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BARBAROSSA; AN **HISTORICAL NOVEL** OF THE **XII Century.**

BY
CONRAD VON BOLANDEN

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**J. FAGAN & SON,
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***PREFACE
TO THE
AMERICAN EDITION.***

The pleasant historical novel which is now offered to the American public, refers to a period of history very much misrepresented, though very frequently written about, or at least referred to by popular writers. In the contest between Pope Alexander III. and the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa, we see a very important phase of the long struggle between the spiritual and civil power; a struggle, in which was fought the battle of real liberty, and real Christian civilization, against brute force and Pagan tyranny. Perhaps nothing has been so badly understood as the real *casus belli* in this struggle of centuries. Most non-Catholics firmly believe that the conflict arose from an effort of the Church to obtain universal dominion; to make princes and people bow to her behests on all matters; to reduce the civil ruler to the condition of a mere lieutenant of the Pontiff, to be removed at will by that spiritual autocrat, and, of course, to improve the condition of her own officials; securing for them the choicest and fairest portions of all the good things of the earth. The Emperors and Kings who were hostile to the Church are painted, on the other hand, as the assertors of civil liberty, the William Tells that refused to salute the tyrant's cap, even though it were called a tiara; the heroes, that in a superstitious age braved the terrors of excommunication, rather than sink into a degraded servitude, to the heartless ambition of churchmen.

Nothing can be farther from the truth than this view of the subject. In reality, what the Church fought for during this long struggle was--not power, but--liberty. She refused to admit that she was a corporation existing by the permission, or the creation of the State. She claimed to be a spiritual society, existing by the fiat of the will of God, entirely independent in her own sphere, having a government of her own; executive, legislative, and judicial rights and duties of her own; an end of her own, far above and beyond the affairs of this world. It was for this liberty and independence that her martyrs had died, her confessors languished in prison, her saints prayed and suffered. When the rulers of the world became Christian, the difficulties in the way of her liberty did not cease; they only assumed a new form. Open opposition became oppression, under the specious name of protection; and the State made every effort to restrain and shackle a power, the indomitable energy and dauntless courage of which it imagined it had reason to fear.

This was, indeed, one of the "empty" things which the sons of men, crafty in their own generation, allow themselves to say when they speak of spiritual things. The unrestrained power

of the city of God on earth cannot hinder, or in any way interfere with the true development of the earthly commonwealth. Truth, morality, justice, are the surest foundations of civil peace, liberty, and prosperity. Under the pretence of defending their rights and those of their people, civil rulers have endeavored to subjugate the Church, enslave her ministers, make her, in a word, merely a piece of government machinery, to register their decrees, and enforce them with her anathemas. Had they succeeded, the only bulwark of freedom would have been swept away; for as man has no right higher or holier than freedom of conscience, that is, freedom to serve God rather than man, had this right been sacrificed to the imperious demands of the civil power, other rights less important, such as those which constitute civil liberty, would have been lost with it.

Thus the medieval Pontiffs--living in exile, wandering from one city to another, often in prison, rarely suffered to live in peace--were the martyrs of the highest and truest freedom. To their indomitable courage, untiring perseverance, and clear-sighted intelligence, we owe whatever idea of true freedom (that is of the existence of the rights of man independently of the permission, toleration, or concession of the civil power) still survives in modern society.

These fundamental truths are well illustrated in the following pages. The special period of history chosen, serves to show clearly the real points of dispute. Even Voltaire acknowledged that it was the "wisdom" of Alexander III. that triumphed over the "violence" of Barbarossa. As the same writer observes:--"Alexander revived the rights of the people and suppressed the crimes of Kings." A Pontiff to whom such testimony is borne by Voltaire, cannot fairly be accused of ambitious designs. In his contest with Frederic, from the beginning to the end, he simply asserted the independence of the Church. Antipope after antipope was opposed to him, all of them were puppets of the Emperor; but in the end, even Frederic was obliged to yield, and to acknowledge the patient but determined Alexander as the Vicar of Christ.

The subserviency of these pretended Pontiffs is well described by our author. There is no exaggeration here. These men were merely Vicars of the Emperor, existing by his favor, the creatures of his breath. They cared little for the ratification of their decrees in Heaven; so that they knew that they pleased the rulers of this world! What the Emperor wished bound, they did bind, and what he wished loosed, they did loose, even the holy bonds of matrimony. Their degradation and that of the courtier bishops, so graphically depicted in these pages, is a practical proof of the great truth, that while there is no human greatness more exalted than the dignity of the ecclesiastical character, there is no fall lower than that of a churchman who, forgetful of his calling, makes himself the slave of the world's power, be it wielded by a crowned King or by an uncrowned mob.

The heartless repudiation of his wife by Henry the Lion, after the mock sentence of the miserable Victor, and the recourse of Constance to Alexander, himself a fugitive, and persecuted, is a touching instance of the manners of the times, and of the protection the Church and her real Pontiffs ever gave to the sanctity of marriage. Little do women in our day think how much they owe to the Popes, who so bravely and so constantly fought their battles in those rude and licentious ages, protecting their innocence, defending their rights, making them the companions, not the servants of those rough warriors. There was more than one Constance in those ages: but never did any of them appeal to the Head of Christendom, that her demand for justice was not heard, and her rights courageously vindicated.

The simple threads of the love-story of Erwin and Hermengarde serve pleasantly to connect together the other more important events of the tale, and serve to illustrate on the one hand the finest type of feminine affection and constancy, and on the other that of manly nobility and courage. We think the author can fairly lay claim to historical accuracy in the main events of his tale. Every matter of public interest, even the wonderful pestilence which checked Frederic in his victorious career at Rome, is related as given by contemporary writers.

We venture to bespeak for BARBAROSSA a kind and gracious reception from the American public. It is a well told tale, which will afford real instruction, as well as pleasant amusement. It will serve to give true ideas about medieval history, and to make Catholics more interested in learning the truth about those real Pontiffs, who did battle for religion and the rights of man against the Kings and rulers of the day. We consider it a valuable contribution to our lighter literature, and we hope to see it followed by many others of the same purpose and object. The translator has done his work well, and we trust BARBAROSSA in its English dress will become a universal favorite.

J. K.

PHILADELPHIA,

Ascension Day, 1867.

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BARBAROSSA.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Towards the middle of the 12th century, Milan had conquered for herself a powerful supremacy throughout all of Upper Italy, and with the exception of the proud Genoa and the maritime Venetian republic, all the cities of Lombardy acknowledged her sovereignty. Lodi, Pavia, and some few of the neighboring towns, had made bold attempts to assert their rights, but all their efforts were unsuccessful; and had only resulted in riveting more tightly their fetters, while the pride of the Milanese, and a desire for more extended power, increased in proportion to the failing strength of their adversaries. The majority bore in silence the yoke which they could not shake off preferring the advantages secured to them by prompt submission to the danger of losing in the unequal struggle every vestige of their former independence.

Lombardy, it is true, was an appanage of the Germanic empire, but the sovereignty of the Emperor was almost nominal, and only acknowledged by the turbulent Lombards, when forced so to do by his victorious arms; and whenever a war broke out between the Monarch, his great feudatories, or the Church, the smouldering embers of rebellion at once burst forth into open insurrection.

Scarcely had Frederic the First, of Hohenstauffen, mounted the throne, when his attention was attracted to Italy by an event of grave and unusual importance.

In 1158, whilst Barbarossa, as the Emperor was usually surnamed by the Italians, was presiding over a High Court of Justice at Kossnitz, and listening to the various cases submitted for his decision, two men, wearing upon their backs a wooden cross as a symbol of their misfortune, presented themselves before the throne with a long list of grievances against the Milanese, by whom, they alleged, the city of Lodi had been destroyed after the pillage and the exile of its citizens. They had come now to implore the intervention of the Emperor, whose power alone, they urged, could check the tyranny of the Milanese and save from utter ruin the other cities of Lombardy.

Frederic at once dispatched one of his nobles, Schwicker, of Aspremont, with a letter of reproof and menace to Milan. But on his arrival the consuls and the people refused to listen to the message. They tore the despatch to pieces, trampled it underfoot, and obliged the ambassador to seek safety in flight.

Such a crime could not go unpunished, and Frederic, at the head of a powerful army, crossed the Alps and appeared, when least expected, in the plains of Lombardy. Meanwhile the Milanese were putting into execution their perfidious designs against Como and Lodi, and offered to the Emperor the sum, enormous for that age, of four hundred gold *marks*, on condition that he would recognize their sovereignty over these cities.

But the proposition was indignantly rejected. "Wretches," said he to the Milanese ambassadors, "do you presume to bribe me to palliate your treachery? Do you propose to the Emperor of Germany to become a partner in your baseness? Even were it in my power to sell the half of my domains, I would rather turn your city into a paltry village than countenance this exercise of arbitrary despotism over a country which has as much right to liberty as yourselves." The result of the interview was a solemn engagement, on the part of the Milanese, to indemnify Lodi and Como for all damages sustained, as the powerful alliances of Milan, her military strength, and the comparative weakness of the German army, did not, at the time, permit of the absolute subjection of Lombardy.

Thence Frederic marched towards Tortona, an ally of the Milanese, which had attacked and ravaged the territory of Pavia. Explanations were demanded, but, confiding in the strength of its fortifications, Tortona haughtily refused. The Emperor at once attacked the town, stormed the

works, and reduced it to ashes.

This terrible example dismayed the Milanese, who were ignorant of the fate in store for them, but they had learned to appreciate the energy and courage of the Emperor, and they began to estimate the necessity of strengthening and renewing the alliances which had formerly existed between them and the neighboring States.

Scarcely had the Emperor recrossed the Alps, and received the crown from the hands of Pope Adrian IV., when the Milanese resumed their depredations upon Lodi. Far from making amends for their former damages, and thus fulfilling the stipulations of the treaty, they marched a powerful army against the city, imprisoned or killed the inhabitants, and only retired after laying waste the vineyards, and destroying the crops throughout the entire province.

Again the inhabitants of Lodi sought the assistance of the Emperor.

Barbarossa was incensed beyond measure at this insolent disregard, not only of his threats, but even of his Imperial supremacy. Such audacity demanded prompt repression, and Imperial edicts were at once issued to all the spiritual and temporal princes of the Empire, summoning them to join the Army destined to operate in Italy.

In the month of June, 1158, the German army crossed the Alps, and Milan was besieged and taken after a heroic defence.

Again Frederic, either through pity or a desire to spare the noble city, or through the temptation of a costly bribe, delayed the execution of his threats, although urgently counselled to inflict upon Milan the fate of Tortona. But he humbled the pride of the haughty Lombards: all their rights and privileges were confiscated, and they were compelled to rebuild Lodi and Como, while all duties and customs were henceforth to revert to the Imperial treasury; a fine of nine thousand silver marks was imposed, and as a guarantee for the fulfilment of these and many other conditions, three hundred of the principal citizens were to be given up and held as hostages.

The Emperor then disbanded the greater portion of his German levies, and convoked a Diet of the princes, prelates, counts, and chief civil dignitaries, who in general assembly were to attend to the pacification of Italy, and the re-establishment of order, and to define precisely the respective rights of the sovereign and his subjects.

An immense camp was pitched in the midst of the vast plain which is watered by the Po; in the centre stood the Imperial tent, and around it, in order of rank, those of the princes. Streets at right angles divided the various quarters of this city of canvas, and to avoid all danger of collisions, the Germans and Italians were encamped on opposite sides of the river. Frederic had invited four of the most celebrated *juris consults* of Bologna, and had given them as coadjutors twenty-eight counsellors from the other Lombard towns, in order to investigate and define thoroughly the origin and spirit of their statute laws and their oral traditions.

From his throne, Frederic opened the assembly with a solemn discourse.

"Called to the supreme power, by the grace of God," said he, "our task is to elevate the courage of the good, to restrain and punish the evil-doer. At the close of the late campaign which we have terminated so fortunately; the pacification of the country demands our earnest attention, for it is only simple justice that we should protect, by our arms, the people who are governed by our laws. But before anything be written, or decided concerning our respective rights, duties, and privileges; we must establish what is equitable and expedient, necessary and useful, according to the locality and the epoch; for once these laws adopted and promulgated, there will be no further discussion admitted in the matter, they will be rigidly and exactly enforced."

The Italians were astonished at the ability of the young monarch. His talents and his policy compelled their respect, for it became evident that under such a ruler, their only safe course of action would be implicit obedience.

Whilst the Bolognese legists insisted upon privileges being accorded to the Emperor, based upon the old Roman law, the Lombard counsellors complained of an autocratic despotism, in the decisions, subversive of their own peculiar rights, and inimical to the interests of their country. For example, all revenues from tolls on rivers and bridges, and tonnage dues in ports and harbors, were to revert hereafter to the Emperor; and all duties on grain, salt works, and fisheries, with the right of coinage, hitherto a prerogative of the dukes, counts, and free cities, were in future to belong exclusively to the Imperial treasury.

Barbarossa had destroyed the autonomy of the Lombard cities, and reduced them to be mere dependencies of the empire. Still, so long as he remained in Upper Italy, no open signs of discontent were manifested, but scarcely had he turned towards Rome, when the revolt broke out. In order to pacify, if possible, the malcontents, Otto de Wittelsbach; the Chancellor Rinaldo, and the Knight of Goswin were at once sent to Milan. But the exasperated populace assembled before the dwelling of the ambassadors, who with much difficulty escaped being torn to pieces.

This unexpected outrage excited the rage of the German nobles who accompanied the Emperor, and the rebellious city was threatened with sack and pillage, while its inhabitants were

doomed to slavery. This fierce menace, however, by no means disheartened the Milanese, who determined to employ every means of resistance in their power, and to die gloriously rather than wear the fetters of serfdom. The struggle began at once, and while Barbarossa was celebrating the festival of Easter at Bologna, the Lombards seized the Imperial treasury, in which were lodged the enormous sums which he had collected in Italy. Then they burned the castle and hung all the garrison, who were Italians, as traitors to their country.

The Emperor hastened back with his little army, but he arrived too late; the Milanese had retreated behind their works, and from the walls of the city could see Frederic, in his anger, lay waste all the surrounding country; for, weak in numbers and destitute of siege artillery, his army was powerless against the town. Scarcely had he left the neighborhood, when the Lombards took up again the offensive, and retaliated upon the Emperor's allies for the havoc which he had caused in their territory. Joining their forces to those of the Brescians, they took Lodi and Cremona, and made several attacks upon the Imperialist forces; and such was the vindictiveness displayed; that several abortive attempts were made to assassinate the German Emperor, who was unable to check or punish these acts of hostility. His army was composed almost entirely of Italians, and although the rebellious city of Cremona was taken and burned, his reprisals were without result.

This continual strife and its attendant misfortunes, equally disastrous for both factions, reduced Lombardy almost to a desert. The devastated fields produced no more crops, and the ground being unable to sustain even the native population, the foreign troops suffered severely from famine. Barbarossa convoked again his knights and nobles, thanked and rewarded them publicly for their devotion to his cause, and disbanded the Germans, promising to open the campaign with a strong army, early in the following spring.

CHAPTER II.

THE AMBUSCADE.

After a winter spent in harassing the enemy and in petty skirmishes with the Emperor's adherents, the Milanese inaugurated the year 1161, in a more serious manner, by the capture of several fortresses, some by assault, others through treachery. Frederic was still unable to make any serious resistance to his enemy's advance; for the German reinforcements had not yet arrived, and his own little army, in order to hasten the fall of Milan, was besieging the towns of Como and Neulodi, so that his operations were limited almost to a strictly defensive policy, whilst, in person, he rode at the head of a small escort, through the province, reassuring his declared allies and conciliating those whose sentiments were as yet doubtful.

It was a beautiful morning. A small troop of armed men, whose appearance was that of banditti, were keeping guard at the foot of a hill, about two days' journey from Milan. The soldiers, wearied by a long march, were stretched upon the ground, and about a dozen horses, with heaving flanks, stood close by, showing clearly that they had shared the fatigue of their riders.

The chief of the band stood a little to their rear, and with his arms crossed on his breast, appeared to be reflecting profoundly. His costly armor and proud bearing was not that of a robber, for his shield was magnificently embossed in silver, the border of his surcoat richly embroidered, and his sword-belt inlaid with precious jewels. By his side stood a man of short stature, apparently quite at his ease. He wore a pointed hat, and on his bronzed face beamed an expression of knavery and deceit, which, with his sparkling eye and a continued sneer around the mouth, gave to his whole physiognomy a most malevolent character. He carried a cross-bow and a quiver full of bolts on his back, and by his side hung a long rapier.

"Nothing!" said the knight, angrily. "Ah! Griffi, if you have deceived me, you shall be flogged."

"Flogged! my lord Pietro! I, Cocco Griffi, the son of the high and mighty Consul Nigri of Milan! I flogged!" said the little man, with marked astonishment.

"Yes, without fail!"

"How, my lord Pietro! your native city boasts of giving liberty to the Italians. Would it not be barbarous to flog a loyal citizen?"

"You have most richly deserved it! At this very moment, the Milanese are destroying one of the strongholds of German tyranny; and I, who would so gladly have shared in the glorious work, have been decoyed here by your specious tale, to await, uselessly, the coming of that accursed

Barbarossa, while my countrymen are celebrating their triumph."

"I crave your pardon, my lord! The destruction of a castle, already half in ruins is scarcely a deed worthy of your heroism," replied Griffi, in a half serious, half jocular tone. "Ah! it would be another thing had it been necessary to storm the Castle of Cinola. But as Barbarossa's worthy governor, Bonello, has in a fit of patriotism opened the gates, I could see but little opportunity there for a display of your valor. For the prowess of the brave Milanese will not go further than the draining of some wine-casks and the destruction of some old furniture; they may perhaps burn the castle, but, this done, they will return within their city walls."

Pietro made no reply, but with a glance of contempt upon the speaker, again turned to gaze into the distance.

"On the other hand," continued Griffi, proudly, "you will have, thanks to me, a chance of doing here something truly heroic. I learned that the Emperor, with a feeble escort, was about to proceed towards the North; I managed to insinuate myself among the soldiers, and discovered the road by which he was to travel; and then galloping night and day, came here, to show you how to rid the country of its oppressor, by his death or capture! And yet, as a reward for all this, you threaten to flog me!"

"But if we succeed!" said Pietro, his face flushing with enthusiasm, "if we succeed, I will fill your hat with gold pieces. I will have your name engraved upon tablets of bronze, and your statue erected in every public square in Lombardy."

Cocco scarcely heeded the last words, so intently did he gaze towards the distant horizon. Suddenly he seized the arm of the knight:

"Look there!" he cried, "there, near the forest; see that armor shining in the sun. It is Barbarossa himself, followed by eighteen knights and seventy varlets!"

"Oh! the wretch!" exclaimed the Milanese, with an expression of mingled hatred and anger.

"I beg you, my lord," said Pietro hurriedly, "take off your helmet, and turn your shield, or their reflection will betray our presence," and, as his advice was followed, he at once resumed,--

"Now let us make every arrangement in order that the tyrant may not escape. Remain here with your men, in observation, whilst I ride over to Cinola to get reinforcements."

"Aye! and meanwhile, Barbarossa will get away. Oh! fool that I am! why am I here, without my own brave troopers? One bold stroke, and the yoke of my beloved country would be broken!"

"Fear nothing," said Cocco, "those iron-clad soldiers would need wings, to escape now. Mark yonder little valley with its sloping meadows and its narrow stream! The Germans are making toward it, for the road passes close by, and good pastures are too rare now in Lombardy for them to neglect so favorable a chance for resting their horses. So, while his Imperial Majesty is taking his ease, our troops will come up, and it will be an easy task to seize this red-headed tyrant by the beard."

Griffi whistled and clapped his hands, and, at the sound, an active little horse ran toward him.

"Cocco," said the knight to his companion, "my good friend, Cocco, lose no time--but, stay, let two of my troopers go with you; an accident might happen, and remember that you hold in your hands the liberty of Italy."

"Bah! my lord Pietro," replied the other, "I will give you leave to flog me, if my horse, Molo, does not easily distance your stiff troopers!" and as he spoke he sprang upon the back of the nimble animal, and soon left far behind him the soldiers whom the knight had detailed as his escort.

Pietro concealed himself behind a bush, whence he could observe the enemy's movements. The Germans continued to advance. In front, rode the knights in complete armor,--he could even distinguish Barbarossa's banner with its richly embroidered lion, and it seemed as though he could recognize the lofty stature of the Emperor himself.

As Cocco had foreseen, they entered the valley, in which, midway, stood the ruins of an ancient cloister.

The emotion of the Milanese increased as he watched the little troop. He forbade his men to rise from the ground, lest their bright helmets might reveal their presence, and, gazing earnestly towards the city, his whole person betrayed the feverish restlessness of one who felt as much anxiety for the deliverance of his country as hatred for the tyrant whose iron arm weighed so heavily upon Italy.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHANCELLOR RINALDO.

The Imperial escort had halted in the valley, the horses were unsaddled and grazing in the meadows, while the soldiers in groups were resting beneath the shade of the pines and oak-trees.

Three of the knights had chosen the most picturesque spot among the ruins, and from the slight elevation, on which they stood, could discern all the surrounding country, and even the lofty summits of the Alps, which bounded the horizon toward the North. It was to this direction that was turned the anxious gaze of one of the knights, who, with his hands resting on his sword-hilt, stood before the gateway of the ruined church. But little above the middle height, he was powerfully built, and his long mantle, thrown behind him, showed that his arms, legs, and feet were cased in mail, and that above his ordinary armor he wore a coat of silver links which came down to the knee. On his head was a steel helmet of proof, which shone brilliantly in the sun, and a heavy two-handled sword with a double hilt, and in a plain leathern scabbard, completed his accoutrement.

At first sight, the form of the young soldier scarcely seemed to warrant his ponderous armor. Strikingly handsome, with hands of remarkable delicacy, with a bright fair complexion, and a mouth around which played a smile of frankness and amiability, it needed a second glance to discover that, under this engaging exterior, was concealed a violent energy, an iron will, and a pride without limit. His full blue eyes inspired confidence, but at times his glance could threaten as fiercely as it now seemed kind and gentle. His brow was high and broad, his nose aquiline, and his beard and hair of a bright red.

Such was the appearance of the Emperor Frederic I., the mightiest sovereign of his age, and one of the most illustrious men of whom history has made mention.

His two companions were striking contrasts. The first was tall, with a grave dark face, and long black hair; and his stern features indicated the soldier whose life had been passed in action. Thoroughly devoted to his sovereign, the Count Palatine Otho de Wittelsbach was the faithful and constant attendant of the Emperor.

The other was a small fair man, with a gentle and smiling face. Unlike Otho, he was not in armor, but wore a long embroidered gown, green trunk-hose, and a black hat. Yet in spite of his amiable expression, there was an air of dissimulation about him, and his eyes were as false and deceitful as his language was elegant and persuasive. He was the celebrated Chancellor Rinaldo, Count of Dussel, and Archbishop of Cologne, in whom the Emperor reposed the most implicit confidence, a confidence fully justified by the political talents of the wily statesman. It was said that his ideas were even more progressive than those of the prince himself, and that he pushed him forward in his policy, despite the many serious obstacles in the path of his Imperial sovereign.

The Emperor was still gazing toward the north, when a young man of handsome bearing and with an almost childlike expression of amiability on his features, approached, holding a cup of wine. Frederic's whole expression changed to one of almost paternal fondness, as he glanced at the young soldier.

"Always mindful of your godfather, my good Erwin," said he, draining the goblet. "By my faith, if the repast be but proportionate to your attentions, we shall feast most regally to-day."

"The table awaits you, Sire," said the young man, pointing to a shield which was placed on a stone near by. "Pray, pardon the frugality of the entertainment." Barbarossa turned towards the shield emblazoned in blue and white *lozenges*, on which was placed the Emperor's meal, consisting of bread and a little smoked meat.

"Sit down, gentlemen," said he. "Ah! not so bad; I see that Bavaria has sent us her food as far as Lombardy."

"Aye!" replied Count Otho, "and her contingent will be here soon to aid us with their good lances. According to the last despatches, the advanced guard should arrive to-morrow."

"It is full time to chastise these disloyal Guelphs," said Frederic. "The rebellion has become general; Milan openly defies us; Genoa grows each day more factious, and even Venice, despite our Chancellor's eloquence, has assumed an air of insolence."

"Right and reason," replied Rinaldo, "have but little chance of success against fraud and dissimulation."

"Well answered," cried Otho; "I am glad to hear such sentiments proclaimed. We must draw the sword, and prove to these insurgents that they owe obedience and respect to their sovereign."

"You are right, my lord Count," said Rinaldo, glancing at the Emperor. "After vainly trying mildness and conciliation, it would be rank cowardice not to use the sword."

At the close of their frugal repast, the Emperor directed his chancellor to read to him, until it was time to mount again; and Rinaldo, taking a book which was brought to him by the young knight Erwin, opened it at a marked page, while Otho, too thorough a soldier to care much for literature, withdrew on one side.

"We have learned the ideas of His Holiness as to the origin of all power," said the Chancellor to the Emperor, who was seated on the pedestal of a fallen column. "The following letter from Pope Gregory VII. will fully explain what these ideas mean, and to what they tend.

"The Church is our common Mother, the source and origin of all light and vitality. It is on this account that all emperors and kings, princes and archbishops, bishops and prelates, are her vassals. Thanks to the power of the Apostolic keys, she can make and unmake them, for the power which she delegates is not for a passing fame, but for a holy eternity. To her, then, they all owe a respectful and modest obedience."

Until then, the Emperor had listened in silence, although his features betrayed the violent emotions of his inner self. Suddenly interrupting the Chancellor, he exclaimed,--

"By my faith, the reasoning is highly logical! The Church rules all! She can make and depose both emperors and princes!--All must passively obey her mandates!--What arrogance!--Princes are naught but simple vassals of the Pope!"

"Absolutely nothing else," replied Rinaldo; "the Pope is the sun, the Emperor the moon, who receives from His Holiness light and brilliancy and power."

"Enough! enough!" cried Frederic, angrily; "mark the place and close the book--the reading of such enormities is an insult to the Imperial dignity." A crafty smile played around the Chancellor's lips as he replied,--

"Great men, unluckily, make great blunders; but for your unfortunate oversight, no Pope would have ventured to make such an extravagant claim to universal sovereignty."

"Was it not the duty of Charles to defer to the request of Rome?"

"Most certainly! but his liberality to the Church might have been more measured, and the honors conceded more judiciously dented. Hold the Pope's stirrup!--yes, the Emperor must even stoop to that--although it is, in reality, a mere idle form," added the Chancellor, hurriedly, as Frederic's face colored up. "Surely none can blame the Popes if they construe what was a mere form into an obligation of importance."

"When I held the stirrup of His Holiness, my lord Chancellor," said Barbarossa with great dignity, "it was the homage paid by a Christian to the chief of Christendom."

"A most excellent reason, Sire," replied the Chancellor, in an insinuating tone. "The fulfilment of a Christian's religious duties can but honor an Emperor. But I have yet to learn in what way those duties interfere with the prerogatives of a Sovereign."

"Well!--you would elevate then the monarch's rights above the Christian's responsibilities?"

The smiling glance of the statesman dwelt for an instant upon his sovereign, who had given his minister to understand that he regarded his opinions as somewhat heretical and very difficult of realization. Barbarossa was willing to admit, to a certain extent, the superiority of the temporal over the spiritual power, but he still hesitated before the impiety of claiming the supremacy.

"Although you may place the Emperor above the Christian," resumed the Chancellor, "you will not on that account cease to be one. I will say even more: to reign, truly, the separation of the Empire from the Papacy is a necessity. Look towards the monarchs of France and Saxony; for them the Pope has never been anything more than the Bishop of Rome, chosen from among the most worthy prelates. They were the temporal masters of the Roman Pontiff, although ever the first to honor him as the Head of the Church. And what, to-day, is the Papal supremacy over the Emperor, what is his influence? You selected Victor as Sovereign Pontiff, while the College of Cardinals elected Roland, who, under the title of Alexander III., reigns in spite of you! Victor, the feeble creation of your own hands, will fall as soon as your support be withdrawn, while Alexander, your triumphant adversary, is seated more firmly than ever upon the throne of St. Peter. His legates, only, are received in Spain, in France, in England; they only are acknowledged throughout the civilized world!"

"Enough of this!" said Frederic. "To what end serves your discourse? It is but a waste of time to prove to me, now, that during the past two years we have plotted, and toiled, and fought in vain."

"In vain! Sire!--but why? Because you neglected the golden opportunity! Milan, the bulwark of Alexander's power, was in your hands; you should have levelled her to the ground!"

"Always ready, my lord, to tell me what should have been done! Why was not this advice offered sooner?"

"It is not yet too late," replied Rinaldo. "The German bands have passed the Alps; let their first exploit be the capture of Milan."

"Naturally; and their second?"

"The overthrow of the present *status* of Italy, and the installation of Victor at Rome."

"And then the heretic Barbarossa, the persecutor of the Holy Church, will be put under the ban of the Universe!" replied Frederic, with a bitter laugh.

"Heretic? No! But the astonished world will hail in you the worthy rival of the great Emperor. What did Charlemagne, and Otho, and Henry III. do? Did they not give Rome to the Popes? And if you, their successor, should place in Rome a bishop of your own selection, who could dispute your authority? Act, break down all opposition, and the Papacy, henceforward, will be no more the enemy, but the obedient vassal of the Germanic Empire." Whilst Rinaldo spoke, Barbarossa seemed lost in thought; every word of the crafty statesman produced its effect, for it answered the ambitious cravings of his own nature, which had long aimed at the subjection of the spiritual to the temporal power. Could his dreams be realized, the Emperor would reign supreme, and the Church, shorn of all her prerogatives, would remain, as she had existed during the dark ages, the source of all faith, but a mere fief of the Empire.

The difficulties of the undertaking did not escape him, but far from causing discouragement, they pleased him the more, by their bold and hazardous originality. Rinaldo, in silence, with folded arms and down-cast eyes, watched narrowly the effect produced on the Emperor by his discourse.

Suddenly Otho of Wittelsbach advanced hurriedly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BATTLE.

"Bad news! Sire," cried the Count Palatine. "Cinola, your strong fortress on the Adda, is in the hands of the enemy."

Barbarossa sprang to his feet, and gazed with surprise upon the Count.

"Cinola taken!" cried he angrily,--"when--by whom?"

"To-day, by the Milanese; but here is a man who will give full details to your Majesty."

And he pointed to a soldier who, until then, had stood at a short distance from the group.

"Ah! is that you, Gero?" said Frederic, whose extraordinary memory never forgot a name or a face. "Tell me at once, everything!"

"The tidings which I bring to your Majesty are most unfortunate. Cinola was, this morning, surrendered to the Milanese."

"Surrendered?" said the Emperor, angrily.

"Yes, Sire,--surrendered by the base Guelph, the traitor Bonello, to whom your Majesty had intrusted the command of the fortress."

The face of the Emperor grew black with rage.

"What is the strength of the Milanese?" he asked.

"About three hundred men."

"Have they burned the Castle?"

"I am ignorant of that fact, Sire! As soon as the banner of the Guelphs was hoisted over the citadel, I hastened hither. But some time must elapse before they can sack and burn the place, as their first visit will doubtless be to the wine-cellars."

"How many Germans were with you in the Castle?"

"Three and a half, your Majesty,--for one of them had lost a leg. Poor fellows! they are in a pitiable condition, for their lives are in danger!"

"Gentlemen," said the Emperor to his knights, who were grouped around him, "we must not lose an instant; this new outrage must be punished at once!"

The knights looked at each other with astonishment; and even the daring Otho shook his head.

"Sire!" said he, "the Guelphs are too much our superiors in numbers."

"Since when has the Count Otho learned to count his foes?" inquired the Emperor.

"But," observed the Chancellor, whom the sudden resolution of the Emperor had alarmed, "would it not be more prudent to await the arrival of the German troops?"

"No! the punishment should always follow closely upon the crime. What! these traitors have dared to lay their plans under my very eyes, and yet you speak of waiting!--It would be a public admission of our weakness."

"To accommodate ourselves to circumstances," replied the Chancellor, "is not weakness, but rather wisdom. The Emperor should not expose his person needlessly. Pardon my frankness, Sire; it is your duty not to court unnecessary danger."

"Know, my lord," said Frederic, "that on the battlefield, he most easily escapes death who braves it most! But, rather death itself, than tame submission to such an outrage as this!"

"Well, then, may Heaven help you!" said Rinaldo, despairingly,--"three hundred against eighty;--the odds are too great;--it is an unpardonable piece of rashness!"

"Be it so, my lord! But what can three hundred traitors do against eighty German nobles, fighting for the honor of their name, in the cause of their sovereign? If I had with me only ten loyal knights, I would prove to the world, that, in Germany, courage and chivalry are not mere empty names! Come, gentlemen, to horse!"

"To arms! to arms! Long live the Emperor!" cried the knights, inspired by the courage of their sovereign.

"Your peaceful calling will render your presence useless in this bloody work of justice," said the Emperor, turning to his Chancellor. "It will be better that you should await our return. Stay, ride off immediately towards the German troops, who are on their march, and bid the princes hasten their arrival!"

"May God preserve us!" said Rinaldo, perceiving that the Emperor wished to keep him out of danger. "I am ready to die with my sovereign."

"Your fidelity needs no such act of heroism to prove its value," said Barbarossa. "Besides, I have by no means decided, as yet, to leave this world for another! But a truce to this discussion. Seek the princes, salute them in my name, and bid them march at once upon Milan!"

Rinaldo anxiously watched the tall form of the Emperor through the crevices of the walls, as his heavy step resounded beneath the arches of the ruined church. The shrill blast of the trumpet assembled the knights who were already in the saddle. Without touching the stirrup, the prince vaulted upon his mail-clad steed, and in a few minutes the little band disappeared in the direction of the south-west.

"There goes a man who probably rides to meet his death," said Rinaldo to himself. "His pride despises danger, and yet, though I know the strength of his arm, some trifling accident may ruin everything. Whilst I seek the princes, the Milanese may exult over his corpse, and Rome, raising again her humbled head, topple down the edifice built up so laboriously!"

The Chancellor started, as a voice addressed him.

"If you are ready, my lord Count, we will set forward," said the soldier whom Barbarossa had left behind as escort to the minister.

"You should not have weakened the little troop by your absence, for your lance would be more than ever useful to-day to His Majesty."

"Pshaw!" replied the man, "I have no fears about the result. The Guelphs never can stand before Count Otho and his brave lances. Besides, Barbarossa leads them, and I never saw his eye flash so fiercely as when he bade me stay with you."

Rinaldo mounted his horse and, accompanied by the soldier, rode swiftly towards the north.

Meanwhile the Emperor pushed forward. His knights rode behind him in stern silence, but with a look of grim determination upon their bronzed faces, and naught was heard, save the

clatter of their horses' hoofs, and the rattle and clank of their armor. Barbarossa was carefully examining the distant limits of the plain, where could be seen what at first seemed only dark moving shadows; soon, however, the gleam of helmets and lances was distinctly visible, and even the heavy step of troops on the march could be distinctly heard. Barbarossa hesitated for a moment, as if in doubt what course to pursue, when Count Otho approached.

"I think I know those troops," said he. "As we were leaving the ruins, I saw several horsemen, on yonder hills, riding towards Milan. They are doubtless the enemy's videttes, who are carrying to the conquerors of Cinola the tidings of our advance."

"Gero," said the Emperor, "you are the least heavily armed. Ride forward and see what is the strength of that detachment; I want to know if they have any infantry in the rear, and whether there are any lancers posted in the wood, to take us in flank."

The trooper galloped off. The other soldiers at once dismounted to draw their saddle-girths and prepare for the fight, and the drinking-cup, which passed freely from hand to hand, contributed greatly to increase their courage.

Barbarossa took no refreshment, but he carefully reconnoitred the ground. Not an inequality of its surface, not a stream or marsh escaped his eye. On the right was a little wood, which might serve the enemy to mask his movements, and as the ground on which he stood was slightly elevated, he determined to await the enemy there, in order to give greater impetus to the charge of his own troopers.

Gero soon returned, followed at a distance by several of the enemy's horsemen, thrown out as scouts.

"The Guelphs are moving in three columns--in the centre is about two hundred Infantry. The wings are much weaker. I could see nothing in the woods."

"The Milanese seem very confident," said the rough soldier Goswin; "they think that five Lombards are at least equal to one German, and so neglect their tactics. Ah! well! I killed twenty of them at Lodi without dinting my sabre, and am rather curious to see how many I can exterminate to-day, and not turn its edge."

"Yes," added Frederic, with a laugh; "and these good people have surnamed you, in consequence, 'The Lombard-eater.' You are in luck to-day, Master Goswin, for you will have enough to satisfy even your appetite.--But to work, gentlemen! The enemy will not leave us much longer the choice of the attack, so we must give him something to do."

He divided the escort into three columns, giving the right wing to Count Otho, the left to the knight of Goswin, and reserving to himself the command of the centre. The Lombard tactics were usually to kill the horses of the knights, who, dismounted and in heavy armor, would then become comparatively less dangerous; but the monarch understood the danger.

The Milanese advanced about a hundred yards, and then halted. Unlike the stern silence of their adversaries, they shouted, and sang, and clashed their weapons as if to prove that they felt assured of victory.

Barbarossa rode along the front of his little band, which calmly awaited the attack:--

"Valiant friends," said he, "have faith in your good cause! You draw the sword against treachery and rebellion! Trust in God; it is he who chastises the perjurer! Confide in the strength of your good right arms, and show to the world, that you are worthy to bear the name of Germans! Let St. Michael, the patron of our country, be your rallying-cry! Couch your lances! Forward, Charge!"

"Saint Michael, Saint Michael for the Emperor!" rang through their ranks, as they dashed upon the foe.

The Milanese cavalry, with a savage yell, advanced to meet their enemies, while their infantry, in close column, awaited the shock of the German horse. Soon the clash of arms and the wild cries of the combatants proclaimed that they were fighting hand to hand. Barbarossa was everywhere in the thickest of the *mélée*; the Milanese leader fell before his lance, and then the Emperor, sword in hand, broke through the enemy's centre. Soon each knight had stretched an adversary on the ground. The ranks of the infantry first faltered, and then gave way, and many a foot-soldier found death beneath the hoofs of the trampling chargers, as he vainly endeavored to pierce the serried line of German steel. Still the Lombards fought stubbornly, and the hope of terminating at one blow the slavery of their country, animated them to desperate efforts. Their bravest champions had fallen beneath the Emperor's sword, and still, to the cry of "Death to the tyrant!" they fought on. Suddenly Frederic's horse was pierced by a pike-thrust, and fell heavily upon him. Crushed under his steed, the Emperor was well-nigh powerless, and the blows of his enemies rained upon his armor.

A cry of triumph revealed to the Germans the danger of their sovereign. Erwin broke through the Lombard ranks, and for an instant diverted their attention to himself. Other knights came up. Erwin, unhorsed, was holding his buckler above the Emperor's head. Suddenly the cry of "St.

Michael to the rescue" rang above the din of the battle, and Otho, at the head of his brave lancers, charged the foe. The fight was over, and soon the Milanese infantry were fleeing, broken and in disorder, across the plain.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER THE VICTORY.

In the midst of the battle-field stood Barbarossa, surrounded by the dead and the dying. His mantle, pierced and torn, and stained with blood, hung over his armor, whose strength had protected him so well against the weapons of the Lombards; for, save a slight contusion, he was unwounded. Far away in the plain could still be seen the German cavalry, chasing the scattered fugitives, but near him were only a few of his own wounded men. Before him lay a dying Guelph, the blood welling in torrents from his breast, who gazed upon the Emperor with an expression which, even in his last moments, bespoke his bitter hatred for the oppressor of his country; powerless and crushed, his impotent rage broke forth in fierce invective.

"Tyrant," said he, in a broken voice, "when will thy bloody work be at an end! Immolate the last of the Lombards to thy pride; drink their heart's blood, if thou wilt!--we will gladly yield it to thee in exchange for our freedom!--But--be accursed!--thou and all thy race!"

He fell back and expired. The Emperor gazed sadly upon the corpse, for the words of the dying man and his malediction had strangely moved him; but just then, Otho of Wittelsbach rode up with his men, in charge of some prisoners.

"I have spared these rascals, Sire," said the Count Palatine, "that some of them, at least, may expiate their treachery on the gibbet."

Frederic turned towards the prisoners, but even before he spoke, his angry glance showed what fate was in store for them. Still he was silent for an instant, in the hope that some of them might sue for mercy. But there was no appeal, and pointing to a tree, he said,--

"Let them die!"

Undismayed by the approach of death, the Lombards met their fate in silence. None asked for pardon. They died martyrs to the holy cause of freedom, and in the defence of the most sacred rights of their native land. But their last glance was one of implacable hatred for the tyrant.

"Count Palatine, take possession of the fortress of Cinola at once, before the Milanese can strengthen themselves in the works," said Barbarossa. "We will wait here for Goswin, and then follow with the wounded."

Wittelsbach mounted, and rode away.

Erwin had remained near the prince, and Barbarossa turned with a kind smile towards the boy, who had so bravely fulfilled his knightly duties in the fight, and who had so efficiently protected the life of his sovereign.

"You have well merited your godfather's thanks, my young friend," said he, "and we will not prove ungrateful. Ask me what favor you will, I promise that it shall be granted."

Erwin bowed in silence, but before he could speak, Goswin rode up, bringing with him as prisoner the knight Bonello, the late treacherous governor of Cinola.

"Ah! by Saint Guy, Sire, this has been a brave day's work," said he, pointing to the dead bodies. "I would have finished mine long since, but for this noble chevalier. I must admit that he is a gallant soldier, although, alas! a most foul traitor!"

Frederic gazed contemptuously upon his former partisan. Bonello was a man still in the prime of life, and, though short in stature, well and powerfully built. His visage, though dejected, was calm. Like the majority of the inferior nobility, he had been long one of the warmest adherents of the Emperor, although he had acted as such rather through necessity than from choice. His glance fell before that of his sovereign.

"Are you ready to die the death of a traitor?" asked Frederic.

"I am ready to die," answered Guido; "but I implore you to withdraw the epithet of traitor!"

"And why, pray?"

"Sire, Guido Bonello was a traitor only on the day when he swore allegiance to his country's tyrant, forgetting, for a moment, that he was a Lombard."

"Are you not ashamed to seek thus to disguise your felony?" asked Frederic.

"Sire, we may bow in obedience to the monarch, who by his victorious arms has conquered Lombardy. But when tyranny reigns in the place of justice, when our rights are trampled underfoot, when our country is laid waste and her inhabitants held to ransom, when the Emperor's iron heel is placed upon the necks of a kneeling people, then, Sire, obedience becomes a crime! It is better to die free, than live as slaves! If it needs be that Italy obey you against her will, exile her population and replace it with serfs."

The monarch, as grand justiciary of the Empire, had allowed the prisoner full freedom of speech in his defence; but when he had concluded:

"The usual Lombard argument," he exclaimed; "the invention of some facts, the misrepresentation of others! You call tyranny the energetic punishment of traitors whom I had loaded with favors; legitimate taxation you term extortion! But who, then, have given greater evidences of tyranny over the weak than the Lombards themselves? Remember Como and Lodi--think of the excesses committed there before our army restored order! Were not those cities, the so-called allies of Milan, only her slaves? But it is not for a sovereign to seek excuses before a traitor! Go, the gallows awaits you!"

Calmly, without bravado as without faltering, the prisoner heard his sentence; but as the men-at-arms advanced to seize him, he raised his head:

"There exists an ancient custom," said he, "honored even among the heathens. All those who are condemned to death, are permitted to make one last request, which is granted to them."

"'Tis well--what is yours?"

"Delay the execution for three days."

"Why ask for this delay?"

The tone of the prisoner changed. His confidence left him, his lips trembled convulsively; and a tear stood in his eye.

"Pshaw!" he said, "I can scarcely believe myself guilty of such weakness! But there are times when the feelings of a father are stronger than the duties of the patriot. Let me see my child once more; she is the sole fruit of my once happy marriage. When one is so near his last hour, there is much to be done."

"You need feel no shame for such sentiments," replied Frederic, "they only do you honor. I will grant your request. Goswin, take charge of the prisoner."

The Emperor turned away to give orders for the care of the wounded and the burial of the dead. Litters were hastily constructed of lances and the branches of trees, and then, escorted by a few knights, Barbarossa rode over to Cinola, whither he was soon followed by the other troops and the wounded Germans.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COURT FOOL.

Scarcely was the Emperor installed in the fortress, when the German levies began to come in, and Frederic was extremely gratified by the arrival of several bishops, whose presence, he hoped, would lend great moral strength to his cause, although they came, not as messengers of peace, but in complete armor, and attended by well-appointed troops. Foremost among the temporal chiefs were Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony and Bavaria, next to Barbarossa himself, the most powerful prince of the Empire; Leopold, Duke of Bohemia; and the mighty counts of Dachau, d'Andech's and d'Abenberg. Duke Henry of Austria had not yet arrived, although his army stood close at hand in the defiles of the Alps.

In the immense plain before the castle a vast camp rose, as if by magic. Over the white tents fluttered the pennons of the knights, and before the pavilions of the princes were hoisted their several standards, rich in gold and silver embroidery. Through the canvas streets pressed a gay crowd in rich dresses and shining armor, while knights surrounded by their brilliant retinues,

rode in every direction.

In the middle of the camp stood the Imperial pavilion, and toward it, as to a common centre, seemed to tend all the varied parts of the strange tumult.

Meanwhile a sad spectacle might have been witnessed before the gates of the fortress, distant a thousand paces from the camp. From the open postern of the huge round tower, which formed the principal salient of the fortification, Bonello was being led out to execution. The three days' respite had expired, and the certainty of his speedy death, joined to the sorrow that he had not yet seen his child, had left upon the prisoner's face traces of deep anguish. His trembling knees could scarcely support him as he followed the jailers who were conducting him to the scaffold from which hung the fatal knot.

The condemned man made every effort to meet his fate with courage, but when, a few steps from the gallows, the executioner seized the rope, all his fortitude deserted him, and he halted.

"What is the matter now," cried the brutal soldier who commanded the escort. "Until now you have given proofs of bravery; do you tremble at the sight of a piece of hemp?"

Bonello raised his head, and with tears in his eyes, in a voice choking with emotion, replied,--

"I do not fear to die, but--oh! my child, my darling child!"

And he covered his face with his hands.

"What serves this everlasting whimper about your child; yesterday was your day, but you got a reprieve by your lamentations; but we can't wait any longer; so come and be hanged at once!"

"You are a fool, cousin," cried a shrill voice; "do you think any one will let himself be hung, if he can help it?"

The executioner turned and glanced angrily at the speaker; a small man, almost a dwarf in stature, with intelligent features and eyes beaming with malice, he was dressed in the garb of a jester, and wore on his head a bright scarlet cap with asses' ears. Both cap and jacket were covered with a great number of little bells, which rang merrily with every movement. He was seated on a stone, his chin resting on his hands, and laughing ironically in the face of the enraged soldier.

"Hold your tongue," said the latter, "or I'll hang you too by the ears."

"Do you want to get me out of the way for my fool's bauble?" said the jester, in the same careless tone. "I warn you if you aspire to be my successor, you will have to prove that there are more brains in your head than there are in a pumpkin. You are making a poor beginning, cousin Hesso, or you would not hang this miserable wretch so early in the morning."

"The man must be hung now, because his time has come!" said Hesso, furiously. But the arms of Henry the Lion, which were embroidered on the jester's coat, prevented any violence on his part.

"You would be right, if you were not such a liar," replied the fool. "Your long ears heard the Emperor say yesterday, 'Let him be hung to-morrow!' What was true then, will be equally so fourteen hours hence. Till then the poor devil's time is his own."

Hesso hesitated for an instant, but the idea that he should suffer the interference of a court fool to delay an execution, was enough to put him beside himself with rage. Turning towards the prisoner, he cried,--

"Enough of this; fasten up the traitor to the gibbet!"

The assistants obeyed, and already the noose was around the prisoner's neck, when, with a sudden spring, and before the executioner could interfere, the jester drew a knife from his belt, and cut the rope.

"What means this!" exclaimed Hesso.

"Thwarted! thwarted," cried the fool; "don't you see! cousin mine, that this man has not yet been to confession? The head and the body of the poor devil belong to you and the crows, but neither you, nor your friend Beelzebub, have any right over his soul! Let this man first comply with his duties as a Christian!"

"By Satan! what's that to me? Here, you men, tie a new knot, and hang up the traitor at once!"

"Then you will be hung too, cousin," said the jester. "Would you really dare to execute a man without confession? I came here to witness the death of a bandit, but not to see the devil steal his soul! If you have any respect for your own life, cousin, you will put off the business until I bring here a monk, or a bishop, or if needs, the Pope himself!" This said, he rushed toward the encampment.

Hesso bit his lips sullenly, but he knew the positive order which existed, that no one was to be put to death, without first receiving the succors of religion.

"Lead the prisoner back to his dungeon," said he, "until the fool and the priest have finished their task."

The jester stopped before a tent whose splendid appearance denoted the princely rank of its occupant. In front of the entrance floated a banner on which were blazoned the arms and bearings of episcopal dignity. Upon the threshold stood a man, evidently of high rank, gazing idly at the busy movement of the camp. He wore a long tunic, magnificently embroidered on the cuffs and collar; his hands sparkled with rings of gold and precious stones; his expression was engaging, and he smiled cordially as the fool approached.

"I'm in luck!" cried the jester; "I was only looking for a monk, and I've stumbled on a prelate in all his glory."

"What do you want, rascal?"

"To save a soul from Satan, cousin Adelbert! There is a poor fellow near here who is going to be hanged; he is still in the bonds of sin, and I want you to come out and cut them, so that he can spring from the gallows straight into Abraham's bosom!"

"But, Lanzo," replied Adelbert, "don't you perceive that I have neither sword nor dagger in my belt."

"Oh! cousin, your tongue is sharp enough of itself. Come with me!"

"What! a prelate follow a fool! Rogue, you ought to be flogged."

"Well then! let the prelate lead the way. I warrant he will not lose the trail."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Why, the prelate, of course."

"And of whose trail do you speak?"

"Zounds! Why, the fool's, to be sure! you look very much like me, cousin, although your cap has no ears, for your surcoat is nearly as motley as mine."

"Leave me instantly!" said Adelbert.

"You are willing, then, to leave this poor wretch to Satan."

"Yes, beyond doubt; and you with him! Find a monk, if you can."

"Hey?--Well, I am learning something new every day," said Lanzo, ironically. "I never thought before, that a monk was worth more than a prelate; but I'll remember in future.--Ah, I am in luck, here comes a monk!--two of them.--I may say three, instead of one!" he cried, as several monks dismounted and approached the tent.

They were dusty and travel-stained, and apparently fatigued with a long journey; the eldest addressed the prelate, while his companions stood on one side in an attitude of deep humility.

"Deign to pardon my boldness," said he, after the usual greetings; "we have just arrived in your camp, and seek a friendly shelter. Our rules prescribe the greatest discretion; but, in these troublous times, it is no longer an easy task to hold our pastoral office. Perhaps, your Excellency will deign to offer us an humble place beneath your tent?"

But the modest request seemed to irritate the prelate. He drew himself up, proudly, and glanced disdainfully upon the speaker, as he replied, sharply,--

"The tent of a bishop is not an inn for mendicant friars."

"If you want to keep company with bishops, or priors, or even canons, holy father," said Lanzo, "you must wear a *pelisse* of *sables*, and let the hair grow on your shaven poll."

"Would you be kind enough," said the embarrassed monk, turning to the jester, "would you be kind enough to use your influence with this noble gentleman. We are messengers from the Archbishop Everard of Salzburg."

"What!" sneered Adelbert. "Monks acting as the envoys of an archbishop? Has your master no abbot or canon at the head of his chapter? Your cowls are out of place amid the splendors of a court! I warn you that His Majesty has little love for your cloth, and he is right."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lanzo, "if my cousin Barbarossa could only use the monks as train-bearers and courtiers for his pet Pope, we would soon have little need for bishops and canons!"

With an angry look at the jester, Adelbert re-entered the tent. The monks seemed greatly

embarrassed. Their scornful reception was the more mortifying, because it was the first visit which they had ever paid to the high dignitaries of the Church.

"Be of good cheer, sons of Saint Benedict," said Lanzo; "on the word of a fool, I promise you comfortable lodgings and a hearty meal! But you must do me a service in return!"

"Most gladly, my son," replied the monk.

"Come with me then, I'll show you the way," said Lanzo, and they left the spot, followed by the others, leading their horses.

"You merely ask me to perform a pious duty," said the priest, when Lanzo had explained the affair; "had we not better go at once to the poor wretch?"

"There is no need of haste," replied Lanzo. "They dare not hang him, until he has confessed and received absolution. You need fear no rivalry in the matter, either; for my cousin Barbarossa hates your fraternity, and will not allow a monk within the limits of the camp. So that we have no one here, save prelates in velvet and ermine, who will have nothing to do with a confession.--Holloa, there, you idlers, make way for honest people!" cried the jester, striking with his cap a crowd of servants who were blocking up the entrance to a narrow street.

Close at hand, in the middle of an open square, stood the tent of Henry the Lion, and behind were the lodgings of his suite and the stables for their horses.

"Here, Balderich!" said the jester to one of the servants, "take these animals to the stables, and feed them well."

And, as the varlet led away the horses, Lanzo conducted the monks to his own tent, where he offered them some food and wine.

"I am aware," said he, "that you abstain from meat; but, with the best will in the world, I cannot give you any fish, although there is plenty of it in camp."

The monks said their *benedicite* and ate what was set before them.

"Will you not change your dress, Father Conrad?" asked one of them, of him who seemed the superior.

"Not yet, my son," replied Conrad; "for the present it will suffice to shake off the dust."

"Whilst the monks were attending to the needs of their chief, the fool examined intently the imposing figure of his guest, as though seeking to guess at his identity.

"My son!" said he to the monk, "if those are your children, you must be their father?"

"Certainly! friend Lanzo."

"Then, may Heaven forgive me, for I have led a worthy abbot to the tent of a fool."

"You see how deceitful appearances sometimes are," replied the abbot, with a smile.

"Yes!--yes. Henceforth I'll go blindfold, and open my ears wider than ever, to see better what lies before me. But now, my lord Abbot, whenever it may please you, we can set out on our mission. As to you, my holy friends and worthy guests, during our absence comfort yourselves with what is before you; the ham comes from the Duke's own table, and the wine from his cellars."

And Lanzo and the Abbot left the tent.

