is that great building, Aspa? That dark mass opposite? The lightning must have struck it. Is it on fire?"

"No, thanks to the gods! The lightning only lit it up. It is the granaries of the King."

"Ha! has your lightning failed?" cried the Queen. "But mortals, too, can use the lightning of revenge." And she left the window. The room became suddenly dark.

"Queen--mistress--where art thou? Whither hast thou gone?" cried Aspa. And she felt along the walls.

But the room was empty, and Aspa called her mistress in vain.

Below in the streets a procession wound its way to the Basilica of Saint Apollonaris.

Romans and Goths; children and old people; very many women. Boys with torches walked first; behind came priests with crucifix and banners.

Through the growling of the thunder and the roaring of the wind sounded the ancient and solemn chorus:

**"Dulce mihi cruciari,
Parva vis doloris est;
Malo mori quam fœdari;
Major vis amoris est."**

And the choir answered:

**"Parce, judex, contristatis
Parce peccatoribus,
Qui descendis perflammatis
Ultor jam in nubibus."**

And the procession disappeared into the church.

The overseers of the corn-magazines had also joined the crowd of worshippers.

Upon the steps of the Basilica, exactly opposite the door of the magazines, sat the woman in the brown mantle, calm and fearless amid the uproar of the elements; her hands not folded, but resting quietly on her lap.

The man in the steel cap stood near her.

A Gothic woman, who was just hurrying into the church, recognised her by the light of a flash of lightning.

"Thou here again, countrywoman? Without shelter? I have offered thee my house, often enough. Thou appearest strange here in Ravenna?"

"I am so; but still I have a lodging."

"Come into the church and pray with us."

"I pray here."

"But thou neither singest nor speakest."

"Yet still God hears me."

"Pray for the city. They fear that the end of the world is at hand."

"I am not afraid."

"Pray for our good King, who daily gives us bread."

"I do pray for him."

Just then two Gothic patrols came clattering round the corner, and met opposite the Basilica.

"Aye, thunder till the skies crack!" scolded the leader of one of the bands; "but do not hinder me in my duty. Halt! Wisand, is it thou? Where is the King? In the church also?"

"No, Hildebad; upon the walls."

"That is right; that is his place. Forwards! Long live the King!"

Their steps died away.

A Roman tutor, with some of his pupils, passed by.

"But, magister," said the youngest boy, "I thought you were going to the church? Why do you take us out in this storm?"

"I only spoke of church to get you out of the house. Church! I tell you, the fewer roofs and walls about one the better. I am going to take you out into the great meadow in the suburbs. I wish it would rain. If Vesuvius were near, as it is in my native place, I should think that Ravenna was about to become a second Herculaneum. I know such an atmosphere as we have to-day--it is dangerous."

And they went on.

"Wilt thou not come with me, mistress?" the man in the steel cap asked the Gothic woman. "I must try to find Dromon, else we shall get no lodging tonight. I cannot leave thee alone in the dark. Thou hast no light with thee."

"Dost thou not see that the lightning never ceases? Go; I will come afterwards. I have still something to think of--and to pray for."

And the woman remained alone.

She pressed both hands against her bosom and looked up at the black sky; her lips moved slightly.

Just then it seemed to her as if, in the high outer galleries, passages, and upper rooms of the mighty wooden edifice which towered in a dark mass opposite, a light came and went, wandering up and down. She thought it must have been a deception caused by the lightning, for any open light would have been extinguished by the wind. But no; it really was a light, for its appearance and disappearance alternated at regular intervals, as if the person carrying it were hurrying along the galleries and passing behind the pillars and supports.

The woman attentively watched the changing light and shadow---- But suddenly--oh, horror!--she started up.

It seemed to her as if the marble step upon which she was sitting had been some sleeping animal, which, suddenly awaking, moved slightly, then rose--and turned itself--violently--from left to right.

Thunder, lightning, and wind ceased all at once.

There! from the granaries sounded a shrill scream. The light flamed up brightly, and then disappeared.

But the woman in the street also uttered a low cry of fear, for now she could no longer doubt--the earth quaked under her.

A slight movement; then two, three strong shocks, as if the ground had heaved from left to right like a wave.

Screams of fear rose from the city.

The people rushed out of the doors of the Basilica.

Another shock!

The woman kept her feet with difficulty.

And, from the farther side of the city, sounded a dull and distant crash, as if of heavy falling masses.

A fearful earthquake had shaken all Ravenna.

CHAPTER XX.

As the woman turned in the direction of the sound, she stood for a moment with her back to the granaries. But she suddenly looked round, for she thought she heard the bang of a heavy door. She looked attentively in that direction, but it was too dark to see anything. She heard, however, something rustling along close to the outer wall of the building, and she thought she caught the sound of a low sigh.

"Stop!" she cried, "who moans there?"

"Peace, peace!" whispered a strange voice. "The earth--disgusted--shook and trembled! The last day has come--it will reveal all. He will soon know.-Oh!"

A groan of pain--a rustle of garments--then complete silence.

"Where art thou? Art thou wounded?" asked the woman, seeking on the ground.

A flash of lightning--the first since the earthquake--showed her a shrouded form lying at her feet. A woman dressed in white and blue.

The Gothic woman stretched out her hand, but the prostrate form sprang up at her touch, and, with a scream, disappeared into the darkness.

All this had passed rapidly, and seemed like some frightful dream, but a broad gold bracelet, ornamented with a green serpent in emeralds, remained in the Gothic woman's hand, a proof of the reality of the mysterious vision.

And again the iron steps of the Gothic patrol approached.

"Hildebad, Hildebad, help!" cried Wisand.

