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Title: A Struggle for Rome, v. 3

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Translator: Lily Wolffsohn

Release Date: May 15, 2010 [EBook #32377]

Language: English

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

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Transcriber's Notes:

1. Page scan source:

<http://www.archive.org/details/astruggleforrom02dahngoog>

A STRUGGLE FOR ROME.

BY

FELIX DAHN.

T R A N S L A T E D F R O M T H E G E R M A N

BY

LILY WOLFFSOHN.

"If there be anything more powerful than Fate,
It is the courage which bears it undismayed."

GEIBEL.

**IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.**

**LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.**

1878.

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A STRUGGLE FOR ROME.

BOOK IV.--Continued.

WITICHIS.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Thanks to the precautions taken by Procopius, the trick had succeeded completely.

At the moment in which the flag of the Goths fell and their King was taken prisoner, they were everywhere surprised and overpowered. In the courts of the palace, in the streets and canals of the city and in the camp, they were surrounded by far superior numbers. A palisade of lances met their sight on all sides. Almost without an exception the paralysed Goths laid down their arms. The few who offered resistance--the nearest associates of the King--were struck down.

Witichis himself, Duke Guntharis, Earl Wisand, Earl Markja, and the leaders of the army who were taken prisoners with them, were placed in separate confinement; the King imprisoned in the "prison of Theodoric," a strong and deep dungeon in the palace itself.

The procession from the Gate of Stilicho to the Forum of Honorius had not been interrupted.

Arrived at the palace, Belisarius summoned the Senate and decurions of the city, and took their oaths of allegiance for Emperor Justinian.

Procopius was sent to Byzantium with the golden keys of Neapolis, Rome, and Ravenna. He was to give a full report to the Emperor, and to demand for Belisarius the prolongation of his office until Italy had been completely tranquillised, as could not fail to be the case presently, and afterwards, as had been the case after the Vandal wars, to accord him the honour of a triumph, with the exposure of the King of the Goths, as prisoner of war, in the Hippodrome.

For Belisarius looked upon the war as ended.

Cethegus almost shared this belief. But still he feared the outbursts of indignation amongst the Goths in the provinces. Therefore he took care that, for the present, no report of the manner in which the city had fallen should pass the gates; and he pondered upon some means of making use of the imprisoned King himself, to palliate the possible renewal of national feeling in the Goths.

He also persuaded Belisarius to send Acacius, with the Persian horsemen, to follow Hildebad, who had escaped in the direction of Tarvisium.

In vain he tried to speak to the Queen.

She had not yet fully recovered the effects of the night of the earthquake, and admitted no one. She had even listened to the news of the fall of the city with indifference. The Prefect gave her a guard of honour, in order to make sure of her, for he had great plans in connection with her. Then he sent her the sword of the King, accompanying it with a note.

"I have kept my word. King Witichis is ruined, you are revenged and free. Now it is your turn to fulfil my wish."

A few days later, Belisarius, deprived of his constant adviser Procopius, called the Prefect to an interview in the right wing of the palace, where he had taken up his quarters.

"Unheard-of mutiny!" he cried, as Cethegus entered.

"What has happened?"

"You know that I placed Bessas, with the Lazian mercenaries, in the trenches of the Gate of Honorius, one of the most important points of the city. Hearing that the temper of these troops was insubordinate I recalled them--and Bessas----"

"Well?"

"Refuses to obey."

"Without reason? Impossible!"

"A ridiculous reason! Yesterday the term of my office expired."

"Well?"

"And Bessas declares that since midnight I am no longer his commander!"

"Shameful! But he is in the right."

"In the right! In a few days the Emperor's reply will arrive, according to my wish. He will naturally, after the conquest of Ravenna, again appoint me as commander-in-chief, until the war is ended. The news may be here the day after to-morrow."

"Perhaps still sooner, Belisarius. At sunset the watchman on the lighthouse of Classis announced the approach of a ship coming from Ariminum. It appears to be an imperial trireme. It may run into harbour at any hour. Then the knot will be loosened."

"I will cut it beforehand. My body-guard shall storm the trenches and strike the head off the obstinate Bessas----"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Johannes.

"General," he cried, "the Emperor is here! The Emperor, Justinian himself, has just anchored in the harbour of Classis."

Cethegus involuntarily started. Was such a thunderbolt from a clear sky, such a whim of the incalculable despot, after such toil, to overthrow the almost perfect structure of his plans?

But Belisarius, with sparkling eyes, asked:

"The Emperor? How do you know?"

"He comes himself to thank you for your victory--never was such honour done to mortal man! The ship from Ariminum bears the imperial flag--purple and silver. You know that that indicates the actual presence of the Emperor."

"Or of a member of his family," interposed Cethegus thoughtfully, and once more breathing freely.

"Let us hasten to the harbour, to receive our Imperial master," cried Belisarius.

He was disappointed in his joy and pride when, on their way to Classis, they were met by the first courtiers who had disembarked, and who demanded quarters in the palace, not for the Emperor, but for his nephew Germanus.

"At least he sends the next in rank," said Belisarius--consoling himself--to Cethegus as they went on. "Germanus is the noblest man at court. Just, incorruptible, and pure. They call him 'The Lily of the Swamp.' But you do not listen to me!"

"Pardon! but I saw my young friend Lucius Licinius in the crowd of people who are approaching us."

"Salve, Cethegus!" cried Lucius as he made his way to the Prefect.

"Welcome to free Italy! What news from the Empress?" asked Cethegus in a whisper.

"Her parting word, 'Nike!' (Victoria), and this letter," Lucius whispered just as softly. "But," and he frowned, "never again send me to that woman!"

"No, no, young Hippolytus, I think it will never again be necessary."

They had now reached the quay of the harbour, the steps of which the Imperial Prince was just ascending. His noble form distinguished itself from the crowd of splendid courtiers who

surrounded him, and he was received by the troops and the people with imperial honours and cries of joy.

Cethegus looked keenly at him.

"His pale face has become still paler," he remarked to Licinius.

"Yes. They say that the Empress, because she could not seduce him, has poisoned him."

The Prince, bowing his acknowledgments to all sides, had now reached Belisarius, who greeted him reverently.

"I return your greeting, Belisarius," said the Prince gravely; "follow me at once to the palace. Where is Cethegus the Prefect? Where is Bessas? Ah, Cethegus!" he said, grasping the latter's hand, "I am glad to see again the greatest man in Italy. You will presently accompany me to the granddaughter of Theodoric. To her belongs my first visit. I bring her gifts from Justinian and my humble service. She was a prisoner in her own kingdom; she shall be a queen at the Court of Byzantium."

"That she shall!" thought Cethegus. He bowed profoundly and said, "I know that you are acquainted with the Princess already. Her hand was once destined for you."

A flush rapidly spread over the cheek of the Prince.

"But unfortunately," he answered, "not her heart. I saw her here years ago, at her mother's court, and since then, my mind's eye has beheld nothing but her picture."

"Yes, she is the loveliest woman on earth," said the Prefect quietly.

"Accept this chrysolite as thanks for that word!" cried Germanus, and put a ring upon the Prefect's finger.

They entered the door of the palace. "Now, Mataswintha," said Cethegus to himself, "now a new life begins for you. I know no Roman woman--one girl perhaps excepted--who could resist such a temptation. And shall this rude barbarian withstand?"

As soon as the Prince had partially recovered from the fatigue of the voyage, and had exchanged his travelling dress for a state-costume, he appeared, with Cethegus at his side, in the throne-room of the great Theodoric.

The trophies of Gothic valour still hung on the walls of the lofty and vaulted hall. On three sides ran a colonnade; in the middle of the fourth stood the elevated throne of Theodoric.

The Prince ascended the steps of the throne with dignity. Cethegus with Belisarius, Bessas, Demetrius, Johannes, and numerous other leaders, remained standing at a short distance.

"In the name of my Imperial master and uncle, I take possession of this city of Ravenna and of the Western Roman Empire," said Germanus. "To you, magister militum, this writing from our master the Emperor. Break the seal, and read it before the assembly. Such were the orders of Justinian."

Belisarius stepped forward, received the letter upon his knees, kissed the seal, rose, opened it, and read:

"Justinian, Emperior of the Romans, Lord of the East and West, conqueror of the Persians and Saracens, of the Vandals and Alans, of the Lazians and Sabirians, of the Huns and Bulgarians, the Avarians and Slavonians, and lastly of the Goths, to Belisarius the Consul, lately magister militum. We have been acquainted by Cethegus the Prefect with the events which led to the fall of Ravenna. His report will, at his request, be communicated to you. We, however, cannot at all agree with the good opinion, therein expressed, of you and your successes; and we dispense you from your office as commander-in-chief. We order you by this letter to return at once to Byzantium, to answer for yourself before our throne. We can the less accord you a triumph, such as you received after the Vandal wars, because neither Rome nor Ravenna fell through your valour; Rome having freely capitulated, and Ravenna having fallen by means of an earthquake, which was a sign of the anger of the Almighty against the heretics, and against highly suspicious actions, the harmlessness of which you, accused of high treason, must prove before our throne. As, in consideration of former merit, we would not condemn you unheard--for East and West shall celebrate us to all time as the King of Justice--we refrain from arresting you as your accusers wish. Without chains--only bound by the fetters of your own self-accusing conscience--you will appear before our Imperial countenance."

Belisarius reeled; he could read no further; he covered his face with his hands and let the letter fall.

Bessas lifted it up, kissed it, and read on:

"We name the strategist Bessas as your successor in the army. We charge the Archon Johannes with the care of Ravenna. The administration of the taxes will remain--in spite of the

highly unjust complaints made against him by the Italians--in the hands of the logician Alexandros, who is so zealous in our service. And as our Governor in Italy we name the highly-deserving Prefect of Rome, Cornelius Cethegus Cæsarius. Our nephew Germanus, furnished with Imperial power, is answerable for your transport to our fleet off Ariminum, whence Areobindos will take you to Byzantium."

Germanus rose, and ordered all present, except Belisarius and Cethegus, to leave the hall.

Then he descended from the throne, and went up to Belisarius, who was now totally unconscious of what was going on around him. He stood immovable, leaning his head and arm against a column, and staring at the ground.

The Prince took his right hand.

"It pains me, Belisarius, to be the bearer of such a message. I undertook it, because I thought that a friend would fulfil such an errand more gently than any of the enemies who were eager to do it. But I cannot deny that this last victory of yours cancels the fame of many former ones. Never could I have expected such a game of lies from the hero Belisarius! Cethegus begged that his report to the Emperor should be laid before you. It is full of your praise. Here it is. I believe it was the Empress who kindled the anger of Justinian against you. But you do not hear----"

And he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the unfortunate man. Belisarius shook it off.

"Let me alone, boy! You bring me--you bring me the true thanks of a crowned head!"

Germanus drew himself up with dignity.

"Belisarius, you forget yourself, and who I am!"

"Oh no! I am a prisoner, and you are my gaoler. I will go at once on board your ship--only spare me chains and fetters."

It was very late before the Prefect could get away from the Prince, who spoke to him with the greatest frankness on state affairs and his own personal wishes.

As soon as Cethegus was alone in his rooms, which had also been appointed to him in the palace, he hastened to read the letter which Lucius Licinius had brought from the Empress. It ran thus:

"You have conquered, Cethegus. As I read your epistle I thought of old times, when your letters to Theodora, written in the same cipher, did not talk of statesmanship and warfare, but of kisses and roses----"

"She must always remind me of that!" cried the Prefect, interrupting his perusal of the letter.

"But even in this letter I recognise the irresistible intellect that, more even than your youthful beauty, conquered the women of Byzantium. And this time also I accede to the wishes of the old friend as I once did to those of the young one. Ah, how I love to think of our youth--our sweet youth! I fully understand that Antonina's spouse would stand far too securely for the future if he did not fall now. So--as you wrote me--I whispered to the Emperor that a subject who could play such a game with crowns and rebellion was too dangerous; no general ought to be exposed to such temptations. What he had this time feigned, he could, at another time, carry into earnest practice. These words weighed more heavily than all Belisarius's success, and my--that is, your--demands were granted. For mistrust is the very soul of Justinian. He trusts no one on earth, except--Theodora. Your messenger, Lucius, is *handsome*, but unamiable; he has nothing in his head but weapons and Rome. Ah, Cethegus, my friend, youth is now no more what it was! You have conquered, Cethegus--do you remember that evening when I first whispered those words?--but do not forget to whom you owe your victory. And mind: Theodora permits herself to be used as a tool only so long as she likes. Never forget that."

"Certainly not," said Cethegus, as he carefully destroyed the letter. "You are too dangerous an ally, Theodora, my little demon! I will see whether you cannot be replaced.--Patience! In a few weeks Mataswintha will be in Byzantium."

CHAPTER XXV.

The round tower, in the deepest dungeon of which Witichis was confined, was situated at the angle of the right wing of the palace, the same in which he had dwelt and ruled as King.

The iron door of the tower formed the end of a long passage which led from a court, and which was separated from this court by a heavy iron gate.

Exactly opposite this gate, on the ground-floor of the building at the left side of the court, was the small dwelling of Dromon, the *carcerarius* or gaoler of the prison.

This dwelling consisted of two small chambers; the first, which was separated from the second by a curtain, was merely an ante-room.

The inner chamber afforded an outlook across the court to the round tower.

Both rooms were very simply furnished. A straw couch in the inner room, and two chairs, a table, and a row of keys upon the walls in the outer room, was almost all that they contained.

Upon the wooden bench in the window abovementioned, sat, day and night--her eyes fixed upon the hole in the wall, through which alone light and air could penetrate to the King's prison--a silent and thoughtful woman.

It was Rauthgundis. Her eyes never left the little chink in the wall, "For," she said to herself, "thither turn all my thoughts--there, where *his* eyes too are ever fixed."

Even when she spoke to her companion, Wachis, or to the gaoler, she never turned her eyes away. It seemed as if she thought that her mere look could guard the prisoner from every danger.

On the day of which we speak she had sat thus for a long time.

It was evening. Dark and threatening the massive tower rose into the sky, casting a broad shadow over the court and the left wing of the palace.

"Thanks, O Heavenly Father," murmured Rauthgundis; "even the strokes of fate have led to good. If, as I once intended, I had gone to my father upon the High Arn, I should never have heard of all the misery here. Or far too late. But I could not bear to forsake the last resting-place of my child near our home. The last, indeed, I was obliged to leave, for how could I know that *she*, his Queen, would not come there? I dwelt in the woods near Fæsulæ, and when news came of failure, and one misfortune followed another; when the Persians burnt our house, and I saw the flames from my hiding-place; it was too late to escape to my father. All the roads were blocked, and the Italians delivered all whom they found with yellow hair into the hands of the Massagetæ. No way was open but the road here--to the city where I had ever refused to go as *his* wife. I came like a fugitive beggar. Wachis, the slave, now the freedman, and Wallada, our horse, alone remained faithful to me. But--forced by God's hand to come, whether I would or not--I found that it was only that I might save *him*--deliver him from the shameful treachery of his wife, and out of the hands of his enemies! I thank Thee, O God, for this Thy mercy!"

Her attention was attracted by the rattling of the iron gate opposite.

A man with a light came through it across the court, and now entered the ante-room. It was the old gaoler.

"Well? Speak! cried Rauthgundis, leaving her seat and hurrying to him.

"Patience--patience! Let me first set down the lamp. There! Well, he has drunk and it has done him good."

Rauthgundis laid her hand upon her heart.

"What is he doing?" she asked.

"He always sits in the same position, perfectly silent. He sits on a stone block, his back turned to the door, his head supported on his hands. He gives me no answer when I speak to him. Generally he does not even move; I believe grief and pain have stupefied him. But to-day, when I handed him the wine in the wooden cup and said, 'Drink, dear sir; it comes from true friends,' he looked up. Ah, his look was so sorrowful, as sad as death! He drank deeply, and bowed his head thankfully, and gave such a sigh, that it cut me to the heart."

Rauthgundis covered her eyes with her hand.

"God knows what horrid thing that man means to do to him!" the old man murmured to himself.

"What sayest thou?"

"I say that you must eat and drink well, or else you will lose your strength; and you will need it before long, poor woman!"

"I shall have strength enough!"

"Then take at least a cup of wine."

"Of this wine? No, it is all for him!"

And she went back into the inner chamber, where she again took her old place.

"The flask will last some time," old Dromon said to himself; "but we must save him soon, if he is to be saved at all. There comes Wachis. May he bring good news, else----"

Wachis entered. Since his visit to the Queen he had exchanged his steel cap and mantle for clothes borrowed from Dromon.

"I bring good news!" he cried, as he entered. "But where were you an hour ago? I knocked in vain."

"We had both gone out to buy wine."

"To be sure; that is the reason why the whole room smells so sweet. What do I see? Why, this is old and costly Falernian! How could you pay for it?"

"Pay for it?" repeated the old man. "With the purest gold in the world! I told you that the Prefect had purposely let the King starve, in order to undermine his health. For many days I have received no rations for him. Against my conscience I have kept him alive by depriving the other prisoners. This Rauthgundis would no longer suffer. She fell into deep thought, and then asked me whether the rich Roman ladies still paid so dearly for the yellow locks of the Gothic women. Suspecting nothing, I said 'Yes.' She went away, and soon returned shorn of her beautiful auburn hair, but with a handful of gold. With this the wine was bought."

Wachis went into the next room, and kissing the hand of Rauthgundis, exclaimed: "Good and faithful wife!"

"What art thou doing, Wachis? Rise, and tell me thy news."

"Yes, tell us," said Dromon, joining them. "What says my Paukis? What advice does he give?"

"What matters his advice?" asked Rauthgundis. "I can manage alone."

"We need him very much. The Prefect has formed nine cohorts, after the model of the Roman legionaries, of all the youth of Ravenna, and my Paulus is enrolled amongst them. Luckily, the Prefect has entrusted the guard of the city gates to these legionaries. The Byzantines are placed outside the city in the harbour; the Isaurians here in the palace."

"Yes," continued Wachis; "and these gates are carefully closed at night; but the breach near the Tower of Ætius is not yet repaired. Only sentinels are placed there to guard it."

"When has my son the watch?"

"In two days. He will have the third night-watch."

"Thanks be to the saints! It could not have lasted much longer. I feared----"

He hesitated.

"What? Speak!" cried Rauthgundis. "I can bear to hear everything."

"Perhaps it is well that you should know it; for you are cleverer than we two, and will better find out what is to be done. I fear they have something wicked in their heads. As long as Belisarius had the command here, it went well with the King. But since Belisarius has gone and the Prefect--that silent demon!--is master of the palace, things look dangerous. He visits the King every day, and speaks to him for a long time, earnestly and threateningly. I have often listened in the passage. But it seems to have little effect, for the King, I believe, never answers him; and when the Prefect comes out, he looks as black as thunder. For six days I have received no wine for the King, and only a little piece of bread; and the air down there is as mouldy and damp as the grave."

Rauthgundis sighed deeply.

"Yesterday," continued Dromon, "when the Prefect came up, he looked blacker than ever. He asked me----"

"Well? Tell me, whatever it may be!"

"He asked me whether the instruments of torture were in good order!"

Rauthgundis turned pale, but remained silent.

"The wretch!" cried Wachis. "What did you----"

"Do not be afraid; all is safe for a time. 'Clarissimus,' I said--and it is the pure truth--'the

screws and pincers, the weights and spikes, and the whole delightful apparatus lie all together as safe as possible.' 'Where?' he asked. 'In the deep sea,' I answered; 'I myself, at the order of King Theodoric, threw them in!' For you must know, Mistress Rauthgundis, that when your master was a simple Earl, he once saved me from being tortured. At his request, the horrible practice was fully abolished. I owe him my life and my sound limbs, and I would gladly risk my neck for him. And, if it cannot be otherwise, I will leave this city with you. But we must not delay long, for the Prefect has no need of my pincers and screws if he once takes it into his head to torture a man's marrow out of his bones. I fear him as I fear the devil!"

"And I hate him as I hate a lie!" cried Rauthgundis sternly.

"So we must be quick," Dromon went on, "before he can carry out his cruel intentions; for he is certainly planning something terrible against the King. I don't know what he can want of the poor prisoner. Now listen, and mark my words. The third night from now, when Paulus keeps the watch, and I take the King his evening drink, I will unlock his chains, throw my mantle over him, and lead him out of the prison and the passage into the court. Thence he will be able to go unnoticed to the gate of the palace, where the sentinel will demand the watch-word. This I shall acquaint him with. When he is once in the street, he must go direct to the Tower of Ætius, where Paulus will let him pass the breach. Outside, in the pine-grove of Diana, at a short distance from the gate, Wachis will wait for him with Wallada. But no one must accompany him; not even you, Rauthgundis. He will escape more surely alone."

"Of what consequence am I? He shall be free; not even bound to me! Thou must not even name my name. I have brought him misfortune enough, I will only look at him once again from the window as he goes away!"

The Prefect now sunned himself in the feeling of supremacy. He was Governor of Italy. By his order the fortifications were repaired and strengthened, the citizens practised in the use of arms all over the country. The representatives of Byzantium could no longer counterbalance him. Their captains had no luck; the siege of Tarvisium, as well as of Verona and Ticinum, made no progress. And Cethegus heard with pleasure that Hildebad, whose troops had been augmented by deserters to the number of about six hundred, had badly beaten Acacius, who had overtaken and attacked him with a thousand Persian horsemen. But Hildebad's road was still blocked by a strong battalion of Byzantines, who marched against him from Mantua--he had intended to join Totila at Tarvisium--and he was obliged to throw himself into the Castle of Castra Nova, which was still occupied by the Goths under Thorismuth.

Here the Byzantines kept him shut up. They could not, however, take the strong fortress, and the Prefect already foresaw that Acacius would soon call upon him to help to destroy the Goths, who could then no longer escape him. It rejoiced him that, since the departure of Belisarius, the forces of Byzantium were proved, in the face of all Italy, to be incapable of putting an end to the resistance of the Goths. And the harshness of the Byzantine financial administration, which had accompanied Belisarius wherever he went--for he could not prevent the practice of draining the resources of the country, which was carried on at the Emperor's command--awakened or heightened the dislike of both town and country to the East Roman rule.

Cethegus took good care not--as Belisarius had often done--to oppose the worst acts of Justinian's officials. It gave him great pleasure when the populations of Neapolis and Rome repeatedly broke out into open rebellion against their oppressors.

When the Goths were completely annihilated, the power of the Byzantines become contemptible, and their tyranny sufficiently hated, Italy might be called upon to assert her independence, and her saviour, her ruler, would be Cethegus.

Notwithstanding, he was troubled by one circumstance--for he was far from undervaluing his enemies. The Gothic war, the last sparks of which were not yet trampled out, might at any time flame up anew, fanned by the national indignation aroused by the treachery which had been practised. It had great weight with the Prefect that the most hated leaders of the Goths, Totila and Teja, had not been taken in the trap laid at Ravenna.

For the purpose, therefore, of preventing such a national uprising as he feared, he attempted to drag from the Gothic King a declaration, that he had surrendered himself and the city without hope and without condition, and that he called upon his people to abstain from fruitless resistance. He also wished his prisoner to tell him in what castle the war-treasure of Theodoric was concealed.

Even in those days such a treasure, as a means of gaining foreign princes and mercenaries, was of the highest importance. If the Goths lost it, they would lose their best chance of strengthening their exhausted forces by the aid of foreign weapons.

And it was the Prefect's greatest wish not to let this treasure--which legend spoke of as immense--fall into the hands of the Byzantines--whose need of money, and the tyranny caused by this need, were such active allies in his plans--but to secure it for himself. His means were also not inexhaustible. But opposed to the calm steadfastness of his prisoner, the Prefect's efforts to

extort the secret were vain.

CHAPTER XXVI.

All necessary measures had been taken for the escape of the King.

Rauthgundis and Wachis had made themselves thoroughly acquainted with the pine-grove where the faithful freedman was to wait with the charger of Dietrich of Bern.

And it was with the confidence which completed preparations always lend to a stout heart, that Rauthgundis returned to the dwelling of the gaoler.

But she turned pale when the latter rushed to meet her with an air of desperation, and dragged her across the threshold.

Once in the room, he threw himself on his knees before her, beating his breast with his fists and tearing his grey hair.

For some time he could find no words.

"Speak," cried Rauthgundis, pressing her hand to her wildly-beating heart. "Is he dead?"

"No; but flight is impossible! all is lost! all is lost! An hour ago the Prefect came, and went down to the King. As usual, I opened both doors for him, the passage and the prison door, and then----"

"Well?"

"Then he took both keys from me, saying he would keep them in future himself."

"And thou gavest them up!" said Rauthgundis, grinding her teeth.

"How could I refuse? I did all I could. I kept them back and asked: 'Master, do you no longer trust me?' He looked at me with a look that seemed to pierce soul and body. 'From this moment,' he said, 'no longer,' and snatched the keys from my hand."

"And thou didst not prevent him?"

"Oh, mistress, you are unjust! What could you have done in my place? Nothing!"

"I should have strangled him. And now? What shall we do now?"

"Do? Nothing! Nothing can be done!"

"He *must* be liberated. Dost thou hear? he *must*!"

"But, mistress, I know not how."

Rauthgundis caught up an axe which lay near the hearth.

"We will open the doors by force."

Dromon tried to take the axe from her hand.

"It is impossible! They are thickly plated with iron."

"Then send for the monster! Tell him that Witichis desires to speak with him, and I will strike him down at the passage door."

"And then? You rave! Let me go out. I will call Wachis away from his useless watch."

"No! I cannot think that we shall not succeed. Perhaps that devil will return of his own accord. Perhaps--" she continued reflectively--"Ha!" she cried suddenly, "it must be so. He wants to murder him! He intends to steal alone to the defenceless prisoner. But woe to him if he come! I will guard the threshold of that door as if it were a sanctuary, and woe to him if he cross it!"

She leaned heavily against the half-door of the room, and swung the ponderous axe.

But Rauthgundis was wrong.

Not to kill his prisoner had the Prefect taken the keys into his own keeping.

He had gone with them in his hand to the south side of the palace, where he gained admittance to Mataswintha's room.

The stillness of death and the excitement of fever alternated so rapidly in Mataswintha, that Aspa could never look at her mistress without the tears rushing to her eyes.

"Most beautiful daughter of the Germans," began the Prefect, "dissipate the cloud which rests upon your white brow, and listen to me calmly."

"How is the King? You leave me without news. You promised to let him go free when all was decided. You promised that he should be taken over the Alps. You have not kept your word."

"I promised it on two conditions. You know them well, and you have not yet done your part. Tomorrow the nephew of the Emperor will return from Ariminum, ready to take you to Byzantium, and I desire you to give him hopes that you will become his bride. Your marriage with Witichis was forced and null."

"No, never! I have told you so before."

"I am sorry for it, for the sake of my prisoner, for he will not see the light of day again until you are on the way to Byzantium with Germanus."

"Never!"

"Do not irritate me, Mataswintha. The folly of the girl who bought the Ares' head at such a high price, is, I think, outgrown. For that once enamoured being has since sacrificed the Ares of the Goths to his enemies. But if you still honour that dream of girlhood, then save the man you once loved."

Mataswintha shook her head.

"Until now I have treated you as a free agent, as a Queen. Do not remind me that you, as well as he, are in my power. You will become the wife--soon the widow--of this noble Prince--and Justinian--Byzantium--the whole world, will lie at your feet. Daughter of the Amelungs, is it possible that you do not love power?"

"I only love--- Never!"

"Then I must force you."

She laughed.

"*You? Force me?*"

"Yes, I force you! (She still loves the man she has ruined!) The second condition is this: that the prisoner fill up this empty space with a name--the name of the castle in which the treasure of the Goths is concealed--and sign the declaration. He refuses to do this with a stubbornness which begins to anger me. Seven times I, the conqueror, have been to him. He would never yet speak to me. And the first time I went I received a look for which alone he deserves to lose his haughty head."

"He will never consent!"

"That remains to be seen. The continual dropping of water wears away a stone at last. But I can wait no longer. Early to-day I received word that that mad Hildebad, in a furious sally, has beaten Bessas so thoroughly, that the latter can scarcely continue the siege. Everywhere the Goths rebel. I must go and make an end of it, and extinguish these last sparks with the water of deception, which is better than blood. To this end I must have the King's declaration, and the secret of the castle. Therefore I tell you that if, before to-morrow, you do not consent to accompany the Prince to Byzantium, and have not procured for me the signature of the prisoner, witnessed as such by yourself, I will--I swear by the Styx--kill----"

Horrified at the awful expression of Cethegus's face, Mataswintha started from her seat and grasped his arm.

"You will not kill *him!*"

"Yes; or rather, I will first torture him, then blind him, and afterwards kill him!"

"No! no!" screamed Mataswintha.

"I am resolved. The executioners are ready. And you, you shall tell him this. He will believe that I am in earnest when he sees your despair. You will perhaps be able to soften him; the sight of me only hardens him. Perhaps he thinks that he is still in the hands of Belisarius, that tender-hearted hero. You will tell him in whose power he really is. Here are the documents--here the keys which open his prison. You shall choose the hour yourself."

A ray of joyful hope shone from Mataswintha's eyes. Cethegus failed not to remark it, but, smiling calmly, he left the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Soon after the Prefect had left the Queen it became quite dark.

The sky was thickly covered with ragged clouds, which were driven across the moon by the fierce wind, so that brief and uncertain light alternated with a gloom rendered greater by contrast.

Dromon had completed his evening round of the cells, and returned to his dwelling tired and sad.

He found no light within. He could scarcely make out that Rauthgundis was still leaning against the half-door, the axe in her hand, her eyes fixed upon the door of the passage.

"Let me strike a light, mistress, and kindle the chips upon the hearth. Share the evening meal with me. Come, you wait here in vain."

"No, no light, no fire! I can see better what happens in the court without, for it is moonlight."

"Well, at least come in here and rest yourself. Here is bread and meat."

"Shall I eat while he hungers?"

"You will be exhausted! Of what are you thinking the whole evening?"

"Of what am I thinking?" repeated Rauthgundis, still looking out. "I am thinking how often we have sat in the colonnade before our beautiful house, when the fountain splashed in the garden and the cicadas chirped in the trees. The cool night-breeze fanned his beloved face, and I nestled against his shoulder, and we did not speak one word, and above us was the silent march of the stars. And we listened to the deep and peaceful breathing of our child, who had fallen asleep upon my lap, his little hands, like soft white fetters, clasping the arm of his father. Alas! his arm now wears other fetters! Iron fetters--that pain----"

And she pressed her forehead against the iron grating, until she, too, felt pain.

"Mistress, why do you torment yourself thus? We cannot help it!"

"But we will help it! I must save him and----Dromon! look there! What is that?" she whispered, and pointed at something in the court.

The old man hastened noiselessly to her side.

In the court was a tall white figure, which seemed to glide stealthily along the wall.

At brief intervals, but sharp and clear, the moonlight fell upon it.

"It is a Lemure! The ghost of some one who has been murdered here!" said the old man, trembling. "God and all the saints protect us!"

He crossed himself and covered his head with his mantle.

"No," said Rauthgundis, "the dead do not return from the other world! Now it has disappeared--all is dark. Ha! the moon breaks through once--more there it is again! It moves towards the passage-door. What is that shining red in the white light? Ha! it is the Queen--that is her red hair? She stops at the door! She opens it! She is going to murder him in his sleep!"

"God knows, it is the Queen! But *she* murder him! How could she?"

"*She* could! But, as I live, she shall not! Follow her! A miracle opens the door to us. But softly, softly!"

And she went out on tiptoe into the court, the axe still in her hand, slowly and stealthily, seeking the shadow. Dromon followed her closely.

Meanwhile Mataswintha, for she it was, had opened the door and gone forward, down many steps and then through a small passage, feeling the way with her hands.

She now reached the door of the prison. She opened it very softly.

Through an aperture high up on the wall, where a stone had been taken out, a slanting strip of moonlight fell into the square and narrow dungeon.

The light revealed the prisoner. He sat motionless upon a block of stone, his back turned to the door, his head supported on his hands.

Mataswintha trembled and leaned against the doorpost. The air felt damp and icy-cold. She shivered. She could not say a word for very horror.

Witichis remarked the draught of air from the open door. He lifted his head, but did not look round.

"Witichis--King Witichis--" at last stammered Mataswintha; "it is I! Dost thou hear me?"

But the prisoner did not move.

"I come to save thee--fly! Thou art free!"

But the prisoner dropped his head again.

"Oh, speak!--oh, only look at me!"

She now went quite into the dungeon. Gladly would she have touched his arm, and taken his hand, but she did not yet dare.

"Cethegus will kill thee!" she said; "torture thee. He surely will if thou dost not fly!"

And now her desperation gave her courage. She drew nearer.

"But thou wilt fly! Thou shalt not die! I must save thee! I beseech thee, fly, fly! Oh, thou dost not hear me, and time presses! Sometime thou shalt know everything! but now fly--to life and liberty! I have the keys of the doors! fly, fly!" And now she grasped his arm and tried to drag him from his seat.

But she heard the rattling of chains--on his arms on his feet. He was chained to the block of stone.

"Oh! what is this?" she cried, and fell upon her knees.

"Stone and iron," he said, in a toneless voice. "Leave me, I am doomed. And even if these bonds did not hold me--I would not follow thee. Back to the world? The world is one great lie. Everything is a lie."

"Thou art right. It is better to die. Let me die with thee, but forgive me! For I, too, have lied to thee."

"It is very possible. It does not surprise me."

"But thou wilt forgive me before we die? I have hated thee--I have rejoiced in thy ruin--I have--oh, it is so hard to tell! I have not the strength to confess it! And yet I must have thy forgiveness. Oh, forgive me!--give me thy hand as a sign of thy pardon."

But Witichis had sunk back into his former stupor.

"Oh, I beseech thee--forgive me, whatever I may have done!"

"Go--why should I not forgive thee? thou art like the rest--not better and not worse."

"No, I am more wicked than all--and yet better. At least more miserable. It is true that I hated thee, but only because thou hast ever thrust me from thee. Thou wouldst not permit me to share thy life. Forgive me!--O God! I only wish to die with thee!--give me thy hand as a sign of pardon!"

Kneeling and beseeching, she stretched out both her hands.

The King again lifted his head. The kindness of his nature awoke within him, and overpowered his own dull pain.

"Mataswintha," he said, lifting his chained hand, "go. I am sorry for thee. Let me die alone. Whatever thou mayst have done--go--I forgive thee."

"O Witichis!" breathed Mataswintha, and would have clasped his hand, but she felt herself suddenly and violently dragged away.

"Incendiary! never shall he forgive thee! Come, Witichis!--*my* Witichis!--follow me; thou art free!"

The King sprang up, roused to life by this voice.

"Rauthgundis! My wife! Thou hast never lied! Thou art true! at last I have thee again!"

And, with a gasp of joy, he stretched out his arms. His wife flew to his bosom, and tear's of delight rushed from their eyes.

But Mataswintha, who had risen, tottered to the wall. She slowly stroked her loose red hair out of her eyes and looked at the pair, who were illuminated by the bright moonlight from the chink in the wall.

"How he loves her! Yes, he will follow *her*! But he shall not! He shall remain and die with me!"

"Delay no longer!" said the voice of Dromon at the door.

"Come, come quickly, my life!" cried Rauthgundis.

She drew a little key from her bosom and felt at the chains, seeking the small opening of the lock.

"What? Shall I really breathe once more the air of freedom?" asked the prisoner, half sinking back into his stupor.

"Yes; the free and open air!" cried Rauthgundis, and threw the loosened chains to the ground. "Here, Witichis, here is a weapon! an axe! Take it!"

Eagerly the Goth took the axe and weighed it in his hand.

"Ha! how the weapon strengthens my arm and soul!"

"I knew it, my brave Witichis," said Rauthgundis, kneeling down and unlocking the chain which bound his left foot to the block of stone. "Now step out, for thou art free!"

Witichis, raising the axe in his right hand, made a step toward the door.

"And *she* is permitted to loose his chains!" whispered Mataswintha.

"Yes, free!" cried Witichis, drawing a deep breath. "Come, Rauthgundis, let us go!"

"He goes with *her*!" screamed Mataswintha, and cast herself before the pair. "Witichis--farewell--but tell me once more--that thou hast forgiven me!"

"Forgiven thee!" cried Rauthgundis. "Never--never! She has destroyed our kingdom--she has betrayed thee! It was no lightning--it was her hand which kindled the granaries!"

"Ha--then be thou accursed!" cried Witichis. "Away, away from this serpent!" and, thrusting Mataswintha violently away, he crossed the threshold, followed by Rauthgundis.

"Witichis," screamed Mataswintha, dragging herself up--"stay--stay! Hear one word--Witichis!"

"Be silent," said Dromon, grasping her arm. "You will alarm the guard!"

But Mataswintha, now no more mistress of herself, ran up the steps into the passage. "Stay, Witichis--stay!" she screamed. "Thou canst not leave me thus!" and fell fainting to the earth.

Dromon hurried past her, and followed the fugitives.

But the shrill cries of Mataswintha had already reached the ear of one who ever slept lightly. Cethegus, his sword in his hand, and only half dressed, came out of his chamber into the gallery which looked over the square court of the palace.

"Guards!" he cried. "To arms!"

The soldiers were already astir.

Scarcely had Witichis, Rauthgundis, and Dromon left the passage and safely reached the dwelling of the latter, when six Isaurian mercenaries rushed noisily into the passage.

Quick as thought Rauthgundis ran out of the house to the heavy iron door, shut it, turned the key, and took it out.

"Now they can do no harm," she whispered.

The husband and wife presently hastened from Dromon's house to the great gate which led from the court into the street. The single sentinel who had remained behind stopped them and demanded the watchword. "Rome," he cried, "and----"

"Revenge!" cried Witichis, and struck him down with the axe.

The sentinel screamed and fell, hurling his spear at the fugitives. It pierced the last of the three--Dromon.

As Witichis and Rauthgundis rushed down the marble stairs of the palace into the street, they heard the imprisoned soldiers thundering at the strong iron door, and a loud voice calling: "Syphax, my horse!" Then they disappeared into the darkness.

A few minutes later the courtyard was bright with the lights of many torches, and several horsemen galloped off to the different gates of the city.

"Six thousand solidi to whoever takes him alive; three thousand if he be brought in dead!" cried Cethegus, swinging himself into the saddle. "Up, Sons of the Wind, Ellak and Mondzach, Huns and Massagetæ! Ride as you have never ridden before!"

"But whither?" asked Syphax, as he galloped out of the gate at his master's aide.

"That is difficult to say. But all the gates are closed and guarded. They can only escape by a breach."

"There are two large breaches."

"Look at Jupiter, which is just rising from behind the clouds in the east. It seems to sign to me. In that direction----"

"Lies the breach near the Tower of Ætius."

"Good! Then thither--I follow my star!"

Meantime the fugitives had happily reached the breach, where Paulus, the son of Dromon, let them pass. In the pine-grove of Diana they found their faithful Wachis and two horses.

The husband and wife mounted Wallada. The freedman took the other horse and rode off at a gallop towards the river, which at this point was very broad.

Witichis held Rauthgundis before him.

"My wife--losing thee I had lost all: life and courage. But now I will once more try for the kingdom. Oh, how could I ever let thee go, thou soul of my soul!"

"Thine arm is wounded with the chaffing of the chain. Lay it across my neck, my Witichis."

"Forward, Wallada--quick! It is for life or death!"

They now issued from the grove into the open country. They reached the shore of the river.

Wachis was trying to urge his rearing steed into the dark flood. The animal shyed and resisted.

The freedman sprang off.

"It is very deep, very rapid," he said. "For three days the river has been unusually full. The ford is useless. The horses will have to swim, and the current will drag us far to the left. There are rocks in the stream, and the moonlight is so inconstant and deceptive."

He looked doubtfully and searchingly up and down the river.

"Hark! what was that?" asked Rauthgundis. "It was not the wind in the trees."

"It is horses!" cried Witichis. "They approach rapidly. I hear the clatter of arms. There--torches! Now into the river for life or death--but softly!"

He urged his horse into the water.

"There is no footing. The horses must swim. Hold fast by the mane, Rauthgundis. Forward, Wallada!"

Snorting and trembling, the noble animal looked at the black water. His mane was blown wildly about his head--he held his fore-feet stretched out, his haunches drawn in.

"Forward, Wallada!" said Witichis, and called softly into the faithful animal's ear, "Theodoric!"

At this the charger sprang willingly into the water.

The pursuing horsemen had already galloped out of the wood, Cethegus foremost; at his side rode Syphax with a torch.

"Here the track disappears in the sand, master."

"They are in the river. Forward, Huns!"

But the horsemen drew rein and stood stock-still.

"Well, Ellak, why do you linger? At once into the flood!"

"Sir, we cannot. Before we ride into running water at night-time, we must ask forgiveness of Phug, the water-spirit. We must first pray to him."

"Pray when you are across as long as you like; but now----"

Just then a strong gust of wind blew from the river and extinguished all the torches.

The river rushed and roared.

"You see, sir, that Phug is angry."

"Be silent. Did you see nothing? There to the left."

The moon just then glanced between the driving clouds. It shone upon the light-coloured garments of Rauthgundis. She had lost her brown mantle.

"Aim quickly; there!"

"We cannot; we must first finish our worship!"

The clouds passed across the moon, and it was again quite dark.

With a curse, Cethegus snatched bow and quiver from the shoulder of the chief of the Huns.

"Come on!" cried Wachis in a low voice, when he had almost reached the opposite shore; "come quickly, before the moon issues from that narrow strip of cloud!"

"Halt, Wallada!" cried Witichis, as he dismounted in order to lighten the burden, and held fast by the horse's mane. "Here is a rock. Take care, Rauthgundis."

Horse, man, and woman were checked for a moment while balancing upon the top of the rock, past which the water rushed and gurgled in a deep whirl.

Suddenly the moon shone out clear and bright. It illuminated the surface of the stream and the group on the rock.

"It is they!" cried Cethegus, who held his bow and arrow ready.

He took a rapid aim, and pulled the string.

Whistling, the long black-feathered arrow flew from the string.

"Rauthgundis!" cried Witichis in terror; for his wife started convulsively and sank forward upon the horse's neck. But she did not utter a groan. "Rauthgundis, thou art hit?"

"I believe so. Leave me here and save thyself."

"Never! Let me support thee."

"For God's sake, sir, stoop! dive! They take aim again!"

The Huns had finished praying. They rode a short way into the water, fixing their arrows and taking aim.

"Leave me, Witichis. Fly! I will die here."

"No; I will never leave thee again!"

He lifted her out of the saddle, and tried to hide her on the rock. The group stood in the full light of the moon.

"Yield, Witichis!" cried Cethegus, spurring his horse up to its haunches in the water.

"A curse upon thee, thou traitor!" was the reply of Witichis.

Twelve arrows whizzed at once. The charger of Theodoric leaped wildly forward, and sank for ever into the flood.

But Witichis also was mortally wounded.

"With thee!" sighed Rauthgundis. She held him closely with both arms.

"With thee!"

And, locked in a fast embrace, husband and wife sank into the river.

In bitter grief, Wachis, on the farther shore, called their names. In vain. Three times he called, and then galloped away into the night.

"Get the bodies out," ordered Cethegus grimly, turning his horse to the bank.

And the Huns rode and swam to the rock, and sought for the bodies. But they sought in vain.

The rapid current had carried man and wife, united now for ever, into the free and open sea.

The same day Prince Germanus had returned from Ariminum to the harbour of Ravenna, ready to take Mataswintha to Byzantium.

The latter was only roused from the faint into which she had fallen when left by Witichis and

Rauthgundis, by the noise of the hammers with which the work-people broke open the passage to liberate the soldiers.

The Princess was found crouching upon the steps of the prison. She was carried up to her chamber in a high fever. She lay for hours upon her purple cushions without moving or speaking, her eyes fixed in a wild stare.

Towards noon Cethegus asked for admission.

His look was dark and threatening; his expression cold as ice.

He went up to Mataswintha's couch.

"He is dead!" she quietly said.

"He would not have it otherwise. He--and you. It is useless to reproach you. But you see what ensues when you oppose me. The report of his death will inevitably rouse the barbarians to new fury. You have created a difficult task for me; for you only are the cause of his flight and death. The least that you can do to atone for this is to fulfil my second wish. Prince Germanus has landed. He comes to fetch you. You will follow him."

"Where is the corpse?"

"It has not been found. The current has carried it away; his body and--the woman's."

Mataswintha's lips twitched.

"Even in death! She died with him?"

"Think no more of the dead. In two hours I will return with the Prince. Will you then be prepared to welcome him?"

"I shall be ready."

"'Tis well. We will be punctual."

"I also. Aspa, call all my slaves; they shall adorn me richly to meet this Prince. Diadem, purple, and silk."

"She has lost her senses," Cethegus said to himself as he left the room. "But women are tough; she will recover them. These women can live, even when their hearts are broken."

He went to console the impatient Prince.

Before the expiration of the time appointed, a slave came to invite the two men to come to the Queen.

Germanus crossed the threshold of her room with a rapid step. But he stood still astonished. He had never seen the Gothic Princess looking so lovely, so queenly.

She had placed a high golden diadem upon her shining hair, which fell over her shoulders in two thick tresses. Her under-dress of heavy white silk, embroidered with golden flowers, was only visible below the knee, for the upper part of her body was covered by the royal purple. Her face was white and cold as marble: her eyes blazed with a strange and supernatural light.

"Prince Germanus," she said, as he entered, "you once spoke to me of love; but do you know of what you spoke? To love is to die."

Germanus looked inquiringly at the Prefect, who now came forward.

He was about to speak, but Mataswintha, in a clear loud voice, recommenced:

"Prince Germanus, you are famed as the most highly-cultivated man of a learned court, where it is a favourite pastime to practise the solving of finely-pointed riddles. I also will put to you a riddle; see to it that you solve it. Let the clever Prefect, who so well understands human nature, help you. What is this?--A wife, and yet a maid; a widow, and yet no wife? You cannot guess? You are right; death alone resolves all riddles!"

With a sudden movement, she cast off her purple robe.

There was a flash of steel! She had stabbed herself to the heart.

With a shriek, Germanus and Aspa (who had stood behind) sprang forward.

Cethegus silently caught the falling figure.

She died as soon as he drew the sword from her breast. He knew the sword. He himself had sent it to her.

It was the sword of King Witichis.

BOOK V.

TOTILA.

"Well for us that this sunny youth still lives!"--*Margrave Ruediger of Bechelaren*, Act i., Scene i.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

A few days after the death of Mataswintha and the departure of Prince Germanus, who was deeply shocked by the sad event, a message came from Castra Nova, which rendered necessary the march of Byzantine troops from Ravenna.

Hildebad had been informed, by fugitive Goths, who had made their way in disguise through the lines of the besiegers, of the treacherous imprisonment of the King.

On hearing the news, he sent word to Cethegus and Belisarius, through some prisoners whom he released, that he challenged them, either together or singly, to mortal combat, "if they had a drop of courage in their veins, or a trace of honour in their souls."

"He thinks that Belisarius is still in the country, and does not seem to fear him greatly," said Bessas.

"This might be a means," said Cethegus cunningly, of ruining the turbulent fellow. "But, certainly, it needs great courage--such courage as Belisarius possesses."

"You know that I do not yield to him a jot in that," answered Bessas.

"Good," said Cethegus. "Then follow me to my house. I will show you how to destroy this giant. You shall succeed where Belisarius failed." But he said to himself, "Bessas is indeed a tolerably bad commander; but Demetrius is still worse, and therefore easier to lead. And I owe Bessas a grudge for that affair of the Tiburtinian Gate at Rome."

The Prefect had not without reason feared that the almost extinguished resistance of the Goths would be renewed on hearing of the treason practised on their King.

No exact report had yet reached old Hildebrand at Verona, Totila at Tarvisium, or Teja at Ticinum.

They had only heard that Ravenna had fallen, and that the King was imprisoned.

Vague rumours of treachery accompanied this report, and the friends of the King, in their pain and anger, were persuaded that the fall of the strong fortress and of the brave King had not been effected by honest means.

Instead of discouraging them, this misfortune only increased the strength of their resistance.

They weakened their besiegers by repeated and successful sallies.

And the enemy felt almost constrained to raise the siege, for already signs of an important change of circumstance crowded upon them from all sides.

This change was, in fact, a rapidly progressing reversion of feeling in the Italian population, at least of the middle classes: the merchants and artisans of the towns; the peasants and farmers of the country.

The Italians had everywhere greeted the Byzantines as liberators.

But after a short period their exultation died away.

Whole troops of officials followed Belisarius from Byzantium, sent by Justinian to reap without delay the fruits of the war, and to fill the ever-empty treasury of the East with the riches of Italy.

In the midst of all the suffering caused by the war, these zealous officials began their work.

As soon as Belisarius had occupied a town, his treasurer summoned all free citizens to the Curia or to the Forum; ordered them to divide themselves into six classes according to their wealth, and then called upon each class to value the property of the class above it.

According to this valuation, the imperial officials then laid the highest possible tax upon each class.

And, as these officials were almost necessitated, because of the retention and curtailment of their never punctually paid salaries, to think of filling their own pockets as well as the Emperor's treasury, the oppression they put in practice became intolerable.

They were not content with the high rates which the Emperor required to be paid in advance for three years; the special tax laid upon every liberated town of Italy as a "gratitude tax"--besides the large contributions and requisitions which Belisarius and his generals were obliged to demand for the use of the army--for neither gold nor provisions came from Byzantium--but every official sought to extort special payments, by special means, out of the richer citizens.

They everywhere ordered a revision of the tax-lists, discovered arrears owing since the times of the Gothic Kings, even from the days of Odoacer, and left the citizens the option of paying immense sums for indemnity or of carrying on a ruinous lawsuit with Justinian's fiscus, who scarcely ever lost one.

But if the tax-lists were incomplete or destroyed--which happened often enough in those times of war--the accountants arbitrarily reconstructed them.

In short, all the arts of finance which had ruined the provinces of the Eastern Empire were practised in Italy, after the landing of Belisarius, as far as imperial arms could reach.

Without consideration for the misery of war-time, the tax executors unyoked the oxen of the peasant from the plough, took his tools from the workshop of the artisan, and his wares from the house of the merchant.

In many towns the people rebelled against their oppressors and drove them away; but they only returned in larger numbers with severer measures.

The Mauretanian horsemen of Justinian, with African bloodhounds, hunted the desperate peasants from their hiding-places in the woods, whither they had fled to escape the tax-gatherer. And Cethegus, who alone was in a position to check such deeds, looked on with calculating coolness.

He desired that, before the end of the war, all Italy should have become acquainted with the tyranny of Byzantium, for then it would be a lighter task for him to persuade the people to rise and, when they had got rid of the Goths, to throw off the burden of the Byzantines. He listened to the complaints of the deputations from various towns, who appealed to him for assistance, with a shrug and the laconic answer:

"That is only Byzantine government--you must get used to it."

"No," had answered the deputation from Rome, "one does not get accustomed to what is unbearable. The Emperor may live to see that of which he has never even dreamed!"

To Cethegus this could only mean the independence of Italy; he knew of nothing else.

But he was mistaken.

Although he thought meanly enough of his countrymen and the times in which he lived, he yet believed that he could elevate them by example.

But the thought so natural to his spirit; as necessary to him as the air he breathed--the freedom and independence of Italy--was far too grand for the comprehension of that generation.

They could only vacillate between two masters.

And when the yoke of Byzantium proved unbearable they began to recall to their memory the milder rule of the Goths; a possibility which had never entered the Prefect's head.

And yet such was the case.

Before Tarvisium, Ticinum, and Verona, there now happened on a small scale, that which was preparing on a large one in such cities as Neapolis and Rome. The Italian country-people revolted against the Byzantine officials and soldiers, and the inhabitants of the above-named three cities supported the Goths in every possible manner.

So, when Totila, backed by the armed peasants of the plains, had destroyed a great part of their works, the besiegers of Tarvisium were obliged to cease their attacks, and limit themselves to the defence of their camp, thus enabling Totila to draw supplies and soldiers from the

neighbouring country.

With a more cheerful spirit than usual he one evening made his round of the walls of Tarvisium.

Rosy clouds floated across the sky, and the sun, as it sank behind the Venetian hills, gilded all the plain before him.

With emotion he watched the peasants from the neighbourhood streaming through the open gates of the city, bringing bread, meat, and wine to his half-starved Goths; who, on their part, hurried out into the open country, and Germans and Italians, embracing, celebrated the victory which they had together gained over their hated enemies.

"Is it then impossible," said Totila to himself, "to preserve and propagate this amity through the whole country? Is it a necessity that these two nations should be eternally divided? How their friendship embellishes each! Have we not also failed, in that we ever treated the Italians as the vanquished? We meet them with suspicion, instead of with generous confidence. We demand their obedience, and neglect to win their affection. And it would have been well worth the winning! Had it been won--never would Byzantium have gained a footing here! The release from my vow--Valeria--would not have been so unattainable. Would that it were permitted me to strive for this goal in *my* way!"

His reflections and dreams were interrupted by a messenger from the outposts, announcing that the enemy had suddenly forsaken their camp, and were in full retreat to the south, towards Ravenna. On the road to the west clouds of dust were seen: a large body of horsemen was approaching--probably Goths.

Totila received the news with joy, but also with doubt. He took all necessary measures against a stratagem.

But during the night his doubts were resolved. He was awakened by the news of a Gothic victory, and the arrival of the victor.

He hurried out and found Hildebrand, Teja, Thorismuth, and Wachis.

With the cry of "Victory! victory!" his friends greeted him, and Teja and Hildebrand announced that at Ticina, and Verona also, the country-people had rebelled against the Byzantines, and had aided the Goths in falling upon the besiegers, whom, after destroying their defences, they had forced to retreat.

But in spite of this joyful news, there lay in Teja's eyes and voice a deeper melancholy than usual.

"What of sorrow hast thou to communicate, beside this joy?" asked Totila.

"The shameful ruin of the best man in the world!" said Teja, and signed to Wachis, who now related the sufferings and death of the King and his wife.

"I escaped the arrows of the Huns by hiding amongst the rushes. Thus I still live. But only for one thing; that is, to revenge my master upon his betrayer and murderer--Cethegus the Prefect."

"No; the Prefect is mine!" said Teja.

"Thou, Totila, hast the first right to his life," said Hildebrand, "for thou hast a brother to revenge."

"My brother Hildebad!" cried Totila. "What of him?"

"He has been shamefully murdered by the Prefect," said Thorismuth, "before my very eyes, and I could not prevent it."

"My strong Hildebad dead!" exclaimed Totila. "Speak!"

"The hero lay with us in the Castle of Castra Nova, near Mantua," related Thorismuth. "The report of the King's treacherous death had reached us. Hildebad challenged Belisarius and Cethegus to mortal combat. Presently a herald arrived, who said that Belisarius had accepted the challenge, and expected thy brother on the plain between our walls and their camp. Thy brother set forth rejoicing; we horsemen followed. And verily, there rode out of a tent, in his golden armour, with closed helm and white plume, with his round shield--well known to us all--the hero, Belisarius. Only twelve horsemen followed him; foremost of all, Cethegus the Prefect. The other Byzantines halted just outside the camp. Hildebad ordered me to follow him with an equal number of horsemen. The two combatants greeted each other with their spears; the trumpets sounded, and Hildebad rushed at his enemy. The next moment the latter lay upon the ground, pierced through and through. Thy brother, unhurt, dismounted, crying: 'That was no thrust from Belisarius!' and opened the visor of the dying man. 'Bessas!' cried Hildebad, and looked, furious at the deception, towards his enemies. Then the Prefect gave a sign. The twelve Moorish horsemen hurled their spears, and, severely hit, thy brother fell."

Totila covered his face. Teja went sympathisingly up to him.

"Listen to the end," said Thorismuth. "When we saw this murder, we were filled with fury. We threw ourselves upon the enemy, who, trusting that we should be discouraged, pressed forward from the camp. After a hot fight, we compelled them to fly. Only the speed of his devilish horse saved the Prefect, who was wounded in the shoulder by my spear. Thy brother lived to see our victory. He caused the chest which he had brought from Ravenna to be carried down to the Castle; opened it, and said to me: 'Crown, shield, and sword of Theodoric. Take them to my brother.' And with his last breath he cried: 'He must revenge me and renew our kingdom. Tell him--that I loved him very dearly!' Then he sank back upon his shield, and his faithful soul departed."

"My brother! Oh, my beloved brother!" cried Totila, leaning against a pillar. Tears flowed from his eyes.

There was a moment of reverent silence.

Then: "Remember thine oath!" cried Hildebrand. "He was doubly thy brother! Thou wilt revenge him!"

"Yes," said Totila, and involuntarily he drew the sword--which Teja handed to him--from its sheath. "I will revenge him!"

It was the sword of Theodoric.

"And renew the kingdom," said old Hildebrand solemnly, and, taking the crown, he set it upon Totila's head. "Hail to thee, King of the Goths!"

Totila started.

He raised his left hand to the golden coronet.

"What do ye?" he exclaimed.

"That which is right. The dying hero's words were prophecy! Thou wilt surely renew the kingdom. Three victories call upon thee to take up the struggle. Remember thine oath. We are not yet defenceless. Shall we lay down our weapons? Shall we submit to treachery and tricks?"

"No," cried Totila, "that we will not. And it is well done to choose a king, as a sign of renewed hope. But here stands Earl Teja, worthier than I, of proved experience. Choose Teja!"

"No," said Teja, shaking his head, "it is thy turn first! Thy dying brother has sent *thee* this sword and crown. Wear them happily! If the kingdom can be saved, it is thou who canst save it; if not, an avenger must be left."

"But now," interrupted Hildebrand, "now we must hasten to sow the seeds of confidence in all hearts. This is thine office, Totila! See, the young day breaks in glory. The first rays of the sun fall into the hall and kiss thy brow! It is a sign from the gods! Hail, King Totila--thou that shalt renew the Gothic kingdom!"

The youth pressed the glittering crown firmly upon his golden locks, and raised Theodoric's sword towards the morning sun.

"Yes!" he cried, "if human strength can do it, I will raise anew the kingdom of the Goths."

CHAPTER II.

And King Totila kept his word.

Once again he raised the Goths, whose sole hold on Italy was embodied in a few thousand men and three cities, to a great power, greater even than in the days of Theodoric.

He drove the Byzantines out of all the towns of Italy, with one fatal exception.

He won back the islands of Sardinia, Corsica, and Sicilia.