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

On a rough stone, in the deep and gloomy dungeon of the fortress of Cinola, sat Guido de Bonello, his body bent forward until his head almost rested upon his knees, his manacled hands hanging helpless under the weight of his fetters, and his tearful gaze fixed despondingly upon the ground. He was a brave man, and had often looked death boldly in the face; and if he was now so unmanned, it was from no thought of his own sad fate; his fears were for his daughter, so soon to be left without a protector. Suddenly the sound of steps met his ear, and he raised his head

quickly, in the fond hope of distinguishing the light footfall of a woman. The key grated in the lock, the door swung back upon its hinges, and the chief turnkey, followed by Lanzo and the Abbot, entered the cell.

"Here is the priest," said the jailer, sullenly; "get through your business as soon as possible, for you must be hung at once. If I am to have as much trouble with all my other prisoners, in future, I would rather resign my office now, and have done with it."

"I am entirely at your service, my son," said the Abbot, kindly, as he approached the prisoner.

"Thanks, holy father," replied Guido; "but you are mistaken if you expect to find a criminal here!"

"Of course!" exclaimed the jester. "Nowadays they never hang any but honest men; the scoundrels go scot-free. Come, come, cousin, if for nothing else, you merit the gallows for being such a tender father, and touching a fool's heart. God knows it was nothing but pity which prompted me to get you a confessor."

Without noticing the idle babble of the fool, the prisoner gazed earnestly upon the Abbot, who seemed deeply grieved at the sight of his sad condition.

"You have no hardened criminal to deal with," said he, divining the priest's thoughts. "My sole fault has been that I drew my sword to resist the bloody despotism of the Emperor. I feel confident that you have not visited the camp of Barbarossa to encourage the crimes and errors of the heretic, for your calm and pious eyes show clearly that you are no sycophant sold to the tyrant! As an unworthy sinner, I will gladly avail myself of your kind arm in this my last journey. But first let me beg you to administer aid to my spiritual necessities." The clatter of horses' feet in the court-yard interrupted the prisoner; the sound of light footsteps was heard along the passage; the door swung open, and a slight veiled form entered the dungeon;--the daughter of Bonello was in her father's arms. In the doorway stood Pietro Nigri, gazing, with deep emotion, upon the scene.

The prisoner, passionately embracing his daughter, wept and sobbed bitterly; for the thought that he held now to his heart, perhaps for the last time, all that he loved on earth, was agonizing in the extreme.

The young girl's face was calmer. She uttered neither complaint nor lamentation. For a moment her head reposed upon her father's breast, and then, raising it, she put back the gray hairs which covered his brow, and gazed fondly into his eyes.

"My father!" She could say no more; but the tone was enough to show the world of deep emotions which filled her heart at this awful moment.

Disengaging herself from his embrace, she looked around her.

Women, in trying circumstances, often give proof of marvellous energy and force of character. Mastering for the moment her grief,--dismissing every painful thought,--the young girl sought only to cheer the last hours of the condemned.

"Take off these heavy fetters which crush him," said she to the jailer; "put him in some other less frightful cell, I implore you!"

"I have no desire to be hung in his place," growled the man.

"Oh!" said she, pleadingly, "it can be no crime to soothe the last moments of a dying man!" and she emptied the contents of her purse into the jailer's hand.

The effect of the gold was magical; he smiled, bowed, and muttered some excuse for his churlishness.

"Noble lady--you are too kind--yes, you are right, it would be inhuman to torture the poor wretch unnecessarily. I will conduct him to the upper tower, and, as he cannot wear his chains on his last journey, I may as well rid him of them now."

And, taking a key from the bunch at his girdle, Guido's manacles fell upon the ground.

"Captain Hesso would be incensed, were he to see this, but it matters little; he won't come back again today, and to-morrow all will be over."

These last cruel words wellnigh broke the young girl's heart. The jester observed her changing face, and his own ready sympathies were awakened.

"Yes," said he, "to-morrow all will, probably, be over; but, one word from me to the noble Duke, would falsify your prediction. I cut the rope once, and I would do it again if the fancy took me."

"I owe you many thanks, my kind friend," said Bonello, pressing the hand of the jester. "I would not be here now, if your kind heart and good knife had not acted so promptly."

"Pshaw! It Was a silly thing to do, my good sir; but if you would do something really of use, you should send this reverend gentleman to the Emperor, to get His Majesty to open your cage."

"If you have access to the court, holy father," said Bonello, "use your influence in my behalf! I have never opposed the Imperial supremacy, and only took up arms to resist oppression; but if the Emperor will spare my life, I will consecrate it, hereafter, entirely to my child."

"Sir knight, be assured that I will do all in my power. A mission of grave importance summons me to the Emperor's presence without delay. May God grant that I may find him mercifully disposed! I will return as speedily as possible, to announce to you the result of my efforts."

And the prelate, followed by Lanzo, took his departure for the Camp, while Guido, his daughter, and Pietro Nigri, were conducted by the jailer to a lofty and well-lighted chamber of the upper tower.

"If you wish anything," said he, "open this window and call; I shall be close at hand."

He lingered for an instant, and then left the room, carefully locking the door behind him.

The travellers evidently stood in need of refreshments; but the sad fate awaiting Bonello, had prevented his child from all consciousness of physical wants. Every movement of the girl betrayed her inward suffering; but, with the desire of soothing his last moments, she strove bravely to conceal every trace of her own emotion.

Pietro was pale and suffering; although severely wounded in the late unlucky battle, the proud Milanese felt still more deeply the dangers menacing his beloved country. Wrapped in contemplation of the German camp, he stood at the open window, entirely forgetful of the unfortunate Guido and his daughter.

"I have been awaiting you impatiently, for two days past, my child! Were you delayed by the insecurity of the road?"

"Not at all, father; it was Pietro's wound which prevented me travelling more rapidly."

"Were you not annoyed?"

"On the contrary," she replied; "the German knights paid us every attention in their power."

"What strange people those Germans are!" said Guido. "I have often admired their courteous treatment of women. But your appearance in their camp would, of itself, bring you a host of valiant champions."

"Heaven preserve us from such chivalrous support," said Pietro, whose violent hatred for the Germans would not suffer him to listen to a word in their praise.

"To be just towards the virtues of our enemies, is no proof of either weakness or treason."

"No; but to admit the virtue of an enemy, is not becoming in a sincere patriot," replied Nigri.

Bonello knew Pietro's blind hatred for everything that was German, and had calculated upon a similar answer, the injustice of which it was most easy to show by simple facts. During their discussion, Hermengarde had approached the window, and now gave way to the emotions which she had so long controlled. The tears coursed down her cheeks, for she could see distinctly the gallows and the executioners. Raising her eyes appealingly towards Heaven, which shone clear and pure above the smiling landscape, she thought of the promised intercession of the holy abbot, and she prayed to God and the Holy Virgin, for the safety of her beloved and unfortunate father.

Her tears ceased, and in a calmer tone, she turned towards him:--

"Without doubt, the Emperor will pardon you. The Almighty knows your innocence, and will not suffer you to die the death of the guilty."

"Let us hope so, my child!"

"For my part, I expect nothing," said Nigri. "The heart of the tyrant Barbarossa knows neither pity nor justice.--Hermengarde, resign yourself to the worst, and do not cherish a vain hope."

"Oh! Pietro," said she, turning away.

"Rather be proud of your father's death; he is a martyr to the cause of his country's freedom!"

"Enough! enough!" interrupted Bonello. "A girl of fourteen cannot understand such heroic sentiments, dear Pietro! But if my hours are numbered, as you seem to think; if I am soon to leave you forever," (and Guido mustered up all his courage to preserve the appearance of calm resignation,) "it is you, Pietro, who must endeavor to replace me. You know my wishes; receive Hermengarde's hand now, until the priest can unite you forever."

Tears streamed from the prisoner's eyes and fell upon his gray beard, as he took his daughter's hand to place it in that of Pietro. But the words of the young man had made too painful an impression upon her heart, and turning from him, with a burst of bitter weeping, Hermengarde threw herself upon her father's bosom.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ABBOT CONRAD.

The condemned man could not easily have found a more powerful advocate than the Abbot Conrad, the friend of the great Archbishop of Salzburg, whose opposition had hitherto prevented the recognition in Germany of the Anti-Pope Victor. Frederic had neglected nothing to obtain the active co-operation of the Princes of the Church, but all in vain; neither threats nor entreaties could induce Eberhard to countenance the schism. He had not even replied to the Emperor's summons to accompany him to Italy, in order that it might not be imagined that he would make any compromise with heresy and error.

Many of the bishops regulated their conduct by that of the eminent Archbishop of Salzburg, and as long as the feeble and irresolute Victor was not universally acknowledged as Pope, the Emperor could not hope for a complete realization of his ambitious projects. In fact, Victor was as humbly submissive to Frederic's slightest wishes as Alexander III. was inflexibly opposed to them. As powerful and bold as Barbarossa himself, he disdained to play the part of lackey to the Emperor, and refused to enthrall the liberty of the Church and make religion the mere stepping-stone to a despotic prince. Such a man was dangerous to the Emperor's projects, and every effort was made to drive Alexander from the throne of St. Peter. Eberhard was the head of the Papal faction in Germany, and as Conrad was said to possess great influence with the Archbishop, it was most natural to suppose that Frederic would gladly oblige the monk whenever it was in his power to do so.

The long expected arrival of the Abbot was promptly noised through the Imperial camp, and scarcely had he returned to the jester's hospitable tent, when he found himself surrounded by the courtiers. Adelbert was one of the foremost, and the prelate strove, by most humble excuses, to atone for his former incivility. Conrad retained his native modesty, and smiled as he witnessed the assiduity of the German nobles.

"His Eminence the Bishop regrets that he is not to have the honor of offering you his hospitality," said Adelbert. "But His Majesty has ordered the most sumptuous apartment of his own tent to be prepared for your reception, my lord Abbot. His Eminence has overwhelmed me with well-merited reproaches for my unlucky mistake of this morning. But I could scarcely imagine that so illustrious an Abbot would have been thus disguised beneath a monk's cowl!"

"Lord Adelbert, I beg that you will cease these apologies; the mistake is of too little importance to be referred to a second time."

"I feel deeply mortified, my lord!" continued Adelbert. "Your celebrated order is welcomed by all, and surely its virtuous superior should have been received with open arms."

The abbot began to feel an intense disgust for this obsequious servility, and was well satisfied when he reached the monarch's tent. At the farther side of the square, on which it stood, was planted a tall flagstaff where floated the proud banner of the Emperor. On either side, midway between it and the tent, were two knights in complete armor, who, with drawn swords, mounted guard over the Imperial shield. This was in conformity with a traditional custom, and the duty was shared, in turn, by every noble, spiritual and temporal, of the court. Unlike the rest of the camp, a profound silence replaced the noisy bustle. Warriors in shining mail, and courtiers in rich dresses, stood around the pavilion; but their grave and respectful deportment showed that they were near the presence of their sovereign.

The Emperor and his chancellor were seated at a table, in deep consultation. Frederic had much reason to be gratified with the alacrity shown by the majority of the German princes in obeying his summons; but the absence of many of the bishops was a bad omen for the success of his cause. Some, it is true, had sent both men and money, others merely excuses; but the Emperor could not but feel that there was a very evident disinclination to hold converse with a schismatic.

His numerous and well-organized army could easily have overrun and conquered all Italy, but his long cherished project, the submission of the spiritual power of the Church to the temporal sovereignty of the Empire, could not, in that age, be attained by force of arms.

He was particularly indignant against the Bavarian Episcopacy, whose primate, Eberhard of Salzburg, was the chief and most zealous adherent of Alexander III. A threatening message had been dispatched to the Archbishop, demanding his immediate presence; but, instead of appearing in person at the head of his men-at-arms, the primate had delegated an humble monk as his representative to the Court.

"In truth!" exclaimed Frederic, "I am beginning to weary of this;--the Archbishop appears to despise both threats and entreaties!--By Heavens! he shall feel my anger!"

"Violence would be out of place here," remarked the Chancellor, dryly. "Your Imperial Majesty is scarcely in a condition, at present, to break the cross and mitre."

"Must we then sue humbly for the aid of this egotistical old priest?" said Frederic, bitterly. "I would have you know, my lord, that we are not yet reduced so low as that! If the Archbishop does not offer us a valid excuse, he shall be punished by banishment."

"Banishment!" replied the minister, with a laugh. "The sentences, which Victor fulminates, will all turn to smoke, for the world has little scruple in ridiculing the Anti-Pope. You may use force, but it will be at the expense of your own reputation. You know well that Eberhard is profoundly respected by all, and his example has been the chief cause of the non-recognition of Victor's claims. The people revere him as a saint, and if you would ruin your own cause irretrievably in the estimation of the world, you have only to punish the Archbishop."

"What then does your wisdom suggest?"

"As neither prayers, nor threats have availed," replied the crafty statesman, "try diplomacy. Assume the mask of Organizer of the Church. Receive the Abbot Conrad with cordiality, and trust to me for the rest."

"What is your plan?"

"To persuade Eberhard to visit your court,--the game will be in your own hands then."

"In my own hands! Bah! Eberhard will never break faith with Alexander!"

"Probably not! but if he should come here, I will spread the report that he has acknowledged Victor. And, what is still more important, the holy man will have paid a visit to the heretic Barbarossa,--a visit which would never be made, were you to continue to be the avowed enemy of the Church."

"Your reasoning is specious," said the prince; "that game may be successful!"

"May be?--only may be!" replied Dassel, somewhat offended by Frederic's incredulity. "My policy is not a *game*; it is no mere fancy of the brain."

"I perceive," answered Barbarossa, "that science is irritable, and her adepts petulant. We will therefore bow before your invention, which you insist is not a mere game, but a deadly war-engine levelled against Alexander III."

"Eberhard's apparent defection will be your rival's death-blow, for Victor's recognition will be its natural and immediate consequence," said the Chancellor. "And now, Sire, if you will permit me, I will summon the Archbishop's envoy. The monarch assented, and the Count drawing aside the silken curtains of the tent, beckoned to a chamberlain. A few moments after Conrad entered."

"Welcome, my lord Abbot," said Frederic, rising. "We are pleased with the judicious choice thus made by our Metropolitan of Salzburg. We are always glad to receive a counsellor whose wisdom can enlighten us in matters of difficulty."

Conrad bowed and handed a sealed packet to the Emperor. Frederic hurriedly tore open the envelope; it only contained the Abbot's letters of credence.

"Be seated," said Barbarossa, pointing to a chair. "The Archbishop, I perceive, alleges his advanced age as an excuse for his refusal to our invitation. We regret these obstacles--but what says he to our request?"

"He cannot send the contingent demanded by your Majesty. All his troops are needed to defend his own territory against his ambitious neighbors. But he is prepared to offer a tribute of money!"

"Money!--I want none of it!" said Frederic, proudly. "Loyalty and attachment are alone of value in our eyes. Our sovereign power would be weak indeed if obedience could be replaced by gold! But enough of this; we can do without the Archbishop's assistance; our forces are strong enough already to take the field! Tell me, though, what does he think of the true head of the Church? We trust that he is not one of those who compound with heresy?"

"Submission to the legitimate Pope is one of the first duties of a prelate," replied Conrad. "But in the opinion of him who sent me hither, it is not Victor but Alexander who has a right to the title. The Archbishop has commissioned me to make this observation to your Majesty."

"There it is again!" cried Frederic, "always observations!"

"Allow me, Sire, to lay before you the reasons which have influenced the convictions of the Archbishop," said Conrad.--"Immediately upon the death of Adrian IV., the Sacred College unanimously elected Roland, now Alexander III."

"Unanimously?" interrupted Barbarossa. "If I recollect aright, all the Cardinals were not present!"

"True, three were absent,--but two of them were held as prisoners by your Majesty," replied Conrad.

"The answer is devoid of reason, my lord Abbot. Those two Cardinals had incurred my displeasure. We merely invited them not to leave our court,--but they could scarcely be called prisoners;--however, proceed!"

"Alexander's energetic, inflexible character was known, and it was decided to depose him. A powerful faction elected Cardinal Octavian, and Alexander was forcibly expelled. In consequence of this, the Archbishop Eberhard, and every other prelate who is learned in the sacred canons, regard Victor's election as illegal, and look upon Alexander as the legitimate Pope."

"This is strange!" said the Emperor, forced to blush before the Abbot's arguments. "We certainly had never considered the question in this light.--We will have to be influenced by the Archbishop's opinion.--Hitherto we had thought differently. Your Metropolitan should have explained before the Council of Pavia, to which he was convened, the reasons which you have just advanced!--If we are in error, if we have indorsed so far the Anti-Pope, it is your master's fault. We much desire an interview with the worthy prelate, and regret exceedingly, that we cannot at once profit by his experience. The more so that, had he so willed it, this schism might have been long since ended."

The Abbot was dumb with surprise, but he still hesitated to give faith to the entire sincerity of the Emperor.

"The schism grieves us much," continued Barbarossa. "The Defender of the Faith, more than any one else, must deplore its continuance. Hitherto we have done all in our power in order that Victor, whom we supported, should be acknowledged by the whole Church. But what you have just told us, as coming from the Archbishop, creates grave doubts in our mind."

"In any case," said Rinaldo, timidly, "it would be well if His Eminence of Salzburg should join the Court.--His presence alone would remove many obstacles."

"Although in feeble health, the venerable Bishop will not hesitate before the fatigues of the journey, if he were once assured that his influence would effect the unanimous recognition of the true Pope!" added Conrad.

"Let us hope so, at least!" replied the Emperor, and turning towards Rinaldo, he added, "You will write to this effect to the Archbishop; and, in the meantime, my dear Abbot, you are our guest."

He rose, and bowed graciously to the prelate, as a signal that the audience was at an end; but the Abbot, preoccupied with Bonello's case, after a moment's hesitation, began to plead in his behalf.

"Deign to excuse me, Sire, if I venture to implore your clemency for a most unfortunate man. A Guelph knight, named Bonello, is to be hung to-day. Spare his life, Sire, and in future he will no longer mix in political strife, but devote himself entirely to the education of his only daughter. She is almost a child, and needs a father's care; the more so that her extraordinary beauty is in itself a grave danger to one so young. If your Majesty desires to show me any favor, you will listen to my earnest prayer."

The Emperor reflected for a moment.

"What you ask is impossible," said he; "the sentence must be executed!"

"Although your Majesty cannot pardon the traitor," said Rinaldo, "you can easily offer him to the Archbishop of Salzburg's friend. Bonello is only a Lombard noble; it would be an original present to a German bishop."

Barbarossa divined the Chancellor's meaning, but he was inflexible.

"Not another word; the traitor must die!"

Conrad read in the Emperor's expression the uselessness of further appeal, and he could only rejoice that he had been able to prolong, although but for a few short hours, the life of the condemned. He might at least prepare him for the great journey into eternity.

"Hasten to discharge your holy mission," said Barbarossa, "for to-morrow at daybreak Bonello shall be hanged."

The prelate bowed, and left the tent.

"You should let the poor devil live," said the Chancellor, in a discontented tone.

"The poor devil might live," replied Barbarossa, "but the rebel must die;" and he took his place again at the table.

"If I aspired to the empire of the world, the blind goddess of justice would be obliged to make more than one sacrifice on the altar of expediency," remarked the Count of Dassel. "The Abbot Conrad solicited the Guelph's pardon; Conrad is the friend of the Archbishop Eberhard, and Eberhard is the soul of the Episcopacy."

"Must we purchase the loyalty which is ours by right, by making concessions and granting impunity to crime?"

"Your Majesty's notions of justice utterly confound my poor wisdom," said Rinaldo respectfully. "At this moment I am in an awkward dilemma. I see dangerous breakers ahead; a species of conspiracy against the realization of your gigantic enterprise, and I neither dare to show the peril nor attempt to avoid it. It is truly painful for a sincerely devoted heart."

"Explain your meaning," said the Emperor.

The Chancellor rose and approached the table, his knit brows and eager eyes wearing an expression of stern determination.

"Henry the Lion is Duke of Saxony and Bavaria," he continued. "He is the most powerful lord of Germany. As a Guelph, his attachment to Alexander is patent; we hold the proofs at hand. To conciliate Henry by gifts of power or territory would be dangerous. Proud, haughty, and ambitious, he can hope for nothing from you, and will naturally turn to that faction which can offer him the most solid advantages. Even now, perhaps, he may be only awaiting a plausible excuse for leaving the Emperor and joining the party of Alexander III."

The Chancellor paused for a moment, as if expecting a reply; but he received none.

"Henry the Lion is allied to the wealthy and powerful Berthold of Zœhringen," continued Dassel. "In the event of a rupture, Zœhringen also would be arrayed against us. Is the Emperor in a fit condition to resist this coalition?"

"The assertion is a bold one, my lord, and yet I must confess that your fears are not entirely groundless," answered Barbarossa.

"I have shown the danger to your Majesty; let me now explain how it may be averted. The Lion espoused Clemence, a sister of the Zœhringen; by her he has no male issue. Now, to a prince who seeks to perpetuate the glories of his race, there can be no condition more painful than this, and it is even said to have caused more than one curious family discussion. Should the Duke repudiate Clemence, your cause would be gained; for by the very fact of the divorce he would be obliged to break with Zœhringen and Alexander, and become your partisan."

Frederic shook his head, as he replied,---

"This master-stroke of policy is not without its merit, but is the proceeding honest or honorable?"

"Ah!" cried Dassel, "I felt sure that the Emperor's love of justice would prove the only real obstacle to the success of the house of Hohenstauffen. Ah, well!" he continued ironically, "we shall at least be martyrs to the cause of justice."

The Emperor was silent; Rinaldo had wounded his conscientious scruples, but the Chancellor spread out before him a parchment, and looked steadily upon his sovereign, as he prepared to employ this last terrible weapon.

"Henry the Lion is ambitious," said Barbarossa; "his strength and his alliances make him really dangerous. But, your plan is a good one, if it were feasible!"

"And why not, Sire? If the Emperor could divorce himself, what can prevent the Duke? If I mistake not, you did not ask permission of the Pontiff when, upon the pretext of consanguinity, you repudiated Adelaide and married Beatrice. Think you that the Pope Victor will hesitate to annul the Duke's marriage, if the Emperor so orders it?"

"Measure your words, my lord Chancellor! If I still hesitate, it is because of the crying injustice of which poor Clemence would be the victim. She is a noble woman!"

"Doubtless, and I pity her sincerely; but are the tears of a woman to baffle your projects for glory and dominion?"

This remark terminated the discussion. The proud aspirations of Barbarossa for universal Empire smothered every other feeling. He loved power and fame, and to them he sacrificed every other sentiment.

"But the Duke's assent to our projects is by no means certain," said he, less to discuss the subject than as a mark of his discontent.

"I will take care of that," said the Chancellor; "the Lion must be speedily influenced to an open rupture!"

CHAPTER IX.

FILIAL DEVOTION.

The oftener Bonello saw his daughter, the more unwilling he became to die. Alas! what will become of her, poor orphan, he thought. Then again, at times, he turned to his project of her marriage with Nigri, and felt reassured. But Pietro had so deeply wounded her feelings by his violent and inconsiderate outburst, that he no longer desired that union for his child. She might perhaps seek shelter in a convent! Yet, in those times of civil strife, the walls of a cloister were but an insecure protection! Whilst he lamented in the bitterness of his thought, Pietro Nigri recommenced his wild harangue on the subject of the expected pardon.

"I should be sorry, sir knight, to allow Frederic to suppose for an instant that I feared death."

"Our positions are very different, young man," replied Bonello. "The cares and sentiments of a father are often more potent than the chivalrous heroism of a youth!"

"You should be able to master your emotions," said Nigri. "The ties of mere human affection should be as nothing compared with the duties which we owe to our country. If we fear the rope and the scaffold,--if the approach of death is to excite our tears,--we will deserve, by our weakness, to bear the German yoke."

"You really do yourself injustice, Pietro!" said the prisoner, glancing towards the window where his daughter stood, anxiously awaiting the return of the Abbot. At last she perceived some horsemen approaching the eminence on which the fortress was built. It even seemed to her that she could distinguish the monk's robe; but what meant those armed men? Were they the Abbot's escort? Her heart beat violently. They drew up at the foot of the hill, and the prelate, leaving his attendants, ascended with hasty steps the path which led to the Castle.

"It is he!--he is coming--he is coming," cried Hermengarde, excitedly. "See how the holy man hastens. No! his is not the air of a messenger of evil; it is mercy and pardon that he will announce! My father!--oh, my father!" said she, embracing Bonello, and smiling through her tears.

"You are right, perhaps, my child; but wait a moment."

"Oh! do not doubt it, it is certain! You are pardoned; a voice from within tells me that I am right!"

The key grated in the lock, and the Abbot entered with a solemn and dejected mien.

"I have come in person," he said, "to communicate the result of my mission. I have only partially succeeded. Sir Knight. But the Emperor has respited you for to-day."

The prisoner was not for an instant deceived by the mild form under which the Abbot veiled his failure. But the childish sentiments of Hermengarde did not take in at once the dread truth.

"Holy Father," said she, "your vague words alarm me. I implore you, tell me clearly if the Emperor has pardoned my father?"

The prelate looked sadly at the young girl.

"At first the Emperor positively refused to listen to my prayers for mercy; however, by my persistent supplications I have attained a satisfactory result."

"Ah! only for to-day!"

"We may feel perfectly easy, dear child. To-day not a hair of your father's head will be harmed!"

"But to-morrow!--Great God! what may happen tomorrow?" she cried, with anguish.

"Trust in God, my child," said the monk; "he alone is master of the future."

"Oh! unhappy creature that I am.--You hesitate to tell me the fearful truth!--You dread my tears!--Do you not see, dearest Father, that my eyes are dry?--that I am calm and resigned?--For God's sake, speak to me!" cried Hermengarde. "This uncertainty is worse than death! I am strong enough to bear anything but that,--we have no time to lose in idle tears now. The few short hours that are left us must be spent in trying to avert to-morrow's fearful doom!"

Hermengarde spoke earnestly, and her touching distress suggested a last hope to the good Abbot.

"Your pleadings may soften the Emperor, my child," he said. "I will gladly use my influence to get you to his presence.--You may be more successful than I."

"You have failed! Then, indeed, all hope is lost," she cried, despairingly.

"Calm yourself, my child," said Guido, "all is not lost yet."

"Oh! I am calm, my Father; my mind is entirely composed.--Reverend Sir, take me at once, I beseech you, to the Emperor!"

And with wonderful stoicism she began her preparations; for though her heart was wellnigh breaking within her, she had summoned all her courage for this one last effort.

"Pietro," said she, after a moment's hesitation, "will you not come with me?"

"Pardon me, noble lady, if I cannot accede to your request; the sight of the tyrant has always been insupportable to me.--What will it be now, when I behold you a suppliant at his feet?"

"Ah! Pietro, do not refuse me the support of your arm!"

"Fear not, my daughter," said the Abbot; "I will not leave you for an instant. This young man appears too much excited, and we must act with the greatest calmness!"

Hermengarde seized the prelate's hand, and they immediately left the tower.

Conrad's retinue was composed of gentlemen of the Imperial household, for Barbarossa always treated with great distinction all those whose favor he wished to gain. As they descended the hill, Hermengarde's beauty attracted the admiration of the knights, one of whom dismounted as she approached, and respectfully held the stirrup for her to mount. For her remarkable loveliness could not fail to conciliate the kind feelings of all those who in that chivalric age treated woman with such distinguished courtesy. The little band moved slowly along the main road to the Imperial tent, for such was the bustle and movement that their progress was more than once arrested by the crowd. Although for the first time within the precincts of a camp, Hermengarde scarcely remarked the tumult, nor noticed the looks of open admiration which her beauty called forth from all, so entirely was she a prey to her own sad thoughts. As they passed the tent of Henry the Lion, they met, the Chancellor Rinaldo, who, richly dressed and surrounded by a brilliant retinue, was about to pay a visit to the Duke.

"Whither go you thus, my lord Abbot?" he asked; "ah, well! I see you are not easily discouraged; and in truth," he added, bowing to the young girl, "your *protégée* is worthy of your best efforts, to which I sincerely wish you every success."

"The result would most certainly be successful, my lord," said Conrad, "if my slight influence was but backed by you."

Rinaldo said nothing, but as he gazed on Hermengarde, his bold imagination at once conceived a plan of which it alone was capable.

"My support is cheerfully offered, my lord Abbot," said he, after a moment's silence. "As much through respect for you, as from interest in this amiable young lady; but we must take every precaution, and not act rashly. I have a trifling affair to arrange with the Saxon Duke, and will then at once join you. Pray, in the meanwhile go into my tent."

The Count directed one of his attendants to show every respect to the prelate and his suite during his absence, and then, after a few words of cheer to the young girl, continued on his way.

"What a lucky meeting!" said the Chancellor, who never neglected even the most unimportant circumstance. "The Lion can never look at this girl calmly. She is rather young, it is true, and a few years more would be in her favor; still, compared with Clemence, the Duke will not hesitate an instant."

He had by this time arrived at the Saxon tent, and dismounting, he left his escort in the ante-chamber, passing himself into an inner apartment. Beckoning to a servant who was in waiting,--

"Can I speak with your master?" he asked.

"In a few moments, my lord! The Duke is at present with his family, and desires not to be interrupted."

In the adjoining room he could hear the deep voice of a man mingling with the gay laugh and joyous prattle of children.

"There is no hurry about it," replied Dassel.

And he paced the ante-chamber, seemingly immersed in grave thought, but in reality listening to what was said in the Duke's chamber.

Henry the Lion was a bold and courageous monarch, ever occupied in the extension of his territories. His dream was to unite under his sway all the provinces of Northern Germany, as Frederic had done with those of the South. Under the pretext of converting the heathen, he had been engaged for many years in a war with the Slaves, but the aggrandizement of his kingdom was a motive far more potent than could be the triumph of the true faith.

The innovations attempted by Frederic in the affairs of the Church met with little favor in his eyes, for he made no secret of his leanings towards orthodoxy, and although, as a vassal of the Empire, he fought against the Lombards, still in his heart he sympathized with their resistance to the encroachments of the Emperor. He refused to recognize Victor, the anti-Pope, whose slavish nature he despised, and whom he openly treated with contempt as occupying a position to which he was not legally entitled. It needed all Frederic's diplomacy to secure the co-operation of the Duke in the struggle which he was about to inaugurate, for Barbarossa had long felt the necessity of detaching him from the support of Alexander III., and it seemed as though the crafty Chancellor had discovered a sure means of success.

Whilst the minister was plotting his dishonorable combinations, the Duke, all unconscious of the visit awaiting him, was seated in the bosom of his family, Henry was a tall, powerfully built man, with dark hair and eyes, a heavy beard, and a frank open expression upon his sun-burned features. His remarkable strength had gained him the surname of the Lion. He was impatient of all repose, and chafed bitterly at the inaction to which the Emperor had condemned him.

Near him sat the Duchess, busied with her embroidery. Not without personal and intellectual attractions, she was sincerely attached to her husband, but the affection which he had once felt for the lovely Clemence had long since made way for other sentiments. Honoring her virtues, he could not but feel deeply mortified that he was without an heir, and to his intimate associates he had more than once hinted at the possibility of a divorce.

"Look, Clemence! what a fine boy our little Hildegarde would make," said the Duke, playing with the silken curls of the child who had glided between his knees. "He would be old enough now to play with arms, or sharpen arrows, and in a few years could fight by my side!"

"And perhaps die there, husband!"

"Our five daughters run no risk of dying a hero's death!" he replied bitterly. "Ah! I would give the half of my left hand if one of those girls were a boy!"

"Henry, do not cherish such gloomy thoughts. You make me tremble for our future!"

"Never mind! a hand for a son!" continued Henry, with growing rage. "If my death-bed could be surrounded by five sons, I should feel that my toils had not been altogether unavailing. Ah! those five young lions could complete the work which their father had begun, and their combined efforts might defy the Emperor. But it is a painful, a bitterly painful thought, that I shall die and leave to helpless girls the great work which I have so painfully achieved."

Clemence let fall her work and gazed upon her husband; despite her gentle nature and her sentiments of Christian resignation, she was much depressed by his violent outburst.

"Pardon, dear Henry!" she said; "your views are selfish ones. He who toils only for earthly fame, gives little thought to Eternity. In this world, we should be contented with the consciousness that we have always acted honestly and from noble motives!"

"A sad fate!"

"But the best, the most really meritorious! The true crown of glory is eternal and unfading! What we accomplish on earth is often valueless hereafter, for what then avails a lifetime spent in strife, and storms, and troubles! I implore you, dear husband, do not question the decrees of Providence; think less of earthly greatness, for pride leads to forgetfulness of God, and to eternal perdition!"

"You are right," said the Prince, who had listened calmly while Clemence was speaking, "if we are to measure honor's reward by what comes after death; but I maintain that I would gladly exchange some leaves of my heavenly crown, for the prospect of an earthly heir."

A slight noise was heard, the curtains were lifted, and Lanzo with a serious face entered the room.

"Whence come you, knave?"

"From the gallows, godfather!"

"What! am I the sponsor of a gallows-bird?"

"You have no reason to be ashamed of it, cousin, since it appears to be the fashion, nowadays, to hang honest people!"

"Who has been hanged?"

"Oh! just now, no one; but those who have the halter around their necks are not always the worst off. It may be that your Grace or the Emperor would send an honest citizen to execution; but, when the devil in person leads a man to the scaffold, it is another thing!"

"You are not bright to-day, Lanzo!"

"And why not, master?"

"This stupid speech about the devil leading a man to the scaffold."

"My luminous idea was a true one, though," said the jester. "Would you like me to show you one of Satan's tricks?"

"I am somewhat curious; let us see."

"Be good enough then to open wide the eyes of your understanding, for he who is blind in spirit, although carnally lucid, cannot discover the wiles of the demon. The works of his diabolical Majesty are, like Beelzebub himself, of a spiritual essence. The first and chief agent of the devil is--guess what, cousin!"

"What do you mean?"

"Pride! Whenever Satan can entangle a man in the meshes of pride, it is all over with him! Pride rises, and aspires to rise. Let us suppose that our individual is a duke, he covets the Empire; and to accomplish his purpose, would destroy every barrier to his ambition, even were it necessary to be guilty of a crime. Should he be an Emperor, he desires the power of God, and even the Pope must be his humble vassal. If you look around, cousin, you can see for yourself, that is, if your eyes are worth anything. Should the proud man have an excellent wife, whose only fault is that she has not borne him a son, the poor creature becomes a martyr, for pride has no respect for the feelings or rights of others, and only dreams of seeing his own power and glory reflected in the persons of his descendants, long after his own flesh has become the food of worms!"

The Duke started, and turned towards his wife; but Clemence seemed absorbed in her work and heedless of the fool's discourse.

"Shall I show you some more of the devil's tricks, cousin?"

"No! I have had enough for to-day!"

"His diabolical Majesty has not only snares and pitfalls to catch fools, but also executioners to hunt them up! If I mistake not, one of these gentry is about to pay you a visit, cousin! Come, I will show him to you, but take good care of yourself, noble Lion!"

The prince looked anxiously to where Lanzo pointed, for he knew that his jester often veiled really serious truths beneath the semblance of frivolity.

"Here is His Majesty's servant!" said the fool, as Rinaldo entered, with a smile.

"Forgive me, my lord, for thus disturbing your family party for a moment; I could not resist the temptation of being the messenger of good news!"

"You are welcome, my lord; and these news are?"

"That to-morrow we break camp, and march upon Milan."

"At last!" cried the soldier; "it is, indeed, good news that you bring me. Camp-life is demoralizing, and we should have finished long since with our enemies!"

"So I have urged," replied Rinaldo. "His Majesty wished at first to await the arrival of the Austrian duke, but your counsels have modified the plan. I must really admire your influence over one who is so little patient of advice or control. Your Highness is as great in the council as in the field."

[Transcriber's note: Initial text of paragraph missing--possibly "The Duke was ..."] secretly flattered by this homage to his pride. "My observations have only served to develop the great military talent of the Emperor."

"With an ironical smile, scarcely perceptible around the corners of his mouth, Rinaldo answered,--

"A monarch is none the less great, because he listens to reason and follows good advice! But I

have come to summon your Highness to a council of war, in which the plan of campaign against Milan is to be discussed. It will be very select, and only a few princes and prelates, who are experienced in the art of war, will be present."

"At what hour?"

"So soon as you shall have arrived?"

"Halloa, without there! my cloak!" cried the Duke.

"Oh! there is no need of such haste!" said Dassel. "Before starting, I must solicit a favor of your Highness."

"On what subject, pray?"

"Oh, a mere peccadillo! But, by your leave, I would make my confession in secret."

As they entered an adjoining room, Lanzo hurriedly concealed himself behind the hangings, as though this presumption was one of his privileges.

"What is the matter?" asked the Duke of Rinaldo, who stood before him with down-cast eyes, and an appearance of irresolution and discouragement.

"I am really a guilty man," said the Chancellor, after a moment's silence. I meant to await a more favorable occasion; but--I was an unwilling listener to your conversation with the Duchess, and much as I dislike to interfere with your domestic happiness, I have been unable to restrain myself.--That you, the most powerful prince of the Empire, should be without an heir to your glory--so mighty a tree, full of sap and vigor to remain barren--truly, it is a sad reflection!--The Lion raised his eyes upon the Chancellor, whose face wore an expression of deep chagrin.

"A sad reflection, say you!--A man must learn to carry the burden which he cannot shake off!"

"Which he cannot?--Very true, *if* he cannot; but, for my part, I have imagined that this accident, so fatal to your race, might be remedied. Mayhap, it will need great strength of mind on your part, or even some violence?" said the tempter, in an insinuating tone.

"Nothing more?"

"I cannot now say! The Emperor's first wife was childless; he divorced her and married Beatrice. This union has been blessed with a numerous progeny."

An expression of mingled regret and anger passed over the features of the Duke, who sat twisting his beard, in silence.

"Frederic could do it;--Adelaide was his relative!"

"Oh, that was the pretext, I know," said the Chancellor; "but we can easily find another equally good; and it is certain that the Pope Victor will gladly yield to a demand made by the Emperor, or even, indeed, to your own request. If consanguinity were a substantial ground for a divorce, it seems to me that the extinction of a noble house would be quite as valid a plea. Do not let this matter drop. I feel sure that your Grace will pardon my indiscretion and importunity."

"There is no indiscretion, my lord! It is not the first time that I have pondered over this matter; but it is strange, how different an almost familiar thought appears when couched in words!"

"It is merely the realization of our long cherished desires," said the statesman but he thought within himself,--"It is a remorse for an evil deed!"

For a moment the Duke was silent, and then, with his eyes turned towards the ground, he resumed,--

"I agree with you, that my marriage has become insupportable to me; but to commence the affair, and to carry it to a satisfactory result,--hum!--I think that rather comes within the scope of your talents and intelligence, my dear Chancellor!"

"With pleasure!--You can count upon me in every way," replied Rinaldo, and, for once, he spoke the truth. "But, in the first place, it will be necessary to secure the Emperor's consent, and, through him, that of the Pope. Perhaps, to-day you may have the opportunity of discussing the matter before four competent persons,--will that suit your Grace?"

They left the room. Henry called for his cloak, and sword and helmet. Lanzo was seated on the ground, playing with his bells.

"Cousin!" said he, looking up, as they approached, "have you forgotten all about the snares of the devil?"

As if to increase the Duke's remorse, Clemence and her children entered the room. The Duchess had heard her husband and hastened, according to the old German custom, to bring him

his sword and helmet. The Chancellor bowed low before the princess, and his calm and smiling face gave no presage to the noble lady of the misfortune which menaced her happiness; but Henry, less skilled in dissimulation, averted his gaze, as he said,--

"You should not take this trouble, Clemence!"

"It is ever my pleasure to serve my noble husband," she replied, presenting him his helmet.

The Chancellor's visit alarmed her, for she knew the violent and impetuous temper of her lord, and she feared lest some misunderstanding might arise between him and the Emperor.

"Where are you going, Henry?" she asked. "Are you summoned to His Majesty?"

"Summoned,--no; that is to say, yes. I am summoned to a Council of War about to take place;" and, in company with the Chancellor, he left the tent.

"Great God! what is the matter?" said Clemence. "I have never seen him thus!"

"Nor I neither," replied Lanzo, who was still seated upon the ground. "He looks marvellously like a man whom the devil is leading to the gallows!"

"What a fearful speech, Lanzo!"

"What a wicked man, Clemence!"

"Do you dare to speak thus of your master, Sirrah?"

"Oh! I have given him up, noble lady, and have entered your service; for, methinks you will soon have grievous need of a faithful servant!"

"Why so?"

"Why so?--hum!--the why would only worry you. Never question a fool too closely, noble dame, for fools tell the truth!"

"But I would know the truth, Lanzo!"

"Good! Then pray for your husband."

"I have already done so, to-day."

"Then do it again."

"But why?"

"Because he is in bad company, and needs your prayers!"

CHAPTER X.

THE TEMPTER.

Frederic awaited Dassel's return, in a state of feverish anxiety for the success of his mission. He had carefully pondered over his Chancellor's proposition, and he now dreaded lest the refusal of Henry to the contemplated divorce might interfere with the realization of his cherished projects. The very possibility of failure was painful to him, but when the Chamberlain announced the Duke's arrival, he dissembled his agitation and advanced cordially to meet him.

"Are you at last satisfied, my dear Duke," said he, motioning to a seat.

"Certainly, I must be satisfied," replied the Duke, who seemed uneasy and dispirited.

"The princes will be here shortly, and we will open the Council without delay, for the measures against Milan must be decided upon at once. This proud and rebellious city shall feel all the weight of our displeasure,--our own opinion is in favor of utterly destroying this hot-bed of treason, and we trust that your Grace thinks with us."

The Duke remained silent, his eyes still fixed upon the ground.

"My plan is the result of mature deliberation," pursued Barbarossa; "but we would listen to your counsel."

"As your Majesty pleases," replied Henry.

The Emperor glanced towards Rinaldo, who answered by a look of astonishment.

"Your Grace seems out of spirits;--you will, I know, pardon my remark," said Frederic, cordially. "I trust that you have received no bad news from the Duchy, or that you have no domestic annoyances!"

"Domestic annoyances, only, Sire!" said Rinaldo.

"How so?"

Dassel read in Henry's silence, an invitation to take upon himself the explanation of the affair, and he began to paint in gloomy colors and with crafty skill the misfortune of the Duke, who, with all his power and renown, was doomed to leave no posterity to reflect his greatness and his fame.

"These sad facts have been the subject of our interview," he said. "Your Majesty will readily appreciate the natural despondency of a prince who looks beyond the present and who labors for ages yet unborn!"

"Really, I am deeply grieved," said Barbarossa, "but I can perceive no remedy. It does not seem as though Clemence were destined to realize your Grace's desires."

"Pardon my boldness," said Rinaldo, "if I venture to allude to your Majesty's course of conduct in a similar conjuncture."

"Very true! but every husband cannot, in the same case, do as I have done," said Frederic.

This remark was calculated to excite the pride of the Duke, who had always regarded Barbarossa as the main obstacle to his own desires of personal aggrandizement.

"The Emperor must fully understand and examine my position," said Henry, raising his head proudly. "I must observe that, were our cases reversed, your Majesty would meet that courtesy from the Duke."

"Particularly from the Duke of Saxony and Bavaria, who does not idly bear the title of 'the Lion,'" added Frederic. "But, in truth, the business is serious and difficult; and although the reason assigned for the divorce appears a valid one, it is not in our power to pass judgment. Pope Victor alone enjoys this prerogative."

The last observation was judiciously calculated. It was necessary that Henry should understand, positively and clearly, that it was only Frederic's Pope, who, upon the Emperor's order, would pronounce the dissolution of the marriage. He wished to be assured of Henry's defection from the party of Alexander III., from whom the Saxon prince had nothing to hope in the matter of the divorce. Frederic gazed at him attentively, for the Lion's silence appeared an encouraging omen, as he hitherto had been a zealous supporter of the claims of Alexander III. to the throne of St. Peter.

"We doubt not," resumed Barbarossa, after a moment's silence, "that his Holiness, upon our representations, will be persuaded."

"I would solicit your Majesty's intervention in this business, that it may be brought to a satisfactory conclusion as speedily as possible," said the Duke.

"As we have been ourselves in a similar position, we shall be able to advance most excellent reasons for its immediate solution. But I would advise that the Duchess be not informed of our project; it would cause her unnecessary pain, and a woman's tears must not influence in anyway the course of events."

The Chancellor seeing that his plot was progressing favorably, withdrew to seek for Conrad and his fair charge. He was anxious for Hermengarde's success, but less through pity for her misfortune than in the hope that it might further his own vile schemes. He found them in his own tent, which stood close by the Imperial pavilion. Hermengarde was seated in a corner of the apartment, gazing first at the sky and then towards the entrance, where she eagerly watched for the Chancellor's return. She trusted that her tears and entreaties would soften the heart of the Emperor. The monk had opened his breviary, and was praying, as Rinaldo entered smiling at the success of his plot against the Saxon Duke. He approached the young girl, and said kindly,--

"Pardon me, noble lady, if I have made you wait. In cases like yours, all depends upon choosing a seasonable moment. I think that moment has arrived."

These words awakened her hopes; but the thought that in a few moments her father's fate for weal or woe would be decided, took away her courage.

"Do not be alarmed; all will be well. Have no fear, and when you are before the Emperor, speak as your heart dictates. In such a case, that language is always more eloquent than studied words."

"Have you any hope?" asked Conrad, who sought to read the statesman's thoughts.

"Most excellent, my dear Abbot. The Emperor, I am positive, will grant Bonello's pardon. But hasten! and when you are summoned, lose no time."

He said a few more kind words to the young girl, and then left the tent. Meanwhile Frederic passed into the council-chamber, where the nobles sat discussing the siege of Milan and the future fate of the city. Obizzo, chief of the Italian auxiliaries, inveighed bitterly against the tyranny of the Milanese, and insisted upon making them submit to the same severe measures which they had inflicted upon Lodi. Obizzo's neighbor, dressed in full episcopal robes, and with a sword by his side, scarcely listened to the Italian's arguments, but watched eagerly the door of the Imperial chamber as though awaiting the presence of the monarch. It was Bishop Gero, of Halberstadt, elevated to that dignity by the powerful will of Barbarossa, in spite of all laws and justice, after the banishment of Bishop Ulrich.

That worthy prelate had sought refuge with the primate of Salzburg, and as Gero had heard of the arrival of the Archbishop's envoy, he began to fear the loss of his benefice. The bishops of Osnabruck and Minden, creatures of the Emperor, also spoke in favor of extreme measures. The Count Palatine, Otho of Wittelsbach, always impatient of long speeches, found Obizzo's harangue tedious, and began to grow angry. At this moment was heard the deep voice of Henry the Lion, the curtain was drawn aside, and Barbarossa, accompanied by the Dukes of Saxony, Bohemia, and Rottensburg, entered the room. Behind them came the Chancellor Rinaldo. The nobles bowed respectfully to the Emperor, who seated himself upon the throne prepared for him, whilst they placed themselves in a half circle before him. On his entrance, the Chancellor had arranged the curtains so as to leave a small opening, behind which stood an attendant awaiting his orders.

"Reasons of grave moment have decided us," said Barbarossa, "not to await the arrival of the Duke of Austria, but to march, to-morrow, upon Milan. With God's help, it will be for your gallantry to punish the crimes which this city has committed against justice, against the supremacy of the German nation, and against the Majesty of our own person. Conscious of their guilt, as they must be, these rebels cannot expect a war according to the dictates of generosity, but one of extermination. We desire to know whether our trusty allies agree with the expectations of our adversaries. The question then is this: shall the campaign be carried on with inexorable severity, or does the enemy deserve that we should exhibit a certain leniency, and a respect for persons and property?"

Henry the Lion, to whom belonged the right of speaking first, reflected for an instant. His chivalrous disposition did not sympathize with this war of extermination proposed by the Emperor, and a similar thought could be read in the countenance of the Duke of Rottensburg and the Count Palatine Otho.

The schismatical bishops, who understood at once that Barbarossa had determined upon the total destruction of the city, bent their heads in token of adhesion. They could scarcely wait for the moment of the ballot, so eager were they to give signs of their obedience. Obizzo moved impatiently upon his chair, unable to understand the hesitation of the Duke of Saxony.

"I came here with my Saxons and Bavarians to fight against the enemy," said the Lion; "to punish the rebels, and to make them acknowledge your sovereignty. But all this can be accomplished without laying waste this beautiful country. Why destroy their vines, uproot their trees, ruin their crops, burn their villages and hamlets? I am no partisan of useless cruelty."

"In other circumstances we would agree with you, noble Duke," replied Frederic; "but we think that Milan should receive the same treatment which she has inflicted upon other cities."

The Margrave Obizzo could no longer keep silence.

"Why show mercy to the scourge of all Lombardy? Milan has shed torrents of innocent blood, and has left to her victims only the choice between death or slavery! Yes," he cried, "Milan has a thousand times merited her destruction. And what I advance here, my lords, is not merely my individual opinion, but the sentiment of all Lombardy."

Obizzo's arguments coincided with the desires of the Emperor, but as he was about to continue, the latter stopped him by a look.

"You have not exaggerated, Margrave," said he, "but your emotions have carried you, perhaps, too far. What is your opinion, my Lord of Rottensburg?"

Although at heart opposed to the destruction of Milan, a punishment, in his opinion, much too severe, this prince was too anxious to conciliate the Emperor's favor to venture upon a remonstrance, and he yielded an immediate assent to the monarch's views.

The Duke of Bohemia likewise voted in favor of sack and pillage.

"And you, Count Palatine?" again inquired Barbarossa.

"I share the opinions of Duke Henry!" replied Wittelsbach; "the enemy should not have cause to think us savages!"

"If you wish to gain the enemy's good graces, my dear Count, you must treat him more gently in battle!" said the Emperor, recording the votes, which, as might have been expected, were in accordance with the Imperial wishes.

The Duke of Saxony dropped his heavy sword, with a loud crash upon the floor, and twisting his long beard, glared angrily upon the vile courtiers.

"You are not obliged to conform to the decisions of the Council," said Frederic, endeavoring to calm the Duke's anger; "we will trust to your own discretion in your relations with the enemy.-- But," continued he, "some one must inform the Abbot of St. Augustine, whose monastery is near Milan, that he must solicit us to spare his convent and its dependencies. Those monks are determined opponents of His Holiness Pope Victor, and warm partisans of the Cardinal Roland."

Henry was about to say a word in defence of the Abbot, and urge that religious discussions were scarcely a valid reason for burning a monastery; but he reflected at the impossibility of obtaining from Alexander III. the dissolution of his marriage, and he was silent.

"Those monks are your Majesty's most dangerous enemies," said Obizzo; "they continually excite the people and kindle the spirit of rebellion, on the pretext that your Majesty robs the Church of her liberty, and seeks to submit everything to your power."

Rinaldo here made a sign to the attendant, who immediately disappeared.

"As far as I know," said Werner, Bishop of Minden, who never let pass an opportunity for the display of his learning, "those monks follow the rule of St. Augustine, which Rule, Book II., chap. 12, forbids them expressly, taking part in worldly affairs, and recommends study and a life of contemplation."

"Pardon," interrupted Barbarossa, who feared a learned dissertation, "St. Augustine's rule has no connection with the question now before us."

"Certainly," said the prelate, humbly; "the rule has no connection with the rebellion. I merely cited it to show that I heartily approved of the punishment of the Augustinians."

"It seems to me," said Gero, Bishop of Halberstadt, "that these monks richly deserve punishment, since they have refused to acknowledge the Pope appointed by the Emperor, to whom belongs, by immemorial custom, the right of nominating the Roman Pontiff. For this reason alone, if none other existed, the followers of St. Augustine deserve to be treated as rebels."

Not a voice was raised in defence of the poor monks, and it was decided that their monastery should be destroyed.

The Emperor was returning his thanks to the princes for their able counsels, when the silken curtain which closed the entrance to the tent was thrown wide open. On the threshold stood the stately form of the Abbot Conrad holding by the hand the trembling Hermengarde--a shrinking girl by the side of a gray-haired man. Near them stood Erwin, the Emperor's godson; for the youth, touched by the girl's misfortunes, had hastened to offer his services in her cause. His relationship to Barbarossa permitted him to follow the Abbot to the council-chamber, where he intended to use every effort to advance the cause of the unhappy Hermengarde.

The Emperor appeared surprised and annoyed, the presence of the Abbot and his charge explained the purport of their visit, and a sombre frown augured ill for their success; but the nobles who were present could not but sympathize with her grief.

"Pardon, Sire," said the Abbot, bowing respectfully to the Emperor and the nobles; "my faith in your generosity emboldens me to plead, once more, in favor of the unfortunate. Before you stands a wretched daughter, whom the father's death will leave a helpless orphan, at a time when a fierce war is raging throughout the land. Will not your Majesty deign to lend an ear to pity?--it is a virtue which becomes a monarch, as much as justice."

While Conrad spoke, Hermengarde had fallen upon her knees; but spite all her efforts, she could only falter out--

"Pity--mercy!--for the love of God! Be merciful!"

Barbarossa remained seated; his scowling gaze turned upon the Abbot.

"You might have spared yourself this effort, my lord Abbot," said he violently; "do you imagine that a woman's tears could succeed, where your arguments have failed?"

"I had hoped it, Sire. It is natural to the human heart to be touched by the tears and prayers of the innocent. I hoped for nothing less from your Majesty's!"

They were alarmed at the bold demeanor of the Abbot, but the Lion bowed his head approvingly, and Barbarossa's scowl deepened. During the scene, Rinaldo had narrowly scanned the Duke's countenance, as if to mark the effect produced upon him by the remarkable beauty of the fair suppliant. But the crafty statesman was wrong if he imagined that a man of the Lion's character could be ensnared so easily. Had the Duke given any indication that the plot so skilfully

imagined would be successful, the Chancellor would have urged Bonello's cause, but Henry's countenance remained impassive. Hermengarde was still upon her knees weeping bitterly, and her face hidden in her hands. At times she looked upon the Emperor, striving to collect her thoughts, but the stern face of the monarch appalled her.

"Pity!" she cried. "Spare my father's life; he regrets his crime! Oh! pardon him!"

"Enough of these lamentations!" said Barbarossa; "let some one lead this woman hence!"

The Bishop Gero hastened to comply with the Emperor's wishes, whilst the latter explained to those present the crime of which Bonello had been guilty.

"If you consider our sentence unjust, speak, and the criminal shall be released," said he.

"Bonello is a valiant soldier, although he has drawn his sword in a bad cause," replied Otho. "Still, I implore you to pardon him for his daughter's sake."

"Pardon him, Sire. I fear your sentence may cause the death of two persons," said Henry, pointing to the pale and trembling Hermengarde.

"This time justice must take its course," answered Barbarossa.