"I am here! What is the matter? Where shall I go?" asked Hildebad, advancing with his men.

"To the Gate of Honorius! The wall has fallen, and the tower of Ætius lies in ruins. Help! Into the breach!"

"I come! Poor, poor Fridugern!"

Outside, in the camp of the Byzantines, Cethegus the Prefect rushed into Belisarius's tent.

He was in full armour, his plume of crimson horsehair tossed upon his helm. His bearing was proud. His eyes flashed.

"Up! Why do you linger, Belisarius? The walls of your enemy's citadel fall of themselves! The last refuge of the last King of the Goths lies open before you! Why do you remain in your tent?"

"I adore the Almighty," said Belisarius with composure. Antonina stood near him, her arm about his neck.

A praying-stool and a tall crucifix showed in what occupation the stormy entrance of the Prefect had disturbed them.

"Do that to-morrow, after the victory. But now, storm the city!"

"Storm the city now?" cried Antonina. "What sacrilege! The earth is shaken to its foundations, for God the Lord speaks in this elemental strife!"

"Let Him speak! We will act. Belisarius, the tower of Ætius and a portion of the walls have fallen. I ask you, will you not storm the city?"

"He is not wrong," said Belisarius, in whom the lust of battle was awakening. "But it is a dark night----"

"To victory and the heart of Ravenna I will find my way even in the dark. And it lightens besides."

"You are all at once very eager for the fight," said Belisarius hesitatingly.

"Yes, for there is good reason. The barbarians are startled. They fear God and forget their enemies."

At this moment Procopius and Marcus Licinius hurried into the tent together.

"Belisarius," cried the first, "the earthquake has thrown down the barracks by the northern trench, and has buried half a cohort of your Illyrians!"

"My poor people!" cried Belisarius, and at once left the tent.

"Cethegus," said Marcus, "one of your cohorts also lies buried under their barracks."

But, impatiently shaking his head, the Prefect asked: "How is the water in the Gothic moat before the tower of Ætius? Has not the earthquake lessened it?"

"Yes, the water has disappeared--the moat is quite dry. Hark, what a

cry! It is your Illyrians! They cry for help!"

"Let them cry!" said Cethegus. "Is the moat really dry? Then give the signal to storm. Follow me with all the Isaurians that are still alive."

And in the midst of thunder and lightning, which now again raged unceasingly, the Prefect hurried to the trenches where his Roman legions and the rest of the Isaurians stood under arms. He quickly counted them. There were far too few to take the city alone, but he knew that a moderate success would immediately cause Belisarius to join him.

"Lights! torches!" he cried, and stepped to the front of his Roman legions with a torch in his left hand. "Forward!" he cried. "Draw your swords!"

But not a hand was raised.

Dumb with astonishment and terror, the whole troop--even the leaders, even Licinius--looked at the demonic man, who, in the midst of all Nature's rebellion, thought only of his goal, and of using the strife of the elements and the terrors of the Almighty as means to prosecute his own ends.

"Well? which is your duty? To listen to the thunder, or to me!" he cried.

"General," said a centurion, stepping forward, "the men pray; for the earth quaked."

"Do you think that Italy will devour her own children? No, Romans; see! The very earth quakes at the tread of the barbarians. It rises, breaks its bonds, and their walls fall. Roma, Roma æterna!"

His words took effect.

It was one of those Cæsarian speeches which move men to great deeds.

"Roma, Roma æterna!" cried, first Licinius, and after him thousands of Roman youths; and through night and storm, through thunder and lightning, they followed the Prefect, whose grand enthusiasm irresistibly carried them away.

Excitement lent wings to their feet. They were soon across the wide moat which usually they scarcely dared to approach.

Cethegus was the first to reach the opposite side.

The wind had extinguished the torches.

But he found his way in the dark.

"Here, Licinius!" he cried, "follow me! Here must be the breach."

He sprang forward, but ran against some hard body and staggered back.

"What is that!" asked Lucius Licinius behind him. "A second wall?"

"No," said a quiet voice, "but a Gothic shield!"

"That is King Witichis!" said the Prefect furiously, and with bitter hatred he looked at the dark figure before him.

He had counted upon a surprise. His hope was frustrated.

"If I but had him," he said to himself, "he should never hinder me again!"

Looking behind, he now saw many torch-lights and heard the flourish of trumpets. Belisarius was leading his troops to storm the walls.

Procopius reached the Prefect.

"Well, why do you stop? Do new walls keep you back?"

"Yes, living walls. There they stand," and the Prefect pointed forward with his sword.

"Under the still tottering ruins, these Goths! Truly," cried Procopius--

"Si fractus illabatur orbis,
Impavidos ferient ruinae!"

They are courageous men!"

But now Belisarius was at hand with his compact lines, ready for the assault.

One moment more--the leaders were still hurrying to and fro, giving orders--and a terrible slaughter would begin.

But suddenly all the sky above the city was flooded with a red light.

A column of flame shot up into the air, and countless sparks descended. It seemed to rain fire from heaven. All Ravenna glowed in the crimson light. It was a fearful but beautiful spectacle.

Both armies, ready to mingle in a hand-to-hand combat, halted and hesitated.

"Fire! fire! Witichis, King Witichis!" shouted a horseman, who came galloping from the city; "it burns!"

"We see it. Let it burn, Markja! First fight and then extinguish."

"No, no, sire; all the granaries burn! The grain flies in myriads of sparks through the air."

"The granaries are burning!" cried Goths and Byzantines.

Witichis had no heart to ask questions.

"The lightning must have kindled the interior long ago. It is quite burnt out. Look! look!"