And still more: he victoriously crossed the old limits of the kingdom, and, as the Emperor obstinately refused recognition of the Gothic rule and possession, sent his royal fleet to carry terror and devastation into the provinces of the Eastern Empire.

And Italy, in spite of the continuance of the war--which was never quite extinguished--bloomed under his government as in the time of Theodoric.

It is remarkable that the legends both of the Goths and Italians celebrate this fortunate King, now as the grandchild of Numa Pompilius, Titus, or Theodoric, now as the spirit of the latter, returned to earth in youthful form, to restore and bless his well-beloved kingdom.

As the morning sun, issuing from the clouds of night, irresistibly spreads light and blessing abroad, so Totila's arms brought happiness to Italy.

The dark shadows retreated step by step at his approach. Victory flew before him, and the gates of the cities and the hearts of men opened to him almost without a struggle.

The manly qualities--the genius of a general and a ruler--which had slumbered in this fair youth, which were only guessed at by Theodoric and Teja, and known to their full extent to no one, were now gloriously displayed.

The youthful freshness of his nature, far from being destroyed by the hard trials of the last years, by the sufferings which he had endured in Neapolis and before Rome, by the long absence from his beloved Valeria, from whom he was parted farther and farther by every fresh victory of the Byzantines, had only deepened into more earnest manliness. The bright sympathy of his manner remained, and cast the charm of amiability and heartfelt kindness over all his actions.

Sustained by his own ideality, he tamed trustingly to the ideal in his fellow-men; and almost all, except those governed by some diabolical power, found his confident appeal to what was noble and good irresistible.

As light illumines whatever it shines upon, so the noble-heartedness of this glorious King seemed to communicate itself to his courts to his associates, and even to his adversaries.

"He is irresistible as Apollo!" said the Italians.

More closely regarded, we find that the secret of his great and rapid success lay in the genial art with which--following the inmost impulse of his nature--he contrived to transmute the bitterness of the Italians against Byzantine oppression into sympathy with the benevolence of the Goths.

We have seen how this feeling of bitterness had taken root amongst the peasants, the farmers, the rich merchants, the artisans, and the middle and lower ranks of the citizens; in fact, among the greater part of the population.

And later, when the Goths marched to the field of battle with the jubilating cry of "Totila!" the personality of the young King completely estranged the Italians from their Byzantine oppressors, who seemed to be totally forsaken by the fortune of war.

It is true that a minority remained uninfluenced: the Orthodox Church, which knew of no peace with heretics; hard-headed Republicans; and the kernel of the Catacomb conspiracy--the proud Roman aristocrats and the friends of the Prefect. But this small minority compared to the mass of the population, was of little moment.

The King's first act was to publish a manifesto to the Goths and Italians.

It was proved to the first that the fall of King Witichis and Ravenna had been the work of superior falsehood, and not of superior strength; and the duty of revenge, begun already by three victories, was impressed upon them.

And the Italians, having now experienced what kind of exchange they had made in revolting to Byzantium, were invited to return to their old friends.

In order to favour this return, the King promised not only a general amnesty, but equal rights with the Goths; the abolition of all former Gothic privileges; the right of forming a native army; and--what was especially effective by contrast--the abolition of all taxes upon Italian soil or property until the end of the war.

Further, as the aristocracy favoured the Byzantines--the farmers, on the contrary, the Goths--it was a measure of the highest prudence which provided that every Roman noble who did not, within three months, subject himself to the Goths, should lose his landed property in favour of his former tenants.

And, lastly, the King placed a high premium, to be paid out of the royal purse, on all intermarriages between Goths and Italians, promising the settlement of the pair upon the confiscated property of Roman senators.

"Italia," concluded the manifesto, "bleeding from the wounds inflicted by the tyranny of Byzantium, shall recover and bloom again under my protection. Help us, sons of Italia, to drive from this sacred ground our common enemies, the Huns and Scythians of Justinianus. Then, in the new-born kingdom of the Italians and Goths, a new people shall arise--begotten of Italian beauty and cultivation, of Gothic strength and truth--whose nobility and splendour shall be such as the world has never yet beheld!"

When Cethegus the Prefect, awaking at morn on the field-bed to which his wound had confined him, heard the news of Totila's accession, he sprang from his couch with a curse.

"Sir," said the Grecian physician, "you must take care of yourself and----"

"Did you not hear? Totila wears the Gothic crown! It is no time now to be prudent.--My helm, Syphax."

And he snatched the manifesto from the hand of Lucius Licinius, who had brought the news, and read eagerly.

"Is it not ridiculous--madness?" asked Lucius.

"Madness it is if the Romans be yet Romans! But are they so? If they are not--then we--and not the barbarian prince--work madness. The thing must never be put to a trial, but be at once nipped in the bud. The blow directed against the aristocracy is a masterpiece. It must not have time to take effect. Where is Demetrius?"

"He marched against Totila last evening. You were asleep. The physician forbade us to awaken you, and Demetrius also."

"Totila king, and you let me sleep! Do you not know that this flaxen-head is the very genius of the Goths? Demetrius wishes to win his laurels alone. How strong is he?"

"More than twice as strong as the Goths; twelve thousand to five thousand."

"Demetrius is lost. Up--to horse! Arm all who can carry a lance. Leave only the wounded to guard the walls. This firebrand Totila must be trampled out, or an ocean of blood cannot extinguish him. My weapons--to horse!"

"I have never seen the Prefect look so," said Lucius Licinius to the physician. "It must be fever? He grew pale."

"He is without fever."

"Then I do not comprehend it, for it cannot be *fear*. Syphax, let us follow him."

Cethegus urged on his troop indefatigably. So indefatigably, that only a small suite of horsemen could keep up with his impatience and the swift hoofs of his war-horse.

At long intervals followed Marcus Licinius, Massurius with Cethegus's mercenaries, and Balbus with the hurriedly-armed citizens of Ravenna. For Cethegus had indeed left in the fortress only old men, women and children, and the wounded soldiers.

At last the Prefect succeeded in communicating with the rear-guard of the Byzantines.

Totila was marching from Tarvisium southwards against Ravenna.

He was joined by numerous bands of armed Italians from the provinces of Liguria, Venetia, and Æmilia, who had been roused by his manifesto into new hope and new resolve.

They desired to fight with him his first battle against the Byzantines.

"No," Totila had answered their general; "you shall decide upon what you will do *after* the battle. We Goths will fight alone. If we win, then you may join us. If we lose, then the revenge of the Byzantines will not affect you. Await the result."

The report of such magnanimous sentiments attracted many more to the Gothic flag.

Besides this, Totila's army was reinforced from hour to hour, during the march, by the arrival of Gothic warriors, who, singly, or in small bands, had come out of prison or left their hiding-places when they heard of the treachery practised on King Witichis, the accession of a new King, and the renewal of the war.

The haste with which Totila pressed forward, in order to avail himself of the enthusiasm of his troops before it had time to cool, and the zeal with which Demetrius flew to meet him, soon brought the two armies in sight of each other.

It was at the bridge across the Padus, named Pons Padi.

The Byzantines stood in the plain; they had the river, which they had crossed with half their foot, at their backs.

The Goths appeared upon the gently-sloping hills towards the north-west.

The rays of the setting sun dazzled the eyes of the Byzantines.

Totila, from the hill, observed the position of the enemy.

"The victory is mine!" he cried to his troops, and, drawing his sword, he swooped upon his enemies like a falcon on his prey.

Cethegus and his followers had reached the last deserted camp of the Byzantines shortly after sunset.

They were met by the first fugitives.

"Turn, Prefect," cried the foremost horseman, who recognised him, "turn and save yourself! Totila is upon us! He cleaved the helm and head of Artabazes, the best captain of the Armenians, with his own hand!" And the man continued his flight.

"A god led the barbarians!" cried a second. "All is lost--the commander-in-chief is taken!"

"This King Totila is irresistible!" cried a third, trying to pass the Prefect, who blocked his way.

"Tell that in hell!" cried Cethegus, and struck him to the earth. "Forward!"

But he had scarcely given the command when he recalled it.

For already whole battalions of vanquished Byzantines came flying through the wood towards him. He saw that it would be impossible to stem the flight of these masses with his small troop.

For some time he watched the movement irresolutely.

The Gothic pursuers were already visible in the distance, when Vitalius, one of Demetrius's captains, came wounded up to Cethegus.

"Oh, friend," he cried, "there is no stopping them! They will now go on till they reach Ravenna."

"I verily believe it," said Cethegus. "They will more likely carry my men away with them than stand and fight."

"And yet only the half of the victors, under Teja and Hildebrand, follow us. The King turned back already on the field of battle. I saw him withdraw his troops. He wheeled to the south-west."

"*Whither?*" cried Cethegus, becoming attentive. "Tell me again. In *what* direction?"

"He marched towards the south-west."

"He is going to Rome!" exclaimed the Prefect, and pulled his horse round so suddenly that it reared. "Follow me!--to the coast!"

"And the routed army? without leaders!" cried Lucius Licinius. "See how they fly!"

"Let them fly! Ravenna is strong. It will hold out. Do you not hear? The Goth is going to *Rome!* We must get there before him. Follow me to the coast--the way by sea is open. To Rome!"

CHAPTER III.

Lovely--famed far and wide for its beauty--is the valley in which the Passara flows from the north into the rapid Athesis, which hurries from the west to the south-east.

Like a bending figure, which leans longingly towards the beautiful Southland, the lofty Mendola rises at a distance from the right bank of the river.

Here, above the junction of the two streams, once lay the Roman settlement of Mansio Majæ.

A little farther up the river, on a dominating rock, stood the Castle of Teriolis.

Now--from a mountain--"muhr" or "mar" (landslip)--the town is called Meran.

The Castle has given its name to the Tyrol.

"Mansio Majæ" is heard even now in the name of the place "Mais," rich in pleasant villas.

But at the time of which we speak an East Gothic garrison lay in the Castle of Teriolis, as was the case in all the old Rhætian rock-nests on the Athesis, the Isarcus, and the œnus, in order to keep down the only half-subjected Suevi, Alamanni, and Markomanni, or, as they were already named, the Bajuvars, who dwelt in Rhætia, on the Licus, and on the lower course of the œnus.

But, besides the garrisons of the castles, East-Gothic families had settled in larger numbers in the mild and fruitful valley and on the willow-covered slopes of the mountains.

Even now a singular, noble, and grave beauty distinguishes the peasants of the valleys of Meran, Ultner, and Sarn. These reticent people are much more refined, pensive, and aristocratic

than the Bajuvar type on the Inn, the Lech, and the Isar.

Their dialect and legends support the supposition that here some few remains of the Goths continued to flourish; for the legends of the Amelungs, Dietrich of Bern, and the Rose-garden, still live in the names of the places and the traditions of the people.

Upon one of the highest mountains on the left shore of the Athesis, a Goth named Iffa had before-times settled; his descendants continued the settlement.

The mountain is named the "Iffinger" to this day. Upon the southern slope, half-way up, the simple settlement was fixed. The Gothic emigrants had found it already cultivated. The Rhætian alpine-house, which Druses had met with when he conquered the Rasenian mountain-people, had suffered no change in its characteristic and commodious form through the Roman conquerors, who built their villas in the valley, and their watch-towers on dominating rocks.

All the Romanised inhabitants of the Eltsch valley had, after the East-Gothic invasion, remained in quiet possession of their property.

For not here, but farther east, from the Save and over the Isonzo, had the Goths pressed forward into the peninsula; and only when Ravenna and Odoacer had fallen, did Theodoric spread his hosts in a peaceful and regular manner over North Italy and the Etschland.

Thus Iffa and his people had peacefully shared the soil with the Roman settlers whom they found upon the mountain, which at that time still possessed its Rasenian name.

A third of the arable land, the meadows and woods; a third part of the house, slaves, and animals, was, here as everywhere, claimed by the Gothic settler from the Roman farmer.

In the course of years, however, the Roman *hospes* had found this close and involuntary vicinity to the barbarians inconvenient. He therefore left the rest of his property on the mountains to the Goths, in exchange for thirty yoke of the splendid oxen which the Germans had brought with them from Pannonia--and which they so well understood how to breed--and went southwards, where the Romans dwelt in greater numbers.

And so the "Iffinger" had become completely Germanic, for the present master had suddenly sold the few Roman slaves which he possessed, and had replaced them by men and maids of Germanic race: Gepidians taken in war. This master was again named "Iffa," like his ancestor. He lived alone, a silver-haired man. A brother, and his wife and daughter-in-law, had, many years ago, been buried under a landslip.

A son, a younger brother, and a son of the latter, had obeyed the call of King Witichis to arms, and had never returned from the siege of Rome.

So no one was left to the old man but his two grandchildren, the boy and girl of the son who had fallen.

The sun had set gloriously behind the mountains which bordered the incomparable Etsch valley in the blue distance to the south and west.

A warm golden lustre lay upon the tender porphyry colouring of the "Iffinger," making it glow like red wine.

Up the mountain slope, upon the top of which stood a dwelling-house with a row of stalls a little apart, climbed slowly, step by step, resting ever and again, and holding her hands over her eyes as she looked at the sunset, a child--or was it already a maiden?--who was driving a flock of lambs before her.

She now and then gave her *protégées* time to crop with dainty tooth the aromatic Alpine herbs which grew in their path, and beat time with the hazel stick which she carried to an ancient and simple melody, the words of which she was softly singing:

"Little lambkins,
Follow freely;
By your shepherd's
Hand led heedful;
Like the heaven's
Lovely lambkins,
Like the quiet
Steady stars, that
Shining, sparkling,
Obey ever
Their bright shepherd,
Mustered by the
Mild moon ever,
Without trouble,
Without pause."

She ceased, and bent forward to look over into a deep ravine on her left hand, which had been hollowed out in the steep slope by a rapid mountain brook. Now, being summer, the water was

very shallow. On the opposite side the hill again rose steeply upward.

"Where can he be?" the girl said; "usually his goats are already descending the hill when the sun has turned to gold. My flowers will fade soon!"

She seated herself upon a stone near the path, let the lambs graze, laid the hazel stick beside her, and allowed the apron of sheepskin, which, till now, she had held up carefully, to fall. A shower of the loveliest Alpine flowers fell to the ground.

She began to wind a wreath.

"The blue speik will suit his brown hair the best," she said as she worked busily. "I get much more tired when I drive the flock alone than when he is with me. And yet then we climb much higher. I wonder how it is! How my naked feet burn! I might go down to the brook and cool them. And then I should see him sooner when he comes along the height. The sun does not scorch any more."

She took off the large broad pumpkin leaf which she wore instead of a hat; and now was seen the shining colour of her pale golden hair--so fair it was!--which, stroked back from the temples, was tied together at the back of the head with a red ribbon. Like a flood of sunbeams it rippled over her neck, which was only covered by a white woollen kirtle, that, confined at the waist with a leather girdle, reached a little above the knees.

She measured the size of her wreath on her own head.

"Certainly," she said, "his head is larger. I will add these Alpine roses."

Then she tied the two ends of the wreath together with delicate grasses, sprang up, shook the remaining flowers from her lap, took the wreath in her left hand, and turned to descend the steep declivity, at the foot of which the brook gurgled amid the stones.

"No! stop up here and wait! Thou, too, darling White Elf! I will come back directly."

And she drove back the lambs, which had tried to follow, and which now, bleating, looked wistfully after their mistress.

With great agility the practised girl sprang down the ravine; now holding fast to the tough shrubs, spurge-olives, and yellow willow; now boldly leaping from rock to rock.

The loose stones broke and the fragments came rattling after her. As she merrily jumped after the rolling pebbles, she suddenly heard a sharp and threatening hiss from below.

Before she could turn, a great copper-brown snake, which had no doubt been disturbed from sunning itself on a stone, coiled itself up, ready to dart at her naked feet.

The child was alarmed; her knees trembled, and screaming loudly, she called:

"Adalgoth, help! help!"

A clear voice immediately replied to this cry of fear with the words, "Alaric! Alaric!" which sounded like a battle-cry.

The bushes on the right creaked and cracked; stones rolled down the slope, and, swift as an arrow, a slender boy in a rough wolf-skin flew between the hissing snake and the affrighted maiden.

He hurled his strong Alpine stick like a spear, and with so true an aim that the small head of the snake was transfixed to the ground. Its long body twined convulsively round the deadly shaft.

"Gotho, thou art not wounded?"

"No, thanks to thee, thou hero!"

"Then let me say the snake-charm before the viper ceases to struggle; it will ban all its fellows for three leagues around."

And lifting the three first fingers of his right hand, the boy repeated the ancient saying:

"Woe! thou wolf-worm,
Wriggle wildly!
Bite the bushes,
Poisonous panting:
Men and maidens,
Hurt thou shalt not.
Down, black devil,
Venomous viper,
Down and die now!
High o'er the heads
Of scaly-bright serpents

CHAPTER IV.

As he finished speaking, and was bending to examine the snake, the girl suddenly placed the wreath which she had made upon his curly auburn hair.

"Hail, hero and helper! Look! the victor's wreath was ready for thee. Ah! how well the blue flowers become thee!" And she clapped her hands joyfully.

"Thy foot is bleeding!" said Adalgoth anxiously; "let me suck the wound. If the poisonous snake has bitten thee!"

"It was only a sharp stone. Thou wouldst better like to die thyself?"

"For thee, Gotho, how gladly! But the poison is harmless in the mouth. Now let me wash thy wound. I have still some vinegar and water left in my gourd. And then I will put sage-leaves upon it, and healing endive."

Thus saying, he gently made her sit down upon a stone, lifted her naked foot and dropped the mixture out of the gourd upon it. This done, he sprang up, looked about in the grass, and presently returned with some soothing herbs, which he tied carefully over the wound with the leather strap which he loosened from his own foot.

"How kind thou art, dear boy!" said the girl, stroking his hair.

"Now let me carry thee--only up the hill?" he begged; "I should so like to hold thee in my arms!"

"Indeed thou shalt not!" she laughed, as she sprang up; "I am no wounded lamb! See how I can run. But where are thy goats?"

"There they come out from the juniper-trees. I will call them."

And putting his shepherd's-pipe to his mouth, he blew a shrill note, swinging his stick round his head.

The sturdy goats came leaping towards him--fearing punishment.

And now, laying his arm tenderly about the girl's neck, and strewing a stripe of salt from his pocket upon the earth, which the goats, following, eagerly licked up, Adalgoth went up the slope.

"But tell me, dearest," said Gotho, when they had arrived at the top of the hill, and she was gathering her lambs together, "why thy cry was again 'Alaric! Alaric!' just as when thou madest the eagle leave my little White Elf, which it had already seized in its talons?"

"That is my battle-cry."

"Who taught it thee?"

"Grandfather; the first time he took me with him to hunt wolves. The time when I got this skin from Master Isegrim's ribs. As I sprang at the wolf, which could not escape and turned to attack me, crying 'Iffa,' just as I had always heard grandfather cry, he said, 'Thou must not cry 'Iffa,' Adalgoth. When thou attackest a hero or a monster, cry 'Alaric!' it will bring thee luck.'"

"But none of our ancestors are so named, brother. We know all their names."

They had now reached the stalls, into which they drove the animals, and then seated themselves before an open window upon a wooden bench, which ran round the front of the house on each side of the door.

"There are," counted Gotho, "first Iffamer, our father; and Uncle Wargs, who was buried by the mountain; then Iffa, our grandfather; Iffamuth, our other uncle; Iffaswinth, his son; and Iffarich, our great-grandfather; and Iffa again--but no Alaric."

"And yet I feel as if I had often heard that name at the time when I used first to run about the mountain; when the great landslip killed Uncle Wargs. And I like the name. Grandfather has told me about a hero-king who was called so; who was first of all the heroes to conquer the fortress of Roma--thou knowest, it is the city from which father and Uncle Iffamuth and Cousin Iffaswinth never returned. And that hero died young, like Siegfried, the dragon-killer, and Balthar, the heathen god. And his grave is in a deep river. There he lies on his golden shield, under his treasures, and tall reeds bend and wave above him. And now another king has arisen, who is called Totila, as the warriors who relieved the garrison over there in the Castle of Teriolis told me. They say he is just like that Alaric, and like Siegfried and the Sun-god. And grandfather says that I also shall become a warrior and go down to King Totila and rush into the fray with the cry

of 'Alaric! Alaric!' Long ago I got tired of climbing about and keeping goats here on the mountains, where there is nothing to fight but wolves, or at most a bear which eats up the grapes and honey-combs. You all praise my harp-playing and my songs, but I feel that they are not worth it, and that I cannot learn much more from the old man. I should like to sing better things. I am never tired of listening to the soldiers' stories about the victories of glorious King Totila. Lately I gave the best chamois I ever shot to old Hunibad--whom the King sent up here to nurse his wounds--so that he might tell me, for the third time, all about the battle at the bridge across the Padus, and how King Totila himself overthrew that black devil, the dreadful Cethegus. And I have made a song about it, which begins:

"Tremble, thou traitor,
Cunning Cethegus;
Tricks will not serve thee;
Teja the terrible
Daunts thy defiance.
And brightly arises,
Like morning and May-time,
Like night from the darkness,
The favourite of Heaven,
The bright and the beautiful
King of the Goths.

"But it goes no further; and I can make no more poetry alone. I need a master for the words and the harp. I should like to finish a song that I have began about the spear-hurler Teja, whom they call the 'Black Earl,' and who is said to play the harp wonderfully. And long ago--but this I tell to thee alone--I should have run away without asking grandfather, who always says I am too young yet, if *one* thing did not keep me back."

He sprang hastily up.

"What is that, brother?" asked Gotho, who sat quite still and looked full at him with her large blue eyes.

"Nay, if thou dost not guess it," he answered almost angrily, "I cannot tell thee. But now I must go and forge some new arrow-points in the smithy. First give me one more kiss--there! And now let me kiss each of thine eyes, and thy fair hair. Good-bye, dear sister, until supper-time."

He left her and ran to a side building, before the door of which stood a grind-stone and various implements.

Gotho rested her cheek upon her hand, and looked thoughtful. Then she said aloud:

"I cannot guess it; for of course he would take me with him. We could not live apart."

She rose with a slight sigh, and went to a field near the house, to look after the linen which was lying there bleaching.

But now old Iffa rose from his seat behind the open window, where he had heard all that had passed.

"This will not do," he cried, rubbing his head hard. "I never yet had the heart to separate the children--for they were but children! I always waited and waited; and now I think I have put it off a little too long. Away with thee, young Adalgoth!"

He left the dwelling-house, and walked slowly to the smithy. He found the boy working busily. With puffed-out cheeks, he blew into the fire on the hearth, and held the already roughly-prepared arrow-points in it, in order to make them red-hot and fit for the hammer. Then he took them out with a pair of pincers, laid them on an anvil, and hammered out neat points and hooks. Without pausing in his work, he nodded silently to his grandfather, striking sturdily upon the anvil till the sparks flew.

"Well," thought the old man, "just now, at least, he thinks of nothing but arrows and iron."

But suddenly the young smith finished his work with a tremendous stroke, threw away the hammer, passed his hand across his hot forehead, and asked, turning sharply to the old man:

"Grandfather, where do men come from?"

"Jesus, Woden, and Maria!" exclaimed the old man, starting back. "Boy, how comest thou to such thoughts?"

"The thoughts come to me, not I to them. I mean the first men--the very first. That tall Hermegisel over there in Teriolis, who ran away from the Arian church at Verona, and can read and write, says that the Christian God made a man in a garden out of clay, and, while he slept, took one of his ribs and made a woman. That is ridiculous; for out of the longest rib that ever was, one could not make ever so small a girl."

"Well, I don't believe it either," the old man thoughtfully confessed. "It is difficult to imagine. And I remember that my father once said, as he was sitting by the hearth, that the first men grew

upon trees. But old Hildebrand, who was his friend, although he was much older--and who stopped here on his way back from an expedition against the savage Bajuvars, and who was sitting near father, for it was early in the year, and very rough and cold--*he* said that it was all right about the trees; only that men did not grow on them, but that two heathen gods--Hermegisel called them demons--once found an ash and an alder lying on the sea-shore, and from them they framed a man and a woman. They still sing an old song about it. Hildebrand knew a few words of it, but my father could not remember it."

"I would rather believe that. But, at all events, there were very few people at the beginning?"

"To be sure."

"And at first there was only *one* family?"

"Certainly."

"And the old ones generally died before the young ones?"

"Of course."

"Then I tell thee what, grandfather. Either the race of men must have died out, or, as it still exists--and thou seest that is what I am coming to--brothers and sisters must often have married each other, until more families were formed."

"Adalgoth, the fairies are riding thee! Thou speakest nonsense!"

"Not at all. And, in short, if it could happen before, it can happen now; and I will have my sister Gotho for my wife."

The old man ran to stop the boy's mouth by force; but the lad evaded him and said:

"I know all that thou wouldst say. The priests from Tridentum would soon get to know of it here, and tell the King's Earl. But I can go with her to some distant land, where no one knows us. And she will go with me, I know."

"Indeed! Thou knowest that already?"

"Yes; I am sure."

"But this thou dost not know, Adalgoth," the old man now said, gravely and decidedly: "that to-night is the last which thou wilt spend upon the 'Iffinger.' Up, Adalgoth! I command thee--I, thy grandfather and guardian! Thou hast a sacred duty to perform--the duty of revenge! Thou wilt fulfil it at the court, and with the army of Totila. A duty bequeathed to thee by thine uncle Wargs--bequeathed to thee by thine ancestor. Thou art now old and strong enough to undertake it. Tomorrow, at dawn of day, thou wilt start for the south--for Italia, where King Totila punishes evil-doers, helps the good cause, and fights against that wretch, Cethegus. Follow me to my chamber. I have to hand over to thee a jewel, which was left for thee by thine uncle Wargs, and to give thee many a word of counsel. But do not speak about it to Gotho; do not make her heart heavy. If thou obeyest thine uncle's orders and my counsel, thou wilt become a mighty and joyous hero in King Totila's court. And then, but only then, thou shalt again see Gotho!"

Very grave and pale, the youth followed his grandfather into the house. There, in the old man's chamber, they talked in low voices for a long time.

At supper, Adalgoth was missing.

He sent word to Gotho by their grandfather that he had gone to bed, being more tired than hungry.

But at night, when Gotho slept, he went into her room on tiptoe. The moon threw a soft light upon her angel face.

Adalgoth stopped upon the threshold, and only stretched out his right hand towards her.

"I shall see thee again, my Gotho," he cried, and signed a farewell.

Presently he crossed the threshold of the simple alpine cottage.

The stars had scarcely begun to pale; fresh and exhilarating the night-wind blew from the mountains around his temples.

He looked up at the silent sky.

All at once a falling star shot in a bright semicircle over his head. It fell towards the south.

The youth raised his shepherd's staff, and cried:

"The stars beckon thither! Now beware, Cethegus the traitor!"

CHAPTER V.

On seeing the disastrous result of the battle at the bridge across the Padus, the Prefect had sent messengers back to his troops and the armed citizens of Ravenna, who were following him, to order them to return at once to the latter city. He left the defeated troops of Demetrius to their fate.

Totila had taken all the flags and field-badges of the twelve thousand, a thing which, as Procopius angrily writes, "never before happened to the Romans."

Cethegus himself, with his small band of trusty adherents, hastened across the Æmilia to the west coast of Italy, which he reached at Populonium. There he went on board a swift ship of war, and, favoured by a strong breeze from the north-east (sent, as he said, by the ancient gods of Latium), sailed to the harbour of Rome--Portus.

He could never have succeeded in reaching Rome by land, for, after Totila's victory, all Tuscany and Valeria fell to the Goths; the plains unconditionally, and also such cities as were held by weak Byzantine garrisons.

Near Mucella, a day's march from Florence, the King once again vanquished a powerful army of Byzantines, under the command of eleven disunited leaders, who had gathered together the imperial garrisons of the Tuscan fortresses to block his way. The commander-in-chief of this army, Justinus, escaped to Florence with difficulty.

The King treated his numerous prisoners with such lenity, that very many Italians and imperial mercenaries deserted their flag and joined the Gothic army.

And now all the roads of Central Italy were covered by Goths and natives who hastened to join Totila on his march to Rome.

Arrived at the latter city, Cethegus had at once taken the necessary measures for its defence.

For Totila, after this new victory at Mucella, approached rapidly, scarcely detained by anything but the ovations made to him by the cities and castles on his way, which rivalled each other in opening wide their gates to the conqueror.

The few forts which still resisted were invested by small divisions of Italians, kept in order by a few chosen Gothic troops. Totila was enabled to do this without weakening his army, as, during his march to Rome, his power was increased, like a river, by the inflowing of greater or smaller parties of Goths and Italians. Not only did the Italian peasants join him by thousands, but even the mercenaries of Belisarius, who for months had received no pay, now offered their weapons to the Goths, so that a few days after the arrival of the Prefect, Totila led a very considerable army before the walls of Rome.

With loud hurrahs the troops in the Gothic encampment greeted the arrival of the brave Duke Guntharis, Wisand the bandalarius, Earl Markja, and old Grippa, whose release Totila had procured by exchanging them for the prisoners taken at the battle of the Padus.

And now the almost impossible task was laid upon Cethegus of manning effectually his grandly-designed fortifications. The whole army of Belisarius was missing--besides the greater part of his own soldiers, who were slowly sailing to the harbour of Portus from Ravenna.

In order, even insufficiently, to defend the entire circle of the ramparts, Cethegus was obliged, not only to demand unusual and unexpected exertions from the Roman legionaries, but also to increase their numbers by despotic measures.

From boys of sixteen years of age to old men of sixty, he called "all the sons of Romulus, Camillus, and Cæsar to arms; to protect the sanctuary of their forefathers against the barbarians."

But his appeal was scarcely read or propagated, and was responded to by very few volunteers; while he saw with mortification that the manifesto of the Gothic King, which was thrown every night over the walls in many places, was carried about and read by crowds; so that he angrily proclaimed that anyone found picking up, pasting on the walls, or reading this manifesto, or in any way facilitating its publication, would be punished by the confiscation of his property or the loss of his liberty.

In spite of this, the manifesto still spread among the citizens, and the list of volunteers remained empty.

He then sent his Isaurians into all the houses to drag boys and old men to the walls by force; and very soon he was more feared, and even hated, than beloved.

His stern will, and the gradual arrival of his troops from Ravenna, alone checked the growing discontent of the Roman population.

But in the Gothic camp messengers of good fortune overtook each other.

Teja and Hildebrand had pursued the Byzantines to the gates of Ravenna.

The defence of that city was conducted by Demetrius, one of the exchanged prisoners, and by Bloody Johannes; that of the harbour town of Classis by Constantianus against Hildebrand, who had won Ariminum in passing, for the citizens had disarmed the Armenian mercenaries of Artasires and opened the gates.

Teja had beaten the troops of the Byzantine general Verus, who had defended the crossing of the Santernus; had killed the general with his own hand, and had then hastened through the whole of North Italy with the manifesto in his left hand, his sword in his right, and in a few weeks had won by force or by persuasion all towns and castles as far as Mediolanum.

But Totila, taught by the experience of the first siege of Rome, would not expose his troops by attempting to storm the formidable defences of the Prefect, and also desired to spare his future capital.

"I will get into Rome with linen wings, and on wooden bridges," he one day said to Duke Guntharis; left to him the investment of the city; and taking all his horsemen with him, marched for Neapolis.

There in the harbour lay, very inefficiently manned, an imperial fleet.

Totila's march upon the Appian Way through South Italy resembled a triumphal procession.

Those districts which had suffered the longest under the yoke of the Byzantines were now most willing to greet the Goths as liberators.

The maidens of Terracina went to meet the King of the Goths with wreaths of flowers.

The people of Minturnæ brought out a golden chariot, made the King descend from his white horse, and dragged him into the town in triumph.

"Look! look!" was the cry in the streets of Casilinum--an ancient place once dedicated to the worship of the Campanian Diana--"Phœbus Apollo himself has descended from Olympus and comes as a saviour to the sanctuary of his sister!"

The citizens of Capua begged him to impress the first gold coins of his reign with the inscription, "*Capua revindicata*."

Thus it continued until he reached Neapolis; the very same road he had once passed as a wounded fugitive.

The commander of the Armenian mercenaries in Neapolis, who had a very brave but small troop, did not dare to trust the fidelity of the population in case of a siege.

He therefore led his lance-bearers and the armed citizens to meet the King outside the gates.

But before the battle commenced, a man on a white horse rode out of the lines of Goths, took his helmet from his head, and cried:

"Have you forgotten me, men of the Parthenopæian city? I am Totila. You loved me when I was commander of your harbour. You shall bless me as your King. Do you not recollect how I saved in my ships your wives and children from the Huns of Belisarius? Listen. These very wives and children are again in my power; not as fugitives, but as prisoners. To protect them from the Byzantines (perhaps from me also), you sent them into the strong fortress of Cumæ. But know that Cumæ has surrendered, and all the fugitives are in my power. I have been advised to keep them as hostages in order to compel you to capitulate. But that is repugnant to my feelings. I have set them at liberty; the wives of the Roman senators I have sent to Rome. But your wives and children, men of Neapolis, I have brought with me; not as my hostages, not as my prisoners, but as my guests. Look how they stream out of my tents! Open your arms to receive them--they are free! Will you now fight against me? I cannot believe it! Who will be the first to aim at this breast?" and he opened wide his arms.

"Hail to King Totila the Good!" was the universal acclamation.

And the warm-hearted men threw down their weapons, rushed forward, and greeted with tears of joy their liberated wives and children, kissing the hem of Totila's mantle.

The commander of the mercenaries rode up to him.

"My lancers are surrounded and too weak to fight alone. Here, O King, is my sword. I am your prisoner."

"Not so, brave Arsakide! Thou art unconquered--therefore no prisoner. Go with thy troop whither thou wilt."

"I *am* a prisoner, conquered by your magnanimity and the splendour of your eyes. Permit us henceforward to fight under your flag."

In this manner a chosen troop, who stood by him faithfully, was won for Totila.

Amid a shower of flowers he made his entry into Neapolis through Porta Nolana.

Before Aratius, the admiral of the Byzantine fleets could raise the anchors of his war-ships, their crews were overpowered by the sailors of the many merchant vessels which lay near in the harbour, the masters of which were old admirers and thankful *protégés* of Totila.

Without shedding a drop of blood, the King had gained a fleet and the third city of importance in the kingdom.

In the evenings during the banquet which the rejoicing inhabitants had prepared for him, Totila stole softly away.

With surprise the Gothic sentinels saw their King, all alone, disappear into an old half-fallen tower, close to an ancient olive-tree by the Porta Capuana.

The next day there appeared a decree of Totila which dispensed the women and girls of the Jews of Neapolis from a pole-tax which had, until now, been laid upon them; and which--they being forbidden to carry jewels in public--permitted them to wear a golden heart upon the bosom of their dress as a mark of distinction.

In the neglected garden, where a tall stone cross and a deep-sunk grave were completely overgrown with wild ivy and moss, there presently arose a monument of the most beautiful black marble, with the simple inscription: "*Miriam from Valeria.*"

But there was no one living in Neapolis who understood its meaning.

CHAPTER VI.

There now streamed into Neapolis ambassadors from Campania and Samnium, Bruttia and Lucania, Apulia and Calabria, who came to invite the Gothic King to enter their cities as a liberator.

Even the important and strong fortress of Beneventum and the neighbouring forts of Asculum, Canusia, and Acheruntia surrendered at discretion.

In these districts thousands of cases occurred in which the peasants were settled upon the lands of their former masters, who had fallen in battle, or had fled to Byzantium or to Rome.

Besides Rome and Ravenna, there were now in the hands of the Byzantines, only Florentia, held by Justinus; Spolegium, whose joint governors were Bonus and Herodianus; and Perugia, under the Hun, Uldugant.

In a few days the King, reinforced by many Italians from the south of the Peninsula, had new manned his conquered fleet, and left the harbour in full sail, while his horsemen marched by land on the Via Appia to the north.

Rome was the goal of both ships and horse; while Teja, having conquered all the country between Ravenna and the Tiber--Petra and Cæsena fell without bloodshed--the Æmilia and both Tuscanies (the Annonarian and the Sub-urbicarian), marched with a third army on the Flaminian Way against the city of the Prefect.

On hearing of these movements, Cethegus was obliged to acknowledge that the struggle would now begin in good earnest, and, like a dragon in his den, he determined to defend himself to the death.

With a proud and contented look he viewed the ramparts and towers, and said to his brothers-in-arms, who were uneasy at the approach of the Goths:

"Be comforted! Against these invincible walls they shall be broken to pieces for the second time!"

But at heart he was not so easy as his words and looks would seem to indicate.

Not that he ever repented his past deeds or thought his plans unachievable. But that when, after repeated reverses, he appeared to have arrived at the point of success, he should be as far off the goal as ever because of Totila's victories--this feeling had a great effect upon even *his* iron nerves.

"Water wears away a rock!" he said, when his friend Licinius once asked him why he looked so gloomy. "And besides, I cannot sleep as I used to do."

"Since when?"

"Since--Totila! That fair youth has stolen my slumbers!"

Though the Prefect felt so secure and so superior to all his enemies and adversaries, Totila's bright and open nature, and his easily-won success, irritated him so much, that his coolness often melted in the heat of his passion; while Totila went to meet the universally feared foe with a sense of victory which nothing could disquiet.

"He has luck, the downy-beard!" cried Cethegus, when he heard of the easy conquest of Neapolis. "He is as fortunate as Achilles and Alexander. But luckily such god-like youths never grow old! The soft gold of such natures is quickly worn out. We lumps of native iron last longer. I have seen the laurels and roses of the enthusiast, and it seems to me that I shall soon see his cypresses. It cannot be that I shall yield to this maiden soul! Fortune has borne him rapidly to a dizzy height; she will hurl him down as rapidly and dizzily. Will she first carry him over the ramparts of Rome?--Fly then, without effort, young Icarus, in the brightest sunshine. I, through blood and strife, step by step, climb up in the shade. But I shall stand on high when the treacherous and burning kiss of Fortune has melted the wax on thy bold wings. Thou wilt vanish beneath me like a falling star!"

This, however, did not seem likely to happen soon.

Cethegus awaited with impatience the arrival of a numerous fleet from Ravenna, which was to bring him the remainder of his troops, and all who could be spared of the legionaries and the troops of Demetrius, as well as a quantity of provisions.

When these reinforcements had arrived, he would be able to relieve the grumbling Romans from their arduous duties.

For weeks he had comforted the embittered inhabitants with the promise of this fleet.

At last it was announced by a swift-sailer that the fleet had reached Ostia.

Cethegus caused the news to be published in all the streets with a flourish of trumpets, and announced that at the next Ides of October, eight thousand citizens would be relieved from duty on the walls. He also caused double rations of wine to be distributed among the soldiers on the ramparts.

When the Ides of October arrived, thick fog covered Ostia and the sea.

The day after, a little sailing-boat flew from Ostia to Portus. The trembling crew announced that King Totila had attacked the Ravennese triremes with the fleet from Neapolis, under the protection of a thick fog. Of the eighty ships, twenty were burnt or sunk; the remaining sixty, with all their men and provisions, taken.

Cethegus would not believe it.

He hurried on board his own swift boat, the *Sagitta*, and flew down the Tiber.

But with difficulty he escaped the boats of the King, who had already blockaded the harbour of Portus and sent small cruisers up the river.

The Prefect now hastily caused a double river-bolt to be laid across the Tiber; the first consisting of masts; the second of iron chains placed an arrow's length farther up the river. The space between the two bolts was filled with a great number of small boats.

Cethegus felt deeply the blow which had fallen upon him. Not only had his long-wished-for reinforcements fallen into the enemy's hand; not only was he obliged to lay still heavier burdens upon the Romans, who began to curse him, for now the river, too, had to be defended against the constant attempts of the Gothic ships to break through; but with a slight shudder of horror he saw approaching nearer and nearer the most terrible of all enemies--famine.

The water-road, by which he, as formerly Belisarius, had received abundant provisions, was now blocked.

Italy had no third fleet. That of Neapolis and that of Ravenna blockaded Rome under the Gothic flag.

And now the horsemen which Marcus Licinius had sent on the Flaminian Way to reconnoitre and forage, came galloping back with the news that a strong army of Goths, under the dreaded Teja, was approaching at a quick step. The vanguard had already reached Reate.

The day following Rome was also invested on the last side which had remained open--the north--and had nothing left to depend upon but its own citizens.

And the latter were weak enough, however strong might be the Prefect's will and the walls of the city.

Yet for weeks and months Cethegus's stern resolution sustained the despairing defenders against their will.

At last the fall of the city, not by force, but by starvation, was expected daily.

At this juncture an unexpected event occurred, which revived the hopes of the besieged, and put the genius and good fortune of the young King to a hard proof: for there once more appeared upon the scene of battle--Belisarius!

CHAPTER VII.

When news arrived in the golden palace of the Cæsars at Byzantium of the lost battles on the Padus and at Mucella; of the renewed siege of Rome, and the loss of Neapolis and almost all Italy, the Emperor Justinian, who had already imagined the West again united to the East, was awakened from his dream of triumph in a terrible manner.

It was now easy for the friends of Belisarius to prove that the recall of that hero had been the origin of all these disasters.

It was clear that as long as Belisarius had been in Italy victory had followed victory; and no sooner had he turned his back, than misfortunes crowded one upon the other.

The Byzantine generals in Italy openly acknowledged that they could not replace Belisarius.

"I am not able," wrote Demetrius from Ravenna, "to meet Totila in the open field. Scarcely am I able to defend this fortress in the marshes. Neapolis has fallen. Rome may surrender any day. Send us again the lion-hearted man, whom, in our vanity, we dreamed we could replace--the conqueror of the Vandals and the Goths."

And Belisarius, although he had sworn never again to serve the ungrateful Emperor, forgot all his wrongs as soon as Justinian smiled upon him. And when, after the fall of Neapolis, he actually embraced him and called him "his faithful sword"--in truth, the Emperor had never believed in the general's rebellion, but was envious of his sovereign position--Belisarius could no longer be restrained by Antonina and Procopius. As, however, the Emperor feared the expense of a second enterprise in Italy (besides that of the Persian wars, which Narses conducted successfully but expensively in Asia), avarice and ambition produced a struggle within him, which would, perhaps, have lasted longer than the resistance of Rome and Ravenna, had not Prince Germanus and Belisarius proposed an expedient. The noble Prince was impelled by the wish to revisit Ravenna and the tomb of Mataswintha, and to revenge her memory on the rude barbarians, for Cethegus had declared that the cause of the tragic end of this incomparable woman was that her mind had been disordered in consequence of her forced marriage with Witichis.

Belisarius, on his side, could not endure that all his fame should be imperilled by Totila's success. "For," asked his enemies at court, "could he really have conquered a people who, within the year, had again almost made themselves masters of Italy?"

He had given his word to annihilate the Goths, and he would keep it.

So, influenced by these motives, Germanus and Belisarius proposed to conquer Italy for the Emperor at their own expense. The Prince offered his whole fortune for the equipment of a fleet; Belisarius all his lately reinforced body-guard and lance-bearers.

"That is a proposition after Justinian's own heart!" cried Procopius, when informed of it by Belisarius. "Not a solidus out of his own pocket! And perhaps the laurels of fame and a province for this world, and the wholesale destruction of heretics to rejoice Heaven and Theodora! You may be sure that he will accept, and give you his fatherly benediction into the bargain. But nothing else. You, Belisarius, I know, can be as little kept back as Balan, your piebald, when he hears the call of the trumpet; but I will not see your lamentable fall."

"Fall? Wherefore, Raven of Misfortune?"

"This time you have both Goths and Italians against you. And you could not conquer the first when Italy was *for* you."

But Belisarius only reproached him with cowardice, and presently went to sea with Germanus.

The Emperor, in fact, gave them nothing but his blessings and the great toe of the holy Mazaspes.

The Byzantines in Italy breathed again when they heard that an imperial fleet had anchored off Salona, in Dalmatia, and that the army had landed.

Even Cethegus, to whom the news was brought by spies, exclaimed with a sigh:

"Better Belisarius in Rome than Totila!"

And the King of the Goths was filled with anxiety. He determined first of all to discover the strength of the Byzantine army, in order to decide upon what course he would take. Perhaps it would be necessary to raise the siege of Rome, and advance to attack the army of relief.

Belisarius sailed from Salona to Pola, where he mustered his ships and men. While there, two men came to him, who announced themselves to be Herulian mercenaries, therefore Goths, but speaking Latin well. They said that they had been sent by Bonus, one of the commanders of Spolegium.

They had succeeded in passing the Gothic lines, and they pressed the commander-in-chief to come to the relief of that place. They begged for exact particulars as to the strength of his army and the number of his ships, in order to be able to revive the sinking courage of the besieged by trustworthy reports.

"Well, my friends," said Belisarius, "you must perforce embellish your report; for the truth is, that the Emperor has left me entirely to my own resources."

All the day long he showed these messengers his army and fleet.

The night following the messengers had disappeared.

They were Thorismuth and Aligern, who had been sent by King Totila, and now furnished him with the much-desired particulars.

So, from the very beginning, fate was against Belisarius, and the whole course of this campaign was unworthy of the fame of that great general.

It is true that he succeeded in running into the harbour of Ravenna, and providing that city with provisions.

But, the very day that he arrived. Prince Germanus was attacked by a fatal malady while visiting the tomb of Mataswintha.

She had been buried in the vault of the palace, near the graves of her brother and the young King Athalaric.

Germanus died, and, according to his last wish, was buried beside the woman he had loved so truly.

In a little niche in the same vault there reposed a heart which had ever beat warmly for Queen "Beautiful-hair."

Aspa, the Numidian slave, would not outlive her beloved mistress.

"In my home," she had said, "the virgins of the Goddess of the Sun often voluntarily leap into the flames which receive the Godhead. Aspa's goddess, the lovely, bright, and kind, has left her. Aspa will not live forlorn in the cold and darkness. She will follow her Sun."

She had heaped up flowers in the death-chamber of her mistress--heaped them still higher than on the day when she had prepared the same small room for a bridal chamber--and had kindled unknown combustibles and African resin, the stupefying odours of which drove away all the other slaves. But Aspa had spent the night in the room.

The next morning Syphax, attracted by the well-known but dangerous odour, which reminded him of his country's sacrificial customs, went softly into the room, which was as silent as the grave. At Mataswintha's feet, her head buried in flowers, he had found his Antelope--dead.

"She died," he told Cethegus, "for love of her mistress. And now I have none left on earth but you."

After the burial of Germanus, Belisarius left Ravenna with the whole fleet.

But his very next undertaking, an attempt to surprise Pisaurum, was repulsed with great loss.

And King Totila, now acquainted with the small number of Belisarius's troops, had sent skirmishers, under the command of Wisand, supported by a few ships of war, to take Firmum, which was situated on the same coast, almost under the generals very eyes.

The Byzantines, Herodian and Bonus, surrendered Spolegium to Earl Grippa, after the lapse of thirty days, during which they had hoped for reinforcements from Belisarius in vain.

In Assisium the commander of the garrison was a man of the name of Sisifrid, a Goth who had deserted in the days of the fall of Witichis.

This man well knew what was in store for him, should he fall into Hildebrand's hands, who besieged the fort in person. Hatred of such treason had enticed the old man from the siege of Ravenna to complete this task of retribution.

The Goth obstinately defended the town, but when, during a sally, the axe of the old master-at-arms sent him to the other world, the citizens obliged the Thracian garrison to yield. Many aristocratic Italians, members of the old Catacomb conspiracy, three hundred Illyrian horsemen, and some chosen body-guards of Belisarius, were taken prisoners.

Immediately afterwards, Placentia, the last town in the Æmilia which was held by a Saracen garrison for the Emperor, was forced to capitulate to Earl Markja, who commanded the small army of investment.

In Bruttia, the fortress of Ruscia, the most important harbour for Thurii, surrendered to the bold Aligern.

Belisarius now despaired of reaching Rome by land. On hearing of the terrible distress of that city, he determined at once to attempt to relieve it by running the blockade of the Gothic fleet.

But as he sailed round the south point of Calabria, off Hydrunt, a fearful storm dispersed his ships; he himself, with a few triremes, was driven southward as far as Sicily, and the greater part of his ships, which had taken refuge in a bay near Croton, were there surprised and taken by a Gothic squadron sent by the King from Rome, which had lain in ambush near Squillacium. These prizes proved to be an important addition to the Gothic fleet, for, as we shall see hereafter, the Goths, were thereby enabled to attack the Byzantines in their islands and coast-towns.

After this blow, the forces of Belisarius, which had been weak from the very first, became completely powerless.

Generalship and valour could not replace missing ships, warriors, and horses.

The hope that the Italians, as in the first campaign, would revolt to the Emperor's commander-in-chief, proved vain.

Thus the whole enterprise was a complete failure, as we are told by Procopius in unsparing words.

The Emperor left all petitions for reinforcements unanswered. And when Antonina repeatedly begged for permission to return, the Empress sent the mocking reply, "that the Emperor dare not venture, for the second time, to interrupt the hero in the course of his victories."

So, lying off Sicily, Belisarius spent a miserable time of doubt and helplessness.

CHAPTER VIII.

And meanwhile the suffering and exhaustion of the citizens in Rome reached its highest point.

Hunger thinned the ranks, never very full, of the defenders on the walls.

The Prefect in vain did his utmost. In vain he had recourse to all possible measures of persuasion or despotism. In vain he lavishly opened his coffers to provide the means of existence for the people.

For the stores of grain which he had procured from Sicily and garnered in the Capitol were exhausted.

He promised incredible rewards to any boat which should succeed in running the blockade of the King's ships and bring provisions to the city; to every mercenary who ventured to creep through the gates and the tents of the besiegers and bring back food.

But Totila's watchfulness was not to be deceived.

At first the promised reward had tempted a few avaricious and daring men to venture out at night. But when Earl Teja, next morning, caused their heads to be thrown over the walls at the Flaminian Gate, even the most venturesome lost all desire to follow their example.

The dung of animals was sold at a high price.

Hungry women fought for the weeds and nettles which they found on the heaps of rubbish.

Long since had hunger taught the populace to eat greedily unheard-of things.

And countless deserters fled from the city to the Goths.

Teja would have forced them to return, in order the sooner to oblige the city to surrender; but Totila gave orders that they should be received and fed, and that care should be taken that they did not injure themselves by the too sudden gratification of their ravenous appetites.

Cethegus now spent his nights upon the walls. At various hours he himself, spear and shield in hand, went the round of the patrols, and sometimes took the place of a sentinel who was

overcome with hunger or the want of sleep. His example certainly had the greatest effect on the brave. The two Licinii, Piso, and Salvius Julianus stood by the Prefect and his blindly-devoted Isaurians with enthusiasm.

But not so all Romans; not Balbus, the gormandiser.

"No, Piso," said Balbus one day, "I cannot endure it any longer. It is not in a man's power, at least not in mine. Holy Lucullus! who would have thought that I should ever give my last and largest diamonds for half a rock-marten!"

"I remember the time," answered Piso, laughing, "when you would have put your cook in irons if he had let a lobster boil a minute too long."

"A lobster! Mercy on us! How can you recall such a picture to my mind! I would give my immortal soul for one claw of a lobster, or even for the tail. And never to sleep one's fill! To be awakened, if not by hunger, by the trumpets of the patrol!"

"Look at the Prefect! For the last fourteen days he has not slept fourteen hours. He lies upon his hard shield, and drinks rain-water out of his helmet."

"The Prefect! He need not eat. He lives upon his pride, like the bear on his fat, and sucks his own gall. He is made of nothing but sinews and muscles, pride and hatred! But I--who had accumulated such soft white flesh, that the mice nibbled at me when I slept, thinking that I was a Spanish ham!--Do you know the latest news? A whole herd of fat oxen was driven into the Gothic camp this morning--all from Apulia; darlings of gods and men!"

The next day early Piso, with Salvius Julianus, came to wake the Prefect, who had lain down on the wall by the Porta Portuensis, close to the most important point of defence, the bolt across the river.

"Forgive me for disturbing your rare slumbers."

"I was not asleep; I was awake. Tell me your news, tribune."

"Last night Balbus deserted his post with twenty citizens. They let themselves down from the Porta Latina by ropes. Outside there had been heard all night long the lowing of Apulian herds. It seems that their bellowing was irresistible."

But the smile of the satirist faded away when he looked at the Prefect's face.

"Let a cross thirty feet high be erected before the house of Balbus in the Via Sacra. Every deserter who falls into our hands shall be crucified thereon."

"General--Constantinus abolished the punishment of crucifixion in the name of our Saviour," said Salvius Julianus reprovingly.

"Then I re-introduce the practice in honour of Rome. That Emperor no doubt held it to be impossible that a Roman noble and tribune could desert his post for the sake of roast meat."

"I have other news. I can no longer set the watch on the tower of the Porta Pinciana. Of the sixteen mercenaries nine are either dead or sick."

"Almost the same thing is reported by Marcus Licinius, at the Porta Tiburtina," said Julianus. "Who can ward off the danger which threatens us on all sides?"

"I! and the courage of the Romans. Go! Let the heralds summon all the citizens, who may yet be in the houses, to the Forum Romanum."

"Sir, there are only women, children, and sick people----"

"Obey, tribune!"

And with a dark expression on his face the Prefect descended from the walls, mounted his noble Spanish charger, and, followed by a troop of mounted Isaurians, made a long round through the city, everywhere assuring himself that the sentinels were on the alert, and examining the troops; thus giving the herald time to summon the people, and the latter to obey. He advanced, very slowly, along the right bank of the Tiber. A few ragged people crept out of their huts to stare in dull despair at the passing horsemen. Only at the Bridge of Cestius did the throng become thicker.

Cethegus stopped his horse in order to muster the guard on the bridge.

Suddenly, from the door of a low hut, there rushed a woman with dishevelled hair, holding a child in her arms. Another pulled at her ragged skirt.

"Bread? bread?" she asked; "can stones be softened by tears until they become bread? Oh no! They remain as hard--as hard as that man. Look, children, that is the Prefect of Rome. He upon the black horse, with the crimson crest and the terrible eyes! But I fear him no longer. Look,

children! that man forced your father to keep watch on the walls day and night, until he fell dead. Curses on the Prefect of Rome!"

And she shook her fist at the immovable horseman.

"Bread, mother! Give us something to eat," howled the children.

"I have nothing more for you to eat, but plenty to drink! Come!" screamed the woman, and, clasping the elder child round the waist with her right arm, and pressing the younger more firmly to her bosom, she cast herself over the wall into the river.

A cry of horror, followed by curses, ran through the crowd.

"She was mad!" said the Prefect in a loud voice, and rode on.

"No, she was the wisest of us all!" cried a voice from the crowd.

"Silence! Legionaries, sound the trumpets! Forwards! To the Forum!" commanded Cethegus, and the troop of horsemen galloped away.

Across the Fabrician Bridge and through the Carmentalian Gate, the Prefect arrived in the Forum Romanum at the foot of the Capitoline Hill.

The wide space appeared almost empty; the few thousand people who, clad in miserable garments, crouched upon the steps of the temple and halls, or supported themselves on their staffs or spears, made little impression.

"What does the Prefect want?"--"What can he want? we have nothing left but our lives."--"And those he will--" "Do you know that the day before yesterday the coast town Centumcellæ surrendered to the Goths?"--"Yes; the citizens overpowered the Prefect's Isaurians and opened the gates."--"Would that we could follow their example!"--"We must do it soon, or it will be too late."--"Yesterday my brother fell down dead, some boiled nettles still in his mouth. He was too weak to swallow the mess."--"Yesterday in the Forum Boarium a mouse was sold for its weight in gold!"--"For a week I got roasted meat from a butcher--he would not sell the flesh raw."--"You were lucky! They storm all houses where they smell roast meat!"--"But the day before yesterday he was torn to pieces by the mob, for he had enticed beggar-children into his house--and that was the flesh he had sold us!"--"But do you know what the Gothic King does with his prisoners? He treats them as a father treats his helpless children; and most of them enter his army at once."--"Yes, and those who will not he provides with money for the journey."--"Yes, and with clothes and shoes and provisions. The sick and wounded are nursed."--"And he gives them guides to the coast towns."--"And sometimes he even pays for their passage in merchant-ships to the East."--"Look, the Prefect dismounts!"

"He looks like Pluto!"

"He is no longer Princeps Senatus, but Princeps Inferorum."

"Look at his eyes! As cold as ice, and yet like red-hot arrows."

"Yes, my godmother is right; she says that only those who have no heart can look like that."

"That is an old tale. Spectres and Lemures have eaten his heart in the night."

"Ah, bah! There are no Lemures. But there is a devil, for it says so in the Bible. And the Prefect has sold himself to the devil. The Numidian who is holding his black horse by the bridle is an imp from hell, who always accompanies him. Nothing can hurt the Prefect. He feels neither hunger nor thirst nor the want of sleep. But he can never smile, for he has sold his soul!"

"How do you know?"

"The deacon of St. Paul's has explained it all. And it is a sin to serve such a man any longer. Did he not betray our Bishop, Silverius, to the Emperor, and send him over the sea in chains?"

"And lately he accused sixty priests, Orthodox and Arian, of treason, and banished them from the city."

"That is true!"

"And he must have promised the devil that he would torment the Romans."

"But we will endure it no longer. We are free! He himself has often told us so. I will ask him by what right----"

But the bold speaker stopped short, for the Prefect glanced at the murmuring group as he mounted the rostrum.

"Quirites," he began, "I call upon you all to become legionaries. Famine and treachery--a shameful thing to say of Romans!--have thinned the ranks of our defenders. Do you hear the

sound of hammers? A crucifix is being erected to punish all deserters. Rome demands still greater sacrifices from her citizens, for *they* have no choice. The citizens of other towns choose between surrender or destruction. We, who have grown up in the shadow of the Capitol, have no choice; for more than a thousand years of heroism sanctify this place. Here no coward thought dare arise. You cannot again endure to see the barbarians tie their horses to the columns of Trajan. We must make a last effort. The marrow of heroism ripens early in the descendants of Romulus and Cæsar; and late is spent the strength of the men who drink of the waters of the Tiber. I call upon all boys from their twelfth, all men until their eightieth year, to help to man the walls. Silence! Do not murmur. I shall send my tribunes and the lance-bearers into every house--only to prevent boys of too tender years and too aged men from volunteering their services--then why do you murmur? Does any one know of something better? Let him speak out boldly; from this place, which I now vacate in his favour."