"The sentence is perfectly just," added Werner, of Minden. "Who would deserve death, if traitors were allowed to go unpunished?"

The two other bishops nodded in token of approval; they never dissented from any apparent desire of Barbarossa.

"You perceive, my lord Abbot, that it is impossible for us to pardon----"

He interrupted himself abruptly at the sight of Hermengarde, who fell fainting upon a chair.

"Enough of this, my lord Conrad, you may withdraw," and he motioned that they should take away the girl.

At this moment Erwin advanced, already deeply interested in Hermengarde's suffering; his godfather's stern refusal to her appeals affected him painfully. Bowing to the Emperor, with a bright flush upon his face, he said,--

"Pardon, Sire, if I venture to recall to Your Majesty's memory the recent battle, and the promise then made to grant me a favor."

"Ah! I trust that you will not make an improper use of my promise, Erwin?"

"An improper use--no, upon my honor. The favor which I now solicit, Sire, is the life and liberty of Bonello, this young girl's father."

"Is this petition serious, Count?" said Barbarossa, turning to him, angrily.

"It cannot be more so, Sire," answered the young man, promptly.

"Reflect well, boy, on what you ask," said the Emperor, fiercely. "Do not play with our promise--it is sacred; but----"

And he raised his right hand menacingly.

"If my petition were dictated by egotism, it might be considered an abuse of your Imperial promise; but I merely solicit the life and liberty of a man whose protection is necessary to his daughter's happiness. In this I merely perform an act of humanity, and perhaps of chivalry."

"Well," said Barbarossa, after a moment of angry silence, "since you persist in a demand which we cannot refuse, be it so! Bonello is free! But you, Count Erwin of Rechberg, for the improper use to which you put our word, we withdraw from you our favor. You are banished from the Court----"

He did not conclude, for Erwin, almost stupefied with astonishment, threw himself at his feet, and taking the monarch's hand,--

"Sire," said he, "in pity, withhold this sentence--do not banish me from your presence--at least not now! Let me remain near you--you who are so menaced with perils on every side. Ah! let me still continue to watch over your precious life, and prove to you my gratitude for the almost paternal love and care which, until to-day, you have ever shown me! As a boy, I played upon your knees; it was from you I learned to use the sword and the lance; you have been to me a second father! Ah! my beloved godfather, do not send me into exile! Without you I care not to live!"

The touching prayer of this devoted heart produced its effect upon the monarch, from whose face all sternness gradually passed, to give place to an expression of a more kindly nature.

"Rise," said he; "you are a great flatterer, Erwin! It may be, too, a crafty knave! What think

you, gentlemen?"

The nobles were somewhat surprised at this exhibition of feeling on the part of their sovereign, but their satisfaction was evident. The Emperor continued,--

"We must not give any evidence of weakness, and as a punishment for the great interest which you have shown in favor of this culprit, you shall be banished, for a week's time, from our camp. This punishment will enable you to conduct to her home, the damsel whose cause you have so chivalrously advocated."

Emotion and fear at first did not allow Hermengarde to take in all the details of the scene. But when the youth came to tell her of her father's pardon, her joy and gratitude knew no bounds. Rising hurriedly, she would have thrown herself at the Emperor's feet, but he waved her away impatiently.

"You have no cause to thank me," he said. "Farewell, madam; this business has wearied us!" He signed to her to withdraw, and Conrad, Rechberg, and Hermengarde left the tent.

CHAPTER XI.

THE JOURNEY.

Erwin thought it advisable to accompany Bonello and his daughter until they had reached a place of safety. Well aware of the dangers of the road, and the bitter party feeling throughout Lombardy, he feared lest the old man might lose his life, were he to meet any of the soldiers from Lodi, Pavia, Cremona, or the other cities which were leagued against Milan. He therefore procured a strong armed escort to protect his friends in case of attack. Whilst the Count of Rechberg was making his preparations, Hermengarde and the Abbot hastened to the castle to communicate the glad tidings of their success to the prisoner, who, in a transport of joyful emotion, threw himself upon his daughter's breast, with tears of pious gratitude. The Abbot looked on calmly. Pietro Nigri, as though he regretted that the tyrant had granted his old friend's pardon, gazed on in gloomy indifference. After the first moments of their joyful greeting, Guido requested to be informed of the details, and the Abbot Conrad related the scene which had taken place between the Emperor and the young Count.

"Where is the noble youth?" asked Bonello; "why did you not bring him here?"

At that moment was heard the clatter of horses' hoofs, and the clank of armor, in the castle-yard, and Erwin, hastily dismounting, made his way towards the tower. Bonello watched him anxiously; and when the Count, in brilliant armor, entered the room, he rushed towards him, seized his hand, and fell upon his knees.

"Most excellent young man!" he cried; "you are my preserver! may God reward you for your kindness to my child! Heaven grant me the power to prove to you my gratitude! Anything which you may ask of me shall be yours. May God bless and keep you."

The old man spoke in a voice choked with emotion. Erwin interrupted him, for he was pained to see Bonello at his feet.

"Rise, my lord, I beg of you. Your thanks overwhelm me. I have only acted as any other gentleman would have done, in my place. I merely crave the favor of accompanying you to your home."

At this new mark of kind consideration, Bonello was about to utter further words of gratitude; but the Count interrupted him by the announcement that all was ready for their departure. They left the tower, and entered the court-yard of the castle, where stood Hermengarde's palfrey, and a splendid courser for her father. The parting between Bonello and the Abbot was touching; they embraced one another, and the prelate returned to the camp. Pietro Nigri mounted sullenly, glancing haughtily upon the young girl, and contemptuously at her father.

"Farewell, lady," he said; "I wish you every happiness. As to you, Sir," he added, "I sincerely trust that you may never have cause to regret the life which you owe to a tyrant's mercy,--a life destined to be passed unprofitably, for all that concerns the honor and well-being of your country."

He dashed off before Guido could reply, and the others hastened to leave the castle, where some of them, at least, had suffered so acutely.

At the foot of the hill, they struck towards the south, and then diverged from the main road. Erwin was anxious to please his guests, and readily yielded to Bonello's guidance. The latter was perfectly familiar with the country, and desired to avoid any meeting with the Italian soldiery. For, though firmly resolved never to draw his sword again, he was pained at the sight of so many Lombards hurrying to join Barbarossa's legions and attack Milan, the most important bulwark of Italian independence, so they took a cross road which speedily led them to the summit of the plain. Every precaution had been taken against the marauders who then infested the country. In front, rode two men-at-arms; then came Rechberg, followed by Hermengarde and her father, and four other troopers closed the rear of the escort.

"We must hasten," said Guido, "in order to arrive before nightfall at the monastery of San Pietro; it will be sufficient for the first day's journey, and by starting at dawn to-morrow, we shall reach my castle before the evening."

Erwin had wished to learn some of the particulars about Bonello's family, and he at once profited by the present opening.

"Only by to-morrow evening?" said he; "then your castle must be near the Lower Alps?"

"In their very midst, Count; in the very heart of the Alps," replied Guido. "If, as I suppose, you like mountain-castles, mine will please you. Years ago, when I visited Germany, I used to admire your fortresses perched upon the craggy peaks, like immense eagles' nests. The evident disposition of the Teutonic nobility to shun the cities and low grounds, and occupy the heights, is a mark of sound judgment. Our ancestors, also, knew how and where to build their strongholds. Did you ever see Castellamare?"

"Is that your dwelling?"

"Yes," answered Bonello. "The Romans from whom I am descended, erected the fortress, and it has been in my family from time immemorial."

"Doubtless, during your absence, your son commands in the castle?"

"I have no son," answered the old man, somewhat sadly.

"That pale-faced young man, who was with you at Cinola, is perhaps one of your relations?"

"Pietro Nigri? Oh, not precisely, but almost!" Here the young girl's horse plunged violently.

"Take care, my child; your horse seems inclined to be troublesome," said Guido. "Pietro," he resumed, "is the son of the Milanese Consul Nigri. He is a most worthy young man; he was my daughter's escort to Cinola."

They approached the monastery, around whose walls the twilight mist was slowly rising. Still, from afar, could be seen the dark red windows of stained glass; and the gilded cross upon the tower, illuminated with the rays of the setting sun, shone bright through the evening haze. Bonello gazed eagerly upon this glad haven of rest, as they hastened forward.

At the sound of the bell, a grating was drawn aside.

"Open, open, brother Ignatius!" cried the lord of Castellamare to the monk, who examined the appearance of the visitors. "We wish a lodging for the night, and a flask of your best wine."

Soon a key grated in the lock, the gates opened, and the little cavalcade rode into the courtyard.

"You are most welcome, my lord," said Ignatius, cordially; "pardon me if I have made you wait. We are obliged to be most prudent, for the country is filled with marauders, who have little respect for the sanctity of our poor cloisters. Your arrival here is truly gratifying to us all; but we regret our superior's absence."

"Where is he?"

"In Genoa."

"I am extremely sorry," said Guido; "for we might have talked together until matins."

The horses were led to the stables, and a lay brother conducted the travellers to the refectory. Several long benches and tables, two comfortable arm-chairs, a handsome crucifix upon the wall, and a bronze *aspersorium*, composed all the furniture of the room. Seating himself in one of the arm-chairs, Guido at once entered into conversation with the lay brother, whose mission it was not only to receive, but also to entertain all visitors to the convent.

"The holy Abbot is at Genoa, you say?" inquired Bonello. "He absents himself so rarely that there must have been grave reasons for his journey."

The monk glanced distrustfully at Erwin, and was silent. Rechberg concluded that the Order belonged to Alexander's party and had incurred the displeasure of the Emperor. The repast was

soon brought in, and the tired travellers partook eagerly of the three copious dishes. The servants were entertained in another room. The rest of the evening was passed in conversation; but Bonello made no allusion to political affairs, and the monk imitated his example, although it was evident that he would gladly have spoken of the German army and the perils now menacing the Church. But the presence of the young nobleman imposed silence upon his curiosity.

Erwin felt this reserve the more so that he feared lest Guido might suspect him of repeating to the Emperor what he had already overheard. He would gladly have talked with Hermengarde, but it seemed as if she meant to model her conduct by her father's, and all his attempts to engage her in conversation were ineffectual.

"She considers me the enemy of her country," he thought; "perhaps avoids me as a heretic. At least she might remember what I have done for her sake."

The idea was painful to him, and he was heartily glad when they separated for the night. Next morning they resumed their journey. The summits of the Alps grew more distinct, and Hermengarde's spirits appeared to brighten as they approached her home. She conversed gayly with Rechberg and asked many artless questions about Germany and its inhabitants, and he was charmed with the interest she evinced in his native land.

"Have you any mountains like those in Germany?" said she, pointing to the Alps.

"Yes, lady; and our mountains are covered with forests in which roam the stag, the roebuck, and the wild boar; but the bear, much to the delight of the traveller and the chagrin of true hunters, becomes every day more rare.

"Bears! but is it possible that any one can regret the disappearance of those fierce animals!"

"Oh! a bear-hunt has its charms!"

"Very dangerous ones, I should think."

"But it is precisely on account of their danger that this sport is attractive, fair lady. To slay a timid stag requires little courage, but a struggle with the bear needs both bravery and skill. The bear-hunt is the school in which we take our first lessons in the art of war."

The Count's earnestness proved that he spoke of one of his favorite pastimes.

"In what part of Germany is your domain, Count?" said Hermengarde, after a short pause.

"In Suabia."

"If I mistake not, Suabia is the birthplace of the Hohenstauffen?"

"Precisely, noble lady! The castles of Hohenstauffen and Rechberg are neighboring ones. Our families have always been intimate and are even connected by ties of blood."

Erwin almost regretted his last remark when he reflected that his relationship with Barbarossa would be a poor recommendation in the eyes of the young Lombard.

"I fear that our journey will be unpleasantly interrupted," said Bonello, who, for some time, had been watching a gray speck on the summit of the mountain.

"In what way, sir knight?"

"Do you see that castle? It is the dwelling of the Emperor's prefect, Herman, who is in charge of yonder bridge. He is a cruel, bad man, and levies tolls to suit his own pleasure, particularly when the travellers are wealthy or of high rank. He has on several occasions seized upon persons and held them prisoners until a high ransom has been paid for their release."

"But this is a crying injustice," said the Count, "and should be reported to His Majesty, who would punish Herman severely for his abuse of power." Bonello shook his head, with a smile.

"Herman merely executes the Emperor's orders," said he. Rechberg looked at the speaker with astonishment. He was loth to believe that such an insult to his sovereign were possible. Bonello resumed,--

"Barbarossa knows perfectly well all about his deputy here, but there are other exactions of which I believe him still ignorant. He has reduced several families to utter beggary, and when he can squeeze nothing more out of them himself, he sells them to the Jews. This is what he calls 'balancing his accounts.' I have known instances where he has stretched the poor wretches on the rack to extort from them their last pennies. In short, this Herman, the terror of the country, is a disgrace to humanity. But there are other deputies of the Emperor in some of the cities, who are equally merciless in their exactions."

"I can scarcely credit your statements," replied the young Count; "but I feel sure that upon the first complaint of such enormities Frederic would interfere."

"You make a grave mistake," said Bonello. "I have personally represented the facts to the Emperor, but in vain; his invariable answer has been, that it was the duty of his agents to collect the taxes and imposts, and if they were obliged to resort to extreme measures, that it was doubtless the fault of the inhabitants who refused to pay their dues."

They rode on in silence. The young Count was dejected, for he began to perceive that it was natural for men like Bonello to resist such an arbitrary exercise of tyranny.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TOLL.

They reached the bridge. On either side were two massive towers, over which floated the Imperial standard. Heavy barriers closed the pathway, and a strong body of men-at-arms defended the approach. Halfway from the bridge, on the summit of a lofty hill, stood the castle of Herman, built to command the road, which, as the main avenue to Genoa, was extensively travelled, and yielded an important revenue to the Imperial treasury. The castle had been destroyed by the Italians, during the reign of Henry V., but had been rebuilt by Frederic, at the time of his second invasion of Upper Italy, at which time Herman had been installed as Governor.

The soldiers were clustered beneath the porch; but a sentinel was watching from one of the loop-holes of the tower, and as he caught sight of the travellers, called out gayly to the others, "Halloa! comrades, here comes a rich prize: a Lombard knight, some Genoese merchants, and a lady! Levy a heavy toll, *Dietho*, they can afford to pay it; and if you will follow my advice, you will get something for us; the Emperor cannot find fault if honest folks think now and then of their own pockets!"

The challenge of the sentinel interrupted him, and the soldiers left the porch and drew up in front of the tower.

"What is that you say about merchants?" said Dietho, glancing sharply at the strangers. "These are no merchants, but a troop of armed men."

"Pshaw!" continued the first speaker, as he looked again. "There are only six,--two before and four behind; for I don't count those in the middle. It is only some of those lazy Genoese. And we are twelve here, and pretty determined fellows too! Now, Dietho, don't forget to lay it on heavily!"

"We will lay it on heavily," said another; "for since yesterday we have had no luck at all."

Dietho, who wore the purse at his girdle as a sign that it was he who received the tolls, carefully examined the travellers, but he seemed discontented, and shook his head.

"There is nothing to be made here; these people advance too boldly. I believe they are Germans."

"Well, and what of that," said the warder, who had descended from the tower. "No one passes here gratis."

"What do you say, Dietho? Do you think a piece of gold each for the gentlefolks, and two silver pennies for the servants, would be enough?"

Dietho shrugged his shoulders.

"It would be enough," he said; "but I fear they will refuse to pay it."

"Then we will force them!" cried several of the soldiers, brandishing their pikes. "A piece of gold for each gentleman, and two pence a piece for the servants, is little enough!"

Rechberg had left Hermengarde's side, and at the head of his little troop rode forward to ascertain if Bonello's complaints were really well founded. As he approached, his noble bearing and costly armor, with the splendid horse which he rode, gave a high idea of his importance to the men-at-arms.

"Look how his gilded helmet shines," said they, "and mark the gold on his spurs and his baldric; he is certainly a count, at least; or, mayhap, the son of some duke!--Oh! that fellow can pay, Dietho; ask at least three gold pieces!"

Rechberg continued to advance towards the closed town, whose guardians made no movement

towards opening the passage.

"Take down the barrier, and allow me to pass," he said, politely.

"One moment, noble sir!--Don't you perceive that the Imperial banner floats above the tower? There is a toll to pay. Frederic would find it a hard matter to keep up his army if his taxes were not paid up! Besides, his Hungarian Archers need their wages. In short, the times are hard and the toll dear!"

The Count was provoked at the observations thus made, for they were of a nature to incense the Italians, and render the Emperor still more unpopular among them. However, he mastered his anger, and asked what there was to pay.

"Four gold pieces!" cried a voice, for Dietho hesitated.

"All right, you hear, four gold pieces, on account of the hard times," added Dietho. "The lady and her companion will also pay eight more, and each servant two pence, in all twelve gold pieces and twelve pennies! Little enough, too, if you but think what an army Frederic is organizing at present."

"As well as I remember," said Erwin, "the legal toll is a penny for each person. By what right do you raise it a hundredfold?"

"I told you once already," replied Dietho;--"it is because the times are hard."

"Besides, we are not here to give explanations to milk-sops," said a voice from within. "Pay, or leave the bridge!"

"Miserable hound! do you dare to speak thus to a knight?" cried Erwin, passionately. "Here are your twelve pennies; now clear the way!"

"The varlets may pass," said Dietho, coolly pocketing the money; "but for the others to cross this beautiful bridge, which has cost so much money to build, there are just twelve pieces too few!"

"If you do not do your duty at once," said the knight, laying his hand on his sword, "I will compel you."

At this, the guard burst into a loud laugh of derision.

"Come on then," they cried; "if that is your game, we will give you a lesson in arithmetic."

Rechberg was disposed to force the passage, but Bonello hastened to interfere.

"Have no difficulty with those people," he cried; "I will pay what they ask!"

"No! you shall not," said the Count. "This robbery of travellers, in the name of the Emperor, is a crime which must not go unpunished. Leave me; it is a meritorious action to chastise such scoundrels!"

All at once Herman appeared; he had overheard the quarrel, and now came to give assistance to his men.

Erwin lowered his visor, for the prefect knew him, and the young man wished to be positive of his complicity.

"What is the matter?" asked Herman.

"It is fortunate that you are here, my lord," replied Dietho. "This young man has been threatening to use his sword against us because we would not allow his whole party to cross for twelve paltry pennies."

"For twelve pennies!--You and your retinue!--You could not have seriously thought it," said Herman to the Count.

"Twelve pennies are just the legal tax, for we are but nine persons in all."

"Ah!" said the prefect; "perhaps you mean to teach me my duty, and what I have the right to ask?"

"The law has fixed the tariff sufficiently."

"Has it, indeed! Dietho, what did you charge this gentleman?"

"Twelve pieces of gold for the three nobles, and twelve pennies for the servants.--Pardon me if my demand was too moderate."

"It was, indeed, too moderate," cried Herman, glancing towards Bonello.--"You traitors have compelled the Emperor to cross the Alps, and now, if I am to judge by your lowered visor, you

wish to force the bridge!--Very well, come on. We are ready for you!"

The Count, at last fully convinced that the Governor was as guilty as his soldiers, raised his visor, and showed his face flushed with anger.

Herman was thunderstruck, and could scarcely falter out,--

"Oh, my dear Count, pardon! I crave you a thousand pardons! It is all a mistake,--but who could have supposed for a moment--?"

But the more he endeavored to apologize for his villainy, the more embarrassed he became. The soldiers, meanwhile, perceiving the sudden change in their master's demeanor, hastened to remove the barrier.

"It is not my place to pardon," said Rechberg; "you must explain your gross abuse of authority to His Majesty, who shall be acquainted with everything."

He turned abruptly, and crossed the bridge with his companions.

The prefect tore his hair with impotent despair as he saw the troop file past him.

"To behave thus to the Emperor's favorite! What a dreadful misfortune!" he cried. "Comrades, make no excuses, no recriminations! I would not care for the complaints of Italy. Frederic would credit nothing which was denied by an honest German. But this Erwin of Rechberg!--Oh, if I could atone for this stupid mistake!"

The travellers soon after reached a convent, whose reputation for hospitality was widely spread; for, in that century, the monasteries were the best, and indeed, almost the only hostleries.

After a brief rest they resumed their journey, and it was near nightfall when they entered a deep and narrow Alpine valley, through which they were obliged to pass.

"We are very near Castellamare," said Bonello, "and but for the windings of the road, should already have perceived the castle!"

"This is a magnificent country, my lord!" said Erwin, admiring the bold and wild landscape.

"It is almost the same as far as the shore," resumed Guido. "The valley gradually narrows into a defile overhung with immense masses of rock, and when we leave it, the wide expanse of the sea bursts, unexpectedly, upon the traveller's gaze."

The road narrowed visibly. The setting sun gilded the Alpine summits, and long, dark shadows darkened the lower slopes. At a turn of the road, the sunlight flashed brightly upon them, and Erwin, raising his dazzled eyes, beheld the fortress of Castellamare standing out from the giant boulders in bold relief.

"What a magnificent spectacle!" exclaimed Rechberg. "I have never seen a castle in a better or more commanding position!"

Following, for a short time, a steep mountain-path, they drew up before a gateway, hollowed in the solid rock, and soon after entered the fortress of Castellamare.

CHAPTER XIII.

CASTELLAMARE.

Rechberg's visit to Castellamare opened to him a future replete with new hopes and desires and fond aspirations. He resolved to study attentively the character of his young hostess; and, if the examination proved favorable, to demand her father's consent to their marriage. But he experienced a cruel uncertainty, when he reflected upon the possible opposition of the Emperor.

On her part, the young girl made no secret of her gratitude to the Count. The memory of his kindness to her father rendered her cordiality perfectly natural.

Her attentions to Erwin were delicately prompted by a wish to make his visit as agreeable as possible. With a keen appreciation of the beauties of nature, she knew how to select the fairest landscapes, and would point out to her guest all the most brilliant effects of light and shade among the lofty crags.

After a week had passed in amusements of this kind, on their return from a neighboring excursion, Hermengarde and the Count found the court-yard filled with horses and men-at-arms fraternizing, cordially, with her father's retainers. Evidently some persons of importance had arrived, but the appearance of their steeds denoted that the visit was to be a brief one.

As they crossed the court, Hermengarde remarked a familiar face among the troopers; the man looked up, and, putting down the goblet from which he was drinking, approached with a respectful bow. She at once recognized Cocco Griffi, whom she had known as a confidential servant of the Milanese consul Gherardo Nigri, in whose palace he was often intrusted with many important duties.

"Is that you, Griffi?" she asked. "Whence come you?"

"From Milan."

"And whose suite is this?"

"It belongs to our noble Consul Gherardo Nigri--your old friend,--if I may still venture to call him so?" added Griffi, seeing Hermengarde's expression change.

A marriage between herself and Pietro had long been projected by the heads of the two families; but, in spite of her father's anxiety for their union, it was repugnant to her, and she hurriedly retired to her own apartments, with a heavy heart. Still, for the present, the businesslike appearance of the little troop seemed a guarantee against the realization of her fears.

Gherardo Nigri, the leading spirit of the Milanese Republic, had been hastily recalled from Genoa, where he had been for some time negotiating an alliance, offensive and defensive, between the two cities. The report of the immediate advance of the Emperor's powerful army greatly discouraged him; for, fully penetrating Barbarossa's designs, he foresaw, in a not far distant future, the fall, and perhaps the total destruction, of his proud city. Similar fears agitated all those who had accompanied him to Castellamare. Among them was one, in ecclesiastical costume, whose exterior indicated a personage of importance. This was Galdini Sala, Archdeacon of the Cathedral, and destined, as Archbishop of Milan, afterwards to play an important part in the history of his country. By nature taciturn and reflective,--his eyes usually downcast,--Sala became animated and bold whenever it became necessary to assert the rights of the Church, which alone could resist human passion and the encroachments of Imperial despotism. Consequently, Galdini's opposition to Barbarossa was more than violent.

"The circumstances are most serious," said Bonello; "but we must not forget that God alone is the arbiter of human destiny. Barbarossa seeks to unite in his own person the spiritual and the temporal power; but we have seen others, as bold and powerful as he, fail in the like attempt."

"You are right," replied Gherardo; "no power can subdue the Church. The papacy is eternal,--as immovable as the rock on which it is built, and which, God has promised, shall endure forever. But, alas! dear Guido, what fearful disasters must result from the strife which is now preparing!"

"It would be easy to prove," said Galdini Sala, "that the Church has never had an enemy so dangerous to her peace as this same Barbarossa. From the times of Nero until the conversion of Constantine, the bloody tyrants strove only to tear away her members. Frederic does not tear away; he stifles! his deadly work is the more dangerous, that it is wrought in silence. The Pagans would have overthrown Christianity, in order to prevent their own conversion; but this despot seeks to destroy the order of things which has existed for centuries. The Roman Emperors sought to protect and save their own paganism. Frederic would subvert the Christian world, in order to build up, upon its ruins, his own Imperial omnipotence."

"I am not well versed in history," said Count Biandrate, a secret partisan of Barbarossa; "but I know of other emperors who were decidedly hostile to the Papacy: Henry IV. for example."

"True," replied Sala; "but the Church has saved the world from destruction. The military operations of Henry IV. against her were terrible; his hatred for the Papacy, beyond all bounds; but Barbarossa is still more to be feared. In him you see none of that cruelty which marked Henry's conduct; on the contrary, he appears frank, and generous, and brave, and he well knows how to surround himself with all that can flatter the eyes. So far, he has not attacked the Pope, sword in hand; but he holds his nets ready to throw over Spain and England, Germany and France, in order to ensnare all Christendom in his baneful schism. It is to this end that he never ceases to proclaim his regret for the sorrows of the Holy Church, and his great desire for the acknowledgment of the legitimate Pope, and the downfall of heresy. All hypocrisy, diabolical equivocation!" cried Sala, angrily; "it is he himself who has caused the schism; it is he who has wounded the unity of the Church, in order the more easily to destroy her. He seeks to control everything,--to become the master of the Universe,--and will brook neither a superior nor an equal!"

"Your words, my lord Archdeacon, are harrowing, but they are not exaggerated," said Nigri. "And it is the more to be regretted that many refuse to see their peril. Genoa, through jealousy of Milan, is wilfully blind and will not reflect that the time may come, when she too will feel the yoke. Barbarossa is skilful in taking advantage of these dissensions between us Lombards. His

policy is to destroy, one by one, our cities; so that Italy may count none but insignificant villages, submissive to his Imperial supremacy."

"According to my belief," said Guido, "I repeat what I have already declared:--God alone holds the destinies of the world in his power. What Barbarossa tries now, many others have attempted, but the efforts of all have proved abortive; Frederic will not be more successful. Then, dear friends, trust in God, and do your duty; the rest will come in good time."

At these words he raised his goblet, the others imitated his example; but in spite of his efforts, the meeting was disheartened and depressed, and shortly after the consul observed that it was time to think of their journey.

"We have no time to lose," said he, "for there is much to be done in Milan; it will be hard enough to resist the attack."

They mounted to return to the city, and Bonello watched from the window, the little troop as it wound through the valley.

"Farewell, dear Gherardo," said he sadly; "perhaps this has been our last meeting! How gladly they hasten to shed their hearts' blood for their liberty, their Church, and their country! while I, unhappy wretch! am doomed by my promise, to sloth and inaction!"

The cavalcade disappeared from his gaze, and he reentered the family room, when Count Rechberg communicated his intention of leaving the castle on the following day.

"Why this haste, Count?" said Guido. "I trust that you have had no cause to regret your visit?"

"Oh! by no means, but I must go. The Emperor granted me only eight days' leave of absence, and I must not exceed them."

"You have no cause for such haste," resumed the Lombard, sadly. "Milan is well supplied with everything, and her fortifications are strong. Months may elapse before Barbarossa can take the city."

"The Emperor's will is energetic," replied Erwin.

"Oh! I well know that iron will!" said Guido. "Frederic will destroy the works, and reduce the citadel by famine; but still before this happens, many weary days will pass. Some months hence, you will still be in time for the fighting. Stay with us. We will go to Genoa together, and look upon the wonders of that proud city; we will visit her churches, her magnificent palaces, her dock-yards, and her fleet; there is much there to repay you for the journey, and, if you wish it, we can cross over to Corsica."

But nothing could influence the youth's resolve, although it was with deep regret that he left Bonello and his daughter; both of whom reiterated their warmest thanks.

"Permit me, dear Count, to offer you a trifling souvenir," said the lord of the castle, drawing a heavy gold chain from a casket. "Wear this in remembrance of me, and may our friendship ever remain as pure and true as this noble metal! Have you nothing, Hermengarde, to give to our worthy friend?"

At these words, the young girl took from one of her waiting-women a richly chiselled cup of gold, on whose cover was sculptured St. George trampling upon the Dragon.

"Deign to accept this slight mark of our friendship and gratitude!" said she.

"I trust, my dear Count, that we shall meet again ere long," added Guido. "Milan is not far distant, and an excursion to our mountains will break the monotony of your camp-life."

"I will gladly avail myself on every possible occasion of your invitation," answered Rechberg. "Farewell, dear Bonello; God keep you, noble lady!"

And as she extended him her hand, he knelt and kissed it.

Guido accompanied his guest to the court-yard, and in a few moments, the hoofs of the knight's charger were ringing upon the drawbridge of the castle.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SIEGE.

Erwin was soon able to realize the devastations committed by the Emperor's army. In the place of smiling hamlets and rich villas, nothing could be seen but smoking ruins; the fruit-trees had been uprooted, the vines pulled up, the crops laid waste. Here and there were the bodies of peasants swinging from the trees, the ground was strewn with booty abandoned carelessly by the marauders. The plain once so green and smiling, appeared as sad and barren as a Russian steppe.

This desolation afflicted Erwin painfully, and he rode rapidly forward to escape the mournful spectacle. Soon could be seen the tents of the Imperial camp, with the varied standards floating proudly above the sharp roofs of the canvas city. The vague hum of the multitude was mingled with the clang of arms and the strains of martial music, and the noise of the workmen in the trenches. From the elevated point on which he stood, Erwin could distinguish the beleaguered city with its mighty walls above which towered the brilliant edifices and lofty turrets. As he gazed with admiration upon the town, Rechberg could not but experience a feeling of sorrow at the thought that all this greatness and power was doomed to destruction. After a short ride he found himself in the interior of the camp, where it was easy to perceive that he was almost entirely surrounded by the Italian contingents.

The complete investment of the city was impossible, and Frederic, in consequence, had established four distinct attacks, surrounded by strong palisades and deep ditches as a protection to the sorties of the besieged. Although, at intervals of distance, the camps commanded all the avenues of approach, and it was impossible for the garrison to receive any supplies or reinforcements, or hold any communication with the exterior. As it had been decided to reduce the place by famine, a rigid blockade was enforced, and the different leaders were relieved from the necessity of constructing any of those clumsy machines, under cover of which in those days the assaults upon the works were conducted. However, Henry the Lion had ordered the building of an immense tower whose proportions excited general astonishment. It was upon wheels, six stories in height, and could accommodate beneath it a thousand soldiers. The upper part was narrower and provided with doors, through which the garrison could pass, by means of temporary bridges, on to the walls of the city. Sorties from the town were of almost daily occurrence, and the personal hatred of the combatants gave to these engagements a most sanguinary character. Whilst the Italians were engaged in this work of mutual self-destruction, Frederic was preparing to submit them all to his Imperial sway.

While the besieged were ready to suffer every extremity in defence of their sacred rights, the greatest agitation reigned in the camp of the Italian auxiliaries. Sworn enemies, for years detesting each other, they were now compelled to live in the forced proximity of a narrow camp. Leagued together by their common hatred for Milan, the old leaven still, at times, broke out into open violence, and it required the most stern and almost cruel severity of the Emperor to preserve anything like order among them. Frederic had learned, by experience, that fear was the only master whom they would obey.

Rechberg perceived an immense crowd of strangers pressing towards the vast open space in the middle of the encampment. Jousts and military games were, in that age, so much the fashion, that, even under the walls of a beleaguered town, a place was set apart for the purpose. But on this occasion it seemed as though the crowd's attraction had another motive than mere amusement. Frederic's banner floated in the air, and the Imperial eagle fluttered bold and haughty above the multitude. On horseback, in the midst, stood a herald in a scarlet tabard and with a silver-mounted truncheon in his hand, and immediately behind him, a man, who, in a few weeks' time, had become the terror of the Italians. It was Hesso, the chief of the Imperial police, surrounded by his men fully armed. He glared fiercely upon the crowd.

"What does that blood-thirsty dog want here?" was muttered on all sides. "See how he is looking for some new victims! the poor devils whom he hung this morning are hardly cold, before he wants to begin again!"

Although Hesso could not understand their words, he could read their thoughts.

"You hate and fear me, do you!--Ah well! there's no love lost between us," he growled, with a still fiercer expression in his eyes.

The loud blast of the trumpets resounded, and the herald commanded silence. Thousands awaited with trembling anxiety. The man of the scarlet tabard made another sign; but still the dull murmur went on unceasingly; he raised his truncheon, and when, after many efforts, silence had been enforced, he proclaimed, in a clear and distinct voice, the wishes of the Emperor.

"In the name of our sovereign liege, listen to the punishments to be enforced against all evil-doers. All fighting in the camp is strictly forbidden. Should the offender be a knight, his arms will be taken from him, and he will be expelled from the army. If he is a varlet, he will be flogged, his head shaved, and his shoulder marked with a red-hot iron, unless his master redeems him by the payment of fifty pennies."

The herald paused to give his hearers time for reflection. The first article had produced a bad effect upon the Italians, who were accustomed to great license in respect to their personal

quarrels, and on all sides black and angry glances were exchanged.

"Flogged, shaved, and marked with a hot iron, for that trifle!" said the crowd. "It is too severe!"

"Do you hear that, Migleo?" said a voice. "He values us at fifty pennies a piece--it's absurd!"

The herald again commanded silence.

"If any one wounds a soldier, he shall lose his hand; whoever kills one shall be decapitated!"

"I say, Migleo, what would you look like, with a shaved head?"

"Don't you think, Robbio, that in the course of a fortnight, the most of us will have neither heads nor hands? For my part, it is as impossible for me to keep my hands off a Pavian, as it is to meet a chicken without wringing its neck?"

"And I can't look at a Novara man, without wanting to spit in his face," said a Pavian, who stood by; and it was with difficulty the two were kept from fighting, even under the eyes of Hesso himself.

"Silence, fools!" said Robbio; "do you want to get into the executioner's clutches, already?"

"For the first theft, a varlet shall be flogged, shaved, and marked with the iron; for the second, he shall be hanged!" added the herald.

"There is one omission in the law about theft," said a voice. "It is forbidden to the varlets to rob, but there is nothing said about the masters. What would happen if the offender were a count, a duke, or a king?"

"Silence," cried another voice, whose piercing tone bore a great resemblance to that of the jester Lanzo. "Don't you know that the nobles never steal? they merely indulge their illustrious desires!"

"Whoever shall hold any communication with the Cardinal Roland, falsely styling himself Pope Alexander III., shall be put under the ban of the Emperor; it is permitted to kill him wherever found!"

"Do you hear that? to pillage is not to steal; the Emperor can permit anything."

"Alexander is the true Pope; Victor is the anti-Pope; is that not so, comrades?"

"Certainly. Long live Alexander!"

"Whoever shall obtain supplies for the Milanese, shall lose his hand; the informer shall be rewarded."

This last article, although the most barbarous, met with general approval among the Italians, who only found fault with the punishment as being too mild. They forgot the iron yoke under which Frederic kept them, to remember only their hatred for their detested rival Milan.

"Long live the Emperor! Down with Milan! Death and destruction to the Milanese!"

The trumpets again sounded, and while the soldiers gave free vent to the expression of their hatred, the herald and his escort left the ground.

Rechberg had listened to the proclamation, and would have pursued his journey, but the dense crowd forced him to remain and hear the imprecations lavished upon the Emperor, as soon as Hesso was out of sight.

"Laugh on!" thought the young man. "You may laugh as much as you please, but you will not be able to violate those orders with impunity."

At this moment, two asses' ears ornamented with bells, approached the Count. Lanzo, with a good deal of difficulty, had elbowed his way through the crowd, and had gained a neighboring spur-post, where he climbed up, and then sprang, with the agility of a monkey, upon the Count's stirrup; a moment after, he was behind his saddle. The crowd laughed and applauded the jester's activity, and Rechberg allowed him to retain his seat, for he saw nothing impertinent in the proceeding of the fool, whose loyalty he esteemed, and whose jests would serve to amuse him.

"Whence come you, Lanzo?"

"From the fulfilment of my duty, noble Count."

"Yes; but how?"

"How? I have only just discovered it; I had no positive end in view, until now. But I perceive, my lord, that your mission is of vast importance. The Emperor, the Pope, and the kings, are very insignificant personages compared with you."

"And why so, Lanzo?"

"Because you have the court-fool behind you!"

"But I cannot see in that an omen of greatness."

"Oh, I will explain, if you will only try to understand me!" said the jester. "I will begin with the Pope, that is, providing Victor be really the Pope,--a matter, about which some quite sensible people begin to doubt. For the last two years, Barbarossa has been holding council upon council, and yet all of them together have not succeeded in proving that Victor is the Pope. This establishes clearly, either that Victor is a fool, or else that he is a puppet of the Emperor, since he is so ready to accept what Alexander refuses. If he had any brains, he would know that an honest monk is better than what he is."

"You have a bad tongue, Lanzo."

"Possibly! But you will see that it tells the truth. Then we have the king of England and the king of France. They are fools too. I made the reflection when I saw their ambassadors kneel before the Emperor. If they had brains, they would guess that Frederic means to catch them all, one after the other, in his nets."

"You are a statesman of wonderful foresight, Lanzo!"

"Of course I am; my ears show that;--and then, the Emperor is as mad as the others.--But, I forgot.--Ah! after all I cannot see that there is much harm in having a madman for one's godfather! If Frederic were wise, he would not try to conquer the world. He is getting ready to swallow Milan, the head of Italy. After the head, the rest will come easily enough; but it is a food not easily digested. The earth belongs to God, and not to the Emperor, and one of these days Frederic's madness will draw upon himself the wrath of an avenging God."

"Well spoken, Lanzo! you ought to be a member of the Emperor's Council."

"God preserve me from it! my honesty would be exposed to too sore temptations.--But I see in the steel of your helmet a little sprite which mocks at me. My argument has a weak point, then?--Tell me, where did you get that splendid gold chain?"

"Why do you ask me?"

"Answer me first."

"From the knight Bonello,--him whose cause you espoused so warmly."

"Tell me, my lord, how did it happen that you became so deeply interested in this traitor's misfortunes? All the camp was astonished at the boldness with which you braved the Emperor's displeasure. No one but you would have risked his sovereign's anger to save a traitor's life. Was it craft on your part, or wisdom?"

"How dare you ask such questions? Is it not our duty to aid all who are unfortunate?"

"Well answered! But the sprite in your helmet is mocking at me again, I fear you have not told me all the truth. When you pleaded Bonello's cause, had you no other motive than pity?"

"You are right."

"Ah! I have a little intelligence sometimes!--Bonello has a daughter!--Some men of sense saw her without being dazzled--that is, another species of madness! I would ask some more questions, if I were not afraid that your steel scabbard might make an intimate acquaintance with my back."

"Still, you are not going to stop there?"

"Certainly not, if I may go on!"

"Go on, then!"

"Well," said the little man, "your heightened color confirms what I had already more than half guessed! But have you reflected on what you are, and what this girl is? I am afraid, in this, you have acted inconsiderately. Go to your godfather, and ask him permission to marry the daughter of ----, a traitor!"

Erwin's countenance changed.

"Ah, how pale you become!" said Lanzo. "You see, dear Count, wise men should always look to the issue of their projects. But don't be down-hearted; this Lombard angel is still only a child, and, in a few years' time, things may change a good deal." And he sprang to the ground.

"You are not leaving me thus, Lanzo? Methinks, a light collation, with me, in the Imperial tent, should not be refused."

"Many thanks, Count! Believe me, there are other things to be done in Barbarossa's tent,

besides giving lodgings to a poor devil."

And Lanzo turned boldly to the pavilion of Henry, the Lion.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ANTI-POPE.

Although Lanzo was merely the Duke of Saxony's buffoon, the Count could not but feel very uneasy, as he thought of their late conversation. The allusions to his intimacy with Bonello annoyed him, and he felt surprised to think that hitherto he had been blind to all the difficulties in which his position as godson to the Emperor had involved him. For it was highly probable that Barbarossa would refuse his consent to any alliance between him and the family of Bonello.

Under the influence of these reflections, Rechberg proceeded through the camp, without at first remarking the extraordinary calm which pervaded everything. The deserted streets and empty tents seemed to indicate that the troops were on some expedition, but when he approached the tent, or rather the palace of the Emperor, he saw on each side of the road both knights and men-at-arms drawn up in order of battle. Frederic's tent and all those in its vicinity were decked with flowers and ornamented with rich carpets, and Erwin soon learned that it was for the solemn reception of the pretended Pope Victor, whose entrance into the camp was already heralded by a full flourish of trumpets.

In the eyes of the young Count, Victor was merely an illustrious and important personage, for he could not admit his claims to the Papal throne, which, of right, belonged to Alexander III. He knew Victor's irresolute character, and as his very appearance was disagreeable to him, he decided not to present himself to the Emperor until after the ceremonies of the reception were concluded.

The Emperor had taken infinite pains to receive his Pope with becoming pomp; not because he wished to honor the head of the Church, but because he thought it expedient to give as much importance to the man whom he considered necessary to the accomplishment of his own projects, and with this view all the actions of the Emperor manifested a profound respect for the Head of the Church. He rode on his left hand, a little to the rear, as though he did not presume to put himself on an equality with the chief of Christendom. Barbarossa wore a scarlet doublet, over which was thrown the Imperial mantle, clasped with gold links and silver crescents. On his head was the crown, and in his hand the sceptre. His face was dignified and composed, and as they neared the camp and the crowd could judge better of his movements, he was more demonstrative in his attentions to the Anti-Pope; whose hand never ceased from blessing the bystanders.

Victor's tall stature, his bearing, and even his costume, were rather those of a temporal prince than those of a spiritual shepherd. Over his shoulders hung a scarlet robe, richly embroidered in gold, and on his long curling locks was placed the triple crown of Rome; his features reflected the pride and arrogance of his disposition.

Immediately after the Emperor rode Henry the Lion, the Dukes of Austria, of Bohemia, and of Rottemburg, and the Landgrave of Thuringen, followed by a brilliant array of princes and nobles. The escort was preceded by the military band, which marched, with a flourish of trumpets, about a hundred yards in advance of the Pope. But, although on all sides there were soldiers and martial standards, there was no religious display, no religious banners or chants; not even a cross was to be seen; for Victor's entry to the camp showed plainly that he was but a creature of the Emperor, from whom he derived all his pomp and greatness.

Frederic dismounted before his tent, and following an ancient custom, came forward respectfully, to hold the Pope's stirrup. But here the Cardinal Octavian, for such was his real title, showed an utter want of tact. Affecting to be deeply engaged in conversation with his immediate attendants, he permitted the Emperor to remain too long in his humiliating posture.

Frederic colored up with anger and mortification, while his Chancellor smiled with inward satisfaction. Rinaldo had long advised the discontinuance of this idle and useless ceremony, but the Emperor, with more foresight than his minister, judged that the moment was not yet ripe for the abolition of a custom which seemed to establish the supremacy of the chief of Christendom.

At last Octavian dismounted; he took the monarch in his arms and gave him the kiss of peace, and then, turning towards the assembled multitude, he gave them his benediction, and entered the Imperial tent.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EMPEROR'S SLAVE.

The first service which Barbarossa exacted of Victor, was the solemn excommunication of Alexander III., and his partisans, in presence of the army, and in front of the walls of Milan. A few days after his arrival at the Camp, an immense tribune, draped with black cloth, and provided with numerous seats, was erected at a safe distance from the city. In the centre was an elevated platform, and behind this a throne for the Emperor, whence he could communicate his desires to the various speakers. Thousands of soldiers from all parts of the Camp surrounded the tribune, and a crowd of curious spectators lined the towers and walls of the city.

At the appointed hour, the Emperor, the nobles, the false Pope, and the prelates, ascended the platform and took seats according to their respective rank. Alberic, the Pope's chaplain, first, in a noisy harangue, explained the object of the assembly. He denounced Alexander and his adherents as heretics, and extolled Victor as the legitimate Pope.

Lighted tapers were then handed to the nobles and the clergy; and Octavian, mounting the pulpit, began to recite, in a voice trembling with passion, the usual lengthy formula of excommunication, at the close of which, as the sentence of malediction was thundered out, the Emperor, nobles, and clergy extinguished their candles.

This solemn farce, enacted by Frederic's orders, in the immediate vicinity of a city whose inhabitants were enthusiastic partisans of the cause of Alexander, was received by the Milanese with shouts of derision; and scarcely had the anathema been uttered when a speaking-trumpet was heard upon the walls.

"Octavian," it cried, "wrongfully surnamed Victor, slave of the Emperor, we scorn your maledictions.--Heaven blesses whom you curse, and curses whom you bless!"

Few of the soldiers present had ever before heard a speaking-trumpet, and these words seemed supernatural, while the distant echo gave credence to the speedy realization of the prophecy. But Frederic, more enlightened, skilfully parried the blow, and aware of a report which had been circulated latterly, that an angel had descended from heaven to curse Victor and his partisans, he looked on in scornful silence, while the crowd broke out in clamorous surprise.

Suddenly a straw effigy of the Pope, crowned with rags, with a paper mitre on its head, and a scroll with the inscription, in large letters, of "Pope Victor" in its hand, was hurled from the walls by a catapult, and fell close to Octavian's feet, while, amid a burst of contemptuous laughter, the voice again shouted through the trumpet, "Straw Pope! Straw Pope!"

Octavian was thunderstruck, and stood gazing with a wild stare upon the effigy, and his face assumed an expression so ridiculously stupid, that Rinaldo and the bystanders, remarking the absurd resemblance between it and the figure, could with difficulty restrain their mirth.

Frederic reflected grimly for a moment, but soon found means to turn this incident to profit.

"Resume your seat!" he said to Victor, and then rising with the fierce and decided manner which so well became him, he commanded silence. Even Rinaldo's face wore a serious expression, and all awaited, breathlessly, the monarch's harangue.

"What means all this? What seeks Milan with these sinful mockeries? Will that accursed city never respect anything? She turns into ridicule even the holy symbols of spiritual power; she mocks at the legitimate Head of the Church; and that her insults may be the better heard, a miserable speaking-trumpet cries them from the walls! Remember the tyranny which reigns in Milan, think of the destruction of Lodi and the misfortunes of Como; think of all those things, and then tell me if that city does not merit destruction!"

Frederic ceased, but his words had produced the desired effect.

"She deserves her fate!" cried, eagerly, the soldiers of Lodi and Como who were present; "she deserves her fate; down with Milan!"

"Yes, she deserves it," resumed the Emperor, "and this time we ourselves will execute the decrees of justice!" He paused, and raising his hand to his brow, took off the crown. Then, his eyes raised to heaven, and his right hand extended, he cried, with a loud voice,--

"I, Frederic of Hohenstauffen, king of the Germans and Emperor of Rome, do swear before Almighty God and the ever blessed Virgin Mary, by the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and all the Saints of Paradise, that this crown will no more grace my brow until the city of Milan shall have

been destroyed in chastisement for her crimes!"

The Emperor made the sign of the cross, and delivered the diadem into the keeping of the Imperial Chancellor.

This solemn oath electrified the Italians.

"Long live the Emperor!" shouted a thousand voices. "Long live the Emperor! Down with Milan!"

In the midst of the applause, Barbarossa, well satisfied with the result of his harangue, left the tribune, followed by his nobles. Meanwhile Victor, who had returned to his tent, gave free vent to his anger, and while Alberic was divesting him of his mantle, shook his head with most unequivocal marks of resentment.

"Straw pope!" he exclaimed; "straw pope! the wretches, to compare me, the legitimate Head of the Church, to a man of straw!"

"It is most infamous!" replied the chaplain; "it merits the vengeance of heaven."

"Patience, the Milanese will pay dearly for their insolence. It needed but this to fill the cup of Imperial anger. This city must be destroyed and levelled with the earth. Henceforth whoever dares to intercede for this new Nineveh, is the foe of the Church, of the Pope, and of the Emperor."

"And the speaking-trumpet," added Alberic; "that abominable speaking-trumpet!"

"True, I had almost forgotten that," replied Victor. "What was it they called me? Straw Pope!--the villains! I am the true Pope, both by the choice of the people and Imperial sanction. Yes, of course I am," he repeated, as though wishing to persuade himself that it really was so. "Alexander can never be more than the Cardinal Roland, for he was neither elected by the people nor confirmed by the Emperor."

"Most certainly, there is no doubt of the fact," added Alberic, quickly, for he knew Victor's anxiety in the matter.

"But what was it they really called me?--I think I heard the words 'Slave of the Emperor!'"

"That was what they said," my lord. "It was a ridiculous epithet, for you, who seek to defend the prerogatives of the Church, can be slave to no one."

These words were bitterly ironical, for Octavian remembered his base servility to the wishes of his master Barbarossa, and he moved uneasily upon his chair, as he resumed,--

"I give to the Emperor what is his by right, and in this I obey the commands of our Lord; but in all that concerns the Church, I am inflexible and yield obedience to no earthly power. Have I not often given proofs of this? Did I not do so only on the day before yesterday, when the Emperor urged me to pronounce the separation of Henry and Clemence? And did we not, in virtue of our sacred office, refuse the demand?"

"I admired your energy, my lord."

"There are no excuses, no threats which can decide us to annul this marriage!" continued Octavian. "If monarchs could, at their pleasure, divorce their wives, we should have little justice and order. No, by the eternal salvation of my soul, to which may God be merciful, I will never countenance a like enormity!"

As Victor finished, Rinaldo entered the room. Octavian's tirade had not escaped the watchful observation of the courtier. Indeed, although rarely bold enough to resist the Emperor's commands, there were times when Octavian, either through shame or anger, refused obedience. Like all men of contracted and timid ideas, he sometimes tried to show proof of energy. Deploring his position, but without greatness of soul enough to consent to break his chains and retire to a subordinate capacity, he gave full vent to his ill-temper against all whom he had no especial cause to fear. Humble and submissive towards the Emperor and his ministers, he was disdainful and supercilious to his inferiors.

For once, Victor seemed decided to give an evidence of character. He remained seated, and replied coldly to the salutations of the Chancellor. But the wily courtier paid no attention to his insolence; and seating himself quietly, he began,--

"Before submitting to your Holiness the message intrusted me by our sovereign lord the Emperor, I desire to offer my sincere regrets for the grave scandal caused by the Milanese."

"The devilful blindness of these Godforsaken people is the surest proof of our legitimacy," interrupted Victor; "we have therefore no need either of your commiseration or your sympathy. You will communicate this reply to the Emperor. We will now examine whether this message, in case it should be a petition, merits our consideration."

It needed all Rinaldo's self-command to remain serious at Octavian's speech, and particularly at the air with which it was uttered. If Victor really were what he tried to seem, the Count of Dassel would have had good reason to be provoked; but as he had known the Pope for many years, his arrogance only excited a smile, as he answered,--

"In this business, I am well aware that the well known wisdom of your Holiness has no need of my sympathy. I will therefore, as such is your desire, explain the purport of the Emperor's communication. It concerns the rupture of the marriage between the Duke of Saxony and his wife Clemence."

"We have already expressed our opinions decidedly on that point," replied Octavian.

"True, a few days ago," said Rinaldo; "but at present His Majesty desires to terminate the matter without delay, and requests you to appoint a time when the divorce shall be solemnly pronounced in public."

"Must I then repeat what I have already said?" replied Victor, with surprise. "The marriage is legal, and cannot be annulled. The question of consanguinity is, by no means, clearly established, and the degree is too remote."

"Nevertheless, the Emperor desires the divorce for grave political reasons," said Rinaldo, quietly.

"Political reasons! What have we to do with politics?"

"Very true, affairs of state are not your province, still, your Holiness might have some consideration for the Emperor's wishes."

"Very well, my lord chancellor! you say that the affairs of state are not our province, and yet in the affairs of the Church we must consult the Emperor's wishes. If that were so, what position should we occupy? The Milanese have defined it perfectly: 'the base slave of the Emperor'!"

"Your Holiness should remember that you owe everything to the Emperor."

"I beg your pardon, my lord chancellor; I hold my power in virtue of my election by the Cardinals and the people."

"The Cardinals!" Dassel cried, ironically; "how many of them voted for you? if I remember rightly, only two. And you speak of the people's choice? The pagan Jugurtha reproached the Roman people with its corruption; yet, without the rich bribes paid by your friends, even that venal people would not have pronounced in your favor."

Octavian colored violently at the insult.

"I have no wish to wound your Holiness," continued Dassel, "but simply to warn you against any feelings of ingratitude to the Emperor."

"Admitting what you have said to be true, was not our election ratified by four plenary councils?"

"Four plenary councils!" sneered Rinaldo. "There should have been four, but the Emperor has never been able to bring the Bishops together. You should know of what value is a plenary council where there are no Bishops! But let me beg you to put an end to this useless discussion. I only wish to transmit the Emperor's orders and carry back to him your answer."

"The Emperor's orders! Oh! this is too much, my lord!"

"Yes; but if you prefer, we will call it the Emperor's request," said the minister, rising as he spoke; "orders or request, it matters little! since the Emperor insists upon implicit obedience to the one, as to the other. Perhaps, upon reflection, you will perceive that your disobedience may possibly have most disagreeable consequences."

"For the love of God! do not leave me," cried the alarmed Victor. "Only show me how I can, in defiance of my duty and my conscience, annul a legal marriage? I am always ready to show my obedience to His Majesty; I only implore him not to insist upon this flagrant violation of divine and ecclesiastical laws."

"Have you the power to loose?"

"Yes; but not the bonds of an indissoluble marriage."

"The consanguinity between Henry and Clemence is a valid cause of divorce. Their genealogical tree shall be submitted for your examination; you can then conscientiously annul the marriage."

Victor was dreadfully embarrassed, and sought in vain an escape from the dilemma. On the one side, he felt ashamed of his weakness, and his conscience reproached him bitterly; but on the other, he saw that most disagreeable consequences would result from his refusal. The tone of the

Chancellor, his gloomy and threatening demeanor, his readiness to leave the apartment, alarmed Octavian, on whose forehead stood great drops of perspiration, a striking proof that bad actions are often more painful in their accomplishment than those dictated by a worthy motive.

"May I then announce to the Emperor, that you will obey him?" resumed Dassel; "or shall I transmit your refusal, so that His Majesty can at once proclaim the illegality of your claims to the Papal throne?"