A stronger gust of wind fanned the fire, which flamed up higher than ever. The flames caught the nearest roofs, and, at the same time, the wooden ridge of the lofty building seemed to fall, for, after a heavy crash, the sparks shot up thicker than ever.

It was a sea of fire.

Witichis tried to lift his hand to give an order--but his arm fell, faint and powerless. Cethegus saw it.

"Now!" he cried; "now let us assault!"

"No; halt!" thundered Belisarius. "He who lifts his sword is the Emperor's enemy and dies! Back to the camp--all. Now Ravenna is mine! To-morrow it will fall without a struggle."

His troops obeyed him and drew back.

Cethegus was in a fury. He alone was too weak to oppose the order. He

was obliged to yield.

His plans were ruined. He had wished to take the city by storm in order--as he had done in Rome--to take possession of its principal defences. And he foresaw that it would be now delivered completely into the hand of Belisarius. He led his troops away in disgust.

But the events which actually occurred afterwards, were very different to what either the Prefect or Belisarius had expected.

CHAPTER XXI.

The King had left the breach in the wall and the Tower of Ætius to the care of Hildebad, and hurried at once to the place of the conflagration.

When he arrived he found the fire dying out--but merely for want of more combustibles.

The whole contents of the magazines, together with the wooden walls and roofs, and everything that could burn, had been destroyed; not a remnant of corn nor a splinter of wood was left. The naked smoke and soot-blackened stone walls of the marble Circus alone still rose into the sky. Not a sign of its having been struck by lightning could be seen. The fire must have glimmered for some time after the lightning had kindled the woodwork, and spread slowly and unseen through the interior of the building; and when smoke and flame had burst through the apertures in the roof, it was too late to save the structure. The inhabitants had enough to do to save the neighbouring houses, of which many had already caught fire in various places.

The rain, which began to fall shortly before daybreak, came to their assistance. The wind, thunder and lightning had ceased; but when the sun broke through the clouds it only illumined, instead of the granaries, a miserable heap of rubbish and ashes in the middle of the marble Circus.

The King leaned against one of the pillars of the Basilica, sadly and silently looking at the ruins.

For a long time he stood motionless, only sometimes he drew his mantle more closely over his heaving chest.

A painful resolution was ripening in his soul, which seemed to have become as still as the grave.

But round about him the place was full of the misery of the poor people of Ravenna, who prayed, scolded, wept and cursed.

"Oh! what will now become of us?"--"Oh, how sweet and good and white was the bread which we received but yesterday!"--"What shall we eat now?"--"Bah, the King must help us."--"Yes, the King must give us bread."--"The King? Ah, the poor man! where will he get it?"--"He has no more."--"That's another thing!"--"He alone has brought us to this pass!"--"It is his fault!"--"Why did he not surrender the city to the Emperor long ago?"--"Yes, to its rightful master!"--"Curses on the barbarians! It is all their fault!"--"No, no, it is only the King's fault!"--"Do you not understand? It is a punishment from God!"--"Punishment? Why? What wrong has he done? Has he not given bread to the people?"--"Then you do not know? How can a bigamist deserve the grace of God? The wicked man has two wives. He lusted for the beauty of Mataswintha, and did not rest until she became his. He put away his lawful wife."

Witichis indignantly descended the steps.

He was disgusted with the people.

But they recognised him.

"There is the King! How gloomy he looks!" they called to each other, avoiding him.

"Oh, I don't fear him! I fear hunger more than his anger. Give us bread. King Witichis! Do you hear? We are starving!" cried a ragged old man, catching at the King's mantle.

"Bread, King!"

"Good King, bread!"

"We are in despair!"

"Help us!"

And the crowd gathered round him with wild gestures.

Quietly but decisively the King freed himself.

"Have patience," he said gravely; "before the sun sets you shall have bread."

And he hurried to his room.

There a Roman physician and some of Mataswintha's attendants awaited him.

"Sire," said the physician, "the Queen, your wife, is very sick. The terrors of last night have disturbed her mind. She speaks as if in delirium. Will you not see her?"

"Not now. Have a care of her."

"With an air of great distress and anxiety she gave me this key," added the physician. "It appeared to be the principal subject of her wandering speeches. She took it from under her pillow, and she made me swear to give it into your own hands, as it was of great importance."

With a bitter smile the King took the key and threw it on one side.

"It is no longer of importance. Go; leave me; and send my secretary."

An hour later, Procopius admitted Cethegus into the tent of the commander-in-chief.

As he entered, Belisarius, who was pacing to and fro with hasty steps, cried out:

"This comes of your plans, Prefect--of your arts and lies! I always said that lies are the source of ruin. I do not understand such ways! Oh, why did I follow your advice? Now I am in great straits!"

"What mean these virtuous speeches?" Cethegus asked Procopius.

The latter handed him a letter.

"Bead. These barbarians are unfathomable in their grand simplicity. They conquer the devil by virtue of their childlike minds. Read."

And Cethegus read with amazement:

"Yesterday thou didst acquaint me with three things: that the Franks

had betrayed me; that thou, allied with them, wilt wrest the West from the ungrateful Emperor; and that thou offerest the Goths a free departure, unarmed, over the Alps. Yesterday I answered that the Goths would never give up their arms, nor Italy, the conquest and inheritance of their great King, and that I would rather fall here with my whole army than do so. This I answered yesterday. I say so still, although earth, air, fire, and water are allied against me. But last night, as I watched the flames which were devouring my stores, I felt sure of what I have long dimly suspected. That a curse lies upon me. For my sake the Goths perish. This shall go on no longer. The crown upon my head has hitherto prevented me from taking an honourable course; it shall prevent me no longer. Thou art right to rebel against the false and ungrateful Justinian! He is our enemy and thine. Well then--instead of placing thy confidence in an army of faithless Franks, place it in the whole Gothic nation, whose strength and fidelity are known to thee! With the first thou wouldst share Italy; with us thou canst keep it all. Let me be the first to greet thee as Emperor of the West and King of the Goths. All the rights of my people remain untouched; thou simply takest my place. I myself will set my crown upon thy head, and verily, no Justinian shall then tear it from thee! If thou rejectest this offer, prepare for such a battle as thou hast never yet fought. I will break into thy camp with fifty thousand Goths. We shall fall, but with us thy whole army. The one and the other. I have sworn it. Choose.