At this, the group at which the Prefect looked became perfectly silent.

But behind him, amid those whom his eye could not intimidate, there arose a threatening cry:

"Bread!" "Surrender!" "Bread!"

Cethegus turned.

"Are you not ashamed? You, worthy of your great name, have borne so much, and now, when it is only necessary to hold out a little longer, you would succumb? In a few days Belisarius will bring relief."

"You told us so seven times already!"

"And after the seventh time Belisarius lost almost all his ships.

"Which now aid in blocking our harbour!"

"You should name a term; a limit to this misery. My heart bleeds for this people!"

"Who are you?" the Prefect asked the invisible speaker of the last sentence; "you can be no Roman!"

"I am Pelagius the deacon, a Christian and a priest of the Lord. And I fear not man but God. The King of the Goths, although a heretic, has promised to restore to the orthodox the churches of which his fellow-heretics, the Arians, have deprived them, in every town which surrenders. Three times already has he sent a herald to the citizens of Rome with the most lenient proposals--they have never been permitted to speak to us."

"Be silent, priest! You have no fatherland but heaven; no people but the communion of saints; no army but that of the angels. Manage your heavenly kingdom, but leave to men the kingdom of the Romans."

"But the man of God is right!"

"Set us a term."

"A short one!"

"Till then we will still hold out."

"But if it elapse without relief----"

"Then we will surrender!"

"We will open the gates."

But Cethegus shunned this thought. Not having received news from the outer world for weeks, he had no idea when Belisarius could possibly arrive at the mouth of the Tiber.

"What!" he cried. "Shall I fix a term during which you will remain Romans, and after which you will become cowards and slaves! Honour knows no term!"

"You speak thus, because you do not believe in the reinforcements."

"I speak thus, because I believe in *you*!"

"But we will have a term. We are resolved. You speak of Roman freedom! Are we free, or are we bound to obey you like your slaves? We demand a term, and we will have it."

"We will have it!" repeated a chorus of voices.

Before Cethegus could reply, the sound of trumpets was heard from the south-eastern corner of the Forum.

From the Via Sacra advanced a crowd of people, citizens and soldiers; in their midst were two

horsemen in foreign armour.

CHAPTER IX.

Lucius Licinius galloped before them, sprang off his horse, and mounted the tribune.

"A herald from the Goths! I arrived too late to prevent his entrance as usual. The famished legionaries at the Tiburtinian Gate opened it for him."

"Down with him! He must not speak," cried the Prefect, rushing from the tribune and drawing his sword.

But the people guessed his intentions. They surrounded the herald with cries of joy, protecting him from the Prefect.

"Peace!"

"Hail!"

"Bread! Peace! Listen to the herald!"

"No! do not listen to him!" thundered Cethegus. "Who is Prefect of Rome, he or I? Who defends this city? I, Cornelius Cethegus Cæsarius; and I tell you, do not listen!"

And he tried to make a way for himself.

But, thick as a swarm of bees, women and old men threw themselves into his path, and the armed citizens surrounded the herald.

"Speak, herald!" they cried; "what bring you?"

"Peace and deliverance!" cried Thorismuth, and waved his white wand. "Totila, King of the Italians and the Goths, sends you greetings and demands a safe-conduct into the city, in order to tell you important news and to announce peace."

"Hail to King Totila!"

"We will hear him. He shall come!"

Cethegus had hastily mounted his horse, and now ordered his trumpeters to blow a flourish.

At this well-known sound, all became quiet.

"Hear me, herald! I, the governor of this city, refuse a safe-conduct. I shall treat every Goth who enters this city as an enemy."

But at these words a cry of rage burst from the multitude.

"Cornelius Cethegus, are you our officer or our tyrant? We are free. You have often vaunted the majesty of the Roman people. And the Roman people command that the King shall be heard. Do we not, people of Rome?"

"We do!"

"It is according to law," growled the Quirites.

"You have heard! Will you obey or defy the people of Rome?"

Cethegus sheathed his sword.

Thorismuth and his companion galloped off to fetch the King.

The Prefect signed to the young tribunes to draw near him.

"Lucius Licinius," he said, "go to the Capitol. Salvius Julianus, you will protect the lower river-bolt: the bolt of masts. Quintus Piso, you will defend the chain-bolt. Marcus Licinius, you shall keep the bulwark which protects the ascent to the Capitoline Hill and the way to my house. The mercenaries will follow me."

"What do you intend to do, general?" asked Lucius Licinius, as he was preparing to obey the order.

"Attack and destroy the barbarians."

There were but fifty horsemen and about a hundred lance-bearers to follow the Prefect, when he had sent away the tribunes.

Meanwhile the people had waited anxiously for the sound of the Gothic horns.

At last they were heard, and presently there appeared Thorismuth and six horn-blowers; Wisand the bandalarius, carrying the royal blue banner of the Goths; the King, accompanied by Duke Guntharis and Earl Teja; and about ten other leaders, almost all without weapons; only Earl Teja displayed his broad and dreaded axe.

As this procession was on the point of setting forth from the Gothic encampment, to ride through the Metronian Gate into the city, Duke Guntharis felt some one pull his mantle, and looking down, beheld a boy or youth, with short and curly brown hair and blue eyes, standing near his horse, with a shepherd's staff in his hand.

"Art thou the King? No, thou art not he. And that, that is brave Teja, the Black Earl, as the songs call him!"

"What wouldst thou with the King, boy?"

"I would fight for him."

"Thou art still too tender. Go, and return two summers hence. And, meanwhile, guard thy flocks."

"I may be young, but I am no longer weak, and I have guarded the flock long enough. Ha! I see that that is the King!" and he went up to Totila, and bowed gracefully, saying:

"By thy leave, O King!"

And he caught the bridle of the horse to lead it, as if it were a matter of course.

The King looked amused, and smiled at the boy.

And the boy led his horse.

But Guntharis thought: "I have seen that face before! But no, it is only a resemblance; yet such a resemblance I have never seen in my life. And how noble is the young shepherd's carriage!"

"Hail to King Totila! Peace and salvation!" cried the people, as the Goths entered the city.

But the young guide looked up into the King's shining countenance, and sang in a soft sweet voice:

"Cunning Cethegus:
Tricks will not serve thee!
Teja the terrible
Daunts thy defiance.
And brightly arises,
Like morning and May-time,
Like night from the darkness,
The favourite of heaven,
The bright, and the beautiful
King of the Goths!
To him are wide opened
All halls and all hearts;
To him, overpowered,
Yield Winter and Woe!"

When the King entered the Forum, there fell a dead silence upon the people.

But Cethegus, who had expected this, immediately took advantage of it. He urged his horse into the crowd and cried:

"What would you, Goth, in this my city?"

Totila cast one flaming look at him, and then turned away.

"With *him* I speak, for evermore, only with my sword! With him, the threefold liar and murderer! To *you* I speak, unhappy and befooled inhabitants of Rome! Your sufferings wring my heart. I come to end your misery. I come without arms, for I am safer, trusting to the honour of Romans, than protected by sword and shield."

He paused.

Cethegus no more attempted to interrupt him.

"Quirites," continued Totila, "you yourselves have truly acknowledged that I might long since have stormed your walls with my hosts. For now you have but stones, and no men to defend them. But if Rome were carried by storm, then Rome would burn; and I confess that I would rather never enter Rome, than enter to find it in ashes. I will not reproach you with the manner in which you have requited the kindness of Theodoric and the Goths. Have you forgotten the time when you coined your gold with the grateful inscription, 'Roma felix'? Truly you are punished

enough; more heavily punished by hunger, pestilence, and the yoke of the Byzantines and that demon Cethegus, than by the severest penalty which we could have inflicted. More than eight thousand people--women and children not included--have perished. Your deserted houses fall into ruins; you greedily pluck the grass which grows in your temples; despair walks your streets with hollow eyes; famished mothers--Roman mothers--have devoured the flesh of their own children. Until this day, your resistance was heroic, although lamentable. But henceforward it is madness. Your last hope was placed in Belisarius. Then hear: Belisarius has sailed from Sicily to Byzantium. He has deserted you."

Cethegus ordered the trumpets to be sounded, in order to drown the groans of the multitude.

For some time it was all in vain, but at last the brazen tones conquered.

When all was quiet the Prefect cried:

"It is a lie! Do not believe such barefaced lies!"

"Have the Goths, have I, ever lied to you, Romans? But you shall believe your own eyes and ears. Come forward, man, and speak. Do you know him?"

A Byzantine in rich armour was led forward by the Gothic horsemen.

"Konon!"

"The navarchus of Belisarius!"

"We know him!" cried the crowd.

Cethegus turned pale.

"Men of Rome," said the Byzantine, "Belisarius, the magister militum, has sent me to King Totila. I arrived in the camp to-day. Belisarius was obliged to return to Byzantium. On leaving Sicily, he recommended Rome and Italy to the well-known benevolence of King Totila. This was my message to him and to you."

"If this be so," cried Cethegus, with a threatening voice, "then now is the day to prove whether you be Romans or bastards! Mark me well! Cethegus the Prefect will never, never surrender his Rome to the barbarians! Oh I think once more of the time when I was your all! When you exalted my name above those of the saints! Who has given you, for years, work, bread, and, what is more, weapons? Who protected you--Belisarius or Cethegus?--when these barbarians encamped by millions before your walls? Who saved Rome, with his heart's blood, from King Witichis? For the last time I call you to the combat! Do you hear me, grandchildren of Camillus? As he once, solely by the might of the Roman sword, swept the Gauls, who had already taken the city, away from the Capitol, so will I sweep away these Goths! Follow me! We will sally forth and let the world see what is possible to Roman valour when led by Cethegus and despair. Choose!"

"Aye, choose!" cried Totila, raising himself in his stirrups. "Choose between certain destruction or certain freedom. If you once more follow this madman, I can no longer protect you. Listen to Earl Teja, who stands at my right hand. You know him, I think. I can no longer protect you."

"No," cried Teja, raising his mighty axe, "then, by the God of Hate, no more mercy! If you refuse this last offer, not a life will be spared within these walls. I, and a thousand others, have sworn it!"

"I offer you complete immunity, and will prove a mild and just king to you. Ask Neapolis what I am! Choose between me and the Prefect!"

"Hail to King Totila! Death to the Prefect!" was the unanimous acclamation.

And, as if at a signal, the women and children, with uplifted hands, threw themselves on their knees; while all the armed inhabitants raised their weapons threateningly, and many a spear was hurled at the Prefect. They were the very weapons which he himself had given to the people.

"They are dogs--no Romans!" exclaimed Cethegus, with disdainful fury, and turned his horse. "To the Capitol!"

And his horse, with a sudden leap, cleared the row of kneeling and screaming women. Through a shower of darts which the Romans now sent after him galloped the Prefect, riding down the few who had courage enough to try to stop him.

His crimson crest soon disappeared in the distance.

His companions galloped swiftly after him. The lance-bearers on foot retreated in good order, now and then turning and levelling their spears. Thus they reached the lofty bulwark which, held by Marcus Licinius, protected the ascent to the Capitol, and the way to the Prefect's house.

"What next? Shall we pursue?" the citizens asked the King.

"No--stay. Let all the gates be opened. Wagons laden with meat, bread, and wine stand ready in the camp. Let them be brought into all parts of the city. Feed the people of Rome for three whole days. My Goths shall keep watch to prevent excess."

"And the Prefect?" asked Duke Guntharis.

"Cornelius Cethegus, the ex-Prefect of Rome, will not escape the vengeance of God," cried Totila, turning away.

"And not mine!" cried the shepherd-boy.

"And not mine!" said Teja, and galloped after the King.

CHAPTER X.

Most of the quarters of the city of Rome had now fallen into the hands of the enemy.

Cethegus was in possession of that part of the city which extended on the right bank of the Tiber from the Mausoleum of Hadrian in the north to the Porta Portuensis in the south, near which were situated the two bolts across the river.

On the left bank the Prefect held only the small but dominating quarter west of the Forum Romanum, of which the Capitol formed the centre. This quarter was enclosed by walls and high bulwarks which stretched from the shore of the Tiber at the foot of the Capitoline Hill, and round the hill eastwards, to the Forum of Trajan in the north; while at the back and westwards from the Capitol, they passed between the Circus Flaminius and the Theatre of Marcellus (abandoning the first and enclosing the last), and ended at the Fabrician Bridge and the Island of the Tiber.

The King had left the Forum, and the rest of the day was spent by the inhabitants of the city in feasting and rejoicing.

The King caused eighty wagons, each drawn by four oxen, to be drawn up in all the principal squares and places of those parts of the city which had surrendered. And round about these wagons, upon the pavement or upon speedily-erected wooden benches, lay the famishing population, raising their voices in thanks to God, the saints, and the "good King."

The Prefect had at once closed all the gates which led from those parts of the city occupied by the Goths into *his* Rome; particularly the approaches from the Forum Romanum to the Capitol, and the Flumentanian, Carmentalian and Ratumenian Gates. He caused them all to be barricaded, and divided the few soldiers he had at his command among the most important points of defence.

He held much about the same part of Rome as he had before occupied under and against Belisarius.

"Salvius Julianus must have another hundred Isaurians to protect the bolt of masts on the river," he commanded. "The Abasgian bowmen must hasten to join Piso at the bolt of chains. Marcus Licinius will remain on the bulwark of the Forum."

But now Lucius Licinius announced that the rest of the legionaries, who had not been present at the scene on the Forum, because they had been on duty in the now barricaded portion of the city, were become very unruly.

"Ah," cried Cethegus, "the odour of the roast meat for which their comrades sold their honour, tickles their nostrils! I come."

And he rode up to the Capitol, where the legionaries, about five hundred men, were standing in their ranks with a very gloomy and threatening aspect.

Looking at them with a searching eye, Cethegus slowly rode along their front.

At last he spoke.

"For you I had reserved the fame of having defended the Lares and Penates of the Capitol against the barbarians. I hear, indeed, that you prefer the joints of beef below there. But I will not believe it. You will not desert the man who, after centuries of helplessness, has again taught the Romans how to fight and conquer. Whoever will stand by Cethegus and the Capitol--let him raise his sword."

But not a blade was seen.

"Hunger is a more powerful god than the Capitoline Jupiter," said Cethegus contemptuously.

A centurion stepped forward.

"It is not that, Prefect of Rome. But we will not fight against our fathers and brothers who are on the side of the Goths."

"I ought to keep you as hostages for your fathers and brothers, and when they storm the bulwarks, throw to them your heads! But I fear it would not stop them in their enthusiasm, which comes from their stomachs! Go--you are not worthy to save Rome! Open the gate, Licinius. Let them turn their backs upon the Capitol and honour!"

And the legionaries marched away, all but about a hundred men, who stood still irresolutely, leaning on their spears.

"Well, what do you want?" cried Cethegus, riding up to them.

"To die with you, Prefect of Rome!" cried one of them.

And the others repeated: "To die with you!"

"I thank you! Do you see, Licinius, a hundred Romans! Are they not enough to found a new Roman Empire?--I will give you the post of honour; you shall defend the bulwark to which I have given the name of Julius Cæsar."

He sprang from his horse, threw the bridle to Syphax, called his tribunes together, and spoke:

"Now listen to my plan."

"You have a plan already?"

"Yes. We will attack! If I know these barbarians, we are safe for to-night from any assault. They have won three quarters of the city. Before they think of the last quarter, their victory must be celebrated in a hundred thousand tipsy bouts. At midnight the whole company of yellow-haired heroes and drinkers will be immersed in feasting, wine, and sleep; and the hungry Quirites will not be behindhand in excess. Look! How they feast and sing below there--crowned with flowers! And very few barbarians have yet entered the city. That is our hope of victory. At midnight we will sally forth from all our gates--they will not dream of an attack from such a minority--and slay them in their revels."

"Your plan is bold," said Lucius Licinius. "And if we fall, the Capitol will be our tombstone!"

"You learn from me words as well as sword-strokes," said Cethegus, smiling. "My plan is desperate, but it is the only one now possible. Is the watch set? I will go home and sleep for a couple of hours. No one must rouse me before that time. In two hours come and wake me."

"You can sleep at such a moment, general?"

"Yes; I *must*. And I hope I shall sleep soundly. I must have time to collect myself--I have just yielded the Forum Romanum to the barbarian King! It was too much! I need time to recover myself. Syphax, I asked yesterday if no more wine was to be had on the right bank of the Tiber?"

"I have been to seek some. There is yet a little in the temple of your God; but the priests say that it is dedicated to the service of the altar."

"That will not have spoiled it! Go, Lucius, and take it from the priests. Divide it amongst the hundred men on the bulwark of Cæsar. It is the only thing that I can give them to show my gratitude."

Followed by Syphax, Cethegus now rode slowly home.

He stopped at the principal entrance to his house.

In answer to the call of Syphax, Thrax, a groom, opened the gate.

Cethegus dismounted and stroked the neck of his noble charger.

"Our next ride will be a sharp one, my Pluto--to victory or in flight! Thrax, give him the white bread which was reserved for me."

The horse was led into the stables near at hand. The stalls were empty. Pluto shared the spacious building only with the brown horse belonging to Syphax. All the Prefect's other horses had been slaughtered and devoured by the mercenaries.

The master of the house passed through the splendid vestibule and atrium into the library.

The old ostiarius and secretary, the slave Fidus, who was past carrying a spear, the only domestic in the house. All the slaves and freedmen were upon the walls--either living or dead.

"Reach me the roll of Plutarch's Cæsar, and the large goblet set with amethysts--it scarcely needed their decoration--full of spring water."

The Prefect stayed in the library for some time. The old servant had lighted the lamp, filled

with costly oil of spikenard, as he had been accustomed to do in times of peace.

Cethegus cast a long look at the numerous busts, Hermes, and statues, which cast sharp shadows along the exquisite mosaic pavement.

There, upon pedestals or brackets, on which were inscribed their names, stood small marble busts of almost all the heroes of Rome, from the mythic Kings to the long rows of Consuls and Cæsars, ended by Trajan, Hadrian, and Constantine.

The ancestors of the "Cethegi" formed a numerous group.

An empty niche already contained the pedestal upon which his bust would one day stand--the last on that side of the room, for he was the last of his house.

But on another side there was a whole row of arches and empty niches, destined for future scions of the family, not by marriage, but by adoption, should the name of Cethegus be continued into more fortunate generations.

As Cethegus walked slowly past the rows of busts, he chanced to look at the niche destined to contain his own, and, to his astonishment, saw that it was not empty.

"What is that?" he asked. "Lift up the lamp, secretary. Whose is that bust standing in my place?"

"Forgive, master! The pedestal of that bust, one of the ancients, needed reparation. I was obliged to remove it, and I placed it in the empty niche to keep it from harm."

"Show a light. Still higher. Who can it be?"

And Cethegus read the short inscription upon the bust: "Tarquinius Superbus, tyrant of Rome, died in exile; banished from the city by the inhabitants on account of his monstrous despotism. A warning to future generations."

Cethegus, in his youth, had himself composed this inscription.

He took the bust away, and placed it on one side.

"Away with the omen!" he cried.

Lost in thought, he entered his study.

He leaned his helm, shield, and sword against the couch. The slave kindled the lamp which stood on the tortoise-shell table, brought the goblet and the roll of papyrus, and left the room.

Cethegus took up the roll.

But he soon laid it down again. His forced composure could not last; it was too unnatural. In the Roman Forum the Quirites drank with the barbarians to the health of the King of the Goths and the ruin of the Prefect of Rome, the Princeps Senatus! In two hours he was about to attempt to wrest the city from the Goths. He could not fill up the short pause with the perusal of a biography which he almost knew by heart.

He drank thirstily of the water in the goblet.

Then he threw himself upon his couch.

"Was it an omen?" he asked himself. "But there are no omens for those who do not believe in them. 'This is the only omen: to fight for the fatherland,' says Homer. Truly, I fight not alone for my native land; I fight still more for myself. But have not to-day's events disgracefully proved that Rome is Cethegus, and Cethegus is Rome? These name-forgetting Romans do not make Rome. The Rome of to-day is far more Cethegus than the Rome of old was Cæsar. Was not he, too, a tyrant in the eyes of fools?"

He rose uneasily, and went up to the colossal statue of his great ancestor.

"God-like Julius! If I could pray, I would pray now to thee! Help me! Complete the work of thy grandchild. How hard have I striven since the day when the idea of the renewal of thy empire was born within my brain--born full-armed, like Pallas Athene from the head of Jupiter! How have I fought, mentally and physically, by day and by night! And though thrown to the ground seven times by the superior force of two peoples, seven times have I again struggled to my feet, unconquered and unintimidated! A year ago my goal seemed near--so near; and now, this very night, I must fight this fair youth for Rome and for my life! Can it be that I must succumb after such deeds and such exertions? Succumb to the good fortune of a youth! Is it, then, impossible for thy descendant to stand alone for his nation, until he renew both it and himself? Is it impossible to conquer the barbarians and the Greeks? Can not I, Cethegus, stop the wheel of Fate and roll it backward? Must I fail because I stand alone--a general without an army, a king without a nation to support him? Must I yield thy and my Rome? I cannot, will not think so! Did not thy star fade shortly before Pharsalus? and didst thou not swim over the Nile to save thy life,

bleeding from a hundred wounds? And yet thou hast succeeded. Again thou hast entered Rome in triumph. It will not go more hardly with thy descendant. No; I will not lose my Rome! I will not lose my house, and this thy God-like image, which has often, like the crucifix of the Christian, filled me with hope and comfort. As a pledge of my success, to thee I will entrust a treasure. Where can anything on earth be safe if not with thee? In an hour of despondency, I was about to give this treasure to Syphax to bury in the earth. But if I lose Rome and this house, this sanctuary, I will lose all. Who can decipher these hieroglyphics? As thou hast kept the letters and the diary, so shalt thou keep this treasure also."

So saying, he drew from the bosom of his tunic, beneath his shirt of mail, a rather large leather bag, filled with costly pearls and precious stones, and touched a spring on the left side of the statue, below the edge of its shield.

A small opening was revealed, out of which he took an oblong casket of beautifully-carved ivory, provided with a golden lock. The casket contained all sorts of writings and rolls of papyrus. He now added the bag.

"Here, great ancestor, guard my secrets and my treasure. With whom should they be safe, if not with thee?"

He touched the spring again, and the statue looked as perfect as before.

"Beneath thy shield, upon thy heart! As a pledge that I trust in thee and my good fortune as thy descendant! As a pledge that nothing shall force me away from thee and Rome--at least for any length of time. If I *must* go--I will return again. And who will seek my secret in the marble Cæsar?"

If the water in the amethyst cup had been the strongest wine, it could not have had a more intoxicating effect than this soliloquy or dialogue with the colossal statue which Cethegus worshipped like a god.

The unnatural strain upon all his mental and physical powers during the last few weeks; the unsuccessful attempt to persuade the people on the Forum; the conception of a new and desperate plan as soon as he had been defeated in the first, and the consuming anxiety with which he awaited its execution, had excited and exhausted the iron nerves of the Prefect to the utmost.

He thought, spoke, and acted as if in a high fever.

Tired out, he threw himself upon his couch at the foot of the statue; and suddenly sleep overcame him.

But it was not the sound sleep which, until now, he had been able to command at will, even after some criminal act or before a dangerous enterprise: the result of a strong constitution which was superior to all excitement.

For the first time his slumber was uneasy, disturbed by changeful dreams, which, like the fancies of a delirious man, chased each other through his brain.

At last the visions of the dreamer took a more concrete form.

He saw the statue at the feet of which he lay, grow and grow. The majestic head rose higher and higher, and passed through the roof of the house. With its crown of laurel it at last penetrated the clouds, and towered into the starry heavens.

"Take me with thee!" sighed Cethegus.

But the demigod replied:

"I can scarcely see thee from this height. Thou art too small! Thou canst not follow me."

And it seemed to Cethegus that a thunderbolt fell and shattered the roof of his house. With a crash the beams fell upon him, burying him under the ruins. The statue of Cæsar also broke and fell.

And crash after crash echoed through the place.

Cethegus woke, sprang up, and looked around in bewilderment.

CHAPTER XI.

The sound continued.

It was real--no dream! Blow after blow fell thundering against the door of his house.

Cethegus caught up his helm and sword.

At that moment Syphax and Lucius rushed into the room.

"Up, general!"

"Up, Cethegus!"

"Two hours cannot yet have passed. Why have you awakened me?"

"The Goths! They have been beforehand with us! They storm the bulwarks!"

"Damn them! Where do they storm?"

Cethegus had already reached the door of the room.

"Where does the King attack?"

"At the bolts on the river. He has sent fire-ships up the stream. Floats with heavy towers on deck, full of resin, pitch, and sulphur. The first bolt of masts and all the boats between are in flames! Salvius Julianus is wounded and taken prisoner. There! you can see the reflection of the flames in the south-east!"

"The bolt of chains--does it hold?"

"It holds still. But if it break--"

"Then I, as once before, am the bolt of Rome! Forward!"

Syphax led up the snorting horses.

Cethegus swung himself into the saddle.

"Away! Where is your brother Marcus?"

"At the bulwark by the Forum."

As Cethegus and Lucius were galloping off, they were met by a mass of mercenaries, Isaurians and Abasgians, who fled from the river.

"Fly!" they cried. "Save the Prefect!"

"Where is Cethegus?"

"Here--to save you! Turn back. To the river!"

He galloped on. The reflection of the burning masts plainly showed the way. Arrived at the river bank, Cethegus dismounted. Syphax placed his horse out of harm's way in an empty storehouse.

"Torches!" cried Cethegus. "Into the boats! There lie a dozen ready. Bowmen, into the boats! Follow me! Lucius, go into the second boat. Row up to the chain. Place yourselves close to it. Whatever comes up the river--shoot! They cannot land below the bolt, the walls are too high and descend straight into the water. They *must* come up here to the chain!"

Already a few boats, filled with Goths, had ventured too near. Some caught fire at the burning masts; others were upset in the crush and confusion. One, which had approached within half an arrow's length of the chain, drove helplessly down the stream again: all the crew had been killed by the arrows of the Abasgians.

"Do you see! There goes a boat of corpses! Resist to the last man. Nothing is lost! Bring torches and firebrands! Kindle the wharf there! Fire against fire!"

"Look there, master!" cried Syphax, who never left the Prefect's side.

"Aye, now comes the struggle!"

It was a splendid sight.

The Goths had seen that the bolt of chains could never be forced by small boats, so they had hewn away so much of the burning bolt of masts that a space was left in the middle just broad enough to permit the passage of a ship of war.

But to try to pass up the river, exposed to the arrows of the Abasgians, between the flaming ends of the masts, and propelled only by their oars, might be more dangerous for the large vessel than for the "boat of corpses."

The Goths hesitated and stopped just before the burning beams.

But suddenly there arose a strong breeze from the south, rippling the surface of the water.

"Do you feel the wind? It is the breath of the God of Victory! Set the sails! Now follow me, my Goths!" cried a joyful voice.

The sails were set, and the wings of the royal galley, the "Wild Swan," spread wide to the breeze.

It was a magnificent spectacle as the great vessel, all its canvas spread, and urged by a hundred oarsmen, came majestically up the river, illuminated by the terrible light from the burning masts and boats.

With irresistible force the noble galley sailed up the stream.

On both sides of the upper deck, high above the heads of the oarsmen on the lower deck, kneeled close rows of Gothic warriors, their shields forming a brazen roof to protect them from the arrows of the foe.

Upon the bows of the ship an immense figure of a swan lifted high its snowy wings.

Between these wings, upon the back of the swan, stood King Totila, his sword in his right hand.

"Forward!" he cried. "Pull, my men, with all your might! Be ready, Goths!"

Cethegus recognised the youth's tall figure. He even recognised the voice.

"Let the galley approach quite close. When within twenty feet, shoot! Not yet!--Now! now shoot!"

"Crouch close, Goths!" cried Totila.

A hail of arrows fell over the galley. But they rebounded from a roof of shields.

"Damn them!" cried Piso, behind the Prefect. "They intend to break the chain with the force of the shock. And they will surely do it, even if every man on deck should fall! The oarsmen we cannot reach, and the south wind cannot be wounded!"

"Fire the sails! fire the ship! Bring firebrands!" cried Cethegus.

Ever nearer rustled the threatening "Swan."

Ever nearer approached the ruinous shock against the tightly-stretched chains.

Firebrands were hurled at the galley.

One flew into the sail of the main-mast, burnt quickly up, and then died out.

A second--Cethegus himself had hurled it--passed close to the golden locks of the King. It fell near him. He had not remarked it; but a shepherd-boy, who carried no weapon but a shepherd's staff, ran up and trampled it out.

The other brands rebounded from the shields and fell hissing into the river.

And now the prow of the galley was only eight feet from the chain.

The Romans trembled in expectation of the shock.

Cethegus stepped to the bow of his boat, balancing and aiming his heavy spear.

"Mark!" he said; "as soon as the King falls, be quick with more firebrands."

Never had the practised soldier aimed better. Drawing back his spear once more, he launched it at the King with all the force lent to his arm by hatred.

His followers waited breathlessly. But the King did not fall. He had caught sight of Cethegus while aiming; at the same moment he threw down his long and narrow shield and awaited the flying shaft with his left arm drawn back.

Whistling came the spear straight at the spot where the King's bare neck showed above his breastplate.

When within a few inches of his throat, the King caught the shaft with his left hand and immediately hurled it back at the Prefect, wounding him on the left arm just above his shield.

Cethegus fell on his knee.

At the same instant the galley struck the chain. It burst. The Roman boats which lay near, including that of Cethegus, were upset; and most of them drove masterless down the river.

"Victory!" shouted Totila. "Yield, mercenaries!"

Cethegus, bleeding, swam to the left bank of the river. He saw how the Gothic galley lowered two boats, into one of which sprang the King.

He saw how a whole flotilla of large vessels, which had sailed up in the wake of the King's galley, now broke through the boats of his bowmen, and landed troops on both sides of the river.

He saw how his Abasgians--neither armed nor in the mood for a hand-to-hand fight--surrendered themselves by companies to the Goths.

He saw how a rain of arrows from the royal galley fell upon the defenders on the left bank.

He saw how the little boat, in which stood the King, now approached the place where he himself stood, dripping with water.

He had lost his helmet in the river, his shield he had thrown away, in order the more speedily to gain the land.

He was on the point of attacking the King, who had just landed, with his sword alone, when a Gothic arrow grazed his neck.

"Well hit, Haduswinth?" cried a young voice; "better than at the Mausoleum!"

"Bravo, Gunthamund!"

Cethegus tottered.

Syphax caught his arm.

At the same moment a hand was laid on his shoulder. He recognised Marcus Licinius.

"You here! Where are your men?"

"Dead!" said Marcus. "The hundred Romans fell on the bulwark. Teja, the terrible Teja, stormed it. The half of your Isaurians fell on the way to the Capitol. The rest still keep the doors, and the half-bulwark in front of your house. I can no more. Teja's axe penetrated through my shield and entered my ribs. Farewell, O great Cethegus! Save the Capitol. But--look there! Teja is quick!"

And he fell to the ground.

From the Capitoline Hill flames rose high into the night.

"There is nothing more to be done here," the Prefect said with difficulty, for he was losing blood fast and becoming rapidly weak. "I will save the Capitol! To you, Piso, I leave the barbarian King. Once before you have wounded a Gothic King upon the threshold of Rome. Now wound a second, but this time mortally! You, Lucius, will revenge your brother. Do not follow me!"

As he spoke he cast one more furious glance at the King, at whose feet kneeled his Abasgians, and sighed deeply.

"You tremble, master!" said Syphax sadly.

"*Rome* trembles!" cried Cethegus. "To the Capitol!"

Lucius Licinius pressed the hand of his dying brother.

"I shall follow him notwithstanding," he said, "for he is wounded."

While Cethegus, Syphax, and Lucius Licinius disappeared in the distance, Piso crouched behind the columns of a Basilica close to which the street led upwards from the river.

Meanwhile the King had placed the Abasgians under the guard of his soldiers. He went a few steps up the bank of the river and pointed with his sword to the flames which arose from the Capitol.

Then he turned to the Goths who were landing.

"Forward!" he cried. "Make haste! The flames up there must be extinguished. The fight is over. Now, Goths, protect and preserve Rome, for it is yours!"

Piso took advantage of the moment.

"Apollo!" he exclaimed; "if ever my satires hit their mark, help now my sword!"

And he sprang from behind the column towards the King, who stood with his back turned to him. But before he could deal a blow, he let his sword fall with a loud cry. A sturdy stroke from a stick had lamed his hand.

Immediately a young shepherd sprang upon him and pulled him to the ground, kneeling on his breast.

"Yield, thou Roman wolf!" cried a clear boyish voice.

"Ah! Piso.... the poet He is thy prisoner, boy," said the King, who now turned. "He shall ransom himself with a goodly sum. But who art thou, young shepherd?"

"He is the saviour of your life, sire," interposed old Haduswinth. "We saw the Roman rush at you, but we were too far off to call or help you. We owe your life to this boy."

"What is thy name, young hero?"

"Adalgoth."

"And what wouldst thou here?"

"Cethegus, the traitor, the Prefect of Rome! where is he, King? Pray tell me. I was sent to the boats. I heard that he would oppose thy attack here."

"He was here. He has fled; most likely to his house."

"Wouldst thou overcome that King of Hell with this stick?" asked Haduswinth.

"No," cried the boy; "I have now a sword."

And he took up his prisoner's sword, which was lying on the ground; brandished it over his head and rushed away.

Totila gave Piso in charge to the Goths, who had now landed in great numbers.

"Hasten!" he cried again. "Save the Capitol, which the Romans are destroying!"

CHAPTER XII.

Meanwhile the Prefect had left the river and gone in the direction of the Capitol.

He passed the Porta Trigemina and arrived at the Forum Boarium.

Before the Temple of Janus he met with a crowd of people by which he was detained for a short time.

In spite of his wound he had made such haste that Lucius and Syphax could scarcely follow. They had repeatedly lost sight of him. Only now did they overtake him.

He now tried to go through the Porta Carmentalis, and thus gain the back of the Capitol.

But he found the gate already occupied by numerous Goths. Amongst them was Wachis. He recognised the Prefect from a distance.

"Revenge for Rauthgundis!" he cried.

A heavy stone struck the Prefect's helmless head. He turned and fled.

He now remembered that there was a sinking of the wall not far from the gate. He determined to climb it at that place.

As he neared it, the flames from the Capitol again shot high into the air.

Three men sprang over the wall just in front of him. They were Isaurians. They recognised him.

"Fly, general! The Capitol is lost! Teja, the black Gothic devil!"

"Did he--did Teja kindle the fire?"

"No; we ourselves set a wooden bulwark, which the barbarians had taken, on fire. The Goths do all they can to extinguish the flames."

"The barbarians save the Capitol!" said Cethegus bitterly, and supported himself upon a spear which was handed to him by one of the mercenaries.

"I must get to my house."

And he turned to the right, the shortest way to the principal entrance to his house.

"O master, that way is dangerous!" cried one of the Isaurians. "The Goths will soon be there. I

heard the Black Earl ask repeatedly after you. He was seeking you everywhere upon the Capitol. He will now seek you in your house."

"I *must* once more go to my house!"

But he had scarcely gone a few steps, when a troop of Goths and Romans, carrying torches and firebrands, came towards him from the city.

The foremost, who were Romans, recognised him.

"The Prefect!"

"The destroyer of Rome!"

"He has set the Capitol on fire! Down with him!"

Arrows, stones, and spears were hurled at Cethegus. One of his Isaurians fell; the others took to their heels.

Cethegus was hit by an arrow; it penetrated slightly into his left shoulder. He tore it out.

"A Roman arrow, with my own stamp!" he cried with a terrible laugh.

With difficulty he gained a dark side-street.

Before his House there was a crowd of soldiers, trying in vain to break open the principal door.

Cethegus heard the uproar, and well understood the cries of rage with which the soldiers accompanied their ineffectual exertions.

"The door is strong," he said to himself. "Before they force an entrance, I shall be again out of the house."

He hurried to the back of the house. He pressed a secret spring which opened the door of the court, entered, and, leaving the door open behind him, hurried in.

Hark! a stroke--very different from all which had gone before--thundered against the front door of the house.

"That is a battle-axe!" thought Cethegus. "That is Teja?"

He hastened to a small gap in the wall, which afforded an outlook into the main street. It was Teja. His long black locks waved about his bare head; in his left hand he carried a firebrand; in his right the dreaded battle-axe. He was covered with blood.

"Cethegus!" he shouted at every stroke of his axe. "Cornelius Cethegus Cæsarius, where art thou? I sought thee in the Capitol, Prefect of Rome! Where art thou? Must I seek thee upon thy hearth?"

Cethegus, listening, heard hasty steps behind him.

Syphax had reached the court, and had followed his master through the open door. He now caught sight of him.

"O master, fly! I will protect thy threshold with my body."

And he hastened past Cethegus, through a suite of apartments to the front door.

Cethegus turned to the right. He could hardly keep himself upright. He managed to reach the "Hall of Jupiter." Here he sank to the ground. But the next moment he again sprang to his feet, for a fearful noise was heard from the front door.

At last it was broken in.

With a thundering crash it fell inwards, and Teja entered the dwelling of his enemy.

Upon the threshold, with a leap like that of a panther, the Moor sprang upon him, grasping his throat and raising a dagger in his hand.

But the Goth let fall his axe, seized him in his right hand, and, like a stone from a sling, the Moor flew sideways through the door and rolled down the steps into the street.

"Where art thou, Cethegus?" again sounded the voice of Teja, coming nearer and nearer, from the vestibule and the atrium.

Some doors, which had been bolted by the secretary, Fidus, were forced one after the other by Teja's axe.

With difficulty Cethegus dragged himself to the middle of the Hall of Jupiter. He still hoped to be able to reach the study and take the writings and treasure out of the statue of Cæsar.

He heard the crash of another falling door, and the voice of Teja now sounded from the study.

He heard how the soldiers, who had pressed forward after Teja into the library, were demolishing the statues and busts of his ancestors.

"Where is thy master, old man?" asked Teja's voice.

The slave had taken refuge in the study.

"I know not, by my soul!"

"Not even here! Cethegus! coward! Where hidest thou?"

It was now evident that the soldiers had also entered the study.

Cethegus could no longer stand upright.

He leaned against the marble statue of Jupiter, from which the hall took its name.

"What shall be done with this house?" he heard some one ask.

"It shall be burned!" cried Teja.

"The King has forbidden that," answered the voice of Thorismuth.

"Yes; but I have begged this house from the King. It shall be razed to the ground! Down with the temple of that devil! Down with the holiest of holies--this idol!"

A fearful blow resounded.

With a crash the Cæsar statue fell in fragments to the ground.

Gold, jewels, and rolls of papyrus covered the floor.

"Ah! the barbarian!" cried Cethegus, forgetting himself, and he was about to rush into the study with his drawn sword, when he fell senseless at the foot of the statue of Jupiter.

"Hark! What was that?" cried a boyish voice.

"The voice of the Prefect!" exclaimed Teja, and opening the door which led from the study into the hall, he sprang forward, swinging his battle-axe.

But the hall was empty.

A pool of blood lay at the feet of the Jupiter, and a broad track of the crimson fluid led to the window which opened into the inner court.

The court was empty.

But some Goths who entered it found the little door closed from outside; the key was still in the lock on the side of the street.

When they had forced this door--some of them had also gone round from the front of the house--and had searched the side-street and the dwellings in it, they only found the Prefect's sword, which was recognised by Fidus, the secretary.

With a gloomy look Teja took it up, and returned into the study.

"Take up carefully all that was concealed in the Prefect's idol, particularly the writings, and carry everything to the King. Where is the King?"

"When he left the Capitol, he, with all the Romans and Goths, went into the sanctuary of St. Peter, to attend a service of thanksgiving."

"'Tis well. Go to him in the church and give him everything. Also the sword of the fugitive. Tell him that Teja sends it."

"Thy order shall be obeyed," said Thorismuth. "But thou--wilt thou not go with us to the church?"

"No."

"Where wilt thou spend this night of victory, when all the others are giving thanks?"

"I will spend it in the ruins of this house!"

And he thrust the firebrand into the purple cushions of the Prefect's couch.

BOOK V.--Continued.

TOTILA.

"Happy are we that this sunny youth still lives!"--*Margrave Ruediger of Bechelaren*, Act i., Scene i.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

Thenceforth King Totila held his court in Rome with much splendour and rejoicing.

The heaviest task of all the war seemed to be completed.

After the fall of Rome, most of the small forts on the coast and in the Apennines opened their gates; very few remained to be taken by siege.

For this purpose the King sent forth his generals, Teja, Guntharis, Grippa, Markja, and Aligern; while he himself undertook the difficult political task of reducing to order the kingdom so long disturbed by war or rebellion. He had, indeed, almost to refund it.

He sent his dukes and earls into the towns and districts to carry out his intentions in all departments of the state; particularly to protect the Italians from the vengeance of the victorious Goths. He had published from the Capitol a general amnesty; excluding only one person: the ex-Prefect, Cornelius Cethegus Cæsarius.

Everywhere he caused the destroyed churches, both Catholic and Arian, to be restored; everywhere the landed property was settled, the taxes newly-laid and diminished.

The beneficial results of all this care were not long in making themselves felt.

Even when Totila had first assumed the crown and issued his manifesto, had the Italians resumed the long-neglected cultivation of the land. The Gothic soldiers were directed to refrain from disturbing this important work, and to do all in their power to prevent any such disturbance on the part of the Byzantines.

And a wonderful fertility of the soil, a harvest of grain, wine, and oil, such as had not been seen for ages, seemed to prove that the blessing of Heaven had fallen upon the young King.

The news of the taking of Neapolis and Rome spread rapidly through the Eastern Empire, where it was received with great astonishment, for all there had long since considered the Gothic kingdom to be extinct.

Merchants who had been tempted by the strong and just government, the security of the high-roads and of the sea--which were severally protected by patrols of soldiers and watchful squadrons of Gothic ships--to revisit the deserted towns and harbours of the peninsula, praised the justice and benevolence of the royal youth, and told of the flourishing state of his kingdom, and of the brilliancy of his court at Rome, where he gathered about him the senators who had repented of their rebellion, and gave to the populace liberal alms and splendid games in the Circus.

The Kings of the Franks acknowledged this change of circumstances. They sent presents--Totila rejected them; they sent ambassadors--Totila would not receive them.

The King of the Ostrogoths frankly offered an alliance against Byzantium and the hand of his daughter. The Avarian and Slavonian marauders on the eastern frontier were punished. With the exception of the few fortresses which were still in a state of siege--Ravenna, Perusium, and a few small castles--the whole country enjoyed as perfect peace as in Theodoric's most glorious days.

At the same time, the King was wise enough to be moderate. He acknowledged, in spite of his victories, the danger-fraught superiority of the East, and earnestly sought to make peace with the Emperor.

He resolved to send an embassy to Byzantium, to offer peace on the basis of a full acknowledgment of the Gothic rule in Italy. He would renounce all claim to Sicily--where not a Goth was now dwelling (the Gothic settlements on that island had never been very numerous); he

would also resign those parts of Dalmatia now occupied by the Byzantines. On his side the Emperor should immediately evacuate Ravenna, which no perseverance or stratagem on the part of the Gothic besiegers had been able to reduce.

As the person most qualified to undertake this mission of peace and reconciliation, the King thought of a man who was distinguished by worth and dignity, by his love for Italy and the Goths, and who was renowned, even in the East, for his wisdom--the venerable Cassiodorus.

Although the pious old man had withdrawn from all affairs of state for many years, the young King succeeded in persuading him to leave the peaceful quiet of his lonely cloister, and brave the troubles and dangers of a journey to Byzantium in order to perform this noble and pious work.

But it was impossible to lay upon the old man the whole burden of such an embassy, and the King now sought for a younger and stronger man to accompany him. A man of similar benevolent and Christian feeling--a second apostle of peace.

A few weeks after the conquest of Rome, a royal messenger carried the following letter over the Cottian Alps into Provence:

"To Julius Manilius Montanus, Totila, who is called the King of the Goths.

"Come, my beloved friend, return to my heart! Years have passed; much blood has been shed, and many tears have fallen. More than once, terribly or fortunately, has everything changed around me since I pressed your hand for the last time. Everything around me has changed, but I remain the same. All is as it was between you and me. I still revere the idols at whose shrines we worshipped together in the first dreams of our youth, but growing experience has ennobled these idols. When sin, treachery, and all dark powers raged upon Italian soil, you abandoned it. See, they have disappeared, like moisture in the sun and wind. The conquered demons growl in the distance, and a rainbow stretches its brilliant arch over this my beloved kingdom. When nobler souls unhappily succumbed. Heaven preserved me to see the end of the fearful storm and to sow the seeds of a new time. Come now, my Julius; help me to carry out those dreams at which you so often smiled, thinking them *mere* dreams. Help me to create a new people of Goths and Italians, which will unite the advantages and exclude the weaknesses of both nations. Help me to found a realm of justice and of peace, of freedom and of beauty, ennobled by Italian grace, and strengthened by Gothic endurance. You, my Julius, have built a cloister for the Church--help me to build a temple for humanity. I am lonely, friend, at the summit of fortune. Lonely my bride awaits the full completion of my vow. The war has robbed me of my devoted brother. Will you not come, my Dioscuros? In two months I shall expect you at Taginæ with Valeria."

Julius read; and with emotion said to himself: "My friend, I come!"

Before King Totila left Rome for Taginæ, he resolved to pay an old debt of gratitude, and to give a worthy, that is a beautiful, form to an old connection that, until now, had not satisfied the desire for harmony which possessed his soul--his connection with the first hero of his nation, with Teja.

They had been friends from their earliest boyhood. Although Teja was several years older, he had always perceived and honoured the depth of the younger man's nature under the brilliant husk of his joyous temperament. And a common inclination to enthusiasm and idealism, besides a certain pride and magnanimity, had drawn them early together. Later, however, their opposite fates had caused their originally very different natures to deviate more and more.

The sunny brightness of the one seemed to contrast with the austerity of the other with painful brilliancy. And Totila, after repeated and impetuous attempts to dispel the gloom of his silent friend--the cause of which he did not know, and the nature of which he did not understand--had at last, attributing it to a morbid mind, withdrawn to a distance.

The milder, though grave and softer influence of Julius, and his passion for Valeria, gradually estranged Totila from the friend of his boyhood.

But the experience of late years, the sufferings and dangers he had endured since the death of Valerius and Miriam, the burning of Neapolis, the distress of Rome, the crimes committed at Ravenna and Castra Nova, and lately the cares and duties of royalty, had so completely matured the impatient and joyous youth, that he was now able to do full justice to his gloomy friend.

And what had not this friend accomplished since the night when they had sworn brotherhood!

When the others had become paralysed by suffering; when Hildebrand's impatience, Totila's enthusiasm, and the quiet steadfastness of Witichis, even old Hildebrand's icy fortitude, had wavered--Teja had never sighed, but always acted; never hoped, but always dared!

At Regeta, before Rome, after the fall of Ravenna, and again before Rome--what had he not accomplished! What did not the kingdom owe to his efforts! And he would receive no thanks.

When Witichis had offered him the dignity of a duke, gold, and land, he had rejected the offer as an offence.

Lonely, silent, and melancholy, he walked through the streets of Rome, the last shadow in the light of Totila's presence. He stood next to the King's throne, with his black eyes ever lowered to the ground. He stole away without a word from the royal table. He never laid aside his armour or weapons.

Only when in action did he sometimes laugh; when, with contempt of death, or the temerity which courts it, he sprang amid the spears of the Byzantines--then only did he seem to feel at ease, then all his being was life, movement, and fire.

It was known to all the nation--and Totila specially had known it from his boyhood--that this melancholy hero possessed the gift of song.

But since his return from captivity in Greece, no one had ever been able to persuade him to sing one of his glowing and inspiring songs; and yet every one knew that his little triangular harp was his constant companion in war or peace, inseparable as his sword. At the moment of attack he was sometimes heard to sing wild snatches of song to the measure of the Gothic horns. And whoever followed him into the wilderness of white marble and green bushes, among the old Roman ruins, where he was fond of passing his nights, might sometimes hear him play some long-forgotten melody, accompanying it with dreamy words. But if any one--which was seldom the case--ventured to ask what he wanted, he turned silently away.

Once, after the taking of Rome, he replied to a similar question put by Guntharis, by the words, "The head of the Prefect!"

The only person whose company he affected was Adalgoth, to whom he had lately attached himself.

The young shepherd had been raised to the office of herald and cup-bearer to the King, as a reward for his bold act at the storming of the Tiber shore.

He had brought with him, though little schooled, a decided gift for song. Teja was pleased with his genius; and it was reported that he secretly taught him his superior art, though they suited each other as little as night and morning.

"It is just on that account," said Teja, when his brave cousin Aligern once remarked this to him, "something must be left when the night sinks."

The King felt that the only thing that could be offered to this man was in *his* power to offer--neither gold, nor land, nor dignities.

One night King Totila came to where the two bards were sitting. He followed the sounds which, arising at irregular intervals from a grove of cypresses, and interrupted by half-sung, half-spoken words, were borne to his ear by the night wind. Unnoticed and unbetraysed by the soft moonlight, Totila reached the avenue of half-wild laurels and cypresses which led into the centre of the garden.

But now Teja heard the approaching footsteps, and laid aside his harp.

"It is the King," he said; "I recognise his step. What seekest thou here, my King?"

"I seek thee, Teja," answered Totila.

Teja sprang from his seat upon a fallen column.

"Then we must fight!" he exclaimed.

"No," said Totila; "but I deserve this reproach."

He took Teja's hand, and affectionately drew him down to his former seat, placing himself at his side.

"I did not seek thy sword, Teja; I sought thyself. I need thee; not thine arm, but thy heart. No, Adalgoth; do not go. Thou mayst see--and I wish thee to see--how every one must love this proud man, the 'Black Earl.'"

"I knew it," said Adalgoth, "ever since I first saw him. He is like a dark forest, through the branches of whose lofty trees blows a mysterious breach, full of terror and charm."

Teja fixed his large and melancholy eyes upon the King.

"My friend," began Totila, "the gracious God of Heaven has endowed me richly. I have won back a kingdom which was half-lost; shall I not be able to win back the half-lost heart of a friend?"

And it was to this friend's efforts that most of my success was owing; he must now help me to regain my friend. What has estranged thee from me? Forgive me if I, or my good fortune, has offended thee. I know to whom I owe my crown; but I cannot wear it with gladness if only thy sword and not thy heart be mine. We were once friends, Teja; oh! let us be so again, for I miss thee sorely!"

And he would have embraced Teja, but the latter caught both his hands and pressed them to his heart.

"This evening's walk honours thee more than thy victorious march through Italy! The tear which I see glittering in thine eye is worth more than the richest pearl upon thy crown. Forgive thou me; I have been unjust. The gifts of fortune and thy careless joy have not corrupted thy heart. I have never been angered against thee; I have ever loved thee, and it was with sorrow that I saw our paths in life diverge; for, in truth, thou art more congenial to me, nearer than thou ever wert to the brave Witichis, or even to thine own brother."

"Yes," said Adalgoth; "you two complete each other like light and shade."

"Our natures are, indeed, equally emotional and fiery," said the King.

"If Witichis and Hildebad," continued Teja, "went the straight way with a steady pace, we two were borne, by our impatient enthusiasm, as if on wings. And being so congenial, though so different, it pains me that, in thy sunny bliss, thou seemest to think that any one who cannot laugh like thee is a sick fool! Oh, my King and friend! whoever has once experienced certain trials and woes, and conceived certain thoughts, has for ever lost the sweet art of laughter!"

Totila, filled with a deep sense of Teja's worth, answered:

"Whoever has fulfilled life's noblest duties with a heroism equal to thine, my Teja, may be pitied, but not blamed, if he proudly scorns life's light pleasures."

"And thou couldst think that I was envious of thy good fortune or thy cheerful humour? O Totila! it is not with envy, but with deep, deep sadness that I observe thee and thy hopefulness. As a child may excite our sadness who believes that sunshine, spring-time, and life endure for ever; who knows neither night, winter, nor death! Thou trustest that success and happiness will be the reward of the cheerful-hearted; but I for ever hear the flapping of the wings of Fate, who, deaf and merciless to curses, prayers, or thanks, sweeps high above the heads of poor mortals and their futile works."

He ceased, and looked out into the darkness, as if he saw the shadow of the coming future.

"Yes, yes," said the young cup-bearer, "that reminds me of an old adage which Iffa sang in the mountain, and which means something like that; he had learnt it from Uncle Wargs:

"'Good fortune or bad
Is not the world's aim;
That is but vain folly,
Imagined by men.
On the earth is fulfilled
A Will everlasting.
Obedience, defiance--
They serve it alike.'

"But," he continued thoughtfully, "if, with all our exertions, we can never alter the inevitable, why do we move our hands at all? Why do we not wait for what shall come in dull inaction? In what lies the difference between hero and coward?"

"It does not lie in victory, my Adalgoth, but in the kind of strife or endurance! Not justice, but necessity decides the fate of nations. Often enough has the better man, the nobler race, succumbed to the meaner. 'Tis true that generosity and nobility of mind are in themselves a power. But they are not always able to defy other and ignoble powers. Noble-mindedness, generosity, and heroism can always consecrate and glorify a downfall, but not always prevent it. And the only comfort we have is, that it is not *what* we endure, but *how* we endure it, that honours us the most; it is often not the victor, but the conquered hero, who deserves the crown of laurels."

The King looked meditatively at the ground, leaning on his sword.

"How much thou must have suffered, friend," he then said warmly, "before thou couldst embrace such a dark error! Thou hast lost thy God in heaven! For me, that would be worse than to lose the sun in the sky--I should feel as if blinded. I could not breathe if I could not believe in a just God, who looks down from His heavenly throne upon the deeds of men, and makes the good cause to triumph!"

"And King Witichis?" asked Teja; "what evil had he done? that man without spot or blemish! And I myself, and----"

He suddenly became silent.

"Thy life has been a mystery to me since our early youth----"

"Enough for the present," said Teja. "I have this evening revealed more of my inmost heart than in many a long year. The time will surely come when I may unfold to thee my life and my thoughts. I should not like," he continued, turning to Adalgoth, and stroking his shining locks, "to dim too soon the bright harp-strings of the youngest and best singer of our nation."

"As thou wilt," said the King, rising. "To me thy sorrow is sacred. But, I pray thee, let us cherish our refound friendship. To-morrow I go to Taginæ, to my bride. Accompany me--that is, if it does not pain thee to see me happy with a Roman woman."

"Oh no--it touches me--it reminds me of---- I will go with thee!"

CHAPTER II.

Soon after this conversation, the King, Earl Teja, Adalgoth, and a numerous suite, arrived at the small town of Taginæ, above which, on a precipitous and thickly-wooded height, stood the cloister founded by Valerius, in which Valeria still continued to reside.

For her the place had lost all its terrors. She had become used to it, not only physically but morally. Slowly but surely, her reluctant soul was influenced by the grave authority of the sacred precincts.

The King met her in the cloister garden, and it seemed to him that her complexion was much paler, her step slower, than usual.

"What ails you, Valeria?" he asked tenderly. "When our vow seemed past fulfilment, you were still full of hope and courage. Now, when your lover wears the crown of this realm, and the foot of the enemy treads the sacred soil of Italia in scarcely more than one city, will you sink and despair?"

"Not despair, friend," said Valeria gravely, "but renounce. No, no! be patient and hear me. Why do you hide from me what all Italia knows--what your people wish? The King of the Ostrogoths at Toletum has offered you his alliance against Byzantium, and the hand of his daughter. Your people expect and wish you to accept both these offers. I will not be more selfish than was that high-minded daughter of your nation, Rauthgundis, of whom your minstrels already sing. And I know that you are as capable of sacrifice as the simple-minded man who was your unfortunate King."

"I hope that I should be so, if necessary. But happily there is no need of sacrifice. I do not want the help of the Ostrogoth. Look around, or rather, look beyond these convent walls. Never has the kingdom flourished as it does now. Once again I will offer to make peace with the Emperor. If he still refuse, a war will break out such as he has never seen. Ravenna will soon fall. Truly, my power and my courage are not reduced to the point of renunciation! The air of this cloister has at length enervated your steadfast mind. You must leave this place. Choose the most lovely of all Italian cities for your residence. Let us rebuild your father's house in Neapolis."

"No. Leave me here. I have learned to love this quiet place."

"It is the quiet of the grave! And you know well that to renounce you would be to renounce the ideal of my life. You are the living symbol of all my plans; you are to me Italia herself! You must become mine--wholly, irrevocably mine. Goths and Italians shall take their King and Queen for a pattern; they shall become as united and happy as we. No--no objections--no more doubts! Thus I smother them!" and he passionately embraced her.

A few days later Julius Montanus arrived, coming from Genoa and Urbinum.

The King and his retinue went to meet him outside the cloister gates.

The two friends embraced each other tenderly; for some time they were incapable of speaking.

Teja stood near and gravely observed them.

"Sir," whispered Adalgoth, "who is the man with the deep-set eyes? a monk?"

"In his heart he is; but not outwardly."

"Such a young man with such an old look! Dost thou know whom he resembles? That picture in the cloisters on the golden background."

"It is true; he is like that gentle and sorrowful head of the Apostle John."

"Your letter," Julius said to Totila, "found me already resolved to come here."

"You were about to seek me--or Valeria?"

"No, Totila. I came to be examined and accepted by Cassiodorus. Benedict of Nursia, who fills our century with the fame of his miracles, has founded an order which powerfully attracts me."

"Julius, you must not do that! What spirit of flying from the world has seized upon my companions? Valeria, you, and Teja!"

"I fly from nothing," said Julius, "not even from the world."

"How," continued the King, taking his friend by the arm, and leading him towards the cloister, "how come you, in the bloom of your manhood, to think of this moral suicide? Look, there comes Valeria. She must help me to convince you. Ah, if you had ever loved, you would not turn your back upon the world."

Julius smiled, but made no reply. He quietly clasped Valeria's offered hand, and followed her into the cloister, where Cassiodorus came to meet them.

Thanks to the King's eloquence, he was able to induce his friend to promise that he would accompany the aged Cassiodorus to Byzantium in a few days. Julius at first shunned the glitter, the noise, and the wickedness of the Emperor's court, until at last Cassiodorus' example and Totila's persuasions overcame his scruples.

"I think," the King said, "that more pious works can be accomplished in the world than in the cloister. *This* embassy is such a pious work; a work which is to save two nations from the horrors of renewed warfare."