"I will obey," faltered Victor.

"At last you have come to a wise decision," said the courtier, whose face immediately resumed its cordial expression. "May I ask when your Holiness will fulfil your promise?"

"Whenever it may so please the Emperor."

"Your visit will be most agreeable to His Majesty," Dassel resumed. "I have only now to request your Holiness to confer the Episcopal mitre upon some young man, high in favor with His Majesty, to whom he wishes to offer this mark of his confidence. He thinks that it would be well for the ceremony to take place next week, in the Cathedral of Pavia. One of the candidates is the young Count Biandrate, whose nomination to the Archbishopric of Ravenna was delayed, owing to some objections on the part of your predecessor, Pope Adrian."

"I must confirm His Majesty's choice, and will be at Pavia on the day mentioned."

The Chancellor bowed and withdrew. Ashamed and cast down, the Pope stood motionless, gazing at the door through which Dassel had disappeared. He seemed scarcely to credit his humiliation, as he murmured,--

"Aye, I am the Emperor's slave, naught but his miserable, degraded slave!"

CHAPTER XVII.

AN EVIL SPIRIT.

After communicating to Barbarossa, Victor's promise of obedience, Dassel took his way towards the tent of Henry the Lion, to announce to the prince the speedy dissolution of his marriage. The Saxon Duke lodged in the Augustinian convent in front of the city. In spite of the decisions of the council of war, this cloister had been neither pillaged nor burned, for it stood in the midst of his camp, and served as his headquarters; and the demand for its destruction, urged by some of the Italians, had met with a stern refusal.

"In the North," he said, "I spare neither time nor money in building churches and monasteries. Why should I consent to destroy them in the South? You must understand, once for all, that I will not do violence to my principles, in order to gratify your hatred for the Milanese."

These words put an end to the discussion; the beautiful church was spared, but the anxious monks were driven to take shelter within the city. Ever since Henry had begun to entertain seriously the idea of a divorce, he had lost the air of frankness and good-nature which had formerly characterized him. He walked with downcast eyes, his brows were knit, his head stooped, and a heavy burden seemed to oppress his intellect. While Rinaldo urged the divorce, the Duke remained irresolute; his pride prompted him to the step, but his heart opposed it. A union of fifteen years had proved the sincere affection and unalterable fidelity of his wife, who lived only in her husband's love. He could not call to mind a single unkind word; Clemence, on the contrary, had always striven to make her husband forget his cares and anxieties. And even now, although well aware of this scheme for their separation, she never gave utterance to one murmur or reproach; all her efforts were directed to conceal her sadness and despair. But his wife's anguish was not unknown to the Duke. He admired the generous spirit of the noble woman, and it cost him many a heartache, to feel himself, as it were, compelled to do her such a cruel wrong. Had the Duchess reproached him with his injustice, the struggle would have been less difficult, but this mute sorrow, this submissive love disarmed him. It was in vain that he looked back over years long gone by, he could discover nothing worthy of dissatisfaction, for each succeeding year since their marriage gave new proofs of Clemence's affection and fidelity.

Sad thoughts filled his mind as he sat beneath an arbor of clematis in the convent garden. His back leaning against the wall, his limbs stretched out and his hands clenched upon his breast, his haggard, downcast face denoted the painful struggle raging within him, which from time to time took vent in a deep sigh.

A child's clear voice awoke him from his mournful reverie. At the end of the grove his wife appeared, leading his little daughter Adelaide by the hand. As soon as she perceived her father, she ran towards him, but suddenly stopped at a short distance with an air of indecision and doubt.

"Well, well! little one, come on!" said Henry, forcing a smile.

The child obeyed, but it was plain that she did not feel at ease, for she looked anxiously towards her mother.

Henry seemed annoyed as Clemence seated herself beside him, but although the noble woman had remarked his grave and troubled expression and divined its cause, her strong will concealed her sad emotions.

"Father, why do you always wear these iron clothes?" said the child, playing with the rings of his coat of mail.

"Because it is necessary in time of war, my child. Would you not like to have one like it? See how it shines and sparkles!"

"No, father; it is too hard and stiff; I like my mother's dresses better."

"If you were a boy, instead of a little girl, it would please you more."

These words produced a strange effect upon the infant. She first turned towards Clemence who seemed ready to burst into tears, and then threw her arms around her father's neck, as if to prevent him reproaching her mother.

"I want to be a boy, father!" said Adelaide, laughing through her tears.

"You do, do you? and what for?"

"So that my mother may not cry any more!"

"Nonsense, little chatterbox; why should your mother cry?"

"Oh yes, she does cry, and a great deal too; only when you come, she dries her eyes, and smiles."

The Duke was touched; these artless words from the mouth of his child contained a reproach which shamed him. Until then, he had never spoken to his wife of the proposed divorce, and even now, although the opportunity seemed favorable, he hesitated, for the consciousness of his injustice deprived him of his courage.

Clemence read his thoughts, and a mingling of love for her husband and pity for his weakness, joined to a faint hope that, even yet, he might be weaned from his determination, decided her to speak.

"Dear Henry," she began, "a wife's duty is to watch and pray, whenever a danger menaces her lord. I can no longer remain silent in the presence of the schemers who seek to beguile you. The sinful projects of the chancellor Rinaldo will destroy your eternal soul. Believe me, no motive can excuse an evil deed; nothing can make innocent that which the laws of God forbid. I am ready, if it were possible, to make any sacrifice to your happiness, even were my heart to break in the attempt!"

Tears choked her further utterance; but the Duke well knew that her words were not an idle speech, but that they were dictated by true and sincere affection.

"Why do you allude to this circumstance, so painful to us both," he said. "There are some things which must be placed even above the feelings of the heart. On the honor of a knight, Clemence, I look upon you as the noblest of women, and yet, with me the Guelphic dynasty in the North will end."

"I know the chancellor's famous discovery of our consanguinity!" replied the Duchess. "Henry, you know that the plea is false. If our divorce will make you happier, I would submit, without a murmur; but the certainty that this divorce will imperil your immortal soul, wrings my heart with anguish. Henry! I implore you, give up this guilty project! Trust to the future.--Perhaps--perhaps, my days are numbered."

At this moment a horse's hoofs rang on the pavement of the outer court, and almost immediately Rinaldo stood before the arbor. Clemence rose hastily; although pale and trembling, her tears had ceased, and she gazed upon the chancellor with a look of horror. Slowly leaving with her child the presence of her husband, she cast upon him one lingering glance in which were reflected the feelings of her soul.

Robed in the magnificent costume which he wore only on great occasions of ceremony, wearing on his finger the pastoral ring of the Archbishopric of Cologne (conferred upon him by the Emperor), a costly chain of triple gold around his neck, and on his head a splendid mitre, the

Count of Dassel, with a smiling face, saluted the Saxon Duke.

"I have ridden over to examine the tower which your Highness has built," he said, with a low bow; "what a noble piece of work! I can only compare it to the one constructed by the Emperor for the Siege of Cremona."

This was one of Henry's weak points, and the crafty Dassel knew it.

"You are in error, my dear Count," he replied; "it is very true that my Imperial cousin constructed a splendid machine for that siege, but his tower could not accommodate, by two hundred men, as many as mine. Besides, it could only be moved slowly and with much danger."

Rinaldo did not venture to doubt the superiority of the ducal construction.

"Oh, if that is the case, the perfection of your edifice threatens to become dangerous."

"Dangerous! and how so?"

"Yes," said Dassel; "dangerous to the fame and aspirations of more than one hero who has built up his dreams of glory and renown upon the taking of Milan. Think of the disappointment of the Count Palatine Otho, of the Duke of Austria, of the Landgrave of Thuringen, and a host of other illustrious captains, when they see the Suabian lion float over the ramparts of the city."

The Duke laughed boisterously.

"The thoughts of your triumph recalls to me naturally the certitude of your good fortune. His Holiness, the Pope, has expressed his readiness to annul the marriage which you have contracted with your relative."

At these words the Duke's face darkened as his right hand began to play with his beard, while the left sought angrily his sword-hilt.

"It only remains for your Highness to indicate the day and hour for this wished-for divorce," added the Chancellor.

"Hum! you appear very much interested in my affairs," replied the Duke. "Why this precipitation?"

"Was it not your desire, my lord?"

"Certainly, it was my desire. But I will not submit to dictation from any one, and it may suit me better to leave matters as they are."

The courtier appeared surprised.

"Oh! that amazes you; yes, I said it might suit me better to leave matters as they were, my dear Count."

"Your Highness is certainly the best judge of your own affairs," replied Dassel, cautiously, as if he felt himself in the presence of an unchained lion; "still I must observe that matters are already pretty far advanced."

"Well, turn them back again. That must be an easy matter for you; you have experience in such things."

"May I venture to inquire the reasons which have influenced your Highness to this sudden change?"

"The reasons!" he cried angrily; "the reasons! because it would be infamous! Why do you stare at me thus? Look there!"

And he pointed to where, at the extremity of the garden, Clemence, half hidden by the rose-trees, was kneeling before an image of the Madonna. Near her stood the little Adelaide with clasped hands, gazing alternately at the image and at her weeping mother. Rinaldo saw the mother and the child; he understood the Duke's anger; he resolved to complete his infernal work.

"She is a pious woman," he said; "a model for her sex! The separation will be most painful to her. I understand it well; but it is also painful for a valiant prince to witness the extinction of his race."

"Oh! the pangs of separation, the grief which they cause a loving heart, may be healed in time," said Henry; "but, my dear Count, this action will be not only cruel and pitiless, but it will be criminal in the sight of God."

"Criminal in the sight of God! this is a new phase to give to the affair. The Pope annuls your marriage; he knows his privileges, and is responsible for the consequences."

"Yes, your Pope," replied Henry, with an angry sneer. "Tell me, can the act of that puppet of the Emperor make an evil act a good one?"

"This is certainly a grave point for a timid conscience," said Dassel, ironically.

"But yourself, my dear Count? Years ago, the Emperor put that archiepiscopal ring on your finger; tell me, how it happens that you have not yet been consecrated? All that is needed is your request. Victor will be delighted. But--and it is natural enough--you despise the consecration of the Anti-Pope! And yet you pretend that his intervention ought to be sufficient for me?"

"There is no hurry about my consecration," replied Rinaldo, quickly; "but your Highness makes a mistake in being influenced by such scruples of conscience, which are, to say the least, exaggerated."

"Exaggerated!"

"Certainly! Is it not the Emperor's prerogative to appoint the Bishop of Rome? The history of the Empire is there to prove the correctness of my assertion."

"Without any doubt, my Imperial cousin needs, for the accomplishment of his designs, a very submissive Pope. I shall not discuss this subject. The Northern bishops, likewise, owe me obedience.--There is but one difference in our positions,--none of my bishops is the supreme chief of Christendom."

"There is still another difference," resumed Rinaldo, with some hesitation, "and that is, your cousin Frederic is laying the foundations of a dynasty which is destined to rule the world, whilst your works will perish with you."

The Duke of Saxony was speechless, as, with contracted features, he rose and stood like a bronze statue before the tempter. The vulnerable point of his armor had been touched; for many years Henry's dream had been, to found an independent empire in the North, and all his efforts, all his warlike enterprises looked to this end. Dassel made a last effort to excite the Duke's ambition.

"You have, it is true, several lovely daughters; but you cannot bequeath your domains to them. All your conquests will revert to the Empire; nothing will remain to them, save their titles and their rights of dower."

"Stop a moment, Count!" cried Henry, furious at seeing his conquests, so painfully made, disposed of thus summarily.

"I am well aware, that my words may have offended your Highness; but, pardon my frankness, they were none the less just."

"It is false, I tell you! entirely false! Do you imagine that for years I have toiled and fought, have borne hunger and thirst, and a thousand fatigues of every kind, only to descend to the tomb like a brainless fool?"

"I regret it sincerely, my lord; but, since you refuse the divorce which is proposed, you must take the consequences."

"Refuse it! No; I must consider the matter further. What shall be, shall be; yes, on my honor!"

Rinaldo trembled with pleasure.

"Go, and thank my Imperial cousin!" continued Henry. "This divorce must be pronounced, even should it insure my own ruin! Still, beg his Majesty not to carry the matter further than I wish myself."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONFIDENTIAL SECRETS.

Rinaldo took his way towards the Imperial pavilion, for he was anxious to report the result of his interview with the Duke of Saxony. He was informed by one of the chamberlains that Frederic had gone to the apartments of the Empress, and Dassel decided to await his return in an adjoining room. He had taken but a few steps in a hall littered with cuirasses and swords and lances, when he heard the Emperor's voice, speaking in an angry tone. It was scarcely calculated to produce a reassuring effect upon the statesman, but he approached the partition and listened attentively.

Upon leaving the Empress, Frederic had met Count Rechberg in the antechamber. For some time the young man had been thinking seriously of asking the Emperor's consent to his marriage with Bonello's daughter, and the uncertainty of the result of his application produced a state of painful anxiety. He was seated in a corner, his head resting on his hands and his elbows on his knees, when the monarch entered, and was so absorbed in his reflections that he was unconscious of his presence. Frederic looked at him with some surprise, and shook his head. At this moment Erwin sighed deeply, and the Emperor involuntarily shuddered.

"Erwin!" said he, with a loud voice.

The young count sprang up hastily, and stood, with heightened color, before his sovereign.

"What is the matter, my boy? For some time past you seem out of spirits. Can nothing amuse your sad thoughts? Tell me what ails you."

Erwin only answered by a still deeper blush. The man who by a word could render him happy, was before him, and yet, trembling like a criminal, he did not dare to speak.

"Are you dumb? Ah! now I begin to be really curious to learn the secret which saddens your young heart."

"I must really help this poor fellow," thought Rinaldo.

"Come, Erwin, your reticence displeases me. What motive can there be for silence with your godfather?"

Rechberg looked sadly at the Emperor, as if to show him how painfully he felt this reproach.

"Well! if you have confidence in me, speak out! What is the matter? For some time past I have noticed your mournful and dejected appearance, and I hoped to have received your confession without being obliged to ask for it."

"Pardon, Sire; it is not my want of confidence in your Majesty which has closed my mouth, but rather the conviction that my cares were unworthy of your notice."

"Your cares!" resumed Barbarossa, looking at the young man more attentively. "True, true, it is some piece of childishness; I might have guessed it sooner."

Rinaldo's entrance on one side, and the Empress on the other, interrupted Frederic.

"Beatrice," said he, "I give this sick boy up to your care. I know that you are a skilful physician;" and he left the room with the Count of Dassel.

Beatrice, the wealthy daughter of Count Reinald, of Upper Burgundy, was but sixteen years of age when she was chosen by Frederic as his wife. In spite of the opposition to his marriage made by Pope Adrian IV; in spite of the representations of the Church and the reputation of the world at large, Barbarossa's passion was so violent that he disregarded every obstacle, and on the repudiation of his first wife, Adelaide, conducted Beatrice to the altar.

At the time of which we speak, Beatrice was twenty-one years of age; beautiful, gracious, and accomplished; she was considered the most amiable princess of the age, and she gladly undertook to console a youth whom she esteemed as much for his own virtuous qualities as on account of his relationship to the Emperor.

Dismissing her attendants, she called the young man to her side, and in a few moments had learned his story. She listened to him coldly, without even a smile, and when all was told, merely remarked,--

"I desire that you make a formal demand for the hand of the fair Hermengarde as soon as possible."

"I humbly thank your Majesty; but I scarcely dare to take a step which may not be approved."

"What do you mean? Not approved! and by whom?"

"By the Emperor, who will never consent to my marriage with the daughter of one whom he looks upon as a traitor."

"Nonsense, Erwin! the Emperor cares nothing about love-affairs! He only wants to see you happy."

"Your Majesty may be mistaken in this," replied Rechberg.

"Has the Emperor ever said anything to you on this subject?"

"Nothing. But I feel assured that he will refuse his consent."

"I understand, my dear Erwin. You are one of those people who like to take trouble on interest. I see that I must help you, as His Majesty has ordered me to be your physician. So, the very first

medicine which I shall prescribe is to keep up your spirits. In the meantime, I am going to prepare you a sovereign remedy;" and she left the room.

"Richilda," said Beatrice, entering her private chamber, "can you not point out some knight whom I can intrust with a message of importance?"

"The whole army is at your Majesty's orders," replied the waiting-maid.

"No! no! I mean a good sword, on whom I can entirely depend."

"What does your Majesty think of the knight Goswin? He is brave, discreet, and would ride to Egypt for your Majesty."

The Empress' clear and musical laugh rang through the room.

"You are crazy, Richilda! Goswin, that vulgar soldier! Upon my word, he would be a beautiful messenger."

"Pardon, madam; I had no intention of offending you; but, not to be guilty of another mistake, it would be well if I knew your Majesty's intentions."

"Ah! you are curious! But after all, you may as well know all. I have long desired to see this Hermengarde, who has so dazzled with her beauty all the knights who have met her. I think of sending a brilliant embassy to invite her to my court."

"A most excellent idea," said Richilda.

"I have heard a great deal of her noble efforts in her father's behalf, and I am curious of knowing intimately one whose filial devotion I have so much admired."

"But will your invitation be accepted? The lady of Castellamare is only a child yet,—I believe not more than fourteen years of age. She cannot leave the castle without her father's permission, and it is scarcely probable that he will allow his daughter to go where he was treated so roughly himself."

"Your objections are not entirely unreasonable," replied the Empress. "But, as a general thing, parents are not opposed to their children's happiness, and will do a good deal to advance it, even if they have to forget their own personal injuries. But I have just thought of a messenger who will probably be a successful one. Come, let us go to work at once."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONSULS.

Meanwhile the Milanese were bearing up courageously against all the fatigues and privations of the rigorous siege. The same spirit appeared to animate all classes of the population; merchants, workmen, and nobles were menaced by the same danger, and each and all fought bravely in defence of his rights and the liberty of his country.

Bold sorties were of daily occurrence, and every effort made to introduce convoys of provisions into the city; but the investment was so complete, and all avenues of approach so carefully guarded, that the attempts were always repelled with severe loss. Although as yet there was no scarcity of food, still the possibility of famine at some future day decided the Consuls of Milan to call a council in order to devise the best means of averting the danger. They were fully persuaded that Frederic would not raise the siege, and that they had little aid to expect from their allies.

Genoa, Pisa, and Venice had long envied Milan's power, and would glory in her fall; while the other towns bowed before the formidable armies of the house of Hohenstauffen, and were disposed to acknowledge its supremacy. Their chief reliance was in the success of skilful diplomacy; and for this they counted upon the talents and abilities of one whom the people looked up to as a saint—the Archdeacon Galdini Sala. At the urgent request of the Consul Nigri, the Archdeacon repaired to the hall where the council was deliberating with closed doors, and after a few words of introduction from Gherardo, expressed his views in favor of a continued and obstinate defence.

"If the people are firm," he said, "Barbarossa cannot hope a speedy surrender. I am convinced that Milan cannot be taken by assault, and that the enemy will endeavor to reduce it by famine."

"But is there no means by which we can obtain provisions?" asked the Consul of the merchants. "If Barbarossa ever succeeds in introducing hunger, his most redoubtable ally, within the walls, our cause is lost! No pains, no money must be spared to avert this terrible disaster, even should we be obliged to spend our last penny, and turn into coin our jewels and the holy vessels of our churches!"

"The Church will not be backward if the sacrifice be needed; but before arriving at this extremity, every other resource must have been exhausted."

"It is not money that we need," said the Consul Oberto, a worthy old man, with a snowy beard; "it is not money, for the richest bribes would fail to get an ounce of bread through the gates. The Emperor's blockade is too rigidly enforced, and all attempts to force it have proved a bloody failure."

"Perhaps it would be advisable," said Galdini, "to put the people on rations. So far they have eaten and drunk as though the supply were inexhaustible."

"I am surprised," replied Oberto, "that a man of your shrewdness could propose such a measure. The courage of the people would quail at the bare possibility of a danger to which hitherto they have not given a thought. And," he continued, in a lower tone, "you know well its fickleness, and how little it requires to bring about the most fearful results. The simple report of a defeat excited an insurrection some years ago, in which the Milanese destroyed the palace of a man who had sacrificed everything in the cause of liberty. With even a distant prospect of famine, the citizens would begin to murmur, and probably rise in open mutiny, for they would think it better to wear the yoke of Barbarossa than to die of starvation."

Sala was too just, too practical, to question the reality of the picture.

"Our future looks gloomy," said Nigri. "Should famine begin to decimate our ranks, we shall be obliged to capitulate, and it may perhaps be advisable not to await the last moment. The Emperor might take into consideration our voluntary surrender, and grant us more favorable terms. I propose to open negotiations with him immediately."

The archdeacon opened his eyes with astonishment at Nigri's proposal.

"Open negotiations with Frederic," he cried; "and on what basis?"

"On the most equitable basis," said Oberto; "he who surrenders willingly, always has less to suffer from the conqueror."

"You make a very grave mistake, my lord!" said Galdini; "there is no possible compromise with the tyrant; offer to him the enjoyment of all your rights; abandon all the revenues of the principality, nothing will suffice him."

"But what does he want then?" inquired Cino, the consul of the workmen, a man of rough manners and herculean build, but of very limited intelligence. In spite of the gravity of the situation, Galdini could not repress a smile, as he answered,--

"Barbarossa aspires to universal dominion. He seeks to hold in his own grasp all control of rights and liberties; he wishes to make paltry villages out of our independent cities. Everything must give way before his Imperial supremacy; all must bow at the footstool of the conqueror. Religion, the Church, all that which we look upon as holy, are in his eyes mere machines of government. Such is Frederic's gigantic dream of power; can we, I ask, negotiate with such a man? No! we must conquer, or perish in the attempt!"

The archdeacon had spoken calmly, but with energy, and all felt that he had by no means exaggerated the position. For a moment there was a profound silence, which neither Nigri nor Oberto dared to break, and then the street without seemed suddenly animated, there was a noise of hurried feet and shouts and cries of alarm. Nigri rushed to a window and anxiously inquired the cause.

"To arms! to the walls!" answered a citizen, who in full armor was hastening towards the ramparts; "the tower of Henry the Lion is moving on the city!"

"The tower! the tower!" cried Cino, pale with fear; "take my word for it, before nightfall there will be many mouths less to feed among our fellow-citizens!"

All the consuls seemed equally alarmed, the object of the council was forgotten, and they hastily withdrew. Nigri detained the archdeacon, and taking him on one side, said,--

"One moment, I beg you, my lord Galdini. The words spoken here might, if known, discourage the people. I trust that I may count upon your discretion."

"Your recommendation is needless," replied Sala; "not a word shall pass my lips. Let us hasten, with God's aid, to repel the assault." He pressed Nigri's hand, and the consul hurriedly buckling on his armor, they repaired to the ramparts.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ASSAULT.

Milan was in mortal fear. The colossal form of the monstrous machine approached still nearer to the doomed city. The streets were filled with an anxious crowd of women, children, and men-at-arms, all pressing with hurried steps to the scene of danger. From every door rushed the alarmed citizens, buckling their armor as they ran. Wagons filled with caldrons of pitch and boiling oil, creaked as they labored slowly forward, and the shouts of the leaders, the orders of the consuls, and the continued challenge of the sentinels, completed the wild and confused tumult. And still the tower moved slowly on.

The garrison, to repel the attack, brought forward two large machines, which threw stone balls and heavy missiles, and four smaller ones, called catapults, which were to rain stones and arrows upon the besiegers. From the summit of the walls the enemy could be distinguished moving from their camp, in four bodies, and impatiently awaiting the orders to rush forward to the support of the Saxon banner. The city walls were lined with crossbow-men and archers, ready to fire into the loopholes of the town as soon as it should be within range. In the open space between the houses and the ramparts, the noblemen and civic guard were drawn up, ready for the moment when the drawbridges should be lowered and the fight become general. Everything was conducted in an orderly manner, each man knew his duty. The women and children had disappeared; on their knees, in the churches, they were seeking the aid of Heaven in the strife which was so soon to begin.

All the machines were ready to commence their work of destroying the town. The two largest were loaded with stones, so large that it required the united strength of four men to lift them; and fires were lighted, at intervals along the wall, on which were placed huge iron vessels filled with oil and pitch.

Still the tower advanced. Its motive power could not be seen, and it was a terrible spectacle, this enormous giant creeping silently along, as though impelled by the breath of a demon.

From within could be distinguished the dull grating of the machinery, and from the loopholes peered the fierce faces of the German archers as they discharged a cloud of arrows upon the besieged.

Anselmo, the chief of the Milanese artillery, an old man, still vigorous, with bold features and a quick eye, examined the tower carefully, as it neared the walls. The troops, watchful of the least movement of their leader Oberto, were ready to act; but if Anselmo's skill did not succeed in destroying the tower, they felt that the city would be taken.

"Let go the catapults!" cried Anselmo, his eyes always fixed upon the machine.

The order was immediately executed, and the old man stepped back to judge of the effect. There was a deep silence, and all gazed anxiously upon the stern visage of their leader, as he touched the spring of the engine. There was a violent shock and a cloud of stones dashed full upon the front of the tower; but the hay and brushwood, with which it was bordered, broke the force of the concussion. A second discharge was attended with a like result.

"By my holy patron saint!" cried Anselmo, shaking his head, "the jade is solid. If four hundred weight of stone have no more effect than a shower of snow-balls, we have little chance of escaping Barbarossa's companions. However, let us try again."

A larger stone was brought forward and put into the catapult; a moment after it whistled through the air and struck heavily against the tower, but without producing any impression.

"It is useless to try," said Anselmo; "the devil himself must have built that tower!"

"Would it not be advisable," said Nigri, "to arrange the smaller machines for the reception of the stormers, as we cannot prevent the assault?"

"Let go the catapults!" interrupted Anselmo.

But it was all in vain, the advance of the machine could not be checked; and the garrison turned their attention to the smaller engines, which were filled with missiles of every kind, and to the pitch and boiling oil, which was to be poured upon the enemy as he clambered up the walls.

"Attention! hold everything in readiness!" said Anselmo; "mix well the tow with the oil and pitch. Be lively, boys! take care that your casks be filled."

Already, severe fighting was going on, in the open space between the tower and the walls. On both sides bolts and arrows flew unceasingly, and wherever a head appeared at a loophole it became a target for the archers. Germans and Milanese had both suffered severely, for the arrows and stones penetrated through every opening.

"Those Milanese fight very gallantly," said Henry the Lion, as an arrow struck his helmet. "We have already lost fifty men in the tower."

"The foul fiend seize this style of battle!" said Otho of Wittelsbach, who awaited, with impatience, the moment when the tower should close upon the walls.

"We shall encounter worthy adversaries, Count," replied Henry. "They are loading their engines in our honor!--I only trust that the fire may not ruin the tower! The Milanese are skilful artificers."

"Upon my honor, as soon as we are on their walls, they may burn it and welcome," said Otho.

The scene soon began to change; the Milanese had covered their ramparts with boiling pitch, and had lighted a fire at the spot where Henry designed to halt the tower, while barrels filled with burning tow were rolled over on the heads of the assailants.

"Forward now!" cried Anselmo. "Get ready the fireballs!" and he rushed to where the smaller machines were raining a cloud of projectiles upon the drawbridges.

The battle now raged fiercely. The burning tow balls had communicated their fire to the machine, the top of which was in flames; the Germans worked diligently to keep the conflagration in check, until they should be close enough to sally out upon the bridges, while the Milanese with locked shields and drawn swords awaited the attack.

For a moment there was a deathlike silence, and then the bridges fell, and Henry of Saxony and Otho de Wittelsbach, followed by their troops in good order, sprang upon the ramparts. They were resolutely met. Otho had one foot upon the wall, but he was driven back; and though his blows made large gaps in the ranks of the enemy in this fierce hand-to-hand encounter, their places were filled at once with new combatants. The Lion raged, and although a foeman went down at every thrust of his heavy sword, he was still upon the bridge, and could not advance a step upon the rampart. The tower was now in flames, and a cloud of projectiles darkened the air already black with smoke from the burning resin. Still the struggle went on, and many a German knight and Lombard noble fell to rise no more.

Henry and Otho fought on; but in vain: their efforts were powerless to break the wall of steel which the brave Milanese opposed to their assailants. So far, the combat had continued without any decided advantage; for, although they could hold their enemy in check, the citizens were unable to drive him from his position. The image of their patron saint waved proudly above them, and the cry of "Saint Ambrose to the rescue!" rang through the air.

In the midst of the tumult were heard shouts of defiance and of cheer.

"Brothers, think of your liberty! Death to the tyrant!" shouted Pietro Nigri, who was fighting in the foremost ranks.

"For Church and Country! Death to Barbarossa!" cried another voice.

"Death to the traitors! Death to the rebels!" thundered Otho of Wittelsbach, cutting down an adversary at every blow.

The battle became more desperate, and the ground was covered with the bodies of the dead and wounded, whose blood mingled with the boiling oil. Fresh troops came up from the besiegers' camp, anxious to take part in the conflict. The tower was now burning fiercely, and to the cries of the soldiers and the clash of swords and cuirasses, were added the groans of the dying and the crackling of the flames, which issued from every loophole, fit ornaments to this bloody tragedy.

"Back! back!" was heard on all sides; "the bridge is on fire!"

But, though like burning serpents the flames were twisting themselves around the frail passage, although many of the soldiers had retreated from the *melee*, Henry of Saxony, the Count Palatine, and a few other knights still held their ground. Careless of the enemy in their rear, they gallantly fought onward towards the city. It was in vain; the courage of the besieged increased with the danger. A horrible crackling noise was heard; the tower had commenced to give way, and was sinking. Then those who were on the bridge lost their last hope; an instant more, and all would be lost, for already it was wrapped in flames.

At this moment, the consul Oberto, a white flag in his hand, sprang forward upon the ramparts, and, as the shrill blast of a trumpet pealed out,--

"Valiant knights! noble gentlemen!" he cried; "cease this fearful strife! We value courage, even among our foes; the burning ground is giving way beneath your feet; lower your weapons, and

return peacefully to your camp."

From this act of generosity there was no appeal. Henry sheathed his sword, and retired. An instant after, the bridge gave way, and then the tower shooting up one vast column of fire, tottered and fell.

The fight cost the besiegers six hundred men, and the Milanese loss was equally heavy; but it had proved one thing, at least, to Barbarossa,--that Milan could not be taken by assault.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE EMPEROR'S POLICY.

Barbarossa continued the execution of his vast projects. As it may be seen, he wished, like Augustus, to be the Emperor of the world, and that every potentate, spiritual or temporal, should acknowledge his sway. But first of all, he was striving to destroy the Papacy. The Roman Cæsar was *pontifex maximus*; and to be this was the summit of Frederic's ambition. But the only chance of success for this gigantic plan lay in the overthrow of all existing institutions. Frederic knew this well, but his energetic character never faltered an instant, for he cared little, provided his empire were founded, even were those foundations built upon the ruins of the world.

He saw clearly that mere brute force would be insufficient, and that he must employ all the resources of diplomacy. His ambassadors were dispatched to the different courts of Europe, bearing to the reigning monarchs the assurances of his consideration and esteem; on every occasion they were instructed to deplore the unhappy condition of the Church and the obstinacy of Alexander; for Frederic was particularly at variance with Rome, where he maintained a powerful faction, which, by its violence, had finally driven the Pope from the Eternal City. Matters had finally assumed so dangerous an aspect that there was scarcely a city in all Christendom which dared offer an asylum to the legitimate Head of the Church. Barbarossa then convened a general council, in order to give a coloring of legality to his projects. The French and English sovereigns were represented by plenipotentiaries; for both, and particularly the bloody Henry of England, considered themselves to have been wronged by Alexander III.

The approaching Council occasioned no little movement in the Imperial camp, and the crafty statesman Rinaldo was busily engaged in arranging matters, in order that everything might proceed harmoniously.

After some days of feasting and amusement of all kinds, Barbarossa decided to give a solemn audience to the ambassadors. They were invited into the *hall of the throne*, and after a brief delay, the rich silken hangings were drawn aside and the brilliant retinue of the Emperor appeared. The nobles, clothed in costly robes, entered first, followed by the Emperor, wearing all the insignia of royalty. The crown alone was wanting:--he respected the vow which he had made before Milan.

The monarch ascended the throne; every word, every gesture indicated unmistakably that he felt his importance, and that he considered himself the most powerful sovereign of the world. The nobles surrounded him, shining like brilliant planets around the Imperial sun. The Count Palatine Otho and the Counts of Andechs and Bogen, were on guard, before the doors of the hall, where, clad in complete armor, with their hands resting on their sword-hilts, they resembled so many statues of bronze.

The ambassadors, followed by their suites, then approached the throne, and the Count of Guyenne, French ambassador, commenced in pompous terms an harangue, in which he assured the Emperor of the friendship of his royal master. He deplored and regretted in a diplomatic manner the discord and dissension prevalent in the Church, using terms so vague and meaningless that the Count Otho became impatient and let his sword fall. The loud ring of the weapon had a calming effect upon the orator; he concluded with a brief and high-sounding phrase, bowed respectfully, and withdrew.

The English ambassador, on the other hand, was stiff and sententious, his face retained a grave and stern expression, and Frederic's presence alone gave some appearance of animation to the features of this phlegmatic son of Albion. Frederic was neither excited by the flatteries of the Frenchman, nor wounded by the Englishman's assumption of importance. He knew Louis's crafty policy, as well as the ambition and cruelty of the English King. Henry possessed certain territorial rights in France which he was desirous of aggrandizing, and the constant quarrels, resulting from these pretensions, rendered each sovereign desirous of cultivating exclusively for himself the Emperor's friendship and favor. Frederic knew all this, and he meant to profit by his knowledge.

The maxim, "Divide and conquer," was always present to his mind. Alexander had used every effort to reconcile the two sovereigns; Barbarossa, on the contrary, did everything in his power to widen the breach between them. An alliance between the two nations might have been fatal to his projects, and the end to which he now looked was to detach both France and England from the Holy Father, deprive him of his strongest support, and then gain over each, separately, to the recognition of his schism.

The Emperor's answer, unlike the harangue of the French envoy, was clear and decided. He expressed, delicately, the consciousness which he possessed of his own power, and the importance which he attached to it; at times, indeed, his words sounded almost like threats. Basing his rights upon the old Roman law, Barbarossa claimed that the Imperial power was supreme, and that the sovereignty of the Emperor extended despotically to all the countries immediately bordering upon it. Perhaps even Frederic himself had not yet foreseen whither his ambition might lead him; but he knew, by heart, all the texts of the digest which could be cited in support of his prerogatives.

"We hope," said he, "that the bonds of friendship which already bind your country with the Empire, will be drawn closer. The duty of the heir of Charlemagne is to maintain law and order, to respect the laws of all men, and to assure the peace and tranquillity of Christendom. We do not make war for the sake of glory and renown; we are forced to it by necessity, for we will always direct the powerful arm of the Empire against whoever opposes our supremacy. It is important for us, the defender of the Faith, never to lose sight of this point; and to enforce our rights, we count upon the aid of both France and England. But as this is rather a question within the jurisdiction of a council, we have requested the presence of plenipotentiaries from your respective governments; and the decisions of this illustrious assembly shall be supported and enforced by every means at our command."

Rinaldo, who had listened with great attention to the Emperor's speech, could not conceal his surprise. Each word seemed a reproach whose bitterness he disguised with difficulty under a diplomatic smile; and the closing words produced a similar effect upon the ambassadors. The French envoy looked towards the Englishman as if to ask: What has been advised?--what has been approved?--what has been promised? The Englishman remained calm and unmoved, although the expression of his countenance was that of one who had trodden upon a viper.

"As we have the pleasure of entertaining at our court the illustrious envoys of England and France, we beg them to carry to their noble sovereigns the renewed assurance of our friendship and consideration."

The Emperor rose: the ambassadors made a profound obeisance, and left the hall accompanied by Otho of Wittelsbach, the Counts of Andechs and of Bogen, and their suites.

"My imperial cousin," said Henry the Lion, "knows marvellously well how to sow dissension between France and England."

"You are right," replied Barbarossa; "Louis will never be able to get rid of the English, if he undertakes to protect Alexander; and, on the other hand, the Englishman will lose every foot of soil which he now holds in France, should he presume to oppose the organization of the Imperial Church."

At this juncture, the Chancellor Palatine Ulrich, upon a sign from the Emperor, left the room.

"We have yet an act of justice to perform," said he, "at which we request your presence. A complaint has been made to us of a gross abuse of authority. Those whom we honor with our confidence should be careful not to be guilty of acts which will disgrace it. Therefore, without regard to rank or position, we are determined that vigorous and stern justice shall be meted out to all."

Whilst Barbarossa was speaking, Rechberg entered the room on one side, while on the other appeared Herman, the prefect of Staufenberg. He was followed by Hesso the chief of police, a sufficient evidence that he was the accused party. He approached the throne boldly and with head erect, and threw himself upon his knees, where he remained in the posture of a suppliant.

"Stand up!" said the Emperor, "and let the chancellor do his duty!"

Ulrich advanced between Herman and the Barons; his stern and flushed face showing that he was about to exercise one of the most important functions of his office.

"In the name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity!" he cried, in a loud voice.

At these words the Emperor and his nobles rose from their seats and bowed profoundly.

"The noble Count Erwin of Rechberg, here present, accuses the knight Herman, prefect and Imperial Castellan of Staufenberg, of having exacted illegal tolls, and of having in this abused the name of the Emperor, to the intent of prejudicing him in the esteem of the public."

"What answer have you to make?" demanded Barbarossa.

"I have never," replied Herman, insolently, "abused the name of the Emperor, and have never violated the law. I maintain that the accusation is false and lying, and will prove it so in the lists, sword in hand."

"Perhaps you had not the intention of violating the law," said Frederic; "still it is none the less positive that such has been the result of your illegal conduct."

"If I had not the intention to act illegally, Sire, I can scarcely be considered criminal. A second time I spurn this accusation as false. I will prove my innocence with my lance and with my sword."

"We cannot accord you this privilege."

"But the right which I claim belongs to every freeman."

Frederic glanced angrily at the bold knight, but his calm demeanor was unshaken. The Bishop of Munster immediately spoke out:

"In the name of the Holy Church," said the prelate, "I must correct your mistake. The canons expressly forbid the practice of trial by battle. In truth, there is nothing more censurable than this mode of attempting to establish one's innocence. Admitting that you defeat your adversary, does that prove in any way that you are not guilty?"

These remarks had not been at all prompted by a sentiment of duty, but influenced solely by a desire of doing the Emperor a service; and as the speaker resumed his seat, he glanced towards him to observe the effect which his words had produced.

"Count Rechberg," resumed the monarch, turning towards Erwin, "what toll was demanded of you by Herman?"

"Four gold pieces for myself, and eight others for Bonello and his daughter."

"Do you admit this, sir?"

Herman looked around anxiously, as if seeking a loophole of escape.

"Knight Herman," said Barbarossa, menacingly, "take care to make no mistake! A denial will avail you nothing, but will only increase the severity of your punishment."

"Under the impression that I had traitors before me, I did demand twelve gold pieces; but as God is my judge, I had no intention of either violating the law, or abusing the Emperor's name."

"However," said Barbarossa, "you have abused your position; you have robbed our subjects; listen then to your sentence: We deprive you of your office and your arms, and declare you degraded from the rank of noble. Your escutcheon shall be broken by the executioner, and a mangy dog shall drag the pieces around the walls of the city of Milan."

Herman heard the first words of his sentence with a contemptuous smile upon his face; but when the Emperor spoke of ordering his escutcheon to be dragged in the mire, he shuddered, changed color, and fell on his knees before the throne.

"Mercy! Pity!" he cried. "Condemn me to death if you will, but do not dishonor the escutcheon of my family."

"Silence! Your sentence has been pronounced, and it shall be executed," said Frederic.

"Sire," resumed Herman, dragging himself like a worm to the foot of the throne, "gracious lord, kill me, but in pity do not inflict this outrage. See these scars," (and tearing open his doublet, he bared his breast;) "I received them fighting in your cause, and yet now you would doom me to eternal ignominy!"

"Lead him away," said the stern lawgiver, unmoved by the prayers of the abject wretch.

The captain and his aids dragged off the condemned man, who mingled threats and maledictions with his entreaties.

CHAPTER XXII.

VANITY.

As soon as Herman's sentence had been pronounced, Erwin left the Camp, and sought the solitude of a neighboring wood, where he might meditate at his leisure.

He had considered it his duty to complain of Herman's conduct, but the demeanor and profound despair of the culprit almost made him regret the step which he had taken. Rechberg, like all generous-hearted men, was painfully impressed by the sight of even a well-merited punishment, and as he reflected upon the sufferings of the disgraced soldier, he was forcibly reminded of his own troubles. Would the inflexible will of the Emperor consent to Bonello's pardon? The question was a doubtful one, but he hoped for the best, and it needed all this hope to sustain his faltering courage. His reverie was long and absorbing, but suddenly a strange restlessness took possession of his imagination; and yielding to his presentiments, he retraced his steps to the Camp as hurriedly as though he had been informed of the arrival of his lady-love. Still he could not possibly expect it, for he was ignorant of the designs of the Empress. However, Hermengarde had really come, and had entered the Imperial tent at a most opportune moment. Beatrice felt some slight apprehension of her husband's anger, but as the Emperor and the Chancellor Rinaldo had gone over to Lodi after the audience of the ambassadors, she was reassured as to the success of her plans, for a few days at least.

Her reception of Hermengarde was cordial in the extreme, and was at first attributed by the latter to the kind offices of Count Rechberg, but Her Majesty's words undeceived her.

"I cannot express to you," said she, "the pleasure which I experience in receiving a young girl whose noble self-devotion made no account of either dangers or difficulties in her father's cause. I desire to assure you of my sincere respect and admiration, and will hope that the Court may derive new lustre from your presence."

These flattering words surprised Hermengarde, whose ingenuous soul, devoid of all pride, had no desire to become conspicuous in any way. At the end of the reception, which had been wearily lengthened out by the many formalities then in usage, she withdrew to her own chamber to repose from the fatigues of the journey.

Beatrice's expectation of the Italian's beauty had been greatly surpassed by the reality. Herself very handsome, and perfectly aware of her charms, she had in her invitation neither been influenced by her guest's merits nor Rechberg's wishes, but simply by the curiosity of seeing one whose beauty was so widely renowned. Up to this moment her own rank and loveliness had given her the first place at Court, and now she found herself in the position of a general who sustains an unexpected defeat after a long career of victories. The haughty sovereign was disappointed and provoked, and although she made every effort to retain her calmness, each movement betrayed the thoughts which agitated her mind.

"Well, madam, what do you think of the young lady's beauty?" asked Richilda, who rather liked to tease her mistress.

"Take away those draperies; it is suffocatingly hot," said Beatrice. "Oh, you ask me what I think?--Do you find her pretty?"

"I have never seen any one like her!" said the tire-woman, boldly. "It is to be supposed that my taste is not perfect, but it is the expression of my opinion. She is beautiful, wonderfully beautiful!"

"Indeed? you think her wonderfully beautiful?" repeated Beatrice, with a mixture of scorn and anger. "You are very enthusiastic, it seems!"

"I only wished to express the highest point of beauty. Perhaps I should have said beautiful as an angel!--And, indeed, your Majesty, I always imagined that an angel would look like her!"

Beatrice endeavored to restrain her anger, but in spite of herself, she colored and grew pale by turns.

"Oh! she is only a child yet, not fourteen they say, and before the age of twenty she may change a great deal. You know that pretty children often grow up into ugly women."

"The proverb will be wrong here, your Majesty. The young girl's beauty is still only in the bud, but we can already foresee what it will become. When the rose shall be fully blown, I would advise no one to come near who is not perfectly sure that she can bear the comparison."

"Enough of this nonsense! Hermengarde is betrothed to Count Rechberg, and I wish to do everything to please him. Go and find out if Rechberg will be here soon, for I am curious to witness their meeting. You may invite her to the collation of which I will partake with her."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MEETING.

Hermengarde felt very uneasy at the Empress' silence with regard to Erwin. Was he no longer in the Camp? Had he accompanied the Emperor to Lodi, or perhaps returned to Germany? The doubts annoyed her, and in her agitation she paced her room with hurried steps.

"You must be tired," said the maid who attended her. "Why in the world do you run about in that way? I feel quite broken down, and yet you seem as lively as if you had not ridden fourteen miles to-day."

"Youth bears fatigue easily, but I have been wrong, dear Hedwige, to make you come such a tiresome journey."

"Wrong! and who but I should accompany you? Your father was away, and you could not come to the Court alone."

"Oh! Hedwige, you remind me that I have been doubly wrong: first in tiring you, and then in coming away without my father's permission."

"You could not have declined such an honor. How silly! Many a prince's daughter would have been flattered by such an invitation! No, no; you did quite right to accept it."

"But my father's consent?"

"Nonsense! Your father would have been proud of the honor paid you; do not doubt it a moment."

"Still"--

"Hush!--some one is coming."

At this moment, Richilda, accompanied by several ladies of honor, entered, bearing a most cordial invitation to visit the Empress. She was surprised at Hermengarde's sad expression.

"I trust that you are not unwell, noble lady?" she asked, kindly.

"Oh, it is nothing," replied Hermengarde, blushing; "I am only a little homesick: it is a malady felt by all spoiled children."

"You must forget, for a few days, your Alpine retreats, although Count Rechberg has given such a vivid picture of their charms, that I can scarcely wonder that you regret your castle in the midst of all this turmoil of the camp."

"Has the Count returned to Germany?" asked Hermengarde.

"Oh no! you will meet him at the banquet to which Her Majesty has commissioned me to invite you."

In a few moments she left her apartment, preceded by several ladies, who composed an escort of honor. At the head of the procession walked the master of ceremonies, holding the silver wand of his office. They passed through several sumptuously furnished apartments, and finally arrived in the reception-hall.

"The noble Lady of Castellamare!" cried the master of ceremonies, with a loud voice.

These words interrupted a serious and animated conversation between the Empress and the Duke of Austria; but Beatrice came forward cordially to welcome her guest, and at once presented her to the prince.

"I have heard a great deal of you, noble lady, and I am happy now to make your acquaintance: you realize the ideal; a lovely soul under a most perfect exterior.--You have given to all children a most beautiful example to be followed, and you have gained honor and renown. Allow me to express all my admiration."

"You are taking the true course to make our Hermengarde proud. Frankness is to be lauded, but must not be abused."

"I crave your Majesty's pardon!" said the Duke, to whom Beatrice was no stranger, and who knew that the girl's beauty annoyed her; "but I must say that you have added to your chaplet a pearl whose lustre will dazzle more than one noble gentleman."

"Oh, you are not frank now," said the Empress, with suppressed rage. "But come, the banquet awaits us; it is served in a woman's fashion, but I will not accept a refusal."

Just then the hangings of the door were lifted, and Erwin of Rechberg entered the room. All

eyes were turned upon the youthful pair. The Count stood motionless, as though rooted to the ground, and with open eyes seemed to fear to advance lest the lovely vision might fade from his sight forever.

The Empress, holding the young girl's hand, approached.

"It is no dream, as you seem to fear, Erwin," said she.--"Well, Count, why do you remain dumb and unmoved? this surprise, I am persuaded, cannot be a disagreeable one to you."

"A thousand pardons, the---it is so unexpected."

And stepping forward, he kissed his lady's hand. They sat down to table. On the right of the Empress was placed Hermengarde, on her left the Duke of Austria, and next to the young Italian was Erwin of Rechberg. The court attendants were at the foot of the table, with Hedwige in the place of honor among them; and the worthy nurse had enough to do in answering all the questions which the curiosity of the other women prompted them to make. The food, consisting of fowls, game, fruit, honey and other sweetmeats, was served on silver dishes; but, except by the Austrian, who quaffed long draughts from a golden goblet, there was very little attention paid to the choice wines set before them.

The conversation went on naturally; Rechberg and Hermengarde had so much to say that they soon forgot to eat or drink, while the Duke resumed the discussion which the Italian's arrival had interrupted.

"Yes, madame," he said, "it is an irreligious, an impious act. Clemence is a noble wife, and this pretext of consanguinity is unfounded. Such a transaction might take place among Moors and Pagans, but among Christians, never! Clemence is the lawful wife of the Duke of Saxony, and should he marry another woman, the union would be illegal. That is my way of looking at the question, and if the affair is debated publicly, I will state my opinion frankly."

This discourse was highly unpleasant to the Empress, whose position towards Frederic was involved in the condemnation so freely expressed. His first wife was still living, and Beatrice, consequently, had no legitimate claims to the title. Her flashing eyes indicated her displeasure, as she replied,--

"I had not supposed your relationship so close."

"My relationship! Most certainly it is painful for me to see my cousin's daughter repudiated so disgracefully, but I have many other reasons for opposing the divorce. The Emperor may, for reasons of policy, overthrow everything in Church and State; but, believe me, this state of things will not continue. To despise the holy teachings of the faith, to break sacred bonds, to be recreant to every law which is revered by nations and sovereigns, are acts of impiety which cannot always go unpunished."

"You are a skilful preacher," said Beatrice, whose frivolous temperament was little disposed to serious questions. "One can see that you were educated by the monks."

"The memories of my youth do not influence my opinions on holy matters. However, I owe many thanks to the good priests of Fulva."

"And I see that your ducal robes are only a species of cowl!"

"Your Majesty, I perceive, agrees with the Emperor; he also has little affection for the monks."

"And very naturally, too. They oppose energetically all development of the Imperial power, for these pious people will not tolerate any division of authority."

"At least they will not acknowledge his spiritual supremacy, and in this they are perfectly right," said the Duke, with his usual frankness.

"Heavens! how you warm with this subject! But let us drop the discussion; neither of us will convince the other."

"Pardon me, madam! I have just learned the story of this divorce. Astonished, furious at the infamy of the proceeding, I came here to express my views frankly to the Emperor; but, as His Majesty unfortunately is absent, I have ventured to express my sentiments to you. May I hope that you will sympathize with me, and use your influence in the defence of this ill-used woman?"

"Enough," said she. "Your conversation has been very instructive, for, until to-day, I was not aware that she who took the place of a divorced wife was no better than a courtesan. You may rest assured, my lord, that the Emperor, as well as myself, will appreciate the lesson as it deserves."

The Duke felt that he had made himself a mortal enemy, but it gave him no uneasiness whatever. Duke Jacomgirott was no courtier, and his energetic character never concealed, even for an instant, his true sentiments. Beatrice left him in anger, but what she witnessed on the other side was not calculated to calm her emotions; her glance was fixed for one moment on the fair Hermengarde, who was conversing joyously with the Count.

"Your attentions are not at all displeasing to me," she said; "but we have determined that you shall not entirely monopolize our amiable guest. She will accompany us to our private apartments." The Empress rose, and bowing coldly to the Duke, swept out of the hall, accompanied by the lady of Castellamare, and followed by her retinue.

"I have made her my enemy for life," said the Austrian to himself. "She cannot, it is true, sympathize with my poor Clemence without thinking of the Empress Adelaide, whose place she has usurped. Ah! what is it, my little man?" as Lanzo advanced, with a grave and important air.

"If my eyes do not deceive me," said the jester, "you are the Duke of Austria?"

"Yes; what then?"

"Then, you must know, that you see before you the ambassador of the Duchess of Saxony and Bavaria."

"You the envoy of a duchess! Upon my word, I am surprised."

"You should not be, my lord; Clemence wanted to find some one to carry her message, but as there are but three men in the four camps, her choice was necessarily limited."

"Three men only, among so many thousands of gallant soldiers! What a piece of impertinence. You deserve a flogging; but come, let us see who these three men are!"

"The first one, naturally, is myself; the second, is my cousin Barbarossa; and the third shall be you, if you choose," said the jester.

"How is that!" interrupted Erwin. "Am not I a man too?"

"No," replied Lanzo. "To be a man, you must be free; and your heart is in bondage!"

"A sorry joke!" said the Duke, with a laugh.

"And all the others are the mere dolls, puppets, wooden horses, armorbearers, and bloodhounds of one man, named Barbarossa. Mix up all these creatures together, pound them into a paste, and put it under a press; you will not extract the least action of independence, energy, or generosity."

"Hum! you are not far wrong; but we are forgetting the important part. What is it that your Excellency is empowered to communicate to me?"

"That you must go at once to your cousin; she has been seeking you for the last hour."

The Duke took his leave of Rechberg, and in company with the jester went towards the tent of the Princess of Saxony.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WALK.

Hedwige was busily employed in dressing the hair of her young mistress, and after arranging the silken tresses which fell in a mass of curls upon her shoulders, she placed a crown of silver, studded with jewels, upon her head.

"Be good enough," she said, "to look in the mirror, and tell me if you are satisfied with my skill."

"It does well enough!" replied Hermengarde, after a hasty glance; "but now, hurry and finish."

"I cannot go so fast. You know that every one looks at you. I don't want to be accused of negligence!" and she gazed affectionately at the young girl.

Hermengarde was dressed entirely in white; her robe fitting closely to her arms and bust, displayed the elegance of her figure, and by its shape and color enhanced her native grace and distinction. Her whole soul beamed in her eyes, and, as she stood there before her nurse, she appeared the creature of another world, detached from the cares and anxieties of earth.

"So far it is all right!" said Hedwige, after a careful examination. She placed a light blue mantle, with buttons and embroideries of gold, upon her shoulders.

"Perfect," she resumed; "I could kiss you gladly, you look so well! White and blue suit you admirably."

"Don't stop for such follies, Hedwige; they have already been twice to see if we were ready."

"Do not fear; we will get there in time for the cavalcade. But how stiff and cold everything is here. The Empress' women are like dolls. What serious faces! and what choice language they use! I am afraid all the time to open my mouth, lest I say something I ought not to. I am glad that we are going where we shall have a little freedom."

She threw over her mistress a costly mantle trimmed with ermine, and then fastened to her coronet a long veil, which shielded her face from the heat of the sun and the impertinent stare of the crowd.

A few moments after, Hermengarde and Erwin rode through the camp towards the neighboring wood, followed by Hedwige and the Count's servant Gero.

"How long has it been since your visit to Castellamare, my lord Count?--about three months, is it not?"

"Three months and six days, madam."

"Perhaps you will explain why, during three months and six days, we have never seen you? My father gave you a most cordial invitation. You know under what obligations we felt ourselves, and were certain of the pleasure which your presence would cause. Why then did you not come?"

"Because, noble lady, I am not free; all my time belongs to the Emperor."

"And the Emperor does not wish you to visit the Bonelli? I should have thought of that."

"Oh, no!" answered Rechberg quickly; "the Emperor's great mind never cherishes a mean thought. He speedily forgets the past, but he enforces strict discipline in his army. Neither prince nor knight is his own master in the field."