"WITICHIS."

For one moment the Prefect was terribly alarmed. He cast a swift and searching look at Belisarius.

But a single glance sufficed to set him at ease.

"It is Belisarius," he said to himself, "but it is always dangerous to play with the devil. What A temptation!"

He returned the letter, and said with a smile: "What an idea! To what strange things can desperation lead!"

"The idea would not be bad," observed Procopius, "if----"

"If Belisarius were not Belisarius," said Cethegus, smiling.

"Spare your smiles," said Belisarius. "I admire the man, and I cannot take it amiss that he thinks I am capable of revolt. Have I not pretended to be so?" and he stamped his foot. "Now advise and help me! You have led me to this miserable alternative. I cannot say yes; and if I say no--I may look upon the Emperor's army as annihilated, and, into the bargain, must confess that I pretended to revolt!"

Cethegus reflected in silence, slowly stroking his chin with his left hand. Suddenly a thought seemed to flash across his mind. A ray of joy beautified his face.

"In this way I can ruin them both," he said to himself.

At this moment he was exceedingly contented with himself.

But first he wished to make sure of Belisarius.

"Reasonably, you can only do one of two things," he said hesitatingly.

"Speak: I see neither the one nor the other."

"Either really accept----"

"Prefect!" cried Belisarius in a rage, and put his hand on his sword.

Procopius caught his arm in alarm. "Not another such word, Cethegus, if you value your life!"

"Or," continued Cethegus quietly, "seem to accept. Enter Ravenna without a stroke of the sword, and send the Gothic crown, together with the Gothic King, to Byzantium."

"That is splendid!" cried Procopius.

"It is treason!" cried Belisarius.

"It is both," said Cethegus calmly.

"I could never look a Goth in the face again!"

"It will not be necessary. You will take the King a prisoner to Byzantium. The disarmed nation will cease to be a nation."

"No, no, I will not do it."

"Good. Then let your whole army make its will. Farewell, Belisarius. I go to Rome. I have not the least desire to see fifty thousand Goths fighting in despair. And how Emperor Justinian will praise the destroyer of his best army!"

"It is a terrible alternative!" cried Belisarius.

Cethegus slowly approached him.

"Belisarius," he said, with a voice which seemed to come from his very heart, "you have often held me to be your enemy. And I am, in some sort, your adversary. But who can be near Belisarius in the field of battle and not admire him!" His manner had a suavity and solemnity seldom seen in the sarcastic Prefect. Belisarius was touched, and even Procopius wondered. "I am your friend whenever possible. In this case I will prove my friendship by giving you good advice. Do you believe me, Belisarius?"

And he laid his left hand upon the heroes shoulder, and offered him his right, looking frankly into his eyes.

"Yes," said Belisarius. "Who can mistrust such a look!"

"See, Belisarius! Never has a noble man had such a distrustful master as yours. The Emperor's last letter is the greatest offence to your fidelity."

"Heaven knows it!"

"And never has a man"--here he took both the hands of Belisarius--"had a more splendid opportunity to put ignoble mistrust to shame, to revenge himself gloriously, and to prove his fidelity. You are accused of aspiring to the Empire of the West! By God, you have it in your power! Enter Ravenna--let Goths and Italians do you homage and place a double crown upon your head. Ravenna yours, with your blindly devoted army, the Goths and Italians--truly you are unassailable. Justinian will tremble before Belisarius, and his haughty Narses will be but a straw against your strength. But you--who have all this in your hand--you will lay all the glory and the power at your master's feet and say: 'Behold, Justinian, Belisarius would rather be your servant, than ruler of the Western Empire.' So gloriously, Belisarius, has fidelity never yet been proved upon earth."

Cethegus had hit the mark. The general's eyes flashed.

"You are right, Cethegus. Come to my heart. I thank you. It is nobly thought. O Justinian, you shall blush with shame!"

Cethegus withdrew from the embrace, and went to the door.

"Poor Witichis," whispered Procopius, as he passed; "he is sacrificed to this masterpiece of truth! Now he is indeed lost."

"Yes," said Cethegus, "he is lost most surely."

Outside the tent he added, as he threw his mantle over his shoulder:

"But you, Belisarius, more surely still!"

Arrived at his quarters, he found Lucius Licinius in full armour.

"Well, general!" asked Lucius. "The city has not yet surrendered. When shall we fight?"

"The war is over, my Lucius. Doff your arms and gird yourself for a journey. This very day you must carry some private letters for me."

"To whom?"

"To the Emperor and Empress."

"In Byzantium?"

"No. Fortunately they are quite near, at the Baths of Epidaurus. Hasten! In fifteen days you must be back again. Not half a day later. The fate of Italy awaits your return."

As soon as Procopius brought the answer of Belisarius to the Gothic King, the latter summoned to his palace the leaders of the army, the principal Goths, and a number of trustworthy freemen, and communicated to them what had happened, demanding their acquiescence.

At first they were exceedingly surprised, and complete silence followed his words.