"Certainly," said Julius, "a king and a hero can serve God as well as a monk. I do not blame your manner of service--leave mine to me. It seems to me that in the time in which we live, when an ancient world is sinking amid much terror, and a new one arises amid wild storms; when all the vices of a degenerated heathenism are mixed with the wildness of a barbarous race; when luxury, brute force, and the lusts of the flesh fill East and West, I think it is well done to found a sanctuary apart from the world, where poverty, purity, and humble-mindedness can dwell in peace."

"But to me," said Totila, "it seems that splendour, the happiness of honest love, and cheerful pride, are no sin before the God of Heaven! What thinkest thou of our dispute, friend Teja?"

"It has no meaning for me," answered Teja quietly, "for your God is not my God. But let us not speak of that, for here comes Valeria."

CHAPTER III.

One evening, the same on which Adalgoth had arrived with the King at Taginal, Gotho, the shepherdess, stood in the sunset light upon the southern declivity of the Iffinger, leaning upon her staff.

Round her gambolled and grazed her flock of sheep and lambs, and gradually gathered close round their mistress, eagerly expecting to be led to the sheepfold.

But they waited and bleated in vain, for the pretty maiden bent over the mossy stones on the edge of the clear mountain brook. Heaped up in her leather apron lay the lovely scented flowers of the mountain: thyme, wild-rose, mint--which grew on the moist edges of the brook--and the dark blue enzian.

Gotho murmured and spoke to herself, to the flowers, and to the running stream, throwing the flowers into the water, sometimes singly, sometimes in little sprays or unfinished wreaths.

"How many," said the girl, as she tossed her thick yellow braids over her shoulder, "how many of you have I sent away to greet him! For he has gone to the south, and the water runs there too. But I know not if you give my greeting, for he has never yet come home. But you, as you rise and sink in the dance of the ripples, you beckon me to follow you. Ah! if I could! or follow the little fish which dart down the stream like dark arrows! Or the swift mountain swallows that skim through the air as free as thought! Or the rosy-winged evening clouds, when the mountain wind drives them southwards! But most surely of all would the heart of the seeker herself find him, could she but leave the mountain, and follow him to the distant and sunny land. But what should I do down there? A shepherdess amongst the warriors or the wise court-ladies! And I shall certainly see him again, as surely as I shall again see the sun, although it sinks behind yonder mountains. It is sure to come again, and yet! all the time between its parting ray and its morning greeting is filled with longing!"

From the house there suddenly sounded a far-reaching tone, a blast upon the twisted ram's horn. Gotho looked up; it had become darker; she could see the red fire upon the hearth glimmer through the open door. The sheep answered the well-known sound with louder bleatings,

stretching their necks in the direction of the house and the stalls. The brown and shaggy sheep-dog sprang upon Gotho, as if to remind her that it was time to go home.

"I will go directly," she said, smiling, and stroking the dog's head. "Ah! the sheep are sooner tired of their pasture than the shepherdess of her thoughts! Now, forwards, White Elf, thou art already become a great fat sheep!"

She went down the hill towards the little hollow between two mountain summits, where the house and stalls found protection from the wind and the avalanches. There the last rays of the sun dazzled her no more. The stars were already visible. Gotho looked up at the sky.

"They are so beautiful, because *he* has looked at them so often!"

A shooting-star fell to the south.

"He calls me! Thither!" cried Gotho, slightly trembling.

She now drove the sheep more quickly forward, and presently shut them into their cot, and entered the large and only chamber of the ground-floor of the dwelling-house.

There she found her grandfather stretched upon the raised stone placed close to the hearth; his feet covered with two large sheep-skins.

He looked paler and older than usual.

"Seat thyself beside me, Gotho," he said, "and drink; here is milk mixed with honey. Listen to me. The time is come of which I have often spoken. We must part. I am going home. Thy dear face is indistinct; my tired old eyes can no longer distinguish thy features. And yesterday when I tried to go down to the spring, my knees failed me. Then I felt that the end was near, and I sent the goat-herd over to Teriolis with a message. But thou shalt not be present when his soul flies out of old Iffa's mouth. The death of a man is not lovely to behold--especially death upon the straw-bed. And thou hast never yet seen anything sorrowful. This shadow shall not fall upon thy young life. To-morrow, before cockcrow, brave Hunibad will come over from Teriolis to fetch thee--he has promised me to do so. His wounds are not yet healed; he is yet weak; but he says that he cannot remain idle when, as they say, the war will be sure to break out again. He wishes to go to King Totila in Rome. And there too thou must go with an important message. He shall be thy guide and protector. Bind thick soles of beech-rind under thy feet, for the way is long. Brun, the dog, may accompany thee. Take that bag of goat's leather; in it are six gold pieces which belonged to--to Adalgoth's--to your father; they are Adalgoth's--but thou mayst use them--they will last till thou reachest Rome. And take a bundle of scented mountain hay from the meadows of the Iffinger, and lay thy head upon it at night; then thou wilt sleep more soundly. And when thou reachest Rome and the golden palace of the King, and enterest the hall, observe which of the men wears a golden circlet upon his brow, and from whose countenance shines a light like that of the morning--that will be King Totila. Then bow thy head before him--but not too much--and do not bend thy knee; for thou art a free Goth's free child. Thou must give the King this roll, which I have carefully kept for many summers. It comes from Uncle Wargs, who was buried by the mountain."

The old man lifted a brick from the masonry which separated the hearth from the floor of stamped clay, and took from a hole a roll of papyrus, which, tied and sealed, was folded in a piece of parchment covered with writing and fastened with strange seals.

"Here," he said, "take the greatest care of this writing. That upon the parchment cover I myself dictated to Hermegisel over in Majæ. He swore to keep it secret, and he has kept his oath. And now he can speak no more from out of his grave in the church. And thou and Hunibad--you cannot read. That is a good thing, for it might be dangerous for thee and--and another--if any one knew what that roll contains before Totila, the mild and just King, has read it. Above all, hide it carefully from the Italians. And in every town to which thou comest, ask if there dwells Cornelius Cethegus Cæsarius, the Prefect of Rome. And if the door-keepers say aye, then turn upon thy heel, however tired thou mayst be, and however late the night, or hot the day, and wander on until thou hast put three several waters between thee and the man Cethegus. And no less carefully than the writing--thou seest that I have put rosin, such as drops from the fir-trees, upon it instead of wax, and I have scratched our house-mark upon the seal, the mark that our cattle and wagons bear--not less carefully keep this old and costly gold."

And he took from the hole the half of a broad gold bracelet, such as the Gothic heroes wore upon their naked arms. He kissed the bracelet and the imperfect Runic inscription upon it reverently.

"This came from Theodoric, the great King, and from him--my dear--son Wargs. Mark--it belongs to Adalgoth. It is his most valuable inheritance. The other half of the bracelet--and the half of the inscription--I gave to the boy when I sent him away. When King Totila has read the writing, and if Adalgoth is present--as he must be if he obeys my orders--then call Adalgoth and put half-ring to half-ring, and ask the King to pronounce a judgment. He is said to be mild and wise and clear as the light of day. He will judge righteously. If not he, then no one. Now kiss my darkening eyes, and go and sleep. May the Lord of heaven and all his clear eyes, sun, moon, and stars, shine upon all thy ways. When thou hast found Adalgoth, and when thou dwellest with him

in the little rooms of the close houses in the narrow streets of the city, and when it feels too small and close and narrow down there--then both of you think of your childish days up here upon the high Iffinger, and once again the fresh mountain air will seem to blow across your heated brows."

Silently, without objection, without fear, without a question, the shepherd-girl listened and obeyed.

"Farewell, grandfather!" she said, kissing him upon his eyes; "I thank thee for much love and faithfulness."

But she did not weep.

She knew not what death was.

She went away from him to the threshold of the door, and looked out at the mountain landscape, which now appeared dark and melancholy. The sky was clear, the summits of the mountains shone in the moonlight.

"Farewell!" said Gotho; "farewell, thou Iffinger! and thou, Wolf's-head! and thou, old Giant! and thou, running below, bright-shining Passara! Do you know it already? To-morrow I leave you all. But I go willingly, for I go to *him!*"

CHAPTER IV.

After the lapse of many weeks, Cassiodorus and Julius returned from Byzantium, bringing--no peace.

On landing, Cassiodorus, weary of the world and its ways, retired at once to Brundisium, to his Apulian cloister, leaving Julius to report their ill-success to the King in Rome.

Totila received his friend in the Capitol, in the presence of the leaders of the army.

"At first," related Julius, "our prospects were sufficiently favourable. The Emperor, who had formerly refused to receive the ambassadors of Witichis, could not shut his palace doors in the face of the most learned man of the West, the pious and wise Cassiodorus. We were received with kindness and respect. In the council held by the Emperor, men of distinction, such as Tribonianus and Procopius, raised their voices in favour of peace. The Emperor himself seemed inclined thereto. His two great generals, Narses and Belisarius, were fighting, at different points of the south-eastern frontier of the Empire, against Persians and Saracens; and the campaign in Italy and Dalmatia had demanded such great sacrifices, and had lasted so long, that war with the Goths had become hateful to the Emperor. It was indeed not likely that he would entirely renounce the hope of reconquering Italy, but he saw the impossibility of doing so at present. He therefore willingly entered into negotiations of peace, and accepted our proposals for further consideration. His first thought was, as he told us, to bring about a provisional division of the peninsula; the far larger portion of the country, to the south of the Padus, to belong to the Emperor, the northern half to the Goths. One day at noon, we had left the Emperor's presence with great hopes; the audience had turned out more favourably than all former ones. But in the evening of the same day we were surprised by the arrival of the Curo-palata Marcellus, accompanied by slaves carrying the gifts which it is customary to present to parting guests--a not-to-be-mistaken sign that all negotiations were broken off. Confounded at this sudden change, Cassiodorus decided, for the sake of his work of peace, to dare the utmost--namely, to seek an audience of the Emperor after the presentation of the parting gifts. Tribonianus, who had always opposed the war, and who highly esteemed Cassiodorus, allowed himself to be prevailed upon to sue for this extraordinary grace. The answer came in a very ungracious threat of banishment should he ever again venture to petition for anything against the clearly-expressed will of the Emperor, Never, never would the Emperor conclude peace with the barbarians, until they had entirely evacuated the kingdom. Never would he look upon the Goths in Italy as anything but enemies. In vain we tried," Julius continued, "to discover the cause of this sudden change. We only learned that, after our last audience, the Empress, who is said to be often suffering, had invited her husband to dinner in her apartments. But it is certain that the Empress, formerly known to be the most zealous advocate of war, has lately given her voice in favour of peace."

"And what," asked the King, who had listened quietly, and with an expression of countenance more threatening than anxious--"what has procured me the honour of such a change of sentiment in the circus-girl?"

"It is whispered that, becoming more and more anxious for the salvation of her soul, the Empress desires to use all pecuniary means--not for a war, the end of which she scarcely expects to outlive--but upon the erection of churches, and especially for the completion of the church of St. Sophia. It is said that she wishes to be buried with the plan of this church imprinted upon her bosom."

"No doubt as a shield against the anger of the Almighty, at the resurrection of the dead! The woman thinks to disarm her God with her hundred churches, and to bribe Him with the sums

expended. What madness this belief engenders!" murmured Teja.

"We could discover nothing," repeated Julius; "for I cannot think the shadow of suspicion which crossed my mind, perhaps the shadow of a mistake, of any moment."

"What was that?" inquired Totila.

"That evening, as I left the palace at a late hour, thinking over Tribonianus's unfavourable report, the golden litter of the Empress was carried past me by her Cappadocian slaves from the quadrangle of the garden where stands the Empress's palace. The trellised shutter was lifted a little by the inmate of the litter--I looked up--and it seemed to me as if I recognised----"

"Well?" asked the King.

"My unhappy protector, the vanished Cethegus," concluded Julius sadly.

"That can scarcely be," said the King. "He fell when Rome was taken. It was surely a mistake when Teja thought he heard his voice in his house."

"I mistake that voice!" cried Teja. "And what meant his sword, which Adalgoth found at the corner of the street?"

"He may have lost it earlier, when he hurried to the Tiber from his house. I distinctly saw him conduct the defence of the chain from his boat. He hurled his spear at me with all the force and steadiness lent by intense hatred. And I struck him, I am sure, when I cast the spear back again. And Gunthamund, that excellent shot, told me that he was certain that he wounded the Prefect in the neck. His mantle with the purple hem was found by the river, pierced by many arrows and covered with blood."

"No doubt he died there," Julius said, very gravely.

"Are you such good Christians, and do not know that demons are immortal?" asked Teja.

"They may be," said the King, "but so are angels!" and, with a frown on his brow, he continued: "Up, my brave Teja! now there is new work for thy sword. Hear it, Duke Guntharis, Wisand, Grippa, Markja, Thorismuth, and Aligern--I shall soon have enough to do for you all. You have heard that Emperor Justinian refuses to make peace, and will not leave us in quiet possession of Italy. It is evident that he considers us inclined to peace at any cost. He thinks it can never hurt him to have us for enemies; that in the worst case we shall quietly await his attack in Italy; that Byzantium will always be able to choose the moment, repeating it until successful. Well--we will show him that we can become dangerous! That it might be wiser to leave us Italy, and not irritate us! He will not let us enjoy our kingdom? Then, as in the days of Alaric and Theodoric, he shall again see the Goths in his own country! At present only this--for secrecy is the mother of victory--we will reach the heart of the Eastern Empire as we once reached Rome--on canvas wings and wooden bridges.--Now, Justinianus, protect thine own hearth-stone!"

CHAPTER V.

Soon after the Emperor's refusal of the proposals of the Goths had arrived in Rome, we find--in the dining-room of a simple but tastefully-built and furnished house upon the Forum Strategii at Byzantium, which, close to the incomparable shore of the Golden Horn, affords a view of the Straits and of the splendid suburb "Justiniana"--two men engaged in confidential talk.

The master of the house was our old--and, we hope, not unloved--acquaintance Procopius, who now lived much respected as a senator in Byzantium.

He zealously attended to the wants of his guest, but in doing so used his left hand. His right arm ended in a covered stump.

"Yes," he was saying, "at every moment I am reminded by my missing hand of a folly. I do not, however, repent it. I should do the same thing again even if it cost me my eyesight. It was a folly of the heart, and to be capable of that is the greatest happiness. I have never been able really to love a woman. My only love was and is--Belisarius! I know very well--you need not draw down the corners of your mouth so contemptuously, friend--I see very clearly the weaknesses and imperfections of my hero. But that is exactly what is sweet in a heart-folly--to love the foibles of your idol more than the merits of other people. And so--to cut my story short--it was during the last Persian war that, one day, I warned the lion-hearted general not to ride through a dangerous wood with a scanty escort. Of course he did it all the more, the dear fool; and of course Procopius, the wise fool, rode with him. All happened just as I had expected. The whole wood was suddenly filled with Persians. It seemed as if the wind had shaken the withered leaves from the trees, and every leaf was an axe or a spear. It was very like the ambush before the Tiburtinian Gate. Balan, the faithful piebald, bore his master for the last time. Stuck full of spears, he fell dead to the ground. I assisted the hero to mount my own horse. But a Persian prince, who was almost as tall as his name was long--the pleasant fellow was called Adrastaransalanes--aimed a

blow at the magister militum which, in my hurry, I received upon my right arm--for my shield was occupied in protecting Belisarius against a Saracen. The blow was well meant; if it had reached my hero's helmless head, it would have cracked it like a nutshell. As it was, it only cut off my fore-arm as if it had never been part of my body."

"Of course Belisarius escaped, and of course Procopius was taken prisoner," said the guest, shaking his head.

"Quite right, you commander of perspicacity, as my friend Adrastaransalanes would call you. But the same man with his long body, scimitar, and name--you will not insist upon my repeating it--was so moved by my 'elephantine magnanimity,' as he expressed himself, that he very soon set me free without ransom. He only begged for a ring which had been on the finger of my former right hand: as a remembrance, he said. Since then it is all over with my campaigns," added Procopius more gravely. "But in this loss of my pen-hand I see a punishment. I have written with it many a useless or not perfectly sincere word. However, if a like punishment overtook all the writers of Byzantium, there would soon be not a two-handed man left who could write. Writing is now a much slower and more difficult process with me. But that is good, for then, at every word one considers whether it is worth the trouble of inscribing or whether one is justified in doing so."

"I have read with true enjoyment," said the guest, "your 'Vandal Wars,' your 'Persian Wars,' and, as far as it goes, the 'Gothic War.' When recovering from my hurt, it was my favourite book. But I am surprised that you were not sent to the Ult-ziagirian Huns and the mines of Cherson to keep our friend Petros company. If Justinian so severely punishes the forgery of documents--how harshly must he punish veracity in history! And you have so mercilessly scourged his indecision, his avarice, his mistakes in the choice of generals and officers--I wonder that you go unpunished."

"Oh, I have not escaped punishment," said the historian gravely. "He left me my head: but he tried to rob me of my honour; and *she* still more, the beautiful demon. For I had hinted that Justinian was tied to her apron-string. And she as passionately tries to hide her dominion as to uphold it. When my book was published, she called me to her. When I entered her apartment, and saw those pages upon her lap, I thought--Adrastaransalanes took off the hand that wrote; this woman will take off the head that thought. But she contented herself with giving me her little golden shoe to kiss; smiled very sweetly, and said, 'You write Greek better than any other author of our day, Procopius. So beautifully and so truly! I have been advised to sink you to the dumb fishes in the Bosphorus. But the man who so well told the truth when it was bitter to us, will also tell the truth when it is sweet to our ears. The greatest censurer of Justinian shall be his greatest panegyrist. Your punishment for the book upon Justinian's warlike deeds--shall be a book upon Justinian's peaceful deeds. You will write by the imperial order a book upon the edifices erected by the Emperor. You cannot deny that he has done great things in that line. If you were a better jurist than your camp-life with the great Belisarius has, unfortunately, allowed you to become--you should describe the Emperor's great piece of mosaic--his pandects. But for that your legal education is not complete enough' (and she was right!). 'Therefore you will describe the edifices of Justinian; and you yourself will be a living monument of his generosity. For you must confess that, for far less heinous offences, many an author under former Emperors has lost eyes, nose, and other things that it is disagreeable to miss. No Emperor has ever allowed such things to be said of him, and, moreover, rewarded candour with new commissions. But if the edifices of Justinian were to displease you, then indeed I fear you would not long outlive your want of taste--the gods would punish such ingratitude with a speedy death. See, I have procured this reward for you--for Justinian would have made you senator--so that you may be right in your assertion that Theodora possesses a pernicious and all-commanding influence!' Another kiss of her foot; of which she took advantage playfully to strike me on the mouth with her shoe. I had made my will before going to this audience. You now see how this demon in a woman's form revenges herself upon me! One really cannot censure the edifices erected by Justinian: one can only be silent--or praise them. If I remain silent, it will cost me my life. If I speak and do not praise, it will cost my life and my veracity. Therefore I must either praise or die. And I am weak enough," concluded Procopius with a sigh, "to prefer to praise and live."

"You have consumed so much Thucydides and Tacitus, dry or liquid," said the guest, filling the glasses, "and yet have become neither a Thucydides nor a Tacitus!"

"I would rather let my long-named friend cut off my left hand also than write about these buildings."

"Keep your hand. But, after the public panegyric on the buildings, write a secret history of the shameful deeds of Justinian and Theodora."

Procopius sprang from his seat.

"That would be devilish, but grand! The advice is worthy of you, friend. For that you shall have one of the nine muses of Herodotus from my cellar--my oldest, dearest, most excellent wine. Oh! this secret history shall excite astonishment! The only pity is that I cannot relate the most filthy and most murderous deeds. I should die of disgust. And that which I can write will be always looked upon as immensely exaggerated. And what will posterity say of Procopius, who left a panegyric, a criticism, and an accusation--one and all on Justinian?"

"Posterity will say that he was the greatest historian, but also the son and the victim, of the Empire of Byzantium. Revenge yourself; she has left you your clever head and your left hand. Well, your left hand need not know what your right hand formerly wrote. Draw the picture of this Empress and her husband for all future generations. Then *they* will not have conquered with their buildings, but *you* with your secret history. They would have punished limited candour; you will punish them by an unlimited revelation of the truth. Every one revenges himself with his own weapons--the bull with his horns, the warrior with his sword, the author by his pen."

"Particularly," said Procopius, "when he has only his left hand. I thank you, and will follow your advice, Cethegus. I will write the 'Secret History' in revenge for the 'Edifices.' But now it is your turn to tell your story. I know the progress of events, through letters and the report of fugitives from Rome, or legionaries set free by Totila, until the time when you were last seen in your house, or, as they say, were last heard. Now relate what happened afterwards, you Prefect without a city!"

"Immediately," said Cethegus. "But tell me first, how did Belisarius succeed in the last Persian war?"

"As usual. You should not need to ask such a question! He had really beaten the enemy, and was on the point of forcing the Persian King, Chosroes, the son of Kabadès, to conclude a lasting peace. Just then Areobindos, the Prince of Purple Snails, appeared in the camp with the announcement of an armistice of half a year's duration, granted, unknown to Belisarius, by Byzantium. Justinian had long ago entered into secret negotiations with Chosroes; he needed money; he again pretended to mistrust Belisarius, and let the Persian King escape for a hundred tons of gold, just as we were about to draw the net over him. Narses was wiser. When the Prince of Purple Snails came to him, on the Saracen side of the scene of war, he declared that the ambassador must be either a forger or a madman, took him prisoner, and continued the war until he had completely vanquished the Saracens. Then he sent the imperial ambassador back with an excuse to Byzantium. But the best excuse was the keys and treasures of seventy forts and towns which he had wrested from the enemy during the armistice, which Belisarius had respected."

"This Narses is----"

"The greatest man of our time," said Procopius, "the Prefect of Rome not excepted; for he does not, like the latter, wish for impossibilities. But we--that is, Belisarius and the cripple Procopius--always growling and grumbling, yet always as faithful as a poodle-dog, and never taught by experience, kept the armistice, gnashed our teeth, and returned to Byzantium. And now we wait for new commissions, laurels, and kicks. Fortunately, Antonina has renounced her inclination for the flowers and verses of other men, and so the couple--the lion and the dove--live very happily together here in Byzantium. Belisarius, day and night, naturally thinks of nothing but how he can again prove his heroism and devotion to his imperial master. Justinian is his folly, as Belisarius is mine. But now for your story."

CHAPTER VI.

Cethegus took a deep draught from the cup which stood before him, which was made of chased gold and shaped like a tower.

He was considerably changed since that last night in Rome. The wrinkles on his temples were more sharply defined; his lip more firmly closed; his under-lip protruded still farther than before; and the ironical smile, which used to make him look younger and handsomer, very rarely played round the corners of his mouth. His eyes were generally half shut; only sometimes did he raise the lids to dart a glance, which, always dreaded by those upon whom it fell, now appeared more cruel and piercing than ever.

He seemed to have become, not older, but harsher, more inexorable, and more merciless.

"You know," he began, "all that happened until the fall of Rome. In one night I lost the city, the Capitol, my house, and my Cæsar! The crash of the fall of that image pained me more than the arrows of the Goths, or even of the Romans. As I was about to punish the destroyer of my Cæsar, my senses forsook me. I fell at the foot of the statue of Jupiter. I was restored to my senses by the cool breeze that blows over the Tiber, and which once before, twenty years ago, had restored a wounded man."

He paused.

"Of that another time, perhaps--perhaps never," he said, hastily cutting short a question from his host. "This time Lucius Licinius--his brother died for Rome and for me--and the faithful Moor, who had escaped the Black Earl as if by miracle, saved my life. Cast out of the front entrance by Teja--who, in his eagerness to murder the master, had no time to murder the slave--Syphax hurried to the back-door. There he met Lucius Licinius, who had only just then reached my house by a side-street. Together they followed the trace of my blood to the hall of the Jupiter. There they found me senseless, and had just time to lower me from the window, like a piece of baggage, into the court. Syphax jumped down and received me from the hands of the tribune, who then

quickly followed, and they hurried with me to the river.

"There very few people were to be seen, for all the Goths and friendly Romans had followed the King to the Capitol to help to extinguish the flames. Totila had expressly ordered--I hope to his destruction!--that all non-combatants should be spared and left unmolested. So my bearers were allowed to pass everywhere. It was thought that they carried a dead man. And they themselves, for some time, thought so too. In the river they found an empty fishing-boat full of nets. They laid me in it. Syphax threw my bloody mantle, with the purple hem of the 'princeps senatus,' upon the shore, in order to mislead my enemies. They covered me with sail-cloth and nets, and rowed down the river, through the still burning boats. When we had passed them, I came to myself. Syphax bathed my face with the water of the Tiber. My first glance fell on the still burning Capitol. They told me that my first exclamation was, 'Turn back! the Capitol!' And they were obliged to keep me quiet by force. My first clear thought was naturally: 'To return; to take revenge; to re-conquer Rome.' In the harbour of Portus we met with an Italian ship laden with grain. There were seven rowers in it. My companions approached it to beg for wine and bread, for they also were wounded and exhausted. The rowers recognised me. One of them wanted to take me prisoner and deliver me up to the Goths, sure of a rich reward. But the other six had served under me at the Mausoleum. I had nourished them for years. They slew the man who wanted to betray me, and promised Lucius that they would save me if it were possible. They hid me in heaps of grain while we passed the Gothic guardships which watched at the entrance of the harbour, Lucius and Syphax put on the dress of sailors, and rowed with the others. Thus we escaped. But while on board this vessel I was dangerously ill from my wounds. Only the ceaseless care of Syphax and the sea-air saved me. For days, they say, I only reiterated the words, 'Rome, Capitol, Cæsar!' When we landed at Panormus, in Sicily, under the protection of the Byzantines, I rapidly recovered. My old friend Cyprianus, who had admitted me into Theodoric's palace when I was made Prefect, received me at Panormus as captain of the harbour. Scarcely recovered, I went to Asia Minor--or, as you say, Asiana--to my estates; you know that I had splendid possessions at Sardes, Philadelphia, and Tralles----"

"You have them no longer--the columned villas?"

"I sold them all, for I was obliged at once to find the means of engaging fresh mercenaries, in order to liberate Rome and Italy."

"Tenax propositi!" cried Procopius, amazed. "You have not, even now, given up hope?"

"Can I give up myself? I have sent Licinius to enlist a wild and savage race, the Longobardians."

"God protect your Italy if *they* ever set foot in it."

"I have also succeeded in winning the Empress to my cause, and by her means the propositions of peace made by Cassiodorus were refused at the last moment. For Rome must be freed from the barbarians! But when shall I find means to move this lazy colossus, Justinian? When will fate call me to my battle-field--Italia?"

At this moment Syphax entered the room. He brought Cethegus a message from the Empress. It ran:

"To the Jupiter of the Capitol. Do not leave your house to-morrow until I call you.--Theodora."

On the next day the Emperor Justinian was standing buried in deep reflection before the tall golden crucifix in his room. The expression of his face was very grave, but without a trace of alarm or doubt. Quiet decision lay upon his features, which, else not handsome or noble, at this moment betrayed mental power and superiority. He lifted his eyes almost threateningly to the crucifix.

"God of the Cross," he said, "Thou puttest Thy faithful servant to a hard proof! It seems to me that I have deserved better. Thou knowest all that I have done to the honour of Thy name! Why do not Thy strokes fall upon Thine enemies, the heathens and barbarians? Why not?"

He was interrupted in his soliloquy by the entrance of the chamberlains and wardrobe-keepers.

Justinian exchanged his morning garment for the robes of state. His slaves served him upon their knees.

He apparelled himself in a tunic of white silk, reaching to the knees, embroidered with gold on both sides, and confined by a purple girdle. The tightly-fitting hose were also of silk of the same colour. His slaves threw over his shoulders a splendid mantle of a lighter shade of purple, with a broad hem of gold thread, upon which red circles and symbolic animal-forms, embroidered in green silk, alternated with each other. But the pearls and precious stones which were lavishly strewn over it, rendered the design almost invisible, and made the mantle so heavy, that the assistance of the train-bearer must have been indeed a welcome relief.

On each of his arms the Emperor wore three broad golden bracelets. The wide crown was made of massive gold, arched over with two rows of pearls. His mantle was fastened on the shoulder with a costly brooch of large precious stones.

The sceptre-keeper put into the Emperor's hand a golden staff the length of a man, at the top of which was a globe made out of a single large emerald, and surmounted with a golden cross.

The Emperor grasped it firmly and rose from his seat.

A slave offered him the thick-soled buskins which he usually wore, in order to increase his height.

"No; to-day I need no buskins," said Justinian, and left the room.

Down the Stairs of the Lions, so called from the twenty-four immense marble lions which guarded the twelve steps, and which had been brought from Carthage by Belisarius, the Emperor descended to a lower story, and entered the Hall of Jerusalem.

This hall derived its name from the porphyry columns, the onyx vases, the golden tables and the numerous golden vessels which, arranged on pedestals and along the walls, were said to have formerly decorated the Temple of Jerusalem. These treasures had been taken to Rome by Titus, after the destruction of Jerusalem. From Rome the Sea-king Geiseric had taken them on his dragon-ships, together with the Empress Eudoxia, to his capital, Carthage. And now Belisarius had brought them from Carthage to the Emperor of the East.

The cupola of the hall, representing the firmament, was wrought in mosaic. Costly blue stones formed the ground-work, in which was inlaid, besides the sun, the moon, the eye of God, the lamb, the fish, the birds, the palm, the vine, the unicorn, and many other symbols of Christianity, the whole zodiac and innumerable stars of massive gold.

The cost of the cupola alone was estimated as high as the whole income of the taxes on property in all the Empire for forty-five years.

Opposite the three great arches of the entrance, which were closed by curtains--it was the only entrance to the hall--and were guarded outside by a threefold line of imperial body-guards--the "Golden Shields"--stood, at the bottom of the semicircular hall, the elevated throne of the Emperor, and below it on the left the seat of the Empress.

When Justinian entered the hall with a numerous retinue of palace officials, all the assembly, consisting of the highest dignitaries of the realm, threw themselves upon their faces in humble prostration.

The Empress also rose, bowed deeply, and crossed her arms upon her bosom. Her dress was exactly similar to that of her husband. Her white stola was also covered by a purple mantle, but without hem. She carried a very short sceptre of ivory.

The Emperor cast a slight but contemptuous glance at the patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, patricians and senators, who, above thirty in number, occupied a row of gilded chairs set in a semicircle and provided with cushions. He then passed through the middle of the hall and ascended his throne with a quick firm step. Twelve of the chief officers of the palace stood upon the steps of the two thrones, holding white wands in their hands. A blast of trumpets gave the signal to the kneeling assembly to rise.

"Reverend bishops and worthy senators," began the Emperor, "we have called you together, to ask your advice in an affair of great moment. But why is our Magister Militum per Orientum, Narses, absent?"

"He returned only yesterday from Persia--he is sick and confined to bed," answered the usher.

"Where is our treasurer of the Sacri Palatii, Trebonianus?"

"He has not yet returned from his embassy to Berytus about the code."

"Where is Belisarius, our Magister Militum per Orientum extra Ordinem?"

"He does not reside in Byzantium, but in Asia, in the Red House at Sycæ."

"He keeps too far apart in the Red House. It displeases us. Why does he avoid our presence?"

"He could not be found."

"Not even in the house of his freedman, Photius?"

"He has gone hunting to try the Persian hunting-leopards," said Leo, the assistant-huntsman.

"He is never to be found when wanted, and is always present when not wanted. I am not content with Belisarius.--Hear now what has lately been communicated to me by letter; afterwards you shall hear the report of the envoys themselves. You know that we have allowed

the war in Italy to die away--for we had other occupation for our generals. You know that the barbarian King sued for peace and the quiet possession of Italy. We rejected it at that time; awaiting more convenient circumstances. The Goth has answered, not in words, but by very insolent deeds. No one in Byzantium knows of it--we kept the news to ourselves, thinking it impossible, or at least exaggerated. But we find that it is true; and now you shall hear it and advise upon it. The barbarian King has sent a fleet and an army to Dalmatia with great haste and secrecy. The fleet entered the harbour of Muicurum near Salona; the army landed and carried the fortress by storm. In a similar way the fleet surprised the coast-town of Laureata. Claudianus, our governor at Salona, sent numerous and strongly-manned vessels to retake the town from the Goths. But a naval combat took place, and the Goth, Duke Guntharis, beat our Squadron so thoroughly that he made prizes of all the vessels without exception, and carried them victoriously into the harbour of Laureata. Further, the Gothic King equipped a second fleet of four hundred large ships at Centumcellæ. It was formed for the most part of Byzantine vessels, which, sent from the East to Sicily to reinforce Belisarius, in ignorance that the Italian harbours were again in possession of the Goths, had been taken by a Gothic earl, Grippa, with all their crews and freights. The goal of this second fleet was unknown. But suddenly the barbarian King himself appeared with the fleet before Regium, the fortress in the extreme southern part of Bruttia, which place we had won on our first landing in Italy, and had not since lost. After a brave resistance, the garrison of Herulians and Massagetæ were forced to capitulate. But the tyrant Totila sailed immediately to Sicily, to wrest from us that earliest of Belisarius's conquests. He beat the Roman governor Domnentiolus, who met him in the open field, and in a short time took possession of the whole island, with the exception of Messana, Panormus and Syracusæ, which were enabled to hold out by reason of their formidable fortifications. A fleet which I sent to attempt the reconquest of Sicily was dispersed by a storm. A second was driven by the north-west wind to the Peloponnesus. At the same time a third fleet of triremes, equipped by this indefatigable King and commanded by Earl Haduswinth, sailed for Corsica and Sardinia. The first of these islands presently fell to the Goths, after the imperial garrison of the capital city of Alexia had been beaten before the walls. The rich Corsican Furius Ahalla, to whom the greater part of the island belongs, was absent in India. But his stewards and tenants had been ordered, in case of a landing of the Goths, in nowise to oppose them, but to aid them to the best of their power. From Corsica the barbarians turned to Sardinia. Here, near Karalis, they beat the troops which our magister militum had sent from Africa to conquer the island, and took Karalis as well as Sulci, Castra Trajani and Turre. The Goths then settled down in both islands and treated them as permanently-acquired dependencies of the Gothic kingdom, placing Gothic commanders in all the towns, and raising taxes according to Gothic law. Strange to say, these taxes are far less heavy than ours, and the inhabitants shamelessly declare that they would rather pay the barbarians fifty than ninety to us. But all this was not enough. Sailing to the north-east from Sicily, the tyrant Totila united his squadron with a fourth fleet, under Earl Teja, off Hydrus. Part of this united fleet, under Earl Thorismuth, sailed to Corcyra, took possession of that island, and thence conquered all the surrounding islands. But not yet enough. The tyrant Totila and Earl Teja already attack the mainland of our Empire."

A murmur of terror interrupted the august speaker.

Justinian resumed in an angry voice:

"They have landed in the harbour of Epirus vetus, carried the towns Nicopolis and Anchisus, south-west of the ancient Dodona, and taken a great many of our ships along the coast. All this may excite your indignation against the insolence of these barbarians; but you have now to hear what will move you in a different way. Briefly, according to reports which reached me yesterday, it is certain that the Goths are in full march upon Byzantium itself!"

At this some of the senators sprang to their feet.

"They intend a double attack. Their united fleet, commanded by Duke Guntharis, Earls Markja, Grippa, and Thorismuth, has beaten, in a combat of two days' duration, the fleet which protected our island provinces, and has driven it into the straits of Sestos and Abydos. Their army, under Totila and Teja, is marching across Thessaly by way of Dodona against Macedonia. Thessalonica is already threatened. Earl Teja has razed to the ground the 'New Wall' which we had there erected. The road to Byzantium is open. And no army stands between us and the barbarians. All our troops are on the Persian frontier. And now listen to what the Goth proposes. Fortunately God has befooled and blinded him to our weakness. He again offers us peace under the former conditions, with the one exception that he now intends to keep possession of Sicily. But he will evacuate all his other conquests if we will acknowledge his rule in Italy. As I had no means, neither fleets nor cohorts, to stop his victorious course, I have, for the present, demanded an armistice. This he has agreed to, on condition that afterwards peace is to be concluded on the former conditions. I have agreed to this----"

And, pausing, the Emperor cast a searching glance at the assembly, and looked askance at the Empress.

The assembly was evidently relieved. The Empress closed her eyes in order to conceal their expression. Her small hand grasped convulsively the arm of her throne.

"But I agreed to it with the reservation that I should first hear the opinion of my wife, who has lately been an advocate for peace, and that also of my wise senate. I added that I myself was

inclined to peace."

All present looked more at ease.

"And I believed that I could tell beforehand what would be the decision of my counsellors. Upon this understanding, the horsemen of Earl Teja unwillingly halted at Thessalonica; unfortunately they had already taken prisoner the bishop of that city. But they have sent him here with other prisoners, carrying messages and letters--you shall hear them and then decide. Reflect that if we refuse to conclude a peace, the barbarians will soon stand before our gates, and that we are only asked to yield that which the Empire has given up long ago, and which Belisarius in two campaigns failed to reconquer--Italia! Let the envoys approach."

Through the arches of the entrance the body-guard now led in several men, in clerical, official, and military costume. Trembling and sighing, they threw themselves at the feet of Justinian. Even tears were not wanting.

At a sign from the Emperor they rose again, and stood before the steps of the throne.

"Your petitions and lamentations," said the Emperor, "I received yesterday. Protonotary, now read to us the letter from the Bishop of Nicopolis and the wounded Governor of Illyricum--since then the latter has succumbed to his wounds."

The protonotary read:

"To Justinianus, the unconquerable Emperor of the Romani, Dorotheos, Bishop of Nicopolis, and Nazares, Governor of Illyricum. The place whence we write these words will be the best proof of their gravity. We write on board the royal barge of the Gothic King, the *Italia*. When you read these words, you will have already learned the defeat of the fleet, the loss of the islands, the storming of the 'New Wall,' and the destruction of the army of Illyricum. Quicker than the messengers and the fugitives from these battles, have the Gothic pursuers reached us. The Gothic King has conquered and spared Nicopolis. Earl Teja has conquered and burnt Anchisus. I, Nazares, have served in the army for thirty years--and never have I seen such an attack as that in which Earl Teja overthrew me at the gates of Anchisus. They are irresistible, these Goths! Their horsemen sweep the country from Thessalonica to Philippi. The Goths in the heart of Illyricum! That has not been heard of for sixty years. And the King has sworn to return every year until he has peace--or Byzantium! Since he won Corcyra and the Sybotes, he stands upon the bridge of your Empire. Therefore, as God has touched the heart of this King, as he offers peace at a moderate price--the price of what he has actually gained--we beseech you, in the name of your trembling subjects, and of your smoking towns, to conclude a peace! Save us and save Byzantium! For your generals Belisarius and Narses will rather be able to stop the course of the sun and the blowing of the wind, than to stay King Totila and the terrible Teja."

"They are prisoners," said the Emperor, interrupting the reader; "and perhaps they speak in fear of death. Now it is your turn to speak, venerable Bishop of Thessalonica; you, Anatolius, commander of Dodona; and you, Parmenio, brave captain of the Macedonian lancers. You are safe here under our imperial protection, but you have seen the barbarian generals. What do you advise?"

At this the aged Bishop of Thessalonica again threw himself upon his knees, and cried:

"O Emperor of the Romani, the barbarian King, Totila, is a heretic, and accursed for ever, yet never have I seen a man more richly endowed with all Christian virtues! Do not strive with him! In the other world he will be damned for ever, but--I cannot comprehend it--on earth God blesses all his ways. He is irresistible!"

"I understand it well," interposed Anatolius. "It is his craft which wins for him all hearts--the deepest hypocrisy, a power of dissimulation which outdoes all our much-renowned and defamed Grecian cunning. The barbarian plays the part of a philanthropist so excellently, that he almost deceived me, until I reflected that there was no such thing in the world as the love which this man pretends, with all the art of a comedian. He acts as if he really felt compassion for his conquered enemies! He feeds the hungry, he divides the booty--your tax-money, O Emperor!--amongst the country people, whose fields have been devastated by the war. Women who had fled into the woods, and were found by his horsemen, he returns uninjured to their husbands. He enters the villages to the sound of a harp, played by a beautiful youth, who leads his horse. Do you know what is the consequence? Your own subjects, O Emperor of the Romani, rebel to him, and deliver your officers, who have obeyed your severe laws, into his hands. The peasants and farmers of Dodona did so by me. This barbarian is the greatest comedian of the century, and the clever hypocrite understands many other things besides fighting. He has entered into an alliance against you with the distant Persians, with your inveterate enemy Chosroes. We ourselves saw the Persian ambassador ride out of his camp towards the East."

When Anatolius had ceased speaking, the Macedonian captain gave his report, which ran:

"Ruler of the Romani--since Earl Teja gained the high-road of Thessalonica, nothing stands between your throne and his battle-axe but the walls of this city. He who stormed the 'New Wall' eight times in succession, and carried it at the ninth attempt, will carry the walls of Byzantium at the tenth. You can only repel the Goths if you have sevenfold their number. If you have it not,

then conclude a peace."

"Peace! peace! we beseech you, in the name of your trembling provinces of Epirus, Thessaly, and Macedonia!"

"Deliver us from the Goths!"

"Let us not again see the days of Alaric and Theodoric!"

"Peace with the Goths! Peace! peace!"

And all the envoys, bishops, officials, and warriors sank upon their knees with the cry of "Peace!"

The effect upon the assembly was fearful.

It had often happened that Persians and Saracens in the east. Moors in the south, and Bulgarians and Slavonians in the north-west, had made incursions into the country, slaying and plundering, and had sometimes beaten the troops sent against them, and escaped unhindered with their booty. But that Grecian islands should be permanently conquered by the enemy, that Grecian harbours should be won and governed by barbarians, and that the high-road to Byzantium should be dominated by Goths, was unheard of.

With dismay the senators thought of the days when Gothic ships and Gothic armies should overrun all the Grecian islands, and repeatedly storm the walls of Byzantium, only to be stopped by the fulfilment of all their demands. They already seemed to hear the battle-axe of the "Black Earl" knocking at their gates.

Quietly and searchingly did Justinian look into the rows of anxious faces on his right and on his left.

"You have heard," he then began, "what Church, State, and Army desire. I now ask your opinion. We have already accomplished an armistice. Shall war or shall peace ensue? One word will buy peace--our assent to the cession of Italy, which is already lost. Whoever among you is in favour of war, let him hold up his hand."

No one moved; for the senators were afraid for Byzantium, and they had no doubt of the Emperor's inclination for peace.

"My senate unanimously declares for peace. I knew it beforehand," said Justinian, with a singular smile. "I am accustomed always to follow the advice of my wise councillors--and of my Empress."

At this word Theodora started from her seat, and threw her ivory sceptre from her with such violence, that it flew far across the hall.

The senators were startled.

"Then farewell," cried the Empress, "farewell to what has ever been my pride--my belief in Justinian and his imperial dignity! Farewell all share in the cares and honours of the state! Alas, Justinian! alas for you and me that I must hear such words from your lips!"

And she hid her face in her purple mantle, in order to conceal the agony which her excitement caused her.

The Emperor turned towards her.

"What! the Augusta, my wife, who, since Belisarius returned to Byzantium for the second time, has always advocated peace--with a short exception--does she now, in such a time of danger, advise----"

"War!" cried Theodora, uncovering her face. And, in her intense earnestness, she looked more beautiful than she ever did when smiling in playful sport. "Must I, your wife, remind you of your honour? Will you suffer these barbarians to fix themselves firmly in your Empire, and force you to their will? You, who dreamt of the re-establishment of the Empire of Constantine! You, Justinian, who have taken the names of Persicus, Vandalicus, Alanicus, and Gothicus--you will allow this Gothic stripling to lead you by the beard whithersoever he will? Are you not the same Justinian who has been admired by the world, by Byzantium, and by Theodora? Our admiration was an error!"

On hearing these words, the Patriarch of Byzantium--he still believed that the Emperor had irrevocably decided upon peace--took courage to oppose the Empress, who did not always hit upon the strict definition of orthodoxy of which he was the representative.

"What!" he said, "the august lady advises bloody war? Verily, the Holy Church has no need to plead for the heretic. Notwithstanding, the new King is wonderfully mild towards the Catholics in Italy; and we can wait for more favourable times, until----"

"No, priest!" interrupted Theodora; "the outraged honour of this Empire can wait no longer! O Justinian!"--he still remained obstinately silent--"O Justinian, let us not be deceived in you! You dare not let that be wrung from you by defiance which you refused to humble petitions! Must I remind you that once before your wife's advice, and will, and courage, saved your honour? Have you forgotten the terrible rebellion of the Nika? Have you forgotten how the united parties of the Circus, of the frantic mob of Byzantium, attacked this house? The flames arose, and the cry of 'Down with the tyrants!' rang in our ears. All your councillors advised flight or compliance; all these reverend bishops and wise senators, and even your generals; for Narses was away in distant Asia, and Belisarius was shut up by the rebels in the palace on the shore. All were in despair. Your wife Theodora was the only hero by your side. If you had yielded or fled, your throne, your life, and most certainly your honour, would have been lost. You hesitated. You were inclined to fly. 'Remain, and die if need be,' I then said; 'but die in the purple!' And you remained, and your courage saved you. You awaited death upon your throne, with me at your side--and God sent Belisarius to our relief! I speak the same now. Do not yield. Emperor of the Romani--do not yield to the barbarians! Stand firm. Let the ruins of the Golden Gate overwhelm you if the axe of the terrible Goth can force it; but die an Emperor! This purple is stained by the immeasurable insolence of these Germans. I throw it from me, and I swear by the wisdom of God, never will I again resume it until the Empire is rid of the Goths!"

And she tore off her mantle and threw it down upon the steps of the throne. But then, greatly exhausted, she was on the point of sinking back into her seat when Justinian caught her in his arms and pressed her to his bosom.

"Theodora," he cried, "my glorious wife! You need no purple on your shoulders--your spirit is clothed in purple! You alone understand Justinian. War, and destruction to the Goths!"

At this spectacle the trembling senators were overwhelmed with terror and astonishment.

"Yes, wise fathers," cried the Emperor, turning to the assembly, "this time you were too clever to be men. It is indeed an honour to be called Constantine's successor, but it is no honour to be *your* master! Our enemies, I fear, are right; Constantine only planted here the dead mummy of Rome, but the soul of Rome had already fled. Alas for the Empire! Were it free or a republic, it would now have sunk in shame for ever. It must have a master, who, when, like a lazy horse, it threatens to sink into the quagmire, pulls it up by the rein; a strong master with bridle, whip, and spurs!"

At this moment a little crooked man, leaning on a crutch, forced his way into the hall, and limped up to the steps of the throne.

"Emperor of the Romani," he began, when he rose from his obeisance, "a report reached me on my bed of pain of all that the barbarians had dared, and of what was going on here. I gathered all my strength and dragged myself here with difficulty, for, by one word from you, I must learn whether I have been a fool from the beginning in holding you to be a great ruler in spite of many weaknesses; whether I shall throw your marshal's staff into the deepest well, or still carry it with pride! Speak only one word: war or peace?"

"War! war!" cried Justinian, and his countenance beamed.

"Victory! Justinian!" cried the general. "Oh, let me kiss your hand, great Emperor!" and he limped up the steps of the throne.

"But how is this, patrician, you have all at once become a man!" mocked the Empress. "You were always against the war with the Goths. Have you suddenly become endowed with a sense of honour?"

"Honour!" cried Narses, "after that gay soap-bubble Belisarius, that great child, may run! Not honour but the Empire is at stake. As long as danger threatened from the east, I advised the Persian war. Nothing was to be feared from the Goths. But now your piety, O Empress, and Belisarius's hero-sword, have stirred up the hornets' nest so long, that at last the whole swarm flies dangerously into our faces. Now the danger threatens from that side, and I advise a Gothic war. The Goths are nearer to Byzantium than Chosroes to the eastern frontier. He who, like this Totila, can raise a kingdom from an abyss, can much more easily hurl another kingdom into an abyss. This young King is a worker of miracles, and must be stopped in time."

"For this once," said Justinian, "I have the rare pleasure of finding my Empress and Narses of one mind."

He was on the point of dismissing the assembly, when the Empress caught his arm.

"Stay, my husband," she said. "To-day, for the second time, I have the honour to be proved your best adviser! Is it not so? Then listen to me and follow my further advice. Keep this wise assembly--all except Narses--confined in this hall.--Do not tremble, Illustrissimi; this time your lives are not in jeopardy. But you are unable to keep a secret; at least unless your tongues are slit. For this time, we will insure your silence by confinement.--There exists a conspiracy against your life, Justinian, or at least against your free will. A certain party had decided to force you to a war with the Goths. This object, truly, is now attained. But either to-night or to-morrow early the conspirators will again finally assemble. We must allow them to do so. We must not hinder them

in their purpose by letting them know that their object is already planned. For dangerous persons--persons suspected long ago, and--O Justinian--very very *rich* persons are concerned in it. It would be a pity if they escaped my snare."

Justinian was not alarmed at the word conspiracy.

"I also knew of it," he said. "But is it already so far advanced? To-morrow! Theodora," he cried, "you are more to the Empire than Belisarius or Narses!--Captain of the Golden Shields, you will keep all present confined here until Narses comes to fetch them. Meanwhile, my pious and wise fathers, reflect upon this hour and its teachings! Narses, follow us and the Empress."

So saying, Justinian descended the steps of the throne. When he, with Theodora and Narses, had left the Hall of Jerusalem, the entrance was immediately blocked with threatening spears.

CHAPTER VII.

The Emperor ordered the Empress and Narses to follow him to his room.

When they reached it, he embraced his wife with great tenderness, unembarrassed by the presence of a witness.

"How your enthusiasm rejoices and exalts me!" he exclaimed. "I am proud of such a wife. How beautiful you were, O Theodora, in your noble indignation. How can I reward you! Choose any favour, any sign of my gratitude, my best and truest councillor and co-ruler?"

"If I, a weak woman, dare indeed believe that I may share your thoughts and plans in this war, then confide in me, and tell me how you intend to conduct it."

"I am resolved to send Belisarius again to Italy. But not alone. His trifling with a crown has made me wary."

"Then I beg the favour of being allowed to propose a second general.--Narses," she continued, before Justinian could speak, "will you be the other?"

She wished to make it impossible for him to go.

"No, I thank you," Narses answered bitterly. "You know that I am a stubborn and ill-tempered horse; I cannot endure to draw together with another. A marshal's staff and a wife, Justinian, should be kept on the same condition."

"How?"

"Alone, or not at all."

"Then *you* not at all," answered Justinian with vexation. "You must not imagine that you are indispensable, magister militum."

"No one on earth is so, Justinian. With all my heart! Send great Belisarius again! He may try his luck for the third time in that country, where laurels grow so thickly. My turn will come later. I am no doubt unnecessary here as a witness of your domestic felicity, and at home, opposite to my sickbed, stands a map of the Italian roads. Allow me to continue my study of it. It is more interesting than the map of our Persian frontier. One piece of advice. You will ultimately be obliged to send Narses to Italy. The sooner you send him the more you will spare yourself defeat, vexation, and money. And if gout or that wretched epilepsy should carry Narses off before King Totila lies upon his shield, who then will conquer Italy for you? You believe in prophecy. In Italy there runs a saying: 'T beats B, N beats T.'"

"Does that mean, perhaps, that Theodora beat Belisarius, and Narses beats Theodora?" asked the Empress mockingly.

"That is not *my* interpretation of the riddle; it is yours. But I accept it. Do you know which was the wisest of your many laws, O Justinian?"

"Well?"

"That which made death the punishment of all accusations against the Empress, for it was the only way in which you could keep her." And he left the room.

"The insolent fellow!" cried Theodora, sending a venomous look after him. "He dares to threaten! When Belisarius has once been rendered harmless, Narses must quickly follow."

"But meanwhile we need them both," said Justinian. "Do you really propose, as the second general to be sent to Italy, the man who persuaded us to reject the proposals of Cassiodorus?"

"The same."

"But my distrust of that ambitious man has since then become stronger."

"Have you then forgotten," retorted Theodora, "who revealed the intentions of Silverius? Who was the first to warn you of Belisarius's dangerous game?"

"But he now frequents the company of the men who are conspiring against me!"

"Yes; but, O Justinian, it is by my order, as their destroyer."

"Indeed! But if he is also deceiving you?"

"Will you believe him and me, and send him to Italy, if he brings the conspirators to your feet in chains to-morrow, and amongst them their unknown chief?"

"I already know who it is; it is Photius, the freedman of Belisarius."

"No, Justinian; it is he whom you would again send to Italy if I did not warn you: Belisarius himself!"

The Emperor grew pale, and grasped the arm of his chair. "Will you now believe in that wonderful Roman's devotion, and send him to Italy with your army, instead of Belisarius?"

"Everything, everything!" said Justinian. "Belisarius, then, is really a traitor! Then we must make haste! Let us act at once."

"I have already acted, Justinian. My net is cast, and no one can escape. Give me full power to draw it close."

The Emperor nodded acquiescence.

And passing through the curtains, Theodora said to the door-keeper:

"Fetch Cethegus, the Prefect of Rome, from his house, and take him to my room."

CHAPTER VIII.

Shortly after, Cethegus once more stood before the still seductive woman, whom he had known in youth. She was lying stretched upon her couch in the room in which we have before seen her.

Galatea frequently handed to her a small onyx-cup, filled with the drops prescribed by her Persian physician. Grecian doctors no longer sufficed.

"I thank you, Theodora," said Cethegus, after a friendly greeting, "and if I must thank any other than myself--and a woman!--I would rather owe something to my early friend than to another."

"Listen, Prefect," said Theodora, looking gravely at him. "You would be just the man--shall I say the barbarian or the Roman?--to first kiss a Cleopatra whom a Cæsar and an Antony had adored, and then take her in triumph to the Capitol in order to strangle her, as, perhaps, Octavianus once intended, if that sly Queen had not been beforehand with him. Cleopatra has always been my model. 'Tis true, I have never found a Cæsar. But the asp, perhaps, will not be wanting. But you need not thank me. I have spoken and acted out of conviction. The insolence which we have suffered from these Goths must be smothered in blood. Perhaps I have not always been such a faithful wife as Justinian believed; but I was always his best and truest adviser. Belisarius and Narses cannot be sent together, and still less singly, to Italy. You shall go. You are a hero, a general, and a statesman, and yet you are too weak to harm Justinian."

"Thanks for your good opinion," said Cethegus.

"Friend, you are a general without an army, an Emperor without an empire, a pilot without a ship. But enough of this--you will not believe me. I send you to Italy because I believe that you hate the barbarians with all your heart. The second general, whom the imperial distrust will undoubtedly send after you, shall be Areobindos. He will not trouble you much! I am rejoiced that I can thus serve not only my old companion but also the Empire. Ah, Cethegus, our youth! To you men it is either golden hopes or golden memories: to a woman it is life itself! Oh for a single day of the time when I sent you roses and you sent me verses!"

"Your roses were beautiful, Theodora, but my verses were poor."

"They were fine to me, for they were addressed to me! My choice of you, which is necessary for the Empire, is sweetened by old and new hate as well as by old love. Belisarius must not rise to new honours. He must fall, and this time fall low and for ever. As sure as I live!"

"And Narses? I should understand and like it better if you were to ruin that head without an arm, than this arm without a head."

"Patience! One after the other."

"What has the good-natured hero done to you?"

"He? Nothing. But his wife! that clumsy Antonina, whose whole triumph lies in her good health."

And the delicate Empress clenched her little white fist, the fingers of which had become more transparent than ever.

"Ah," she exclaimed, "how I hate her! Yes, and I envy her too! Stupid people are always healthy. But she shall not rejoice while I suffer!"

"And the fate of the Capitol depends upon such a woman's hatred!" exclaimed Cethegus to himself. "Down with Cleopatra!"

"The foolish woman is in love with her husband's honour and glory. There I can wound her fatally!" continued Theodora.

As she spoke the twitching of her delicate features betrayed an attack of acute pain; she threw herself back upon her cushions.

"My little dove," said Galatea, "do not be angry. Thou knowest what the Persian said. Every excitement, be it of love or of hate----"

"Yes. To hate and to love is life! And as one grows older, hatred is almost sweeter than love. Love is false; hate is true."

"In both," said Cethegus, "I am a novice compared to you. I have always called you the Siren of Cyprus. One can never be sure that you will not suddenly tear your victim in the very act of embracing him--either from love, or from hate. And what has suddenly changed your love of Antonina into hatred?"

"She has become virtuous, the hypocrite! Or can she be really so weak-minded? It is possible. Her fishy blood can never be made to boil. For a strong passion or a bold crime she was always too cowardly. She is too vain to forego admiration and too paltry to reciprocate it. Since she accompanied her husband on his campaign she has become quite virtuous. Ha, ha, ha! because she was obliged! Even as the devil fasts when he has nothing to eat. Because I kept her lover a prisoner."

"Anicius, the son of Boëthius? I heard of it."

"Yes, he. When in Italy Antonina again clung to her husband and shared his fame and his misfortunes. And since that time she is a very Penelope! When she returned here, what did the goose do? She reproached me with having enticed her from the path of virtue! and swore that she would save Anicius from my toils. And she succeeds, the snake! She opens the gates of conscience and weans my unfaithful chamberlain more and more from me--of course only to keep him for herself."

"So you cannot imagine," said Cethegus, "that any woman can try to save a soul?"

"Without profit? No. But at the same time she deceives herself and him by pious speeches. And oh! how gladly the youth allows himself to be saved by this youthful blooming saint from the arms of the faded woman--who is wasted before her time! Ha!" she added passionately, starting from her seat, "how pitiable that the body must succumb from fatigue before the soul has half satisfied its thirst for life! And to live is to rule, to hate, and to love!"

"You seem insatiable in these arts and enjoyments."

"Yes," cried Theodora, "and I am proud of it. Must I indeed leave the richly-spread table of existence, must I leave this imperial throne, with all my ardent love of joy and power still unquenched? Shall I only sip a few more drops? Oh, Nature is a miserable blunderer! Once in many thousand ages she creates, amid a host of cripples, ugly in body and weak in mind, a soul and body like mine, perfect and strong, and full of the longing to live and to enjoy for an eternity. And, when only six lustres have passed, when I have scarcely sipped of the full cup offered to me. Nature dries up the spring of life! A curse upon the envy of the gods! But men can envy too, and envy changes them into demons. Others shall not enjoy when I can do so no longer! Others shall no more laugh when I must writhe in agony all night long! Antonina shall not rejoice in her youth with the false man who was once mine and yet could think of another, or of virtue, or of heaven! Anicius has told me this very day that he can bear this life without fame and honour no more--that heaven and earth call him away. He shall repent it--together with her. Come, Cethegus," she said furiously, grasping his arm, "come; we will destroy them both!"