"What rigorous severity!" said Hermengarde.

"It is necessary, I assure you. Think what would happen if every one could leave camp when he pleased."

"Well, well! I accept your excuse; duty before everything. But look, what a beautiful grove! How the grass and the flowers bloom, and the pines spread out their verdant branches! It is truly charming; but it wants the grandeur of our Alpine forests."

"If you wish, we will go on a little further; there is a lovely spot above, where I have often dreamed in secret," replied the Count.

She assented. Gero was left with the horses; and accompanied by Hedwige, they followed the narrow path which led to the top of the hill. As soon as they had arrived, Rechberg spread his mantle on the grass, and Hermengarde took her seat.

The dense foliage of the trees stretched above them like a dome of verdure, in which the birds were chirping their gay songs. Through an opening of the forest could be seen the towers and spires of Milan, but all around the forest was thickly planted, and the eye could penetrate with difficulty through the underbrush.

Scarcely had the young girl seated herself, when two men began to creep up silently and cautiously towards the little group, and concealing themselves behind a tree, listened eagerly to the conversation. One of them was in complete armor, and wore his visor down, but his eyes glared fiercely through the bars of his helmet. The other had only a cuirass, and beneath his hat appeared the cunning face of the Milanese Cocco Griffi.

"You have chosen a beautiful spot," said Hermengarde; "and this perspective is admirable."

"Yes; and it was in some degree on that account I selected this wild site----"

At this moment the man in armor uttered an angry exclamation through his visor, and disappeared in the thicket, followed by his companion.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CAPTURE.

"What say you of this adventure?" asked Griffi of the knight, with whose long strides he could scarcely keep pace; "I know that you are entirely disinterested in the question."

The knight made no answer. They soon reached a clearing, where a dozen soldiers were sleeping on the ground. The knight's horse was fastened to a tree by a long strap, which allowed him to graze at his ease.

"Up sleepers!" cried the knight. The soldiers sprang to their feet, and awaited anxiously their leader's instructions.

"Come here, Wido!" he continued, speaking to a broad-shouldered young man near him.

After Wido had unfastened the horse and tied the strap to the saddle-bow, Cocco Griffi approached.

"You will surely not kill them?" he said.

"What is that to you?" the knight answered roughly. "And you," he added, turning to one of the troopers, "lead my horse to the road, and wait until you hear my bugle."

"But, noble sir," observed Griffi, "we did not come here to commit an evil action, but to help pass in some provisions for the hungry Milanese. It would be terrible if the convoy, deprived of our support, should fall into Hesso's power. He will cut off the right hands of all the people in the train, and the provisions will never get to Milan."

"Silence!"

"Silence! yes, silence!" murmured Griffi; "I am to hold my tongue and let my fellow-citizens die of hunger! Before I announced to you the presence of this girl, I should have reflected on the folly of which I was guilty in speaking of her."

The chief looked at the little man calmly, as if he thought that, after all, he might be right; and taking out a purse, he handed its glittering contents to his attendant.

"Here! don't get angry, Cocco! At least you cannot say that you have ever done me a service without receiving a reward for it."

"Great service, worthy reward, upon my word!" said Cocco, weighing the purse. "I must smother my intelligence, in order to look at things in the same light as you do. We will see whether our marauders will ever reach the city. I am afraid that they are in mortal danger of falling into Hesso's clutches!"

The knight ordered his men to follow him as silently as possible, and they crept forward to where Erwin and the lady were talking with Hedwige. Suddenly Hedwige uttered a piercing shriek, and at the same moment, Rechberg was thrown backwards upon the ground. Wido put his knee upon his chest, and the other varlets tied his hand and foot, so that he could not move. Hermengarde had scarcely time to understand what had happened, when the Unknown seized her by the arm and dragged her through the wood. Behind them ran Hedwige, screaming with terror, and Gero, who came up to his master's aid, was speedily put in a condition to make no resistance.

Still it was no easy matter to tie up the knight, whose powerful arm resisted manfully; and could he have but gained his feet, his sword would have rendered the success of the attempt at least doubtful.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Wido, "are not eight valiant Lombards a match for this German wild boar? Nozi, pass that strap under his left arm,--good!--now pull tight, comrade! Slip this one more to the right! Come, I think he is well tied up now--we will see whether he can break these triple knots. Be careful about the feet too, for you can never tell when these wild beasts are securely fastened!"

"And now, I think we can let him wriggle, like a fish out of water."

"Wretches, caitiffs, scoundrels!" cried Erwin.

"Hold your tongue!" said one of the soldiers; "it won't untie you, and it is only a useless fatigue. Try to die quietly."

"Is my life threatened?"

"What a question! our master never spares any Germans who fall into his hands. It is a real pleasure for us to cut your throats!"

"Who is your master?"

"Ask him yourself!"

"And the lady!--The villain!--let this bandit but dare to be wanting in respect!"

"I suppose that you would leave your grave to twist his neck," sneered Wido. "But here comes our master himself, to give you every explanation which you may desire."

The Unknown, at the same moment, came up, with his helmet closed; halting in front of Erwin, he stood with arms folded, as though deliberating on his fate.

"Raise your visor, villain, and show me your bandit's face!" said Erwin, furiously.

"It is unnecessary; I am a brave Lombard, who has sworn to free his country of German tyranny. That ought to suffice you."

"And meanwhile you practise a truly Lombard profession,--robbers, assassins, and cheats, that you all are!"

"Spare your words, and listen to me. I have no doubt that what I have done appears criminal, particularly in the eyes of the noble Count of Rechberg, for whom, in spite of the hatred which I bear his race, I still have a certain respect, on account of his generous sentiments. Without this consideration, I would have killed you immediately; for I am bound by a solemn oath to destroy the enemies of Italy, wherever I can meet them."

"Very well; but is it the act of a brave man to attack a defenceless girl? Shame upon you!"

"Silence!" said the Unknown, interrupting him. "I deliver the lady of Castellamare from the power of those who are unworthy to possess such a treasure! The thoughtlessness of youth, perhaps a feeling of gratitude induced her, in her father's absence, to leave the castle and visit the tyrant's court. The lady shall remain under my protection until I can restore her to that of her father."

The Count stared at this man who, at all events, reassured him of Hermengarde's safety from all insult or danger.

"But by what right do you interfere in the matter," he said.

"It matters not; the right is mine, and I use it. Hermengarde has begged me to spare your life, and although I almost hate her for the request, I have consented; you are free.--Your gray head," continued the Lombard, turning to Gero, "assures me of your discretion; so listen attentively, for your master's sake, to what I am about to say. In an hour's time, you may untie him; we shall then have reached Milan, and it will be impossible to follow me. But take care not to let yourself be touched by his entreaties, for if he should pursue, I shall consider myself freed from my promise, and he shall die. Will you swear to obey me?"

"With all my heart," answered Gero; "and literally too!--Not to please you, but on my master's account."

"You are an honest fellow," said the knight. And drawing his poniard, he cut the ropes which bound the squire.

"By all the saints of paradise!" cried Erwin; "since you still have some chivalrous feelings left, will you accept my challenge?"

"With pleasure, when and where you will!"

"Whither can I send it?" asked Rechberg, eagerly.

"What use is there of all these formalities when your Emperor violates every law, whether human or divine. Present yourself, under a flag of truce, at the gate of St. Ambrose; you will find me there."

"I thank you," said the Count. "Be prepared tomorrow at early dawn."

"You will find the horses where you left them," added the Unknown. "You have stolen nothing, I trust," he continued, turning to his followers, who had listened with curiosity to the dialogue.

"For whom do you take us, my lord?" replied Wido. "But this glove which I see here, scarcely will fit the hand of a German boar, so I conclude it is not his property."

"Ah! give it to me," said the Unknown; "it belongs to Hermengarde. If our combat should be prevented by any accident, you can always recognize your enemy by this glove which he will wear on his helmet. Yes, I will bear this in her honor and as a defiance to you."

At these words he signed to his men to follow him, and soon the troop disappeared in the recesses of the forest.

"What a strange person!" said Erwin; "he is a singular mixture of an honest man and a

highway robber.

"Yes," replied Gero; "but there is a preponderance of the robber. His loyalty seems to me like a drop of wine in a cask of water. My lord, I don't like to see you stretched thus on the ground, so I will lift you upon your feet."

"Cut these ropes, and I will lift myself up."

"Excuse me, my lord Count, but I cannot; for I fear that you will make a bad use of your liberty, and pursue the bandits."

Gero, after some trouble, managed to get his master on his feet, and then went to look for the horses. In the interval, Rechberg reflected upon the change which had taken place in his position, and which had seemingly blasted his hopes. It was all over, he thought; Hermengarde was in the power of one who seemed to have certain claims to her; but Gero's return put an end to his meditations.

"Decidedly, they were not robbers. I have found the horses where I left them," said the soldier; "and now I have tied them up close by, ready for us to mount when the hour is up."

"You say they were not robbers, Gero?"

"Well, not ordinary robbers; for if they had been, these gold rings on your baldric and your horses too, would have disappeared."

"Hasten, my good fellow, and cut these ropes at once; you would leave me a prisoner forever, it seems!"

"The hour is not quite up yet, Count; be patient a little while longer. Does the time really appear so wearisome?"

"Even if I would, it is impossible for me to pursue the bandit now. Do you not perceive how dark it grows?"

"Pray have a little patience, my dear lord. I am dreaming of your triumph of to-morrow; be assured that I will select the strongest lance and the best tempered coat-of-mail in your armory."

"You think, then, that he will meet me?"

"Most certainly; he has too proud an air to be a disloyal knight."

"But who is he? It is strange, but it seems as though I had already heard his voice."

"Do not worry your brain by guessing, Count; you will know his face soon enough."

"You are right. Never before have I experienced so much curiosity to see an adversary raise his visor!"

"And now, my lord, allow me to untie you;--how tightly the villains have drawn these knots!"

"Do you think so? And yet I felt nothing.--Quickly, now, Gero; where are the horses?"

They mounted and left the wood, as speedily as the obscurity would permit; but before reaching the camp, Rechberg was obliged to witness a scene rendered still more horrible by the darkness. He had scarcely advanced a hundred yards, when his attention was arrested by the clashing of arms and the shouts of strife. Always curious to recognize his enemy, he drew up his horse to listen, for he imagined that there must be some connection between this nocturnal combat and the Unknown, whose escape he hoped had been prevented by some of the German patrols. As he advanced as rapidly as prudence and the darkness permitted, the noise ceased and he perceived, by the light of a dozen torches, a troop of heavily laden mules, whose drivers, with downcast eyes and manacled hands, were marching between two files of armed men.

"It is Hesso and his bloodhounds," cried Gero; "I know his gruff voice!"

"Captain Hesso," said Rechberg, when they had gotten nearer, "I heard the noise of your skirmish, as I was returning to camp, and was about to come to your assistance."

"I scarcely needed it, my lord."

"You have made a valuable capture, it seems!"

"Yes," answered Hesso; "twenty mules, and eight Milanese. One got away, and three were killed, so that four will escape punishment."

"Was there no escort?" inquired Erwin, as he rode by the headsman's side.

"No, not this time, although usually one comes out from Milan; but to-day it failed."

Thinking that the Unknown and his soldiers had probably been detailed for that duty, Erwin

determined to question the prisoners, in the hope of discovering the name of his adversary.

"We must invent some other punishment," resumed Hesso. "They don't care for mutilation; one of them told me the other day, that Milan would give him a golden hand to replace the one that I had cut off. If the Emperor wants to starve them out, he will have to hang every one who tries to bring even a handful of peas into the town."

"Death is the punishment for a repetition of the offence, I believe?" asked the knight.

"Yes; but they are very careful not to be caught at that! They are so well paid for mutilation that they are not tempted to risk their lives. But they do not seem to care for their hands at all, and I am kept busy all day long in intercepting their convoys.--I suppose that, while I am stopping this one, another has got into the city."

By this time, they had reached the line of tents occupied by Hesso and his assistants--about thirty paces in front of the main camp. In the centre stood a gallows, and, near by, a heavy block stained with blood, to which the unfortunate prisoners were led.

"Do you mean to carry their sentence into effect at once?" asked Erwin.

"Certainly! These birds are a useless encumbrance in camp; as soon as they have left their hands with me, they can go where they please. Such is the law!" replied Hesso, who had taken off his doublet, and stood, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to the elbows, before the fatal block.

One of the prisoners came up; his pale and suffering expression painfully affected the Count, who could not bear the sight of this barbarous tragedy, which to Hesso was a mere pastime.

"Bring up your contribution," said the headsman; "what a face the scoundrel has! he trembles, and his teeth chatter with fear."

A dull sound was heard, followed by a plaintive groan.

"One!" said the executioner, as he threw the hand on one side; "look what a baby-paw it is!"

The assistants joined in their chiefs laugh, as they saw the mutilated wretch faint with pain.

"Never mind!" said Hesso, coolly; "if he bleeds to death, we shall be sure that he won't try this business again."

"One moment, sir! Will you allow me a moment's conversation with the prisoners?" asked Erwin.

"What for?" was the reply, and the headsman stared angrily at the Count.

"As you have yourself told me, the besieged are in the habit of sending out to escort these convoys; perhaps I may gain some useful information which will decide the Emperor to adopt some more energetic measures!"

"Three!" cried Hesso.

And at the same time was heard the cry of pain and a brutal laugh.

"More energetic measures are well enough, but you will get no information.--Four!"

"But it is worth trying."

"Five!--and a bloody hand fell at Erwin's feet.

"It will be labor in vain; you don't know these bandits; all they are fit for, is to lie and steal!--Seven!--And besides, it is too late now,--here is the last--Eight!--It is all over. Long live the Emperor!" said Hesso.

Among the victims, some had fainted with pain, others had still strength enough to bind up their bleeding arms.

"Have you no orders to dress their wounds?" asked Erwin. "The Emperor has prescribed their punishment, but he does not wish the poor wretches to bleed to death."

"You are right," was the reply. "Where is that quack Lutold? Come here with your plasters, old man."

And while the surgeon, thanks to the interference of the young Count, discharged his duty, Rechberg and his squire took their way to the Imperial camp.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TREACHERY.

Events of great importance had attracted the attention of all the Court, and Erwin's prolonged and unusual absence had in consequence passed unnoticed.

Influenced by their sincere admiration for the heroic resistance made by the citizens, and out of respect for the nobility of the Guelphic faction, the Count Palatine Conrad, Count Ludwig, and the Duke of Bohemia, decided to employ all their influence in case the besieged should seek to negotiate terms of surrender. The Milanese Consuls were agreeably surprised by the proposal, and eagerly accepted the offered mediation.

A short time after Erwin's departure from the camp, the nobles presented themselves in a body before the Emperor and made known their views on the subject. At first Frederic was astonished, and disposed to reject any arrangement, but the firmness of the princes finally persuaded him that some concession must be made to the chivalrous spirit of the age, and the Milanese were notified that His Majesty would deign to receive a flag of truce.

Barbarossa attached more importance to this step than it really merited; for, accustomed to look at everything from the standpoint of his pretensions to universal sovereignty, he thought himself aggrieved, not by the interference of his knights, but by what seemed an encouragement given to rebels. Besides, he was provoked at the opposition made by the Duke of Austria to the contemplated divorce between Clemence and Henry the Lion, and particularly by the conversation which Beatrice had repeated to him. Rinaldo, who was sent for, went still further, and loud words and threats were overheard in the Imperial chamber, which the Chancellor did not leave until after midnight. What passed between the Emperor and his minister was never known, but the chronicles of the Court leave us in doubt whether the latter was ever informed of the efforts made by the princes in favor of the Milanese.

Such being the condition of affairs, it was not surprising that the absence of the Count and the lady passed unnoticed, and that Erwin could quietly retire to his chamber and prepare for the combat which was to take place on the ensuing day.

At dawn everything was ready, for Gero had faithfully attended to his duty. Rechberg put on a shirt of fine chain-mail, with a hood for the neck and back of the head, and his arms and legs were protected with brassarts and greaves of linked steel. Above all this, he wore a suit of plate armor with gauntlets, and a polished helmet. A poniard and a long sword completed his equipment, while a page, according to the custom of that time, carried his lance and shield.

Preceded by a herald, Erwin left the camp and took his way towards the appointed place of meeting. What was his surprise to find the gates open and the garrison drawn up in line upon the towers and ramparts. Entirely ignorant of the arrangement which had been made, he was at a loss to explain the situation. The noise of arms could be heard in that division of the camp occupied by the troops of the Archbishop of Cologne, and still there could be no mistake on the part of the besieged, whose movements were slow and precise, and among whom could be seen the consuls in their robes of ceremony, escorted by a showy retinue.

Whilst Rechberg was gazing with curiosity on the scene, the trumpets sounded, and the Cologne troops marched rapidly from their camp and charged the Milanese, who, unprepared for the attack, were unable, for some moments, to organize themselves. On all sides was heard the cry of "Treachery," and at the same time reinforcements issued from the city to the support of the assailed.

Rechberg felt the more surprised that he perceived the standard of the Duke of Bohemia in the midst of the Milanese. The strife became more deadly every moment, and Rinaldo was in serious danger, for the Duke of Bohemia, after endeavoring in vain to quell the trouble, had withdrawn from the *melee*. Erwin rode hastily towards Count Ludwig, and the other nobles on whose faces he read an expression of settled anger.

"We are eternally disgraced!" said the Count Palatine Conrad.

"The villain! the treacherous villain!" said the Duke of Bohemia. "That infamous Chancellor! I will insult him to his face, when he returns."

"His return will be a difficult matter," added Goswin; "see how he is surrounded; and how his men are falling! Look there, that lance-thrust will hurl him from his saddle!"

Count Dassel, in truth, was in mortal danger, hemmed in on all sides by the enraged Milanese. At this moment the Emperor and his knights, in full armor, rode up.

"How is this, my lords? What means this combat? How! Cologne is in peril, and you remain idle?"

"Pardon, Sire," answered Count Ludwig; "the Chancellor has, treacherously, attacked the Milanese, who, confiding in our word, had left the city. He is justly suffering the punishment of his treason."

"It is possible that the Chancellor may have erred, but you are equally guilty if you allow our Germans to be crushed!" replied Frederic. "Ride to the camp, Goswin! and bring up your men; and you, Erwin, take this troop, and charge the enemy on the flank."

Whilst Rechberg, in the execution of the order, put himself at the head of the column, Barbarossa turned to the princes and nobles, and with prayers and threats endeavored to force them to take part in the combat; but it was in vain he spoke.

"It has never been our duty, Sire, to defend traitors!" said the Count Palatine Conrad.

"Take care, sir," replied the Emperor, menacingly; "you may have cause to repent your conduct." He spurred to the head of a small body of men-at-arms who had assembled in the mean time.

"Courage, my faithful knights!" he cried, couching his lance; "think of German glory!--a German flag is in danger! Charge to its rescue!" and with levelled lances, the men-at-arms hurled themselves upon the foe.

Rechberg was already in the thickest of the fight, sowing death and destruction around him, in his efforts to relieve the Chancellor; but it was in vain that he sought the Unknown, whom he was to recognize by the glove upon his helmet.

The fresh troops from the camp and the Milanese were now engaged in a fierce hand-to-hand conflict. The confusion was immense; without order or preconcerted plan, each man attacked his adversary wherever he could find him. The ground trembled under the hoofs of the charging horses, swords clashed, and lances rose and fell; and the shrill blasts of the trumpets, and the cries of rage and agony, formed a fitting accompaniment to the sombre tragedy. Erwin pressed forward to where the consuls stood, unable either to advance or retreat; but before he could accomplish his object, a loud shout was heard on the left, where the Emperor was fighting. Rechberg looked around; the Emperor had disappeared, but a fierce struggle was going on, and the cry "the Emperor is down!" ran through the ranks; and then the Germans, with a wild yell, began to drive back the enemy, who were giving way on all sides; and at this moment the Emperor regained his saddle and charged forward.

Erwin had finally reached the consuls, while the Milanese were breaking in great confusion.

"Surrender!" he shouted, placing his sword's point on the breast of Gherardo Nigri.

"I yield," replied the Italian, "on the usual terms of chivalry."

The Count confided the prisoner to one of his companions.

"Friend Berthold," he said, "accompany this gentleman to your tent, and remain with him until my return."

The rout had now become general, and the Germans pursued the fugitives to the very gates of the city. Eighty men-at-arms and two hundred and sixty-six infantry, who had left the town to aid the Consuls, were prisoners, while heaps of dead and wounded covered the field of battle.

Before taking off his armor, our hero repaired to the tent where he had placed his prisoner.

Nigri looked up with an air of reproach, as Rechberg entered.

"I beg you to accept my excuses, my lord, for the unfortunate events which have occurred this morning, whose cause I entirely ignore, but in which my honor compelled me to engage."

"My lord Count," replied Gherardo, "I can find no fault with your explanation; the Chancellor's hatred for my country is such, that to gratify it, he considers himself at liberty to use even disloyal weapons against us."

"No apology can be made for Dassel's conduct; but Milan also counts among her citizens some whose loyalty is most questionable," replied Erwin.

"I understand you," said Nigri: "you allude to a matter which interests you personally--and me also. The capture of Hermengarde is a most reprehensible action."

Rechberg was surprised, but his astonishment increased when the Consul, after a brief pause, continued.

"My son's act is very reprehensible, it is true; but perhaps under similar circumstances you would have done the same. Pietro is not yet formally betrothed to Hermengarde, but their marriage has been in contemplation for many years.--Put yourself in Pietro's place and tell me if his conduct does not seem less culpable?"

The Count was thunderstruck; he looked wildly at the Consul, and then paced the room in great agitation.

"Indeed?" said he, "I was not aware of this."

"You perceive, then, that Pietro's claim to the young lady somewhat palliates his violence."

"Yes! yes! naturally."

"Still, what he has done is unworthy of a knight, and I count upon your generosity not to make the father responsible for--"

"No; but your son's action will in some degree modify the conditions of your release. Excuse me for a moment. My friend Berthold will, during my absence, discharge the duties of host."

"With pleasure, Count," said Berthold; "I look upon it as an honor to entertain your prisoner."

Erwin mounted and rode over to the Imperial tent; for he wished to be alone for a short time. On his arrival, Gero announced that a Guelphic knight urgently desired to see him.

"You are not wounded, I trust, my lord?" said the squire, as he was taking off his armor.

"No!"

"It is a pity that your duel was prevented. But perhaps the Unknown has not come off scot-free, and indeed he may have been killed or captured, for we have taken prisoner a great many knights."

"That will do now, Gero; you may put away the armor and then leave me. I wish to be alone."

The squire obeyed without another word; for he had never seen his master so sorrowful and dispirited.

"May I bring the stranger in when he returns?" he asked, as he was retiring.

"Yes," replied the knight, seating himself sadly in a chair, and already plunged in a gloomy revery, which betrayed itself in his features.

Bonello of Castellamare entered a moment afterwards, and met with a reception whose coolness he at once attributed to its proper cause.

"My daughter," he said, "has been severely punished for visiting the court without my permission."

"Do you think so?" asked Erwin.

"Do you doubt it, my lord Count?"

"From what I have just learned, her marriage with Pietro Nigri has been definitely settled for some time," remarked the young German.

"The project is abandoned; Hermengarde will never be the wife of Pietro Nigri."

"Still, the Consul, who appears to be an honorable man, and who for a few hours has been my prisoner, tells a very different story."

"Because he is ignorant of certain facts. It is true that, a few years ago, a marriage between our children was contemplated. But I have never spoken to Hermengarde on the matter, and I know that Pietro's manners have in some way of late displeased her. Besides, after your visit to Castellamare, she herself informed me that she would never be his wife, and as my intention is in no way to coerce her inclinations, she is perfectly free."

This revelation changed at once Rechberg's expression, and in his delight he almost threw himself into Bonello's arms; but suddenly his countenance fell as he thought of Hermengarde still a prisoner in Milan.

"My daughter will leave the city to-day," Bonello hastily added. "Gherardo Nigri is your prisoner, and Pietro will not refuse to exchange Hermengarde for his father."

Before Rechberg could answer, the Chancellor entered, and after a hurried glance at Bonello, saluted the Count, with many warm thanks for his opportune assistance during the battle.

"I merely did my duty," replied Erwin, "and am delighted that you have come out of it safely."

"I escaped myself," said Dassel, gravely; "but fully two-thirds of my men have fallen. May God rest their souls! With his thanks, His Majesty has also commissioned me to deliver you a message. The influential consul Gherardo Nigri has, I have heard, fallen into your hands. The Emperor requests that you will deliver him up to himself."

"I regret that I cannot comply with His Majesty's wishes. Nigri is already at liberty."

"What!" cried Dassel; "you have already sent him back to Milan?"

"He has not yet gone, but he will be dispatched shortly."

"Do not be too hasty; at least, wait until I have informed the Emperor!" and the courtier hurriedly left the room.

"My lord Count," said Guido, who had anxiously listened to the conversation, "you will do wisely in acceding to His Majesty's desires."

"Not at all," answered Rechberg; "the prisoner belongs to me, and to me only!"

At this moment the Chancellor reappeared.

"The Emperor desires your immediate presence," he said.

"Very well, my lord; I will obey at once. As for you, my lord Bonello, go to the consul Nigri and inform him upon what conditions he can obtain his release. Gero, show this gentleman the way to Berthold's quarters; I will be there soon myself."

"Be prudent, young man," said Dassel, after Guido had left them. "Take my advice, and comply with your godfather's wishes. You know that everything should give way before State reasons."

"It is well; let us go on," replied Erwin.

"I would deeply regret should your interest for this Italian lady prompt you to refuse to accede to the Imperial desires. I beg you to be prudent, and do nothing which might compromise your good fortune."

Rechberg was silent, and they entered the Emperor's apartment. With a gracious smile, Frederic motioned them to approach.

"We are not altogether satisfied with you, Erwin; you keep up an intimacy with one who has incurred our Imperial displeasure, and even receive the traitor's visit in our own quarters. And, more than this, we are inexpressibly surprised at these projects of marriage with Bonello's daughter, whose invitation, on the part of the Empress, to visit the Court has displeased us. We desire and insist that such things do not occur again."

Rechberg heard this sharp rebuke in silence.

"To-day's battle," continued Frederic, "in which you took a very distinguished part, has given into your hands the consul Nigri. He belongs to you, according to the laws of chivalry; and as we are unwilling to be guilty of any act of injustice, we merely express a simple desire that he may be delivered over to our charge."

"Pardon me, Sire! It is impossible for me to comply with your wishes," said Erwin, respectfully but firmly. "Hermengarde was carried off by Nigri's son; her release depends upon that of the consul. In this circumstance, I feel sure that your Majesty will make no opposition to the course which I have taken, and which is entirely consistent with the laws of chivalry."

"Ah! the duties of chivalry!" cried Barbarossa, angrily. "Under this pretext our vassals have hesitated to protect their sovereign in the late battle; and Count Rechberg, always on the same plea, refuses what the Emperor requests. When will this stop? If it goes on, all our vassals will soon be false to their oaths of fealty."

"Loyalty and courage are a part of the duties of chivalry," replied Erwin, "and they are as sacred as the others."

"You appear to set great store by them, young man. It is very lucky for Bonello! But do not go too far,--and fear our displeasure."

Erwin-bore with calmness the monarch's angry looks.

"It is strange," resumed the Emperor, still more violently; "it is strange how this girl seems always to glide between us. I tell you, it is high time that you return to reason, and discard these absurd illusions. The daughter of the traitor Bonello is no fit wife for a Count of Rechberg."

The young man was in a most unpleasant position; but after a moment's hesitation, he answered,--

"Sire, I cannot, I must not comply with your wishes."

"Very good!" said the enraged monarch; "since you will not do as I ask, it would be absurd to test your courage any further. Go and prepare for your journey. To-morrow you will return to Germany."

Erwin had not expected this result. He felt sure that with one word he could soften Frederic's

displeasure by yielding to his demand. But,--

"No!" he muttered to himself, "I cannot!" and bowing respectfully, he turned and left the Imperial chamber.

"If we could put his disobedience out of the question, we should think him charming," said Frederic. "Did you notice that he would not give way to his emotions, even although his heart was full to bursting?"

"It seems to me entirely natural," replied the Chancellor; "he is a Rechberg, and all of his family bear in this respect a striking resemblance to their relatives of Hohenstauffen."

"We shall miss him greatly," resumed the Emperor. "But the healthy, bracing air of Suabia will soon cure him of these stupid and absurd ideas of marriage."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BETROTHAL.

The entrance of several of the princes turned Barbarossa's attention to a subject of serious importance. Rinaldo's treachery had excited general indignation. The nobles thought themselves dishonored, and their arrival announced a storm. They came in abruptly; their obeisance to the Emperor was less respectful than usual, and all glanced angrily upon the minister.

"To what do we owe the honor of this unexpected visit?" asked Frederic, as they took their seats.

"We have come," replied the Landgrave Louis, "to demand the condign punishment of your Chancellor Rinaldo, who traitorously attacked the Milanese when their envoys, confiding in the sanctity of our word, and with full trust in our honor, were on their way to the Court."

"Your complaints deeply grieve us," said the Emperor; "we foresee all the evils which may result from these misunderstandings. But let us be just before all things. My lord Chancellor, what have you to plead in your defence?"

Dassel assumed an air of injured innocence, and in an insinuating tone replied,--

"The accused should have the right to defend his cause always, and particularly in the present case, where there are many excuses to be urged. My fidelity to your Majesty, and the respect which I have always professed for the nobility of the Empire, are in themselves a guarantee for my innocence. May God preserve me from violating a princely word! Had I been aware that the Milanese, although the avowed enemies of the Emperor and the Empire, had approached our camp with a safeguard, I should not have presumed to attack them. I can only crave my pardon on the ground of ignorance, if such an excuse be in your eyes worthy of acceptance."

"But, Chancellor, did we not cry, and that too, loudly, that the Italians were under the protection of our word, and that they must not be molested?"

"True, my lords; but the fighting had already begun!" answered Dassel. "The Milanese hemmed me in on all sides, and I was no longer the aggressor, but in the position of legitimate defence."

"Your representations are not sufficient!" said the Duke of Bohemia; "your tongue is more skilful than ours, and you are our superior in all that is tricky; but your treason must and shall be punished! Are you ready to clear yourself of this stain in single combat?"

"Your lordship must be aware," replied Dassel, with a smile, "that the canons of the Church forbid this mode of justification to the Archbishop of Cologne?"

"Bah!" said the Count. "You are only a layman like us; only a consecration can make you a priest or a bishop. So long as you are not an ecclesiastic, you have no right to shelter yourself behind the privileges of the Church."

"My lords!" cried the Emperor, angrily, "we will not permit this assault upon a man whose honor and veracity are known to us; we declare him absolved from all blame; we are satisfied with his explanations!"

Rage and mortification were expressed on the faces of the knights.

"If your Majesty wishes to shield your Chancellor, we must obey," said Conrad; "but as some amends for the outrage, we request that you will release the consuls who were captured despite our word of honor as gentlemen and knights."

"It cannot be!" answered Barbarossa. "These consuls are the chiefs of the rebellion, the ringleaders of the conspiracy, which, for many years, has been plotting against us. It would be gross folly, on our part, to send away the promoters of the disorder. They must remain with us as captives, until the surrender of the fortress."

"But, Sire," added the Duke of Bohemia, with difficulty restraining his indignation, "the Milanese will say that we are *disloyal felons*, who desire, not the reduction, but the destruction of their city!"

"As for me," said Conrad, boldly, "my honor is at stake, and I will avoid all intercourse with the Chancellor.--To-morrow, I and my troops will return to our homes."

"Your term of service has expired, and we have no right to detain you," answered Barbarossa, calmly. "However, I shall expect you next spring, when you will return with more numerous and better disciplined troops. If, before that time, Milan shall have fallen, there will still remain enough to do in Italy, before we can restore the Empire to its ancient splendor."

Although these last words were prompted by a desire to flatter the nobles, they left his presence with a discontented and dissatisfied air.

Meanwhile Rechberg, Bonello, and Nigri were standing in front of the city gate, near which the consul's tent was pitched, and Erwin related the circumstances which had induced the order for his banishment from Italy. The sad and despondent tone of the young man moved Bonello's sympathy.

"If my daughter could esteem you more than she does already," he said, "this injustice would have that effect. I am confident, however, that she will now yield to my wishes and consent to leave Italy."

"You desire then to abandon your country?" asked Rechberg, with surprise.

"Yes, and perhaps forever!" replied Guido. "It is too painful to live in the vicinity of a struggle which threatens one's very existence, without being able to share in it. This, and some other motives, decide me to go to France, where I will remain until the storm is over."

They dismounted, and Gherardo Nigri was released upon his engagement to return, provided Hermengarde was not immediately given up to her father.

"Since you refuse to enter within the city," said Nigri to Erwin, "wait here for a few minutes, and you will be assured of the lady's liberation. Accept my thanks for the energy with which you defended your honor and my safety against Barbarossa."

Erwin seated himself upon a stone in front of the gate, with his face towards the city, in anxious expectation. At last he heard a loud noise, the massive portals swung back, and Bonello appeared, leading his daughter by the hand, while a crowd of wondering citizens lined the ramparts. The young man rose slowly. The thought of their separation and his arbitrary exile saddened him.

"Everything goes on as I desired and predicted," said Bonello. "Hermengarde is glad to leave the country from which you are banished. Indeed, I believe that, in spite of all obstacles, she would prefer Suabia to France."

"Are those obstacles insurmountable?" asked Erwin. "Although the ward and vassal of the Emperor, I alone am master in my father's castle."

"It is impossible," replied Bonello, gravely. "You have told me what the Emperor has said, and I fully understand the reasons for which he has sent you away from Italy. Barbarossa is not a man to allow his plans to be thwarted, and we should scarcely arrive in Suabia, before an order for our expulsion would be issued."

Erwin's countenance fell, for he could not deny the truth of the objection.

"Still you can do us a great service," said Guido. "The roads are not safe, and perhaps you can procure an escort?"

"I will attend to that," answered Rechberg; "when do you wish to set out?"

"To-day, without fail; and the sooner the better."

"I will see the Duke of Austria at once. He will be delighted to do all in his power for one who has become so celebrated for her filial affection as your fair daughter."

"Many thanks, noble Count! Well! Hermengarde, have you not one word of acknowledgment for our benefactor?"

"My lord Count," said she, with a trembling voice, "even could I find words in which to clothe my gratitude, my voice would express imperfectly all the feelings of my heart. We will never forget you, and each day our prayers will mount to the throne of that God in whose hands is the destiny of all mortals."

"Well said, daughter, you are right. Could I be fortunate enough, Count, to gratify one of your wishes?--Come," continued Bonello, seeing that Erwin was too agitated to speak, "you should at least have courage enough to ask me, but I think I can reward you? Well, if you won't, I must; take her, my son! My children, I betroth you in the sight of Heaven, and before this assemblage."

The people applauded, as Erwin took her hand; he had forgotten the past, and his eyes shone with a courage and a determination which would have defied the universe.

"My dear Bonello, I leave you, full of hope in a brighter future! Farewell, Hermengarde, and fear nothing; our separation will be only a brief one."

He mounted and rode away, followed by the cheers and good wishes of the crowd.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE POPULACE IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

The Milanese were profoundly discouraged by the Chancellor's disloyal conduct and the forcible abduction of their consuls; while the rigid enforcement of the blockade by the Imperial troops rendered the introduction of supplies a matter of impossibility.

The people, full of courage and fortitude, so long as they possessed an abundance of everything, began to murmur, when they became aware that their provisions were nearly exhausted, and even the Archdeacon Sala, once revered almost as a saint, lost his influence, and, with the Archbishop and the other ecclesiastics, was obliged to seek an asylum within the walls of Genoa. With them, all organization disappeared, and the angry crowd threatened to open the city gates to the enemy. Thousands of infuriated men and women assembled before the palaces of the consuls Nigri and Oberto, demanding food, and the magistrates were unwillingly obliged to yield, and on the last day of February, 1162, convoked an assembly of the people.

The multitude flocked together on the public square, in the centre of the town, their hollow eyes, pallid cheeks, and trembling limbs giving proof of the bitter pangs of hunger. One member alone had lost none of its energy; it was the tongue, which railed out violently against the consuls, who were accused of everything dishonorable and unjust. The boldest of the mob got as close as possible to the tribune, from which the magistrates were to harangue the people, in order that they might interrupt the speakers at their pleasure.

"Trust me, my friends," said a cobbler, with wan cheeks and a hungry air; "I have been obliged to give up mending shoes, and do you know why? It was because my children have eaten the last piece of leather that there was left in the house."

"Leather! why, that's food for a king," interrupted another speaker. "We eat things that I won't name! We must all die, miserably, of hunger, if the gates are not soon opened to the besiegers."

"Certainly we must!" cried a third. "If our consuls were as hungry as we are, they would soon stop talking about courage, and patriotic devotion, and heroic patience, and other beautiful things of the sort. However, they can say what they please, comrades, for they have plenty to eat and drink."

"Consul Boriso's red nose, and Grillo's big belly, have made me reflect very seriously for some time past," said a butcher. "We all look awfully, as if we were going to die of starvation to-day. A man can't live on liberty and patriotism; for we have not got cellars and wine vaults as well filled as our consuls."

"Barbarossa will not treat us as badly as the famine will," added another. "What is the use of freedom, if we are to perish with hunger?"

"It is all folly! Look, if you please, to what this freedom has brought us? If we taste its sweets ten days longer, we will all be in the grave-digger's hands."

"Hurrah for bread! Down with liberty!" screamed a thousand voices, as they caught sight of the consuls. Oberto ascended the tribune, and the yells and murmurs gradually subsided as they looked upon the old man, who, sad and dejected, gazed upon the crowd, and thought of the time

when he used to speak to the Milanese, once so brave and valiant.

"Fellow-citizens," he said, "it is now a year that you have borne, with a courage and a patience worthy of your ancient renown, all the rigors of a siege. Barbarossa hems us in more closely every day. He desires the destruction of our free institutions; his aim is to humble our noble city, and reduce her citizens to vassalage."

A succession of savage yells interrupted the orator.

"Bread! Bread!" was cried on all sides.

"Open the gates! Down with the ranter!"

"Brothers, fellow-countrymen," resumed Oberto, "think of the glories of the past! Are you willing to wear the yoke of slavery?"

"Ah! our past glories. We are too wretched and humble now; it will do to talk of that when we are in prosperity. Give us food!"

"Fellow-citizens, do not torture me with your reproaches. I suffer from hunger, like yourselves; but I prefer death to the loss of that liberty which our ancestors have bequeathed to us."

"Bah! we are not such fools!" yelled the crowd. "Life is better than liberty!"

"The man is mad!" cried a voice; "he advises us to die of starvation!"

"He is mad! Yes, the gold paid him for his treason inspires his tongue! Comrades, let us go and open the gates!"

"Long live the Emperor! Hurrah for bread!"

Oberto turned, appealingly, towards his audience,--

"Fellow-citizens," he resumed, "your desires shall be gratified; you shall have all that you ask. To-day a delegation will leave Milan to treat for the surrender of the city; but the consequences must rest on your own shoulders; you will regret and bewail them. If the Lombard race is degenerate, if it courts its own slavery with eagerness, let its wishes be accomplished."

There was for a moment a profound silence. Oberto had spoken so sadly, his features expressed such bitter anguish, that the sympathy of many was awakened, but the ringleaders were firm.

"These are only fine words, comrades!" they said. "Barbarossa won't eat us; he may shave off a little of our liberty, and force us to pay the expenses of the war; he will demolish some of the forts, which we can build again when we please; all the rest will be as it was before!"

"Certainly! certainly!" cried many voices.

"Brothers, let us go to the municipal palace!" was yelled out; "let us see whether the consuls will keep their promise!"

"Yes, yes! let us go there at once!"

The mob rushed to the official residence and surrounded the building, until the delegation, preceded by a herald bearing a white flag, appeared upon the steps of the palace; and then, as though fearing some trickery, accompanied the commissioners to the city gates, where they watched them enter the enemy's camp. About two hours afterwards, the envoys returned with a message that, on the ensuing day, the Emperor would receive and consider the terms offered by the besieged. Still the news did not give universal satisfaction; for, although the rabble was delighted, the more respectable class of the citizens and the nobility winced under the disgrace. On the next day, four of the consuls repaired to the Imperial camp, where they met with a reception which foretold clearly the probable fate of their city. They were not admitted to the Emperor's quarters, but obliged to await his pleasure in the open air, exposed to all the severity of the weather. A violent storm burst forth meanwhile, accompanied by thunder and lightning and torrents of rain, and in a few moments the unfortunate consuls, drenched to the skin, and with their costly robes clinging to their persons, sought in vain a shelter, which was refused to them, amid the jeers and mockeries of the insolent lackeys.

They felt deeply humbled by this treatment, so different to what they had been accustomed to in their native city, where they had always occupied the first place in the public estimation. With bent heads and clothes soiled with water and mire, their faces expressive of sadness and resignation, these noble old men looked like statues--strangers to all the concerns of earth.

At last they were admitted to the council-hall, where Frederic was seated, surrounded by all the dignitaries of the Empire and the consuls of the allied towns. The Milanese threw themselves at the Emperor's feet, and then Gherardo Nigri laid before him the terms which they were commissioned to propose.

"Sire, illustrious princes, noble lords," he said, "the disasters of a protracted siege have at last inclined my countrymen to submission and peace. It is true that our formidable works would have enabled us for some time to resist the enemy's attacks--"

"Enough!" interrupted Barbarossa, abruptly. "State simply the terms of surrender, without any commentaries."

"I obey," replied Nigri, mortified that he should be obliged to submit tamely to his country's humiliation. "Our terms embrace everything which could possibly be demanded; even were the city taken by storm, your Majesty could exact little more. Milan will demolish her fortifications and build an Imperial citadel at her own expense; she will annul all her treaties of alliance; will admit your army within the walls; will give three hundred hostages to be held for three years; will recognize the supremacy of the German functionaries over all others; will acknowledge fealty to your Majesty, and will pay a tribute which shall be established at a future period."

The German nobles appeared satisfied, but the consuls of the allied towns shook their heads in token of their disapproval.

"Duke," said Frederic to Henry the Lion, "what think you of these propositions?"

"I think that nothing more can be asked for," replied Henry. "I confess, however, to my surprise, that the haughty city of Milan should have consented to draw them up."

The other nobles, as well as the bishops of the Empire, were of a similar opinion.

"However," observed the Bishop of Munster, "should His Majesty consider the chastisement as insufficient, I am opposed to the adoption of the enemy's conditions."

"It is well known," said the Pavian consul, "that the Milanese are always as willing to make as they are to break their engagements. Sire, reflect upon the treachery of the past, and do not allow them to renew it."

"Milan destroyed our city and led away her inhabitants as captives; let the same fate be inflicted upon her," urged the consul of Lodi.

"Unexampled confiscations have filled the Milanese treasury; it will not be difficult for the city to pay a heavy tribute," added the Consul of Novara. "When, after three years' absence, her hostages return, it will be easy to rebuild the fortifications which she now promises to demolish. She will again destroy the Imperial citadel, make new alliances, and put herself at the head of a new league against the Emperor and the Empire. The propositions now submitted to your Majesty offer an insufficient guaranty against a relapse into her former tyranny."

"So long as Milan exists, the safety and peace of Lombardy cannot be assured on a solid basis," said the consul of Vercelli. "Your Highness must not only perform an act of justice, but also protect the interests of the Italian cities. Not a stone should be left upon another in Milan!"

The nobles seemed to dissent; but Frederic, who had silently listened to the various arguments, gave no intimation of his own sentiments, whether they were in favor of moderation or anger.

"The opinions are divided," said he, at length; "my Lord Chancellor, be so kind as to give us your advice."

"It seems to me," answered Rinaldo, "that the grave outrages committed against your Imperial Majesty, can only be expiated by an unreserved submission. If Milan has decided to cease her resistance, let her yield to the Emperor unconditionally; it should depend upon his generosity whether the voice of pity or of vengeance is to prevail."

"We agree with you, my lord," said Frederic; "your words decide the question. It is not the besieged, but the victor, who should dictate the conditions. Whenever Milan shall have surrendered at discretion, we will make known our intentions."

"Our powers scarcely go so far," replied Nigri.

"You can inform your countrymen of our pleasure. Lose no time here, that your delay may not retard the destiny of your city."

CHAPTER XXIX.

HUMILIATION.

The Milanese had not doubted that their proposition would be at once accepted. Frederic's refusal consequently was a matter of surprise, and a majority of the most influential citizens felt confident that the people would continue an energetic defence, rather than unconditionally capitulate. They were mistaken. The Milanese refused to hear a word spoken in favor of further resistance.

When this information was communicated to the monarch, his satisfaction was unbounded, for he foresaw at once the results of his victory;--with Milan fell the last support of Alexander III.

Frederic had driven the unfortunate Pontiff from Rome; and although Genoa had offered him an asylum, this city could not hope to be able long to serve as a refuge to the fugitive head of the Church; for with the surrender of Milan, the resistance of the remaining cities of Lombardy became unavailing.

"The chief bulwark of Alexander's faction is levelled, and his defeat prepares a glorious future for you, Sire," said Rinaldo, entering the Imperial chamber. "Your wish of itself will suffice to drive Roland from Genoa. And where can he go then? Spain alone can support his supremacy so long as she is not struggling against the Moors. As to France, she cannot recognize this pretended pope, and England must follow her example. I see nothing for him but to seek the aid of the Saracens,--a strange alliance for His Holiness."

He was dreaming of the future; Frederic, on the other hand, was occupied only with the present. He desired that the formal surrender of Milan should take place in the style best calculated to strike the imagination. He wanted a tragedy to mark the fall of this queen of Lombardy, and he fixed the 6th of March as the date of the performance.

A platform, sufficiently vast to accommodate, at the same time, the Emperor and all his nobles, was erected outside of the camp. It was an amphitheatre, with fourteen tiers of seats for the nobility, whilst the Imperial throne towered above in splendid magnificence, an emblem of the supremacy of the sovereign. The platform was hung with scarlet cloth, and costly carpets were spread in the immediate vicinity of the monarch's stand, which was richly ornamented with garlands of flowers and decked with the pennons of the different princes. Behind was hoisted the Imperial banner.

On the appointed day the troops were drawn up in battle-array upon the plain, and the sunlight danced merrily upon the thousands of helmets and lances of polished steel. Nearer, the knights, in complete armor, sat motionless upon their chargers, like a wall of iron.

The Milanese advanced despondently and slowly in dense masses. At their head walked the consuls, barefooted, with halters around their necks, and clothed in sackcloth. The banners and escutcheons of the several municipalities were borne aloft on long lances. Not a breath of wind moved them, and they hung sadly against their staves, as though mourning their city's ruin. The keys of the town were carried on a cushion of blue velvet, ready to be offered, by the consuls, to the Emperor. The bugles at times rang out a melancholy wail of despair, and when they ceased, there went up a dirge of woe mingled with supplications for mercy, like those uttered by the people in moments of national calamity. It seemed as if Heaven were taking part in the sombre pageant, for dark clouds suddenly veiled the sun, and the air grew heavy and oppressive. The victors themselves were affected by the sight of this humiliation of their valiant enemies, and only among the troops of the Italian auxiliaries could be seen a sneer of irony and exultation.

The consuls halted in front of the platform, and a thrill of anxious expectation ran from rank to rank, until it reached the gates of Milan, whence the people still continued to issue. Insensibly the crowd stood still. The very boldest now were bowed to the earth. On all sides nothing met the eye but ashes and cords and penitential vestments. The trumpets were silent, and the solemn chant, *Kyrie Eleison! Kyrie Eleison!* was heard, as if the citizens would show that they expected no aid now but from God. From time to time a plaintive groan was answered by a thousand sighs of agony: it seemed the dying breath of a whole nation whose funeral knell was sounding.

There was a flourish of trumpets near the Imperial tent; Barbarossa was about to appear. The sound grew nearer and more distinct; and then the Emperor, surrounded by his nobles, rode up and dismounted about thirty paces from the throne. With haughty bearing and a look of pride upon his face, Frederic moved forward, followed by a splendid array of knights and princes. Far away in the distance stretched the serried ranks of the army, and the whole scene had that character of majestic grandeur so well suited to the sovereign who dictated the laws of the world.

Next to the monarch came the ambassadors of France and Spain and England, who, although nominally sent to the Court on business of State, seemed only there to share in Barbarossa's triumph as spectators of his greatness. Frederic mounted the throne, his nobles took seats in the amphitheatre, and at once a loud shout of glad applause rent the air. The meanest soldier of the army rejoiced, for he felt that the bright rays of the Imperial sun shone even upon him. He saw the Emperor above all; below him were the brilliant ranks of the nobles, at his feet the people of Milan, prostrate and humbled in the dust! The mind of Barbarossa was occupied with considerations of grave importance. His face beamed with the intoxication of success, for his soul exulted in his new honors. He saw all the nations, from Rome to Lubeck, with their millions of

inhabitants, submissive to his sceptre. He thought of England and Spain, and France and Greece; and though there was much for him to do ere they could be overcome, the end which he had in view seemed bright with hope. His dream was to establish the supremacy of the Empire over all the thrones of Christendom. He was ambitious to be the successor of Charlemagne, not merely in name and dignity, but also in power. Plunged in his reverie, he had forgotten even the contemplated demolition of rebellious Milan. The consuls had delivered up the keys of the city, already they had sworn their fealty, in the presence of four hundred nobles, when a tumultuous movement of the troops interrupted his meditations.

One wing of the army which occupied the open space between the encampment and the fortress, had changed front, and swinging round, opened a passage to the advancing population, which was mingling its groans and lamentations with the blasts of martial music and the shouts of triumph. With halters around their necks and cross in hand, covered with sackcloth and penitential vestments, they halted, successively, before the Imperial throne, and as each group laid down before it their banners and trumpets, they solemnly swore fealty, and then, slowly and sadly, took their way towards the narrow space reserved for them on the opposite side of the plain.

There was something really majestic in this simple demonstration of the Milanese; and as their bugles sounded their farewell notes, and their banners fell upon the ground, one would have imagined that a fraction of the people was breathing its last sigh. Even the conquerors were moved to pity, and although those nearest to the sovereign prudently dissembled their emotion, the tears coursed down the bronzed cheeks of more than one rude soldier. Barbarossa alone was stern and pitiless, and his remorseless glance, bent upon the vanquished foe, seemed to indicate that he considered the punishment a feeble atonement for the outrage offered to his Imperial majesty.

The plain was now covered with a dense crowd. An immense chariot, drawn by five white oxen, advanced slowly, bearing the celebrated statue of St. Ambrose, Milan's patron saint, and an immense pole from which fluttered the city's flag and those of all the other towns of the confederation. The chariot was hung with scarlet cloth, the drivers were dressed in scarlet, and twelve warriors, with casques and corslets of polished steel, covered with robes of purple, formed an escort of honor.

This chariot, which had been built by the Archbishop Ariberti, played an important part in times of war, and was looked upon almost as the *Palladium* of the City of Milan.

During battle its banner towered above the combatants, and served as a rallying-point; and it was the duty of the citizens to defend it to the death,—it was the symbol, the soul of the free City, the glory and honor of Milan.

It halted in front of the throne, and the guards descended. A death-like silence reigned, and glances of tearful anger were turned towards Barbarossa. Suddenly an ominous crash was heard, the flag-staff had broken, and its fall upset the car. The image of St. Ambrose, the flags and banners, had rolled in the dust; and the deep bell of the distant cathedral tolled out mournfully, as these symbols, once so brilliant, lay stretched upon the ground, in striking analogy to the fate which awaited Milan.

The people broke out in groans of rage; some tore their hair in very desperation, while others, yielding to the weight of their emotion, were silent and bit their lips with grief and mortification. Still the Emperor remained unmoved, although there were tears on the energetic face of Henry the Lion, and his features told of his deep sympathy with the humiliation of the illustrious city.

The Count of Biandrate, formerly an ally of the Milanese, but now a staunch partisan of the Emperor, advanced, and kneeling before the sovereign, craved his mercy.

"I implore your Majesty," he said, "to have pity upon this people, which, humbled in the dust, prays for your forgiveness. All the greatness, all the power of the proud city is at your feet. Do not regard them as criminals; look upon them as your children who knew not how to discriminate between good and evil; grant them their lives, and let compassion moderate your justice!"

"Experience has already taught us the sad results of too much clemency," answered Barbarossa. "Milan has despised and rejected our favors, and has always remained the centre of all the seditions, the directress of all the plots against the Empire and its sovereign."

"Nevertheless, I still supplicate your Majesty," continued the Count, seeing that the Emperor's hesitation displeased the nobles, "not to break the bruised reed. Would the fame of your Highness, or of the German nation be increased, if, upon a sign from you, this mighty city, this assemblage of warriors, became the object of a chastisement unequalled in the annals of Christendom?"

The nobles audibly gave signs of approbation, and Frederic was unable to resist. Too much violence might produce unpleasant consequences; he understood the position and moderated his sentence.

"I will treat them with all the forbearance which is compatible with justice," he said. "All have merited death; we will grant their lives to all!"

"God be praised!" exclaimed the nobles.

But the Italians murmured. They wished nothing less than the destruction of the city; and several of the consuls of the allied towns stepped forward, and expressed their views with a violence and animosity which, inwardly, pleased the Emperor.

"Sire," said the Pavian consul, "Milan destroyed Como and Lodi, it is but justice that she should share their fate."

"Recollect, Sire," added the consul of Vercelli, "that you owe support to those who always remained faithful to your cause. So long as Milan exists, neither peace nor order is possible. You have conquered the she-wolf; your trusty sword has forced her to grovel in the dust; but that is not enough; she must be destroyed! A few years hence, and Milan, always thirsting for her neighbors' blood, will again extend her tyranny over all Lombardy. We ask for simple justice. Sire, give us justice!"

"You have every right to demand our protection," replied Frederic, "and you shall have it. We will never permit our faithful subjects to be oppressed. Milan shall be deserted, and within fifteen days all its inhabitants must leave the city, and be divided into four detachments separated from each other by a distance of at least two miles."

The monarch arose and gave the signal that the ceremony was finished.--He mounted his charger, and, surrounded by his nobles, trampling under their horses' hoofs the banners which were spread out upon the ground,--returned to his camp amid the loud strains of martial music, while the Milanese wept sadly over the destruction of their much loved city.

CHAPTER XXX.

AMUSEMENTS.

On the 26th of March, 1162, the victorious Emperor made his triumphal entry into the conquered city, not through the gates, but over the dismantled fortifications. Thence he proceeded with his Court to Pavia, where he celebrated his successes with extraordinary pomp, and received the envoys from the cities allied to Milan, who, despairing of preserving their liberty, came to tender their submission. Severe terms were imposed upon Brescia, Placenza, Imola, Faenza, and Bologna, while immense concessions were granted to those towns which had remained faithful to their allegiance. Barbarossa also opened negotiations with the powerful maritime republics of Genoa and Pisa, to which were secured, by a secret treaty, portions of Sicily and Catania, until a more equal division could be made of the rich treasures of the King of Naples.