At last Duke Guntharis, looking at the King with emotion, said:

"The last of thy royal deeds, Witichis, is as noble, yea, nobler than all thy former acts. I shall ever regret having once opposed thee. Long since I swore in my heart to atone by blindly obeying thee. And truly--in this case thou alone canst decide; for thy sacrifice is the greatest--a crown! But if another than thou shalt be King--the Wölfung's can better endure to serve a stranger, a Belisarius, than some other Goth. So I agree to what thou sayest, and tell thee that thou hast acted well and nobly."

"And I say no! a thousand times no!" cried Hildebad. "Think what you do. A stranger at the head of the Goths!"

"Have not other Germans done the same before us--Quadians; Herulians, and Markomannians?" said Witichis calmly. "Even our most glorious Kings--even Theodoric? They served the Emperor and received land in exchange. So runs the treaty with Emperor Zeno, by which Theodoric took possession of Italy. I do not count Belisarius less than Zeno, and myself, truly, not better than Theodoric!"

"Yes, if it were Justinian," interposed Guntharis.

"Never would I submit to the false and cowardly tyrant!" cried Hildebad.

"But Belisarius is a hero--canst thou deny it? Hast thou forgotten how he thrust thee off thy horse?"

"May the thunder strike me if I forget it! It is the only thing in him

which has ever pleased me."

"And fortune is with him, as misfortune is with me. We shall be as free as before, and only fight his battles against Byzantium. We shall be revenged on our common enemy."

Almost all those present now agreed with the King.

"Well, I cannot contradict you in words," said Hildebad; "my tongue has ever been more clumsy than my sword. But I feel sure that you are wrong. Had we but the Black Earl here, he would say what I can only feel. May you never regret this step! But permit me to quit this monstrous kingdom. I will never live under Belisarius. I will go in search of adventures. With a shield and spear and a strong hand, a man can go a great way."

Witichis hoped to change the intention of his trusty comrade in private conversation. At present he continued to carry forward that which he had at heart.

"You must know," he said, "that first of all Belisarius has made it a condition that nothing should be published until he has occupied Ravenna. It is to be feared that some of his leaders, with their troops, will hear nothing of a rebellion against Belisarius. These, as well as the suspicious quarters of Ravenna, must be surrounded by the Goths and the trustworthy adherents of Belisarius before all is made known."

"Take care," said Hildebad, "that you yourselves do not fall into a trap! We Goths should not try to spin such spiders' toils. It is as if a bear should try to dance on a rope--he would fall, sooner or later. Farewell--and may this business turn out better than I expect. I go to take leave of my brother. He, if I know him, will soon reconcile himself to this Roman-Gothic State. But Black Teja, I think, will go away with me."

In the evening a report ran through the city that terms of capitulation had been made and accepted. The conditions were unknown. But it was certain that Belisarius, at the desire of the King, had sent large stores of bread, meat, and wine into Ravenna, which were distributed amongst the poor.

"He has kept his word!" cried the people; and blessed the name of the King.

Witichis now asked after the health of the Queen, and learned that she was gradually recovering.

"Patience," he said, taking a deep breath; "she also will soon be at liberty, and rid of me!"

It was already growing dark, when a strong company of mounted Goths made their way through the city to the breach at the Tower of Ætius.

A tall horseman went first. Then came a group, carrying a heavy burden, hidden by cloths and mantles, upon their crossed lances. Then the rest of the men in full armour.

"Unbolt the gate!" cried the leader; "we want to go out."

"Is it thou, Hildebad?" asked Earl Wisand, who commanded the watch, and he gave the order to open the gate. "Dost thou know that to-morrow the city will surrender? Whither wilt thou go?"

"To freedom!" cried Hildebad; and spurred his horse forward.

CHAPTER XXII.

Many days passed before Mataswintha fully recovered from the delirium of fever and the uneasy slumbers, haunted by terrible dreams, which followed.

She had become dull and impassive to all that passed around her, taking no interest in the great changes which were in preparation. She appeared to have no other feeling than that of the enormity of her crime. The triumphal exultation which she had felt while rushing through the night with her torch, had given place to devouring remorse, horror, and dread.

At the moment of committing the wicked deed, the earthquake had thrown her upon her knees, and in her excitement, in the pang of awakening conscience, she thought that the very earth was rising up against her, and that the judgment of Heaven was about to fall upon her guilty head.

And when, on reaching her chamber, she presently saw the flames, which her own hand had kindled, reddening all the sky; when she heard the cries and lamentations of Ravennese and Goths; the flames seemed to scorch her heart and every cry to call down curses upon her.

She lost her senses; she was overwhelmed by the consequences of her deed.

When she came to herself and gradually recollected all that had passed, her hatred of the King was completely spent. Her soul was bowed down; she was filled with deep remorse; and a terrible fear of ever having to appear before him again came upon her, for she well knew, and now heard from all sides, that the destruction of the magazines would oblige the King to surrender to his enemies.

Himself she did not see. Even when he found a moment in which to ask personally after her health, she had conjured the astonished Aspa on no account to let him approach her, although she had left her couch many days ago, and had frequently admitted the poor of the city; had, indeed, invited the sufferers to apply to her for help.

At such times she had given the provisions intended for herself and her attendants to the poor with her own hands, and divided amongst them her jewels and gold with unlimited generosity.

It was one of these visits that she was expecting, after having been petitioned by a man in a brown mantle and steel cap to grant a private audience to a poor woman of her nation. "She has a message which concerns the King. She has to warn you of some treachery which threatens his crown and perhaps his life," the man had said.

Mataswintha at once granted his request.

Even if it were a mistake, an excuse, she could now never more refuse to admit any one who came with a message concerning the King's safety. She ordered the woman to come at sunset.