"You forget," said Cethegus coldly, "that I have no reason to hate either her or him. So what I do will be done for your sake."

"Not so, you wise and icy Roman! Do you believe that I do not see through you?"

"I hope not," thought Cethegus.

"You wish to keep Belisarius away from Italy. You wish to fight and conquer alone. Or at most with a shadow beside you, such as Bessas was and Areobindos will be. Do you think I did not understand why you so cleverly managed the recall of Belisarius when before Ravenna? Anxiety for Justinian! What is Justinian to you?"

Cethegus felt his heart beat.

"The freedom of Rome!" continued Theodora. "Nonsense! You know that only strong and simple men can be trusted with freedom. And you know your Quirites. No, your aim lies higher."

"Is it possible that this woman guesses what all my enemies and friends do not even suspect?" thought Cethegus.

"You wish to free Italy alone, and alone rule her as Justinian's vice-regent. To be next to his throne, high above Belisarius and Narses, and second only to Theodora. And if there were any higher goal, yours would be the spirit to fly at it."

Cethegus breathed again.

"That would hardly be worth the trouble," he thought.

"Oh," continued Theodora, "it is a proud feeling to be the first of Justinian's servants!"

"Of course," thought Cethegus, "she is not capable of imagining anything superior to her husband, although she deceives him daily."

"And," Theodora went on, "to rule *him*, the Emperor, in company with me."

"The flattering atmosphere of this court dulls even the clearest intellect," thought Cethegus. "It is the madness of the purple. She can only think of herself as all-commanding."

"Yes, Cethegus," continued Theodora; "I would allow no other man even to *think* of this. But I will help you to obtain it. With you I will share the mastery of the world. Perhaps only because I remember many a foolish youthful dream. Do you still remember how, years ago, we shared two cushions in my little villa? We called them the Orient and the Occident. It was an omen. So will we now share the Orient and the Occident. Through my Justinian I will rule the Orient. Through my Cethegus I will rule the Occident!"

"Ambitious, insatiable woman!" thought Cethegus. "Oh that Mataswintha had not died! She at this court--and you would sink for ever!"

"But to gain this," said Theodora, "Belisarius must be got out of the way. Justinian had resolved to send him once more as your commander-in-chief to Italy."

Cethegus frowned.

"He trusts again and again to his dog-like fidelity. He must be thoroughly convinced of his falsity."

"That will be difficult to manage," said Cethegus. "Theodora will sooner learn to be faithful than Belisarius to be false."

A blow from Theodora's little hand was the punishment for this speech.

"To you, foolishly, I have been ever faithful--that is, in affection. Do you want Belisarius again in Italy?"

"On no account!"

"Then help me to ruin him, together with Anicius, the son of Boëthius."

"So be it," said the Prefect. "I have no reason to spare the brother of Severinus. But how can you possibly bring proofs against Belisarius? I am really curious. If you accomplish *that*, I will declare myself no less a novice in plots and machinations than in love and hatred."

"And that you are, you dull son of Latium! Now listen. But it is such a dangerous subject, that I must beg thee, Galatea, to keep watch that no one comes and listens. No, my good mother, not inside! I beg thee; *outside* the door. Leave me alone with the Prefect: it is--more's the pity--no secret of love?"

When, after some time, the Prefect left the room, he said to himself:

"If this woman were a man--I should kill her! She would be more dangerous than the barbarians and Belisarius together! But then, certainly, the iniquity would be neither so inscrutable nor so devilish!"

CHAPTER IX.

Soon after the Prefect had returned home, Syphax announced the son of Boëthius, who came from the Empress.

"Let him enter, and admit no one else until he has gone," said Cethegus. "Meanwhile send quickly for Piso, the tribune."

And he rose to meet Anicius, who now entered the room.

Anicius was no longer a youth, and his delicate features were much improved by the expression of resolution which at this moment rested upon them. He was dressed very simply, and his hair, which was usually curled, now hung straight down.

"You remind me of your beautiful sister, Anicius."

With these words the Prefect received his visitor.

"It is on her account, Cethegus, that I come," said Anicius gravely. "You are the oldest friend of my father and of our house. You hid Severinus and me from our enemies, and assisted us to escape at your own risk. You are the only man in Byzantium to whom I can appeal in a mysterious affair. A few days ago I received this incomprehensible letter, 'To the son of my patron; Corbulo the freedman----'"

"Corbulo? I know that name!"

"He was the freedman of my father, with whom my mother and sister took refuge, and who----"

"Fell before Rome with your brother!"

"Yes. But he only died after being carried into the Gothic encampment, for he was taken prisoner, together with my dying brother, in the village *ad aras Bacchi*. So I am told by one of Belisarius's mercenaries called Sutas, who was taken prisoner at the same time, And who has now brought me the letter which Corbulo could not finish. Read it for yourself."

Cethegus took the small wax tablet with its scarcely legible writing and read:

"The legacy of your dying brother, and his last words were: Anicius must revenge our mother, our sister, and myself. It was the same enemy of our house, the same demon who----"

"The letter ends here," said Cethegus.

"Yes. Corbulo lost his senses and never again became conscious, the mercenary said."

"There is not much to be made of this," observed Cethegus, shrugging his shoulders.

"No; but the mercenary Sutas--they were all in the same tent--heard a few words spoken by my dying brother to Corbulo, which may give us the key to the letter."

"Well?" asked Cethegus, with concealed anxiety.

"Severinus said: 'I suspect it. He knew of the ambush--he sent us to meet certain death.'"

"Who?" asked Cethegus quietly.

"That is just what I want to find out."

"You have no suspicion?"

"No; but it cannot be impossible to discover the man who is meant."

"How will you manage it?"

"Sent us to meet certain death,' that can only mean some leader or general who was the cause of my brother's sharing that fatal morning ride out of the Tiburtinian Gate. For Severinus did not at that time belong to the suite of Belisarius. He was a tribune of your legions. If you, Belisarius, and Procopius will earnestly try to find out the man who sent Severinus with Belisarius, you must succeed. For he did not go with other legionaries--none of your legionaries or horsemen accompanied Belisarius."

"As far as I recollect," said Cethegus, "you are right."

"Not one," repeated Anicius. "Procopius--unfortunately he has gone to examine the buildings which Justinian has erected in Asia--was present, and has often told me the names of all who were with him. When he returns, I will make a careful inquiry of what my brother did just before the sally. Into whose house or tent he went--I will not rest, I will ask all the still living comrades of Severinus where they saw him last before he rode out."

"You are very acute for your years," said the Prefect with a strange smile. "What will you be when you are arrived at maturity? But certainly you are in a good school. Does the Empress know of this letter?"

"No. And she shall never hear of it. Do not name her to me! This duty of revenge has been sent by God to tear me away from her!"

"But she sent you to me?"

"In another affair, which, however, shall end very differently to what she intends. A few hours ago she sent for me, and asked me once again if it was so very terrible to be kept in a golden cage. But the woman disgusts me. And I heartily regret the months that I have wasted at her side, while my brother fought and fell for the fatherland. I gave her such a rude answer, that I expected a storm. But, to my astonishment, she was perfectly quiet, and said, smiling, 'Be it so. No faithfulness lasts long. Go to Antonina, or to Virtue, or to both goddesses. But, as a last sign of my favour, I will save you from certain destruction. There exists in Byzantium a conspiracy against the life or free will of Justinian. Be quiet--I know it. I know also that you are already half won; that you have not yet gone to any of their meetings, but that you have the documents of the conspiracy in your keeping. I have allowed them to do as they liked, because there are some of my old enemies amongst them, whom I wish to ruin. In a few days they will be surprised. But I will warn and save you. Go to the Prefect. He must take you with him away from Byzantium. Tell him that you are in danger, and that Theodora sends you. But say nothing to him of the conspiracy. There are some of his tribunes concerned in it, whom he would gladly save, but whom I will destroy.' All this she said to me, and I came, but not to fly! I came to warn you and my Roman comrades. I shall also go to the meeting--there is no danger for to-day, the Empress said--and warn them all. I shall tell them that the conspiracy is discovered. You must not be there, Prefect; you must not place yourself in any further danger. Justinian already suspects you. The foolish youths wish to wait until they have won Belisarius to their cause! And if they are not warned they will most likely be all taken prisoners to-morrow. I shall hasten to tell them of their danger. But, that done, I will not rest a moment until I have discovered the murderer of my brother."

"Both intentions are highly praiseworthy," said Cethegus. "But, by the way, where do you hide the papers of the conspirators?"

"Where I hide all secrets," said Anicius, blushing--"secrets and letters that are sacred and dear to me; where I will also hide this tablet. You shall know the spot, for you, the oldest friend of my house, must help me to complete my task of vengeance. I have written out Sutas's report of the scarcely-comprehensible conversation of the two dying men. They spoke of 'poisoning'--of 'murderous order'--of an 'accusation before the senate'--therefore our enemy must be a Roman senator--of a 'crimson crest'--of a 'black devil of a horse----'"

"Et cetera, et cetera," said Cethegus, interrupting him. "Where is your hiding-place? It may be that you will have to escape in a hurry--for I strongly advise you not to trust the Empress--and perhaps you would not even be able to reach your house."

"And besides," added Anicius, "it is necessary that you take up my work. I should in any case have told you of the hiding-place. It is in the cistern in the court of my house--the third brick to the right of the wheel is hollow. And you must know for another reason," he concluded gloomily. "If it is not possible to save my friends, if my own freedom is in danger--for you are right in your warning: I have long since remarked that I am followed by the spies of the Emperor or Empress--then I will quickly make a bloody end to it all. What matter if I die, if I cannot fulfil the duty which Severinus has imposed upon me? Then--it is my office to tell the Emperor every morning how the Empress has passed the night--then--I will strike the tyrant in the midst of his slaves!"

"Madman!" cried Cethegus, in real terror--for he *now* wished to keep Justinian alive and in power--"to what has remorse and a planless and dissolute life brought you? No! the son of Boëthius must not end as a murderer. If you wish to atone in blood for your inglorious past--then fight with my legions! Purify yourself in the blood of the barbarians, shed, not by the dagger of the murderer, but by the sword of the hero!"

"You speak nobly, Cethegus. And will you really place *me*, untried and without fame, amongst your brave knights? How can I thank you!"

"Spare your thanks until all is ended--until we meet again. Meanwhile warn the conspirators. That alone will be a proof of courage. For, as it seems you are followed, I think it a dangerous task. If you shun the danger, say so frankly."

"I hesitate to give the first proof of my courage! I would go and warn them, even if certain death were the consequence."

He pressed the Prefect's hand, and hurried away.

As soon as he was gone, Syphax brought in the tribune Piso through another door.

"Master of Iambics," cried Cethegus, "you must now be as quick-footed as your verses! Enough of conspiracy and creeping here in Byzantium! You must immediately seek all the young

Romans who frequent the house of Photius. The setting sun must find none of you within those walls. Your lives depend upon it. No one must go to the 'evening feast' at Photius's house. Go hunting, singly or in groups; make boat-races on the Bosphorus; only hurry away. The conspiracy is superfluous. The sound of the trumpet will soon summon you to battle against the barbarians in Latium. Away with you all! Wait for me at Epidamnus. Thence, with my Isaurians, I will fetch you to the third fight for Rome. Away!--Syphax," he said, when left alone with his slave, "have you inquired at the great general's house? When is he expected back?"

"At sunset."

"Is his faithful wife at home? Good. Bring a litter--not mine--bring the first you find at the Hippodrome. The blinds must shut closely. Take it to the harbour, into the back street of the slop-dealers."

"Sir, the worst rabble of this city of vagabonds dwell in that street. What will you do there?"

"I will there enter the litter, and then go to the Red House."

CHAPTER X.

In the Red House, the abode of Belisarius, which was situated in the suburb "Justiniana" (Sycæ), sat Antonina in the women's chamber, working busily.

She was embroidering a border of golden laurels upon a mantle for her hero, Belisarius.

Near her, upon a citron-wood table, lay, in a costly binding set with precious stones, a splendid edition of the "Vandal Wars," by Procopius, the lately published book which described her husband's prowess.

At her feet lay a magnificent animal, one of the four tame hunting leopards which the Persian King had presented to Belisarius after the last peace; a very costly present, for it was seldom that the attempt to tame these leopards succeeded, and many hundreds of cubs which had been caught or born in confinement, were obliged to be killed as useless after being trained for years. The large, beautiful, and powerful animal--it easily became wild when it tasted warm blood while hunting, and had therefore been left at home stretched itself luxuriously, like a cat, upon the folds of Antonina's dress, played with her ball of gold thread, waved its tail, and sometimes rubbed its round and clever-looking head against the feet of its mistress.

A slave entered and announced a stranger--he had arrived in a modest litter, and was dressed in a common mantle--the door-keeper would have refused to admit him, as the master was away, and the mistress received no visitors, but he would not be denied; he ordered them to announce to Antonina "the conqueror of Pope Silverius."

"Cethegus!" cried Antonina.

She grew pale and trembled.

"Let him in at once."

The influence which the powerful intellect of Cethegus had gained upon her the first time of their meeting; the recollection that, when her husband, Procopius, and all the leaders of the army, had helplessly succumbed to the priest, this man had conquered and humbled the conqueror; of how, at the entrance into Rome, the fight on the bridge of the Anio, the defence of Rome Against Witichis, in the camp of Ravenna and at the taking of that city, he had always and everywhere kept the upper hand, and yet had never used his superiority inimically against her husband; how nothing but misfortune had followed any neglect of his warnings; how all his counsels had been victorious in themselves--these recollections now confusedly crossed her mind.

She heard the footsteps of the Prefect, and hastily rose.

The leopard--pushed roughly aside and disturbed in his comfortable sport on account of the intruder--rose with a low growl, and looked threateningly at the door, gnashing his yellow teeth.

Cethegus, before entering, drew the curtain violently aside and thrust forth his head, which was covered by a cowl. The abrupt movement must have either frightened or irritated the leopard. When the Persian lion and tiger tamers first began to break in a newly-caught animal, they were accustomed to envelop themselves and cover their heads with long woollen cloaks. Possibly the fierce and never wholly-tamed beast was reminded of his old enemies. With a terrible howl he crouched in preparation for a deadly spring, whipping the floor with his long tail and foaming at the mouth a sure sign of fury.

Antonina saw it with horror.

"Fly! fly, Cethegus!" she screamed.

Had he done so, had he but turned his back, he would have been lost; the monster would at once have been upon his back with his teeth in his neck. For no door closed the entrance, the only barrier was a curtain.

Cethegus promptly stepped forward, threw back his cowl, looked straight into the leopard's eyes, raising his left hand with an action of command, and threatening him with the dagger held in his right.

"Down! down! The irons are hot!" he cried in the Persian language, at the same time moving a step in advance.

The leopard suddenly broke into a whining howl of fear; his muscles, which had been contracted for the spring, relaxed; he crept whining, with his belly on the ground, to the feet of Cethegus, and howling with fear, licked the sandal of his left foot, while Cethegus set his right foot firmly upon the animal's neck.

Antonina had sunk upon her couch in her fear; she now stared at the terrible, but beautiful scene.

"That animal--the prostration!" she stammered. "Dareios always refused to do it; he was furious when Belisarius insisted upon it. Where have you learned this, Cethegus?"

"In Persia, of course," he answered.

And he kicked the thoroughly cowed animal between the ribs with such violence, that with a howl it flew into the farthest corner of the room, where it remained trembling and crouching, with its eyes fixed upon its subduer.

"Belisarius only mastered the forts, but not the language of Persia," said Cethegus. "And these beasts do not understand Greek. You are grimly guarded, Antonina, when Belisarius is absent," he added, as he hid his dagger in the folds of his dress.

"What brings you to my house?" Antonina asked, still trembling.

"My often misdoubted friendship. I would save your husband, who has the courage of a lion, but not the dexterity of a mouse! Procopius is unfortunately absent, or I should have sent that better-trusted adviser, I know that a heavy blow threatens Belisarius from the Emperor. We must ward it off. The favour of the Emperor----"

"Is very fickle, I know. But the services of Belisarius----"

"Are his ruin. Justinian would not fear an insignificant man. But he fears Belisarius."

"That we have often experienced," sighed Antonina.

"Learn then--you before all others--what no one outside the palace knows: the Emperor's indecision is at an end. He has decided upon war with the Goths."

"At last!" cried Antonina, with a beaming countenance.

"Yes; but--think of the shame! Belisarius is not appointed commander-in-chief."

"Who else?" asked Antonina angrily.

"I am one of the generals----"

She looked at him suspiciously.

"Yes; it was my aim long since, I confess. But the second in command is to be Areobindos. I cannot conquer the Goths with him, hindered by his ignorance. No one can conquer the Goths but Belisarius. Therefore I must have him near me, or, for aught I care, over me. See, Antonina, I hold myself to be the greater statesman----"

"My Belisarius is a hero, no statesman!" cried the proud wife.

"But it would be ridiculous to compare myself as a general with the conqueror of the Vandals, Goths, and Persians. You see that I openly confess that I am not influenced only by friendship to Belisarius, but also by egotism. I *must* have Belisarius for a comrade."

"That is clear," said Antonina, much pleased.

"But Justinian is not to be persuaded to appoint him. Still more, he again suspects him, and indeed more than ever."

"But, by all the saints! wherefore?"

"Belisarius is innocent; but he is very imprudent. For months he has received secret letters, notes, and warnings--stuck into his bathing-robe, or thrown into his garden--which invite him to take part in a conspiracy."

"Heavens! You know of this?" stammered Antonina.

"Unfortunately not I only, but also others--the Emperor himself!"

"But the conspiracy is not against the Emperor's life or throne," said Antonina apologetically.

"No; only against his free will. 'War with the Goths.'--'Belisarius commander-in-chief.'--'It is shameful to serve an ungrateful master.'--'Force the Emperor to his own advantage.' Such and similar things do these papers contain, do they not? Well, Belisarius has certainly not accepted; but, imprudently, he did not at once speak of these invitations to the Emperor, and this oversight may cost him his head!"

"Oh, holy saints!" cried Antonina, wringing her hands. "He omitted to do so at my request, by my advice. Procopius advised him to tell all to the Emperor. But I--I feared Justinian's mistrust, which might have discovered the semblance of guilt in the mere fact that such papers had been sent to Belisarius."

"It was not that alone, I think," said Cethegus cautiously, when he had looked round to see if any could hear, "which impelled you to give such advice, taken, of course, by Belisarius."

"What else? What can you mean?" asked Antonina in a low voice.

But she blushed up to the roots of her hair.

"You knew that good friends of yours were concerned in the conspiracy; you wished first to warn them before the plot was betrayed."

"Yes," she stammered. "Photius, the freedman----"

"And yet another," whispered Cethegus, "who, scarcely freed from Theodora's gilded prison, would only exchange it for the vaults of the Bosphorus."

Antonina covered her face with her hands.

"I know all, Antonina--the slight fault of former days, the good resolutions of a later time. But in this case your old inclination has ensnared you. Instead of thinking only of Belisarius, you thought also of his welfare. And if Belisarius now falls, whose is the guilt?"

"Oh! be silent! have pity!" cried Antonina.

"Do not despair," continued Cethegus. "You have still a strong prop, one who will be your advocate with the Emperor. Even if banishment be threatened, the prayers of your friend Theodora will prevent the worst."

"The Empress!" cried Antonina, in terror. "Oh, how she will misrepresent! She has sworn our undoing!"

"That is bad," said Cethegus--"very bad! For the Empress also knows of the conspiracy, and of the invitations to Belisarius. And you know that a much less crime than that of being invited to join a conspiracy is sufficient----"

"The Empress knows of it! Then we are lost! Oh! you who know how to find a means of escape when no other eye can see it--help I save us!"

And Antonina sank at the Prefect's feet.

A lamentable howl issued from the corner of the room. The leopard trembled with renewed fear. The Prefect cast a rapid glance at his beaten adversary, and then gently raised the kneeling woman.

"Do not despair, Antonina. Yes; there is a way to save Belisarius--but only one."

"Must he tell *now* what has happened? As soon as he returns?"

"For that it is too late; and it would be too little. He would not be believed; mere words would not prove that he was in earnest. No; he must prove his fidelity by deeds. He must seize all the conspirators together, and deliver them into the Emperor's power."

"How can he seize them all together?"

"They themselves have invited him. To-night they assemble in the house of Photius, his freedman. He must consent to put himself at their head. He must go to the meeting, and take them all prisoners. Anicius," he added, "has been warned already by the Empress. I have seen him."

"Alas! But if he must die, it is to save Belisarius. My husband must do as you say; I see that it is the only way. And it is a bold and dangerous step; it will allure him."

"Do you think he will sacrifice his freedman?"

"We have warned the fool again and again. What matters Photius when Belisarius is in danger! If ever I have had any power over my husband, I shall prevail to-day. Procopius has often advised him to give such a brutal--as he called it--proof of his fidelity. I will remind him of it. You may be sure that he will follow our united counsel."

"'Tis well. He must be there before midnight. When the watchman on the walls calls the hour, I shall break into the hall. And it is better, so that Belisarius may be quite safe, that he only enter the meeting when he sees my Moor Syphax in the niche before the house behind the statue of Petrus. He may also place a few of his guards in front of the house. In case of need, they can protect him, and bear witness in his favour. He is not capable of much feigning; he must only join the meeting shortly before midnight; thus he will have no need to speak. Our guards will wait in the Grove of Constantinus, at the back of Photius's house. At midnight--the trumpet sounds when the guard is relieved, and you know that it can be distinctly heard--we shall break in. Belisarius, therefore, need not undertake the dangerous task of giving a signal."

"And you--you will be sure to be there?"

"I shall not fail. Farewell, Antonina."

And, suddenly stepping backwards, his face still turned towards the leopard, his dagger pointed, he had gained the exit.

The leopard had waited for this moment; he moved slightly in his corner, rising slowly.

But as he reached the curtain, Cethegus once again raised his dagger and threatened him.

"Down, Dareios! the irons are hot!"

And he was gone.

The leopard laid his head upon the mosaic floor and uttered a howl of impotent fury.

CHAPTER XI.

The power and glory of Totila were now at their height. His happiness was completed by his union with Valeria.

The betrothal had just taken place in the church of St. Peter, and was solemnised by Cassiodorus, assisted by Julius, now a Catholic priest, and also by an Arian minister. When Cassiodorus had betrothed the daughter of his old friend to the King, and they had exchanged rings, the royal couple were led in solemn procession over the Janiculum towards the right bank of the river, and across the Theodosian and Valentinian Bridges, which were decorated with triumphal arches. Following the course of the river, the procession entered a villa situated on an eminence overlooking the river and the campagna, and the betrothed couple took their places under a magnificent baldachin in the great hall.

There, before the assembled national army, under the golden shield of the King, which was hung upon his spear, the Roman bride stepped into the right shoe of her Gothic bridegroom, while he laid his mailed right hand upon her head, which was covered with a transparent veil.

Thus the betrothal was completed according to ecclesiastical, Roman, and Germanic custom.

This ceremony over, Totila and Valeria took their seats at the centre table upon the terrace of the villa; Valeria surrounded by noble Roman and Gothic women, Totila by the dukes and earls of his army.

Grecian and Roman flute-players played and sang alternately; Roman dances followed the sword-dance of the Gothic youths. Presently, dressed in a long, white festive garment, the hem embroidered in gold, and a wreath of laurel and oak-leaves upon his head, Adalgoth stood forth in front of the royal pair, cast an inquiring look at his teacher in war and song. Earl Teja, who sat on the King's right hand, and, to the accompaniment of his harp, sang in a clear voice:

"Hear, all ye people, far and near,
Hear, Byzant', to thy dole:
The Gothic King, good Totila,
Thrones on the Capitol/

"No more is Belisarius' name
In Rome with honour decked:
Of Orcus, and no more of Rome
Cethegus is Prefect.

"Of what leaves shall we weave the crown

For good King Totila?
Like sweetest rose upon his breast
Blooms sweet Valeria.

"Peace, freedom, right, and law protect
His shield, his star, his sword:
Olive, thy peaceful spray now give,
Give for the peaceful Lord!

"Who carried terror and revenge?
Who bore the Grecians down?
Come, *laurel*, leaf of victory,
Make rich my hero's crown!

"But his victorious strength grew not
From Roma's mouldering ground:
With leaves of young Germanic *oak*
Let his young head be crowned.

"Hear, all ye people, far and near,
Hear, Byzant', to thy dole:
The Gothic King, young Totila,
Thrones on the Capitol."

A burst of applause rewarded his song, during which a Roman youth and a Gothic maiden, kneeling before Totila and Valeria, offered each a crown of roses, laurels, olive-leaves and oak-leaves.

"*Our* songs are also not quite without sweetness, Valeria," said Totila with a smile, "and not without strength and truth. I owe my life to this youthful minstrel." And he laid his hand upon Adalgoth's head. "He struck thy countryman Piso, his colleague in the art of song, most roughly upon his clever scanning fingers--as a punishment for having written many a verse to my Valeria and raised the deadly steel against me with one and the same hand!"

"There is one thing that I would rather have heard, my Adalgoth," Teja said to the boy in a low voice, "than your song of praise."

"What is that, my Earl of harp and sword?"

"The death-cry of the Prefect, whom thou hast only sent to hell in thy verse."

But Adalgoth was called away down the steps by a crowd of Gothic warriors, who would not part with him for a long time; for his song pleased the Gothic heroes who had fought with Totila much better than it will perhaps please you, my reader.

Duke Guntharis embraced and kissed Adalgoth and said, as he drew him aside:

"My young hero! What a resemblance! Whenever I see thee my first thought is: Alaric!"

"Why, that is my battle-cry!" said Adalgoth, and, engaged in conversation, they disappeared amid the crowd.

At the same time the King looked back at the vestibule of the villa, for the performance of the flute-players stationed there was suddenly interrupted.

He quickly perceived the cause and started from his seat with a cry of astonishment.

For between the two centre and flower-wreathed columns of the entrance stood a form which seemed scarcely human. A maiden of wondrous beauty, clad in a pure white garment, holding a staff in her hand, and with a wreath of star-like flowers upon her head.

"Ah! what is that? Lives this charming figure?" the King asked.

And all the guests followed the direction of the King's eyes and the movement of his hand with equal wonder, for the small opening left between the pillars by the masses of flowers was filled up by a more lovely form than their eyes had ever beheld.

The child, or girl, had fastened her shining white linen tunic upon her left shoulder with a large sapphire clasp; her broad golden girdle was set with a row of sapphires. The long and pointed sleeves of her dress fell from her shoulders like two white wings. Wreaths of ivy were twined about her whole figure; in her right hand, which rested on her bosom, she held a shepherd's staff, wreathed with flowers; her left hand carried a beautiful crown of wild-flowers and was laid upon the head of a large shaggy dog, whose neck was likewise surrounded with a wreath.

The girl looked without fear, but thoughtfully and examiningly, at the brilliant assembly. For a

while the guests stared and waited, and the maiden stood motionless. Then the King left his seat, went towards her, and said with a smile:

"Welcome to our feast, if thou art an earthly being. But if--which I almost believe--thou art the lovely Queen of the Elves--why then, be welcome too! We will place a throne for thee high above the King's seat." And with a graceful action he opened both his arms, inviting her to approach.

With a light and gentle step the maiden crossed the threshold of the vestibule and, blushing, replied:

"What sweet folly speakest thou, O King! I am no queen. I am Gotho, the shepherdess. But thou--I see it more by thy clear brow than by thy diadem--thou art Totila, the King of the Goths, whom they call the 'King of joy.' I have brought flowers for thee and thy lovely bride. I heard that this feast was to celebrate a betrothal. Gotho has nothing else to give. I plucked and twined these flowers as I came through the last meadow. And now, O King, protector of the orphan's right, hear and help me!"

The King again took his place near Valeria. The maiden stood between them. Valeria took one of her hands; the King laid his hand upon her head, and said:

"I swear to protect thee and thy rights by thine own lovely head. Who art thou, and what is thy desire?"

"Sire, I am the grand-child and child of peasants. I have grown up in solitude amid the flowers of the Iffinger mountain. I had nothing dear to me on earth except my brother. He left me to seek thee. And when my grandfather felt that he was dying, he sent me to thee to find my brother and the solution of my fate. And he gave me old Hunibad from Teriolis as a companion and protector. But Hunibad's wounds were not fully healed and soon re-opened, and he was obliged to stay sick at Verona. And I had to nurse him for a long time, until at last he died too. And then I went alone, accompanied only by my faithful dog Brun, across all this wide hot country, until at last I found the city of Rome and thee. But thou keepest good order, O King, in thy land--thou deservest all praise. Thy high-roads are watched day and night by soldiers and horsemen. And they were friendly and good to the lonely wandering child. They sent me to the houses of good Goths at nightfall, where the housewife cherished me. And it is said that the law is so well obeyed in thy realm, that a golden bracelet might be laid upon the high-road, and would be found again after many many nights. In one town, Mantua, I think it was called, just as I was crossing the market-place, there was a great press, and the people ran together. And thy soldiers led forth a Roman to die there, and cried: 'Marcus Massurius must die the death, at the King's command. The King set him, a prisoner of war, free, and the insolent Roman ravished a Jewish girl. Sang Totila has renewed the law of the great Theodoric.' And they struck off his head in the open market-place, and all the people were terrified at King Totila's justice. Now, my faithful Brun, thou mayest rest here; here no one will hurt thee. I have even ornamented *his* neck with flowers to-day, in honour of thee and thy bride."

She slightly struck the powerful dog on the head; he immediately went up to the King's throne, and laid his left fore-foot confidently upon the King's knee. And the King gave him water to drink out of a flat, golden dish.

"For golden fidelity a golden dish," he said. "But who is thy brother?"

"Well," the girl answered thoughtfully, "from what Hunibad told me during the journey and upon his sick-bed, I think that the name my brother bears is not his real one. But he is easy to be known," she added, blushing. "His locks are golden-brown; his eyes are blue as these shining stones; his voice is as clear as the note of the lark; and when he plays his harp, he looks up as if he saw the heavens open."

"Adalgoth!" cried the King.

"Adalgoth!" repeated all the guests.

The boy--he had heard the loud shout of his name--flew up the steps.

"My Gotho!" he exclaimed in a jubilant voice, and locked her in a tender embrace.

"Those two belong to each other," said Duke Guntharis, who had followed the youth.

"Like the dawn and the rising sun," added Teja.

"But now," said the girl, as she quietly withdrew from Adalgoth's arms, "let me fulfil my errand and the behest of my dying grandfather. Here, O King, take this roll and read it. In it is contained the fate of Adalgoth and Gotho; the past and the present, said our grandfather."

CHAPTER XII.

The King broke the seals and read:

"This is written by Hildegisel, the son of Hildemuth, whom they call "the long;" once priest, now castellan at Teriolis. Written at the dictation of old Iffa; and it is all written down faithfully. Lo!--now it begins! The Latin is not always as good as that sung in the churches. But thou, O King, wilt understand it. For where it is bad Latin it is good Gothic. Lo!--now it really begins. Thus speaks the old man Iffa: My Lord and King Totila; the roll which is wrapped in this cover is the writing of the man Wargs, who, however, was neither my son, nor was his name Wargs--but his name was Alaric, and he was a Balthe, the banished Duke of----"

A cry of astonishment from all present interrupted the King. He paused. But Duke Guntharis cried:

"Then Adalgoth, who calls himself the son of Wargs, is the son of Alaric! whom he himself, in his office of herald, has often, riding through the town on a white horse, loudly summoned to appear. And never saw I a greater resemblance than that between the father Alaric and the son Adalgoth."

"Hail to the Duke of Apulia!" cried Totila, with a smile, as he embraced the boy.

But, speechless with excitement, Gotho sank upon her knees, her eyes filled with tears, and, looking up at Adalgoth, she sighed:

"Then thou art not my brother! O God!--Hail, Duke of Apulia! Farewell! farewell for ever!" and she rose to her feet and turned to go.

"Not my sister!" cried Adalgoth. "That is the best thing which this dukedom brings me! Stop there!" and he caught Gotho in his arms, pressed her to his bosom, and kissed her heartily. Then he led her up to the King, saying, "Now, King Totila, unite us! Here is my bride--here is my duchess!"

And Totila, who had meanwhile cast a rapid glance over the two documents, answered smiling:

"In this case I do not need the wisdom of Solomon. Young Duke of Apulia, thus I betroth thee to thy bride." And he laid the laughing, weeping girl in Adalgoth's arms.

Then he turned to the assembled Goths, and said:

"Permit me shortly to explain to you what this writing--the Latin of which is rather rude, for Hildegisel was cleverer with the sword than the pen--contains. Here is, besides, Duke Alaric's declaration of his innocence."

"That has already been proved by his son," cried Duke Guntharis. "And I never believed in his guilt."

"Duke Alaric," continued the King, "discovered his secret accuser too late. Our Adalgoth, as you know, brought his innocence to light, when he found the hidden documents in the broken statue of Cæsar. Cethegus the Prefect had kept a sort of diary in a secret cypher. But Cassiodorus, with grief and amazement, deciphered the writing, and found an entry at the commencement of the book, written about twelve years ago, which ran thus: 'Duke Alaric condemned. That he was innocent, is now only believed by himself and his accuser. He who injures Cethegus shall not live. At the time when I woke from a death-like swoon on the banks of the Tiber, I swore to be revenged. I made a vow and it is now fulfilled.' The cause of this hatred is still a secret. But it is connected in some way with our friend Julius Montanus. Where is he?"

"He has already returned to St. Peter's with Cassiodorus," answered Earl Teja; "excuse them. Every day at this hour they pray for peace with Byzantium. And Julius," he added with a bitter smile, "prays also for the Prefect's soul."

"King Theodoric," said the King, "was hardly to be persuaded of the guilt of the brave duke, with whom he was on terms of intimate friendship."

"Yes," observed Duke Guntharis, "he once gave him a broad gold bracelet with a runic device."

The King now resumed his reading of the papers:

"'I took a bracelet given me by King Theodoric'--these are the words of the duke--'when I fled with my child. Broken in two just in the centre of the runic inscription. It will one day serve to prove the honourable birth of my son.'"

"He bears the proof on his face," cried Duke Guntharis.

"But the golden proof is also not wanting!" exclaimed Adalgoth: "at least old Iffa gave me a broken bracelet. Here it is," and he took out the half of a broken bracelet, which he carried tied to a ribbon round his neck; "I have never been able to explain the sense of these words:

"The Amelung--
The eagle--
In need--

The friend--"

"Thou hast not the other half," said Gotho, and took the second half of the bracelet from her bosom. "See, here is written:

"--to the Balthe,
--to the falcon,
--and death,
--to the friend."

And now Teja, holding the two halves together, read:

"The Amelung to the Balthe,
The eagle to the falcon,
In need and death,
The friend to the friend."

But the King continued to read from the roll:

"King Theodoric could no longer protect me when letters were laid before him, in which my handwriting was so excellently imitated that I myself, on being shown a harmless sentence which had been cut out, acknowledged without hesitation that I had written it. Then the judges fitted the piece into the parchment and read the whole to me. That letter purported to be written to the court of Byzantium, with the promise that the writer would murder the King and evacuate South Italy, if the Emperor would acknowledge him as King of North Italy. And the judges condemned me. As I was led away from the hall, I met my old friend Cethegus Cæsarius in the passage. I had some time before succeeded in persuading a girl with whom he was in love to leave him and marry a good friend of mine in Gaul. Cethegus forced his way through my guards, struck me lightly on the shoulder and said, "He from whom his love has been torn, comforts himself with revenge;" and his eyes told me that he, and no other, had been my secret accuser. As a last favour, the King procured me the means of escape. But I and all my house were outlawed. For a long time I wandered restlessly in the northern mountains, until I recollected that some old and faithful adherents of my house were settled upon the Iffinger mountain. Thither I went with my boy, taking with me a few hereditary jewels, and my faithful friends received me and my son, and hid me under the name of Wargs--the banished--and gave out that I was the son of old Iffa, sending away all untrustworthy servants who might have betrayed me. Thus I lived in secret for some years. I educate my son to be my avenger on Cethegus the traitor, and when I die, old Iffa will continue this education. I hope the day will come when my innocence will be proved. But if it delays too long, my son, when he can wield the sword, shall leave the Iffinger and go to Italy, and revenge his father upon Cethegus Cæsarius. That is my last word to my son.'--'But,'" the King now read from a second paper, "soon after the Duke had written this, a great landslip buried him, together with some of my relations. And I, Iffa, have brought up the boy as my grandchild and Gotho's brother, for the ban had not been taken off the family of Duke Alaric, and I did not wish to expose the boy to the revenge of that devil, Cethegus. And that it might not be possible for the boy to betray anything about his dangerous parentage, I never told him of it. But when he was grown up, and I heard that there reigned in the Roman citadel a mild and just King, who had conquered the devilish Prefect as the God of Morning conquers the Giant of the Night, I sent young Adalgoth away, and told him that, according to his father's command, he must revenge the noble chief and patron of our family upon Cethegus the traitor. But I did not even then tell him that he was Alaric's son, for I feared the ban. So long as his father's innocence was unproved, his father's name could only injure him. And I sent him away in great haste, for I discovered that the belief in his brotherly relation to my grandchild, Gotho, had not prevented him from loving her in a very unbrotherly manner. I might have told him that Gotho was not his sister. But far be it from me that I should dishonestly try to unite the noble scion of my old master and patron with my blood, the simple shepherd's child. No, if justice still exists upon earth, he will soon take his place as Duke of Apulia, like his father before him. And as I fear that I may die before he sends me word of the Prefect's ruin, I have begged the long Hildegisel to write all this down.' (And I, Hildegisel, have received for the writing twenty pounds of the best cheese, and twelve jars of honey, which I thankfully acknowledge, and all of which was good.) 'And with, these writings, and with the blue stones and fine garments and golden solidi from the inheritance of the Balthes, I send my child Gotho to King Totila the Just, to whom she must reveal everything. He will take the ban away from the innocent son of the guiltless duke. And when Adalgoth knows that he is the heir of the Balthes, and that Gotho is not his sister--then he may freely choose or shun the shepherdess; but this he must know, that the race of the Iffingers was never a race of vassals, but free from the very beginning, although under the protection of the House of Balthe.

"And now. King Totila, decide the fate of my grandchild and Adalgoth."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Well," laughed the King, "thou hast spared me the trouble, Duke of Apulia!"

"And the little duchess," added Valeria, "has, as if she had foreseen what was coming, already adorned herself like a bride."

"In honour of *you*," said the shepherdess. "When I heard of this feast as I entered the gates of Roma, I opened my bundle, as my grandfather had bidden me, and put on my ornaments."

"Our betrothal," said Adalgoth to his bride, "has fallen upon the day of the King's betrothal; shall our wedding take place also on the wedding-day of the royal pair?"

"No, no!" interrupted Valeria hastily, almost anxiously. "Add no other to a vow which is yet unfulfilled! You children of Fortune, be wise. You have to-day found each other. Keep to-day fast, for to-morrow belongs to the unknown!"

"Thou speakest truth!" cried Adalgoth. "Even today shall be our wedding!" and he lifted Gotho upon his left arm, and showed her to all the people. "Look here, ye good Goths! This is my little wife and duchess!"

"With your favour!" said a modest voice. "When so much sunshine falls upon the summits and heights of the nation, the lower vegetation would also gladly share some of its warmth."

A homely-looking man approached the King, leading a pretty girl by the hand.

"Is it thou, brave Wachis?" cried Earl Teja, going up to him. "And no longer a bond-servant, but with the long hair of a freedman?"

"Yes, sir. My poor master. King Witichis, gave me my liberty when he sent me away with Mistress Rauthgundis and Wallada. Since then I have let my hair grow. And my mistress--I know it for a fact--was about to free Liuta, so that we might be married according to the law of the nation; but, alas, my mistress never returned to her home at Fæsulæ. But I returned just at the right moment to save Liuta, for the very next day the Saracens burnt the house and murdered all whom they found. After Mistress Rauthgundis's death--leaving no one to claim the inheritance, for a storm had buried her father Athalwin under an avalanche--Liuta became the King's property; and therefore I would beg the King to take me again as a bond-servant, so that we may not be punished if we marry, and----"

"Wachis, thou art indeed faithful!" cried Totila, interrupting him. "No! thou shalt contract a free marriage! Give me a gold-piece."

"Here, King Totila," said Gotho, eagerly taking one from her shepherd's bag; "it is the last of six."

The King took the gold, laid it upon Liuta's open palm, and then struck her hand from below, so that the gold-piece flew up into the air, and fell ringing upon the mosaic pavement.

Then the King said:

"Liuta, thou art free! No bonds hold thee. Go in peace and rejoice with thy bridegroom."

Earl Teja now came forward and said:

"Wachis, once before thou hast borne the shield of a luckless master. Wilt thou now become my shield-bearer?"

With tears in his eyes, Wachis clasped the hand of the Earl in both his own.

And now Teja lifted his golden goblet and solemnly said:

"Fortune befall you!
Already shines on you
The shimmering sunshine:
Yet thankfully think
Of the Dear and the Dead
With reverent remembrance!
He who strove unsuccessful,
The world-renowned warrior:
Witichis, Waltharis' worthiest son!
Though you celebrate cheerily
The feast of the fairest,
The Deity's darlings,
Yet honour for ever
The memory mournful
Of the Great and the Good!
I remind you, O revellers,
To drink to the dear ones;
To the manliest man,
And the worthiest woman;
To Rauthgundis and Witichis,
Deploring, I drink!"

And all solemnly and silently returned his pledge.

Then King Totila once more raised his cup and said before all the people:

"*He deserved! I received! To him be eternal honour!*"

As he resumed his place--the other two betrothed couples had been seated at the King's table--Earl Thorismuth, of Thurii (he had been rewarded for his valour by the title of Earl, but, at his own request, had retained his office of herald and shield-hearer), ascended the steps, and lowered his herald's staff before the King, saying:

"I come to announce strangers, O King of the Goths! Guests who have sailed here from afar. The large fleet, of about a hundred ships, which was reported by thy coast-guards and from the harbour-towns, has now run into the harbour of Portus. It has brought northern people, an old, brave, and seafaring folk, from the land of farthest Thule. Their dragon-ships have lofty decks, and their monstrous figure-heads terrify the beholder. But they come to thee in peace. Yesterday the flag-ship lowered its boats, and our noble guests have sailed up the river. I challenged them, and received the answer: 'King Harald of Goetaland, and Haralda (his wife, as it seems), wish to greet King Totila.'"

"Lead them to us! Duke Guntharis, Duke Adalgoth. Earl Teja, Earl Wisand, and Earl Grippa, go to meet and accompany them here."

Presently, to the sound of strange and twisted horns made of shells, and surrounded by twenty of their sailors and heroes clad in close coats of mail, there appeared on the terrace two figures which far overtopped even the slender Totila and his table companions.

King Harald bore upon his helmet the two wings--each several feet long--of the black sea-eagle. The tail-feathers of the same bird floated from his iron crest. Down his back fell the skin of a monstrous black bear, the jaws and fore-paws of which hung from broad iron rings upon his breast-plate. His coat, woven of iron wire, reached to the knee, and was confined round the hips by a broad belt of seal-skin, set with shells. His arms and legs were bare, but at once adorned and protected by broad golden bracelets. A short knife hung from a steel chain at his belt. In his right hand he carried a long forked spear like a harpoon. His thick, bright yellow hair fell like a mane low down upon his shoulders.

At his left hand stood--scarcely shorter by a finger's length--the Walkyre-like form of his female companion.

Upon her head she wore a golden open helmet, decorated with the small wings of the silver-gull. Her bright red hair, which had a metallic lustre, fell from beneath it in a long straight mass over the small strip of white bearskin which covered her back--more an ornament than a mantle--almost to her ankles.

A closely-fitting mail, made of little scales of gold, betrayed the incomparable figure of the Amazon, yielding to every movement of her heaving bosom. Her under garment, which reached half-way between the knee and ankle, was tastefully made of the white skin of the snow-hare. Her arms were covered by sleeves made of rows of amber beads, which glittered strangely in the evening rays of the southern sunshine.

Upon her left shoulder was gravely perched one of the delicate white falcons of Iceland.

A small hatchet was stuck into her girdle. She carried over her shoulder a long sweeping harp, surmounted with a swan's head and neck of silver.

The Roman populace--their eyes opened wide in wonder--pressed after these singular figures, and even the Goths could not but admire the wondrously fair complexion and the singularly light and sparkling eyes of these northerners.

"As the black hero who received me," began the Viking, "assures me that he is not the King, then no other can be he but thou," and he gave his hand to Totila, first pulling off his fighting-glove of shark's skin.

"Welcome to the Tiber, my cousins from Thuleland!" cried Totila, as he raised his cup and pledged his guests.

Seats were quickly prepared, and the royal visitors took their places at the King's table; their followers at the table near them. Adalgoth poured out wine from tall, two-handled jugs.

King Harald drank, and looked wonderingly around.

"By Asathor!" he cried; "but it is beautiful here!"

"Such I imagine Walhalla to be!" said his companion.

The Goths and the northerners could scarcely understand each other.

"If it pleases thee so well, brother," Totila slowly said, "then rest amongst us with thy wife for some time."

"Ho-ho! Rome-King!" laughed the giantess, and tossed back her head so suddenly, that the waves of her red hair shook.

The falcon flew screaming up, and circled round her head three times. It then quietly returned to her shoulder.

"The man has not yet been born," continued the Amazon, "who could conquer Haralda's heart and hand. Harald alone, my brother, can bend my arm, and spring and hurl his spear farther than I."

"Patience, my little sister! I trust that soon a man of marrow will master thy coy maidenhood. This King here, although he looks as mild as Baldur, yet resembles Sigurd, the vanquisher of Fafner. You shall vie with each other in hurling the spear."

Haralda cast a long look at the Gothic King, blushed, and pressed a kiss upon her falcon's smooth head.

But Totila said:

"Evil befell, as the singers tell us, when Sigurd strove with the Amazon. Rather let woman greet woman in peace. Give thy hand, Haralda, to my bride."

And he signed to Valeria, to whom Duke Guntharis had very imperfectly translated what was said.

Valeria rose with graceful dignity. She wore a long white Roman-Grecian garment, which hung in soft folds, and was confined at the waist by a golden girdle, and upon the shoulder with a cameo brooch. Bound her nobly-shaped head was bound a branch of laurel, which Totila had taken from Adalgoth's wreath to fasten into her black hair. Her beauty, and the rhythm of her movements and the folds of her garments, seemed to float around her like music. She silently held out her hand to her northern sister.

Haralda had cast a sharp and not very friendly look upon the Roman girl; but admiration soon dispelled the angry surprise which had overspread her countenance, and she said:

"By Freia's necklace! thou art the most lovely woman I have ever beheld. I doubt whether a Wish-girl of Walhalla could compare with thee. Dost thou know, Harald, whom this Princess resembles? Ten nights ago we laid waste an island in the blue Grecian sea, and plundered a columned temple. There stood a tall, icy-cold woman, made of white stone; upon her breast was the figure of a head surrounded with snakes; at her feet the night-bird; she was clad in a garment of many folds. Swen unfortunately broke her to pieces because of the jewels in her eyes. The King's bride resembles that marble goddess."

"I must translate what she has said to thee," said Totila, turning to Valeria with a smile. "Thy poetical adorer, Pisa, could not have flattered thee more delicately than this Bellona of the north. They landed, so we were told, at Melos, and there broke the beautiful statue of Athene, sculptured by Phidias. You have made great desolation, I hear," he continued, turning to Harald, "in all the islands between Cos, Chios, and Melos. What, then, has led you so peacefully to us?"

"That I will tell thee, brother; but only after more drink." And he held out his cup to Adalgoth. "No, do not spoil the splendid juice with water! Water should be salt, so that no one could drink it unless he were a shark or a walrus. Water is good to carry us upon its back, but not to be carried in our stomachs. And this vine-beer of yours is a wonderful drink. I am soon tired of our mead; it is like a tame sweet dish. But this vine-mead! the more a man drinks, the thirstier he becomes. And if one drank too much--which is scarcely possible--it is not like the intoxication of ale or mead, which makes a man ready to pray to Asathor to hammer an iron ring round his temples. No; the intoxication of the vine is like the sweet madness of the Skalds--a man feels like a god! So much for the vine! But now I will tell thee how it was that we came here."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Well," began King Harald, "our home is in Thuleland, as the Skalds call it; in Goetaland, as we name it. For Thuleland is the land where one does *not* dwell; where only, still nearer to the ice-mountains, *other* people live. Our realm reaches, towards the rising of the sun, to the sea and our island, Gothland; towards the setting of the sun, as far as Hallin and the Skioldungahaff; towards midday, to Smaland, Skone, and the kingdom of the Sea-Danes; towards midnight, to Svealand. The King is my father, Frode, whom Odin loves. He is much wiser than I; but he has now crowned me as Vi-king, upon the sacred-stone at King-Sala, because he is already a hundred years old, and quite blind. Now the minstrels in our halls still sing the legends which tell that you Goths were originally our brothers, and that only by reason of the wandering of the peoples have you gradually drawn nearer to the south; for you followed the flight of the crane from the Caucasus, but we the running of the wolf."

"If that be so," said King Totila, smiling, "I prefer the crane for a guide."

"It may well seem so to thee, sitting here in this gay drinking-hall," answered King Harald gravely. "But however that maybe--and I do not quite believe it, for then we ought to understand

each other's words better--we truly and highly honour this our blood-relationship. For a long time nothing but good news came from your warm realm to our cold Gothaland--news of the highest fame. And once my father and your King Thidrekr,¹ who is praised by the harp-songs of our Skalds, exchanged envoys and gifts, through the agency of the Esthes, who live on the Austrway. These men led our envoys to the Wends, on the Wyzla; these to the Longobardians, on the Tisia; these to the Herulians, on the Dravus; these through Savia to Salona and Ravenna."

"Thou art a man learned in roads and countries," observed Totila.

"That the Viking must be; for else he will never go forwards, and likewise never get back. Well, for some time we only heard of your glory and good fortune. But once and again there came bad news, brought by merchants who bought our furs and eiderdown and amber, and took it to the Frisians, and Saxons, and Franks, giving us in exchange artfully-formed vessels, and silver and gold. The news became sadder and more sad; we heard that King Thidrekr had died, and that afterwards great evils had broken out in your realm. We heard of defeat, treachery, and of the murder of Kings; of Goths warring against Goths; and of the might of the false Prince of Grêkaland. And it was said that you had broken your heads by thousands against the high walls of your own Roman citadel, which was held not by you, but by a man like Asathor, and another man still worse than the fire-fiend Loki. And we asked if none of the many Kings and Princes who had begged favours of Thidrekr of Raven could have helped you. But at that the Frank merchant, who offered us fine tissues from the Wahala, laughed and said, 'Broken fortunes, broken faith! They have all forsaken the luckless Gothic heroes, Visigoths and Burgundians, Herulians and Thuringians, and most of all we Franks, for we are wiser than all.' But, on hearing this. King Frode threw down his staff angrily, and cried, 'Where is my strong son Harald?' 'Here, father,' I answered, and took his hand. 'Hast thou heard,' my father continued, 'the news of the faithlessness of the Southland Kings? Such things shall not be said or sung of the men of Goetaland! If all others turn away from the Goths of Gardarike and Raven, we will keep faith and help them in their need. Up, my brave Harald, and thou, my bold Haralda! equip a hundred dragon-ships, and fill them with men and weapons. Put your hands deeply into my royal treasure at Kinsala, and do not spare the heaped-up golden rings. And set forth with Odin's wind in your sails. Go first from Konghalla, past the island Danes and the Jutlanders, towards the setting of the sun; thence along the coasts of the Frisians and the Franks, through the narrow path of the sea; then sail farther round the realm of the Sueves to the mountain land that is called Asturia; and round the land of the Visigoths bend towards the south. Then wind through the narrow strait of the wide ocean, where Asathor and Odin have set two pillars.

"You will then have entered the sea of Midilgard, where lie innumerable islands covered with evergreen bushes, out of which shine marble halls, upheld by high, round stone-beams. Lay waste these islands, for they belong to the false Prince of Grêkaland. And then sail to the Roman citadel or to Raven, and help the people of King Thidrekr against their enemies. And fight for them by land and water, and stand by them until all their enemies are overcome. And then speak to them and say: Thus advises King Frode, who will soon have seen a hundred winters, and who has seen the rise and fall of many peoples, and who, as a young Viking, has himself visited the Southland. This is his advice: 'Leave the Southland, however beautiful it may be. You cannot endure therein. As little as the iceberg can endure when it drifts into the southern sea. The sun, air, and waves consume it continually, and be it ever so mighty, it must melt away and leave not a trace behind. It is better to live in the poor Northland than to die in the rich Southland. Go on board our dragon-ships, and equip your own, and fill them with all your people; men, women, and children; and with your oxen and horses, and weapons and treasures; and leave the hot ground that will surely swallow you up, and come away to us. We will press closely together and make room, or take as much land from the Wends and Esthes as you need. And you shall be preserved fresh and green. Down there the southern sun withers and scorches you.' This is the advice of King Frode, whom men have called the Wise for fifty years. Now as we passed into the sea of Midilgard, we had already heard from seafarers that your troubles had been put an end to by a new King, whom they described as looking like the god Baldur; that you had re-won the Roman citadel and all the land of Gardarike, and had even victoriously carried destruction into part of Grêkaland itself. And now we see with our own eyes that you do not need the aid of our weapons. You live in plenty and pleasure, and everything is full of red gold and white stone. But still I must repeat my father's words and advice; listen to him; he is wise! Until now, every one who has despised King Frode's advice, has bitterly regretted it."

But Totila shook his head, smiled, and said:

"We owe you and King Frode warm thanks for rare and noble faithfulness. Such brotherly love from the Northern heroes shall never be forgotten in the songs of the Goths. But, O King Harald, follow me and look about you."

And Totila rose and took his guest by the hand, and led him to the entrance of the pavilion, casting back the hanging curtains.

There lay river and land and city in the glowing light of the setting sun.

"Look at this land, wonderful in the beauty of its sky and soil and art. Look at this Tiber-stream, covered by a happy, jubilant, and handsome people. Look at these masses of laurel and myrtle. Cast thine eyes upon the columned palaces, which shine across from Rome in the evening rays; on the tall marble figures upon these terrace-steps--and say thou, if all this were thine,

wouldst thou ever leave it? Wouldst thou exchange all this magnificence for the firs and pines of the cold land of the north, where spring-time never blooms, for the smoke-blackened wooden huts on the misty heaths?"

"Aye, that I would, by Thorns hammer! This land is good to lay waste, to luxuriate and win battles in; but that done, then up and away with the booty! But you, Goths, are thrown here like drops of water upon hot iron. And if ever we sons of Odin shall rule this land, it will be only such of us as have a strong support in other sons of Odin. But you--you have already become very different to us. Your grandfathers, your fathers, and yourselves have wooed Roman women; in a few generations, if this continue, you will be Romanised. Already you have become smaller, and darker in skin, eyes, and hair. At least many of you. I long to be away from this soft and sultry air, and to breathe the north wind that rushes over our woods and waves. Yes, and I long for the smoke-blackened halls of wood, where Gothic runes are burnt into the roof-beams, and the harps of the Skalds hang on the wooden pillars, and the sacred hearth-fire glows hospitably for ever! I long for our Northland, for it is our home!"

"Then permit us to love *our* home: this land Italia!"

"It will never be your home; but perhaps your grave. You are strangers and will remain so. Or you will become Romanised. But there is no abiding in the land possible for you as sons of Odin."

"Let us at least try, my brother Harald," cried Totila, laughing. "Yes, we have changed in the two centuries during which our people have lived among the laurels. But are we the worse for it? Is it necessary to wear a bearskin in order to be a hero? Is it necessary to rob gold and marble statues in order to enjoy them? Can one be only either a barbarian or a Roman? Can we not keep the virtues of the Germans and lay aside their faults? Adopt the virtues of the Romans without their vices?"

But Harald shook his massive head.

"I should rejoice at your success, but I do not believe in it. The plant takes the nature of the soil and climate upon and under which it lives. And, for my part, I should not at all like it, even if I and mine could succeed. Our faults are dearer to me than the virtues of the Italians--if they have any."

Totila remembered the words with which he himself had answered Julius.

"From the north comes all strength--the world belongs to the Northmen," concluded Harald.

"Tell it to them in the words of thy favourite song," said his sister.

And she handed him her harp; and Harald played and sang an alliterative measure, or *stabreim*, which Adalgoth, translating it into rhymed verse, thus repeated to Valeria:

"Thor stood at the midnight end of the world,
And the battle-axe flew from his hand.
'As far as the battle-axe flies when hurled,
Is mine the sea and the land!'
And the hammer flew from his powerful hand
Like chaff by a hurricane blown:
And it fell in the farthest southern-land,
So that all became his own.
Since then 'tis German right and grace
With the hammer the lands to merit;
We come of the Hammer-God's noble race,
And his world-wide realm will inherit!"

A burst of applause from his Gothic hearers rewarded the royal minstrel, who looked as if he could well realise the proud boast of the song.

Harald once more emptied his deep golden cup. Then he rose and said:

"Now, my little sister Harald, and you, my sailor brothers, we must break up. We must be on board the *Midgardschlange* before the moon shines upon her deck. What says the Wikinga-Balk?-

"'Ill sleeps the ship
When her pilot lies on shore.'

"Long friendship--short parting; that is northern custom."

Totila laid his hand upon his guest's arm.

"Art thou in such haste? Fearest thou to become Romanised with us? Do but remain; it does not come so quickly. And with thee would scarcely happen."

"There thou art right, Rome-King," laughed the giant; "and, by Thor's hammer, I am proud of it! But we must go. We had three things to do here. To help you in battle. You do not need us. Or

do you? Shall we wait until new wars break out?"

"No," said Totila, with a smile; "we have peace and not new strife in view. And if it should really once more come to a war--shall I prove thee right, brother Harald, in thinking us Goths too weak to uphold our rule alone? Have we not beaten our enemies without your help? Could we not beat them again, we Goths alone?"