In this way Frederic followed up his designs, even while he seemed most absorbed in his pleasures.

Pavia surpassed herself in her efforts to entertain her illustrious guest. The different corporations took turns in the amusements; but he always found time to see everything, and nothing escaped his attention or passed without praise. Accompanied by a brilliant retinue, often with the Empress at his side, he rode through the streets decked with flags, winning golden opinions from all, for he conversed freely with the humblest citizen, and never dismissed unaided any one who came to ask his pity.

Frederic possessed the great talent of nearly all those who aspire to extended dominion; he knew how to conciliate popular sympathy.

After a succession of jousts and tournaments, balls and joyous galas, it was decided to produce the spectacle of the capture of a fort defended by women and young girls. A square redoubt was built, flanked with small towers and balconies, and with walls of variegated stuffs, of velvets, purple, and ermine. The actors were clothed in rich tissues, decorated with gold and diamonds; and in place of helmets they wore crowns of filigree-work or costly diadems. In lieu of deadly weapons, they carried perfumed rose-water and amber, with which they drenched the assailants. The variety of colors, the splendid materials which formed the fortress, and the grace and beauty of its defenders, made up a charming picture.

Before the assault, a new pageant advanced to the sound of joyous music; it was the corporation of bakers, carrying before them on a car decked with flags and ribbons, an immense cake, a masterpiece of their art. They marched around the fortress singing, and then deposited their offering near a tall pole, announcing that it was to be the prize of the person who could pull down the banner fastened to the summit of the mast.

Next came the corporation of the butchers, with an immense hog roasted whole; they were followed by the game dealers and the other trade societies, all with costly presents. The vast cask of wine offered by the tavern-keepers caused especial pleasure to the Germans.

Meanwhile the young men prepared for the assault; surrounding the mimic fortress, they were met with a shower of dates, pears, apples, nutmegs, and cakes. Although it was only in sport, there was a good deal of excitement, as is the case in the beginning of every contest, and the cheeks of the fair defenders flushed, and their eyes flashed as their enemies drew near.

The podestà raised his baton, and, to the sounds of a flute, the strife began. On all sides a cloud of dates, quinces, and sweetmeats was hurled against the fortress; the walls shook, and a noisy music drowned the cries of the wounded. A shower of rose-water filled the air with rich perfume, whilst a crowd of boys eagerly picked up the dainty missiles.

One young man, particularly, displayed great energy during the assault. Despite the rose-water and the amber, he reached the castle-door, and forcing the passage with a rose-covered wand, penetrated to the heart of the place. His courage excited the emulation and the envy of all; but his triumph was short-lived, and he was soon expelled by the besieged. He came out, wrapped from head to foot in a sheet smeared with honey, and when at last he had succeeded in disentangling himself, a swarm of flies covered him, to the great amusement of the spectators. Soon the besiegers declared that the citadel was impregnable, and then a lady of lofty bearing appeared upon one of the balconies, and announced the terms of capitulation.

"You have learned, valiant warriors," she said, "that violence can accomplish nothing against us women. It is true that you are our masters, but we know how to repay with usury, anything like cruelty or ill-treatment. Only show us kindness and courtesy, and you can have what you will. By virtue of my office, as governor of this castle, I think it my duty to inform you that we have kept it as long as it so pleased us, and now we surrender of our own free will, in order to set you an example of moderation."

This harangue was received with laughter and shouts of applause, and then the music announced that the ascent of the pole would begin.

The Knight of Groswin, who was among the lookers-on, took no pains to conceal his discontent; for the assault of the mimic fortress, far from amusing him, had only provoked his anger, and it was evident that he would have sought more congenial amusements, had he not been detained there on duty.

"What a stupid game! what a silly idea!" he said, as he glanced towards the balcony, where Frederic and his courtiers were laughing and talking with animation.

"I cannot understand the Emperor," he resumed; "he chatters like an old woman, and laughs as though he really were amused by these mummeries. But, after all, it may only be a mask, the better to deceive these Italians.--I wonder how he will look when he hears my message?"

Goswin left the crowd, and entering the palace, sought the Imperial hall.

"That fellow climbs well," said Barbarossa to the Pisan envoy; "see how tightly he clings to the slippery pole; I advise you to recruit him for your fleet."

"We have plenty of sailors still more active than he Sire. The approaching hostilities against Naples will show you of what our men are capable."

"Have the deputies yet started for Pisa and Genoa?" inquired the Emperor.

"They went yesterday, Sire," replied the Pisan.

"We will take advantage of the present opportunity, and no longer delay the punishment which the unfriendly behavior of the Neapolitan king so well merits. I am confident that the opposition of Venice is only prolonged by William's assistance."

"Perhaps it would be well to curb the power of the Venetians a little?" remarked a Genoese. "It is not an easy matter, but your Majesty can be assured of our hearty co-operation."

Frederic received this overture with evident satisfaction; the mutual jealousy of the Italian cities served his own projects admirably.

"What tidings does the Knight Goswin bring us?" asked the Emperor, as the noble entered.

"A communication which your Highness----"

"Is it very important?" said Frederic, hastily, fearing lest the imprudent soldier might reveal, to indiscreet ears, things which ought not to be known to every one. "Excuse me for a moment, my lords," and he withdrew on one side with Goswin.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"Count Rechberg has returned to Lombardy."

"Is that all? there was scarcely need to take the trouble of telling me anything so unimportant."

"It was the abbot who announced it to me; and I was to communicate it to you," replied Goswin.

"The abbot!--What abbot?" asked the Emperor.

"The one who came to your camp before Milan, last summer."

"The Abbot Conrad, you mean?"

"Perhaps that is his name; he awaits you in the palace."

"What motive can bring him?" inquired Frederic, greatly surprised.

"I can tell you, Sire: the abbot comes in the name of the Archbishop of Salzburg, who is now near Pavia with some other prelates."

"What is this you say?" cried Barbarossa; "the Archbishop of Salzburg in Italy, near us! How stupid in you, Goswin, to announce in this frivolous manner a matter of such great importance!"

"I supposed that Count Erwin had, at least, as much importance in your eyes, as the Bishop of Salzburg," answered the knight.

"But why does he remain outside of the town? What prelates are with him?"

"You can ask him yourself, Sire."

Frederic was going out, when the Podestà of Pavia entered.

"One word only, Sire," he said.

"Well, but speak quickly; the Metropolitan of Salzburg, accompanied by several other prelates, has just arrived to offer us their congratulations."

The crafty Pavian understood better than Goswin the bearings of this visit.

"It is another victory, Sire, a new triumph for your ideas, more important, perhaps, even than that which you achieved at Milan. I merely wished to inquire whether the two hundred silver marks, which Pavia has laid at your feet, will be sufficient?--we are quite ready to offer more, should it be required."

"The sum is sufficient, Count; many thanks!"

"I also desire to remark, that the destruction of Tortona is absolutely necessary to the security of your faithful Pavia. Your magnanimous generosity was satisfied with the demolition of the fortifications; but, Sire, the work is only half done."

"Pavia has nothing to fear from an open place."

"Walls are soon rebuilt, Sire, and you know the unfriendly feelings of Tortona towards us. We Pavians are ready to make any sacrifice, if you will allow us to destroy that city."

Frederic, without answering, left the room abruptly.

"Very well!" said the Podestà, rubbing his hands gayly; "that means, do as you please: I will not do it myself, but I will not forbid it."

Goswin had heard all the conversation, and even his intelligence took in all the immorality of the scene.

"This really is a piece of knavery!" he said, as he followed his master. "Tortona displeases Pavia; Pavia offers money to the Emperor, and Tortona will be destroyed! Now I call this proceeding neither honorable, imperial, nor even Christian."

The monarch hastened to the ancient palace of the Lombard kings, in which he had established his quarters. Scarcely had he arrived, when Pope Victor requested an audience. It was refused, but the Abbot Conrad, on the contrary, was immediately admitted in company with the Chancellor Rinaldo.

"You are right welcome to Pavia, my lord Abbot," said Barbarossa, "and the more so, because you announce the visit of our worthy Metropolitan of Salzburg."

At these words he glanced towards Dassel, whose impassive face, as the Emperor well knew, boded no good.

"The prelate offers his respectful salutations, and begs your Majesty to appoint a time for an audience, in some other city than Pavia," said the Abbot Conrad.

"In some other city! And for what reason?"

"Because it is not seemly for the Archbishop to enter the city where Victor holds his court. His duty forbids him to have any intercourse with the Antipope, and a sojourn in Pavia might be construed as a recognition of his claims," replied the abbot.

Rinaldo made a sign to Barbarossa, who listened without any evidence of what was passing in his mind. Eberhard's reputation in Italy was wide-spread, and this refusal to hold any communication with the Antipope was naturally calculated to displease the Emperor.

"We can fully appreciate the Archbishop's prudence," remarked Frederic, after a moment's reflection; "where is he at present?"

"In the Abbey of St. Martin."

"At St. Martin, in that paltry cloister which has scarcely wherewithal to feed its own monks! We will direct an immediate change, more in harmony with Eberhard's dignity and position. What prelates has he with him?"

"The Bishop of Brixen, the Prior of Reichersburg, and several abbots," answered Conrad.

"We are highly pleased at the arrival of these worthy prelates. Be prepared, my lord Abbot, to return here soon with some of my courtiers, whom we will send forward to meet the Archbishop."

Scarcely had Conrad left the room when Victor entered; mortification and anger were depicted on his countenance.

"I crave your pardon," he said, "if my visit here be inopportune, but I have been grievously insulted, and I am well aware that your Majesty will not leave unpunished those who outrage the legitimate Pope."

"We are seriously busy in State affairs," replied Frederic, in a tone of ill-humor; "however, relate at once your complaint."

"Eberhard of Salzburg refuses to obey me, and rather than contaminate himself by contact with the schismatic Victor, has left Pavia. This public degradation is insupportable; the Chief of the Church, duly appointed and confirmed by the Emperor, must not be thus vilified before all Christendom; such an indignity deserves punishment."

"I am extremely grieved by this affront; what would you advise me to do?" asked the Emperor.

"Chastise the Archbishop's pride, Sire; and oblige him to acknowledge the lawful Pope."

"Oblige him! how does your wisdom interpret this?"

"If he will not obey willingly, let him be made to obey by force:--The only man whose energy sustains the schism in the German Church is in your power."

"You counsel, then, his arrest and close confinement?"

"It will scarcely be necessary to proceed to such extreme measures. The fear which your Majesty inspires is quite enough of itself to make him bend the knee."

"Men of Eberhard's character are not easily influenced by fear; that sentiment is unknown to them. A much more effective mode of persuasion would be a visit from you to the Archbishop."

"What say you!--I humble myself thus!--I solicit the friendship of a rebellious prelate!"

"Perhaps we may desire you to take this step. If this alone can put an end to the present difficulty, it must be done."

Victor was thunderstruck at these words. Although his relations with the Emperor were such that he had long lost all self-consideration or respect; even his spirit revolted at the baseness of the step which he was advised to take.

"Your Majesty can never force me to this act of degradation," he said; "I would rather resign the tiara."

"I have said perhaps:--We must be prepared for everything. But allow me to return to this business, which is pressing."

Victor protested his ready obedience, and bowed himself out of the room.

"He will have to come to it," said Frederic, turning towards Dassel, who had kept to one side. "You will remember," he added, "that you have heard nothing of our conversation with the Pope."

"Sire, it is impossible; I must speak to you of it."

"To what end?"

"To what end! Can anything be of greater importance than to ward off the blow which Eberhard is about to strike against you and the Holy Father? Thank Heaven, circumstances will permit you to surmount the difficulty."

"Explain yourself."

"You expect, in the course of the next two days, the arrival of the relics of the three Magi which are to be borne here from Milan in solemn procession. The respect which you will show will prove to all in Pavia the ardor of your religious faith, and to do them still greater honor, you will send the Pope in advance to meet them. Victor can start early to-morrow, and in this way you can remove the purulent infection which is so offensive to the too delicate Archbishop."

"But will not Victor return with the relics?"

"He must not return; an order from your Majesty will take him to Lodi, where he will wait until he is wanted."

"Excellent!"

"Eberhard is in earnest, and your Majesty must stint nothing in the evidences of respect shown to him. The people will admire your condescension. Let your embassy be as brilliant as possible. Count Haro should be one of your envoys; he possesses a magnificent castle between Pavia and St. Martin. He can conduct the prelates thither, and your Majesty can then encounter this Goliath of the South-German Episcopacy."

"Bravo!" cried Frederic; "I approve of everything: Act at once."

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT RIVOLI.

An express was immediately dispatched to Rivoli, bearing to Count Haro the order to get all the apartments of his castle in readiness. Dassel himself sent forward a train of mules, bearing costly carpets, silver candlesticks, and massive plate--everything, in short, which was needed to offer a most sumptuous hospitality. The castle, usually so quiet, assumed an air of gayety, and the steward rushed in every direction, arranging and disarranging, ordering, scolding, and hastening on the preparations.

The chaplain of the castle alone remained calm, in the midst of the general confusion. Evidently, some unusual occurrence condemned him to idleness, for his callous hands showed that his occupations were not purely intellectual. The servants generally abandoned to him everything which they refused to do, and his appearance was rather that of a stable-boy than an ecclesiastic. Although he had received but a limited education, Rainulph felt the impropriety of such behavior, and often complained that his spiritual functions were not regarded with becoming reverence. But his murmurs rarely reached the Count's ear, and when they did, little attention was paid to them; for Haro, always at Court, knew too well the Emperor's course towards the Pope to be respectful to his own chaplain.

"Since the Pope," he told him, "obeys Frederic's orders, you must make up your mind to do as I tell you."

But the chaplain of Rivoli was suddenly aroused from his inactivity by a shrill voice.

"How is this, sluggard?" cried the angry steward; "the stable is not swept yet, everything is out of place, and the horses of His Majesty and the Court will be here directly!"

"I don't care," answered Rainulph; "the manure may stay there; I shall not touch it!"

The steward could not believe his ears. The conduct of the formerly submissive chaplain seemed inexplicable.

"Are you mad? Have you not done that work a hundred times?"

"Yes, and more too! You have made me do the most menial drudgery, and I have complained in vain; but it is different to-day."

"I suppose that you hardly intend to appeal to the Emperor?" sneered the other. "You will make a fine thing of it. Don't you know, fool, that the Pope and the bishops are as much the servants of the Emperor as the chaplains are of the Castellan? I tell you it is the custom!"

"It is a bad custom, an impious custom! Priests were not ordained to clean out stables, but to discharge their sacred calling."

"Ah! what a noble transport! Wait a minute, till I teach you your duty!"

At that moment a horseman dashed up, and announced that the prelates were close at hand. The steward raised his eyes to heaven, tore his hair, ordered the chaplain to be locked up in one of the towers, and, entering the castle, mounted upon a turret.

"May all the saints aid me!" he cried, as he saw the valley shining with helmets, and lances, and armor. "What! it is a whole army!--an army of knights and counts! How am I to lodge all these in Rivoli, where there is scarcely room for twenty lords with their retinues? It is impossible; they cannot all come here! They must be blind not to see that the castle cannot hold them, even were I to stow some of the knights in the barns and the cellars. No! it is not possible! But let us see: they are at the foot of the hill. Ah! the men-at-arms halt, and are letting the prelates take the lead. Quick, Romano, quick! put on your finest suit, the newest you have. To-day you must be marshal of the palace."

Whilst the steward was donning his rich livery, and taking his long silver-headed staff of office, Eberhard of Salzburg slowly ascended the hill. The old man was tall in stature, of energetic strongly-marked features, whose expression was by no means softened by a pair of piercing eyes. His voice was deep and sonorous, and all his words carefully selected. He rode easily, in spite of his advanced age, which had neither broken down his vigorous physical strength nor weakened his intellect. His suite and the costume which he himself wore indicated his high rank. His surcoat was bordered with ermine, and he wore around his neck a heavy gold chain, to which hung a pastoral cross enriched with jewels. The saddle of his courser was ornamented with rings and buckles of silver.

By his side were Herman, Bishop of Brixen; and Gerhoh, prior of Reichersberg; two noble dignitaries of grave and serious demeanor. Behind them were several abbots, and last, the escort of honor, sent by Frederic, in which could be remarked Count Erwin of Rechberg.

Count Haro hastened to the court-yard to welcome the prelate, as he dismounted; a crowd of servants stood ready to take care of the horses, and soon the noble hosts were introduced to the castle.

Eberhard's own followers remained at the foot of the hill, where they at once pitched their tents, as was the custom of the time. About two hundred soldiers had accompanied the Archbishop, from Salzburg, and formed an escort sufficiently numerous to hold in awe the most desperate highwaymen.

The prelate knew that a display of strength always imposes upon savage and uneducated men, and, although living, in his own house, with almost monastic simplicity, he never neglected on all public occasions to appear with as much pomp as possible.

Offering his fatigue as an excuse, he partook but lightly of the banquet, and soon retired to his own apartment; the other ecclesiastics shortly followed his example; but Haro and the laymen, who were his guests, remained at table until nightfall.

The pleasures of the feast offered little attraction to Erwin, and he found still less pleasure in listening to the recital of Barbarossa's victory over the Milanese, which he had already heard recounted a hundred times, in all its most minute details.

Taking advantage of a beautiful spring evening, he left the hall and the castle, and descending the hill, soon found himself in the little park. He had scarcely taken his seat and begun to reflect that in spite of the Metropolitan's intercession, his Imperial godfather might, possibly, send him back again to Suabia, when a long whistle attracted his attention. A little while after, the sound was repeated, and replied to from the castle; then he heard footsteps, and saw two men approach each other and converse in a low tone, at a short distance from him.

The occurrence appeared mysterious and aroused his curiosity, the more so, that these night-walkers wore the short cloaks and high hats of the Italian nobility, which almost concealed the face. Rechberg listened attentively, but could not make out their conversation. He only could catch the names of "Pope, Emperor, France, and Eberhard," because they were uttered with much energy. To his great surprise, he suddenly heard his own name pronounced.

"Count Erwin of Rechberg!--It is not possible!"

The other added a few words in a smothered voice, to which a curse was the reply. Then they separated, one of them moving towards the castle. Erwin determined to accost the Unknown. The stranger with surprise halted and laid his hand on his sword. Erwin looked at him attentively, but could distinguish nothing, except a pair of flashing eyes and a thick black beard.

"It is not my profession to interfere with honest people," he said, "but as you made use of my name, just now, I have the right to ask who you are and with what you reproach me."

"Who I am is of no importance to you, Count," answered the stranger; "and if you follow the

teachings of your own conscience, I can reproach you with nothing."

"What do you mean? For whom do you take me?"

"For a frivolous youth, who forgets his promises too easily."

"Villain! withdraw this insult at once, or ----" And he put his hand to his sword-hilt.

"I have no intention of offending you," replied the Unknown, coolly; "do not draw your sword: not that I fear it, but because I have no wish to fight with a gentleman whose enemy I am not."

"Ah! and yet you do not hesitate to calumniate me!"

"Unpleasant truths are not calumnies. It is positive that you have broken your word, in a circumstance where it should have been held sacred."

"The proof! Quickly--or, upon my honor, you shall not repeat the insult a third time!"

"Do you know the Lady of Castellamare?"

"Yes."

"You are betrothed to her."

"I am; what then?" asked Rechberg.

"Are you not restored to Barbarossa's favor on condition of marrying another person?"

"I-forget Hermengarde!--such an assertion does not even merit a denial."

"That is strange," said the Unknown, shaking his head.

"What else is there besides?"

"The Emperor banished you on account of your projects of marriage, and yet you are back again."

"You conclude therefore that I have purchased the Imperial favor by the violation of my word?"

"Such is my conviction."

"Why suppose evil rather than good? Would it not have been more natural to think that Rechberg had profited by Eberhard's arrival to obtain pardon through his intercession? That would have been reasonable and just, and you would have guessed the correct motive of my return."

"Are you not invited to the Court?"

"I am not."

"If such is the case, your fidelity has been severely tested. Do not be uneasy about your reconciliation with Barbarossa; you come at an opportune moment. He needs you, or, rather, he would like to use you, to accomplish an evil action. Still I hope that you will not allow yourself to be led away."

"Will you explain your meaning?"

"You will learn it soon enough. Misfortune travels quickly. I merely tell you: be faithful to your betrothed, to your wife; do not be seduced or dazzled by ambition. Farewell!----"

"One moment! Cease this equivocation and tell me plainly what all this means."

"Still, you must be satisfied with what I have made known to you: you are forewarned; that is all that is necessary. Do not delay me, for my time is precious; we will meet again in Pavia."

The stranger disappeared, and Rechberg, full of uneasiness, returned to the castle.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALEXANDER'S AMBASSADOR.

On the very next morning Erwin could judge of the truth of at least some of the stranger's assertions. Frederic arrived early, and contrary to the expectations of all, received our hero with open arms and every token of sincere affection. Rechberg himself was surprised, for no allusion whatever was made to the previous misunderstanding.

"You are welcome, Erwin," said the monarch, when Eberhard presented the young man; "I heard of your arrival in Pavia, and was pleased to think that you could accompany us to France."

He pressed the Count's hand with so much warmth, that the latter could no longer doubt that his sovereign had some ulterior designs in view. The Chancellor also was most amiable, and during their return to Pavia, which took place the same day, rode constantly by his side, speaking of the contemplated council which was to be held in France, at which the French and English monarchs were to be present. He took such pains to vaunt the riches and elegance of the French ambassador, Count Henry of Champagne, whose sister had just married King Louis, that Rechberg was completely puzzled, and resolved to be more than ever on his guard.

A magnificent reception had been prepared by Frederic's order in Pavia. Victor and his partisans had left the city, and everything which could possibly remind any one of the Antipope, had disappeared, even to the arms which hung over his palace.

The zealous Omnibonus, Bishop of Verona, a staunch adherent of Alexander, and the uncompromising opponent of Victor, received the Metropolitan at the entrance of the cathedral. Barbarossa had determined that the Archbishop should have no pretext for discontent, and that he himself would appear free from all party spirit, and only desirous of assuring the peace and unity of the Church. The pious Eberhard, whom nothing could fatigue, was delighted with the state of things. As it appeared, Pope Alexander, previous to his departure from Genoa, had written to him to request his mediation with the Emperor, and the prelate hoped to experience little difficulty in influencing him to a kind and moderate course of action, particularly, as, during their journey from Rivoli, Frederic had acknowledged, in a flattering manner, the personal merits of the Pope. Eberhard, with Bishop Herman of Brixen, immediately waited upon the Emperor, and were at once received. As soon as Alexander's name was mentioned, a look of anger crossed the monarch's face and his eyes flashed. It was gone in an instant, but the Archbishop had perceived it, and although Frederic listened calmly to his explanations, he feared to encounter an inveterate and irreconcilable hatred. Judging that the Pope's letter would best define his position, he laid it before the Emperor.

"The explanations offered by the Cardinal Roland are scarcely in accordance with the efforts made by him to prolong the resistance of the Milanese," remarked Barbarossa. "We hold positive proofs that he encouraged the rebels, by presenting the revolt to them under the appearance of a sacred war. You will acknowledge yourself, as a holy and honorable ecclesiastic, that this is not the action of a loyal subject."

"Sire," replied Eberhard, "Pope Alexander never either encouraged or approved of the insurrection. The documents which your Majesty holds are forgeries and valueless, as the work of people little worthy of credit, who seek to advance their own selfish ends by sowing discord in the Church. What is true, is, that Alexander thanked the Milanese for their loyalty to him, and their opposition to the Antipope; in this, he only did his duty."

"It is a sad business!" said Frederic, with a sigh. "Suppose, for example, that we became the protector of Victor, and that the people were excited to disobey him, the rebellion would be nothing but a crusade against the schismatic Frederic of Hohenstauffen--"

"It is never lawful for Christians to fight against their sovereign," replied Eberhard. "In the time of Nero, they became martyrs for their faith, but never rebels."

This observation seemed to reassure the Emperor.

"Very well," said he. "Personally, we have no cause of complaint against Alexander. If the approaching council to be held at Besançon, at which the bishops of our Empire and those of France and England are to assist, pronounces the claims of Alexander to be legitimate, we shall be the first to recognize his supremacy."

"The decision scarcely appears doubtful," said Herman of Brixen: "Victor has violated every law too audaciously."

"As for ourselves," resumed Barbarossa, "we are not so proud but that we are ready to acknowledge our error, so soon as it shall be proved."

"May the Divine grace produce good fruit to your desires," said the Archbishop. "The Holy Father writes to you:--'I beg and supplicate the Emperor to take pity on the Church, and grant her peace. Let him not believe that aught of good can result from the evil which he has promoted, for as the abyss of heresy widens, a still greater number of souls plunge into it and are lost. Assure him that we are ready to stretch forth our hand to bless him, as soon as he will renounce the bonds of iniquity, and cease to protect the disloyal Octavian.' Words truly evangelical!" added

Eberhard; "with what joy the Holy Father will learn that you do not spurn his offered hand!"

"Again, I must assure you, my lord Archbishop, that our decision is entirely dependent upon that of the council," replied Barbarossa, refraining from the discussion of a subject which diplomacy forbade him to broach under its true light. "We understand that the relics of the three kings will arrive to-morrow. We desire that they be received with all the honor which they merit, and that they be exposed, for a few days, in Pavia. It will gratify us should your Reverence deign to organize the proper ecclesiastical ceremony."

"With infinite joy, Sire; I will be careful that the clerical prescriptions are observed."

The monarch accompanied the prelates to the door of his apartment, where he dismissed them. Scarcely had he re-entered, when Rinaldo appeared.

"How did your Majesty sustain the first shock?" he inquired.

"Pretty well. We will recognize Alexander as soon as the council acknowledge his claims."

"Excellent," said Dassel; "but we will take care that the council do not acknowledge him. The presence of one as holy as Eberhard has already begun to bear its fruits! He enjoys so vast a reputation of sanctity among the people, that his visit suffices to make of the schismatic Barbarossa the most faithful of the faithful. You must acknowledge, Sire, that you really owe me a debt of gratitude for my discovery. But let us not forget what is equally material: the wind has completely shifted at the French Court. The Count of Champagne has shown me a letter from the royal Chancellor, giving him full powers to conclude an arrangement with you. This excellent Count is beside himself with joy, for if he had been in his senses, he would most certainly not have been quite so communicative."

"There is no reason to be astonished if the noble Count should have lost his wits. Did we not promise him castles, and bailiwicks, and fortresses along the Lorraine frontier?" replied the Emperor.

"It needed a tempting bait to catch the Count of Champagne; but a diplomatist should never hesitate to make promises. The French ambassador is yours, body and soul; ask him what you please, there is no fear of a refusal."

"What can have caused this fortunate change?"

"Oh! little enough. Alexander received Louis' envoy quite roughly; he preached a long sermon to the Abbot Theobald of St. Germain, and threatened the Archbishop of Orleans, the royal Chancellor, with canonical censure. The courtiers complain; the king is hurt, and proposes to abandon Alexander."

"Very well!--What do you advise me to do now?"

"Let the Count, in the name of his sovereign, notify the French ecclesiastics, and announce Alexander's coming. If, in the meanwhile, Louis should change his mind, which, with the French character, is not at all unlikely, either the Count will oblige the King to keep his word, or he must be himself disavowed. In which latter case, Troyes, Champagne, and the rich provinces which belong to them, will be happily annexed to the Empire, and the French kingdom necessarily weakened."

"Your advice is good," said Frederic; "send in the Count, and have the contract ready."

"The Count will doubtless remind your Majesty of my promises; do not hesitate, ratify everything, and affix your seal, without scruple, to all which he may propose."

"Best content," replied Barbarossa, as the Chancellor left the apartment.

"Alexander, your death-knell has sounded!" exclaimed the Emperor; "and soon the most dangerous enemy of our Imperial supremacy, the most intrepid and cunning opponent to our wishes, will regret his haughty conduct. Ah! for the Emperor to be altogether Emperor, the Pope must not seek to divide the Empire with him. The pagan emperors called themselves *Pontifices maximi*, and they were; why should I not be the head of Church as well as State?"

Meanwhile Count Dassel was making every preparation for the treaty. On his passage through the palace he approached a window looking into the garden.

"He is not there yet," he said. "Ah! still--there they are; it is all right!" and with a scornful sneer he disappeared.

It was towards Rechberg that the Chancellor's attention had been directed. The Count was approaching, accompanied by a young nobleman, whose appearance offered a certain resemblance to that of Rinaldo himself. They were conversing with animation, and the bright look, the graceful bearing, the elegant shape and ironical expression of the nobleman, vividly recalled the German statesman.

"Your description of the Countess is calculated to excite one's curiosity. Who is her father?"

asked Erwin.

"Count Henry of Champagne, the ambassador and brother-in-law of the King of France," replied the nobleman.

"Count Dassel has spoken to me of the father, but has said nothing of the daughter."

"Indeed! he said nothing of her whom all Pavia is talking of,--nothing about Richenza?"

"And you say that she leaves for France to-morrow?"

"I have heard so; she only came to do homage to the sacred relics."

"Where does she live?" asked Erwin.

"Outside of the city walls, in a villa; for the Count, though in every way polite and courteous, keeps his daughter secluded. He seems like a miser who watches anxiously over his treasure."

"He is a prudent father, Hellig."

"He would have done better to leave her at home."

"What frightful egotism! Richenza came here not to be seen, but to see."

"You are right. But I shall not look at her again, although I shall have the best chance in the world tomorrow at Pavia."

"Still you will go with me, Hellig?"

"What is the use of it? Must I point the sun out to you, and then tell you it is there? You should take more care of your peace of mind; your neighbor's misfortunes ought to serve you as a warning."

"Don't be alarmed. Suppose that I already possess a jewel whose brilliancy eclipses all others; you tell me: Come, and see the brightest diamond in the world! I shall go, although I am sure beforehand that this treasure is naught in comparison to mine."

At this moment a courtier appeared with an invitation to Count Rechberg to be present as a witness at the interview about to take place between Frederic and the Ambassador of France.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A WARNING.

The removal of the holy relics of the three Magi had excited the people, and from all sides a crowd of every age and sex hurried forward toward Pavia. The Emperor and his entire Court went out to meet the procession, and soon a noise like the distant murmuring of the sea, announced the approach of the relics.

The shrine, carried by the monks, was a work of art of inestimable value. It was shaped like a dome, of gold and silver, studded with precious stones. Four columns supported the roof, which was of solid gold; and the sides exhibited medallions representing scenes in the life of the three wise men of the East.

Eberhard of Salzburg inaugurated the ceremonies with the greatest solemnity. Frederic and seven other princes bore the shrine through the streets, which were lined by the knights, in complete armor, in order to keep back the crowd. Flags floated from every turret and spire, and the windows were decked with rich draperies and ornaments of gold and silver, above which appeared the reverent faces of the pious inhabitants. The streets were hidden beneath masses of flowers and costly carpets; the bells tolled, and the people chanted hymns of thanksgiving and of praise. Rinaldo himself, magnificently dressed, seemed, as he walked along with clasped hands, to be animated by the same sentiment of respectful awe which pervaded all classes of the spectators. Occasionally he glanced stealthily at the Emperor with every evidence of satisfaction on his features, for the crafty chancellor fully appreciated the motives which had influenced his sovereign to this parade of outward devotion.

Rechberg took part in the religious ceremony in an entirely different frame of mind. He prayed fervently, joined in the sacred chants of the congregation, and repeated audibly the invocations of the people. With a lively faith in the power of the holy kings, he laid bare to them his inmost

heart, and sought their intercession. He besought them to draw down the blessing of God upon his approaching marriage with Hermengarde, promising that he would, after its solemnization, suspend three silver lamps as a votive offering in their honor from the dome of the Cathedral of Cologne. He pronounced this vow at the moment that the procession crossed the nave to replace the shrine in the body of the church. Seats for the Empress and other Court ladies had been erected on either side; and Rechberg, who did not understand the Latin prayers chanted by the clergy, desired to contemplate the brilliant spectacle presented by the Imperial suite. He thought that he had sufficiently honored the relics by his devotions. He remembered the vaunted beauty of the Countess Richenza of Champagne, and he gazed curiously around. The benches on the right were occupied exclusively by Beatrice and her ladies of honor; the Countess must necessarily be on the other side, to which his back was turned. He might by a slight movement change his position, but he feared lest his action might appear rude. After a moment's hesitation, however, he stepped forward so that his face was concealed by the main altar, and then, certain that he had not been remarked, he turned round unaffectedly. His curiosity was immediately gratified. In the first row, at a few paces only from him, knelt the daughter of the Count of Champagne. Her veil was thrown back, and a cloud of fair hair fell in rich masses upon her neck. Her eyes were fixed upon the shrine, and her lips moved as though in prayer.

Rechberg was bewildered with admiration. Hellig had exaggerated nothing, for Richenza was wonderfully beautiful. Suddenly her eyes were raised toward the young man, who hastily turned away.

In the interval, the ceremony had been completed. The shrine had three doors, like a large church. They were open, and through a golden lattice-work could be seen the venerated relics. An immense number of tapers were burning in candlesticks of silver; several priests were watching carefully around the shrine, and monks were seated before the doors to receive the books and engravings and pictures which the piety of the crowd presented as votive offerings to the holy remains.

Eberhard of Salzburg could not let escape this excellent opportunity of proclaiming his religious sentiments. He stood upright on the summit of the altar-steps, immediately in front of the ostensorium, ready to bless the princes and the people. But, before bestowing the benediction, and much to the discomfiture of the Emperor and the confusion of Rinaldo, he pronounced a few words of earnest exhortation, counselling obedience to the authority of Alexander III.

"Our gracious Emperor and lord," he said, "whose duty it is to defend the Church, will root out the venom of heresy. It is due to his own renown, to the name which he inherits from his Carolingian ancestors, to the glory which he has won, to rise in aid of the Holy See, and to show to all the scoffers, that he is the obedient son of the Pope, the protector of the Church, of law, and of morals. It is on these conditions that I bless our noble sovereign; I bless all those illustrious prelates and knights who obey Pope Alexander,—I bless all the world of faithful Catholics."

He was about to take the ostensorium, when Barbarossa made a sign. It was impossible that the discourse of the Archbishop before so brilliant an assembly could be allowed to pass unnoticed.

"Your Reverence has profited by this opportunity," he said, "to remind us of the duties of our position. These duties are onerous, indeed, now that error has possessed the minds of many of our fellow-men. We espouse the cause of no faction; we only defend right and justice. Our predecessors, acting in this by the advice of high ecclesiastical dignitaries, deposed all those, whatever their position, who profited by it to the injury of souls and the prejudice of the Holy Church. Our duty is the same, and we are resolved to discharge it. Whenever the Plenary Council, which is about to assemble, shall have proclaimed who is the lawful Pope, we will defend him against all his enemies and opposers whatsoever. May the present schism soon be destroyed forever, and may peace be restored to God's Holy Church."

Frederic had spoken energetically, and with a loud voice. The words rang through the cathedral as though they were a profession of faith made in the presence of the world. Rinaldo smiled faintly, and the crowd shouted, "What a pious Sovereign! What a God-fearing Emperor! May God protect and defend him!"

After the benediction, Rechberg left the cathedral, in the Emperor's train. All at once he felt a touch upon his arm, and, turning, saw the stranger of the park of Rivoli, dressed in the rich costume of the Italian nobility. On the former occasion the moonlight had enabled him to catch merely a glimpse of his person, but he at once recognized him by his strongly marked features and his long beard. Upon a sign from the Unknown, Erwin followed him.

"I promised," he said, as soon as they had entered a by-street, "to meet you in Pavia. Let us then at once resume our previous conversation. But let me first ask you one question: Is your fidelity to the lady of Castellamare not yet shaken?"

"If I had not confidence in your loyalty," replied Erwin, "I should regard the question as an insult."

"Take care, young man; you do not yet know the inconstancy of the human heart."

"Thanks for your advice; but, in pity, tell me, what motives prompt your interference?"

"What I told you at Rivoli should be proof enough that I am informed on all Court secrets. This infamous Rinaldo has arranged everything.--He has shown you the Countess of Champagne; you admired her; you will speak to her to-day;--the rest will come of itself, naturally."

Rechberg was astonished. Hellig was nothing but a tool of the Chancellor. He understood now the reasons for Dassel's extravagant praise of the French envoy.

"I must acknowledge," he said, "that you are extremely well informed; and I need no other proof to give credence to what you advance. But if this Rinaldo fancies that he can make me unfaithful to my oath, he is grievously mistaken."

"Still, he wishes to bring about a marriage between you and the Countess of Champagne."

Rechberg blushed indignantly.

"How!" he said; "does Dassel believe me faithless, base, and without honor?"

"Dassel believes everything possible, because he himself is capable of everything. Don't be surprised at anything in that man, whom they rightly call *ruina mundi*; I only wonder that Barbarossa has not a better opinion of his relative."

"Eh! what? the Emperor too thinks so meanly of me?"

"No, Count; the Emperor does not think meanly of you; he wishes to use you for his own purposes, that is all. Rinaldo has shown to him the advantages of a union between you and Richenza. Frederic's own marriage gave Burgundy to the Empire; a similar proceeding would unite Champagne. Believe me, the plan is by no means a bad one. For a cousin of Frederic to become Count of Troyes and Champagne would be a great step forward in the march to universal dominion. But, as I have already said, the question is, Are you strong enough to resist?"

"Well! if the heiress to the throne of France were to offer me her hand, I would refuse it!"

"Richenza returns to her home, and you will be her escort," continued the stranger.

"I?"

"Barbarossa will give you the order himself."

"Very well; if he does, I shall decline the honor."

"You cannot."

"Do you advise me to accompany the Countess?"

"I do."

"But you have yourself reminded me of the inconstancy of the human heart."

"He who is on his guard has nothing to fear."

"I will not put myself in a false position."

"But when I will have informed you that Hermengarde's journey----"

"Do you know where she is living?" asked Erwin.

"No; but your cousin owns property in that part of the country. It is there a fearful, mortal struggle against Alexander will take place; there, the bishops of England, Germany, and France will assemble, at Barbarossa's request, to restore peace to the Church: it is there, that Louis will meet Frederic; it is also in that direction that the Count of Champagne and his daughter are going."

"So that, without doubt, I will be near Hermengarde?"

"If you refuse to yield to Barbarossa's wishes, he will send you back to Germany."

"It is very probable. Well, be it so; I will accept the mission."

"In that case, my dear Count, I must ask you to do me a service," said the stranger.

"Speak! you have a claim to my gratitude."

"Suppose that a lady of high rank should wish to travel under your protection?"

"You only require me to fulfil one of the duties of chivalry. Where shall I meet this lady?"

"She and her suite will join you a few miles from here. The roads are so insecure that your escort will be extremely valuable; but, like all unfortunates, she requests to be left as much as possible alone."

"I understand; but, before separating, can I not learn the name of him who seems to take so warm an interest in my welfare?"

"My name?" said the *stranger*, irresolutely. "Call me Antonio; the name is an humble one, but a thousand noble ancestors of immortal fame are not sufficient to make their descendant a man of honor."

They parted, and Erwin entered the palace, where he met Hellig.

"Ah!" said he to himself, "here comes the traitor, Dassel's tool."

"Count, I am directed to lead you to the Emperor."

Rechberg went to the Imperial chamber, and was informed by Barbarossa that he had chosen him to accompany the French Count to his home.

"Let all be in readiness," he said, "for to-morrow's journey."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DIVORCED DUCHESS.

Count Henry's journey was long and tedious. He halted in every locality which seemed to offer any attraction, and even remained nearly three weeks at Chanbery. But these delays were prompted by political reasons, and many couriers came and went between the Count and the Courts of Germany and France. He also visited several of the principal towns of Italy, and his frequent interviews with the Pisan and Genoese envoys presaged the conclusion of an offensive and defensive alliance between these maritime republics and France and the Emperor. Although the Count regretted this forced seclusion of his daughter, the fair Richenza scarcely seemed to regret her monotonous existence. On the contrary, accustomed to excite universal admiration in the gay and brilliant French Court, the ceremonious politeness of the young German noble amused her. It was in vain that, to further her father's projects, she treated him with marked distinction; he remained always the same, perfectly courteous, but cold and reserved. At last the young Countess got piqued, but Erwin cared little for this; he had been warned by the Unknown of the Emperor's designs, and he was on his guard. Still, this constant struggle between duty and temptation rendered his position a painful one, and he regretted a hundred times his acceptance of the mission in which he was now engaged.

One day, in the midst of a profound revery, he heard a light rap at the door of his apartment.

"Come in!" he cried.

A veiled woman entered, but although she remained covered, Rechberg recognized her as one of the attendants of the unknown lady whom Antonio had intrusted to his care. Our hero was ignorant of her rank and position, for he had never seen her face; and she always remained in her tent, or else was so deeply veiled that he could neither distinguish her features nor even the sound of her voice. He often rode by her side, less through curiosity than as a chivalrous duty; still it was impossible to penetrate the mystery which enveloped her, and one thing alone was evident, that she was the victim of some crushing misfortune.

Now at last, the lady had sent to request his visit, and Rechberg followed the messenger through many tortuous streets to a house which seemed chosen with an especial view to retirement and melancholy, and it was not without emotion that Erwin entered the apartment, where, surrounded by her attendants, the lady was reclining upon a divan. Upon his entrance, she rose and advanced a step to reply to his courteous bow, and then motioned him to a seat. There was a long silence, during which Erwin looked attentively at the lady, whose stature and dignified deportment announced to be of high position.

"Count," she said, in a calm, sweet voice, "first let me thank you for the kind protection which you have given to a very wretched woman. Pardon me, if I have been compelled, by circumstances, to conceal my name and character; but I still need your aid, and I trust that, though unknown, I may count upon it."

"I have merely discharged the duties imposed by the laws of chivalry," replied Erwin; "I am

always ready to serve you."

"Thank you, my lord. You probably know that His Holiness the Pope Alexander III. has taken refuge in France, and is at present in a monastery on the frontiers of the Empire, not far from Laon. It is there, near to the Father of the faithful, the support of the afflicted and the unhappy, that I am now going."

She paused for a reply, and it seemed to Erwin that her voice was familiar, and that he had already heard it at the Court.

"I now learn," she resumed, "that the Holy Father, through fear for his personal safety on account of the alliance between France and the Emperor, intends to go to England. Should he do so, I shall lose this opportunity of laying my sorrows at the feet of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. To be so near the only person who can aid me in my misfortunes, and yet not see him, will be an additional trial. You, Count, can relieve my unhappiness by consenting to accompany me to Laon."

"What do you ask me to do?" said Erwin. "I cannot leave the Count of Champagne, without violating all the rules of courtesy and incurring my sovereign's displeasure; but I will do all in my power to persuade him to hasten his journey."

"Your efforts will be vain. The Count of Champagne is merely a statesman who is influenced by reasons of political expediency, but not by pity for the sufferings of a stranger."

"Still I will try."

"You will lose your time; but, perhaps, when you see my face, you will consent to do what you have refused to a mere unknown."

She raised her veil;--Clemence, Duchess of Saxony, pale and dejected, stood before him, the living image of grief.

"Great God!" he cried, "can it be you, noble lady? You, the most powerful princess of the Empire, here, unprotected, without the retinue which belongs of right to the Duchess of Saxony and Bavaria!"

"Calm yourself," she answered. "What are rank and dignities? I am nothing now but a poor, divorced wife, who implores your aid and pity."

"It is true then? That infamous deed, of which they spoke so cautiously, has really been consummated?" cried Erwin, indignantly. "Duke of Saxony, they call thee 'the Lion,' but thou art only a lion in cruelty! Henry, thou art an unnatural husband, a prince without honor, the disgrace of knighthood!"

Rechberg's eyes flashed, and his hand sought his sword-hilt, as though he would chastise the crime.

"Restrain yourself, do not blame him," said Clemence. "The fault is entirely theirs who have led him astray, and estranged his heart from the sentiments of duty."

"Not at all, noble Duchess; your excuses only render him more guilty. But tell me how such iniquity could be perpetrated under the very eyes of the Emperor? Why this visit to the Pope? Is not our sovereign the guardian of our rights? Why did you not appeal to him?"

"I have done so, but in vain! Frederic pities my fate, but he neither can, nor will defend my rights."

"You say that he cannot?"

"Those were his own words. The marriage is invalidated by our consanguinity; he is not competent to decide in matters of divorce."

"As if it were not the duty of the Emperor to prevent or punish every act of injustice! You are related to your husband, and the discovery has only just been made!--This is still more extraordinary."

"The discovery is entirely due to the hatred of the Chancellor Rinaldo. Oh! how happily we lived together until that evil man came across our path!--Then, my husband was great and noble, a lion in war, but a lamb at home, a loving and attentive father, a tender and affectionate husband!--And now, O my God!"

And her tears, impatient of all restraint, burst forth in torrents.

"Calm yourself, madam! believe me, such a deed cannot be lawfully recognized. Were there any formal proceedings? Has any sentence been pronounced?"

"The Emperor presided at his tribunal, and the Pope decreed the divorce! It was in vain I tried to defend my cause; I begged on my knees for mercy; all was useless.--At last, moved by my tears

and entreaties, Victor confessed that our consanguinity was not established, and that he had annulled the marriage by the express command of His Majesty, and against his own convictions."

"Alas!"

"Consanguinity," said he, "is a mere pretext; State reasons of the highest importance have compelled the Emperor to this course."

"Heavens! is it thus that justice is administered? Madam, your tale has changed my intentions. Since the Emperor cannot protect your rights, I will accompany you to the Holy Father. Make your arrangements, noble lady, we will start immediately."

Gero met his master at the door, and received orders to prepare everything for their departure. Erwin then went to his apartment, where, with many a bitter invective against Barbarossa's conduct, he began to put on his armor.

"And yet, I cannot go!" he said to himself, as he left his chamber. "How annoying! What ought I to do? A true knight owes as much respect to courtesy as to his other duties."

He laid down his lance, and went to call on Richenza. The young Countess had just finished her toilette, as he entered, and was exquisitely dressed in white.

"Deign to excuse my early visit, noble lady," said the Count; "I was unable to defer it. Reasons of grave importance oblige me to leave your party immediately; I have come, according to custom and courtesy, to crave your permission."

"Unless you will tell me the reasons, I cannot grant your request. Sit down, dear Count, and explain yourself. I will see if there is no means of making you change your intentions."

He was forced to obey, and he took his seat with an embarrassment which did not escape the young girl's notice.

"I am less able to accede to your demand, dear Count, because it is contrary to all our arrangements. The Emperor has chosen for my escort the best lances of German chivalry, so that you cannot, without disrespect to His Majesty, leave me before the end of my journey."

"It is true, noble lady, that it is an honor for me to escort you; but there are some circumstances in which one duty must yield to another, whose claims are still more imperative."

"Circumstances! May I ask you again for some explanations?"

"It is on account of an unfortunate lady, who up to the present moment has travelled under my protection."

"I scarcely expected, Count, that this mysterious person would play such a trick as this, and carry you away from us. Believe me, I am seriously interested in her troubles, on account of the influence she appears to exercise over you. You say that she is to be pitied; what is the cause of her sorrow?"

"The most terrible which can possibly afflict a wife. I cannot say more."

"Has she been married?"

"Yes; and she has always been amiable, faithful, but now is most unfortunate."

Richenza breathed more easily. She had no cause for uneasiness; Erwin was still free.

"The interest you take in this misfortune is very praiseworthy," she said.

"Grant me leave, noble lady; this unhappy woman's only hope is in Pope Alexander's sympathy and protection; I ought to accompany her to his court, and I must go without delay."

"Pope Alexander should be in the Imperial camp at Laon; are we not going in that direction?" asked Richenza.

"I believe so; but we travel so slowly."

"You have not then heard that my father has been hastily summoned to Laon? Your visit prevented me from putting on my riding-dress. Listen! everything is ready, and the escort is already mounted."

They went to the window, and saw the knights and squires issuing from their tents, and drawing up in line, upon the square in front of the palace.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LAON.

From this day forward, the French Ambassador hurried his journey as much as he had hitherto delayed it. The necessary rest was scarcely allowed to the horses, and they travelled night and day as if under the pressure of some political interest of weighty moment.

A grave and careworn expression had succeeded the usually gay and jovial air of the French Count; he spoke rarely, and only in answer to his daughter's questions. Although much fatigued, Richenza still assured her father that she was strong enough to go on; but, from time to time, she looked at the German noble, as if to say,--

"I bear all the annoyances of our journey, rather than be separated from you."

As they neared the French frontier, Erwin met several noblemen of his acquaintance; for Barbarossa had summoned all the spiritual and temporal princes to meet him at Laon. A great number had already arrived, and were encamped along the banks of the Saône.

Soon the towers of Laon, where Louis VII. held his court, began to stand out in bold relief upon the distant horizon. Crowds of horsemen and foot-passengers were pressing towards the city, and the road became more animated as they approached the gates. Numerous huts lined the causeway, offering refreshments at a moderate price; and citizens and soldiers were carousing gayly, under the trees.

Near the drawbridge, in a position to see all who passed, were seated, around a jug of wine, our three old acquaintances, Antonio, Pietro Nigri, and Cocco Griffi.

Pietro seemed much changed. His country's ruin had broken down his proud spirit, and he showed, in his features, the grief he so keenly felt. As to Cocco, he was always the same, and his attentions to the banquet made up for his companions' neglect.

"I came from Dôle yesterday," said Pietro; "all the houses are filled with knights, and you can see nothing anywhere but couriers and soldiers. King Louis will find out one of these days where Barbarossa will take him. If he does not intend to support the Emperor's tyranny, and become his vassal, these German savages will occupy the frontiers, and ravage the French territory with fire and sword, until Louis sues for mercy."

"You are a profound statesman, Pietro," said Antonio, with a laugh; "we are not there yet, and we will not be soon. I grant you that Barbarossa will do his best to frighten the king; but he will think twice before he attacks the allied powers of France and England."

"France and England, allied powers!" exclaimed Pietro. "I thought that the two kings had quarrelled?"

"Ask Pope Alexander if he agrees with you."

"I only know this much, that Alexander has hitherto taken great pains to bring about a reconciliation. But I also know, as every one else does, that Louis has threatened to give the Pope up to Barbarossa!"--

"Louis' threats are not serious," said Antonio. "He must yield to circumstances."

"Circumstances! To my thinking, they are not very favorable!"

"One must not tell all one knows," said Antonio, shrewdly.

"So much the better, if you know all the State secrets; as for me, I expect nothing good from the future. If France ever becomes a vassal of the Emperor, it is all over with the liberty of Italy."

"Come, friend Pietro, do not worry over these things. Think rather of the business which has brought you to France. Do you know what has become of Hermengarde? How did she receive you?"

"Very kindly; but she informed me of her betrothal."

"Count Erwin is certainly a good match; still, the affair may yet fall through.--Eh! what do I see? There he is!--Richenza is with him.--Look at the young Countess."

The brilliant retinue of the Count of Champagne was advancing through the midst of a crowd of admiring spectators. Richenza rode, at the head of the escort, between Rechberg and her father. Pietro glared at the young Count, with a muttered curse. Antonio turned his back, and only resumed his place when the clatter of the horses' hoofs had died away in the distance.

"Malediction on all whom the tyrant protects!" said Pietro, sullenly. "Shame on me, not to have

killed him!" and he drank deeply.

"It is a good lesson, friend Pietro! you must profit by your chances, in future."

"I swear to revenge myself!" cried Nigri, scowling with hatred. "Let me only meet him in the plain, or elsewhere, and he will soon make the acquaintance of my sword."

"It would be much more simple to break off his marriage," sneered Antonio.

"Can you do that?" asked Pietro, eagerly. "Antonio, my life, my fortune are yours, if you can accomplish this!--But, alas! it is impossible!"

"And why so? I have my own plan, and I wish him to marry Richenza."

"Explain yourself, dear Antonio!"

"I will see Hermengarde, and tell her of the widely-spread reports of her betrothed's marriage with the beautiful and wealthy Countess of Champagne."

"Will she believe you?"

"And why not? I already see the effect which my revelation will produce on Hermengarde!"

"Excellently imagined, Antonio."

"We need skill and cunning. The only difficulty will be to procure, in proper time, the necessary proofs. But the Count of Champagne has his castle in the neighborhood of the city.--Hermengarde is not far distant.--Leave it to me."

During this conversation, Count Henry and his retinue moved towards the city. He had already dispatched a nobleman to the royal chancellor, Bishop Manasés of Orleans. On leaving the north gate, they came at once in sight of the castle, which was built upon an eminence overlooking the park which surrounded the hill.

The unhappy Duchess of Saxony gratefully accepted the Count's invitation to remain in his castle during her stay at Laon. It was there she retired with her protector, the only person who knew her secret, until he could accompany her to the papal court; for Alexander had not yet arrived at the town, but was residing in the celebrated Abbey of Cluny.

As soon as he reached his apartment, the lord of the castle hastened to change his costume. He was very uneasy, for the good understanding, reported to exist, between Alexander and king Louis, threatened to destroy the hopes held out to him by Rinaldo of increasing his possessions. Naturally he wished to be positively certain of the fact before presenting himself to his sovereign. No one could furnish more correct data than the Bishop Manasés, who, equally desirous of seeing the Count, hastened to the castle, accompanied by only two servants. Scarcely had Henry of Champagne perceived the horsemen, when he descended to the court-yard, and embracing the prelate with great cordiality, led him to his cabinet for a private interview.

Manasés, by the laxity of his conduct in ecclesiastical matters, had incurred the Pope's displeasure. Alexander did not deceive himself as to the possible consequences of his reprimands. He knew that the Bishop would endeavor to destroy the amiable relations existing between him and the feeble King of France; but the illustrious Pontiff had too exalted a regard for what he considered his duty, to allow himself to be influenced by any worldly considerations.

The exterior of the Bishop of Orleans was at once a mixture of the ecclesiastic and the man of the world. All his movements were stamped with a certain affected grace which was not at all natural to him. His dress was in no way different from that of other courtiers of rank, and the episcopal ring alone indicated his position. The cut of his hair, which he wore long and flowing in perfumed curls, did not conform to the canons, which enjoined that this luxury should be left entirely to the laity. His delicate moustache was turned up at the ends, whilst the chin and cheeks were closely shaved. A casual examination indicated that the prelate was inclined to the pleasures of the table.

"You have acted wisely," said Manasés, as soon as his host had related to him the result of his interview with Frederic; "you have acted wisely in disguising the principal point of your mission; above all, you have done well in not stating that you were disposed to secede, with your domains, to the Emperor, in case Louis refused to ratify the contract."