The sun had gone down.

In the south there is almost no twilight, and it was nearly dark when a slave beckoned to the woman, who had been waiting in the court for some time, to come forward.

The Queen, sick and sleepless during the night, had only fallen asleep at the eighth hour. She had just awoke, and was very weak.

Notwithstanding, she would receive the woman, because she said her message concerned the King.

"But is that really true?" inquired the slave---it was Aspa. "I should not like to disturb my mistress without cause. If you only want gold, say so freely; you shall have as much as you wish--only spare my mistress. Does it really concern the King?"

"It does."

With a sigh, Aspa led the woman into the Queen's chamber.

The form of Mataswintha, clad in light white garments, her head and hair covered by a folded kerchief, was relieved against the dark background of the spacious chamber, lying upon a couch, near which stood a round table in mosaic. The golden lamp, which was fixed to the wall above the table, shed a faint light.

Mataswintha rose and seated herself, with an air of fatigue, upon the edge of her couch.

"Draw near," she said to the woman. "Thy message concerns the King? Why dost thou hesitate? Speak!"

The woman pointed at Aspa.

"She is silent and faithful."

"She is a woman."

At a sign from the Queen, the slave reluctantly left the room.

"Daughter of the Amelungs, I know that nothing but the strait in which the kingdom stood, and not love, led thee to Witichis.--(How lovely she is, although pale as death!)--Yet thou art the Queen of the Goths--his Queen--and even if thou dost not love him, his kingdom, his triumph, must be all in all to thee."

Mataswintha grasped the gilded arm of her couch.

"So thinks every beggar in the nation!" she sighed.

"To the King I cannot speak, for special reasons," continued the woman. "Therefore I speak to thee whose province it is to succour and warn him against treason. Listen to me." And she drew nearer, looking keenly at the Queen.--"How strange," she said to herself; "what similarity of form!"

"Treason! still more treason?"

"So thou too suspectest treason?"

"It is no matter. From whom? From Byzantium? From without? From the Prefect?"

"No," the woman answered, shaking her head. "Not from without; from within. Not from a man; from a woman."

"What dost thou say?" asked Mataswintha, turning still paler. "How can a woman----"

"Injure the hero? In the devilish wickedness of her heart. Not openly, but by cunning and treachery; perhaps with secret poison, as has already happened; perhaps with secret fire."

"Hold!"

Mataswintha, who had just risen, staggered back to the table and leaned upon it. But the woman followed her and whispered softly:

"I must tell thee of an incredible, shameful act! The King and the people believe that the lightning set the magazines on fire, but I know better. And *he* shall know it. He shall be warned by *thee*, so that he may discover the rank offender. That night I saw a torch-light passing through the galleries of the magazines, and it was carried by a woman. *Her* hand cast it amongst the stores! Thou shudderest? Yes, a *woman*. Wherefore wilt thou go? Hear one other word, and I will leave thee. The name? I do not know it. But the woman fell just at my feet, and, recovering, escaped; but as she went, she lost a sign and means of recognition--this snake of emeralds."

And the woman held up a bracelet in the light of the lamp.

Mataswintha, tortured to death, started upright. She held both arms over her face. The hasty movement disturbed her kerchief. Her red-gold hair fell over her shoulders, and through the hair gleamed a golden bracelet with an emerald snake, which encircled her left arm.

The woman saw it and screamed:

"Ha! by the God of the faithful! It was thou--thou thyself! *His* Queen--his *wife* has betrayed him! He shall know it! Curses upon thee!"

With a piercing cry, Mataswintha fell back upon her couch and buried her face in the cushions.

The scream brought Aspa from the adjoining room. But when she entered, the Queen was alone.

The curtain of the door still rustled. The beggar had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The next morning Procopius, Johannes, Demetrius, Bessas, Acacius, Vitalius, and many other Byzantine leaders arrived in the city, and, to the great astonishment of the Ravennese, entered the King's palace.

They assembled there to take counsel as to particular stipulations, and to decide upon the form of surrender.

Meanwhile the Goths heard only that peace was concluded. The two principal considerations, for the sake of which they had endured all the grievous war, were obtained. They would be free, and remain in undisturbed possession of the lovely Southland, which had become so dear to them. That was far more than could have been expected, considering the desperate state at which the Gothic cause had arrived since the retreat from Rome and the inevitable loss of Ravenna; and the heads of the great families, and other influential men in the army, who were now made acquainted with the intentions of Belisarius, were completely satisfied with the conditions agreed upon.

The few who refused acquiescence were freely allowed to depart from Ravenna and Italy.

But, apart from this, the Gothic army in Ravenna had already been dispersed in all directions.

Witichis saw that it was impossible to feed the Gothic army and the population, as well as the hosts of Belisarius, from the produce of the

exhausted land; he therefore agreed to the proposal of Belisarius, that the Goths, in companies of a hundred or a thousand, should be led out of the gates of the city and dismissed in all directions to their native places.

Belisarius feared the outbreak of despair when the terrible treachery practised should become known, and he therefore wished for the speedy dispersal of the disbanded army. Once in Ravenna, he hoped to be able to quell any possible rebellion in the open country without difficulty.

Tarvisium, Verona, and Ticinum, the last strongholds of the Goths in Italy, could not then, for any length of time, resist the forces which would be sent against them.

The execution of these measures was the work of many days. Only when very few Goths were left in Ravenna did Belisarius decide upon entering the city. And even of the few who remained, half were transferred to the Byzantine camp, the other half being divided amongst the different quarters of the city, under the pretext of being ready to crush any possible resistance on the part of Justinian's adherents.