"I thought as much," said the Viking. "Secondly, we came to fetch you back to the Northland. You will not come. And, thirdly, to lay waste the islands of the Emperor of Grêkaland. That is a merry sport, which we have not sufficiently practised. Come with us, help us, and revenge yourselves."

"No; the word of a king is sacred. We have agreed to an armistice which has still several months to run. And listen, friend Harald. Have a care and do not mistake *our* islands for those of the Emperor. It would displease me if---"

"No, no," laughed Harald, "fear nothing. We have already noticed that thy harbours and coasts are excellently guarded. And here and there thou hast erected high gallows, and affixed to them tablets inscribed with Roman runes. Thy commodore at Panormus translated it to us:

"'Sea-robbers drowned,
Land-robbers hanged;
That is the law
In Totila's land.'

"And my sea-brothers have taken a great dislike to thy sticks and tablets and runes. Farewell, then, Rome-King of the Goths! May thy good-fortune endure! Farewell, lovely Queen of Night! Farewell, all you heroes! we shall meet again in Walhalla, if not sooner."

And after taking a short leave, the northerners walked away.

Haralda threw her falcon into the air.

"Fly before us, Snotr--on deck!"

And the intelligent bird flew away, swift as an arrow, straight down the river.

The King and Valeria accompanied their guests halfway down the staircase; there they exchanged the last greetings. The Amazon cast one more rapid glance at Totila.

Harald remarked it, and as they descended the last steps he whispered:

"Little sister, it is on thy account that I left so quickly. Do not grieve about this handsome King. Thou knowest that I have inherited from our father the gift of recognising men who are fated to die. I tell thee, death by the spear hovers over this King's sunny head. He will not again see the changing of the moon."

At this the strong and tender-hearted woman forced back the tears which rose into her proud eyes.

Duke Guntharis, Earl Teja, and Duke Adalgoth accompanied the Goths to their boats on the Tiber, and waited until they had put off.

Teja looked after them gravely.

"Yes, King Frode is wise," he said. "But folly is often sweeter than truth; and grander. Go back to the terrace without me, Duke Guntharis. I see the King's despatch-boat coming up the river. I will wait and see what news it brings."

"I will wait with thee, my master," said Adalgoth, looking at Teja anxiously. "Thy countenance is so terribly grave. What is the matter?"

"I have a foreboding, my Adalgoth," answered Teja, putting his arm round the youth's neck. "See how rapidly the sun sets. I shudder! Let us go and meet the boat--it will land below there, where lie the ancient marble columns."

Totila and Valeria had returned to the pavilion.

"Wert thou moved, my beloved," asked the Roman girl with emotion, "by what that stranger said? It was--Guntharis and Teja explained it to me--of very grave import."

But Totila quickly raised his head.

"No, Valeria, it did not move me! I have taken great Theodoric's great work upon my shoulders. I will live and die for the dream of my youth, for my kingdom! Come--where is Adalgoth, my cup-bearer? Come; let us once more pledge a cup, Valeria--let us drink to the good fortune of the Gothic kingdom!"

And he lifted up his cup; but before he could put it to his lips, Adalgoth, with a loud call,

hurried up the steps followed by Teja.

"King Totila," cried Adalgoth breathlessly, "prepare to hear terrible news; collect thyself----"

Totila set down his cup and asked, turning pale:

"What has happened?"

"Thy despatch-boat has brought news from Ancona. The Emperor has broken the armistice--he has----"

Teja had now drawn near. He was pale with fury.

"Up, King Totila!" he cried. "Exchange the wreath for the helmet! Off Senogallia, near Ancona, a Byzantine fleet suddenly attacked our squadron which lay under the protection of the armistice. Our ships no more exist. A powerful army of the enemy has landed. And the commander-in-chief is--Cethegus the Prefect!"

CHAPTER XV.

In the camp of Cethegus the Prefect at Setinum, at the foot of the Apennines, a few miles north of Taginæ, Lucius Licinius, who had just arrived by sea from Epidamnus, was walking up and down, in eager conversation with Syphax, before the tent of the commander-in-chief.

"My master has been anxiously expecting you, tribune, for many days," said the Moor; "he will be rejoiced to find you in the camp when he returns. He has ridden out to reconnoitre."

"Whither rode he?"

"Towards Taginæ, with Piso and the other tribunes."

"That is the next fortified town occupied by the Goths to the south, is it not? But now, you wise Moor, tell me what happened last at Byzantium? You know that your master sent me to levy forces among the Longobardians, long before anything was decided. And as, after a dangerous journey through the country of the Longobardians and Gepidæ, I safely crossed the rapid Ister near Novæ into Justinian's kingdom, and went to fetch the promised orders of the Prefect from my host at Nicopolis, I only found a laconic command to meet him in Senogallia. I was much astonished; for I scarcely dared to hope that he would ever again, at the head of the imperial fleet and army, victoriously tread the soil of Italy. From Senogallia I followed your march hither. The few captains whom I have met in the camp told me briefly of the course of events until shortly before the arrest of Belisarius. But they could not tell me how that occurred, and what took place later. Now you----"

"Yes, I know what happened almost as well as my master, for I was present."

"Is it possible? Can Belisarius really have conspired against the Emperor? I could never have believed it!"

Syphax smiled slyly.

"I have no right to judge of that. I can only tell you exactly what happened. Listen--but come into the tent and refresh yourself. My master would scold me for letting you stand outside unattended to. And we can talk more freely inside," he added, as he closed the curtains of the tent behind him. Then begging his master's guest to be seated, he served him with fruit and wine, and began his account. "As the night of that fateful day fell, I went and hid myself in a niche of Photius's house, behind the tall statue of some Christian saint, whose name I do not know, but who had a famous broad back. I could easily look into the hall of the house through an aperture just above my head, which had been made to allow the passage of fresh air. The faint light within enabled me to distinguish a number of the aristocrats whom I had often seen in the imperial palace, and in the houses of Belisarius and Procopius. The first thing that I understood--for my master has taken care that I should learn the speech of the Greeks who call themselves Romani--was what the master of the house was saying to a man who had just then entered. 'Rejoice,' he said, 'for Belisarius comes. After scarcely deigning to look at me yesterday when, full of expectation, I stopped him in the gymnasium of Zenon, to-day he himself addressed me as I was slowly and cautiously passing his house, for I knew that he would return from the hunt towards evening. He pressed this waxen tablet into my hand, first looking round to make sure that no one observed him. And on the tablet is written: "I cannot longer withstand your appeals. Certain reasons impel me to join you. I shall come this evening." But,' continued the master of the house, 'where is Piso, where is Salvius Julianus and the other young Romans?' 'They will not be coming,' answered the man. 'I saw almost all of them in boats on the Bosphorus. They have no doubt sailed to some feast at the Prefect's villa, near the Gate of Constantine.' 'Let them go,' said Photius; 'we do not need the brutal Latins, nor the proud and false Prefect. Verily, Belisarius outweighs them all.' At that moment I saw Belisarius enter the hall. He wore an ample mantle, which entirely hid his figure. The master of the house hurried to meet him, and all present

gathered respectfully around him. 'Great Belisarius,' said his freedman, 'we know how to value your compliance.' And he pressed upon Belisarius the little ivory staff which is held by the head of the assembly, and led him to the raised seat of the president, which he himself had just vacated. 'Speak--command--act--we are ready,' said Photius. 'I shall act at the right time,' answered Belisarius gloomily, and took his seat. Just then young Anicius rushed into the room with tangled hair and flying garments; a drawn sword in his hand. 'Fly!' he cried. 'We are discovered and betrayed.' Belisarius rose. 'They have forced my house,' continued Anicius. 'My slaves were taken prisoners. The weapons which I had hidden were found, and your letters and documents, and, alas, my own too, have disappeared from a hiding-place which was known only to me! And still more--as I turned into the grove of Constantine, I thought I heard the sound of whispering and the rattle of arms amongst the bushes. I am followed--save yourselves!' The conspirators rushed to the doors. Belisarius alone remained quietly standing before his chair. 'Take heart!' cried Photius. 'Follow the example of your hero-chief!' But the sound of a trumpet was heard from the great house-door, the sign for me to leave my post and join my master, who stormed into the house at the head of the imperial lance-bearers and Golden Shields, with the Prefect of Byzantium, and the archon of the palace-guard. My master looked splendid," continued Syphax enthusiastically, "as, with a flaming torch in his left hand, a sword in his right, and his crimson plume floating behind him, he rushed into the hall; so looks the fire-demon when he issues from a blazing mountain in Africa! I drew my sword and sprang to my master's left side, for he carried no shield. He had ordered me to render young Anicius harmless as soon as possible. 'Down with all who resist, in the name of Justinian!' cried my master. His sword was dripping with blood, for he had killed with his own hand the body-guards whom Belisarius had placed at the entrance of the grove. 'Yield!' he cried to the frightened crowd; 'and thou, archon of the palace, arrest *all* the conspirators. Do you understand--*all*!' 'Is it possible! Shameless traitor!' cried Anicius, and rushed at my master with his sword. 'Yes,' he cried, 'there is the crimson crest! Die, murderer of my brother!' But the next moment he lay at our feet, severely wounded. I drew my sword out of his breast, and then disarmed Photius, who was the only one who still resisted. All the others allowed themselves to be taken like sheep bewildered by a thunder-storm. 'Bravo, Syphax!' cried my master. 'Examine his dress for any writings.' Then he turned to the archon, asking him if he were ready, for he had stopped hesitatingly opposite Belisarius, who remained perfectly quiet. 'What!' asked the archon--'must I also arrest the magister militum?' '*All*, I said. 'Do you no longer understand Greek? You see--all see--that Belisarius is at the head of the conspiracy--he holds the president's staff, he occupies the president's chair.' 'Ha!' now cried Belisarius; 'is it so! Guards! Help, help, my body-guards! Marcellus, Barbatio, Ardaburius!' 'The dead cannot hear, magister militum,' said my master. 'Yield, in the name of the Emperor! Here is his great seal. For this night he has made me his representative, and a thousand lances bristle round this house.' 'Fidelity is madness!' cried Belisarius, threw his sword away, and held out his strong arms to the archon, who put on the chains. 'Into the dungeons with all the prisoners,' said my master. 'Photius and Belisarius must be put separately into the round tower of Anastasius, in the palace. I will hasten to the Emperor and return his ring, and take him this steel'--he lifted the sword of Belisarius from the ground--'and tell him that he may sleep in peace. The conspiracy is crushed--the Empire is saved!'--The very next morning the trial for high treason was commenced. Many witnesses were heard--I amongst them. I swore that I had seen Belisarius received and heard him greeted as the head of the conspiracy. I myself had taken the tablet from the dress of Photius. Belisarius would have appealed to the testimony of his bodyguards, but they were all dead. Photius and other prisoners, submitted to the rack, confessed that Belisarius had finally consented to become the head of the conspiracy. Antonina was strictly guarded in the Red House. The Empress refused to grant the interview for which she passionately sued. It told strongly against both her and Belisarius when spies of the Empress bore witness that they had seen young Anicius steal by night into the house of Belisarius for weeks together. And it shocked the judges that Anicius himself, Antonina and Belisarius, continued obstinately to deny their guilt, although it was so fully proved. Immediately after the arrest I was sent for by my master, to tell Antonina that he had been most painfully surprised to find that Belisarius was *really* at the head of the conspiracy; and at the same time to say that he had found not alone letters of hatred in the cistern belonging to Anicius. As I said these words, which I did not understand, the beautiful wife of Belisarius fell fainting to the ground.--We left Byzantium before Belisarius was sentenced; but Photius and most of the others were already condemned to death as we set sail with the imperial fleet for Epidamnus, where my master's tribunes and mercenaries, and the imperial forces originally intended for the Persian wars, were awaiting us. For my master had been honoured with the newly-created dignity of Magister Militum per Italium, and the command of the 'first army.' The 'second army' was to be brought after us by Prince Areobindos, when he had accomplished the easy task of overpowering the small Gothic garrisons in the towns of Epirus and the islands with a force five times their number."

"What is said will be the punishment of Belisarius?" asked Lucius Licinius. "I could never have believed that that man----"

"The judge will certainly condemn him to death, for his guilt is clear. But people speculate as to whether the Emperor's anger or his former affection for the general will get the victory. Most of them think that the Emperor will change the sentence of death into one of banishment and loss of sight. My master says that Belisarius's senseless denial of his guilt does him great harm. And he is also without the assistance of his wise friend Procopius, who is absent in Asia. Cethegus managed the embarkation of the troops to Epidamnus with such secrecy that the stupid Goths, who, besides, reckoned upon the armistice, were completely taken by surprise; and while the crews were sleeping on shore, the scantily-guarded Gothic fleet was taken and destroyed. But

hark! here comes my master; he alone has such a proud step?"

From Licinius Cethegus now learned that not only had he obtained a promise from Alboin, the Longobardian chief, that he would come to the help of Cethegus with twenty thousand men (a number which the latter, always jealous, found almost too great), but that he had succeeded in engaging other warlike troops of mercenaries.

Cethegus, on his side, informed Lucius that, although he had been able to relieve Ravenna, he had met with much hindrance on the part of his own countrymen, who were slow to rise in revolt against the Goths; and that only with the Byzantines under his command, it would be impossible to beat Totila. He complained bitterly of the delay of Areobindos in bringing up the "second army," and regretted that he had been unable to reach Taginæ before Earl Teja, who had beaten the Saracens there posted with great loss, and had taken up a strong position in the expectation of being speedily joined by King Totila with the army.

"And Taginæ is the key of the position," concluded Cethegus. "Earl Teja must have flown from Rome on the wings of the wind! I have tried to-day to ascertain the strength of his garrison, but I could not penetrate beyond Capræ. The barbarian King is already on the march, and where, oh! where tarries my 'second army?'"

CHAPTER XVI.

The next day Totila reached Taginæ, accompanied by Valeria and Julius. He had hastened forward to join Teja with a portion of his troops, while Wisand and Guntharis reached him later with the main army. Only after their arrival could any attack be made upon the very strong position of the Prefect.

Cethegus, too, attempted no assault, but while thus inactive, awaiting his "second army," he once more, and in vain, endeavoured to regain the lost affection of Julius. He went to Taginæ to meet him at a spot between the outposts of the opposing forces. He tried all possible means to induce him to return to his allegiance, even unveiling the history of his past life. The mother of Julius had once been betrothed to Cethegus, but her father had been persuaded by Duke Alaric to break off the match, and to give her in marriage to a Gothic noble. On the day of her wedding, Cethegus, mad with grief, had tried to carry her off by force, but, overpowered by numbers, had been struck down, and thrown, seemingly lifeless, on the banks of the Tiber. Many years after, he had found Julius, a young boy, forsaken, with his dying mother, in their villa on the banks of the Rhodus, which had been sacked by bands of marauders. From that moment Cethegus had adopted the son of his lost bride.--But in vain he now appealed to the gratitude of his adopted son. Julius not only recoiled with horror from any further connection with a man whose ruthless hands were stained with blood, but his deepening religious feeling separated him entirely from the avowed atheist.

And, blow upon blow, Cethegus was disappointed in another matter. The "second army" was at last reported as approaching. Syphax brought the news; he had ridden night and day in order to reach the Prefect before this army should arrive, for at its head was, not Areobindos, but--*Narses*.

Vexed and alarmed, Cethegus left his camp, and rode forward to meet Narses, with whom he found Alboin, the Longobardian chief. Narses received him with marked coolness, and at once explained to him that he could suffer no rival in his camp; that Cethegus must either serve under him as one of his generals, or remain inactive as his *guest*. Clearly seeing that he must either submit or be a prisoner, Cethegus at once affirmed that he considered it an honour to serve under Narses, and together the generals reached a favourable position between Helvillum and Taginæ.

And a mighty army was that of Narses, with which he had advanced from the north and east in terrible strides, driving before him the Goths from position to position, making no prisoners, but inexorably annihilating all who stood in his way.

Totila had but a small force to oppose to these numbers, for his army had been fearfully diminished; and now, when the Italians foresaw the probable consequences of the renewed war, and that the Goths were being slowly but surely overcome, they ceased to rally round Totila's flag, and even, where they felt themselves safe, betrayed the hiding-places of the Gothic people to the Byzantines. The persecuted Gothic families fled, and sought protection in the camp of Totila, who, fearing the famine sure to be caused by the accumulation of helpless masses, sent them still farther south to those parts of the peninsula yet uninvaded by Narses.

Surrounded by his Earls, Totila now formed a plan by which he intended to entice the centre of the army of Narses (which was held by the Longobardians) into an ambush between Capræ and Taginæ. Reckoning upon the headlong valour of the Longobardians, Totila determined to place the full half of his troops in the town of Capræ, leaving the other half in Taginæ. Totila himself, with his small troop of horsemen, would advance beyond Capræ against the Longobardians; and at the moment of attack, would turn, feigning a sudden panic; would gallop back through the gates of Capræ (the troops there remaining concealed in the houses), and thus draw on the Longobardians to pursue him into the narrow road, between low hills, which lay

between Capræ and Taginæ. At this spot Totila would place in ambush a troop of Persian horsemen, which had been unexpectedly brought to him by his old friend and rival, Furius Ahalla, who had orders, when the Longobardians were fairly taken in the trap, to issue from their ambush, and annihilate them. Totila counted upon the fidelity of Ahalla, who was bound to him by strong ties of gratitude in spite of the defeat he had suffered in his suit of Valeria. This plan of Totila was highly approved of by Hildebrand, and all the warriors who shared his counsels.

The evening before the day of its execution all was in readiness. Furius Ahalla and his horsemen were posted in the narrow road, the "Flaminian Way." Earl Thorismuth himself went out to make sure that they had punctually obeyed orders. When he returned to Totila's camp, he brought word that Furius Ahalla begged Totila to delay his attack and feigned flight on the morrow, until three hundred of his best men, who had been delayed on the march, should have joined him; of which event he would immediately apprise Totila outside the gates of Capræ.

"Well," said Totila, smiling, "I will await the proper moment, and meantime entertain the Longobardians by my feats of horsemanship. To-morrow, Teja, God will decide the right. Thou sayest there is no God but necessity. I say there is a living God--my victory to-morrow shall prove it."

"Stay," cried Julius, who was present, "ye shall not tempt the Lord!"

"Seest thou," cried Teja, as he rose and took up his shield, "Julius fears for his God!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Brilliantly arose the sun on the next morning, casting its first beams over the warlike movement in the Gothic camp.

As the King issued from his dwelling in the marketplace of Taginæ, Adalgoth, Thorismuth, and Phaza hurried to meet him with his milk-white charger, sent, together with a magnificent suit of armour, by Valeria, his bride.

His arms rang as the King swung himself into the saddle.

His grooms led up two other horses in reserve, one of which was Pluto, the Prefect's restless and fiery charger.

From Totila's shoulders flowed his long white mantle, held together at the neck by a broad and heavy clasp set with precious stones. His cuirass was of shining silver, richly inlaid with gold, the figure of a flying swan upon the breast. The edges of the cuirass at the neck, arms, and belt, were bound with red silk. Beneath it showed the coat of white silk, reaching over the thighs.

Broad gold bracelets and silvered gauntlets protected his arms and hands; greaves his knees and the top of his feet.

His narrow and gracefully-shaped shield was divided into three fields of silver, gold, and crimson. On the golden field the figure of the flying swan was wrought in white enamel.

The caparison and reins of his horse were set with silver and embroidered with red silk.

In his right hand the King held a spear, to the point of which Valeria had fastened four streamers of red and white riband; merrily they fluttered in the morning breeze.

Thus brilliantly arrayed, the King rode through the streets of Taginæ at the head of his horsemen. Earl Thorismuth, Phaza, and Duke Adalgoth, and also Julius, rode in his train. Julius carried no weapons, but he bore a shield forged by Teja.

Never had Totila shone in such beauty! The people greeted him upon his way with shouts of joy. At the northern gate of Taginæ, Aligern came riding towards him.

"I thought that thy place was with the right wing," said the King. "What brings thee here?"

"My cousin Teja has ordered me to remain at thy side and guard thy life."

"My Teja is untiring in his care of me!" cried the King.

Aligern joined the escort.

Earl Thorismuth now undertook the command of the footmen who were hidden in the houses of Taginæ.

Outside the gate, the King rode to the front of his not very numerous troop of horsemen, and disclosed his plan to the captains.

"I entrust to you, comrades, the most difficult of all tasks--flight! But the flight will be only

seeming. What is true, is your courage and the destruction of the foe."

And now the small troop rode forward past the place of ambush on the Flaminian Way, the King convincing himself that the Persian horsemen were in readiness upon both the wooded heights. The ambush on the right was commanded by Furius himself, that on the left by his chief, Isdigerd.

Totila now rode into Capræ through the southern gate, and admonished the bowmen under Earl Wisand not to issue from the houses in which they were concealed, until the Persian horsemen had fallen upon the Longobardians from their ambush, but then immediately to sally out of the southern gate, while at the same time the spear-bearers would advance against the enemy from the northern gate of Taginæ.

"Thus the Longobardians and such of Narses' foot who have pressed forward between Capræ and Taginæ will be surrounded on all sides and crushed. I and Thorismuth attack in front, Furius and Isdigerd on both flanks, and Wisand in the rear. They will be lost!"

"Does he not look like the sun-god?" Adalgoth delightedly asked Julius.

"Peace! Make no idol of sun or man! Besides, to-day is the solstice!" answered Julius.

At length the King reached the northern gate of Capræ, left it open behind him, and galloped out with his little troop upon the level land between Capræ and Helvillum.

Here Narses had placed his centre; foremost Alboin with his Longobardians. Behind these, at a considerable distance, stood Narses in his litter, surrounded by Cethegus, Liberius, Auzalas, and other leaders.

Narses had had a bad night, disturbed by slight fits. He was very weak, and could not stand up for any length of time in his low and open litter.

He had strictly admonished Alboin not to advance to the attack without special orders.

King Totila gave a sign to his horsemen, and at a trot the thin line advanced towards the far superior ranks of the Longobardians.

"They surely will not shame us by attacking us with only a few lances?" cried Alboin.

But an attack did not seem to be the present object of the King.

He had ridden far in advance of his men, who had suddenly halted, and now attracted all eyes by his feats of horsemanship.

The spectacle which he afforded was so wonderful in the eyes of the Byzantines, that the witnesses related it in astonishment to Procopius, who, himself amazed, has remitted it to us.

"On this day," he writes, "King Totila evidently wished to show his enemies what manner of man he was. His weapons and his horse shone with gold. So many shining red streamers fluttered from the point of his spear that this ornament alone announced the King from a distance. Thus, mounted on a splendid charger, in the space between the two armies, did he indulge in a skilful exercise of arms. Now he rode in a circle; now he caracoled in semicircles to the right and left; now he hurled his spear into the air, as he rode off at full gallop, and caught it by the middle of the shaft as it fell quivering, first with his right hand, and then with his left; and thus he showed to the wondering troops his feats of horsemanship."

After the battle, however, the Byzantines learned the true reason of this merry sport.

For a time Alboin looked on quietly.

Then he said to a Longobardian chief who stood near him:

"That fellow rides to the battle-field adorned like a bridegroom! What costly armour! We do not see the like at home, Gisulf. And not to dare to attack! Does Narses again sleep?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

At last a Persian horseman, making his way through the ranks of the Goths, galloped up to the King, gave a message, and galloped back again at full speed.

"At last!" cried Totila. "Now enough of sport! Brave Alboin, son of Audoin," he loudly cried across to the enemy's ranks, "wilt thou really fight for the Greeks against us? Then come on, O King's son--it is a King who calls thee?"

Alboin could no longer restrain his impatience.

"Mine must he be with armour and horse!" he shouted, and spurred forward with his lance

couched.

Totila, with a gentle pressure of his thigh, brought his horse to a sudden standstill. It seemed that he intended to stand the shock.

Alboin came on at a furious gallop.

Another slight pressure of Totila's thigh, a clever spring to one side, and the Longobardian, who could not check his horse, rushed far past his adversary.

But the next moment Totila was at Alboin's back; he could easily have bored him through with his spear.

The Longobardians, seeing the danger of their chief, uttered loud cries and hurried to his assistance.

But Totila whirled his lance round, and contented himself with giving his adversary such a thrust in the left side with the shaft end, that Alboin fell headlong out of his saddle on the right side of his horse. Totila quietly rode back to his troop, waving his spear over his head in triumph.

Alboin had remounted, and now led his troop against the thin ranks of the Goths.

But just before the shock of meeting, the King cried, "Fly! fly into the town!" turned his horse's head, and galloped away towards Capræ.

His horsemen followed him.

For one moment Alboin halted in perplexity. But the next he cried:

"It is nothing else; it is a pure flight! There they run into the gate! Yes, feats of horsemanship are one thing, and fighting is another. After them, my wolves! into the town!"

And the Longobardians galloped forwards to Capræ, burst open the northern gate--which had been closed, but not bolted, by the flying Goths--and rushed through the long street towards the southern gate, through which the last Goth was just disappearing.

Narses had till now stood upright in his litter with difficulty, observing all that passed.

"Halt!" he angrily cried. "Halt! Blow the trumpets! Sound the retreat! It is the most clumsy trap in the world! But this Alboin thinks that if any one runs away from him, it must be in earnest!"

But the trumpeters blew in vain.

The cries of victory uttered by the pursuing Longobardians, drowned the blast of the trumpets; or those that heard it disregarded it.

Narses groaned as he saw the last ranks of the Longobardians disappear into the Gate of Capræ.

"Oh!" he sighed; "those blockheads oblige me to commit a folly with open eyes. I cannot let them suffer for their stupidity as they deserve. I still need them. Therefore, forward, in the name of nonsense! Before we can overtake them, they may be already half destroyed! Forward, Cethegus, Anzalas, and Liberius! Take the Isaurians, Armenians, and Illyrians, and get into Capræ. But reflect that the town *cannot* be empty. It is a snare, into which we follow those blind bulls with open eyes. I will come after in my litter; but I can stand no more."

And he sank back into his seat, terribly fatigued. A slight convulsion, such as he often experienced when excited, shook his frame.

The footmen of Cethegus and Liberius advanced towards the town at a rapid march, the two leaders riding in front.

Meanwhile pursued and pursuers had rushed through the little town, and the last Longobardians had passed Capræ, while the first, with Alboin, had reached that part of the Flaminian Way where the two hills bounded and confined the road on the right and left.

The King galloped forward another horse's length; then he halted, turned, and gave a sign.

Adalgoth, who rode at his side, blew his horn, and out of the northern gate of Taginæ issued Thorismuth and his spear-bearers, while from the double ambush on the hills the Persian horsemen of the Corsican burst out with a yell and a blast of cornets.

"Now wheel about, my Goths! Forward to the charge! Woe to the befooled!" cried Totila.

Alboin looked helplessly round.

"We have never before trotted into anything so evil, my wolves!" he said.

He would have retreated, but now Gothic footmen issued likewise from the southern gate of Capræ, blocking the way back.

"There is nothing for it but to die merrily, Gisulf! Greet Rosimunda, if thou escapest!"

And he turned to meet one of the leaders of the Persian horsemen, who, distinguished by a richly-gilded open helm, had now reached the road, and was advancing straight upon him.

As he came up to Alboin, he of the gilded helmet cried:

"Turn, Longobardian! yonder stands our common foe! *Down with the Goths!*"

And he ran his sword through a Gothic horseman who was aiming a stroke at Alboin.

And now the Persian horsemen, galloping past the Longobardians, attacked the horrified Goths. For a moment the latter halted, taken by surprise. But when they saw that it was no mistake--that the ambush was against *them*, and not against the Longobardians--they cried, "Treachery, treachery! all is lost!" and, this time in unfeigned flight, rushed back to Taginæ, carrying everything along with them, even their own footmen, who were just issuing from the gate.

Even the King changed countenance when he saw the Corsican strike at the Goths at Alboin's side.

"Yes, it is treachery!" he cried. "Ha! the tiger! Down with him!"

And he rushed at the Corsican. But before he could reach him, Isdigerd the Persian had stormed into the road from the left between the King and Furius.

"Aim at the King!" he cried to his men. "All spears at the King! There he is, the white one! With the swan on his helmet! Down with him!"

A hail of spears whistled through the air. In a moment the King's shield bristled with darts.

By this time the Corsican had recognised the tall and glittering figure in the distance.

"It is he! I will have his heart's blood!"

And he forced his way through his own and Isdigerd's men.

The two enraged adversaries were now separated only by a few feet.

But Totila had turned against Isdigerd. Pierced in the neck by the King's spear, the chief fell dead to the ground.

And now Totila and Furius met.

The Corsican aimed his spear full at the King's unprotected face.

But suddenly the glittering helmet and the white mantle had disappeared.

Two spears had struck the white horse, and at the same time a third pierced the King's shield and wounded his left arm severely.

Horse and man fell.

Isdigerd's Persians raised a wild cry of exultation and pressed forward.

Furius and Alboin spurred their horses.

"Spare the King's life! take him prisoner! He spared me!" cried Alboin.

For he had been greatly touched when Gisulf told him that he distinctly saw the King change the point of his spear for the shaft.

"No! Down with Totila!" cried Furius.

And he hurled his spear at the wounded man, whom Aligern was trying to lift upon the Prefect's horse and lead out of the fight.

Julius caught the Corsican's first spear upon Teja's proven shield.

Furius called for a second, and aimed at the press around the King; Phaza, the Armenian, tried to parry the stroke and received the spear in his heart.

Then Furius, who had now spurred close up, raised his long and crooked scimeter against the King. But before the stroke could fall the Corsican fell backwards from his saddle.

The young Duke of Apulia had thrust the staff of his banner with such force against Ahalla's

breast that the wood was shattered.

And now Totila's banner--the costly work of Valeria and her women--was in the greatest danger in Adalgoth's hands. For all the enemy's horse pressed upon the bold young standard-bearer; a stroke of Gisulf's axe struck the staff and broke it again--Adalgoth tore off the silken flag and tucked it into his sword-belt.

Alboin had now come up, and cried:

"Yield, thou King of the Goths--to me, a King's son!"

Aligern had just succeeded in lifting the King on to the Prefect's horse; he turned to the Longobardian, who, wishing to stay the King's flight but to save his life, aimed a stroke at the latter's horse with his spear. But the next moment Aligern had cleft Alboin's vulture-winged helmet, and, stunned, the latter wavered in his saddle.

Thus, the leaders of their enemies being for the moment repulsed, Adalgoth, Aligern, and Julius had time to lead the King out of the tumult as far as the northern gate of Taginæ. From this place the King would have conducted the battle, but he could scarcely hold himself upright in his saddle.

"Thorismuth," he said, "thou must defend Taginæ; for the present Capræ is lost. Let a mounted messenger fetch the whole of Hildebrand's wing here; the road to Rome must be kept open at all costs. Teja, as I learned, has already joined in the battle with his left wing.--To defend the retreat to the south--is our last hope!"

And, saying this, he swooned away.

But Earl Thorismuth said:

"I and my spearmen will defend Taginæ to the last man. Not a foe shall get in here; neither the Persians nor the Longobardians. I will protect the King's life as long as I can raise a finger. Take him farther back; into the mountain--into the cloister but make haste, for there, from the Gate of Capræ, come the enemy's foot--and, look there!--Cethegus the Prefect with his Isaurians! Capræ and our bowmen are lost!"

And so it was.

Wisand, obeying his orders, had not defended Capræ, but had allowed Cethegus and Liberius to enter, and only when they were fairly inside the town did he begin the fight in the streets, at the same time sending a thousand of his men out of the southern gate to attack the Longobardians.

But, as the ambuscades had fallen upon the Goths instead of the Longobardians; as Alboin and Furius united in dispersing or annihilating the few Gothic horsemen, and the attack intended by the spearmen from Taginæ did not take place; the Gothic bowmen, first in Capræ itself, and then on the Flaminian Way, between Capræ and Taginæ, were quickly crushed by superior force.

Wisand escaped as if by a miracle, and, though wounded, reached Taginæ and reported the annihilation of his troops.

Narses was carried into Capræ, and the Illyrians began to storm Taginæ. Earl Thorismuth resisted heroically. He fought his best in order to cover the retreat of his comrades.

He was presently reinforced by a few thousand men from Hildebrand's left wing, who now hurried up, while the old master-at-arms led the greater part of his troops southwards beyond Taginæ upon the high-road to Rome.

Just as the storming of Taginæ was about to commence, Cethegus met Furius and Alboin, who had recovered from the blows they had received.

Cethegus had heard of the course pursued by the Corsican, which had decided the fate of the battle. He shook him by the hand.

"Well done, friend Furius! At last on the right side, and against the barbarian King!"

"He must not escape alive!" growled the Corsican.

"What? How? He still lives! I thought that--he had fallen," said Cethegus hastily.

"No; they managed to rescue him after he was wounded."

"He must not live!" cried Cethegus. "Then you are right! It is of more importance than to win Taginæ. Narses can manage that heroic work from his litter. He has seventy to one. Up, Furius! Why do your horsemen stand idle here?"

"The animals cannot ride up the walls!"

"No; but they can swim. Up! take three hundred yourself, and give me three hundred. Two roads lead right and left from the little town over--no! they have broken down the bridges--they lead *through* the Clasius and the Sibola--let us take these roads. The wounded King is certainly--can he still fight?"

"Hardly."

"Then he has fled beyond Taginæ--to Rome or--"

"No; to his bride!" cried Furius. "Most certainly to Valeria in the cloister. Ha! I will stab him in her very arms! Up, Persians! follow me. Thanks, Prefect! Take as many horsemen as you like. And ride to the right--I will ride to the left round the town; for both roads lead to the cloister."

And, wheeling to the left, he disappeared.

Cethegus ordered the rest of the horsemen to follow him, speaking in the Persian language.

Then he rode up to Liberius and said:

"I will take the Gothic King prisoner."

"What? He still lives? Then make haste!"

"Meanwhile you can take this Taginæ," continued Cethegus; "I will leave you my Isaurians."

And he galloped away with Syphax and three hundred Persians.

Meantime the wounded King had been taken by his friends out of Taginæ into a little pine-wood near the road, where he drank from a spring and gradually revived.

"Julius," he said, "ride on to Valeria; tell her that the battle is lost, but not the kingdom. That I am alive and still hope. As soon as I feel a little stronger I shall ride up to the Spes Bonorum. I ordered Teja and Hildebrand there when they had finished their tasks. It is a high and safe position. Go, I beg thee; comfort Valeria and take her also from the cloister to Spes Bonorum. Thou wilt not? Then I must myself ride up the difficult road--surely thou wilt spare me that?"

Julius was reluctant to leave the wounded man.

"Oh, relieve me from my helmet and mantle! they are so heavy," said Totila.

Julius took them from him and gave him his own mantle.

CHAPTER XIX.

All at once a thought flashed across the mind of the monk; had they not once before exchanged garments--the Dioscuri?

Had he not once before drawn the murderous steel directed at Totila's heart upon himself?

He thought they were followed. It seemed to him that he heard horses approaching, and Aligern--Adalgoth held the King's head upon his knees--had hastened to the edge of the wood to look.

"Yes, it is they," he cried as he returned; "Persian horsemen are riding up from both sides of the wood!"

"Then make haste, Julius," begged Totila; "save Valeria! Take her to Teja at the sarcophagus."

"I will make all speed, my friend! Farewell till we meet again!" And Julius once more pressed Totila's hand. Then he mounted Pluto--he chose the wounded horse, leaving his own, which was unhurt.

Unseen by Totila, he set the helmet with its silver swan upon his head, folded the white mantle around him, and galloped out of the wood towards the cloister hill.

"This road," he thought, "is open and undefended, while the road which the King will take to the Spes Bonorum leads through wood and vineyard. Perhaps I shall succeed in attracting the pursuers away from him."

And, in fact, he had no sooner issued from beneath the trees, and begun to ride up the hill, than he saw that the horsemen who had come from beyond Taginæ were eagerly following him.

In order to keep the pursuers away from the King, and from discovering their error, he urged his horse to its full speed.

But the animal was wounded, and the way was very steep. Nearer and nearer came the

pursuers.

"Is it he?"

"Yes, it is he."

"No, it is not. He is too short," said the leader of the troop, who rode foremost.

"Would he fly alone?"

"That would be the best way to escape," observed the leader.

"It is he most surely; I see the silver swan on his helmet!"

"And the white mantle!"

"But he rode a white horse," said the leader.

"Yes, at first," said one of the horsemen; "but when it fell, struck by my spear, they lifted him-- I was close by--upon that charger."

"Enough," said the leader, "you are right. I recognise the horse."

"A noble animal! How it keeps on, and up hill, too, although wounded."

"Yes, he is a noble animal! And I will make him stop. Pay attention! Halt, Pluto!" he shouted. "On your knees!"

Snorting and trembling, the clever, obedient animal, in spite of spur and blows, stood stockstill, and slowly bent its fore-legs in the sand.

"It is ruin, barbarian, to ride the Prefect's horse! There, take that for the Forum! and that for the Capitol! and that for Julius!"

And the Prefect--for he it was--furiously hurled three spears one after the other, his own and two carried by Syphax, at the back of his victim, and with such force that they passed completely through the fugitive's body.

Then Cethegus sprang from his horse, drew his sword, and taking the fallen man by the back of his helmet, dragged up his head from the earth.

"Julius!" he screamed in horror.

"You, O Cethegus!" Julius could just murmur.

"Julius! you must not, must not die!"

And Cethegus passionately tried to stanch the blood that issued from the three wounds.

"If you love me," said the dying man, "save him--save Totila!" And his gentle eyes closed for ever.

Cethegus put his hand upon the heart of the dead man; he laid his ear upon the bared breast.

"All is over!" he then said, in a faint voice. "O Manilia! Julius, I loved thee! And he died with *his* name upon his lips! All is over!" he cried again, but this time in a voice of anger; "the last bond which united me to human love I have myself cut, deceived by mocking accident! It was my last weakness! And now all tender feeling, be dead to me! Lift him on to the horse.--This, my Pluto, shall be your last service.--Take him--up there I see a chapel--take him there, and let him be buried with all ceremony by the priests. Merely say that he died as a monk--that he died for his friend. He deserves a Christian burial. But I," he added, with a terrible expression on his face, "I will once more seek his friend; I will unite them without delay--and for ever."

And he mounted his horse.

"Whither?" asked Syphax. "Back to Taginæ?"

"No! down into that wood. He must be hidden there, for thence came Julius."

During these occurrences the King had recovered, and now rode with Adalgoth, Aligern, and a few riders, straight out of the wood, on the outer edge of which the road ascended to the chapel hill. As they issued from the trees they could distinctly perceive the walls of the building.

But they themselves had been seen, for they heard a yell to their right, and over the open level a numerous troop of horsemen came galloping towards them from the river.

The King recognised the leader, and before his companions could prevent him, he spurred his

horse, couched his spear, and rushed to meet his enemy. Like two thunderbolts from the lowering heavens, the two horsemen crashed together.

"Insolent barbarian!"

"Miserable traitor!"

And both fell from their horses.

They had met with such fury, that neither of them had thought of defending himself, but only of overthrowing his adversary.

Furius Ahalla had fallen dead, for the King had pierced him to the heart through gilded shield and breastplate with such force, that the shaft of the spear had broken in the wound. But the King also sank dying into Adalgoth's arms. Ahalla's lance had entered his breast just below his throat.

Adalgoth tore Valerians blue banner out of his belt and tried to stanch the streaming blood--in vain; the bright blue was at once dyed deep red.

"Gothia!" breathed Totila, "Italia! Valeria!"

At this moment, before the unequal fight could commence, Alboin arrived upon the spot with his Longobardians. He had followed the Prefect, not being inclined to remain idle while the fight was going on round the walls of Taginæ.

The Longobardian looked silently and with emotion at the corpse of the King.

"He gave me my life--I could not save his," he said gravely.

One of his horsemen pointed to the rich armour worn by the dead man.

"No," said Alboin, "this royal hero must be buried with all his royal trappings."

"There, Alboin, on the rocky height above us," said Adalgoth, "his bride and his tomb, self-chosen, have waited for him long."

"Take him up! I will give safe-conduct to the noble corpse and the noble bearers. Now, my men, follow me back to the fight!"

CHAPTER XX.

But the fight was over: as Alboin and the Prefect discovered, to their great disgust, when they again reached Taginæ.

The Prefect, just as he had entered the pine-wood and was about to follow the King's track, had been overtaken by a messenger from Liberius, who sent word for him to return immediately. Narses was insensible, and the peril of the situation necessitated immediate counsel.

Narses insensible--Liberius perplexed--the victory they had thought certain, endangered--these circumstances weighed more with the Prefect than the doubtful expectation of dealing the death-stroke to the half-dead King.

In haste Cethegus galloped back to Taginæ the way that he had come. When he reached the town he found Liberius, who cried:

"Too late! I have already settled and agreed to everything. A truce! The rest of the Goths march off!"

"What?" thundered Cethegus--he would gladly have poured all the blood of the Goths upon the grave of his darling as a sacrifice. "They march? A truce? Where is Narses?"

"He lies insensible in his litter; he has been taken with severe convulsions. The fright, the surprise--it prostrated him, and no wonder."

"What surprise? Speak, man!"

And Liberius briefly related how they had forced their way into Taginæ with fearful loss of blood, "for the Goths stood like a wall"--had been obliged to storm house by house, even room by room--"we were obliged to hack to pieces by inches one of their leaders, who ran Anzalas through as he leaped into the first breach, before we could force our way into the town over his body."

"Who was he?" asked Cethegus earnestly. "I hope Earl Teja?"

"No; Earl Thorismuth. When we had finished our bloody work, and Narses was about to let himself be carried into the town, he met in the gate a messenger from our left wing--which no

more exists! It was Zeuxippos, wounded, and accompanied by Gothic heralds."

"Who has----?"

"He whom you just named--Earl Teja! He guessed or learned that Zeuxippos was threatening his centre, that the King was wounded--and, well knowing that he would arrive too late to turn the course of events at Taginæ, he came to a bold and desperate resolution. He suddenly gave up his post of expectation on the hills, threw himself upon our left wing, which was slowly advancing up the hill opposite to him, beat it at the first onset, pursued the fugitives into their camp, and there made prisoners of ten thousand of our men, and all the captains, amongst them my Orestes and Zeuxippos. He sent Gothic heralds to Narses, who took Zeuxippos with them to witness to the truth of what they said, and demanded an immediate truce of twenty-four hours."

"Impossible!"

"Otherwise he swore to slay all his ten thousand prisoners---together with the captains."

"That is no matter," observed Cethegus.

"It may be no matter to you, Roman--what matters to you a myriad of our troops?--but not so to Narses. The terrible surprise, the still more terrible necessity of making a choice, quite prostrated him. A severe attack of his malady came on, and as he sank down, he gave me his commander's staff, and I, of course, accepted the conditions----"

"Of course, Pylades must save Orestes!" said Cethegus in a rage.

"And, besides, ten thousand men of the imperial army!"

"I am not bound by this agreement," cried Cethegus; "I shall again attack."

"You dare not! Teja has taken most of his prisoners and all the captains with him as hostages--he will slay them if another arrow be shot?"

"Let him slay them! I shall attack."

"See whether the Byzantines will follow you! I at once communicated the order of Narses to your troops: for now *I* am Narses."

"You shall die, as soon as Narses has recovered his senses!"

But Cethegus perceived that he could do nothing against the Goths with his mercenaries alone. For when Teja had retreated to the cloister and chapel hill and the Flaminian Way with his prisoners, and Hildebrand's wing had also reached the road with little loss of life--for the two rivers, and then the news of the truce, had checked the pursuit attempted by Johannes--the Goths had gathered the rest of their troops together and taken up a safe position.

Cethegus waited with impatience for the recovery of Narses, who he hoped would never acknowledge the agreement concluded by his representative.

CHAPTER XXI.

Meanwhile Teja and Hildebrand had arrived upon the chapel hill, whither, as they had been apprised, the wounded King had been carried.

News of later events had not yet reached them.

Before they entered the walls which enclosed the grove before the chapel, the two leaders had agreed upon the plan which they would propose to the King. There was no other way but to retreat to the south under the protection of the truce. But when they entered the grove, what a sight met their view!

Sobbing loudly, Adalgoth hurried up to Teja, and led him to an ancient and ivy-grown sarcophagus. Within it, upon his shield, lay King Totila. The majesty of death gave to his noble features a solemnity that made them more beautiful than they had ever been when brightened by joy.

On his left hand rested Julius, in the open hollow cover of the sarcophagus, which had long since fallen from its proper place. Under the common shadow of death, the resemblance between the "Dioscuri" was more striking and touching than ever.

And between the two friends lay a third form, which had been carefully laid by Gotho and Liuta upon the King's blood-stained mantle. Upon a gently-rising mound lay Valeria, the Roman virgin.

Fetches from the neighbouring cloister to receive her lover, she had thrown herself, without a

scream, without even a sigh, upon the broad shield with its solemn burthen, which Adalgoth and Aligern were carrying through the gate with sad and slow steps. Before any one could speak, she had cried:

"I know all--he is dead!"

She had assisted them to lay the corpse in the sarcophagus, and while so occupied she had repeated to herself, in a low voice, these words:

"Him too thou seest, 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 rend his life.
Then may I, too, visit th' eternal shades!"

Then, without haste, quietly and slowly, she drew a dagger from her girdle, and with the words, "Here, stern Christian God, take my soul! thus I fulfil the vow!" the Roman maiden thrust the sharp steel into her bosom.

Cassiodorus, a little cross of cedar in his hand, went, deeply moved--the tears trickled down his venerable white beard--from corpse to corpse, repeating the prayers of the Church.

And the pious women of the cloister, who had accompanied Valeria, began the simple and noble chant:

"Vis ac splendor seculorum,
Belli laus et flos amorum
Labefacta mox marcescunt;
Dei laus et gratia sine
Ævi termino vel fine
In eternum perflorescunt."

Gradually the grove had become filled with warriors, who had followed their leaders. Among them were Earls Wisand and Markja.

Teja heard the report of the weeping Adalgoth in silence. Then he went close to the King's corpse. Without a tear, he laid his mailed right hand upon the King's wounded breast, bent over him, and whispered:

"I will complete the work."

Then he went back and took his place under a mighty tree, which rose above a forgotten grave-mound, and spoke to the little group of soldiers who stood silently and reverently round the dead.

"Gothic men! the battle is lost, and the kingdom likewise. Whoever will now go to Narses, whoever will subject himself to the Emperor, I will not keep him back. But I am resolved to fight to the end; not for victory, but to die the free death of a hero. Whoever wishes to share this fate with me, may remain. You all wish it? 'Tis well."

Hildebrand interposed.

"The King has fallen. The Goths cannot--even to die--fight without a King. Athalaric, Witichis, Totila--*one* only can be the fourth; only one is worthy to succeed these three; thou, Teja, our last, our greatest hero!"

"Yes," said Teja; "I will be your King. Under me you shall not live joyfully; you shall only die greatly. Be still! No cry of joy, no clang of arms must greet me. Whoever will have me for his King, let him do as I do."

And he broke a small branch from the tree under which he stood, and twisted it round his helmet. All silently followed his example.

Adalgoth, who stood next him, whispered:

"O King Teja! it is a cypress bough! Thus is crowned a victim doomed to sacrifice!"

"Yes, my Adalgoth, thou speakest prophecy;" and Teja swung his sword in a circle round his head. "Doomed to death!"

BOOK VI.

TEJA

"I have now to describe a most remarkable battle, and the high heroism of the man who was inferior to none of the heroes--of Teja."--*Procopius: Gothic War*, iv. 35.

CHAPTER I.

The destiny of the Goths was soon to be fulfilled. The rolling stone approached the abyss.

When Narses came to his senses and learned what had taken place, he gave orders at once to arrest Liberius and send him to Byzantium to answer for his conduct.

"I will not say," he said to his confidant, Basiliskos, "that he has come to a false decision. I myself could not have done otherwise. But I should have done it for different reasons. *His* only wish was to save his friend and the ten thousand prisoners. That was wrong. Situated as he was, he ought to have sacrificed them, for he could not overlook the actual condition of the war. He did not know, as I know, that after this battle the Gothic kingdom is lost--whether it be completely destroyed at Rome or Neapolis is indifferent--and that alone would have been, and is, the reason for which the ten thousand should be saved."

"At Neapolis? But why not at Rome? Do you not remember the formidable fortifications of the Prefect? Why should not the Goths throw themselves into Rome and resist for months?"

"Why? Because things are very different with regard to Rome. But the Goths know this as little as Liberius. And Cethegus--above all--must know nothing of it yet; therefore be silent. Where is the Prefect of Rome?"

"He has hastened forward, in order to be the first to conduct the pursuit as soon as the time of truce has expired."

"Surely you have taken care----"

"Do not doubt it! He would have marched with his Isaurians alone, but I--that is, Liberius at my order--gave him Alboin and the Longobardians as companions, and you know----"

"Yes," said Narses, with a smile, "my wolves will not lose sight of him."

"But how long shall he----"

"As long as he is necessary to me; not an hour longer. So the young and royal wonder-worker lies upon his shield! Now may Justinian rightly call himself 'Gothicus,' and again sleep peacefully. But truly--he will never more sleep peacefully--that disappointed widower----"

So the two generals, Narses and Teja, were of one opinion with regard to the Gothic kingdom. It was lost. The flower of the Goths had fallen at Capræ and Taginæ. Totila had placed there five-and-twenty thousand men; not even a thousand had escaped. The two wings of the army had also suffered great loss; and so King Teja commenced his retreat to the south with scarcely twenty thousand men.

He was urged to the greatest speed by the calls for help sent by the little army under Duke Guntharis and Earl Grippa, who were hard pressed by the greater force of the Byzantines under the command of Armatus and Dorotheos, who had landed between Rome and Neapolis.

And besides this, Teja's retreat was also precipitated because of the terrible manner in which, when the truce was ended, he was pursued by Narses.

While the Longobardians and Cethegus pursued the fugitives without pause, Narses slowly followed with the main army, spreading to the right and left his two formidable wings, which extended in the south-west far beyond the Sub-urbicarian Tuscany to the Tyrrhenian sea, and in the north-east through Picenum to the Ionian Gulf, extinguishing as they passed from north to south and from west to east, every trace of the Goths behind them.

This proceeding was considerably facilitated by the now general desertion of the Gothic cause on the part of the Italians. The benevolent King, who had once won their sympathies, had been succeeded by a gloomy hero of terrible reputation. And all who hesitated were speedily drawn over to the other side, not by inclination to the rule of Byzantium, but from fear of Narses and of the Emperor's severity, who threatened all who took the part of the barbarians with death.

The Italians who still served in Teja's army now deserted and hastened to Narses. It also happened much more frequently than before the battle of Taginæ, that Gothic settlers were betrayed to the Romani by their Italian neighbours, generally by the *hospes*, who had been obliged to relinquish a third of his property to the Goths; or, where the Italians were in the majority, the Goths were either killed, or taken prisoners and delivered up to the two Byzantine fleets, the "Tyrrhenian" and the "Ionian," which, sailing along the coasts of those seas, accompanied the march of the land forces and received all the captured Goths on board--men, women, and children.

The forts and towns, weakly garrisoned--for Teja had been obliged to strengthen his small army by lessening their numbers--generally fell by means of the Italian population, who now overpowered the Gothic garrison, as, after Totila's election, they had done the imperial. Thus fell, during the progress of the war, Namia, Spoletium and Perusia; the few towns which resisted were invested.

So Narses resembled a strong man who walks with outstretched arms through a narrow passage, pursuing all who try to hide themselves before him. Or a fisher, who wades up a stream with a sack-net; behind him all is empty. The few Goths who could yet save themselves fled before the "iron roller" to the army of the King, which soon consisted of a greater number of the defenceless than of warriors.

The Visigoths were again engaged in migration, just as they had been a hundred years before, but this time the iron net of Narses was behind them; and before them, as they advanced farther and farther into the constantly narrowing peninsula, the sea. And not a ship did they possess in which to fly.

CHAPTER II.

Added to this, an inevitable necessity reduced the number of Goths in the King's army capable of bearing arms in the most frightful manner.

From the very commencement of the pursuit, Cethegus, with his mercenaries, and Alboin with his Longobardians, had stuck to the heels of the fugitives, and consequently, if the retreat of the Gothic army--already delayed by the number of women, children, and aged people who had joined it--was not to be brought to a complete standstill, it was necessary to sacrifice each night a small number of heroes, who halted at some spot suitable for their design, and held the pursuers at bay by an obstinate, fearless, and hopeless resistance, until the main army had again gained a considerable advance.

This cruel, but only possible expedient, always entailed the loss of at least fifty men, and often, where the place to be defended had a wider front, a much greater number.

Before King Teja marched from Spes Bonorum, he had explained this plan to the assembled army; his faithful troops silently assented to it. And every morning the "death-doomed" volunteered so eagerly to join this forlorn hope, that King Teja--with humid eyes--made them draw lots, not wishing to offend any one by the preference of others. For the Goths, who saw nothing before them but the certain destruction of the nation, and many of whom knew that their wives and children had fallen into the enemy's hands, vied with each other in seeking death.

So their retreat became a triumphal procession of Gothic heroes, and every halting-place a monument of courageous self-sacrifice. Thus, among the leaders of the "doomed rear-guard," old Haduswinth fell near Nuceria Camellaria; the young and skilful archer, Gunthamund, at Ad Fontes; and the swift rider, Gudila, at Ad Martis. But these sacrifices, and the King's generalship, were not without influence on the fate of the nation.

Near Fossatum, between Tudera and Narnia, a night attack took place between the rear-guard under Earl Markja, and the horsemen of Cethegus, which lasted from afternoon till sunrise.

When at last the returning light illumined the hastily-constructed earthworks thrown up by the Goths, they were as still and silent as the grave.

The pursuers advanced with the utmost caution. At last Cethegus sprang from his horse and on to the parapet of the earthworks, followed by Sypfax.

Cethegus turned and signed to his men: "Follow me; there is no danger! You have only to step over the bodies of our enemies, for here they all lie--a full thousand. Yonder is Earl Markja; I know him."

But when the earthworks were demolished, and Cethegus and his horsemen continued their pursuit of the main army--which had gained a great advance they soon learned from the peasants of the neighbourhood that the Gothic army had not passed on the Flaminian Way at all.

By the noble sacrifice of this night, King Teja had been enabled to conceal the further direction of his retreat, and the pursuers had lost the scent.

Cethegus advised Johannes and Alboin, the one to send a portion of his men to the south-east, the other to the left on the Flaminian Way, to try to find the lost track. He himself longed to get to Rome. He wished to reach that city before Narses. Once there, he hoped to be able to checkmate him, as he had done Belisarius, from the Capitol.

After discovering that King Teja had evaded all pursuit, Cethegus summoned his trusty tribunes, and told them that he was resolved--if necessary, by force--to rid himself of the constant supervision of Alboin and Johannes--who were at present weakened by the division of their troops

at his advice--and to hasten with his Isaurians alone straight to Rome by the Flaminian Way, which was now no longer blocked by the Goths.

But even while he was speaking, he was interrupted by the entrance of Syphax, who led into the tent a Roman citizen, whom he had with difficulty rescued from the hands of the Longobardians. The man had asked for the Prefect, and the Longobardians had answered, laughing, that they would treat him (the messenger) "as usual."

"But," added Syphax, "a great crowd of people is approaching in the rear; I will see what it is and bring you word."

"I know you, Tullus Faber," said the Prefect, turning to the messenger, when Syphax had left him; "you were ever faithful to Rome and to me. What news do you bring?"

"O Prefect!" cried the man, "we all thought you were dead, for you sent us no answer to eight several messages."

"I have not received even one!"

"Then you do not know what has happened in Rome? Pope Silverius has died in exile in Sicily. His successor is Pelagius, your enemy!"

"I know nothing. Speak!"

"Alas, you will neither be able to advise nor to help. Rome has----"

Just then Syphax returned, but before he could speak, he was followed into the tent by Narses, supported by Basiliskos.

"You have allowed yourself to be detained here so long by a thousand Gothic spears," said the commander-in-chief angrily, "that the healthy have escaped, and the sick have overtaken you. This King Teja can do more than break shields; he can weave veils with which to blind the Prefect's sharp sight. But I see through many veils, and also through this. Johannes, call your people back. Teja cannot have gone south, he must have gone northwards, for he, no doubt, has known long since that which concerns the Prefect most: Rome is wrested from the Goths."

Cethegus looked at him with sparkling eyes.

"I had smuggled a few clever men into the city. They excited the inhabitants to a midnight revolt. All the Goths in the city were slain; only five hundred men escaped into the Mausoleum of Hadrian, and continue to defend it."

Faber took courage to put in a word.

"We sent eight messengers to you. Prefect, one after the other."

"Away with this man!" cried Narses, signing to his officers. "Yes," he continued quietly, "the citizens of Rome think lovingly of the Prefect, to whom they owe so much: two sieges, hunger, pestilence, and the burning of the Capitol! But the messengers sent to you always lost their way, and fell into the hands of the Longobardians, who, no doubt, slew them. But the embassy sent to me by the Holy Father, Pelagius, reached me safely, and I have concluded an agreement, of which you, Prefect of Rome, will surely approve."

"In any case, I shall not be able to annul it."

"The good citizens of Rome fear nothing so much as a third siege. They have stipulated that we shall undertake nothing that can lead to another fight for their city. They write that the Goths in the Mausoleum will soon succumb to hunger; that they themselves can defend their walls; and they have sworn only to deliver up their city, after the destruction of those Goths, to their natural protector and chief, the Prefect of Rome. Are you content with that, Cethegus? Read the agreement. Give it to him, Basiliskos."

Cethegus read the paper with deep and joyful emotion. So they had not forgotten him, his Romans! So now, when everything was coming to a crisis, they called, not the hated Byzantines, but himself, their patron, back to the Capitol! He again felt at the height of power.

"I am content," he said, returning the roll.

"I have promised," continued Narses, "to make no attempt to get the city into my power by force. First King Teja must follow King Totila. Then Rome--and many other things. Accompany me, Prefect, to the council of war."

When Cethegus left the council in the tent of Narses, and asked after Tullus Faber, not a trace of the latter was to be found.

CHAPTER III.

Narses, that great general, had acutely guessed in what direction King Teja had turned aside from the Flaminian Way. He had first gone north towards the coast of the Ionian Gulf, and thence, with singular knowledge of the roads, had led his fugitive people and army by a circuitous route past Hadria, Aternum, and Ortona, to Samnium. That Rome was lost, he had learned beyond Nuceria Camellaria from some Goths who had fled from that city.