"What does it matter! the contract is signed, attested, and must be observed," answered the Count. "Our King's gallantry cannot be used as a pretext to injure me. But how is it that Louis has so suddenly changed his intentions and become reconciled with Alexander?"

"I can scarcely explain it to myself. The Pope invited him to a conference, which, in spite of my remonstrances, took place at Montpeleier. It hardly lasted a half-hour, but it was sufficient to gain over the king. It seems as though he has enlightened him on the subject of Frederic's ambition; at least since then, Louis often speaks uneasily of the Emperor's warlike preparations and his hostile intentions towards France."

"Nothing is more apparent than Frederic's pretensions to universal empire," replied the Count, carelessly; "but what matters it? Great men have indisputable rights to take the lead of weaker princes."

"I see, my dear Count, that you have not lost your time at the Imperial Court," said the Archbishop, ironically; "still you will do well not to parade the result of your mediations at the Court of France. Few of the crown vassals would understand you."

"I will follow your advice. But I must avow that Frederic's views in all that concerns the Papacy do not seem right and proper. It is not so much Alexander's person that he hates, as the pontifical chair. It is not very Christian, and is very dangerous for the other States."

"You go too far, Count: Frederic hates only Alexander. He only wishes to humble the proud and inflexible prelate Roland, and we must aid him in the work. Yes," added Manasés, passionately, "this pious man has the most absurd ideas about bishops. He would like to turn them into monks and hermits, and shut them up in a cloister, that he may the more easily rule them. He has already published a bull about the length of the hair; soon, I suppose, he will give directions about the prelates' houses, their retinues, and their style of dress."

"Ah! I begin to understand: Alexander is too severe with the jovial prelates," said the Count, with a smile.

"Yes," replied Manasés, "and he will punish also the noble lords and counts who profit by every opportunity to get an award of some fragment of Church property! But enough on this subject.--As we have already agreed, the King must know nothing more than he knows already. Above all, conceal your personal arrangements with Barbarossa; that of itself would suffice to enrage him."

"Must he then not be informed of the determination which has been taken to bring Alexander before the Council, whether he will or not?"

"That must depend on circumstances. Let me act first; I will give you notice in due time. I will go to work at once. Come to the Court to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?" the Count asked.

"Because I must first prepare the King's mind. But be perfectly easy; you are wearied by this long journey and need rest.--Louis, you know, is very sympathetic in all bodily ailments."

"Very well, we understand each other perfectly. Farewell."

The Count accompanied the Chancellor to the courtyard, where the latter mounted his horse and rode over to meet the King.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

KNAVERY.

At sunrise, Antonio was prowling about the vicinity of the Count of Champagne's castle. He passed the park-gates, and, cautious as a fox in search of his prey, concealed himself behind a clump of bushes near the court-yard, whence he could perceive what was going on in the building.

"Rechberg likes early walks," he said to himself. "I shall not have long to wait. If he only knew that Bonello's daughter is at an hour's distance from here, nothing could prevent him going to her at once. But as this interview would upset all my calculations, I must be prudent.--Good, there he is at last, with his head down, as if he were counting the pebbles on the road.--He is coming towards me as though I had called him!--Oh! your servant, my lord Count."

"Ah! is that you, Antonio? I imagined you were still in Pavia."

"It is my duty to be wherever the master of the world is."

"I do not understand your meaning."

"You have not heard then that Barbarossa, with all his troops, entered Dôle yesterday?"

"Indeed!"

"Your looks and your surprise rather indicate that you do not desire to join him there."

"I wish, Antonio, that it were possible to avoid this interview.--My troubles will begin--"

"I bring news of your betrothed.--I regret extremely that they are not more agreeable ones.--But who could imagine her capable of such a thing?--I would have suspected myself sooner."

"What do you mean to say?"

"You will need all your courage, but I must tell you the truth."

"Explain yourself!"

"Yesterday I met Pietro, who was once betrothed to Hermengarde."

"I beg your pardon, sir; Pietro never was her betrothed."

"Well, at any rate, he is now."

"Villain!" said Erwin, growing pale, and grasping his sword-hilt.

"Is this your idea of gratitude, my lord? Through interest for you, I communicate something of importance, and by way of thanks you seize your sword!--Farewell, Count!"

"Stop a moment!--Ah! what is this you tell me? Pardon my violence, but my heart is broken."

"Pietro himself has assured me that Hermengarde regrets her engagement to one who is related to the tyrant, the scourge of her country, the persecutor of the Church."

Rechberg was thunderstruck; he was unable to speak.

"Compose yourself, Count, and be a man! Perhaps Pietro has exaggerated."

"Oh! if I could only know the truth."

"I have some business to attend to, to-morrow, at La Flèche. Hermengarde is there, and I will announce to her your arrival at Laon. From her manner of receiving the news, her looks and actions, I can judge whether Pietro's assertions are true or false."

"Thanks, dear Antonio; I shall be greatly indebted to you for the service."

"Make yourself perfectly easy on this point, and trust to me."

"Where shall I hear from you?"

"Here; do not leave the castle until I see you again."

"The time will seem very long. Farewell."

Antonio hurriedly crossed the park in the direction of Laon. Pietro was waiting for him at the gate.

"Well, Antonio, what have you done?" he asked.

"He believed everything I told him.--He is so guileless. To-morrow you and I must go to La Flèche.--He sends me to see his betrothed."

"We will not speak of his arrival!"

"I shall simply state that Rechberg and the French Countess have come here together, and that report says they are to be married soon, as the Emperor urges the alliance, and Rechberg himself makes little opposition."

"She will never believe you."

"Perhaps not, at first; but she will begin to doubt, and I know how to change doubts into certainty."

"In what way?"

"You shall know in due time. Now you had better leave me, for we are near the palace-yard; but do not forget to-morrow at daybreak."

Antonio entered the court-yard, where he met the Count of Champagne on his way to see the Bishop, who was awaiting him in the King's antechamber.

"I have had a hard battle to fight, Count," said the prelate. "His Majesty is very uneasy about Barbarossa's military organizations. I warn you to be prepared for everything."

The Count seemed unconcerned.

"I have not acted without proper authority," he said; "your own letter gave me full powers."

"Certainly! shield yourself behind the instructions received from me; it will induce Louis to reflect on the past. Perhaps he is already ashamed of his conduct."

At this moment the King entered. The courtiers were interrupted, for Manasés had still much to tell the Count; but there was nothing to be done but to wait for a more favorable opportunity. Henry advanced towards his sovereign and then knelt and kissed his hand respectfully. The French prince, though naturally kind and generous, often allowed himself to be led away by evil counsellors. His frivolous and vacillating character made him the tool of parties who profited by their influence, to allure him to the commission of bad actions. But as soon as his spirit had regained its wonted calm, he at once rejected the advice and the decisions which had been suggested to him. This explains the continued series of weaknesses which marked his reign. His conduct towards Alexander III. was an exact reflex of his character, and at one time he was for, at another against him. A powerful faction had sprung up since His Holiness had declared the necessity of resisting the encroachments of the clergy, and of defending the Church against the disloyal nobility. At the head of this faction was Queen Adèle, the sister of the Count of Champagne, and a relative of the Antipope Victor, and every means was employed to picture to the king, in the most gloomy colors, the dangers which his kindness towards Alexander might entail upon the French monarchy. A strong argument was the inevitable peril of a war with Germany, and the prospect of an alliance between Frederic and Henry of England, the sworn enemy of France.

Louis understood the position, but the Pope was there, and he could not make up his mind to leave the Head of the Church without protection, or to give him up to his enemy Barbarossa.

On the other hand, Alexander's friends, comprising, with few exceptions, all the Episcopacy of France, were opposed to Frederic's plans, and proved to Louis that the Emperor only sought to humble the Pope, and to subjugate all the other sovereigns. The king was sufficiently clear-sighted to understand the truth of the statement, but he made a grave mistake in supposing that he could deceive his rival by diplomatic negotiations. The German troops, encamped on the very borders of France, revealed unmistakably the intentions of their leader, which greatly disturbed and annoyed the King; and as soon as the formalities of the reception were finished, his discontent became manifest.

"What is the meaning of this?" said he to the Count of Champagne; "what contract is this you have made with the Emperor? Who gave you unrestricted powers in this matter?"

"Your Majesty himself, by directing me, through your Chancellor, to conclude a treaty of alliance. Deign to assure yourself of the truth of my assertion, by examining this document."

"We regret our Chancellor's precipitation," replied the King, after a cursory glance at the letter. "He should not have countenanced, so hastily, an alliance hostile to the Holy Father."

"Allow me to remind your Majesty of what happened," said Manasés. "When Alexander, by his gross discourtesy, so gravely insulted the royal envoys, and when, in consequence, it was determined to break off all intercourse with him, I could not foresee that your generosity would so soon forget the outrage. My instructions to the Count contain nothing more nor less than the expression of your own will."

"You know perfectly well how to excuse yourself, my lord Bishop; the fault is entirely our own.-Let it be so! but this fault, the result of an unfortunate misunderstanding, must have no further consequences!"

Manasés bowed deprecatingly before his sovereign's displeasure, but an attentive spectator might have noticed the courtier's suppressed anger.

"But, Sire!" remarked the astonished Count of Champagne, "this treaty in no way affects your own royal prerogatives."

"Indeed!" said the King; "we are then free? We are not tied down to anything?"

"You are merely pledged to a personal interview with the Emperor, and to make Alexander be present."

"What is that you say?" cried the King, furiously. "Force Alexander to be present at an assembly which is to condemn him?--And I am to aid in this!--Is that in the treaty?"

"Yes, Sire," answered Henry.

"No! by all the saints, it shall not be!" exclaimed the monarch, with increased passion. "Shame on you, Count, for signing an agreement which dishonors us! The Head of the Church has sought refuge within our territory, and we are to act against him so disloyally?--We are to use violence to force him before a tribunal composed of the Emperor's creatures! No! by Saint Denis! we would sooner lose our crown and our life!"

The courtier waited until the storm had passed, and when the King had become more calm, he

said,--

"Allow me, Sire; you make a grave mistake in this interpretation of the treaty. There is nothing said about violence. You are merely to use your influence to persuade Alexander to be present at the plenary council. If he be innocent, if he be the lawful Pope, he will be charmed with this opportunity of asserting his rights."

"Very good!--You have exceeded your powers, and the treaty is invalid. Alexander can do what he pleases; and we, whatever appears to us to be just and proper. Are we then nothing but the Emperor's vassals? Have we no longer liberty to act in accordance with our own ideas?"

"I repeat that the treaty in no way interferes with your supremacy," replied the Count of Champagne; "but what was I to do? The Emperor was on the point of concluding an alliance with England against you; ought I to have permitted such a contract to be signed?"

The King made no answer to this crafty observation of his courtier; but it was not without its effect, for it was the fear of this very alliance between Frederic and the English monarch, which had made him, in the first instance, open the negotiations.

"And how is Barbarossa preparing for our alliance?" asked Louis, who was seeking a new pretext for his ill-humor. "Is he not on our very frontiers, at the head of a powerful army? Is not that, of itself, a threat?"

As if in answer to the question, a loud flourish of trumpets rang out in the palace-yard.

"What is that?" said the King.

He approached the window. A troop of knights had halted before the palace, and a chamberlain came up to announce the arrival of Frederic's envoys.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SPY.

The Chancellor Rinaldo and the Count Palatine Otho de Wittelsbach were at the head of the embassy which had been sent by Frederic to congratulate the French King. Whilst their retinue dispersed through the town, the marshal of the palace introduced the two German nobles into the royal apartments.

The reception-hall took up the entire length of the palace, and resembled a market-house, rather than a room, for the accommodation of persons of distinction. The bare walls were destitute of hangings, and ornamented only with trophies of arms, among which was a collection dating back to the time of the Franks. The sunlight dimly penetrated through the narrow loopholes; the ground was coarsely floored, and stone benches along the walls were the only furniture. The Count Palatine examined, with some curiosity, the armor, and particularly an ancient shield, which, it was said, had once belonged to Charlemagne. Rinaldo placed himself in the recess of a window where he could converse freely with the Count of Champagne. At last Louis appeared; he was richly dressed and followed by a numerous retinue of French nobles, among whom could be remarked his brother Henry, Archbishop of Rheims and primate of France,--a prelate of great distinction and a devoted adherent of Alexander III.

The monarch proceeded to the upper end of the hall, where he mounted a throne of carved oak, whose only value consisted in having once been used by the Emperor Charlemagne.

While the Count Palatine boldly approached the King, Rinaldo advanced with a profound obeisance, (his eye eagerly scanning the faces of the royal suite,) and remarked with uneasiness the presence of the venerable prelate. Louis acknowledged the Chancellor's obsequious homage by a simple wave of his hand, but his face wore a look of stern determination, which gradually gave way to one of attentive curiosity, as the Count of Champagne named the different persons composing the embassy.

Dassel noticed the surprise with which the King looked at him, and was flattered by it, while the Count Palatine Otho, cased in armor from head to foot, stared with utter unconcern at the monarch and his court.

Dassel at once brought into play all his crafty diplomatic science, and met the cold expression and indifferent manner of the sovereign with a coldness and indifference, if possible, more strongly marked. After a brief compliment, he broached the subject of the treaty.

"We bear to your Majesty," he said, "the friendship and best wishes of our sovereign lord and master, the Emperor. Your Majesty is aware of the grave concern which the important affair of the election of a Pope has caused him; and he is rejoiced at being able to come to some understanding with you, by which the schism may be arrested before it can spread itself through all Christendom. From all that can be learned up to the present moment, the only means of securing the peace of the world is by the assembling of a general council. The princes of Europe will be present, together with all the bishops of the Empire; and it is hoped that your Majesty will call to it the French prelates. The two Popes should appear, and each present his respective claims for the consideration of the solemn conclave. The wisdom of the council can then definitely settle the question. The Emperor trusts that you are as anxious as himself to give peace to the Church, and that you will aid him to the utmost of your ability."

"We thank the Emperor for his kind wishes," replied the King, "and our desires are the same, but we do not agree upon the means to be used. The right to assemble a plenary council does not belong to temporal princes, but to the Pope alone. We will never allow ourself to encroach upon the privileges of the Head of the Church; the French prelates are very strict in their observance of the canonical rules, and would scarcely notice our invitation. Besides, the ecclesiastical statutes forbid any layman, even though he be a sovereign prince, to have a vote in a plenary council. The bishops only can take part in their proceedings and deliberations."

"Allow me to observe," answered Dassel, "that the Roman Emperor is the born protector of the Church, and has always had the right of convoking a plenary council; consequently, Frederic's pretensions are not original with him. His intention is, by no means, to take part in the deliberations, but simply to be present as a spectator. Besides, my mission now is only to congratulate your Majesty, and inquire when and where an interview can take place with the Emperor."

This request was embarrassing; Louis scarcely ventured to refuse, and yet he dreaded the results of the meeting.

"Certainly, my lord Chancellor," he said, "we ardently desire an interview with your noble sovereign in order to renew our ancient friendship; but we fear lest it be interpreted in a manner entirely opposed to our present intentions."

"And in what might this erroneous interpretation consist?" asked Dassel, in his most submissive tone.

"I might be supposed to agree with the Emperor in his intention to depose Pope Alexander."

"But I scarcely think that judgment would be a false one," replied the Chancellor, smiling.

"What! you think, my lord, that we are capable of such an impious crime?" exclaimed Louis, who was astonished at Rinaldo's assurance.

"To keep one's solemn promise is not a crime, but a duty."

"Yes, when our envoys have not exceeded their powers," replied Louis, quickly. "The Count of Champagne had no authority whatever to pledge himself for us to take part against the Head of the Church."

The blood rushed to the Count of Champagne's face, and his lips moved convulsively, but he said nothing.

"Your Majesty is pledged only to a personal interview with the Emperor. The non-fulfilment of this promise would be a grave outrage. If you refuse, the Emperor will keep his engagements, and come in person with all his retinue."

This threat produced a marked effect upon the French nobles. The King hesitated a moment, but before he could reply, the Duke of Burgundy exclaimed,--

"If this be a menace, my lord Chancellor, you may tell your master that we will receive him and his followers as they deserve!"

"Let us have no violence, my dear Duke," said Louis. "We have already told you that we are ready to accept the Emperor's invitation, and have never had any intention of insulting him. Let him appoint the place and time for our meeting; we will be there."

If this were a trick to gain time, Dassel was prepared for it, and answered immediately,--

"Since your Majesty leaves everything to the Emperor's discretion, Frederic will expect you at the bridge over the Saône, on the 29th of this month."

Louis had no further excuse, and the Count of Dassel having terminated his mission, left the city after partaking of a banquet. The King's indecision, or rather his unexpected determination, amazed the Imperial faction. The Count of Champagne went to his sister's apartments, while Bishop Manasés paced the room in great agitation.

"Cluny reconciled to Alexander!" he exclaimed; "the primate at the Court and Louis more

undecided than ever! All that is wanting to assure our defeat, is an arrangement between the King and Henry of England. If Alexander succeed, there will be nothing for us to do, but bow down and submit to severe ecclesiastical penances. There is no time to lose. I must act at once, and see that the news of the divorce of Henry the Lion reaches the Pope's ear;--this repudiated princess must be sent to Cluny. Alexander will be exasperated, and our nobles will learn what is to be feared from the Pope's severity. The spirit of opposition once aroused, court hatred will do the rest. Send my spy to me immediately!" he cried, opening the door.

The order had scarcely been given, when Antonio appeared.

"I have not yet had time to reward your services. For the present, take this;" and the Bishop handed Antonio a purse, which the latter put in his pocket, with a smile.

"Thank you, my lord; can my limited intelligence be again useful to your policy?"

"We shall see, Antonio; you promised to bring about Richenza's marriage with this cousin of the Emperor, and so far I can see very slight progress in the affair, although it appears that the young man is still an inmate of her father's castle. If Louis were even to suspect this project, it would be all over with the Count of Champagne, for the alliance is inimical to the interests of France."

"I confess, my lord, that so far I have been unsuccessful. But it is not my fault. The Count of Champagne himself---"

"You do not understand me; the Count desires to remain neutral; it is your business to arrange it. Rechberg is already betrothed, you tell me, and his future wife is in the neighborhood.--Come, Antonio, you should be able by some clever piece of rascality, to destroy all their projects; I trust that you will succeed."

Manasés paused, and then after making a few steps in the room, resumed,--

"The Duchess Clemence is secretly staying at the castle."

"Yes."

"She must go to Cluny to-morrow; you will accompany her."

The order disconcerted Antonio, who had proposed visiting Hermengarde on the ensuing day, in company with Pietro.

"I am ready to obey you, my lord," he replied, after a moment's reflection.

"When you are at Cluny," continued Manasés, "keep your ears and eyes open; let nothing escape you. Watch, above all, the prelates who reside there, and see upon what terms Henry and Alexander appear to be. Mingle with the servants of the house, for you must know every nook and corner in it, and the vassals will suspect nothing."

"You will be satisfied with me, my lord."

"But, take care, the Italian roads are infested with banditti, and Clemence cannot travel without an escort."

"You need have no apprehension on that score; the best sword in Germany will accompany her."

"Who will it be?"

"Erwin of Rechberg."

"Very good; he will then leave the castle. But are you sure of him?"

"Perfectly. Rechberg is a valiant knight: if it be necessary, I will tell him her name, and that will be sufficient for him to consider it a duty not to leave her until she is at her journey's end."

"Antonio, be active, faithful, and discreet, and you will lose nothing. Now go; invent some pretext to hasten your departure."

Antonio found the Duchess ready, but Erwin was not to be found; he had gone, early in the morning, to the Imperial camp, and thither the spy went to look for him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE QUEEN OF FRANCE.

The Count of Champagne had secured the cooperation of a more powerful ally than the Bishop of Orleans. His sister Adèle, as we have already stated, was Queen of France. The indecent haste with which this marriage had been consummated--within a fortnight after the death of Queen Constance--joined to the general absence of affection that he had shown for his deceased wife, had excited the indignation of the people against the King, while the new alliance had created for him many new enemies, not the least formidable of whom was the King of England.

Adèle exercised an immense influence over her husband. She was a relative of the Antipope Victor, whose cause she warmly espoused, and, consequently, did all in her power to further an alliance between Louis and Barbarossa. Pope Alexander, on the contrary, was odious to her, on account of his opposition to her marriage, and his threats of excommunication. After a long interview with her brother, she repaired to the King's apartments. Louis was seated in a high-backed chair, his head resting upon his hands, his eyes cast down, and his whole face bearing an expression of anger and uneasiness.

"Adèle," said the monarch, perceiving his young wife, "since Alexander is in France, I have not had an hour of repose."

This remark (à propos to the very subject which interested the Queen most) gave Adèle the opportunity of exerting her influence for her relatives, and to gratify her revenge towards Alexander; and she said,--

"You have the power, Sire, to send the cause of your uneasiness out of France."

"The wish certainly, but not the power."

"Are you then no longer master in your own kingdom?"

"Circumstances are stronger than my will. I cannot show myself hostile to Alexander, without alienating from me the majority of the prelates. Besides, he is our guest, and the supreme chief of Christendom."

"You cannot be forced to observe the laws of hospitality towards one who has brought trouble under your roof."

"Oh, my dear!" said the King; "we are scarcely at that point yet."

"I know it; but matters are still in a very unfortunate position," said Adèle, with an expression of discouragement. "If the support which you give to Alexander satisfies the prelates, it displeases the great vassals of the crown."--This observation was just.

"The Emperor at the head of a powerful army, is already on our frontiers; Henry of England is mustering his troops in the North. Who, except your vassals, can extricate France from her peril? Can Alexander help you in any way against the dangers which you incur on his account?"

"Honor and duty enjoin on our vassals to answer our summons; do you think they would hesitate to obey?" said Louis.

"The situation is perhaps more critical than you imagine, Sire. If you destroy the contract made with the Emperor, if you protect Alexander, Barbarossa will cross the frontier at once. All will desert your cause, even my brother."

She hid her face in her hands, and wept bitterly.

"What is that you say, Adèle?" exclaimed the King. "Is it, as we hope, merely anxiety which makes you speak thus, or have you really any knowledge of such treachery?"

"My dear husband, be prepared for the worst! Yes, the Count Henry of Champagne and Troyes, the most powerful of your vassals, has promised to go over to the Emperor, if you violate a single article of the treaty which he signed."

"What do you say, madam?" cried Louis, angrily.

"He confessed it to me secretly. In spite of my prayers and my tears, he has sworn to keep his oath."

"Ah! the villain, the caitiff!" he cried, pacing the room. "By Saint Denis! we will arrest and imprison the traitor."

"It is too late, dear husband. The Count has left the Court."

"What! has the wretch retired to his castle?"

The last question was dictated less by anger than by anxiety.

"No; he has gone to the Court of the Emperor."

"Doubtless to receive there the price of his perfidy! Oh, the villain!"

"He has even intimated," continued Adèle, who was endeavoring to alarm the King,--"that other vassals of the crown were inclined to follow his example. 'We prefer,' said he to me, 'to bear allegiance to a free and independent Emperor, than to obey a vassal of the Pope.'"

"Where do I stand?" cried Louis, sadly, and giving way to all the indecision of his character; "rebellion against the throne, rebellion against the Church, surrounded by traitors in my own palace!"

"The danger is near and threatening. But you have the power to ward off the blow," said Adèle.

"I have the power: I? Has not your brother already left the Court? will not the other traitors follow him? Will they not, perhaps to-morrow, rise in rebellion against their sovereign? Oh! I perceive their treasonable plan; it is skilfully organized."

"You exaggerate, Sire," hastily added the wily princess. "It is possible that my brother may return to-morrow. In that case, you will do well to dissemble your anger.--He must not suppose that you suspect his hostile designs."

"My dearest friends, my own family rebel against me!" said Louis, with emotion. "I see in it the finger of God. For years past, I have trampled underfoot the commandments of the holy Church,--the wrath of Heaven is let loose against me!"

"Do not despair," resumed Adèle; "seek rather to avoid the storm; but lose no time, for events are urgent. Only observe the treaty which he has signed in your name, and my brother will be faithful to you, against all the world."

"But I have agreed to the interview, and yet the traitor has gone!"

"You refused to influence Alexander to appear before the council."

"Am I the Pope's sovereign? Is it my place to give orders to the Head of the Church?"

"You can invite him, you can act on him by friendly representations; in a word, you can fulfil the letter of the treaty without in any way violating your conscientious scruples."

Adèle easily reassured her husband. The Archbishop Peter of Tarantasia, a well-known prelate, whose reputation for sanctity extended beyond the frontiers of France, was at that moment present at the Court, and it was determined to select him as the most suitable person to influence the Pope.

He was at once summoned to the royal presence, and soon afterwards made his appearance. The calmness of the noble old man was in striking contrast with Louis' emotion, and his whole person the most severe rebuke to the prelates of the Court. The Archbishop wore a cassock of coarse cloth, without embroidery, fastened at the waist with a belt. His bald head had merely a crown of curly white hair, and his long beard falling upon his breast gave him a venerable mien. Extreme age and the practice of austerity, had bent his body, but his eyes still glowed with a divine light, and his face was a happy mingling of sweetness and Christian charity.

"Welcome, holy prelate!" cried Louis, advancing hastily to meet him.

He explained his situation, and continued,--

"And now tell me, father, am I not as wretched as King David when he was pursued by Absalom? The Count of Champagne is my own wife's brother."

"I have long known the crafty arts of the Imperial Court, and the skill with which it has led away others in its train," replied Peter. "The Count Henry has been tricked. He swore to execute a treaty whose results he could not foresee. We must seek a way by which his oath to Barbarossa may not be violated."

"Can you conceive of any other means of escape from this difficulty than that of inviting the Pope to attend the council?"

"I perceive none other at present; I must reflect."

"But there is not a moment to be lost; who can tell whether my refusal is not really what Frederic desired; if he will not gladly profit by this opportunity of allying himself with Henry of England against France? He is on our very frontiers, ready for the struggle."

"Unfortunately we must dread everything from one who persecutes the Church."

"It is on this account, worthy prelate, that I implore you to go, as my ambassador, to His Holiness; assure him of my respect, of my fidelity; tell him that circumstances over which I have no control, and not my own free will, have obliged me to invite him to the council."

"There is nothing in this invitation which can be blamed if it be suitably presented," said the Archbishop, after a moment's reflection. "There is no doubt of your Majesty's sentiments towards the Holy Father, and I will gladly undertake to deliver your message."

"God be praised!" answered Louis, joyfully; "you have relieved my heart of the heavy weight which oppressed it."

"Well," said the aged prelate, "inform the Emperor immediately, that, in execution of the treaty, you have invited His Holiness to be present at the council. I feel almost positive that Alexander cannot consistently go there; but you have saved appearances; the Count of Champagne will see that his promise has been complied with, and your enemies will have no further pretext to seek your ruin."

"God speaks by your mouth, father, and I will follow your advice."

"I go to prepare for my journey; may God preserve your Majesty."

"Do not leave me thus; give me your blessing, father," said the King, kneeling as he spoke.

The Archbishop, without manifesting the least emotion, raised his eyes and hands to Heaven, prayed for a few moments in a low tone, then stretching out his right hand, he said with a loud voice, "*Benedictio Dei omnipotentis descendat super te et maneat semper.*"

"*Amen!*" responded the King, who rose and accompanied the prelate to the door of the apartment.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

UNDER THE OAKS.

On the day appointed for the interview between the two sovereigns, Frederic ordered several magnificent tents to be pitched along the bank of the river which was occupied by the German troops, while on the French side, Louis and his suite merely sheltered themselves under a clump of oak-trees.

The King wore a green hunting-dress, a plumed hat, and a short sword. He had left the city under the pretext of hunting in a neighboring forest; for he was anxious that the meeting should seem purely accidental, at least, to the French people, who had a profound contempt for the Antipope Victor, and were displeased with the alliance between Louis VII. and the schismatic Barbarossa.

The annoyance caused him by this forced interview, was apparent on the King's face, and his uneasiness increased as he gazed at the rows of tents stretching far into the distance. Barbarossa, indeed, had come at the head of a numerous army, in order the better to enforce his policy, and all the princes of the Empire were ordered to rendezvous at Laon, with their several contingents on a war-footing.

The King was accompanied by the Duke of Burgundy and the Counts of Champagne and Nevers, the latter of whom was a bold and arrogant noble, bitterly opposed to the papacy. A violent enemy of Alexander, he was none the less so as regarded Victor, and if he favored an alliance between Louis and the German Emperor, it was merely through a hope that this would better enable him to enjoy the fruits of his robberies.

A little later the Primate of France, Peter of Tarantasia and Galdini Sala, appeared near the bridge. The latter, since the fall of Milan, had been residing at Alexander's court, and had now come with the Archbishop of Tarantasia from Cluny, and had apparently been delegated on some secret mission.

Louis breathed more freely as the time passed without any signs of Barbarossa, for he began to hope that the Emperor would not come, and the interview not take place.

"What think you, my lords?" he said. "His German Majesty seems to care little for his promise. It is late now, and the hour fixed upon is long since passed."

"Some unforeseen occurrence must have detained him," said Henry of Champagne, who had observed his sovereign's secret satisfaction; "but he cannot fail to be here soon."

"Would it not be well," remarked one of the nobles, "for your Majesty to inform him of your arrival."

"No," answered Louis; "what use is there of this exchange of messages? What is the King of France, after all? Perhaps the Emperor has already forgotten this trifle."

"He has been detained by some state affairs," said the Count of Nevers.

"And I suppose, until these affairs are settled, the King of France can wait. Very well indeed," replied Louis. "But we will wait no longer--although there are some persons in France who desire our humiliation, and perhaps even our dethronement!"

These words, intended for the Count of Champagne, were uttered with some bitterness.

"Those men are nothing more than traitors!" said the Duke of Burgundy, who was aware of the relations between Henry and the Emperor.

The Count scowled angrily at the speaker.

"I did not believe," added the King, "that in all France there was a man base enough to sell his honor, even if there were any one capable of paying him in false promises."

"The passions, and particularly covetousness," resumed the Duke, "corrupt the heart and dispose it to the commission of evil deeds; but it is positive that France does contain persons, who are ready to sell their country."

"Are you perfectly assured of the existence of such persons?" asked Champagne, who, with difficulty, restrained his anger.

"I have heard them spoken of," replied the Duke.

"A man of honor is cautious in accusing others."

"Each man knows whether or not he is a slave to Barbarossa," answered the Burgundian. "I can only watch the traitors as long as they wear the mask of loyalty; but if they ever venture to show their faces, they shall pay dearly for their perfidy."

"Why this discussion, my lords?" said the Primate, who desired to prevent a still more unfriendly retort from the King's brother-in-law. "I am sure that, whenever France shall unfurl her *oriflamme*, Burgundy and Champagne will fight side by side beneath its folds."

"I am always at the post to which my honor and my oath assign me!" said the Count proudly.

"There can be no doubt on that point," added Louis; "you are united to us by the double bond of vassalage and relationship."

The Count of Champagne made no reply; his pride forbade further discussion. In ordinary circumstances, he would have mounted and ridden away without a word of apology; but now he was obliged to yield, but he did so with a firm resolution of revenging himself on the Burgundian Duke, on the first favorable opportunity.

Louis appreciated the danger of a quarrel between his vassals, and he hastened to change the subject.

"The hour has passed," he said, looking at the sun. "You, my lords, can bear witness that it is not we who failed to appear."

"But the Emperor will certainly come; wait a little longer," urged the Count Henry.

"No, Count; our self-respect forbids it, and I am tired of waiting. Frederic shows clearly by his absence, that his consideration for your sovereign is not excessive, and I am almost inclined to believe the reports which attribute to him pretensions to supremacy over all the princes of Christendom."

"As it may please you, Sire. However," continued Henry of Champagne, "you may possibly regret the results of your too hasty departure."

"The results! What mean you?"

"The Count means to say," replied the Duke of Burgundy, "that the enemies of France may profit by the opportunity to accuse you of breaking your royal word, and to invade our frontiers."

"Let them come if they wish; we will meet them!"

Louis looked towards the German camp, and under the influence of returning fears, was about to wait still longer, but the Duke opposed him.

"You cannot, Sire, without compromising yourself. If the Emperor means war, all your concessions will not prevent him from fixing a quarrel on you."

"I commend France to the care of the Almighty," said the feeble monarch; "but be kind enough, noble Duke, to ride over and salute the Emperor in my name."

"Heaven preserve me from it! I never meet the enemies of France except on the battle-field. It is at the head of my men-at-arms that I will pay my respects to Barbarossa;" and the fiery soldier mounted his charger.

"Since it is necessary, reverend father," said Louis to Peter of Tarantasia, "that you bear the Pope's message to the Emperor, have the kindness to explain to his Majesty that I have complied with all the conditions agreed upon, and that I have waited beyond the hour appointed."

"You may trust to me," said the pious Archbishop.

After another glance behind him, the King mounted, and rode with the Duke of Burgundy towards Laon.

The Count of Champagne leaned with a gloomy air against a tree, and the savage William of Nevers, smiling ironically, approached him.

"The Burgundian," he said, "speaks as though he meant to dispute Barbarossa's claim to the Empire."

"You seem jovial, my lord," replied Henry.

"And why should I not be? The heroic soul of the Duke of Burgundy will inspire the King. Our valiant sovereign will not keep his promise. As Alexander will not come, Barbarossa will be obliged to bring Victor. Ah! there is a worthy man for you; he thinks it no crime to rob a rich convent! But, if Pope Alexander keeps his place, the devil! I will have to do penance!"

Whilst the Count of Nevers was explaining the motives which attached him to Frederic and Victor, the two ecclesiastics were conversing privately.

"King Louis may be sincerely devoted to the Holy See," said Galdini Sala; "but he will not go to war against Barbarossa. I have grave fears for the Holy Father; he will be incarcerated in some lonely cloister, and will stay there, strictly guarded, until his last hour. Meanwhile, Victor, Frederic's devoted slave, will rule as the Emperor may dictate; and the court prelates will follow his bidding, until the whole Church falls into a deplorable condition."

"These fears are only human; but God's decrees are inscrutable, and beyond the comprehension of mortal man," replied the Archbishop. "How did Louis receive the news of the negotiations with the English King? I know that your mission is to sound him on that subject. But here comes the Emperor;" and he pointed to a cloud of dust in the distance.

The cavalcade advanced rapidly; the armor glittered in the sunlight. Princely banners, and the sumptuous robes of the nobles, could be distinguished; and at last the escort drew up before the tents.

CHAPTER XL.

A TRUE BISHOP.

Followed by Rinaldo and the French Counts, the Emperor entered his tent, chafing angrily at the announcement that the King had gone.

"He imagines that he has acted royally," said Barbarossa; "is it not ridiculous to think that peace is endangered, because one of us came to the bridge a little later than the other? But how is it with the chief article of the treaty? Will the Cardinal Roland be present at the council?"

"The Archbishop of Tarantasia will give you every explanation on this point, Sire," replied the Count of Champagne. "All that I know is, that he refused the royal invitation."

"The invitation! What does this mean? Do you think that Roland can be influenced by an invitation? You will be good enough to remember, my Lord, that in our treaty, sworn to by you in the name of your King, it was stipulated that Roland should be forced to appear before his judges."

"Most certainly, Sire; and I will perform what I have promised; but I cannot oblige the King to do as much."

"Still it is the only way to prevent him from violating his oath," added William of Nevers.

There was a pause, Frederic's brow darkened, and his eye cast a threatening glance towards France.

"It is evident," he resumed, "that Louis hopes to deceive us, but we will not permit it. The king of France will learn that no one can, with impunity, baffle the plans of the mightiest nation of the earth! Chosen, by the grace of God, to protect the Church, it is our duty to establish order and even to punish kings! Count, you will freely express to your sovereign our discontent.--We insist on his executing every article of the treaty which he has sworn to.--Remember that you have pledged yourself to bring the Cardinal Roland before the Council, either with or without his consent. If the King of France desires, as ardently as we do, to promote the peace and well-being of the Church, he will spare neither entreaties nor threats to decide the French bishops to take part in the Council. The non-observance of the most insignificant clause, in a solemn treaty, will be looked upon by us as a declaration of war. We will invade the country, and we will compel the King not to leave the Church and his subjects in the hands of a few bigoted fanatics. My lord Chancellor, order this message to be written and sealed."

Dassel bowed and left the tent, well satisfied with his master's energy.

"You will perfectly understand, my lords," said Barbarossa, suddenly changing his tone, "that we receive the Archbishop as an envoy from the King of France, and not as Roland's messenger."

The French nobles left, with Rinaldo, to be presented to the German princes.

"What a mixture of weakness and bravado!" said the Emperor to himself. "I shall regret a war, but, at any cost, France must cease to be the protectress of the Pope."

His soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of the Archbishop, whose noble and saintly appearance produced a great impression upon the monarch. Accustomed to see the prelates of his Court covered with finery and sumptuous robes, he was surprised at the Archbishop's simple and unpretending attire. Although well versed in the religious customs of the day, and aware of the wide-spread reputation of Peter of Tarantasia, Frederic was surprised at the inward emotion which he experienced at their meeting. On the other hand, the prelate appreciated the Emperor's position, and knew his hostile intentions towards the Church,--but he gazed calmly upon him, as though he would read his inmost thoughts.

"I am happy to be able to know you personally, worthy father," said Barbarossa, as he invited the prelate to be seated. "I have heard so much in your praise that I can only desire that all our prelates would take you as their model. Allow me to say one word: I know that Roland has refused our invitation. I should have been prepared for it; some characters are emboldened rather than subdued by danger. Still I am curious to learn the motives which have dictated his refusal."

"The motives were not invented by him, Sire. Our Holy Church teaches that her chief cannot submit to any earthly tribunal."

"In this I recognize the Cardinal's pride!"

"The Holy Father implores you to persecute the Church no more; it grieves him to see everywhere the laxity of morals, the universal discord which has been produced by your fault. He complains, above all, that you leave certain episcopal seats vacant, or else that you confer them upon men who are under ecclesiastical censure."

"Naturally we do not choose Alexander's partisans for Bishops. This would be only to warm the viper in our breast. But I am wrong in excusing myself to one who is accused; it is contrary to reason. If we were willing to apologize to Pope Alexander for all the insinuations which he has made against us, our honor would not support the trial!"

Frederic spoke with much bitterness and rose to indicate that the audience was at an end. The prelate remained quietly seated; he understood Barbarossa's disposition perfectly, and he regretted to see so influential a sovereign follow a course which could not but cause great evils to Christendom. He deplored the fatal consequences which were inevitable, and he endeavored to make them evident in terms the novelty of which must have surprised the Emperor.

"Your Majesty is right in insisting upon the recognition of the Imperial supremacy. But cannot the Holy Father solicit a similar favor; that is, the acknowledgment of his spiritual independence?"

"Doubtless! We have no pretensions to interfere in any way with Papal matters."

"Still, you do interfere with them in the most outrageous manner! The vicar of Jesus Christ has scarcely place on earth to rest his feet! Everything has become Imperial: we have Imperial bishops, Imperial convents, Imperial abbots, and, in the schools, Imperial instructions!--If that be

just, what need is there for a Pope?"

This striking truth, uttered with perfect calmness, scarcely awakened a memory in Frederic's soul.

"Your reasoning," he replied, "is false and unjust at the same time! The whole earth belongs to the Pope, and he can cast his fisherman's net where it may please him; we, the protector of the Church, will certainly not hinder him."

"Yes, you will allow him to act so long as he is obedient to your orders; but if the Pope should wish to be his own master, if he should wish to reign independent of all human control, what would happen then?"

"There is but one sovereign lord upon earth," said the Emperor, proudly; "the laws are only the expression of his will, and all power exists by it alone!"

"It may be so for earthly concerns; but for spiritual matters, God has chosen another sovereign, the chief of religious unity, the supreme shepherd of Christianity--the Pope!"

"The Emperor also belongs to the fold of the faithful," said Frederic, quickly, "so that the Pope must be the Emperor's shepherd, his spiritual father; am I not right?"

"Most certainly; God said to the first Pope, 'Feed my sheep;' he made no exception to the Emperor."

"And yet the Roman Emperor bore the title of *pontifex maximus*! How do you explain that, my lord Archbishop?"

"The Roman emperors were pagans."

"Be it so; I am and will be entirely a Roman emperor!"

"A pagan head on a Christian body!"

"No!" answered Barbarossa; "but go to Byzantium; examine the *Pandects* of Justinian; you will see there that an alliance may exist between a pagan on the throne and Christianity."

"You support yourself on Justinian? but what was Justinian's code? Was it not the destruction of all liberty, the abrogation of every right of humanity? Great God!" added the illustrious prelate, standing sorrowfully before the Emperor, "what error! what peril! But the Pope has not yet worn the yoke of slavery; the nations of the Christian world will not permit it."

"Very well! But if, in case of disunion, the people leaned towards the spiritual, it would be easy to lessen the Emperor's person, and overthrow the tyrant."

"One moment, Sire; you give an incorrect interpretation to our meaning. The father of the faithful ought to oppose all those who wish to exercise tyranny and oppression. The Gospel delivered mankind from the slavery imposed upon it by paganism. Believe me," added the old man, in a prophetic tone, "the day that the Popes shall cease to protect liberty, anarchy and revolution will convulse the world."

Barbarossa shook his head with an incredulous and discontented air.

"The Emperor of the East has no Pope," he replied, "and yet he reigns peacefully."

"You are again in error, Sire! Mark attentively what is going on in Byzantium. What do you see there? An exhausted and dying kingdom, a weak and corrupt clergy, a host of ecclesiastics knowing no law but the Imperial will; an effeminate people without morals, and puffed up with vanity and servile ideas. Is this the state to which you would reduce your brilliant Empire?"

"You exaggerate; matters are scarcely in so bad a state as that."

"Ah, Sire! they are in an infinitely worse condition. Great God! I see it now; Salisbury was right!--I deplore it, but he was right."

"Salisbury!" said Barbarossa, starting, for he had a great respect for this illustrious scholar. "May I ask in what he was right?"

Peter sighed deeply.

"Why do you hesitate, my lord Archbishop? You know the opinion which a wise man entertains of our actions; why then do you seek to conceal it from us?"

"Salisbury occasionally writes to me, Sire," said Peter, with an embarrassed manner.

"Well, what has he written about us?"

"I received his letter a few days since," replied the prelate, drawing a parchment from his bosom; "it contains a dissertation upon the present condition of the Church, and particularly

upon your designs. But it tells me no more than your Majesty himself has just stated, still I was unwilling to believe it."

"Speak!"

"You will it so; make up your mind then to listen to some bitter truths.--

"Led astray by the principles of the Justinian Code, Frederic dreams of the renewal of the brilliant Roman empire in its complete and most deceitful form. Either he does not understand the great Christian Empire, or it is insufficient to gratify his pride. He has less desire to be the protector of the Church than to be her master. The Pope must steer St. Peter's boat according to the Emperor's will; the bishops must be nothing but abbots of the Empire, and religion must be subordinate to the ends which the Government proposes. As he has destroyed the free life of the Church, so does he subvert the liberties of the people. Instead of preserving the ancient manners and customs of his people as is his duty, his plan contemplates the reorganizing of everything. If this Emperor ever succeeds in his designs, it will be by the abolition of all independence. Still, what prince could be compared with Frederic before he became a tyrant, and from a Catholic Emperor degenerated into a schismatic?"

Frederic heard this discourse with marked astonishment, and more than once was on the point of interrupting; at last, at the word schismatic, he colored with anger, and exclaimed,--

"Enough! the letter of this learned personage is full of exaggerations! The name of schismatic cast in our teeth seems to be looked upon as an excuse for everything.--Because Victor's humility seemed to us more worthy of the Holy See than Roland's pride, we are called the destroyer of Church liberty!"

"Pardon me, Sire, it is my duty to say a few words in reply," remarked Peter. "You speak of Victor's humility, but Victor is, after all, your creature; a plaything which your breath sends whither it will; a puppet which you have chosen to obey all your caprices:--And should Victor be the supreme Head of Christendom?"

Barbarossa was confused by such language. The old man's frankness, his calmness and dignity, obliged him to listen. There was no animation in his manner, but his clear voice sorrowfully expressed his feeling of duty.

Barbarossa looked at him in silence.

"You will acknowledge, Sire, that the Pope must be free and independent to discharge his ministry. What would become of an enslaved Church, dependent upon the will of a temporal ruler? Great God! to what baseness would she not be obliged to descend; what infamous enormities would she not have to sanction, under the pretext of State policy! A religion which acts in the interest of human passions instead of opposing their indulgence, could not aid in the salvation of souls--Everything would be subverted; sin would invade the whole world, and would extinguish Christ's holy light, and with it all faith, all desire, all power of good!--And this," concluded the prelate, with energy, "this is the state of degradation to which you would reduce a Church which has existed for a thousand years!"

The Archbishop had risen, and stood before the Emperor like a prophet of old.

"It is well! enough of this; we understand independence, but within certain limits."

"It is not independence, but duty which dictated my words, Sire! May this appeal of an aged prelate, ready to appear at the judgment-seat of God, not be lost upon you! It is more difficult to speak the truth to princes than to conceal it. I have told you naught but the truth. May Heaven in its mercy enlighten your Majesty!"

The Archbishop bowed, and left the room.

"By my faith!" cried Barbarossa; "there goes a worthy man; one not often met with! His words might have turned from its determination a spirit less decided than mine!"

CHAPTER XLI.

A HARDENED SINNER.

The Duke of Austria had scarcely dismounted, when he was informed that Galdini Sala requested an audience. At the time of the siege of Milan, Galdini's name had been so often

mentioned that the Duke felt almost a sentiment of pride at being thus brought into personal relations with one who had exercised so weighty an influence over the besieged. Consequently, he hastened to the tent where Sala was awaiting him.

The Archdeacon held in his hand a roll of parchment to which a seal was attached. This was the usual form of correspondence between persons of distinction. "With a low bow, Galdini presented the letters, but scarcely had Henry opened the roll and glanced at the seal, when his face assumed an expression of astonishment.

"What do I see? a letter from His Holiness! to me!" he cried. "There must be a mistake here; this letter must be for the Emperor, or the King of France!"

"It is addressed to Henry, Duke of Austria, and is highly important," said Galdini, respectfully.

The Duke cut the silken thread, and to the great surprise of the prelate, read over the Latin brief; for his studies in the Convent of Fulva had enabled him to do without a secretary.

"Clemence at the Papal Court! I thought she was in Germany! His Holiness is enraged at this criminal act--*scelus et flagitium*; yes, it is indeed a crime," said the Duke, continuing to read, and accompanying the reading with his own commentaries. "The divorce is declared null and void. The Lion is excommunicated and banished. By my faith, these are the words of a true Pope! I must speak to the Duke on the subject. I fear it will be labor in vain!"

"Your Highness will be faithful to the voice of the Holy Father," replied Sala. "Your Highness alone, among all the princes in the Imperial camp, is worthy of the Pope's confidence, and he charges you to protest against this sinful deed. It should be the Emperor's duty to protect the unhappy Duchess, but Frederic is not opposed to the divorce!"

"It is most true; it is a miserable measure of political expediency in the interest of territorial aggrandizement," said Henry, warmly. "The Emperor's villainous Chancellor has directed the whole business. My cousin's daughter lived on the best possible terms with her husband, before the interference of that felon. Ah! princes will not see to what their ambition leads them, until the halter is around their necks."

"What has all this to do with the divorce?"

"You do not understand the plot," resumed Henry; "the repudiation of Clemence must make trouble between Saxony and her relations; the union of those two houses would have thwarted all Frederic's designs against the liberties of the people, the clergy and the nobility."

"Frederic evidently seeks to assure his supremacy," said Galdini, endeavoring to excite the Duke to a fuller confession.

"There is no doubt about it. Why does he not assign incumbents to the vacant fiefs? He keeps them for himself. He owns already all the territory from Rottemburg to Besançon. He sows discord among the nobles, adds the fiefs to the crown, and has organized in the Church an army of corrupt Bishops! Tell me, is not that one way of assuring his Imperial supremacy?"

"It seems so to me."

"That is not all. The Empire is to be divided according to the old Eastern system. One of my followers, who was with Barbarossa during the last crusade, has heard him express his admiration for the Byzantine Empire. Barbarossa needs a capital, another Constantinople, and he has already made his selection. It is Mayence! Wait until he returns to Germany, and you will see whether this city be not deprived of all her liberties, as a punishment for Arnold's murder, and if he does not make her his capital!"

"But why do you aid him with your troops?"

"Because I am alone in my way of thinking! Besides, I have already spoken frankly to the Emperor, and he is well aware that I will not further his guilty projects. I have spoken frankly to you, that you may repeat my words to the Holy Father. Alexander must not yield; he is the only protector of right and liberty!--I am going to fulfil your message, and that, too, in your presence."

The Duke raised the curtain, and left the tent; a moment afterwards he returned with the Saxon prince.

"This is a messenger from His Holiness, Pope Alexander III.," said the Austrian; "he has given me this letter."

And he began to read it off in German.

"This is perfectly useless," said the Lion; "neither you, my dear Duke, nor Alexander, are called upon for an opinion; the sentence has been pronounced; the affair is concluded."

"The sentence has been pronounced, and by whom?"

"By Pope Victor, the legitimate chief of Christendom."

"Is it Henry the Lion who speaks thus?" said the Duke of Austria, with more dissatisfaction than surprise. "No one ever despised Victor more than you have done! Who has ever called him the Imperial puppet as often as you? and yet, to-day, he is for you the chief of Christendom!"

"The last reasons are often the best!"

"Because you need some excuse to justify your misdeeds!"

"Misdeeds? Duke, what does this mean!" said the Lion, with an air of menace.

"Must I then call evil good, and good evil? No, Duke of Saxony, not yet; not even in Frederic's camp! Do not misunderstand my frankness, Henry; your divorce is a wrong, a crying injustice, a stain upon your name."

"Your interference in my private affairs is insulting to me, my lord!" said the Lion, sullenly.

"Is not Clemence my relative?"

"Too distant to warrant such excessive interest."

"The duty of every knight is to defend the rights of helpless woman," replied the Austrian. "Besides, I am fulfilling the Pope's mission. He has excommunicated you; is that of no moment?"

"Very well! your message has been delivered; the rest is my own business."

"What! You will put yourself in opposition to the whole Church, you will endanger your own soul, while you violate the rights of chivalry?"

"Enough of this; spare me these superfluous representations. At my own formal request, the Holy Father has annulled my marriage; neither you, nor any one, even Alexander, can make me reverse my decision."

As he spoke he turned his back upon the Duke, and hastily left the tent.

"You see there a fair instance of the respect paid to one's conscience, and the sanctity of marriage, in the Imperial court," said the Duke, sadly. "Frederic set the first example of a divorce, and he will find scores of imitators."

"Alas!" Galdini exclaimed.

"I am uneasy for Clemence's safety. The fate of the unfortunate Empress Adelaide is still unknown; she has disappeared, and Clemence too might be spirited away, if I did not prevent it. I will go to-day, and solicit from the French King a strong escort to conduct her to her relatives. The unfortunate princess will travel through Lorraine and Bavaria to Austria under the protection of my troops. She will there be able to end in peace her blighted existence; for, even should Henry return to kinder sentiments, she can scarcely look for much happiness in her husband's society."

Galdini Sala thanked the Duke, and they separated after the latter had repeated his assurance of unalterable fidelity to Pope Alexander.

"Recommend me, my house, and my country to the blessing of His Holiness--and comfort poor Clemence."

Whilst the archdeacon was on his way to the tent where the nobles were assembled, Barbarossa was taking leave of the Count of Champagne, and their parting was so affectionately cordial that Sala was astonished.

"I will soon make a visit to that beautiful castle of yours, of which my cousin appears so fond," said Frederic to the Count, as he was mounting on his horse.

"I thank your Majesty for the honor you will then favor me with," said the Count, bowing respectfully and dashing off, followed by his retinue.

Without a moment's loss of time, the Count of Champagne returned to his castle, and Nevers presented the Imperial despatch to the King.

The same evening Manasés and Champagne held a long and secret interview. The Emperor's letter had greatly embarrassed Louis, for Rinaldo had rather exaggerated Frederic's warlike language, so that it differed little from a formal declaration of war. The King paced uneasily in his room, cursing the Emperor, the Count of Champagne, and the obstinacy of the Pope. At last he seemed to have made up his mind, and sent for the Chancellor Manasés, Alexander's most bitter enemy.

"This is my opinion," said the latter, after a perusal of the communication; "if you continue to support Roland, war is inevitable; besides, I have learned from another source, that an alliance is about to be concluded between Frederic and the English King. We consequently are in danger of being attacked on both sides at once."

The King's anxiety increased.

"We have fulfilled the duties of a Christian," he said. "I have defended the Pope as far as I am able. No one can compel me to subject my kingdom to all the horrors of a merciless war."

The wily courtier expected this conclusion, and it was decided to send a message, couched in very emphatic language, to the Holy Father at Cluny.

The Chancellor recommended that it should be intrusted to a partisan of Alexander, and the Archbishop of Tarantasia was selected. It is probable that some other choice had been made by Manasés and the Count of Champagne; for when the prelate arrived at Court, on the next day, the Count announced boldly to the King that Peter neither would nor could bear the despatch.

"Have I then no longer a right to choose my own ambassadors?" asked Louis. "What have you against the Archbishop?"

"This holy man cannot suit you, Sire," he replied. "He will kiss Alexander's hand and will address him, with every mark of respect, a request which ought to be communicated as an order. The Pope will be under a false impression; he will refuse to come, and war will break out. Rather send a man in armor with a strong escort, that he may, if needs be, enforce the execution of your orders."

"Employ violence!" exclaimed the King.

"Why are you astonished, Sire? gentle measures have been tried without result, there is nothing left but compulsion."

"It would be an unheard of crime to drag the Chief of Christendom, against his will, before a tribunal composed exclusively of his enemies!" said Louis. "I will not permit it!"

"Very well; but in that case, the Count Henry of Troyes and Champagne will keep his oath."

"One moment, Count, for the love of God! Do not be so hasty, cried the terrified prince. I know your unfortunate oath, but you have scarcely reflected that it would be treason!"

"My oath is an oath even when pledged to an enemy; and yet, Sire, you would make me a perjurer and a felon? Either you will send a proper message to Alexander, or I will go over to the Emperor."

"Since your Majesty cannot resist the Count's arguments," interrupted Manasés, "would it not be well to intrust him with this mission? The situation is delicate; it is necessary not to render it still more dangerous."

After a moment's hesitation, the King consented.

"Go, in God's name," he said; "but I adjure you, on your conscience, respect the Pope, respect the Chief of Christendom."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE ABBEY OF CLUNY.