But what surprised the Ravennese and the uninitiated Goths the most was, that the blue Gothic flag still waved upon the roof of the palace. Certainly it was guarded by a Byzantine instead of by a Gothic sentinel. For the palace was already full of Byzantines.

Belisarius had taken particular measures against any attempt of the Prefect to make himself master of the city, as he had done of Rome.

Cethegus saw through this and smiled. He did nothing to prevent it.

On the morning of the day appointed for the entrance, Cethegus entered the tent of Belisarius, clad in a magnificent suit of armour. He found only Procopius.

"Are you ready!" he asked.

"Perfectly."

"At what time shall it take place?"

"At the moment when the King mounts his horse in the courtyard of the palace in order to ride to meet Belisarius. We have thought of everything."

"Once more of everything!" said Cethegus, with a laugh. "Yet one thing you have left to me. It is certain that as soon as our plan has succeeded and become known, that the barbarians all over the country will fly into a rage. Revenge and compassion for their King may cause them to commit furious deeds. But all their enthusiasm for Witichis and anger against us would be nipped in the bud; they would consider themselves betrayed by their King, and not by us, if we could get him to sign a document to the purport that he did not surrender the city to Belisarius as the King of the Goths and a rebel against the Emperor, but simply to Justinian's commander-in-chief. Then the revolt of Belisarius, which will actually not take place, would seem to the Goths to have been a mere lie invented by their King in order to hide from them the shame of the surrender."

"That would be excellent; but Witichis will not do it."

"*Knowingly*, scarcely; but perhaps unknowingly. He has only signed the treaty in the original yet?"

"He has signed only once."

"And the document is in his possession? Good. I will make him sign the duplicate which I have drawn up, so that Belisarius also may possess the

valuable document."

Procopius looked at it.

"If he sign this, then, indeed, not a Goth will raise his sword in his defence. But----"

"Let me manage the 'buts.' Either he will voluntarily sign it to-day, unread, under pressure of the moment----"

"Or?"

"Or," concluded Cethegus gloomily, "he will sign it later, against his will. I will now go before you. Excuse me if I do not assist at your triumphal procession. Many congratulations to Belisarius."

But as he turned to go, Belisarius himself entered the tent, unarmed, and looking very sullen. He was followed by Antonina.

"Hasten, general," cried Procopius, "Ravenna waits for her conqueror. The entrance----"

"Speak not of it!" cried Belisarius angrily. "I regret the whole affair! Recall the soldiers!"

Cethegus remained standing at the entrance of the tent.

"Belisarius!" cried Procopius, horrified, "what demon has put you into this temper?"

"I!" said Antonina proudly. "What do you say now?"

"I say that great statesmen have no business with wives," cried Procopius angrily.

"Belisarius told me your intentions only last night," said Antonina, "and with tears----"

"Of course!" grumbled Procopius. "Tears always come when wanted."

"With tears I prayed him to refrain. I cannot bear to see my hero so spotted with black treachery."

"And I will not be so," said Belisarius. "Rather would I ride into Orcus a prisoner, than as *such* a conqueror into Ravenna! My letters to the Emperor have not yet been sent away--so there is still time----"

"No!" cried Cethegus imperiously, coming forward from the doorway, "fortunately for you there is *not* still time. I wrote to the Emperor eight days ago, told him all, and congratulated him on his general's having won Ravenna and put an end to the war without the slightest loss."

"Indeed, Prefect!" cried Belisarius. "You are very ready! Wherefore this zeal?"

"Because I know Belisarius and his wavering mind. Because you must be *forced* into taking advantage of your good fortune, and because I wish to make an end to this war which so cruelly devastates my Italy!"

And he approached Antonina threateningly, who again could not avoid the demonic fascination of his glance.

"Dare it! try it now! Dare to retreat, to undeceive Witichis, and sacrifice Ravenna, Italy, and your whole army to a whim of your wife! Then see if Justinian would ever forgive you! On Antonina's soul the guilt! Hark! the

trumpets sound! Arm yourself! There is no choice!"

And he hurried out.

Antonina looked after him in dismay.

"Procopius," she asked, "does the Emperor really know it already?"

"Even if he did not, too many are initiated into our secret. In all cases he would learn afterwards that Ravenna and Italy were his, and--that Belisarius strove for the Gothic and the imperial crown. Nothing can justify Belisarius in the Emperor's eyes, except the fact of gaining Ravenna, and delivering it to Justinian."

"Yes," said Belisarius, sighing, "he is right. I have no choice left."

"Then go!" said Antonina, intimidated. "But excuse me from accompanying you. It is no triumph, but a laying of a trap."

The population of Ravenna, although in the dark as to the particular conditions, were still certain that peace was concluded, and the long and terrible suffering they had endured at an end. In their joy at this deliverance, the citizens had cleared away the ruins caused by the earthquake in many of the streets, and had festively decorated the city.

Wreaths, flags, and carpets were hung out; the people crowded the forums, the canals of the lagoons, and the baths and basilicas, curious to see the hero, Belisarius, and the army which had so long threatened their walls, and had, at last, overcome the barbarians.

Already some divisions of the Byzantine army marched proudly through the gates, while the scattered and scanty Gothic patrols beheld, in silence and indignation, the entrance of their hated enemies into the residence of Theodoric.

The Gothic nobles assembled in a hall in the gaily-decorated palace, near the apartment of the King.

The latter, as the hour for the entrance of Belisarius approached, prepared to don his royal garments--with great contentment, for it was the last time that he would ever wear the signs of a dignity which had brought him nothing but pain and wretchedness.