The King, whose impatient and unsparing disposition ever looked forward to the end, not unwillingly found himself obliged to get rid of his prisoners.

In number about as strong as their conquerors, the captives had made the office of guarding them so difficult, that Teja threatened to punish with death any attempt at escape.

Notwithstanding, when the army marched northwards, a number of these prisoners made an attempt to free themselves by force. Very many were killed in the struggle that ensued, and the King ordered that all the rest, together with Orestes and the whole of the officers, should be thrown into the Aternus with their hands bound; where they died miserably by drowning.

When Adalgoth begged Teja to revoke his cruel sentence, the latter replied:

"Did they not fall upon our defenceless women and children in their peaceful homes, and slay them? This is no longer a war between warriors; it is nation murdering nation. Let us do our part."

From Samnium the King, leaving his unarmed people to follow slowly under scanty escort--for they were threatened by no pursuit--hurried forward with his best troops to Campania. His arrival in those parts was so unexpected, that he not only surprised Duke Guntharis and Earl Grippa, whose small army had melted still more in consequence of frequent battles with superior forces, but, shortly after, the enemy also, who now had thought themselves sure of victory.

He had found Duke Guntharis and Earl Grippa occupying a secure position between Neapolis and Beneventum. He learned that the Romani were threatening Cumæ from Capua.

"They shall not reach that city before me," he cried; "I have to complete there an important work."

And, his army being now reinforced by the garrison of his own county town of Tarentum, under the command of brave Ragnaris, he surprised the superior force of the Byzantines, which was about to march upon Cumæ, and defeated them with great loss. He himself slew the Archon Armatus with his battle-axe, and at his side young Adalgoth ran Dorotheos through with his spear. The Byzantines were routed, and fled northwards to Terracina.

It was the last ray of sunshine cast by the God of Victory upon the blue banner of the Goths.

The next day King Teja entered Cumæ. Totila, upon his last fatal march from Rome, had decided, at the instance of Teja, and contrary to his custom, to take with him hostages from that city. No one knew what had become of them.

On the evening of his entry into Cumæ, King Teja ordered the walled-up garden of the Castle of Cumæ to be broken open. There were hidden the hostages from Rome: patricians and senators--among them Maximus, Cyprianus, Opilio, Rusticus, and Fidelius, the most distinguished men of the Senate--in all they numbered three hundred. All were members of the old league against the Goths.

Teja ordered the Goths who had lately escaped from Rome to tell these hostages how the Romans, persuaded by envoys sent by Narses, had one night risen in revolt, had murdered all the Goths upon whom they could lay hands, even the women and children, and had driven the rest into the *Moles Hadriani*.

The King fastened such a terrible look upon the trembling hostages, as they listened to this news, that two of them could not endure to wait till the end, but then and there killed themselves by dashing their heads against the stony walls which surrounded them.

When the Goths from Rome had sworn to the truth of their story, the King silently turned away and left the garden. An hour after, the heads of the three hundred hostages stared ghastly down from the summit of the walls.

"It was not alone to fulfil this terrible judgment that I came here," Teja said to Adalgoth: "I have also to reveal a sacred secret."

And he invited him and the other leaders of the troops to a solemn and joyless midnight banquet. When the sad feast was over, the King made a sign to old Hildebrand, who nodded, and took a dimly burning torch from the iron ring into which it was stuck on the centre column of the vaulted hall, saying:

"Follow me, children of these latter days, and take your shields with you."

It was the third hour of the July night; the stars glittered in the sky. Out of the hall, silently following the King and the aged master-at-arms, there stepped Guntharis and Adalgoth, Aligern, Grippa, Ragnaris, and Wisand the standard-bearer. Wachis, the King's shield-bearer, closed the procession, carrying a second torch.

Opposite the castle garden rose an ancient round tower, named the Tower of Theodoric, because that great King had restored it. Old Hildebrand was the first to enter this tower with his torch, but instead of leaving the ground-floor, which contained only the empty tower-room, the old man halted, knelt down, and carefully measured fifteen spans of his large hand from the door, which he had closed behind them, to the centre of the room. The whole floor seemed to be composed of three colossal slabs of granite. When Hildebrand had measured the fifteen spans, he held his thumb upon the spot at which he had arrived, and struck his battle-axe against the floor; it sounded hollow. Boring the point of his axe into a scarcely-visible crack in the stone, he signed to his companions to stand aside on his left; when they had done so, he pushed a portion of the slab to the right. A chasm, as deep as the tower was high above them, revealed itself to the astonished eyes of those present.

The opening was only large enough to admit one man at a time. It led to a narrow flight of more than two hundred steps, hewn in the living rock.

Silently, at a sign from Hildebrand, the men descended. When they arrived at the bottom, they found that the circular space was divided in the middle by a stone wall. The semicircle into which they had entered was empty.

And now King Teja measured ten spans on the wall to the centre, and pressing his hand upon a stone, a small door opened inwards. Hildebrand entered with his torch, and kindled two others which were fixed upon the wall.

The observers started back dazzled, and covered their eyes with their hands. When they again looked up, they recognised--at once guessing the secret--the whole rich treasure of Dietrich of Berne.

There lay, partly heaped up symmetrically, partly thrown in disorder one upon another, weapons, vessels, and ornaments of all kinds. Strong Etruscan steel-caps of ancient times, brought by the commerce of the Goths as far as the Baltic, or to the Pruth and Dniester, and now brought back to the south by the migration of the nations, probably near to the very spot where they had been fashioned. Near these lay flat wooden head-pieces, over which was stretched the skin of the seal, or the jaws of the ice-bear; pointed Celtic helmets; high-crested helms from Rome or Byzantium; neck-rings of bronze and iron, of silver and gold. Shields--from the clumsy wooden shield, as tall as a man, which was set up like a wall to hide the archer, to the small round and ornamented horseman's shield of the Parthians, studded with pearls and precious stones. Ancient ring-mail of crushing weight, and light-padded clothing of purple-coloured linen, besides scimitars, swords and daggers, of stone, bronze, and steel. Axes and clubs of all kinds--from those rudely made from the bones of the mammoth and tied to the antler of a stag with bast, to the Frankish *franciska*, and the small perforated and gilded axe with which the Roman circus-riders used to split an apple while at full gallop. Spears, lances, and darts of all sorts--from the roughly carved tusk of the narwal, to the ebony shaft, inlaid with gold, of the Asdingian Vandal Kings in Carthage, and the massive golden arrows of these princes, with steel points a foot long, and the shafts decorated with the purple feathers of the flamingo. War-mantles--made of the fur of the black fox, the skin of the Numidian lion, and the costliest purple of Sidon. Shoes--from the long shovel-shaped snowshoes of the Skrito Fins, to the golden sandals of Byzantium. Doublets of Frisian wool, and tunics of Chinese silk. Innumerable vessels and table utensils--tall vases, flat salvers, cups, and round-bellied urns, of amber, of gold, of silver, of tortoise-shell. Arm-rings and shoulder-clasps, necklaces of pearls and of crystal beads, and innumerable other utensils for meat and drink, for clothing and decoration, for sport and war.

"This secret cave," said Teja, "known only to us, the blood brethren--the master-at-arms caused it to be hewn in the rock when he was Earl of Cumæ, forty years ago--was the vault in which was hidden the treasure of the Goths. This is the reason why Belisarius found so little, when he ransacked the treasure-house at Ravenna. The most costly pieces of booty, the gifts, the collection of Amelung trophies in war and peace, which existed long before Theodoric, in the time of Winithar, Ermanarich, Athal, Ostrogotho, Isarna, Amala, and Gaut--all these have we concealed here. We left nothing in Ravenna but the minted gold, and such things as seemed richer in intrinsic value than in honour. For months our enemies have walked above these treasures; but the faithful abyss kept the secret. But now we will carry all away with us. Take the treasures on your shields, and hand them from one to another up the steps. We will take it to the last battle-field upon which an Ostrogothic army will ever fight. No, do not be anxious, young Adalgoth; even when I have fallen, and all is lost, the enemy shall not bear away the sacred treasure to Byzantium. For wonderful is the last battle-field which I have chosen; it shall conceal and swallow up the last of the Goths, their treasure and their fame!"

"Yes, and their greatest treasure and noblest renown," said old Hildebrand; "not merely gold and silver and precious stones. Look here, my Goths!"

And he held his torch towards a curtain which shut off a portion of the treasure-cave, and pushed the curtain to one side. As he did so, all present fell upon their knees. For they recognised

the great dead, who sat, erect and clothed in purple, upon a golden throne, the spear still grasped in his right hand.

It was the great Theodoric.

The art which had been introduced to the Romans by the Egyptians--the art of embalming the dead--had preserved the body of the hero-King with terrible perfection.

All present were struck dumb with emotion.

"Many years ago," at last Hildebrand began, "Teja and I mistrusted the good fortune of the Goths. And I, who, before the breaking out of the war, had the command of the guard-of-honour at the Mausoleum of Ravenna, in which Amalasintha had interred her dead father--I liked the building but little, and still less the incense-scented priests who so often prayed there for the soul of my good and great King--I thought that if ever all trace of my nation were rooted out of this southern land, no Italian or Greekling should mock at the remains of our beloved hero. No! even as the first great conqueror of the Roman fortress, Alaric the Visigoth, found his unknown and never to be dishonoured tomb in the sacred bed of the stream, so also should my great King be delivered from the curiosity of posterity. And, with Teja's help, I took the noble corpse away by night, from its marble house, and from the vicinity of the whining priests, and we brought it hither, as part of the royal treasure. Here it was safe. And if, after the lapse of centuries, some accident should betray its resting-place, who could then recognise the King with the eagle-eye? And so the sarcophagus at Ravenna is empty, and the monks sing and pray in vain. Here, near his treasures and his trophies, in hero splendour, erect upon his throne, he rests; it is more pleasing to his soul, which looks down from Walhalla, than to see his mortal remains stretched out, weighed down by heavy stones, and surrounded with clouds of incense."

"But now," concluded Teja, "the hour has come for him once more to rise from the abyss. When you have raised the treasure, we will carefully lift up this beloved form. Early to-morrow we will march out of this city. The approach of Narses and the Prefect has already been announced. We will go, with royal corpse and royal treasure, to the last battle-field of the Goths, whither I have already sent the women and children. The battle-field--long ago I saw it in the visions of my sleepless nights--the battle-field whereon we and our nation will gloriously perish; the battlefield which, even when the last spear is broken, can save and hide all who do not fear to die in its glowing bosom; the battle-field which Teja has chosen for you and for himself!"

"I guess thy meaning," whispered Adalgoth; "this last battle-field is----"

"Mons Vesuvius!" said Teja. "To work!"

CHAPTER IV.

As rapidly as his fearful, all-encompassing system would allow, Narses, after the council which we have mentioned as taking place at Fossatum, had marched southward with his whole force and with the broadest front, in order to make an end of all the remaining Goths. Only to Tuscany did he send two small detachments, under his generals, Vitalianus and Wilmuth, to take such forts as still resisted, and, after them, Lucca, in Annonarian Tuscany. Valerianus, who had meanwhile conquered Petra Pertusa, which place blocked the Flaminian Way beyond Helvillum, was sent still farther north against Verona, the obstinate defence of which had enabled many Goths to escape up the valley of the Athesis to the Passara.

With these exceptions, Narses hurried south with the whole of his army. He himself passed Rome on the Flaminian Way; while Johannes, on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea, and the Herulian Vulkaris on that of the Ionian Gulf, were to drive the Goths before them.

But Johannes and Vulkaris found but little work to do; for in the north the Gothic families had already been received, in passing, into the mass of the army of the King, which it was now impossible to overtake; and from the south the Goths had likewise long since streamed past Rome to Neapolis, whither expresses from the King had bidden them to repair. "Mons Vesuvius!" was the rallying word for all these Gothic fugitives.

Narses had named Anagnina to his two wings as the point of reunion with the main body.

Cethegus gladly accepted the commander's invitation to remain with him in the centre, for he could expect no great events with the two wings; and the road taken by Narses led past Rome. In case that the commander, in spite of his promise, should attempt to procure entrance into Rome, Cethegus would be on the spot.

But, almost to the Prefect's astonishment, Narses kept his word. He quietly marched his army past Rome. And he called upon Cethegus to be witness to his interview with Pope Pelagius and the other governing bodies of Rome, which interview took place below the walls at the Porta Belisaria (Pinceana), between the Flaminian and Salarian Gates.

Once more the Pope and the Romans assured Narses--swearing by the holy remains of Cosma

and Damian (according to legend, Arabian physicians who were martyred under Diocletian), which were brought in silver and ivory caskets to the walls--that they would unhesitatingly, after the annihilation of the Goths in the Moles Hadriani, open their gates to the Prefect of Rome, but firmly resist any attempt on the part of the Byzantines to enter the city by force; for they would not expose themselves to any possible struggle which might yet take place.

The offer of Narses to leave them at once a few thousand armed men, in order to enable them the more speedily to reduce the Moles Hadriani, was civilly but decidedly refused, to the great joy of the Prefect.

"They have learned two things during the last few years," he said to Lucius Licinius, as they rode away at the termination of the interview--"to keep the Romani at a distance, and to connect Cethegus with the well-being of Rome. That is already a great deal."

"I regret, my general," said Lucius Licinius, "that I cannot share your joy and confidence."

"I neither," cried Salvius Julianus. "I fear Narses; I mistrust him."

"Oho! what wise men!" laughed Piso. "One should exaggerate nothing; not even prudence. Has not everything turned out better than we dared to hope since the night when a shepherd-boy struck the greatest Roman poet upon his immortal verse-writing hand, and the great Prefect of Rome swam down the Tiber in a granary?--since Massurius Sabinus was recognised by Earl Markja, dressed in the garments of his Hetares, in which disguise he was about to make his escape?--and since the great jurist, Salvius Julianus, was rudely fished up, bleeding, from the slime of the river by Duke Guntharis? Who would have thought then that we should ever be able to count upon our fingers the day when not a single Goth would be left to tread Italian soil?"

"You are right, poet," said Cethegus with a smile; "these two friends of ours suffer from '*Narses-fever*,' as their hero suffers from epilepsy. To over-rate one's enemy is also a failing. The holy remains upon which those priests have sworn, are really sacred to them; they will not break such an oath."

"If I had only seen, besides the priests and artisans," replied Licinius, "any of our friends upon the walls! But there were none but fullers, butchers, and carpenters! Where is the aristocracy of Rome? Where are the men of the Catacombs?"

"Taken away as hostages," said Cethegus. "And they were rightly served? Did they not return to Rome, and do homage to the fair-haired Goth? If now the 'Black Earl' cuts off their heads, it cannot be helped. Be comforted; you see things in too dark a light, all of you. The crushing superiority of Narses has made you timid. He is a great general; but the fact that he has made this treaty with Rome--this agreement that I, and no other, should be admitted--and that he has *kept* it, shows that he is harmless as a statesman. Let us but once again breathe the air of the Capitol! It does not agree with epileptic subjects."

And when, the next morning, the young tribunes went to fetch the Prefect from his tent to join the united march against Teja, their leader received them with sparkling eyes.

"Well," he cried, "who knows the Romans best, you or the Prefect of Rome? Listen--but be silent. Last night a centurion, one of the newly-formed city cohorts, named Publius Macer, stole out of Rome and into my tent. The Pope has entrusted to his care the Porta Latina, to that of his brother Marcus, the Capitol. He showed me both commissions--I know the handwriting of Pelagius--they are authentic. The Romans are long since tired of the rule of the priesthood. They would rejoice once more to see me, and you, and my Isaurians patrolling the walls. Publius left me his nephew Aulus, at once as a hostage and a pledge, who will let us know the night--which will be announced to him in the harmless words of a letter agreed upon beforehand--on which the Romans will open to us their gates and the Capitol. Narses cannot complain if the Romans voluntarily admit us--I shall use no force. Now, Licinius! Tell me, Julianus, who best knows Rome and the Romans?"

CHAPTER V.

Narses now marched to Anagnia. Two days after his arrival, his two wings reached that place according to order. After some days occupied in resting, mustering, and newly ordering his immense forces, the commander-in-chief marched to Terracina, where the remainder of the troops of Armatus and Dorotheos joined him. And now the united army rolled forward against the Goths, who had taken up a most excellent and secure position on Vesuvius, on the opposite mountain. Mons Lactarius, and on both shores of the little river Draco, which flowed into the sea north of Stabiæ.

Since he had left Cumæ, marched past Neapolis (the citizens of which place shut their strong gates, which had been restored by Totila, overpowered the garrison and declared that, following the example of Rome, they would at present hold their fortress against both parties), and reached his chosen battle-field, King Teja had done all that was possible to make his naturally strong position still stronger.

He had caused provisions to be carried from the fertile country around up to the mountains, in sufficient quantities to nourish his people until the light of the last day should dawn upon his nation.

It has ever been a vain task for learned investigation to attempt to find on Mons Lactarius or Vesuvius the exact spots which correspond to the description of Procopius. It is impossible to fix upon any one of the innumerable ravines and valleys. And yet the description of the Byzantine historian, grounded as it was upon the verbal reports of the leaders and generals of the army of Narses, cannot be doubted.

Rather may the contradictions be simply explained by the sudden, forcible and gigantic changes, and by the still more numerous, gradual and slighter alterations made in the face of the country by streams of lava, landslips, the crumbling of the rocks, and floods which have taken place upon that never quiet mountain, during the course of more than thirteen centuries. Even credible accounts of much later Italian authors, concerning places and positions on Mount Vesuvius, cannot always be reconciled with the reality.

The ground which sucked up Teja's life-blood has no doubt been covered, ages ago, by deep layers of silent and impenetrable lava.

Even Narses was compelled to admire the circumspection with which his barbarian adversary had chosen his last place of defence.

"He intends to die like the bear in his den," he exclaimed as he observed the whole of the Gothic defences from his litter at Nuceria. "And many of you, my dear wolves," he added, turning with a smile to Alboin, "will fall under the blows of this bear's paws when you try to trot through those narrow entrances."

"Oho! It is only necessary to let so many run in at once that the bear gets both paws full and is not able to strike again."

"Softly, softly! I know of a pass on Vesuvius--long ago, when I still nursed my miserable body hoping to restore its strength, I spent weeks together upon Mons Lactarius, in order to enjoy the pure air, and at that time I firmly impressed upon my memory the pass I speak of; from that pass--if the Goths get into it--only famine can drive them out."

"That will be tiresome!"

"There is nothing else for it. I have no desire once more to sacrifice a myriad of imperial troops in order to stamp out these last sparks."

And so it happened. Very gradually, gaining each forward step only at a great and bloody loss, did Narses draw his net tighter and more tightly together. He surrounded in a semicircle every point of the Gothic position, on west, north, and east; only on the south, the sea-side, where he himself had encamped on the strand, was he able to leave a space undefended, for the enemy had no ships whereon to fly or wherewith to procure provisions.

The "Tyrrhenian" fleet of Narses was already occupied in carrying the captive Goths to Byzantium; the "Ionian" was shortly expected; a few vessels had been sent to cruise in the Bay of Bajæ and opposite Surrentum. Thus Narses, notwithstanding his great superiority, only gradually occupied, with obstinate patience and forgetting nothing, Piscinula, Cimiterium, Nola, Summa, Melane, Nuceria, Stabiæ, Cumæ, Bajæ, Misenum, Puteoli, and Nesis. And presently Neapolis also became alarmed at the power of Narses, and voluntarily opened to him its gates.

From all sides the Byzantines advanced concentrically towards the Gothic position. After many furious battles the Byzantines succeeded in driving the Goths away from Mons Lactarius and over the river Draco; where the rest of the nation encamped upon a level plain above the pass so highly praised by Narses, in the immediate vicinity of one of the numerous craters which, at that time, surrounded the foot of the principal cone; only rarely, when the wind blew from the south-east, suffering from the smoke and sulphurous exhalations of the volcano.

Here, in the innumerable hollows and ravines of the mountain, the unarmed people encamped under the open sky, or under the tents and wagons which they had brought with them, in the warm August air.

"The only access to this encampment," writes Procopius, "could be obtained by a narrow pass, the southern opening of which was so small that a man holding a shield could completely block it up."

This opening was guarded day and night, each man occupying it for an hour, by King Teja himself, Duke Guntharis, Duke Adalgoth, Earl Grippa, Earl Wisand, Aligern, Ragnaris, and Wachis. Behind them the pass was filled by a hundred warriors, who relieved each other at intervals.

And so, in accordance with the system pursued by Narses, the whole terrible war, the struggle for Rome and Italy, had been dramatically reduced to a point; to a battle for a ravine of a foot or two wide on the southern point of the so dearly-loved, so obstinately-defended peninsula. Even in

the historical representation of Procopius, the fate of the Goths resembles the last act of a grand and awful tragedy.

On the shore, opposite to the hill from which the pass was approached, Narses had pitched his tents with the Longobardians; on his right Johannes; on his left Cethegus.

The Prefect drew the attention of his tribunes to the fact that Narses, by the cession of this position--Cethegus himself had chosen it--had given either a proof of great imprudence or of complete inoffensiveness of intention, "for," said Cethegus, "with this position he has left open the way to Rome, which he could easily have prevented, by giving me the command of the right wing or of the centre. Hold yourselves in readiness to start secretly and at night with all the Isaurians, as soon as a sign is made by Rome."

"And you?" asked Licinius anxiously.

"I remain here with the dreaded commander. If he had wished to murder me--he could have done so long ago. But it is evident that he has no such intention. He will not act against me without just cause. And if I obey the call of the Romans, I do not break, I fulfil, our agreement."

CHAPTER VI.

Above the narrow pass on Vesuvius, which we will call the Ravine of the Goths, a small but deep chasm had been formed by the black blocks of lava. Within it King Teja had concealed the most sacred possession of the nation--the corpse of King Theodoric and the royal treasure. Theodoric's banner was fixed before the mouth of this chasm.

A purple mantle, stretched upon four spears, formed the dark curtain to the rocky chamber which the last King of the Goths had chosen for his royal hall. A block of lava, covered with the skin of the black tiger, formed his last throne.

Here King Teja rested, when not called away by his jealously-held post at the southern entrance of the Ravine of the Goths; upon which, now from a distance with arrows, slings, and hurling--spears, now close at hand in a bold and sudden attack, the outposts of Narses commenced their assaults. None of the brave guardians returned home without bringing tokens of such attacks upon shield and armour, or leaving signs at the entrance of the ravine, in the form of slain enemies.

This happened so frequently, that the stench arising from the decay of the bodies threatened to render any further sojourn in the ravine impossible. Narses seemed to have counted upon this circumstance, for, when Basiliskos lamented the useless sacrifice, he said, "Perhaps our slain soldiers will be more useful after death than during their life." But King Teja ordered that the bodies should be thrown by night over the lava cliffs; so that, horribly mutilated, they seemed a warning to all who should attempt to follow their example. Seeing this, Narses begged to be allowed to send unarmed men to fetch away the bodies, a favour which King Teja immediately granted.

Since retiring into this ravine, the Goths had not lost a single man in fight; for only the foremost man in the pass was exposed to the enemy, and, supported by the comrades who stood behind him, this guardian had never yet been killed.

One night, after sunset--it was now the month of September, and all traces of the battle at Taginæ were already obliterated; the flowers planted by Cassiodorus and the nuns of the cloister round the sarcophagi of King Totila, his bride, and his friend, had put forth new shoots--King Teja, who had just been relieved from his post by Wisand, approached his lava hall, his spear upon his shoulder. Before the curtain which closed the entrance to his rocky chamber, Adalgoth received Teja with a sad smile, and, kneeling, offered to him a golden goblet.

"Let me still fulfil my office of cup-bearer," he said; "who knows how long it may last?"

"Not much longer!" said Teja gravely, as he seated himself. "We will remain here, outside the curtain. Look! how magnificently the bay and the coast of Surrentum shine in the glowing light left by the setting sun--the blue sea is changed to crimson blood! Truly, the Southland could afford no more beautiful frame with which to enclose the last battle of the Goths. Well, may the picture be worthy of its setting! The end is coming. How wonderfully everything that I foreboded--dreamed, and sang--has been fulfilled!"

And the King supported his head upon both his hands. Only when the silver tones of a harp was heard, did he again look up. Adalgoth had, unseen, fetched the King's small harp from behind the curtain.

"Thou shalt hear," he said, "how I have completed thy song of the Ravine; or I might have said, how it has completed itself. Dost thou remember that night in the wilderness of ivy, marble, and laurel in Rome? It was not a battle already fought, a battle of ancient days, of which thou didst sing. No! in a spirit of prophecy, thou hast sung our last heroic battle here." And he played and

sang:

"Where arise the cliffs of lava,
On Vesuvius' glowing side,
Tones of deepest woe and wailing,
Evening's peace and calm deride.
For the brave dead's direst curses
Rest upon the rocky tomb,
Where the Gothic hero-nation
Will fulfil their glorious doom."

"Yes," said Teja, "glorious, my Adalgoth! Of that glory no fate and no Narses shall deprive us. The awful judgment, which our beloved Totila challenged, has fallen heavily upon himself, his people, and his God. No Heavenly Father has, as that noble man imagined, weighed our destinies in a just balance. We fall by the thousand treacheries of the Italians and the Byzantines, and by the brute superiority of numbers. But *how* we fall, unshaken, proud even in our decay, can be decided by no fate, but only by our own worth. And after us? Who after us will rule in this land? Not for long these wily Greeks--and not the native strength of the Italians. Numerous tribes of Germans still exist on the other side of the mountains--and I nominate them our heirs and our avengers."

And he softly took up the harp which Adalgoth had laid down, and sang in a low voice as he looked down upon the rapidly darkening sea. The stars glittered over his head; and at rare intervals he struck a chord.

"Extinguished is the brightest star
Of our Germanic race!
O Dietrich, thou beloved of Bern,
Thy shield is bruised, defaced.
Unblemished truth and courage fail--
The coward wins--the noble fly;
Rascals are lords of all the world--
Up, Goths, and let us die!

"O wicked Rome, O southern gleam,
O lovely, heavenly blue!
O rolling blood-stained Tiber-stream--
O Southern, all untrue!
Still cherishes the North its sons
Of courage true and high;
Vengeance will roll its thunders soon--
Then, up! and let us die!"

"The melody pleases me," said Adalgoth; "but is it already finished? What is the end?"

"The end can only be sung in time to the stroke of the sword," said Teja. "Soon, methinks, thou wilt also hear this end." And he rose from his seat. "Go, my Adalgoth," he said; "leave me alone. I have already kept thee far too long from"--and he smiled through all his sadness--"from the loveliest of all duchesses. You have but few of such evening hours to spend together, my poor children! If I could but save your young and budding lives----" He passed his hand across his brow. "Folly!" he then cried; "you are but a part of the doomed nation--perhaps the loveliest."

Adalgoth's eyes had filled with tears as the King mentioned his young wife. He now went up to Teja and laid his hand inquiringly upon his shoulder.

"Is there no hope? She is so young!"

"None," answered Teja; "for no saving angel will come down from heaven. We have still a few days before famine commences its inroads. Then I will make a speedy end. The warriors shall sally forth and fall in battle."

"And the women, the children--the defenceless thousands?"

"I cannot help them. I am no god. But not a Gothic woman or maiden need fall into slavery under the Byzantines, unless they choose shame instead of a free death. Look there, my Adalgoth--in the dark night the glow of the mountain is fully seen. Seest thou, there, a hundred paces to the right.--Ha! how splendidly the fiery smoke rushes from the gloomy mouth!--When the last guardian of the pass has fallen--one leap into that abyss--and no insolent Roman hand shall touch our pure women. Thinking of *them*--more than of us, for we can fall anywhere thinking of the Gothic women, I chose for our last battle-field--Vesuvius!"

And Adalgoth, no longer weeping, but with enthusiasm, threw himself into Teja's arms.

CHAPTER VII.

A few days after Cethegus had taken up his chosen position on the left of Narses with his mercenaries, the report came to the camp of the Byzantines that the Goths in the Mausoleum of Hadrian had been overpowered.

So now all Rome was in the hands of the Romans; not a single Goth, and, as Cethegus exultingly thought, not a single Byzantine, ruled in his Rome.

If he could now succeed in throwing his Isaurians, under the command of the tribunes, into Rome, the Prefect would be in a much more favourable position, opposed to Narses, than he had ever been opposed to Belisarius, with whom he had been obliged to share the possession of the city.

One of the messengers who had brought the news from Rome, at the same time gave to Aulus, the hostage, a letter from the two centurions, the brothers Macer, which ran thus: "The bride has recovered from her long sickness; if the bridegroom will come, there is nothing more to hinder the wedding. Come, Aulus."

These were the words fixed upon. Cethegus communicated them to his Roman knights.

"Excellent!" cried Lucius. "Now I shall be able to place a monument upon the spot where my brave brother fell for Rome and for Cethegus."

"Yes," said Salvius Julianus, "imprescriptible is the Romans' right to Rome."

"But if we are to go secretly, see to it well, Prefect," said Piso, "that our departure is concealed so long from the greatest cripple of all times, that it will be impossible for him to overtake us."

"No," said Cethegus, "you shall not depart in secret. I have convinced myself that this most prudent of all heroes has placed outposts far beyond our position on the left wing. What we considered our outposts are hemmed round by *his*-occupied by his Longobardian wolves, whom he has placed in all directions. Without his consent, you cannot manage your departure either by force or deception. It will be far wiser to act openly. If he chooses, he can frustrate our plan, for, in any case, he is sure to hear of it. But he will have nothing to say against it--you will see! I shall tell him of my resolution, and, depend upon it, he will approve of it."

"General, that is very bold; it is great!"

"It is the only possible way."

"Yes, you are right," said Salvius Julianus, after a few moments' reflection. "Force and deception are equally impossible; and should Narses consent, I will willingly confess that my fears----"

"Were founded upon an over-estimation of the *statesman* Narses. Large numbers have intimidated you, and the certainly not to be over-estimated *general-ship* of the sick man. I confess that before the battle of Taginæ the whole horizon threatened thunderstorms; but, as I am still alive, those appearances must have been illusive. I will at once send you with my inquiry to Narses. You are suspicious, you will therefore observe sharply. Go, tell him that the Romans have resolved to admit me, their Prefect, within their walls *now*, before the annihilation of Teja's army. And I wish to know if he will permit you to march to Rome with my Isaurians, or if he would consider such an act as a breach of our agreement. Against his will neither I nor the Isaurians will set forth."

The two tribunes took leave, and, as he stepped out of the Prefect's tent, Piso said with a laugh to the others:

"The crutch of Narses rendered your wits useless, longer than the stick of the shepherd did my fingers!"

When they were well outside, Syphax hurried up to his master.

"O master," he said, "do not trust this sick man with his quiet and impenetrable looks! Last night I again questioned my snake oracle. I divided the skin of my idol into two pieces, and laid them upon live coals. The piece which I called 'Narses' outlasted by far the piece which I called 'Cethegus.' Shall I not make the attempt? You know that a scratch with this dagger, and he is lost! What would it matter if they impaled Syphax, the son of Hiempal? I cannot do it by stealth, for the Longobardian prince sleeps in the tent of Narses, in a bed stretched across the entrance, and seven of his 'little wolves' lie upon the threshold. The Herulians stand outside the curtain. According to your hint, I have watched Narses' tent at night ever since we left Helvillum. Even a gnat can scarcely escape the vigilance of the Herulians and Longobardians when it flies into the tent. But openly, by day, one spring into his litter--a scratch of the skin--and he is a dead man in a quarter of an hour!"

"And before that time has elapsed, not only is Syphax, the son of Hiempal, a corpse, but also Cethegus. No. But listen; I have discovered where the commander is accustomed to hold his

secret conversations with Basiliskos and Alboin. Not in his tent--a camp has a thousand ears--but in the bath. The physicians have ordered Narses a morning bath in the bay at Stabiæ, and he has had a bath-house built out into the sea, which can only be reached in a boat. When Alboin and Basiliskos accompany him thither, they are only as wise as--well, as Basiliskos and Alboin. But when they return, they are full of the wisdom of Narses; they know what letters have come from Byzantium, and many other things. Round about the bath-house there is much seaweed. Syphax, for how long a time can you dive?"

"As long," answered the slave, not without pride, "as the clumsy and suspicious crocodile in our streams takes to observe the gazelle which has been thrown into the reeds as a bait, and to make up his mind to swim to it--then a knife from below in his belly! This small-eyed Narses has something of the crocodile--we will see if I cannot outdo him by patient diving."

"Excellent! my panther on shore, my diving duck in the water!"

"I would leap into fire for your sake, then you would call me your 'salamander.'"

"Well, you must manage to listen to the conversation of this sick man when he goes to bathe."

"The office will very well suit another game which I have on hand. For many days a fisherman, who throws his net every morning and evening, and never catches anything, has been signing and winking to me in a very innocent-sly manner. I believe he is watching for me, and not for sea mullets. But the long-bearded wolves of this Alboin are always at my heels. Perhaps, when I dive into the water, I shall be able to catch up what this fisherman wishes to confide to me."

CHAPTER VIII.

Very gravely, but no more in a melting mood, Adalgoth told his young wife of the resolve of the King, and of the last alternative between death and a shameful slavery.

He expected an outbreak of wild grief, such as it had been so difficult even for him to repress. But, to his astonishment, Gotho remained unshaken.

"I have foreseen this long ago, my Adalgoth! It is no misfortune; to lose what we love, and still live, that alone is a misfortune. I have attained to the highest earthly bliss, I am thy wife. Whether I shall have been so for ten years or for twenty, or for scarcely half a year, alters nothing. At least we shall die together on the same day, possibly at the same hour. For King Teja will not forbid thee--when thou hast done thy part in the last battle, and, perhaps wounded, canst fight no longer--he will not forbid thee to come and take me in thine arms--how often hast thou carried me on the Iffinger!--and leap with me into the abyss. Oh, Adalgoth!" she cried, passionately embracing him, "how happy we have been! We will show that we were worthy of such bliss, by dying bravely, without cowardly lament. The scion of the Balthe," and she smiled, "shall not say that the shepherd's daughter could not keep pace with his nobility. There arises in my soul a vision of the grandeur of our mountains! My grandfather, Iffa, admonished me, when I left him, to call to mind the fresh and free air of our mountains, and the strict and noble severity of the proud heights, should ever life in the narrow, small, gilded chambers here below seem too paltry for our souls. We have not been menaced with that, but now, when it is necessary to raise our minds from timid, tender sorrow--which almost crept over me--and to gain strength for a noble resolve, the remembrance of my native mountains has made me strong. 'Shame on thee,' I said to myself, 'shame on thee, daughter of the mountains! What would the Iffinger, and the Wolfshead, and all the stony giants say, if they saw the shepherdess despair? Be worthy of thy mountains and of thy hero husband.'"

Adalgoth pressed his young wife to his bosom, with mingled pride and joy.

Behind the tent of the Duke lay the low hut, made of dried branches, where dwelt Wachis and Liuta. Liuta, who had heard from Gotho what fate menaced them, had been obliged to use all her powers of persuasion upon her husband (who sat shaking his head and hammering and patching his shield, which had been sadly defaced, by Longobardian arrows in the last watch he had held at the mouth of the pass, and who now began to whistle to hide his suppressed sobs) before she could raise him to a like enthusiasm of renunciation.

"I do not think," said the honest man, "that the Lord of heaven can see it done. I am one of those who never like to say, 'All is over!' The proud ones, those who hold their heads high, like King Teja and Duke Adalgoth, certainly run constantly against the beams of fate. But we small people, who can stoop and bend, easily find a mouse-hole or a chink in the wall by which to escape. It is too vile! miserable! cruel! rascally!"--and each word was accompanied by a sounding stroke with his hammer. "I will not believe it! I cannot believe that hundreds of good women, pretty girls, lisping children, and stammering old men, must jump into the hellish fire of this accursed mountain! As if it were but a merry bonfire! As if they would come out at the other side safe and sound! I might just as well have let thee burn in the house at Fæsulæ. And not only thou must burn, but also our expected child, whom I have already named Witichis."

"Or Rauthgundis," said Liuta, blushing, as she bent over her husband's shoulder and stopped

his hammering. "Let this name admonish thee, Wachis! Think of our beloved mistress. Was she not a thousand times better than Liuta, the poor maid-servant? And would she have hesitated or refused to die on the same day with all her people?"

"Thou art right, wife!" exclaimed Wachis, with a last furious stroke of his hammer. "Thou knowest I am a peasant, and peasants do not at all like to die. But if the heavens fall, they strike down peasants as well as others; and before it happens--ha-ha!--I will deal many a famous stroke! That would please Sir Witichis and Mistress Rauthgundis right well also. In honour of them--yes, thou art right, Liuta--we will live bravely--and, if it cannot be otherwise, bravely die!"

CHAPTER IX.

It was with most joyful surprise that the two tribunes, Licinius and Julianus, entered the tent of the Prefect after their interview with Narses.

"Once again you have conquered, O Cethegus!" cried Licinius.

"You have got the upper hand, Prefect of Rome," said Salvius Julianus. "I do not understand it, but Narses really abandons Rome to you."

"Ha!" cried Piso, who had entered with the others, "that is your old Cæsarian luck, Cethegus! Your star, which has seemed to wane since this famous cripple's arrival, shines anew. It seems to me that sometimes his *mind* suffers from attacks of epilepsy. For, with a sound mind, how could he quietly let you enter Rome? No! Quem deus vult perdere dementat! Now will Quintus Piso again wander through the Forum, and look into the book-stalls to see if the Goths have assiduously bought his 'Epistolae ad amabilissimum, carissimum pastorem Adalgotum et ejus pedum'--(Letters to the very amiable and greatly beloved shepherd-boy, Adalgot, and his bludgeon)."

"So you have composed in exile, like Ovidius?" asked Cethegus, smiling.

"Yes," answered Piso. "The six-footed verses come more readily, since they no longer need to fear the Goths, who are a foot longer. And amid the noise of Gothic banquetings it would not be easy to compose, even in time of peace."

"He has composed some merry verses, intermixed with Gothic words, on that subject too," said Salvius Julianus. "How does it begin, 'Inter hails Gothicum skapja'----"

"Do not wrong my words! It is not permitted to quote falsely what is immortal."

"Well, how go the verses?" asked Cethegus.

"Thus," said Piso:

"De conviviis barbarorum.
Inter: 'Hails Gothicum! skapja matjan jah drinkan!'
Non audet quisquam dignos educere versus:
Calliope madido trepidat se jungere Baccho,
Ne pedibus non stet ebria Musa suis."

"Horrible poetry!" exclaimed Salvius Julianus.

"Who knows," said Piso, laughing, "whether the thirst of the Goths will not become immortal through these verses?"

"But now tell me exactly what Narses answered?" said Cethegus.

"First he listened to us with great incredulity," replied Licinius, "He asked suspiciously, 'Is it possible that the prudent Romans can again beg for an Isaurian garrison and the Prefect, whom they have to thank for so much famine and unwilling valour?' But I answered that he under-rated the patriotism of the Romans, and that it was your affair if you had deceived yourself. If the Romans did not voluntarily admit us, your seven thousand men were too weak to storm the city. This seemed to convince him. He only required our promise that, if we were not admitted voluntarily, we would at once return here."

"And we thought we might well venture to promise this in your name," concluded Julianus.

"You were right," said Cethegus, with a smile.

"Narses then said that he would not hinder us if the Romans liked to have us. And he is so completely harmless," Licinius went on, "that he does not seem to wish to detain you, even as a hostage; for he inquired when the Prefect would start. Therefore he must have taken it for granted that you would lead the Isaurians to Rome yourself. And he has nothing to say against that either. He was evidently surprised when I answered that you preferred to witness here the destruction of the Goths."

"Well," said Cethegus, "where, then, is this terrible Narses, the great statesman! Even my friend Procopius sadly over-rated him, when he once named him to me as the greatest man of the time."

"The greatest man of the time is--some one else," cried Licinius.

"It was natural that Procopius should give the palm to the superior enemy of his Belisarius. But one almost ought to take advantage of the clumsy blunder made by the 'greatest man,'" continued Cethegus reflectively. "The gods might be angry if we did not make use of the miracle of infatuation which they have accomplished for us. I alter my resolution; I long to get to the Capitol; I will go with you to Rome. Syphax, we will start--at once! Saddle my horse!"

But Syphax gave his master a warning look.

"Leave me, tribunes!" said Cethegus, "I will recall you directly."

"O sir!" cried Syphax eagerly, as soon as they were alone, "do not go to-day! Send the others on in advance. To-morrow early I shall fish two great secrets out of the sea. Diving under his boat, I have already spoken to the fisherman I mentioned. He is no fisher, he is a slave, a post-slave belonging to Procopius."

"What do you say?" asked Cethegus hastily and in a low tone.

"We could only exchange a few words in a whisper. The Longobardians stood on the shore watching us. Seven letters from Procopius, sent either openly or secretly, have never reached you. He therefore chose this clever messenger, who will fish to-night by moonlight and give me the letter. He had not brought it with him to-day. And to-morrow early--to-day he was too ill--Narses will again bathe in the sea. I have found a hiding-place among the weeds; quite close. And should they chance to see bubbles rising from the water, I can whistle like an otter. I saw the imperial post arrive with well-filled mail-bags. Basiliskos took them. Do but wait until to-morrow early; Narses will be sure to talk over the latest secrets from Byzantium with Basiliskos and Alboin. Or at least leave me here alone----"

"No, that would be at once to betray you as a spy. You are worth more than ten times your weight in gold, Syphax!--I shall remain here till to-morrow," he continued, as the tribunes again entered.

"Oh, come with us!" begged Licinius.

"Away from the oppressive influence of this Narses!" added Julianus.

But Cethegus frowned.

"Does he still over-top me in your eyes, this fool, who allows Cethegus to escape from his well-guarded camp to Rome; who throws the fish out of his net into the water? Verily, he has too much intimidated you! To-morrow evening I will follow you. I have still some business to transact here, which no one but myself can complete. Meanwhile, if Rome does not resist, you can occupy it without me. But I shall surely overtake you at Terracina. If not, march into Rome. You, Licinius, will keep the Capitol for me."

With sparkling eyes Licinius exclaimed: "You honour me highly, my general! I will answer for the Capitol with my life! May I venture a petition?"

"Well?"

"Do not expose yourself foolhardily to the spear of the Gothic King! The day before yesterday he hurled two spears at once at you; one in each hand. If I had not caught the one from his left hand upon my shield----"

"Then, Licinius, the Jupiter of the Capitol would have blown it aside before it struck me. For the god still needs me. But you mean well."

"Do not widow Roma!" persisted Lucius.

Cethegus looked at him with the irresistible look of admiring love which was so winning on *his* face; and continued, turning to Salvius Julianus:

"You, Salvius, will occupy the Mausoleum. And you, Piso, the rest of the city on the left bank of the Tiber. Particularly the Porta Latina; through that gate I shall follow you. You will not open to Narses *alone*, any more than you formerly did to Belisarius alone. Farewell; salute my Roma for me. Tell her, that the last contest for her possession, that between Narses and Cethegus, has ended with victory for Cethegus. We shall meet again in Rome! Roma eterna!"

"Roma eterna!" repeated the tribunes with enthusiasm, and hurried out.

"Oh, why was not this Licinius the son of Manilia!" cried Cethegus, looking after the young men as they departed. "Folly of my heart, why art thou so obstinate? Licinius, you shall take the place of Julius as my heir! Oh, would that you were indeed Julius!"

CHAPTER X.

The departure of the Prefect for Rome was delayed for many days. Narses, who invited him to his table, did not indeed seek to keep him back. He even expressed his astonishment that the "Ruler of the Capitol" was not more powerfully drawn to the Tiber stream.

"Certainly," he said with a smile, "I can understand that, as you have seen these barbarians rule and conquer so long in your Italy, you desire strongly to see them fall there. But I cannot say how long that event may yet be put off. The pass cannot be taken by storm as long as it is defended by men like this King Teja. Already more than a thousand of my Longobardians, Alamannians, Burgundians, Herulians, Franks, and Gepidæ have fallen before it."

"Send for once," interposed Alboin in a vexed tone of voice--"send for once your brave Romani Against the Goths. The Herulians, Vulkaris and Wilmuth, fell under King Teja's axe almost as soon as they arrived here; the Gepidian Asbad, under the spear of that boy Adalgoth; my cousin Gisulf lies wounded by Duke Guntharis's sword; Wisand, the standard-bearer, has stabbed the Frank count, Butilin, with the point of his flagstaff; the old master-at-arms has dashed out the brains of the Burgundian Gernot with his stone axe; the Alamannian Liuthari was slain by Earl Grippa, and my shield-bearer, Klaffo, by a common Gothic soldier. And for every one of these heroes, a dozen of their followers lie dead also. If, at midnight last night, a block of lava, upon which I was standing, had not most opportunely slipped down just as King Teja, who can see in the dark, was hurling his lance at me, Rosamunda would not be the loveliest woman, but the loveliest widow in the realm of the Longobardians! As it was I got off with some ugly bruises, which will not be extolled in future heroic songs, but which I fancy much more than King Teja's best spear in my stomach. But I think that it is now the turn of other heroes. Let your Macedonians and Illyrians come forward. We have shown them often enough how a man can die in front of that needle's eye."

"No, my little wolf! Diamond cut diamond!" laughed Narses. "Always Germans against Germans; there are too many of you in the world!"

"You seem to have the same fatherly opinion about the Isaurians--at least about *mine!*--magister militum," said Cethegus. "Shortly before their departure for Rome, you ordered my Isaurians to storm the pass in mass--the first storming-party in mass that you had ever ordered! Seven hundred of my seven thousand remained dead upon those rocks, and Sandil, my tried and faithful chief, at last found this Black Earl's axe too sharp for his helmet. He was very valuable to me."

"Well, the rest are safe in Rome. But nothing except fire can drive these Goths out of their last hole; unless indeed the earth would do me the favour to quake, as it did at Ravenna when Belisarius----"

"Is there still no news of the result of the process against Belisarius?" asked Cethegus. "Letters came lately from Byzantium, did they not?"

"I have not yet read them all.--Or, if not fire--then hunger. And if they then sally forth for a last battle, many a brave man would rather hear the murmur of the Ganges than the murmur of the Draco. Not you, Prefect! I know that you can look boldly into the eye of death."

"I will still wait here a little and see how things turn out. It is bad travelling weather. It storms and rains unceasingly. On the first or second warm sunshiny day, I will start for Rome."

It was true. On the night of the departure of the Isaurians, the weather had suddenly changed. The fisherman, who dwelt in a village near Stabiæ, could not venture out upon the sea; less on account of the storm than because of the Longobardians, who had long been watching him with suspicion, and who had once arrested him. Only when his old father came forward and proved that Agnellus was really his, the old fisherman's son, did they hesitatingly let him go free. But he did not dare to pretend to fish, when no other fisher threw out his nets; and only far out upon the water could Syphax, who was also closely watched, venture to communicate with him.

The exits of all the camps, even of the half-deserted camp of Cethegus--Narses had placed only three thousand Thracians and Persians in the tents deserted by the Isaurians--were guarded night and day by the Longobardians. And Narses was also obliged to postpone his baths for some days. But for the secrets, namely, the letter from Procopius and the conversation held by Narses in his bath-house, Cethegus fully intended to wait.

CHAPTER XI.

The usual good luck of the Prefect did not desert him. The weather changed again. On the morning of the day after his last conversation with Narses, the sun rose splendidly over the blue and sparkling bay, and hundreds of small fishing-boats set out to take advantage of the

favourable weather.

Syphax, yielding his place at the threshold of his master's tent to the four Isaurians, who alone had remained behind their comrades, had disappeared at the first approach of dawn.

When Cethegus had taken his morning bath in an adjoining tent, and was returning to his breakfast, he heard Syphax making a great noise as he approached through the lines of tents.

"No!" he was shouting; "this fish is for the Prefect. I have paid for it in hard cash. The great Narses will not wish to eat other people's fish!"

And with these words he tore himself loose from Alboin, and from several Longobardians, as well as from a slave belonging to Narses, who were trying to detain him.

Cethegus stopped. He recognised the slave. It was the cook of the generally sick and always temperate general, whose art was scarcely practised except for his master's guests.

"Sir," the well-educated Greek said to the Prefect, in his native language, "do not blame me for this unseemly turmoil. What does a sea-mullet matter to me! But these long-bearded barbarians forced me to take possession, at any cost, of this fish-basket, which your slave was bringing from the boats."

A glance which Cethegus exchanged with Syphax sufficed. The Longobardian had not understood what had been said. Cethegus gave Syphax a blow on the cheek, and cried in Latin:

"Good-for-nothing, insolent slave! will you never learn manners? Shall not the sick general have the best there is?"

And he roughly snatched the basket from the Moor and gave it to the slave.

"Here is the basket. I hope Narses will enjoy the fish."

The slave, who thought he had refused the gift distinctly enough, took the basket with a shake of his head.

"What can it all mean?" he asked in Latin as he went away.

"It means," answered Alboin, who followed him, "that the best fish is *not* hidden in the basket, but somewhere else."

As soon as Syphax entered the tent, he eagerly felt in his waterproof belt of crocodile-skin for a roll of papyrus, which he handed to the Prefect.

"You bleed, Syphax!"

"Only slightly. The Longobardians pretended, when they saw me swimming in the water, to take me for a dolphin, and shot their arrows at me."

"Nurse yourself--a solidus for every drop of your blood!--the letter is worth blood and gold, as it seems. Nurse yourself! and bid the Isaurians let no one enter."

And now, alone in his tent, the Prefect began to read.

His features grew darker and darker. Ever deeper became the wrinkle in the centre of his mighty forehead; ever more harshly and firmly compressed his lips.

"To Cornelius Cethegus Cæsarius, the Ex-prefect and ex-friend, Procopius of Cæsarea, for the last time. This is the most sorrowful business for which I have ever used either my former or my present pen-hand. And I would gladly give this my left hand, as I gave my right for Belisarius, if I need not write this letter. The revocation and renunciation of our friendship of thirty years! In this unheroic time I believed in two heroes; the hero of the sword, Belisarius; and the hero of the intellect, Cethegus. In future I must hate, and almost despise, the latter."

The reader threw the letter on the couch upon which he lay. Then he took it up again with a frown and read on:

"Nothing more was wanting but that Belisarius should prove to be the traitor that you would have represented him to be. But his innocence is as clearly proved as your black falsehood. I had often felt uneasy at the crookedness of your ways, into which you had partly led me also; but I believed in the grandeur and unselfishness of your design: the liberation of Italy! Now, however, I see that the mainspring of your actions was measureless, unlimited, merciless ambition! A design which necessitates such means as you have used is desecrated in my eyes for ever. You tried to ruin Belisarius, that brave and simple-minded man, by means of his own repentant wife, and to sacrifice him to Theodora and to your own ambition. That was devilish; and I turn away from you for ever."

Cethegus closed his eyes.

"I ought not to wonder at it," he said to himself. "He too has his idol: Belisarius! Whoever touches that idol is as hateful to the wise Procopius as he who sees in the Cross merely a piece of wood is to the Christian. Therefore I ought not to wonder at it--but it pains me! Such is the power of a thirty years' habit. During all those years a warmer feeling came over my heart at the sound of the name, Procopius! How weak does custom make us! The Goth deprived me of Julius--Belisarius deprives me of Procopius! Who will deprive me of Cethegus, my oldest and last friend? No one. Neither Narses nor Fate. Away with you, Procopius, out of the circle of my life! Almost too lachrymose, certainly too long, is the funeral speech which I have held over you. What else does the dead man say?"

And he continued to read:

"But I write this letter, because I wish to close our long friendship--to which you have put an end by your treacherous attack upon my hero, Belisarius--with a last sign of affection. I wish to warn and to save you, if it yet be possible. Seven letters which I sent you have evidently never reached you, otherwise you would not still be dwelling in the camp of Narses, as his army-reports affirm. So I will entrust this eighth letter to my slave, Agnellus, a fisherman's son from Stabiæ, where you are now encamped. I will give him his freedom, and recommend this letter to him as my last commission. For, although I ought to hate you, I still love you, Cethegus! It is hard to abandon you, and I would gladly save you. When, shortly after your departure, I returned to Byzantium--already on the way the news of the arrest of Belisarius (on account of treachery!) came upon me like a thunderbolt--I believed at first that you, like the Emperor, had been deceived. In vain I tried to gain a hearing from Justinian; he raged against all who had ever been united in ties of friendship to Belisarius. In vain I strove to see Antonina by every means in my power. She was strictly guarded (thanks to your hints) in the Red House. In vain I proved to Tribonianus the impossibility of treachery on the part of Belisarius. He shrugged his shoulders and said: 'I cannot comprehend it! But the proof is striking; this senseless denial of the visits of Anicius. He is lost!' And he was lost. The sentence was pronounced; Belisarius was condemned to death; Antonina to banishment. The Emperor mercifully *mitigated* the sentence of Belisarius into banishment--far from Antonina's exile--the loss of sight, and confiscation of his property. This terrible judgment lay heavy upon all Byzantium. No one believed in the guilt of Belisarius except the Emperor and the judges. But no one was able to prove his innocence, or change his fate. I was resolved to go with him into banishment; the one-armed with the blind. Then--and may he be blessed for it for ever!--his great enemy, Narses, saved him! He whom I once named to you as the greatest man of the age."

"To be sure," said Cethegus to himself, "and now he will also be the most magnanimous."

"As soon as the news reached him in the Baths of Nikomedia--whither the sick man had repaired--he hurried back to Byzantium. He sent for me and said: 'You know well that it would have been my greatest pleasure to beat Belisarius thoroughly in the open field; but he who has been my great and noble rival shall not perish miserably because of these lies. Come with me. We two--his greatest friend and his greatest enemy--will together save that impetuous man.' And he demanded an audience of the Emperor, which was at once granted to the enemy of Belisarius. Then he said to Justinian: 'It is impossible that Belisarius is a traitor. His only failing is his blind fidelity to your ingratitude.' But Justinian was deaf. Then Narses laid his marshal's staff at the Emperor's feet and said: 'Well, either you will annul the sentence of the judges, and permit a new inquiry, or you will lose both your generals on one day. For, on the same day that Belisarius goes into exile, I go too. Then see to it, who will guard your doors from the Goths, Persians, and Saracens.' And the Emperor hesitated, and demanded three days' time for consideration, and meanwhile Narses was to be allowed to look through the papers in company with me, and to speak to Anicius and all concerned. I soon perceived from the papers that the worst proof against Belisarius--for I hoped to be able to explain away the consent which he had written upon the tablet found in the house of Photius--was the secret and midnight visits of Anicius, which Belisarius, Antonina, and Anicius himself, obstinately and unreasonably denied. I then spoke to Antonina in private. I told her that these visits and their denial would be the ruin of Belisarius. Then she cried with sparkling eyes: 'Then I alone will be ruined, and Belisarius shall be saved! He really knew nothing of these visits, for Anicius did not come to him--he came to me. All the world shall know it--even Belisarius! He may kill me, but he shall be saved!' And she gave me a little bundle of letters from Anicius, which, certainly, when laid before the Emperor, would explain everything, but would also accuse the *Empress* in a terrible manner. And how firmly stood Theodora at that time in the esteem of Justinian! I hastened with these letters to Narses. He read them through and said, 'In this case, either Belisarius and all of us are ruined--or the beautiful she-devil will fall! It is for life or death! First come with me to Antonina once more.' And, accompanied by guards, and taking Antonina with us, we hastened to Anicius, who was slowly recovering from his wound in prison."

Cethegus stamped his foot; but he read on:

"And then we all four went to Justinian. The magnanimous sinner, Antonina, confessed upon her knees the nightly meetings with Anicius, which, however, she had only encouraged in order to deliver the youth from the toils of the Empress. She gave the Emperor the letters of Anicius, which spoke of the seductress, of her manifold arts, of the secret passage to her chamber, and of the turning statue. The poor Emperor broke out into a fearful rage; he would have arrested us all upon the spot for leze majesty, for unlimited calumny. But Belisarius said, 'Do that--to-morrow! But this evening, when the Empress sleeps, let Anicius and me lead you through the turning

statue into the chamber of your wife, seize her letters, confront her with Antonina and Anicius, subject the old witch Galatea to the torture, and then see if you do not learn much more than you will like to hear. And if we have deceived ourselves, punish us to-morrow as you like!' The turning, statue! that was so palpable! The assurance of Anicius, that he had often passed this secret door, was so provoking! Such things could scarcely be invented. Justinian accepted our proposition. That very night Anicius led the Emperor and us three into the garden adjoining the Empress's apartments. A hollow plantain-tree concealed the mouth of the subterranean passage which ended under the mosaic of Theodora's ante-room. Until then, Justinian had still preserved his belief in the Empress. But when Anicius pushed a marble slab to one side, and opened a secret lock with a secret key that he had fetched from his house, and the statue became visible, the Emperor, half fainting, sank back into my arms. At last he roused himself, and pressed forward alone past the statue into the chamber. Twilight filled the room. The dimly burning lamp shone over the couch of Theodora. The poor befooled man went up to her with a stealthy and unsteady step. There lay Theodora, fully dressed in imperial garments. A shrill cry from the Emperor called us to his side, and also Galatea from an adjoining chamber, whom I immediately seized. Justinian, stiff with horror, pointed to the couch--we stepped forward--the Empress was dead! Galatea, not less startled than we, fell into convulsions. Meanwhile, we searched the room, and found, upon a golden tripod, the ashes of numerous rolls of parchment. Anicius called for slaves and lights. By this time Galatea had recovered, and, wringing her hands, told how the Empress had left her rooms towards evening--about the time of our audience--without attendants, in order to visit the Emperor, as she frequently did at that hour. She had returned almost immediately, very quiet, but strikingly pale. She had ordered the tripod to be filled with glowing coals, and had then locked herself up in her room. When Galatea knocked some time later, she had answered that she had gone to rest, and required nothing more. On hearing this, the Emperor threw himself again upon the beloved corpse; and now, by the light of the lamps which had been brought, he saw that the little ruby capsule, containing poison, in the ring which had once belonged to Cleopatra, and which Theodora wore upon her little finger, had been opened--the Empress had killed herself! Upon the lemonwood table lay a strip of parchment, upon which was written her favourite motto: 'To live is to rule by means of beauty.' We were still in doubt whether it was the tortures of her malady or the discovery of her threatened fall which had driven her to this desperate deed. But our doubts were soon solved. When the news of Theodora's death spread through the palace, Theophilus, the Emperor's door-keeper, hurried, half desperate, into the chamber of death, threw himself at the Emperor's feet, and confessed that he guessed the connection. He had been for years in the secret service of the Empress, and every time that the Emperor held an audience to which he had given orders that the Empress was not to be admitted, he (the doorkeeper) had apprised the latter of it. She had then almost always heard the most secret councils of the Emperor from a hiding-place in the doorway of an adjacent chamber. Thus yesterday he had, as usual, informed the Empress that we were to have an audience, to which he had been particularly ordered not to admit her. Presently she had entered her hiding-place, but she had scarcely heard a few words spoken by Antonina and Anicius, when, with a smothered cry, she had sunk half fainting behind the curtains; but, quickly rising, she had made a sign to him to keep silence, and then disappeared.--Narses pressed the Emperor to question Galatea upon the rack, but Justinian said, 'I will inquire no further.'

"Day and night he remained alone near the corpse of the still beloved woman, after which he caused her to be interred, with the highest imperial honours, in the church of St. Sophia. It was officially published that the Empress had been suffocated by charcoal fumes while sleeping. The tripod, with the ashes, was publicly exposed. But that night had made Justinian an old man. The complete agreement of the evidence of Antonina, Anicius, Belisarius, Photius, the slaves of Antonina, the litter-bearers who had taken you to Belisarius's house before his arrest--all fully proved that you, in conjunction with the Empress, had persuaded Belisarius, through Antonina, to place himself seemingly at the head of the conspirators; and I swore to the fact that a few weeks ago he had expressed to me his just anger at the project of Photius.

"Justinian hastened to the cell where Belisarius was confined, embraced him with tears, begged his forgiveness for himself and for Antonina, who remorsefully confessed all her innocent love-makings, and obtained full pardon. The Emperor, in atonement, begged Belisarius to accept the chief command in Italy. But Belisarius said, 'No, Justinian; my work on earth is finished. I shall retire with Antonina to my most distant villa in Mesopotamia, and there bury myself and my past. I am cured of the wish to serve you. If you will grant me a last favour, then give the command of the army in Italy to my friend and preserver, Narses. He shall revenge me upon the Goths, and upon that Satan called Cethegus!' And the two great enemies embraced before our sympathetic eyes. All this was buried in the deepest secrecy, in order to spare the memory of the Empress; for Justinian still loves her. It was announced that the innocence of Belisarius had been fully proved by Narses, Tribonianus, and me, by means of lately-discovered letters of the conspirators. Justinian pardoned all who had been sentenced; also Scævola and Albinus, who were formerly undone by you. But I tell you the whole truth, in order to warn and save you. For, although I do not know in what way, I am quite convinced that Justinian has sworn your ruin, and entrusted your destruction to the hands of Narses. Your design to found a free and recognised Rome, ruled only by yourself, was madness. To it you have sacrificed everything--even our fair friendship. I shall accompany Belisarius and Antonina, and I will try, in the contemplation of their complete reconciliation and happiness, to forget the disgust, doubt, and vexation with which all human affairs have filled me."

CHAPTER XII.

Cethegus sprang from his seat, tossed the letter down, and hastily paced his tent.

"Feeble creature! and weak-minded Cethegus! to vex yourself that another soul is lost to you! Had you not lost Julius long before you killed him? And yet you still live and strive! And this Narses, whom all fear as if he were God and devil in one--is he, then, really so dangerous? Impossible! He has blindly entrusted Rome to me and mine. It is not his fault that I do not defy him at this moment from the Capitol. Bah! I cannot learn to be afraid in my old days. I trust in my star! Is it foolhardiness? Is it the calmest wisdom? I do not know; but it seems to me that confidence like this led Cæsar from victory to victory! However, I can scarcely learn more from the secret council of Narses in his bath-house than I have learned from this letter." And he tore the papyrus roll into small pieces. "I will start this very day, even if Syphax has overheard nothing at this moment, for I think it is the hour of the bath."

Just then Johannes was announced, and, at a sign from Cethegus, was admitted.

"Prefect of Rome," said Johannes, "I am come to beg pardon for an old injury. The pain I felt at the loss of my brother Perseus made me suspicious."

"Let that rest," said Cethegus; "it is forgotten."

"But I have not forgotten," continued Johannes, "your heroic valour. In order at once to honour it and profit by it, I come to you with a proposal. I and my comrades, used to Belisarius's straightforward attacks, find the caution of the great Narses very tiresome. We have now been lying for nearly two months before this cursed pass; we lose men and win no renown. The commander-in-chief will starve the barbarians out. Who knows how long that may last? And there will be a fine butchery if, at last driven by despair, the barbarians break out and sell dearly every drop of their blood! It is clear that if we only had the mouth of that confounded pass----"

"Yes, *if!*" said Cethegus, smiling. "It is not ill-defended by this Teja."

"Just on that account he must fall! He, the King, is evidently the only one who holds together the whole loose bundle of spears. Therefore I and more than a dozen of the best blades in the camp have formed a league. Whenever it is the King's turn to guard the pass--the approach is so narrow and steep, that only one at a time can attempt a hand-to-hand fight--we, one after the other, taking our turns by lot, will attack him; the others will keep as close as possible to the foremost combatant, will save him if wounded, step into his place when he falls, or, if he is victor and slays the Goth, press forward into the ravine. Besides me, there are the Longobardians Alboin, Gisulf, and Autharis, the Herulians Rodulf and Suartua, Ardarich the Gepide, Gunebad the Burgundian, Chlotachar and Bertchramn the Franks, Vadomar and Epurulf the Alamannians, Garizo the tall Bajuvar, Kabades the Persian, Althias the Armenian, and Taulantius the Illyrian. We should much like to have your terrible sword among us. Will you, Cethegus, be one in our league? I know you hate this black-haired hero."

"Gladly," said Cethegus, "as long as I am here. But I shall soon exchange this camp for the Capitol."

A strange and mocking smile passed across the face of Johannes, which did not escape Cethegus. But he attributed it to a wrong feeling.

"You cannot well doubt my courage," he said, "according to your own words. But there are more important things for me to do than to stamp out the last glimmering sparks of the Gothic war. The orphaned city longs for her Prefect. The Capitol beckons me."

"The Capitol!" repeated Johannes. "I think, Cethegus, that a heroic death is also worth something."

"Yes, when the aim of one's life is reached."

"But no one knows, O Cethegus, how near he has approached his aim. But, another thing: it seems to me as if something is in preparation among the barbarians on their cursed mountain. From the hill near my quarters we can peep a little, through a gap, over the peaks of the lava. I should like you to turn your practised eye in that direction. At least, they shall not surprise us by a sally. Follow me thither. But do not speak of our league to Narses; he does not approve of such things. I purposely chose the hour of his bath for my visit to you."

"I will come," said Cethegus.

He finished putting on his armour, and, after vainly inquiring for Syphax of the Isaurian sentry, went with Johannes through his own and the central camp of Narses, and finally turned into that on the right wing--the camp of Johannes.

Upon the crown of the little hill mentioned by Johannes stood a great many officers, who were eagerly looking through a small gap in the lava into the portion of the Gothic encampment visible to them.

When Cethegus had looked for some time, he cried:

"There is no doubt about it! They are evacuating this easternmost part of their position; they are pushing the wagons, which were drawn together, apart, and dragging them farther to the right, to the west. That must mean concentration; perhaps a sally."

"What do you think, Johannes?" quietly asked a young captain, who had evidently only lately arrived from Byzantium, and who was a stranger to Cethegus, "what do you think? Could not the new catapults reach the barbarians from the point of that rock? I mean the last inventions of Martinus--such as my brother took to Rome."

"*To Rome?*" repeated Cethegus, and cast a sharp look at the questioner and at Johannes.

He felt himself suddenly turn hot and cold--a fright came over him, more terrible still than he had experienced when he had heard of the landing of Belisarius, of Totila's election, of Totila's march to Rome at *Pons Padi*, of Totila's entrance into the Tiber; or of the arrival of Narses in Italy. It seemed to him as if an iron hand were clutching his heart and brain. He saw that Johannes imposed silence on the young questioner with a furious frown.

"*To Rome?*" again repeated Cethegus in a low voice, and fixing his eyes, now upon the stranger, now upon Johannes.

"Well, yes, of course, to Rome!" at last answered Johannes. "Zenon, this man is Cethegus, the Prefect of Rome."

The young Byzantine bowed with the expression of one who sees for the first time some far-famed monster.

"Cethegus, Zenon here, a captain who till now has been fighting on the Euphrates, arrived only yesterday evening with some Persian bowmen from Byzantium."

"And his brother," asked Cethegus, "has gone to *Rome?*"

"My brother Megas," quietly answered the Byzantine--who had now collected himself--"had the order to offer to the Prefect of Rome"--and here he again bowed--"the newly-invented double-catapults for the walls of Rome. He embarked long before me; so I thought that he had already arrived, and was gone to you in Rome. But his freight is very heavy. I am rejoiced to become personally acquainted with the most powerful man of the West, the glorious defender of the Tomb of Hadrian."

But Cethegus cast another sharp look at Johannes, and, abruptly bowing to all present, turned to go.

When he had gone a few paces he suddenly looked back, and caught sight of Johannes, with both his fists raised in anger, scolding at the talkative young archon. A cold shudder ran through the Prefect. He intended to reach his tent by the shortest cut, and, without waiting for Syphax and his discoveries, to mount his horse and hasten to Rome without taking leave.

The shortest way to get to his tent was to leave the camp of Johannes, and walk along the straight line of the semicircle formed by the whole encampment. In front of him a few Persian bowmen were riding out of the camp commanded by Johannes. And some peasants who had sold wine to the soldiers were also permitted to pass unhindered by the sentinels. These sentries were all Longobardians, to whom, as everywhere, the exits of this camp were entrusted by Narses.

As Cethegus was about to follow his countrymen, these sentries stopped him with their spears. He caught at the shafts and angrily pushed them aside. At this one of the Longobardians blew his horn; the others pressed more closely round Cethegus.

"By order of Narses!" said Autharis, the captain.

"And those?" asked Cethegus, pointing to the peasants and the Persians.

"Those are not you," said the Longobardian.

At the sound of the horn a troop of guards had hurried up. They bent their bows. Cethegus silently turned his back on them and returned to his tent by the way that he had come.

Perhaps it was only his suddenly-aroused mistrust which made him imagine that all the Byzantines and Longobardians whom he passed regarded him with half-jeering, half-compassionate looks. When he reached his tent he asked the Isaurian sentry:

"Is Syphax back?"

"Yes, sir, long since. He is impatiently waiting for you in the tent. He is wounded."

Cethegus quickly pushed aside the curtains and entered. Syphax, deady pale beneath his bronzed skin, rushed to meet him, embraced his knees, and whispered in passionate and desperate excitement:

"O my master! my lion! You are ensnared--lost--nothing can save you!"

"Compose yourself, slave!" said Cethegus. "You bleed?" "It is nothing! They would not permit me to return to your camp--they began to struggle with me as if in joke, but their dagger-stabs were bitter earnest."

"Who? Whose dagger-stabs?"

"The Longobardians, master, who have placed double guards at all the entrances of your camp."

"Narses shall give me a reason for this," said Cethegus angrily.

"The reason--that is, the pretext--he sent Kabades to inform you of it--is a menaced sally by the Goths. But oh! my lion, my eagle, my palm-tree, my wellspring--you are lost!"

And again the Numidian threw himself at his master's feet, covering them with tears and kisses.

"Tell me coherently," said Cethegus, "what you have heard."

And he leaned against the central support of his tent, crossing his arms behind his back, and raising his head. He did not seem to regard the troubled face of Syphax, but to gaze at vacancy.

"O sir--I shall not be able to tell it very clearly--but I succeeded in reaching my hiding-place among the sea-weed. It was scarcely necessary to dive--the weeds hid me sufficiently. The bathing-house is made of thin wood and has been newly covered with linen since the last storm. Narses came in his little boat with Alboin, Basiliskos, and three other men, disguised as Longobardians--but I recognised Scævola, Albinus----"

"They are not dangerous," interrupted Cethegus.

"And--Anicius!"

"Are you not mistaken?" asked Cethegus sharply.

"Sir, I knew his eyes and his voice! From their conversation--I did not understand every word--but the sense was clear----"

"Would that you could repeat their very words!"

"They spoke Greek, sir, and I do not understand it as well as your language--and the waves made a noise, and the wind was unfavourable."

"Well, what did they say?"

"The three men only came from Byzantium yesterday evening--they at once demanded your head. But Narses said, 'No murder! A just sentence after a process in all form.' 'When is it to be?' asked Anicius. 'So soon as it is time.' 'And Rome?' asked Basiliskos. 'He will never see Rome again!' answered Narses."

"Stop!" cried Cethegus. "Wait a moment. I must be quite clear."

He wrote a few lines upon a wax tablet.

"Has Narses returned from his bath?"

"Long ago."

"'Tis well." He gave the tablet to the sentinel at the door. "Bring back the answer immediately.--Continue, Syphax."

But Cethegus could no longer stand still. He began hastily to pace the tent.

"O sir, something monstrous must have happened at Rome--I could not exactly understand what. Anicius put a question; in it he named your Isaurians. Narses said, 'I am rid of the chief Sandil,' and he added, laughing, 'and the rest are well cared for in Rome by Aulus and the brothers Macer, my decoy-birds.'"

"Did he name those names?" asked Cethegus grimly. "Did he use that word?"

"Yes, sir. Then Alboin said, 'It is well that the young tribunes are gone; it would have cost a hard fight.' And Narses replied, 'All the Prefect's Isaurians must go. Shall we fight a bloody battle in our own camp, and let King Teja burst in upon us?' O sir, I fear that they have enticed your most faithful followers away from you with evil intent."

"I believe so too," said Cethegus gravely. "But what did they say about Rome?"

"Alboin asked after a leader whose name I had never heard before."

"Megas?" asked Cethegus.

"Yes, Megas! That was it. How did you know?"

"No matter. Continue! What about this Megas?"

"Alboin asked how long Megas had been in Rome. Narses said, 'In any case long enough for the Roman tribunes and the Isaurians.'"

Cethegus groaned aloud.

"But," continued Syphax, "Scævola remarked that the citizens of Rome idolised their tyrant and his young knights. 'Yes,' answered Narses, 'formerly; but now they hate and fear nothing so much as the man who tried by force once more to make them brave men and Romans.' Then Albinus asked, 'But if they were to take his part again? His name has an all-conquering influence.' Narses answered, 'Twenty-five thousand Armenians in the Capitol and the Mausoleum will bind the Romans----'"

Cethegus struck his fist fiercely on his forehead.

"'Will bind them more strictly than Pope Pelagius, their treaty, or their oath.' 'Their treaty and their oath?' asked Scævola. 'Yes,' answered Narses, 'their oath and treaty! They have sworn only to open their gates to the Prefect of Rome.' 'Well, and then?' asked Anicius. 'Well', they know, and they knew then, that now the Prefect of Rome is called--Narses. *To me, not to him* have, they sworn!'"

Cethegus threw himself upon his couch and hid his face in his purple-hemmed mantle. No loud complaint issued from his heaving chest.

"Oh, my dear master!" cried Syphax, "it will kill you! But I have not yet finished. You must know all. Despair will give you strength, as it does to the snared lion."

Cethegus raised his head.

"Finish," he said. "What I have still to hear is indifferent; it can only concern me, not Rome."

"But it concerns you in a fearful manner! Narses went on to say, after a few speeches which escaped me in the noise of the waves--that yesterday, at the same time as the long-expected news from Rome----"

"What news?" asked Cethegus.

"He did not mention what. He said, 'At the same time, Zenon brought me word to open the sealed orders which I carry from the Emperor; for the latter rightly judges that any day may bring about the destruction of the Goths. I opened and'--O master, it is dreadful----"

"Speak!"

"Narses said, 'All the great Justinian's littleness is exposed in these orders. I believe he would more easily pardon Cethegus for having enticed him to blind Belisarius, than for having been in collusion with Theodora, for having been the seducer of the Empress! A frightful anachron'--I did not understand the word."

"Anachronism!" said Cethegus, quietly righting Syphax.

"'For having deceived and outwitted him. The fate which Cethegus almost brought upon Belisarius, will now fall upon his own head--the loss of his sight.'"

"Really!" said Cethegus with a smile. But he involuntarily felt for his dagger.

"Narses said further," continued Syphax, "that you were to suffer the punishment which, in blasphemous desecration of Christ's death, and contrary to the law of the Emperor Constantine, you had lately introduced into Rome. What can he mean by that?" added Syphax anxiously.

"Crucifixion!" said Cethegus as he put up his dagger.

"O master!"

"Softly! I do not yet hang in the air. I still firmly tread the hero-nourishing earth. Conclude!"

"Narses said that he was a general and no executioner, and that the Emperor would have to be contented if he only sent him your head to Byzantium. But oh, not that! Only not that--if we *must* die!"

"We?" said Cethegus, who had fully gained his usual calmness. "You have not deceived the great Emperor. The danger does not threaten you."

But Syphax continued:

"Do you not know then? Oh, do not doubt it. All Africa knows that if the head of a corpse is wanting, the soul must creep for ages through dust and mire, in the shape of a vile and filthy headless worm. Oh, they shall not separate your head from your trunk!"

"It still stands firm upon these shoulders of mine, like the globe on the shoulders of Atlas. Peace--some one comes."

The Isaurian who had been sent to Narses, entered with a sealed letter.

"To Cethegus Cæsarius: Narses, the magister militum. There is nothing to prevent your carrying out your wish to go to Rome."

"Now I understand," said Cethegus, and read on:

"The sentinels have orders to let you ride forth. But, if you insist upon going, I will give you a thousand Longobardians under Alboin as an escort, for the roads are very unsafe. As, in all probability, an attempt will be made by the Goths, to-day or tomorrow, to break through our lines, and repeated foolhardy sallies on the part of my soldiers have led to the loss of leaders and troops, I have ordered that no one be permitted to leave the camp without my express permission, and have entrusted the watch, even that of the tents, to my Longobardians."

Cethegus sprang to the entrance of his tent, and tore the curtains open. His four Isaurians were just being led away. Twenty Longobardians, under Autharis, drew up before the tent.

"I had thought of escaping to-night," he said to Syphax, turning back. "It is now impossible. But it is better so, more dignified. Rather a Gothic spear in my breast, than a Grecian arrow in my back. But I have not yet read all that Narses writes."

He read on:

"If you will come to my tent, you will learn what measures I have taken against the probably great bloodshed which will ensue if the barbarians venture to sally, as they threaten. But I have still a painful communication to make to you. News, which reached me yesterday evening by sea from Rome, informs me that your tribunes and the greater part of the Isaurians have been killed."

"Ah! Licinius, Piso, Julianus!" cried the Prefect, startled out of his icy and defiant calmness by deep pain.

After a pause he controlled his emotion sufficiently to take up the letter and read on:

"When they had been quietly admitted into the city (shamefully decoyed!) they refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Emperor. They tried, contrary to their promise, to use force. Lucius Licinius attempted to take the Capitol by storm; Piso, the Porta Latina; Salvus Julianus, the Mausoleum. They fell, each before the place which he attacked. What remained of the Isaurians were taken prisoners."

"My second Julius follows the first!" cried Cethegus. "Well, I do not need an heir, for Rome will never now be mine! It is over! The great struggle for Rome is over! And brute force, small cunning, has conquered the mind of Cethegus as it did the sword of the Goth. O Romans, Romans! *You, too, my sons?* You are my Brutus. Come, Syphax, you are free. I go to meet death. Go back to your deserts."

"O master!" cried Syphax, sobbing passionately, as he crouched at the feet of Cethegus. "Do not send me from you! I am not less faithful than Aspa! Let me die with you!"

"Be it so," said Cethegus quietly, and laying his hand upon the Moor's head. "I have loved you, my panther! Then die with me. Give me my helm, shield, sword, and spear."

"Whither go you?"

"First to Narses."

"And then?"

"To Vesuvius!"

CHAPTER XIII.

King Teja's intention was to throw himself at night with all his armed men--except a few guards who would be left in the ravine--into the camp of Narses, and there, favoured by the darkness and surprise, to commit great carnage.

Then, when the last of his warriors had fallen, and--probably at daybreak--the enemy prepared to assault the pass, the unarmed people--at least those who did not prefer slavery to death--were to seek an honourable grave in the neighbouring crater of Vesuvius, after which the few

remaining defendants of the pass would sally forth and die fighting.

When the King called his people together, and left the alternative to their choice, he was filled with pride and joy to find that not one voice among the thousands of women and children--for all the boys from ten years of age and all the old men were armed--was raised in favour of dishonour rather than death. His hero soul rejoiced in the thought that his whole race, by a deed unheard of in the history of nations, would die a glorious and heroic death, and worthily seal the renown of their great past.

However, the despairing idea of the grim hero was not to be carried out. His dying eyes were to behold a brighter and more consoling picture. Narses, ever watchful and wary, had noticed the mysterious preparations of his enemies even sooner than Johannes and Cethegus, and had called a meeting of generals, which was to be held in his tent at the fifth hour, in order to explain to them his counter-measures.

It was a lovely September morning, full of shining light and shining mist over land and sea; a golden glow, such as, even in Italy, is only poured forth in like wondrous beauty over the Bay of Neapolis.

Into the clear sky curled the white cloud of smoke from the summit of Vesuvius. Upon the curved line of the shore the smooth and gentle waves rolled in a rhythmic measure. Close to the edge of the water--so close that the ripples of the waves often wetted his steel-shod feet--a lonely man walked slowly along, carrying his spear over his shoulder, and apparently coming from the left wing of the Byzantine army. The sun glistened upon his round shield, upon his splendid armour. The sea-breeze played with his crimson crest.

It was Cethegus; and the way he was going led to the gates of death. He was followed at a short distance by the Moor. He soon reached a little promontory which stretched out into the bay, and going to its outer point, he turned and looked towards the northwest. There lay Rome--his Rome.

"Farewell!" he cried with deep emotion; "farewell, ye seven immortal hills! Farewell, old Tiber stream! thou that hast laved the venerable ruins through many centuries. Twice hast thou tasted my blood; twice hast thou saved my life. Now, kindly River-god, thou canst save me no more! I have striven and fought for thee, my Rome, as none of thy children, not even Cæsar, has ever done before.--The struggle is over; the general without an army is vanquished. I now acknowledge that a mighty intellect may possibly supply the place of a single man, but not the want of a whole nation's patriotism. Intellect can preserve its own youth, but it cannot renew that of others, I have tried to do what is impossible; for to do only what is possible is common; and it is better to fall striving for the superhuman than to be lost in dull resignation among the common herd. But"--and he knelt down and wet his hot forehead with the salt water--"be thou blessed, Ansonia's sacred flood; be thou blessed, Italians sacred soil!"--and he put his hand deep into the sea sand--"thy most faithful son parts from thee with a thankful heart--moved, not by the terrors of approaching death, but only by thy beauty. I forebode for thee, Italia, an oppressive foreign rule; I have not been able to turn it aside, but I have offered up my heart's blood; and if the laurels of thy Empire are for ever withered--may the olive of thy people's love of freedom still bloom amid the ruins of thy cities, and may the day quickly come when no foreign master rules in all the length and breadth of the land, and when thou art mistress of thyself from the sacred Alps to the sacred sea!"

He rose quietly, and now walked more rapidly through the centre camp to the tent of the commander-in-chief. When he entered it, he found all the generals and officers assembled. Narses called to him in a friendly voice, saying:

"You come at the right moment, Cethegus. Twelve of my officers, whom I have discovered in a foolish league, such as barbarians, but not the scholars of Narses, might make, have appealed to you in excuse. They say that what is shared in by the wise Cethegus cannot be foolish. Speak! have you really joined this league against Teja?"

"I have; and when I leave you--let me be the first, Johannes, without casting lots--I go straight to Vesuvius. The hour of the King's watch approaches."

"This pleases me, Cethegus."

"Thanks. It will, no doubt, save you much trouble, *Prefect of Rome*," answered Cethegus.

A movement of extreme surprise escaped all present; for even those who were initiated into the secret were amazed that Cethegus knew the position of affairs.

Narses alone remained unmoved. He merely said in a low voice to Basiliskos:

"He knows all, and it is well that he does so." Then he turned to Cethegus and said: "It is not my fault, Cethegus, that I did not tell you sooner of your dismissal; the Emperor had strictly forbidden me to do so. I approve of your resolve, for it agrees with my best intentions.--The barbarians shall not have the pleasure of slaying another myriad of my people tonight. We will march forward at once with all our troops, including both our wings, to within a spear's throw from the pass. We will not leave the Goths room to sally far out. The first step they take beyond

the mouth of the ravine shall be amongst our spears. I have also nothing to object, Cethegus, if volunteers offer to fight that King of terrors. With his death, I hope, the resistance of the Goths will cease. Only one thing makes me anxious. I have long ago ordered up the Ionian fleet--for I expected that all would be over a few days earlier--and yet it has not arrived. The ships are to take the captured barbarians on board at once, and carry them to Byzantium.--Has the swift-sailer which I sent to gather news beyond the Straits, of Regium not yet returned. Captain Konon?"

"No, general. Neither has a second swift ship, which I sent after the first."

"Can the late storm have damaged the fleet?"

"Impossible, general! It was not violent enough. And the fleets according to the last reports, lay safe at anchor in the harbour of Brundisium."

"Well, we cannot wait for the ships! Forward, my leaders! We will march at once to the pass. Farewell, Cethegus! Do not let your dismissal disquiet you. I fear that you will be menaced with many a troublesome process when the war is ended. You have many enemies, rightly and wrongly. There are bad omens against you. But I know that from the very beginning you have believed in only one omen--'The only omen'----"

"Is to die for the fatherland!" Grant me one more favour, Narses. Allow me--for my Isaurians and tribunes are in Rome--to gather round me all the Italians and Romans whom you have divided among your troops, and lead them against the barbarians."

For one moment Narses hesitated. Then he said:

"Well, go; gather them together and lead them--to death," he added in a low voice to Basiliskos. "There are at most fifteen hundred men. I do not grudge him the pleasure of falling at the head of his countrymen. Nor them the pleasure of falling behind him!--Farewell, Cethegus."

Silently greeting Narses with his uplifted spear, Cethegus left the tent.

"H'm!" said Narses to Alboin, "you may well look after him, Longobardian. There goes a remarkable piece of universal history. Do you know who that is marching away?"

"A great enemy to his enemies," said Alboin gravely.

"Yes, wolf, look at him again; there goes to his death--the last Roman!"

When all the leaders, except Basiliskos and Alboin, had left Narses, there hurried into the tent from behind a curtain, Anicius, Scævola, and Albinus, still in the disguise of Longobardians, and with faces full of alarm.

"What!" cried Scævola, "will you save that man from his judges?"

"And his body from the executioner; and his fortune from his accusers?" added Albinus.

Anicius was silent; he only clenched his hand upon the hilt of his sword.

"General," said Alboin, "let these two brawlers put off the dress of my people. I am disgusted with them."

"You are not wrong there, wolf!" said Narses; and turning to the others he said, "you need no further disguise. You are useless to me as accusers. Cethegus is judged; and the sentence will be carried out--by King Teja. But you, you ravens, shall not hack at the hero after he is dead."

"And the order of the Emperor?" asked Scævola stubbornly.

"Even Justinian cannot blind and crucify a dead man. When Cethegus Cæsarius has fallen, I cannot wake him up again to please the Emperor's cruelty. And of his money, you, Albinus, shall not receive a single solidus, nor you, Scævola, one drop of his blood. His gold is for the Emperor, his blood for the Goths, and his name for immortality."

"Do you wish the death of a hero for that wretch?" now asked Anicius angrily.

"Yes, son of Boëthius; for he has deserved it! But you have a veritable right to revenge yourself on him--you shall behead the fallen man, and take his head to the Emperor at Byzantium. Do you not hear the tuba? The fight has commenced!"

CHAPTER XIV.

When King Teja saw the whole of Narses' forces advancing towards the mouth of the pass, he said to his heroes:

"It seems that instead of the stars, the mid-day sun is to shine upon the last battle of the

Goths! That is the only change in our plan."

He then placed a number of warriors in front of the hollow in the lava, showed them the royal treasure and the corpse of Theodoric, raised upon a purple throne, and ordered them to pay attention while the fight for the pass was raging, and, on receiving a sign from Adalgoth--to whom and Wachis he had confided the last defence of the pass--at once to throw the throne and the coffers into the crater. The unarmed people pressed together round the lava cave--not a tear was seen, not a sigh was heard.

Teja arranged his men into hundreds, and these hundreds into families, so that father and sons, brothers and cousins, fought at each other's side; an order of battle the terrible obstinacy of which the Romans had often experienced since the days of the Cimbrians and Teutons, of Ariovist and Armin. The natural construction of the last battlefield of the Goths necessitated of itself the old order of battle inherited from Odin--the wedge.

The deep and close columns of the Byzantines now stood in orderly ranks from the shore of the sea to within a spear's throw from the mouth of the pass: a magnificent but fearful spectacle. The sun shone brightly upon their weapons, while the Goths still stood in the deep shadow of the rocks. Far away over the spears and standards of the enemy, the Goths beheld the lovely blue sea, the surface of which flashed with a silvery light.

King Teja stood near Adalgoth, who carried the banner of Theodoric, at the mouth of the pass. All the poet was roused in the Hero-King.

"Look!" he said to his favourite, "what more lovely place could a man have to die in? It cannot be more beautiful in the heaven of the Christian, nor in Master Hildebrand's Asgard or Breidablick. Up, Adalgoth! Let us die here, worthy of our nation and of this beauteous death-place."

He threw back the purple mantle which he wore over his black steel armour, took the little harp upon his left arm, and sang in a low, restrained voice:

"From farthest North till Rome--Byzant--
The Goths to battle call!
In glory rose the Goths' bright star--
In glory shall it fall!
Our swords raised high, we fight for fame;
Heroes with heroes vie;
Farewell, thou noble hero-race--
Up, Goths, and let us die!"

And he shattered the still vibrating harp upon the rocks at his feet.

"And now, Adalgoth, farewell! Would that I could have saved the rest of my people! Not here; but by an unobstructed retreat to the north. It was not to be. Narses would never grant it, and the last of the Goths cannot *beg*. Now let us go--to death!"

And raising his dreaded weapon, the mighty battleaxe with its lance-like shaft, he stepped to the head of the "wedge," Behind him Aligern, his cousin, and old Hildebrand. Behind them Duke Guntharis of Tuscany, the Wölfung, Earl Grippa of Ravenna, and Earl Wisand of Volsinii, the standard-bearer. Behind them again, Wisand's brother, Ragnaris of Tarentum, and four earls, his kinsmen. Then, in ever-broadening front, first six, then ten Goths. The rear was formed of close ranks, arranged by tens.

Wachis, halting in the pass near Adalgoth, blew, at a sign from the King, a signal on the Gothic war-horn, and the assaulting force marched out of the ravine.

The heroes in league with Johannes stood upon the first level place close before the pass; only Alboin, Gisulf, and Cethegus were still missing. Next behind the ten leaders stood Longobardians and Herulians, who at once greeted the advancing Goths with a hail of spears.

The first to rush upon the King, who was easily recognisable by the crown upon his helmet, was Althias the Armenian. He fell dead at once, his skull split to the ears.

The second was the Herulian, Rodulf. Holding his spear at his left side with both hands, he rushed at Teja. Teja stood firm, and, receiving the stroke upon his narrow shield, pierced his adversary through the body with the lance-like point of his battle-axe. Rodulf staggered back at the shock, then fell dead.

Before Teja could disengage his weapon from the scales of his enemy's mail-coat, Suartua, the nephew of the fallen Herulian, the Persian Kabadés, and the Bajuvar Garizo, all attacked him at once.

Teja thrust back the last--the nearest and boldest--with such vigour, that he fell in the narrow and slippery lava path, and over a declivity on the right.

"Now help, O holy virgin of Neapolis!" cried the tall man as he flew downwards. "Help me, as you have done during all these years of war!" And, but little damaged, Miriam's admirer came to a stop, slightly stunned by his fall.

The Herulian Suartua was brandishing his sword over Teja's head, when Aligern, springing forward, struck his arm clean off his shoulder. Suartua screamed and fell.

Kabades, who tried to rip up the King's body with his long and crooked scimeter, had his brains dashed out by old Hildebrand's stone axe.

Teja, again become master of his battle-axe, and rid of his nearest foes, now sprang forward to attack in his turn. He hurled his axe at a man in a boar-helmet--that is, a helmet decorated with the head and tusks of a wild boar. It was Epurulf, the Alamannian, who fell backwards to the ground.

Above Teja bent Vadomar, Epurulf's kinsman, and tried to possess himself of the Gothic King's terrible weapon; but Teja was upon him in a moment, his short sword in his right hand. It flashed, and Vadomar fell dead upon the corpse of his friend.

The two Franks, Chlotachar and Bertchramn, hurried up at the same moment, swinging the franciska, a weapon similar to Teja's battle-axe. Both axes whizzed through the air at once. Teja caught one upon his shield; the second, which came hurtling at his head, he parried with his own axe, and in another moment he stood between his two adversaries, whirled his axe round him in a circle, and at one blow the two Franks fell right and left, both their helmets beaten in.

At that moment a spear struck the King's shield; it pierced the steel rim, and slightly grazed his arm. As he turned to meet this enemy--it was the Burgundian Gundobad--Ardarich, the Gepide, ran at him from behind with his drawn sword, and struck him a heavy blow on the top of his helmet. But the next moment Ardarich fell, pierced through by the spear of Duke Guntharis; and the King pressed Gundobad, who defended himself valiantly, down upon his knees. Gundobad lost his helmet in the struggle, and Teja thrust the spike of his shield into his throat.

But already Taulantius the Illyrian and Autharis the Longobardian stood before Teja. The Illyrian struck at the King's shield with a heavy club made of the root of the ilex, and broke off a piece of the lower rim. At the same time, just above the crack thus made, a lance, hurled by the Longobardian, struck the shield and tore off the fastening of the spike, sticking with its hook into the hole, and dragging the shield down by its weight.

Already Taulantius raised his club over the King's head. But Teja did not loiter; sacrificing his half-shattered shield, he dashed it into the Illyrian's visorless face, letting it go; and almost at the same moment he thrust the point of his battle-axe through the breast-plate of Autharis, who was rushing upon him. But now the King stood without a shield, and his distant enemies redoubled their hail of spears and arrows. With axe and sword, Teja parried the thickly falling darts.

An alarum from the pass caused him to look round. He saw that the greater part of the warriors whom he had led out of the ravine had fallen. The innumerable projectiles hurled from a distance had done their deadly work, and already, advancing from the left, a powerful division of Longobardians, Persians, and Armenians, had attacked them in the flank, and now mingled in a hand-to-hand fight.

On the right the King saw a column of Thracians, Macedonians, and Franks press forward against the guardians of the pass with spears couched; while a third division--Gepidians, Alamannians, Isaurians, and Illyrians, tried to cut off himself and the small troop which still stood at his back from the retreat into the pass.

Teja looked sharply towards the pass. For a moment the banner of Theodoric disappeared--it seemed to have fallen. This circumstance decided the King.

"Back into the pass! Save Theodoric's banner!" he cried to those behind him, and tried to break through the troop of enemies which surrounded him.

But they were in terrible earnest, for they were led by Johannes.

"Upon the King," lie cried. "Do not let him through. Do not let him go back! Spears! Throw!"

Aligern had come up.

"Take my shield!" he cried.

Teja caught the proffered shield just in time to receive the lance hurled by Johannes, which would otherwise have pierced his visor.

"Back to the pass!" again Teja cried, and rushed with such impetuosity upon Johannes, that the latter fell to the ground. The two nearest Isaurians succumbed to Teja's sword.

And now Teja, Aligern, Guntharis, Hildebrand, Grippa, Wisand and Ragnaris hurried back to the pass. But here the battle was already raging. Alboin and Gisulf had stormed the pass, and a heavy, pointed block of lava, hurled by Alboin, had struck Adalgoth on the thigh, and caused him

to sink upon his knees. But Wachis had caught the falling banner, and Adalgoth, quickly rising, had pushed the Longobardian, who was pressing forward, out of the pass with the spike of his shield.

The sudden return of the King with his little troop of heroes relieved the almost overpowered guardians of the pass. The Longobardians fell in heaps before the unexpected assault in their rear. With loud cries the two guardians of the pass rushed forth, and the Longobardians, carrying their leaders along irresistibly, ran and leaped over the jagged lava in their downward retreat. But they did not run far. They were absorbed by the ranks of Isaurians, and Illyrians, Gepidians and Alamanni, who advanced in force, led by Johannes. Gnashing his teeth, he had risen from his fall, had set his helmet straight, and at once led his men against the pass, into which Teja had now entered.

"Forward!" cried Johannes; "up and at him, Alboin, Gisulf, Vitalianus, Zenon! Let us see if this King be really spear-proof!"

Teja had now taken up his old position at the mouth of the pass, and leaning upon the shaft of his battle-axe, he rested awhile to cool himself.

"Now, barbarian King! the end is at hand! Have you crept again into your snail-shell? Come out, or I will make a hole in your house. Come out, if you be a man!"

Thus cried Johannes, twirling his spear over his head in defiance.

"Give me three spears!" cried Teja, and gave his shield and battle-axe to Adalgoth, who stood near him still, though wounded. "There! Now, as soon as he falls, follow me out."

And he took one step forward out of the pass, without his shield, and holding his three spears in his hands.

"Welcome to the open! and to death!" cried Johannes, as he hurled his spear.

The spear was accurately aimed at the King's visor. But Teja bent to one side, and the strong ashen lance was shattered against the opposite rock.

As soon as Teja hurled his first spear in return, Johannes cast himself upon his face; the spear flew over him and killed Zenon, who stood close behind.

Johannes quickly recovered his feet, and rushed at the King like lightning, catching the King's second spear, which immediately followed the first, upon his shield. But Teja, immediately after hurling this second lance with his right hand, had followed it up by a third with his left, and this spear, unnoticed by Johannes, passed completely through the latter's body, the point coming out at his back. The brave man fell.

At this his Isaurians and Illyrians were seized with terror; for, after Belisarius, Johannes was looked upon as the first hero of Byzantium. They cried aloud, turned, and fled in wild disorder down the mountain, followed by Teja and his heroes. For one moment the Longobardians, who had again collected together, still held firm.

"Come, Gisulf--clench your teeth--let us stand against this death-dealing King," cried Alboin.

But Teja was already upon them. His fearful battle-axe glittered above, between them. Pierced through his armour deep into the left shoulder, Alboin fell, and immediately afterwards Gisulf lay on the ground with his helmet shattered. Then there was no more stopping the rest: Longobardians, Gepidians, Alamanni, Herulians, Isaurians and Illyrians, scattered in headlong flight, rushed down the mountain.

With shouts of exultation, Teja's companions followed. Teja himself kept to the pass. He called to Wachis for spear after spear, and aiming high over the Gothic pursuers, hurled them at the flying enemy, killing whomsoever he touched.

They were the Emperor's best troops. In their flight they carried away with them the Macedonians, Thracians, Persians, Armenians, and Franks, who were slowly climbing the ascent, and fled until they reached Narses, who had anxiously raised himself upright in his litter.

"Johannes has fallen!"

"Alboin is severely wounded!" they cried as they ran past. "Fly! Back into the camp!"

"A new column of attack must be--Ha! look!" said Narses, "there comes Cethegus, at the very nick of time!"

And Cethegus it was. He had completed his long ride through all the troops to which Narses had sent Romans and Italians; he had formed these into five companies of three hundred men each, and when they were drawn up in battle array, he took his place quietly at their head.

Anicius followed at a distance. Syphax, carrying two spears, kept close behind his master. Letting the defeated fugitives pass through the vacant spaces between their ranks, the Italians

marched on. Most of them were old legionaries of Rome and Ravenna, and faithfully attached to Cethegus.

The Gothic pursuers hesitated as they met with these fresh, well-ordered troops, and slowly receded to the pass. But Cethegus followed. Past the bloody place, covered with corpses, where Teja had first destroyed the league of the twelve; past the spot farther up, where Johannes had fallen, he marched on with a quiet and steady step, his shield and spear in his left hand, his sword in his right. Behind him, with lances couched, came the legionaries.

They marched up the mountain in silence, without the word of command, or the flourish of trumpets. The Gothic heroes would not retreat into the pass behind their King. They halted before the entrance.

Guntharis was the first with whom Cethegus came into contact. The Duke's spear was shattered on the shield of Cethegus, and at once Cethegus thrust his spear into his adversary's body; the deadly shaft broke in the wound.

Earl Grippa of Ravenna set to work to avenge the Wölfung; he swung his long sword over his head; but Cethegus ran under the thrust, and struck the old follower of Theodoric below the right shoulder with his broad Roman sword. Grippa fell and died.

Wisand, the standard-bearer, advanced furiously against Cethegus; their blades crossed; sparks flew from shield and helmet; but Cethegus cleverly parried a too hasty stroke, and before the Goth could recover himself, the broad blade of the Roman had entered his thigh. Wisand tottered. Two of his cousins bore him out of the fight.

His brother, Ragnaris of Tarentum, now attacked Cethegus, but Syphax, running up, caught the well-thrust spear in his hand, and before Ragnaris could let fall the shaft, and draw his axe from his belt, Cethegus stabbed him in the forehead.

Struck with horror, the Goths retreated before the terrible Roman, and pressed past their King into the ravine. Aligern alone, Teja's cousin, would not yield. He hurled his spear with such force at the shield of Cethegus, that it pierced it; but Cethegus lowered it quickly, and received Aligern, as he rushed forward, on the point of his sword. Severely wounded, Aligern fell into old Hildebrand's arms, who, letting fall his heavy stone axe, tried to carry the fainting man into the ravine.

But Aligern's spear had also been well-aimed. The shield-arm of Cethegus bled profusely. But he did not heed it; he pressed on to make an end of both the Goths, Hildebrand and Aligern, and at that moment Adalgoth caught sight of his father's hated enemy.

"Alaric! Alaric!" he shouted, and, springing forward, he caught up the heavy stone axe from the ground. "Alaric!" he cried.

Cethegus caught the name and looked up. The axe, accurately aimed, came whizzing through the air upon his tall helmet. Stunned, Cethegus fell. Syphax sprang to him, took him in both his arms, and carried him aside. But the legionaries would not retreat; they could not. Behind them, sent by Narses, two thousand Persians and Thracians pressed up the ascent.

"Bring hurling spears!" commanded their leader, Aniabedes. "No hand-to-hand fight! Cast spears at the King until he fall. By order of Narses!"

The soldiers willingly obeyed this order, which promised to spare their blood. Presently such a fearful hail of darts rattled against the narrow opening of the pass, that not a Goth was able to issue forth and stand before the King.

And now Teja, filling the entrance with his body and his shield, defended his people for some time--for a very considerable time--quite alone. Procopius, following the report of eye-witnesses, has described with admiration this, the last fight of King Teja:

"I have now to describe a very remarkable fight, and the heroism of a man who is inferior to none of those we call heroes--of Teja. He stood, visible to all, covered by his shield, and brandishing his spear, in front of his own ranks. All the bravest Romans, whose number was great, attacked him alone; for with his death, they thought, the battle would be at an end. All hurled and thrust their lances at him alone; but he received the darts upon his shield, and, repeatedly sallying forth, killed numbers of his adversaries, one after the other. And when his shield was stuck so full of darts that it was too heavy for him to hold, he signed to his shield-bearer to bring him a fresh one. Thus he stood; not turning, nor throwing his shield on his back and retreating, but firm as a rock, dealing death to his foes with his right hand, warding it off with his left, and ever calling to his weapon-bearers for new shields and new spears."

It was Wachis and Adalgoth--heaps of shields and spears had been brought to the spot from the royal treasure--who continually handed to Teja fresh weapons.

At last the courage of the Romans, Persians, and Thracians sank as they saw all their efforts wrecked against this living shield of the Goths, and all their bravest men slain by the spears of the King. They wavered--the Italians called anxiously upon Cethegus--they turned and fled. Then

Cethegus started up from his long stupor.

"Syphax, a fresh spear! Halt! Stand, Romans! Roma, Roma eterna!" And raising himself with an effort, he advanced against Teja.

The Romans recognised his voice. "Roma, Roma eterna!" they shouted, as they ceased their flight and halted. But Teja had also recognised the voice. His shield bristled with twelve lances--he could hold it no longer; but when he recognised the adversary who was advancing, he thought no more of changing it.

"No shield! My battle-axe! Quick!" he cried.

And Wachis handed to him his favourite weapon.

Then King Teja dropped his shield, and, swinging his axe, rushed out of the pass at Cethegus.

"Die, Roman!" he cried.

Once again the two great enemies looked each other in the face. Then spear and axe whizzed through the air. Neither thought of parrying the stroke, and both fell. Teja's axe had pierced Cethegus's left breast through shield and armour.

"Roma, Roma eterna!" once more cried Cethegus, and fell back dead.

His spear had struck the King's right breast. Not dead, but mortally wounded, he was carried into the pass by Hildebrand and Adalgoth. And they had need to make haste. For when, at last, they saw the King of the Goths fall--he had fought without a pause for eight hours, and evening was coming on--all the Italians, Persians, and Thracians, and fresh columns of attack which had now come up, rushed towards the pass, which was now again defended by Adalgoth with his shield; Hildebrand and Wachis supporting him.

Syphax took the body of Cethegus in his arms and carried it to one side. Weeping aloud he held the noble head of his master upon his knees, the features of which appeared almost superhuman in the majesty of death. Before him raged the battle. Just then the Moor remarked that Anicius, followed by a troop of Byzantines--Scævola and Albinus among them--was approaching him, and pointing to the body of Cethegus with an air of command.

"Halt!" cried Syphax, springing up as they drew near; "what do you want?"

"The head of the Prefect, to take to the Emperor," answered Anicius; "obey, slave!"

But Syphax uttered a yell--his spear rushed through the air, and Anicius fell. And before the others, who at once busied themselves with the dying man, could come near him, Syphax had taken his beloved burden upon his back, and began to climb up a steep precipice of lava near the pass, which Goths and Byzantines had, till then, held to be impassable. More and more rapidly the slave advanced. His goal was a little column of smoke which rose just at the other side of the cliff. For there yawned one of the small crater chasms of Vesuvius. For one moment Syphax stopped upon the edge of the black rocks; once again he raised the corpse of Cethegus erect in his strong arms, as if to show the noble form to the setting sun. And suddenly master and slave had disappeared.

The fiery mountain had received the faithful Syphax and the dead Cethegus, his greatness and his guilt, onto its glowing bosom. The hero was snatched away from the small spite of his enemies.

Scævola and Albinus, who had witnessed the occurrence, hastened to Narses, and demanded that the corpse should be sought for on the sides of the crater. But Narses said:

"I do not grudge the mighty hero his mighty grave. He has deserved it. I fight with the living, and not with the dead."

But almost at the same moment, the tumultuous battle round the pass, which Adalgoth, not unworthy of his royal master, heroically defended against the attacks of the enemy, ceased. For while, standing behind Adalgoth, Hildebrand and Wachis suddenly cried, "Look! look at the sea! The dragon ships! The northern heroes! Harald! Harald!"--the solemn tones of the tuba were heard from below, sounding the signal for a cessation of hostilities--for a truce. Very gladly the fatigued and harassed warriors lowered their weapons.

But King Teja, who lay upon his shield--Hildebrand had forbidden every one to draw out the spear of Cethegus from the wound--"for his life would flow out with his blood"--asked in a faint voice:

"What do I hear them cry? The northern heroes? The ships? Is Harald there?"

"Yes, Harald! He comes to our rescue! He brings safety for the rest of the nation! For us, and for the women and children!" cried Adalgoth joyously, as he knelt at Teja's side. "So thy incomparable heroism, my ever-beloved hero; thy superhuman and untiring efforts, were not in vain! Basiliskos has just come, sent by Narses. Harald has destroyed the Ionian fleet in the

harbour of Brundisium; he threatens to land and attack the already exhausted Byzantines; he demands to be allowed to carry away all the remaining Goths, with weapons and goods, to Thuleland and liberty! Narses has agreed; he will honour, he says, King Teja's noble heroism, in the remnant of his people. May we accept? Oh, may we accept, my King?"

"Yes," said Teja, as his eyes grew dim. "You may and shall. The rest of my people free! The women, the children, delivered from a terrible death! Oh, happy that I am! Yes, take all who live to Thuleland; and take with you--two of the dead: King Theodoric--and----"

"And King Teja!" said Adalgoth: and kissed the dead man's mouth.

CHAPTER XV.

And so it happened, and this was the manner of it.

Immediately after Narses had left his tent, a fisherman was led before him, who had just sailed round the promontory of Surrentum in a small and swift vessel, and who announced that an immense fleet of the Goths was in full sail for the coast. Narses laughed; for he knew that not a Gothic sail was to be found on all the seas.

More narrowly questioned, the man was obliged to confess that he had not seen the fleet himself; but merchants had told him of it, and had related that a great naval combat had taken place, in which the Goths had destroyed the Emperor's fleet, at Brundisium.

That was impossible, as Narses well knew. And when the fisherman described the appearance of the pretended Gothic ships, according to what his informers had told him, the commander-in-chief cried out:

"At last they are coming! Triremes and galleys! They are our ships which are approaching, not Gothic vessels."

No one thought of the Viking's fleet, which had not been heard of for four moons, and which, it was believed, had sailed to the north.

A few hours later, as the battle was raging round the pass, engrossing the attention of all, the coastguards announced to Narses the fact of the approach of a very large imperial fleet. The ship of the admiral, the *Sophia*, had been distinctly recognised. But the number of sails was far greater than had been expected. The ships which Narses had sent to urge the coming of the fleet were also among them, sailing first. The strong south-eastern breeze would shortly bring them within sight of the camp.

And presently Narses himself could enjoy from the hill the magnificent spectacle of the approach of the fleet, propelled not only by their spreading sails, but also by their long oars.

Much relieved, he again turned his attention to the combat upon Vesuvius--when, suddenly, messengers reached him from the camp, affirming the first reports in an alarming manner, or rather, they brought much worse news. They had hurried on in advance of an embassy which reached the litter of Narses just as Cethegus was advancing for the last time against Teja.

This embassy consisted of the admiral and captains of the Ionian fleet, who came forward with their hands in chains, and guarded by four Northmen, whose message they had been brought to interpret. They briefly related that they had been attacked by the fleet of the Viking one stormy night, and had lost almost all their ships; that not one could escape to warn Narses, for the enemy had blockaded the harbour.

When Jarl Harald had heard of the threatened destruction of the Goths upon Vesuvius, he had sworn to prevent or to share their evil fate. And sending the captured Grecian ships in advance, prudently hiding behind them his dragon-ships, he had hurried to the coast of Neapolis on the wings of the east wind. "And thus," concluded the interpreters, "thus says Harald the Viking: 'Either you will allow all yet living Goths, with all their weapons and goods, to leave the Southland upon our ships and return with us to their fatherland; in return for which we will give up all our thousands of prisoners, and all our prize-ships, except those we need for the transport of the Goths; or we will immediately kill our prisoners, land, and attack you, your camp and army, in the rear. Then see to it, how many of you, when attacked in front by the Goths, in the rear by us, will remain alive! For we Northmen fight to the last man! I have sworn it by Odin.'"

Without a moment's hesitation Narses agreed to the departure of the Goths.

"I have only sworn to drive them out of the Empire," he said, "not out of the world. It would bring me small renown if I overpowered and slaughtered the poor remains of such a noble nation. I reverence the heroism of this Teja; in forty years of warfare I have never seen his like. And I have no desire to try how my harassed army, which has had a day of the hardest fighting, and has lost almost all its leaders and numbers of its bravest soldiers, would resist these northern giants, who come with untired strength and unconquered courage."

And so Narses had immediately sent heralds to Harald and to the pass. The battle ceased; the retreat of the Goths began.

In double ranks, reaching from the summit of the mountain down to the sea, the army of heroes formed a lane. The Viking had landed four hundred men, who received the Goths on the sea-shore. But before the march began, Karses signed to Basiliskos and said:

"The Gothic war is over--the stag is killed--now away with the wolves which hunted him to the death. How are the wounded leaders of the Longobardians?"

"Before I answer," said Basiliskos respectfully, "accept this laurel-wreath, which your army sends to you. It is laurel from Vesuvius; from the pass above; there is heroes' blood upon the leaves."

The first impulse of Narses was to push the wreath aside; but after a pause, he said:

"'Tis well; give it to me." But he laid it beside him in the litter.

"Autharis, Warnfrid, Grimoald, Aripert, Agilulf and Rotharis are dead," Basiliskos now reported. "Altogether the Longobardians have lost seven thousand men; Alboin and Gisulf, severely wounded, lie motionless in their tents."

"Good, very good! As soon as the Goths have embarked, let the Longobardians be led away. They are dismissed my service. And say to Alboin, as my parting words: 'After the death of Narses--*perhaps*; but certainly not before.' I will remain here in my litter; support me with the cushions--I cannot stand--but I must witness this wonderful spectacle."

And in truth it was a grand and moving sight to behold the last of the Goths, as they turned their backs upon Vesuvius and Italy, and embarked in the high-prowed ships which were to bear them away to the safe and sheltering north.

From the ravine, into which not a single enemy had succeeded in penetrating, was heard at intervals the solemn tones of the Gothic war-horns, accompanied by monotonous, grave, and touching strains from the men, women, and children--the ancient death-song of the Gothic nation.

Hildebrand and Adalgoth--the last chiefs, the hoary Past and the golden Future--had arranged the order of march.

Foremost went, full-armed, five hundred men, led by Wisand, the standard-bearer, who, in spite of his wounds, bravely opened the procession, leaning on his spear. Then followed, stretched upon his last shield, the spear of Cethegus still sticking in his breast, without helmet, his noble and pallid face framed by his long black locks--King Teja, covered with a purple mantle, and carried by four warriors. Behind him came Adalgoth and Gotho, and Adalgoth, softly striking his harp, sang in a low voice:

"Give place, ye peoples, to our march:
The doom of the Goths is sped!
No crown, no sceptre carry we,
We bear the noble dead.

"With shield to shield, and spear to spear,
We march to the Northland cool;
Until in grey and distant seas
We find the Island Thule.

"That is the Isle of the brave and true,
Where none dishonour fears;
There we will lay our bravest King
In his bed of oaken spears.

"From off our feet--give place! give place!--
We shake Rome's traitor dust;
We only bear our King away--
For the Gothic crown is lost!"

When the bier was carried past the litter, Narses called a halt, and said in a low voice in the Latin language:

"Mine was the victory, but his the fame! There, take the laurel wreath! Other generations may see greater things, but now. King Teja, I greet you as the greatest hero of all ages!"

And he laid the laurel wreath upon the dead man's pallid brow. The bearers again took up the bier, and slowly and solemnly, to the sad sound of Adalgoth's silver harp, the death-song of the people, and the long-drawn tones of the war-horns, the procession marched on towards the sea, which now glowed magnificently in the evening red.

Close behind Teja's body was carried a lofty crimson throne. Upon it rested the silent august form of Dietrich of Bern; upon the head the crowned helm; on the left arm the tall shield; a spear leaning against the right shoulder. On the left of the throne marched old Hildebrand, his eyes fixed upon the face of his beloved master, which shone in the magic light of the setting sun. He held aloft the banner with the device of the lion, high above the head of the great Dead. The evening breeze from the Ausonian Sea rustled in the folds of the immense flag, which, in ghost-like speech, seemed to be taking leave of Italian soil.

As the corpse was carried past, Narses said:

"I know by the shudder which passes across me that this is the wise King of Ravenna! First came a stronger, now a greater man. Let us do this dead man homage."

And, with great exertion, he rose upright in his litter, and bent his head reverently before the corpse.

Then followed the wounded, supported by or carried in the arms of their followers. This part of the procession was opened by Aligern, who was carried on a broad shield by Wachis and Liuta, assisted by two warriors. Then came the chests and coffers, the baskets and vessels, containing the royal treasure and the goods of the different families, which, until then, had been hidden in the wagons.

Afterwards came the great mass of the unarmed people--women, girls, children, and old people--for the boys, from ten years of age upwards, would not part with the weapons which had been entrusted to them, and marched in a separate corps.

Narses smiled as the little fair-haired heroes passed, looking up at him with anger and defiance.

"Well," he said, "the Goths have taken care that the Emperor's successors and their generals shall not want work!"

The procession was closed by the rest of the Gothic army.

Innumerable boats lent their assistance in the embarkation of the people and their scanty possessions. Presently all were on board the high-decked vessels of the Northmen.

The corpses of Teja and Theodoric, the royal banner, and the royal treasure, were taken into Harald's ship. The great Dietrich of Bern was placed upon his throne at the foot of the mainmast, and his lion-standard hoisted to the mast-head. Old Hildebrand installed himself at the foot of the throne.

In the stern of the ship, Adalgoth and Wisand had laid down the body of Teja. The mighty Harald and his beautiful sister approached it sorrowfully. The Viking laid his mailed hand gently upon the dead man's breast, and said:

"I could not save thee, bold and daring King! I could not save thee and thy people. Nothing remains but to take thee and the rest of thy folk to the land of the strong and the true, from which you should never have departed. Thus, after all, I bring back to King Frode the Gothic nation."

But Haralda said:

"I will preserve the body of the noble dead by secret arts, so that it shall endure until we land in our home. There we will vault for him and King Thidrekr a hill-grave near the sea, so that they may together hear the roar of the breakers and hold converse with each other; for they were worthy of each other. Look, my brother! the enemy's army stands in ranks upon the strand; they lower their flags and weapons in reverence, and the sun sinks glowing behind Misenum and yonder islands; a crimson glow covers the sea as with a royal mantle; our white sails are coloured red, and red gold shines upon our weapons! Look how the south wind spreads out the banner of King Thidrekr! The wind, which obeys the will of the gods, points to the north! Up, brother Harald! weigh anchor! direct the rudder! turn the dragon's prow! Up, Freya's wise bird! Fly, my falcon!"--and she tossed her falcon into the air--"point out the way! to the north! to Thuleland! Home! home we take the last of the Goths!"

FOOTNOTE:

[Footnote 1](#): Theodoric.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A STRUGGLE FOR ROME, V. 3 ***

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