"Go, Duke Guntharis," he said to the Wölfung, "Hildebad, my faithless chamberlain, has left me; thou, therefore, must take his place. The attendant will show thee the golden chest which contains the crown, helm, and purple mantle, the sword and shield of Theodoric. To-day, for the first and last time, I will array myself in them, in order to deliver them to a hero who will wear them not unworthily. What noise is that?"

"Sire," answered Earl Wisand, "it is a Gothic woman. She has tried to force her way in thrice already. Send her away!"

"No; tell her I will listen to her later. She shall ask for me this evening at the palace."

As Guntharis left the room, Bessas entered with Cethegus.

The Prefect had given Bessas--without initiating him into the secret--the duplicate of the capitulation, which the King had yet to sign. He thought that Witichis would take the document more unsuspectingly from an innocent hand.

Witichis greeted them as they entered; but at the sight of the Prefect

there passed a shadow across his countenance, which had before been brighter than for many months. But he forced himself to say:

"You here, Prefect of Rome? The war has ended very differently to what we expected! However, you may be satisfied. At least no Grecian Emperor, no Justinian, will rule over your Rome."

"And shall not, as long as I live."

"I come, King of the Goths," interrupted Bessas, "to lay before you the treaty with Belisarius, in order that you may sign it."

"I have already done so."

"It is the duplicate intended for my master."

"Then give it me," said Witichis, and stretched out his hand to take it.

But before he could do so, Duke Guntharis hurried into the room with the attendant.

"Witichis," he cried, "the royal insignia have disappeared!"

"What sayest thou?" asked Witichis. "Hildebad alone kept the key!"

"The golden chest and other chests are gone. Within the empty niche, where they usually stood, lay this strip of parchment. The characters are those of Hildebad's secretary."

The King took it and read:

"'Crown, helm and sword, purple and shield of Theodoric are in my care. If Belisarius will have them, he may fetch them.' The Runic character H-- for Hildebad!"

"He must be followed until he yield them up," cried Cethegus.

At this moment Demetrius and Johannes hurried in.

"Make haste. King Witichis," they cried. "Do you hear the trumpets? Belisarius has already reached the Gate of Stilicho."

"Then let us go," said Witichis, allowing his attendant to place the purple mantle, which they had brought instead of the missing one, upon his shoulders, and pressing a golden coronet upon his head. Instead of the sword, a sceptre was handed to him; and thus adorned, he turned to the door.

"You have not yet signed, King," said Bessas.

"Give it to me," and now Witichis took the parchment from the hand of the Byzantine. "The document is very long," he said, glancing over it; and then began to read.

"Haste, King," said Johannes.

"There is no time to read it," said Cethegus, with an indifferent voice, and took a reed-pen from the table.

"Then there is no time to sign it," said the King. "You know I am the '*Peasant*-King,' as the people call me. And a peasant never signs a letter before he has read to what he commits himself. Let us go," and, smiling, he gave the document to the Prefect and left the room.

Bessas and all present followed, except Cethegus. Cethegus crushed the document in his hand.

"Wait!" he whispered furiously. "You shall yet sign!" And he slowly followed the others.

The hall leading to the King's apartment was already empty. The Prefect went into the vaulted gallery which ran round the quadrangle of the first story of the palace. The Byzantine-Roman arches afforded a free outlook into the large courtyard. It was filled with armed men. At all the four doors were placed the Persian lance-bearers of Belisarius.

Cethegus leaned against an archway and, watching the course of events, spoke to himself.

"Well, there are Byzantines enough to take a small army prisoner! Friend Procopius is prudent. There! Witichis appears at the door. His Goths are still far behind upon the staircase. The King's horse is led forward. Bessas holds the stirrups. Witichis is close to it; he lifts his foot. Now comes a blast of trumpets. The door of the staircase is closed and the Goths shut into the palace! Procopius tears down the Gothic flag on the roof. Johannes takes the King's right arm--bravo, Johannes! The King defends himself valiantly--but his long mantle hinders him--he staggers! He falls to the ground! There lies the kingdom of the Goths!"

"There lies the kingdom of the Goths!" with these words Procopius also concluded the sentences which he wrote down in his diary that night.

"To-day I have assisted in making an important piece of history," he wrote, "and will take note of it to-night. When I saw the imperial army enter the gates and the King's palace of Ravenna, I thought that indeed it is not always merit, virtue, or number that ensures success. There is a higher power, inevitable necessity. In number and heroism the Goths were superior to us, and they did not fail in every possible exertion. The Gothic women in Ravenna scolded their husbands to their faces when they saw the slight forms, the small number of our troops as they marched in. Summa: in the most righteous cause, with the most heroic efforts, a man or a nation may succumb, if superior powers, which have not always the better right on their side, oppose him. My heart beat with a sense of wrong as I tore down the Gothic flag and set the golden Dragon of Justinian in its place, as I raised the flag of evil above the flag of righteousness. Not justice, but a necessity which is inscrutable, rules the fate of men and nations. But that does not confuse a true man. For not *what* we do, live, or suffer--*how* we do or bear it, makes a man a hero. The Goths' defeat is more honourable than our victory. And the hand which tore down their banner will chronicle the fame of this people for future generations. Notwithstanding, however that may be--there lies the kingdom of the Goths!"

FOOTNOTE:

[Footnote 1](#): Procopius, in his "Wars of the Goths," vol. i., pp. 7, 18, places here, in mistake, the Tiber instead of the Anio.

END OF VOL. II.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD, SURREY.

H. L. & Co.

***** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A STRUGGLE FOR ROME,
V. 2 *****

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree

to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional

terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- **You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”**
- **You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.**
- **You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.**
- **You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.**

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project

Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside

the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

**Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility:
www.gutenberg.org.**

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.