The Abbey of Cluny belonged to the most illustrious of the religious orders, and controlled two thousand convents distributed throughout Christendom and Palestine. It was not only a pious sanctuary, but also a school, the renown of which extended beyond the seas. Unlike the monks of the other orders who were chiefly engaged in agriculture and field labors, the peaceful denizens of Cluny were entirely devoted to study and the pursuit of science, and attached a greater value to their manuscripts than to any material treasures. Many were constantly occupied in transcribing the works of the Fathers of the Church, and even those of the pagan writers of antiquity. The volumes intended for the church service were richly illuminated in order to be more worthy to appear upon the altar. The Church itself was enriched with pictures, sculpture, and works of art. The dormitories, the halls, and the refectory were filled with masterpieces, and resembled a vast museum destined to defend the fine arts against the ravages of time.

The cathedral, which was the largest in the world, was a marvel of Roman architecture, and everything in it so magnificent, that Saint Bernard could not resist expressing his discontent.

"What use is there of this amazing height, this immense width and endless length, of these sumptuous ornaments, which attract the gaze of the faithful, but distract their attention?" he

wrote to Peter, the venerable Abbot of Cluny. "Why all these candelabras studded with precious stones, these costly paintings and works of art? Is it through honor to the Saints that you walk over their images and spit upon those of the Holy Angels? Why these sublime representations on a pavement which must be covered with dust?"

In the opinion of the austere monk of Citeaux, the study after the beautiful was far inferior to that of godliness, and he imagined that the former injured the latter. The most liberal hospitality was lavished in the abbey on all travellers of every rank; women only were excluded; and precise rules specified the manner of the reception of strangers according to their rank and quality. At different times Cluny had entertained Pope Innocent IV., twelve Cardinals, with their entire suite, two patriarchs, three Archbishops, and eleven Bishops, and the King of France, with his mother, brother, sister, and the whole court; the Emperor of Constantinople, the heirs-apparent to the crowns of Castile and Aragon, and several Dukes with their knights and retinues. Still the good monks continued to live in rigorous asceticism; and their liberality to others often reduced them to extremities of privation. They watched over the poor of the neighborhood, and each week the pious brothers sought out the sick and wretched, to administer succor and consolation. On one occasion, during a famine, the Abbot Odilon sold the church ornaments, even to a crown, which had been presented to the monastery by the Emperor Henry II., in order to relieve the wants of the suffering members of Jesus Christ.

Although hospitality was considered an obligation by all the cloisters of the Catholic world, Rechberg was surprised at the scale on which it was dispensed at Cluny; and the presence of the Pope increased the concourse of travellers. Each day came and went messengers to and from all parts of the world; and Erwin heard on all sides a perfect Babel of the most different tongues. Pilgrims were arriving from Greece and Spain, from Muscovy, England, and Arabia, to prostrate themselves before the Apostolic throne. The Roman Empire alone was not represented at Cluny, through fear of the powerful displeasure of the Emperor Barbarossa.

Rechberg admired the learning, the energy, and the grave dignity of the monks, and never before had he experienced so deeply the influence of Catholicity. The Pope appeared to him to be the heart of Christendom, uniting the two extremities; for Frederic's authority was as nothing compared with that of the Holy Father. When he contrasted the Emperor's creature, the false Pope Victor, with the venerable Pontiff, the Head of the Church, he smiled with pity and contempt.

"My godfather will be obliged to subdue the universe," he said to himself, "if he wishes to make the Holy Pope his vassal."

Erwin had resided in Cluny for about a fortnight; the novelty at first amused him, but Antonio's words constantly recurred to his memory, and although full of anxiety to ascertain their truth, a sentiment of duty retained him at the abbey;--he could not desert the unfortunate Clemence.

One day, upon leaving the princess, now more resigned and collected, since she had ascertained with what paternal interest she was looked upon by Alexander, Rechberg was met by the lay brother, a worthy man, who hitherto had done him the honors of the monastery.

"Are you already at liberty, brother Severinus?" asked the Count. "I scarcely thought it was yet time for vespers."

"The good fathers are about going to the choir, and we will take advantage of their absence; you would lose a great deal, Count, if you were to leave us without seeing the pictures in the refectory."

"I don't doubt it; let us go there now." As they were crossing the court-yard, where crowds of strangers were walking beneath the shade of the oak-trees, Rechberg suddenly perceived a man whose face appeared familiar; he had seen him at Castellamare where he had been pointed out by Hermengarde. It was Nigri's servant, Cocco Griffi, and our hero stood still, watching his movements and hoping for an opportunity to address him.

"There is no want of curiosities here," said brother Severinus, remarking his guest's astonishment, "for we have every variety of costume and language. Look at that Arab with his bright eyes and white teeth; he and the grave and haughty Castilian by his side are envoys from the King of Navarre." Just then Erwin lost sight of Cocco Griffi.

"Our painters often come here," resumed the monk, "to study faces and details of which I know nothing; I saw the other day in one of the artist's cells a representation of the devil, which was the living image of a Moor who had been here;--I will show it to you."

Rechberg had not been mistaken. Cocco Grim, in company with a monk, entered a two-storied house where persons of the middle class were lodged. The monk mounted on the steps to examine the red marks traced upon the wall, and then, turning towards Cocco,--

"It is here that Antonio lives," he said, "if you want him."

Griffi went in. The spy was waiting, and at first looked up as though not well satisfied with the interruption; but as soon as he recognized his visitor, he rose and went forward, cordially.

"Cocco! is that you? What good wind brings you here?"

"A miracle, my dear Antonio; when you know it you will be surprised, and, it may be, somewhat provoked."

"I will wager that your master has been doing something absurd; is not that the case?"

"Yes, you have guessed it. My master and the lady of Castellamare are on their way to Cluny; I was sent ahead to announce to you this masterpiece of diplomacy."

Antonio looked at Griffi with amazement, and then broke out, angrily.

"This is a beautiful piece of business, indeed! That ass never had any brains! He will spoil everything! The young girl will come here; she will meet the Count, and all my plans will be thwarted. What imprudence! I suppose he has told her that Rechberg is here with the Duchess, and that on his return he is to marry Richenza; is that it?"

"Yes, all but the marriage."

"That's it; he concealed the only thing which he ought to have told."

"Oh, he talked of nothing but Erwin and Richenza, Richenza and Erwin."

"Well, what then?"

"Then! oh, Hermengarde asserted that she was under a vow to make a pilgrimage to Cluny, and that she would no longer delay it."

"The pretext was a good one,"

"Then my master offered to accompany the young person."

"And she refused?"

"Two or three times, but Pietro insisted. They will be here to-morrow at the latest, and my master promises to conduct the affair to your entire satisfaction. You may count upon his gratitude."

Antonio smiled as he heard the last words, for he knew that Pietro possessed immense wealth in Lombardy.

"The affair has miscarried," he said to himself, pacing the room. "But Hermengarde cannot lodge in the cloister; she must stay in the village, and as Cluny opens its gates but once a week to women, it will be a mere chance if she and Rechberg meet."

He turned towards Griffi. "Where are you living?" he asked. "Near the gate; one of the windows overlooks the street."

"Be on the lookout, and let me know as soon as they arrive."

CHAPTER XLIII.

IN THE CLOISTER.

Meanwhile Rechberg had reached the gate of the cloister; it was opened at once, and, with his companion, he entered a small courtyard.

"It is too soon yet," said the porter, when the monk had informed him of the object of their visit; "but you can wait here."

They stepped forward towards a low wall, festooned with creepers, which shut off the garden, exclusively reserved for the brotherhood. Erwin could see and admire their grave and dignified deportment, and remarked their difference from the German monks, who were usually occupied in out-door pursuits; whereas at Cluny they passed their lives in the practice of interior virtues, and the advancement of science.

At this moment two lay brothers approached the wall, talking with an earnestness which indicated the importance of their subject. They spoke gravely and in measured tones, although Rechberg could not understand a single word of their conversation, he imagined that it was

probably a discussion of some intricate problem of philosophy.

"What language is that?" he asked.

"Greek, Count," replied Severinus, in a low voice; "every known language is spoken in our community; Latin and Greek, and Arabic and Hebrew; they are perfectly familiar with all of them, and with more still. I like to hear them talk Hebrew, it is such a strange dialect,--so guttural, that it seems uttered rather by the throat than by the tongue. I doubt, whether the Franks could articulate a single syllable of it; but I think you will have a chance to judge for yourself during our walk. Ah! here come two of your artists!--The very ones of all whom I prefer, for they have heart and a soul; whereas some learned men have nothing but intellect Look, how they argue. Let us go a little nearer; I will wager that their discussion turns upon Homer, Pindar, Apollo, or Horace."

Erwin listened.

"You deny then all value to pagan sciences, brother Odilon?"

"By no means. I simply remarked that religious faith was the true domain of true science. The pagans had their own belief, and consequently their own school of art; but a Christian's art is as far superior to a pagan's as Christianity is to paganism."

"Do you think that our poetry is better than that of Horace?"

"Yes, inasmuch ours celebrates truth; his, only pagan errors. But, brother Colomban, in all that relates to style, the pagans are our masters, for Christian poetry is still in its infancy."

"We have admired together the statues lately received from Rome; do you think we are capable of doing anything as perfect?"

"We must make a distinction here," replied Odilon. "The pagans attained a rare perfection of form; but is the body the only, the real object of art? No; the sculptor must give a spirituality to his work! The most skilful pagan would never have been able to chisel out the pure image of the Holy Virgin."

"I think I understand your meaning," said Colomban.

"It is the same with poetry. The fountain head of all sublimity, the source of the beautiful is God; the nearer the poet approaches that, the more truly artistic he becomes, and, in proportion as his ideas diverge from the Divinity, so much farther is he from perfection."

The two monks disappeared at a turn of the path.

"Well, what think you? are not those men true lights of the faith?" asked Severinus. "They have great privileges, they can go to Rome and further, too, if they wish, and sometimes are excused from attendance in the choir."

At this moment the bell rang; all conversation was immediately suspended, and each monk took his place with a regularity which surprised the young German, who could almost fancy that he was looking at a well disciplined troop of soldiers, as they defiled before him in stately procession.

The solemn strains of the organ were heard, and the chants began.

"Now, let us make good use of our time," said Severinus, hurrying forward. "Let us see the refectory first; it is only a refectory, it is true, but its equal does not exist in France or Germany."

They entered the hall, near the door of which was a large crucifix artistically sculptured. At the upper end of the room was the Abbot's chair placed so as to overlook everything, and his table, to which the chief dignitaries of the monastery were often invited, stood upon a raised platform. Long oaken tables, with richly carved supports, were ranged methodically, and covered with a white cloth, at which, as Severinus assured the Count, more than four hundred guests could be seated; for Cluny counted at that time four hundred and eighty monks, many of whom lived as hermits in the neighboring forest.

On one side stood a single table covered with black cloth.

"The *pulmenta defunctorum* are served there," replied Severinus, to Rechberg's curiosity. "This, is the place of the pious Duke of Aquitaine, the protector of our convent; that, is for his saintly wife Ingeburge."

And so he went on enumerating the eighteen places.

"But all those of whom you speak are dead," said Erwin. "What is the use of spreading a banquet every day, of which they cannot partake."

The monk looked at Erwin with astonishment.

"Do you not remember," he said, "that the Archangel Raphael assured the young Tobias, that it

was better to give alms than to build up pyramids of gold and silver? It is for this that every day the deceased benefactors of Cluny feed the poor. Do you not believe that the blessings which they receive in Heaven are worth more than precious stones?" Rechberg was too fervent a Catholic to doubt of the correctness of this view of the subject; it was a praiseworthy and pious custom.

His attention was directed to the pictures on the walls; many of them, such as the hunt of Saint Eustace, and the fight between Saint George and the Dragon, he recognized at once; but there were others so strange in all their details, that he was obliged to ask for explanations.

On their way from the refectory to the artist's apartments, as they crossed a long gallery, Rechberg stopped before a bronze statue, which attracted his admiration.

"It is the image of our late Superior, Peter the Venerable," said Severinus, very respectfully. "It was cast about two years since, and those who knew him during his lifetime, affirm that the likeness is striking. We will have it made in silver one of these days, when our convent is richer."

The galleries were filled with statues of saints and holy men, in wood and stone; some of recent date, others of ancient workmanship; so that it would have been easy to trace, step by step, the progress of the art. But the Count was little versed in such matters, and what was more, he could not forget Cocco Griffi.

"My lord Count, you must visit the library, even if it is only for a moment," said the monk, opening the door. A score of desks were arranged in a half-circle around one of larger size, which Rechberg perceived, at once, was a masterpiece of sculpture. This work of art was ornamented with arabesques, and with flowers, birds, and animals of every description; upon it was a book in Greek characters.

"They write the books here," said Severinus; "the reader is seated at the upper desks, with the copyists in front and around him. You can judge for yourself, (and he offered the manuscripts to Rechberg,) if they know their business. And our fathers attend to everything! We have twenty copies of the Holy Scriptures. Nearly all the works of the early Fathers, and many of those written by pagan authors and priests are to be found in our library. Every year some of the order go through France and England, and even as far as Greece, in search of rare manuscripts, of which four copies are immediately made."

After leaving the cloister, and crossing a vacant yard, they came to a house with large windows. The rooms were filled with evidences of the sculptor's art; figures and images of all sorts were standing there on pedestals.

"Is not that a splendid angel's head?" said Severinus; "the features are so sweet and delicate, and the folds of the robe so natural! And that Holy Virgin! how beautiful and gracious she appears! I do not think it possible to give more life to a work of stone."

But Rechberg was thinking of something else, and sympathized very little with the artistic enthusiasm of his companion.

"It is a pity that we cannot go in," said Severinus, pointing to a placard on which was written, *Porta clausa*. "The door is closed and the painter is at work; but it is a great loss, Count."

"I cannot see everything in one day," replied Erwin, who was delighted.

"You would be obliged to stay at Cluny for months if you would do justice to everything. The church alone, with all its pictures, and portraits, and mosaics, would require a long examination."

"Whose dwelling is this?" asked Erwin, as they passed before a handsome house.

"The Holy Father lives there. May God protect him! His enemies give him no rest. He was forced to fly from Italy, and with difficulty can obtain an asylum in France."

"With difficulty? Are the French, partisans of Pope Victor?"

"God preserve us from it!" said Severinus; "but we fear the fierce Barbarossa, who has taken it into his head that Victor must be Pope, whether or no!"

Erwin smiled at the dread which his godfather inspired,

"This Barbarossa is a cruel man, and they tell dreadful stories about him," continued the monk. "It appears that he wants to be Pope and Emperor at the same time, and this desire is unchristian. He is now on the frontier with a mighty army, in order to force the king of France to give up the Pope. Woe to us if this merciless sovereign comes here! He will destroy our convent as he destroyed Milan."

"You have too bad an idea of the Emperor," said Rechberg; "why should he cherish evil designs against your abbey? Is it because you show hospitality to Alexander? I assure you that the Emperor is too chivalrous to inflict a punishment for the accomplishment of a duty."

He spoke so warmly that Severinus almost regretted his frankness.

"I have never yet seen the Pope," continued Erwin. "Do you think it possible?"

"It is difficult," was the reply. "The Holy Father takes but a few moments' repose each day, when he comes to this garden. From morning till night he works or receives visits and ambassadors or letters from every part of the world. We are often compelled to refuse admittance to persons of distinction."

As they reached the door which led to the enclosure reserved to the brotherhood. Severinus drew a key from his girdle and took leave of Erwin, who thanked him warmly, regretting that he would accept of no gratuity for his trouble.

"Do not insist, Count," he said; "gold or silver would be useless to me. The best reward for a monk is that which results from a consciousness that he has done his duty."

Rechberg immediately proceeded to look for Antonio, for Cocco Griffi's face had haunted him ever since they had met, and he began to imagine that there must be some connection between Pietro's servant and the fears which he entertained about the fate of Hermengarde.

CHAPTER XLIV.

POPE ALEXANDER III.

Two noblemen were on their way towards the modest dwelling of the Holy Father: they were the Archbishop Peter of Tarantasia and Count Dietrich, the envoy of the primate of France. Peter had been in Cluny for the last two days. The message had been calmly received, but the form did not deceive His Holiness for a moment as to its true import. Alexander guessed everything; he knew that Louis would not dare to resist Frederic, and that Peter had brought him not an invitation, but an order. On the other hand, Count Dietrich conveyed to the Pope the assurance of the entire and perfect devotion to him of the Archbishop of Rheims.

As soon as the Primate had discovered the intentions of his royal brother, and the orders given by him to the Count of Champagne, he hastened to his presence, with the hope of effecting a change of policy. But either through fear of Barbarossa's violence, or influenced by the demands of his own vassals, Louis, instead of listening to his brother's arguments and representations, broke out into bitter accusations against the Pope. Convinced of the fruitlessness of his attempts, the Primate at once dispatched Count Dietrich to Cluny, to inform the Pontiff of the danger with which he was threatened.

They were received, upon their arrival, by a steward who showed them to a room in the upper story, where they found the celebrated founder of Notre Dame, the Archbishop Maurice of Paris, and three cardinals. While the chamberlain repaired to Alexander's private apartment, the news was communicated to the prelates, who were thunder-struck.

Alexander was standing before a desk covered with parchment, which he was examining attentively; dictating at the same time to a deacon who took down his words, for the Pope possessed the rare talent of being able to do several things at once.

The Pontiff's exterior indicated the energy of his mind, and his strong physical constitution enabled him to support the fatigues which the cares of the Church rendered necessary. His features were strongly marked and displayed great firmness tempered by benevolence. His eye was calm and decided; a gracious smile was playing around his mouth; but his brow was furrowed by the afflictions he had experienced. He had been formerly a professor in the University of Bologna and shone, by his great attainments, in all branches of learning. Although the untiring champion of the rights and liberties of the Church, he was personally humble and modest. He hated no one, not even Barbarossa, his successful and implacable adversary.

Alexander's costume was of the most simple description: a long white garment reached to his feet; above he wore a short red tunic, with full sleeves, the dalmatica of that age: from his shoulders a white woollen pallium, with a black cross, folded over on his breast, whence it hung almost to the ground, after the manner of the ancient stole. On his finger the Pontiff wore the pastoral ring, and his head was covered with a round mitre ornamented with a number of small crosses.

As soon as he had been informed of the arrival of the French envoy, he left his work and repaired to the hall of audience, where Count Dietrich and the cardinals were in waiting.

All knelt at the entrance of the Head of Christendom, who advanced towards the Count and extended to him his hand which the latter kissed reverently, and then took his seat with the

cardinals, on chairs placed in a semicircle around the Papal throne.

"Most Holy Father," he said, "your devoted son, Henry, Archbishop of Rheims and Primate of France, has sent me to give warning of the danger which threatens your personal safety. A short time after the departure of the Archbishop of Tarantasia, a partisan of the Emperor, the Count Henry of Champagne presented himself before the king, and so alarmed him that His Majesty has promised to abandon your holy cause in order to avoid the danger of a quarrel with Barbarossa. The Count of Champagne, uniting his forces with those of William of Nevers, the Bishop of Orleans, and other enemies of your Holiness, is now marching towards Cluny, with the intention of arresting your Holiness, and giving you over to Barbarossa. My revered lord has sent me to you, now to advise, that you avoid this captivity by seeking refuge on English soil."

During this speech the features of the cardinals indicated their consternation, but the Pope never lost his coolness for one instant, although his face gave signs of the pain he inwardly experienced.

"I thank you, Count," said the Pontiff, calmly. "Be so kind as to assure our worthy son, the primate of France, of our paternal and sincere affection; but we cannot follow his advice. We shall remain here, although we may be led into captivity, if such be the design of God. It is not the first time that the head of the Church has been forced to yield to violence. If God in his infinite wisdom; and in the interest of His holy name, judges me worthy to suffer even death itself, let His will be done."

"Permit me, Holy Father," said the cardinal, John of Naples; "your resolution does not appear to me to be prudent. As soon as you have fallen into the power of the tyrant, your enemies will drag you before the council and throw you into a dungeon. Octavian, who styles himself Victor, would then rule in the name and according to the wishes of the Emperor, while the successor of St. Peter would be in a prison. Avoid this peril and the whole Catholic world will rise to resist the schismatical Emperor and his bishops. Did not St. Paul fly from danger in order to be able to spread more widely the divine word?"

"Worthy brother," replied the Pope, "in this particular we have been long a zealous disciple of St. Paul; we have fled from Rome, we have fled from Genoa. Where, hereafter, could we hope to avoid the inveterate pursuit of Barbarossa?"

"The Greek Emperor Manuel," replied John of Naples, "has, on several occasions, offered you men and money to defend Rome and drive the Germans from Italy!--Your Holiness cannot be ignorant of the fact that Venice and other powerful cities will give strenuous aid to this enterprise."

"But, my lord Cardinal, what conditions did Manuel exact in return," said Alexander.

"He demands the guaranty of the Imperial crown to him and his successors. Now, as this crown belongs to the Pope, he can dispose of it as he pleases."

"Very true!" said Alexander; "but, in that case, would we not seem to deprive the German princes of their rights in order to gratify our own personal spite? The wisdom of our predecessors has for ages placed the crown on German princes, and should we from purely personal motives presume to abrogate the acts of their wisdom? No, my lord Cardinal! may God preserve, keep, and enlighten the Emperor Frederic."

"Perhaps it would be well," said the Cardinal William of Pavia, "to request aid from the English king. His Camp is only ten miles from here, and a simple request from your Holiness will be sufficient to have his troops put at your orders."

This proposal awakened the Pope's astonishment; his irritated glance was fixed upon the Cardinal.

"We take refuge at the English Court!--we trust to a man who has violated the bonds of matrimony, and whose cruelty never hesitates in shedding innocent blood!--We put ourself in the power of one who acknowledges no laws, who has nothing of human in his constitution, who tramples underfoot divine and ecclesiastical laws and precepts!--But we should be in a position still more degraded than that which poor Victor occupies with the Emperor."

The Cardinal had nothing to reply to this and bent his head in silence.

"Perhaps Spain is the only country in which your Holiness can find an asylum?" said Maurice of Pavia.

But Alexander interrupted him at once.

"Spain!--oh! poor Spain," said the Pope sadly. "You have not yet learned, my dear brothers, the news which reached me yesterday. The Moors have mustered all their forces; they have summoned from the deserts of Africa their countless hordes of savage bandits, who will throw themselves upon Spain like the sands of the desert. And to think," continued the Pope, "that the Emperor, instead of fighting against the Crescent, encourages the enemies of our holy religion by his own impious struggles against the Apostolic See. My brethren, these are bitter trials!--May

God preserve the faithful from persecution, prison, and death!--May Christendom be not divided by schism!--May we remain at the helm to guide our bark through the troubled sea."

He was silent and with bent head forgot his own situation in reflecting on that of the Church. On their part, the prelates remained speechless with emotion.

At last Alexander raised his head, and his look was calm though dejected, as he declared his unalterable determination not to seek to escape by flight from the danger which now threatened him.

"You will be good enough, Cardinal," he said to William of Pavia, "to take care that all the archbishops, bishops, and prelates whom we have admitted to the reception of the royal envoy be invited to the reunion. Our intention is, perhaps for the last time, to speak openly in order to defend the rights and the liberties of the Church."

He rose as a signal that the audience was at an end. All who were present knelt piously, received the Pontiff's blessing, and bowing respectfully, left the room.

"Oh, my Lord and my God!" said Alexander to himself, as he sought the little oratory in which he usually said mass.

He knelt devoutly before the altar, where a golden dove contained the Body of his Redeemer. The vicar of Christ had come to implore the aid of his divine Master. He prayed long and fervently; his features by turns assumed the expression of grief, consolation, and resignation; and when the rays of the setting sun shone through the red windows of the chapel, they shed a halo of glory around the head of the still kneeling Pope.

CHAPTER XLV.

A KNAVE'S STRATAGEM.

"In any case," thought Erwin, "Antonio must be aware of Griffi's presence at Cluny."

He sent his faithful Gero to the Italian quarter to look for Antonio, but he was not there. "He usually walks in the public square among the strangers," said the squire; "but I don't know where he has hidden himself to-day."

The day passed without any further result, but the next morning Antonio was announced. The Count received him coldly.

"We can go to Laon at last, my lord Count. Henry the Lion persists in his designs, even at the risk of being put under the ban of the Empire; and the Duke of Austria has sent a strong escort to accompany the Duchess to her home. It was a prudent measure; for the poor lady would have fared badly if her husband had thought proper to use violence."

"Where did you receive these details?"

"From an old acquaintance who met the Pope's envoy, Galdini Sala, at the camp."

"Have you no other news?"

"None."

"Did not Pietro Nigri's servant pay you a visit?"

Antonio started, but recovered himself promptly.

"Yes, Cocco Griffi came to see me; but I did not intend to speak of a visit which was not a pleasant one for your Lordship."

"Speak freely; you have nothing to fear."

"I know that, but I dislike to wound those whom I esteem. Pietro Nigri has sent to request me to meet him on a matter of great importance; for you must know that we are intimate friends; this ought to suffice you."

"Not at all. Why this invitation, and what is this important business?"

"The accomplishment of a great design."

"Which has reference to Hermengarde?"

"Since you mention her name, I will confess that it has. But compose yourself; nothing is lost yet; as we return to Laon to-morrow, we shall have time enough to see your betrothed and remind her of her promises."

Erwin grew pale and red by turns, and then became very serious. Turning his back upon the Italian, he walked towards the window to reflect.

"May I ask," inquired Antonio, after a brief pause, "whether you will leave to-morrow?"

"Leave! and what for?" answered Rechberg, dreamily. "Ah! well,--yes, to-morrow."

And he left Antonio, who soon after might have been seen upon the road leading from Cluny to the neighboring village. Accustomed to pick up information from every source, he approached a man who was going in the same direction as himself.

"Do you know," said the stranger, "that they wish to capture the person of His Holiness? The Count of Champagne is on his way with a strong party of knights and varlets to seize and give him up to the Emperor, who will put him to death."

"That is a very likely story, my good man!"

"You think it is an invention of mine, do you?--But I tell you that I saw him and his daughter Richenza in the village last night."

"With his daughter?" repeated the Italian, looking with stupid amazement at the stranger.

"Yes, with his daughter and a troop of his retainers; but I swear that they shall not give the Pope up to Barbarossa. The people will rise in his defence."

Without listening further to the conversation of the old man, Antonio began to reflect over the fact of Richenza's presence at Cluny. It seemed so strange, so unlikely, that he could attribute it only to the designs of the Emperor to enforce the marriage with his cousin, as soon as possible.

When he arrived at the village, Pietro hailed him from a window, and on his entrance received him with every demonstration of friendship.

"Let me recover a little, my dear Pietro; it is all so extraordinary, that my ideas are somewhat confused."

"What is the matter with you?"

Antonio made no answer.

"Are you mad, Antonio?--Look me in the face! Come!"

"I am undone! I cannot repair what you have compromised. And why did you tell Hermengarde that Erwin was at Cluny? Your mistake has spoiled everything."

"Enough, Antonio, enough! I know that I have made a mistake; why then do you take pleasure in increasing my regrets for it."

"Let me console you, Pietro; the Count of Champagne is expected every moment."

"What matters that to me?"

"His daughter Richenza is with him; I foresee that the Emperor has designs on young Rechberg."

"Something may be made out of this circumstance," said Pietro.

"Do you think so? your eyes are at last opened to the light? You begin to understand now why I was anxious? My plans have failed! It was necessary for Erwin to leave to-morrow to avoid meeting Hermengarde; but now he must remain!"

"What have you decided to do?"

"Ask me no questions, but do as I bid, for I have no confidence in you, friend Pietro; did you speak of me to Hermengarde?"

"No; she only knows that a friend of mine, named Antonio, came here with me."

"Very well! present me at once, for there is no time to be lost."

They entered a room where two of the retainers were seated at a chess-board. Their armor hung upon the wall, and their lances stood in a corner.

"Ubaldo, ask the waiting-woman if your mistress will receive my friend?" said Pietro to one of

the soldiers.

In a few moments the soldier returned with an affirmative reply.

They then proceeded to a sumptuously furnished apartment, where Hermengarde was awaiting them. She rose as they entered, and greeted Antonio with a friendly smile. As she resumed her seat, Hedwige placed two chairs for the visitors.

"This is my friend Antonio, noble lady," said Pietro; "he accompanied Count Rechberg to Cluny, and I had the good fortune to meet him in the street."

"I am happy, my lord Pietro, to receive your friend. But what business has brought Count Rechberg here?"

"He came with the Duchess of Saxony, who, divorced and banished by her husband, has sought the Pope's protection.--It was a duty he owed to chivalry," the Italian added, "and the more meritorious that Rechberg travelled without, or rather against the consent of the Emperor."

"I hope that his generosity will not put him in disfavor with Barbarossa?"

"I am unable to say anything positive on this point; but I imagine that Frederic will endeavor to preserve the friendship of one who is about to be allied to one of the most powerful houses of France."

Hermengarde started.

"From what Rechberg tells me," continued Antonio, "the Count of Champagne is expected with his daughter to-day. It is possible that the young Count will retire with the Countess to her father's estates."

"Can I not see the Count, Antonio?" asked Hermengarde; "he saved my father's life, and we are under great obligations to him."

"It appears to me rather difficult, noble lady. Women are admitted within the convent only once a week, and I doubt that the Count will tarry here long; still, if you so desire, I will inform him of your wishes."

"I beg you to do so, sir, and as soon as possible."

"I am entirely at your orders, noble lady. But if I mistake not, here comes the Count of Champagne."

The blast of a trumpet and the clatter of horses, resounded in the street. The Count and a numerous retinue was passing along the road, and at a few paces in his rear, Richenza was riding along in a showy costume.

Hermengarde stood motionless, as though her strength was about to fail her, but, with a violent effort, she recovered herself, and dismissed her visitors.

"Be kind enough to remember my request, knight," she said to Antonio; "perhaps you can bring me the Count's answer this evening?"

"I repeat, madam, that I am entirely at your command," replied the Italian, bowing himself out of the room.

"I say, my friend, you don't mean to tell him anything, do you?" said Nigri to the other.

"What are you thinking about? I will tell her tomorrow, that the Count will neither come to her, nor receive her visit. We shall see then what will happen. It is a capital joke after all, to lead people about by the nose in this way! But we must be prepared for everything; suppose that Hermengarde meets the German?"

"Then I will put an end to the joke with a single blow!" said Pietro, sullenly.

"Well, that is your lookout, not mine. Expect me here to-morrow," said Antonio.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SERMON.

Stephen, prior of Cluny, entered the Pope's chamber; the Abbot Hugo had been deposed the same day by the Chapter, on account of his schismatical tendencies, and the prior had just been informed that the Count of Champagne had placed guards at all the doors of the cloister.

"The Count is much interested in our affairs," said Alexander. "You perceive how faithful he is to his master; why then should we be less so to ours? Is every thing ready for the council?"

"Your orders have been executed, Holy Father."

"I will administer the holy sacrament, and then receive the Count of Champagne. Is there anything else, my son?" asked the Pope, seeing that Stephen still waited with a restless and uneasy expression on his features.

"Holy Father, are you then decided to allow yourself to be made prisoner by these impious men?" asked the good prior, with an emotion which touched his hearer. "All the doors are guarded, but you can get out in the disguise of a monk and escape! I have prepared everything."

"Stephen," answered the Pope, in a tone of reproach, "you have been busy about many things, when there was but one important;" then, with a milder voice, he continued: "The hour is at hand, my son; take care that everything be ready."

"The hour is at hand!" repeated the prior as he withdrew; "our blessed Redeemer said those words when they came to lay hands on him. Woe is me! Cluny has become a Mount of Olives, and the Holy Father will leave it to go to prison, and perhaps to death."

As has already been observed, the church of Cluny was the largest in the world. The roof was supported by gigantic columns, measuring eight feet each in circumference; the whole building was ornamented with pictures and sculpture; a magnificent mosaic pavement covered the floor of the choir, and the walls were hung with invaluable works of art, representing the life of Jesus Christ and the Saints, and scenes from the Old Testament. Gold and silver candlesticks stood upon the altar, and in front hung a chandelier of four branches, wrought in solid silver, with lanterns studded with precious stones.

As soon as Stephen had ascertained that Alexander's orders had been carried out, he proceeded to the cloister, where the Count of Champagne and thirty men-at-arms had just entered.

Without vouchsafing a glance at the works of art around them, these advanced boldly into the very house of God, and drew up in line before the pulpit at the entrance to the chancel. With helmets on, clothed in complete mail, and their swords drawn, they resembled the horde of barbarians who had come to pursue Christ in the holy temple of God.

The moment fixed upon by Alexander was approaching. The door of the sacristy opened, and the procession entered the chancel. At the head walked the monks and lay brothers, robed in white; then came the abbots, bishops, and cardinals, in rich costumes, wearing the mitre, and with cross in hand; last of all, the Pope, in red vestments, and all the pomp of solemn ceremony.

"Red! the color of the holy martyrs," thought Stephen, as he remarked the color which had been selected by the Pontiff; "and there are the executioners!" he added, looking at the soldiers. The holy sacrifice began. The Pope, entirely absorbed in his devotions, thought of nothing which was going on around him. The prelates were kneeling upon scarlet cushions; the monks and lay brothers upon the pavement.

As soon as the office was terminated, and without laying aside his pontifical robes, the Pope entered the chancel and ascended his throne, around which were seated the cardinals, bishops, and abbots. The monks stood in line waiting, with anxious faces, for the end. About three paces in front stood a table, covered with parchments, at which two clerks were seated, in order to copy the proceedings. The men-at-arms, led by Henry of Champagne and the fierce Count of Nevers, advanced boldly towards the Pontiff.

"Sir Pope," said Henry, "we have been sent to invite you, in the name of our sovereign lord and king, to appear before an ecclesiastical council, which is to meet at an early day in Besançon. We can take no excuse, as your refusal might plunge France and Germany into a bloody war. Our king has pledged himself by oath that you will be present at the assembly, and he means to keep his word. You must, then, accept the invitation graciously, if you do not wish to compel us to resort to violence."

This harangue, so devoid of all courtesy, excited the openly expressed disapproval of the audience.

"Count of Champagne!" exclaimed the pious but impetuous Maurice, Archbishop of Paris; "you not only act contrary to all custom, but you are also wanting in the respect which you owe to the Head of the Church. How can you dare to address such words to the Vicar of Christ in the very temple of God? Would you have us to suppose that the great vassals of the French crown surpass in irreligion the slaves of the schismatic Barbarossa?"

Maurice would have continued, but Alexander III. interfered.

"My lord Count," he said, "it is not obstinacy, but duty, which dictates our refusal to this invitation. We will certainly repair to Besançon, but not as a culprit. Who convoked the assembly? Men who are forgetful of their duties, and almost without exception under the ban of ecclesiastical censure. We cannot submit our cause to any earthly tribunal, least of all to one acting only under the orders of the Emperor. Frederic has violated all laws, human and divine, in placing the Council above the Pope, and the Emperor above the Council. We rebuke this injustice, and we are ready, in the discharge of our duty, to suffer every torture, and even death itself."

Alexander paused, and then rose from his seat with an expression of such majesty upon his features that even Count William himself was impressed.

The Vicar of Jesus Christ resumed, with a calm, dignified energy which carried conviction to the minds of all.

"My dear brethren," he said, turning towards the prelates, "it is most probable that we are about to be again called to tread the road on which our Lord and Saviour has preceded us, and in which many of our predecessors have followed Him to martyrdom! Yes, the way of the Cross alone leads to victory, and to a better world! You have long known the drift of the Emperor's designs. Misled by the false glitter of Pagan Imperialism, Frederic aims at ruling over both Church and State. The Head of Christendom is for him a mere instrument of his own will, and our holy religion only a means of attaining his ends. We are amazed that such ideas should have taken possession of a prince whom God has gifted with so many noble qualities. You are aware, my brethren, that the Emperor has nominated to all the vacant Sees of his Empire, men who are unworthy of such positions, without either the learning which is indispensable, or the spirit of piety which should animate the shepherds of God's flock. And yet the Apostle has said, 'For a bishop must be without crime, not proud, not subject to anger, not given to wine, no striker, nor greedy of filthy lucre; but given to hospitality, gentle, sober, just, holy, continent.' And yet, he would make the bishops nothing but the Emperor's slaves! We feel grievously afflicted at the sight of such grave misconduct. What misfortunes are they not preparing for the Church! The ecclesiastical spirit is less and less valued every day; the liberty of the Church no longer exists except in name, and her property is at the mercy of impious hands. But in the midst of this deluge of injustice, the Holy See has been established, by divine Providence, like the rock of order, against which storms and tempests will spend their fury in vain. So, we solemnly announce to you, in the name of God, that the Cardinal Octavian, falsely styled Pope Victor, is excommunicated and put under the ban of ecclesiastical censure. We declare, in advance, all the proceedings and resolutions of the Council of Besançon to be null and void. If, until to-day, we have refrained from launching the thunders of the Church against the scourge of Christendom, it is because our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us to pardon. And, although the time for speaking has come at last, we still pardon the Emperor for all the misery and pain which he has caused us. You will repeat this discourse, my brethren, in the pulpits of all your parishes, and you will circulate it, by every possible means, in order that the Christian world may not be misled into error. As regards ourselves, we pray God ceaselessly, that he may prevent the success of the enemies of the Holy Church; may He protect her with His mighty arm! May he lead to repentance and contrition the souls which have strayed from her fold!"

"*Amen, amen!*" repeated the prelates.

"*Amen, amen!*" said the witnesses.

And the crowd throughout the Church exclaimed, "*Amen!*"

The Count of Champagne stood amazed. Thoroughly convinced of the justice of Alexander's claims, ambition alone had united him to the Imperial faction, and he had been impressed by the discourse of the Holy Father; for it seemed to him as though God himself had spoken.

"Holy Father," he said, "I appreciate your reasoning and the resolution with which you wish to discharge the sacred duties of your ministry. But my personal opinions have naught to do with the execution of the order which is intrusted to me. I await then, Holy Father, until it may please you to notify me of the hour which you have fixed for your departure for Laon."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DUEL.

Richenza's arrival at Cluny surprised Erwin; but she manifested so sincere a sympathy with the misfortunes of the Duchess Clemence, that he related to her all the details of the outrage.

The influential position of the Count of Champagne permitted him to lodge in the dependencies of the cloister, and his apartments opened upon an immense garden ornamented with flowers, groves, and shady walks.

Richenza and her retinue had just entered the garden, followed at a distance by brother Severinus; and Erwin, after leaving the table, went thither to join the party. Antonio, who was constantly on the watch over Rechberg's movements, at once left the cloister and hurriedly proceeded to the village, where Hermengarde was awaiting his return with feverish anxiety. At last he came, and entered the lady's presence with an air of supreme indifference.

"Your absence has been long, Antonio; was it not possible for you to give my message yesterday?"

"Noble lady, Rechberg remained quite late with the Count of Champagne and the other nobles. He rose late this morning, and I was unable to give him your message until a few moments since, as he was going to the garden with the Countess Richenza. The time was ill-chosen."

"Well! what was his answer?"

"Hermengarde here?' he said, with surprise. 'Come to see her!--you say. I am very sorry; but it is no longer possible----'"

"Go on, Antonio, and tell the truth!" said she. "Is he in the garden?"

"Precisely; now, as the garden is close to the road near the mountain, you can see for yourself."

"Yes, and that is what I mean to do," replied Hermengarde, who seemed to have all at once regained her courage. "Wait for one moment, gentlemen; I will be back again soon;" and she left the room.

"You have done a stupid thing," said Pietro. "If she succeeds in entering the garden----"

"Pshaw! she cannot get over a ten-foot wall."

"And if Rechberg were to perceive her?"

"He! his eyes are not clear enough to see so far."

Hermengarde returned in a few minutes, and at once set out, followed by the two Italians and her nurse Hedwige.

In a short time they were on the road which overlooked the garden. Antonio led the way to an elevation, from which they could see all the adjoining country, and the young girl followed, without heeding the words which the spy still continued to address to her. Suddenly she paused, and then, before her companions could interfere, ran towards a little gate in the cloister-wall.

As soon as Antonio perceived her intention, and that the door was open, he sprang towards her.

"For the love of God!" he cried, "where are you going? Your entrance into the convent may have disastrous results!"

She turned her head a little, glanced at Antonio, and disappeared. Hedwige and Pietro followed, but the other remained behind.

"That door open!--unlucky mishap!" he said; "all is lost! The best thing for me to do is to run away, and escape the Count's anger;" and he hastily left the place.

A narrow path wound through several clumps of bushes, and terminated at a conservatory surrounded by vines. Hermengarde stopped here. At about a hundred yards in front, Richenza and the young nobleman were walking together, in earnest conversation. Brother Severinus stood near the door, reading his breviary.

"The Duchess of Saxony is a noble woman," said Richenza; "and what did she say of her husband's disloyal conduct?"

"Galdini Sala was obliged to repeat three times the Duke's words: 'Clemence ceased to be my wife by the Pope's decree, and with my consent. No one, not even Alexander, can change my determination.' At first the Duchess seemed thunderstruck. She repeated only, 'With his consent!' in a tone which I cannot describe. It seemed at first as though her heart would break, and then her eyes flashed with anger. The Duke of Saxony had lost all claim to her affection. 'My lord Count,' she said to me, 'accept my thanks for all the trouble I have given you;' and taking a rich jewel, 'Accept this,' she said, 'it is the only way in which the repudiated Duchess can show her gratitude.' Then she went to see His Holiness, and this morning left Cluny, escorted by some of the Austrian men-at-arms."

"How noble! how truly great! but, alas! how unfortunate!" said Richenza, with emotion.

"Now that the Duchess has gone," said Erwin, "and the object of my journey is accomplished, I can return to Laon, where I have business of great importance."

"It can be put off a little longer, and we will go there together," urged Richenza.

"I regret that it is impossible; but everything is prepared, and I must leave Cluny to-day. Allow me, noble lady, to bid you farewell."

He was interrupted by a piercing shriek.

"Erwin! my Erwin!" cried a voice from the conservatory.

The Count approached. In the dim light he saw a group of three persons, one of whom lay fainting on the ground. He had recognized the voice, but he could scarcely believe that Hermengarde was there. But it was she, and Rechberg knelt in astonishment beside his lady-love, from whose face all signs of life had disappeared. Suddenly the Count was seized, and thrust violently away.

"Back! wretch," cried Pietro, whose anger broke out at the sight of his rival. "Back! you have no longer the right to tend her, German savage."

Rechberg gazed first at the Lombard and then at the fainting girl.

Nigri again pushed him away.

"If you dare to approach her again, I will plunge my sword into your breast." And Pietro, sword in hand, placed himself between the Count and the lady.

"Who are you, who dare to separate me from my affianced wife?" cried Rechberg.

"Draw and defend yourself," said the Italian furiously.

"Here, in her presence? No, sir!" replied the Count. "Put up your sword; elsewhere I will chastise you as you deserve."

"You shall not escape me thus! Villain, defend yourself!" said Pietro.

And his sword's point grazed Erwin's breast.

"Hold!" cried the Count. "Would you dare to assassinate me?"

"I will take your life.--If you will not defend it," said Nigri, striking Rechberg, as he spoke, with the flat of his sword. Scarcely had the Count felt the blow, when his sword, quick as lightning, flashed from the scabbard, and the fight began. Hermengarde still lay upon the ground, her head upon Hedwige's knee. During the progress of the duel, she opened her eyes and called her lover's name, but Erwin saw and heard nothing except his antagonist who had slightly wounded him. Suddenly, he saw his opportunity, and with a rapid thrust stretched Pietro lifeless on the ground. Just then the chamberlain, rushed forward to prevent the combat, but it was too late, and as he saw the bloody corpse,--

"Woe to us!" he cried, "a murder has been committed within the cloister-walls. Wretch, what have you done?"

But Rechberg paid no attention to the question; he wished to approach the young girl, who was seated with her nurse upon a neighboring bench, but she motioned him away.

"I was present during the whole affair," said brother Severinus, who endeavored to apologize for the Count. "I saw it all, worthy father; the Count would have gone elsewhere, but this unhappy man, whose soul is before his God, tried to kill him; he was obliged to defend himself."

"That certainly diminishes the enormity of the offence," replied the chamberlain, "but a crime has been committed within the cloister, and it is to be judged here at Cluny. Follow me, Count."

"At once," said Rechberg. "Noble lady," he added, turning to Richenza, "I regret sincerely, that my violence has caused your young lady of honor to faint. I trust that she will be cared for until I have established my innocence and can offer my excuses in person. Richenza understood the hint; for, except as an attendant of the Countess, Hermengarde would have been obliged to leave the cloister immediately.

"It was scarcely necessary to ask me to take care of my young friend," she said; "it is only my duty."

She gave the necessary orders for her to be conveyed to her own apartments, and Erwin with one last look at Hermengarde, followed the chamberlain.

On the ensuing day, the judges met, but the testimony of Severinus, and the favorable reputation which Erwin bore as Clemence's champion, procured his acquittal. Still the court was

at a loss to understand the motives of the Count's quarrel with the Italian. The judges withdrew into an adjoining room, whence, after a short deliberation, they returned.

"My son," said the president, "the law absolves you on the ground of legitimate self-defence. God alone, to whom the secrets of all hearts are known, can pronounce whether your act was free from all earthly passion. Still, in the interest of your own soul, we advise you, as a penance, to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where in defence of our Redeemer's tomb you can purge your sword of the stain left on it by the blood of Pietro Nigri."

The Count expressed his thanks and proceeded at once to Richenza's apartments, where he expected to find Hermengarde.

To his great surprise he was informed that the Count of Champagne, with all his retinue, had started at an early hour for Laon, and that the young Italian had returned to the neighboring village.

He repaired there at once, and on his entrance to the inn was received by Hedwige, who informed him that her mistress was quite unwell, and had not yet left her chamber.

"But I will tell her," she said, "that you are here."

Erwin paced the room until the servant announced that her lady would receive him.

"Great heavens!" said Hedwige, "how she has suffered! I have always maintained that you would not be false to your plighted word, and that in spite of Richenza's relationship to the king of France, she could not make you forget your betrothed."

"I cannot understand you, Hedwige. How could you entertain such an idea?"

"Pietro assured us that you wanted to marry Richenza, and Antonio confirmed his story. Besides, you stayed for several days in her father's castle and refused to receive us, and then Richenza came to Cluny with you."

"Now I understand it all," said Erwin; "ah! the wretched knave!"

The door opened, and Hermengarde entered. She was dressed simply in white, with a blue sash around her waist.

"Pardon me, dearest," said the Count, tenderly; "pardon me for all I have made you suffer." But Hermengarde was already assured of Erwin's innocence before he had even spoken.

"Count," she replied, "you need make no excuses; only tell me why I did not see you yesterday?"

"I had no idea that you were at Cluny."

"Then Antonio did not carry you my message?"

"Most certainly not! You seem surprised, Hermengarde; but you do not know all. That villain Antonio was in a plot to separate us, and his measures were skilfully taken."

"Fortune sometimes favors the wicked," said the noble girl. "But was the arrival of Richenza merely the result of chance?"

"It may have been a part of the plot! I intended to return to Laon, and was taking my leave, when--"

He suddenly paused, for the recollection of the scene in the garden seemed painfully depicted on Hermengarde's features. She sat down and gazed silently at her lover, whose attentions to the young Countess she had fancied meant more than was called for by the mere requirements of chivalrous courtesy. But it was impossible to cherish a suspicion of Erwin's loyalty after his frank and honest explanations.

"Ah! Erwin," she said; "but that murder, that fearful crime!"

"You could not have wished me to allow myself to be assassinated?"

"No, oh! no. But after the combat I saw how your sword was covered with blood; I seem to see even now his wild glance and the blood streaming from the ghastly wound." And she hid her face in her hands as if to shut out the horrid vision.

"Wretch that I am," said Erwin, "to have caused you this fright! But console yourself, dearest; with time, the painful impression will fade away. Would you make me regret having been the victor? The pious monks have pronounced me innocent; will you be more severe than they? Tell me, dearest Hermengarde; I will abide by your decree, however rigorous it may be."

"I know you are guiltless, Erwin,--and yet this blood seems to rise up between us: it is a childish feeling, I know, but I cannot overcome it."

The Count stood in pensive silence, for the monks even in his acquittal had uttered doubts of his complete innocence. And indeed, if he had gone directly to Laon, instead of waiting for Antonio, Pietro would not have met his death in the gardens of Cluny. His remorse was poignant.

"The pious monks," he said, "have counselled me to make a pilgrimage to Palestine, to the sepulchre of our blessed Redeemer. It is for you, Hermengarde, to decide whether I shall submit to this penance."

This singular question was entirely consistent with the manners of the times. Hermengarde reflected for a moment.

"To-morrow," she said, "after having invoked together, the aid of Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, you shall know my decision."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE TRIUMPH OF FORCE.

The unexpected departure of the Count of Champagne excited general surprise, and even Alexander himself was at a loss to account for the motive. It was said that a horseman had arrived during the night, urgently inquiring for the Count; but none could say whence he came, or of what tidings he was the bearer; all that was known was, that after the receipt of some important despatches, the Count had gone away in great haste. He scarcely gave breathing-time to his horses, but pressed on so rapidly, that, after six days' travel, he arrived at his castle near Laon, on the Seventh of September, the date which had been fixed upon for another interview between the Emperor and the King of France.

Louis, who had experienced much alarm as long as he was in sight of the German army, appeared to wish anxiously for this meeting. At least he had ordered tents, for himself and the court, to be pitched in the vicinity of the bridge over the Saône.

About nine o'clock Louis arrived, but Barbarossa had not yet appeared. Rinaldo, with a number of prelates and nobles, seemed astonished at the punctuality of the King, whom he found more affable than at the audience in Laon.

"The Emperor can scarcely question my pacific intentions now," said Louis; "the Count of Champagne has discretionary powers to bring the Pope, even should violence be necessary. I am punctual to a minute at the rendezvous which has been appointed by your master. What more can I do, to avoid the accusation of treachery or double-dealing?"

The Chancellor was embarrassed for an answer.

"The Emperor admits your good intentions, Sire," he answered. "With his aid, you will soon be freed from an evil which distracts France and torments the Church. There is no doubt whatever that the Fathers of the council will refuse to Cardinal Roland, wrongly styled Alexander, all right to the pontifical throne."

"I cannot take it upon myself to decide upon which side is the right," answered Louis.

Before Rinaldo could answer, a loud noise was heard, and a body of armed men were seen advancing. A horseman, covered with dust, spurred to the front, glanced around the royal group, and perceiving the king, bowed respectfully and solicited a private audience. The monarch entered his tent, and through the canvas walls could be heard the voice of the stranger, interrupted after a few sentences by Louis, who exclaimed,--

"Deo gratias!--God be thanked for this fortunate result!"

Rinaldo was astonished, but while he was reflecting upon the possible meaning of what had just happened, they came out. The King's face beamed with satisfaction, and without noticing the Chancellor's anxiety, he gave charge of his guest to a nobleman of his suite, with instructions to treat him with every possible courtesy, and then turning to Rinaldo, resumed their former conversation.

"We have but one point to regulate, my lord Chancellor, and that is the pressure which the Emperor means to bring to bear upon the council. The Fathers ought to be entirely unbiassed, and their votes must not be influenced either by the force of arms or by worldly considerations."

"His Majesty," said Dassel, "will employ both argument and force to re-establish order in the

Church."

"Doubtless, according to his own ideas. But there is no guaranty that these ideas are exempt from all selfish considerations! The Emperor is Alexander's personal enemy; think you that he would recognize his rights to the throne of Saint Peter?"

"These questions are insulting, Sire!--Frederic is too just by nature, to be guilty of an injustice.--And you ask for guaranties of the purity of his intentions? To whom would you make the Emperor responsible? On whom does he depend?"

"He is responsible to the laws of nations, which he has repeatedly violated in many different ways, my lord."

"This reproach has often been made by interested persons; I am surprised, Sire, that you would repeat it."

"And we are surprised!" said Louis, proudly, "that you, Count, do not feel the importance of this reproach! Besides, in the Assembly of Besançon, there will be present both temporal princes and unconsecrated bishops.--Who has conferred on laymen the right of voting in purely ecclesiastical questions, and particularly on questions of this importance?"

"The Emperor!" replied Dassel, promptly. "If his Imperial Majesty sees fit to sanction an exception to a rule, this very exception becomes by the consequence of his high and mighty authority, the rule and the law. And more, if the chief of the Roman Empire, who is, at the same time, the chief of all the princes of Christendom, thinks it expedient to grant a vote upon this question to foreign princes, he has a right to all their gratitude."

"Very good, my lord! and we are then the Emperor's vassals? This is a new phase!--Our bishops will be delighted with the lesson you set them!--Gentlemen," he added, "are you not somewhat surprised to hear such a doctrine preached?"

Rinaldo answered boldly, and some bitter words were interchanged; at last he lost patience.

"We have no need, in any way, of French bishops to put an end to schism!" he cried. "When a discussion on the subject of a bishopric arises among you, you put an end to the difficulty yourselves: why should not the Emperor have the same right? Rome belongs to him."

The French courtiers heard these words, with surprise. Dassel's opinions were in opposition to all received notions, and to the canons of the Church. The King profited by the statesman's mistake.

"I am astonished," he said, "that so cautious a man as yourself should advance such extraordinary assertions. We have the right to choose our bishops after a previous understanding with the Holy See. But no bishop of my kingdom is chief of Christendom; your argument is consequently invalid. You say that the Emperor and his bishops alone have the right to choose the Pope. Did not Christ confide to Saint Peter and his successors all his flock? Were my bishops and myself excepted? Is the Pope only your shepherd, and not mine?"

This language astonished Rinaldo, who was nevertheless forced to admit its truth; but all efforts to explain his words were useless, Louis turned away from him, and soon after rode back to Laon.

"What a changeable man!" said the Bishop Gero of Halberstadt. "Yesterday the French king was the Emperor's humble servant, and to-day he seems to defy him."

"Patience!" replied Werner of Minden; "Frederic will teach him obedience. It must come to that. If peace were to last forever, there would be no need of our good armor. Believe me, this insolence of Louis comes very opportunely; in two days' time the Imperial eagle will float over the French frontier."

"Yesterday, the Emperor gave me a splendid charger and a suit of Venetian armor; I shall be glad of a chance to use them," said Philip of Osnabruck.

"I shall wear my Nuremberg mail," added the Bishop of Munster; "it was a present from Frederic, and so far no weapon has started a single link."

The entrance of the Count of Champagne interrupted the conversation; Dassel, who had been reflecting seriously, approached him.

"Back already?" said the Chancellor. "I trust that you have brought the Cardinal Roland with you."

"With the best intentions in the world, it was impossible," replied Henry, whose gloomy face presaged no good. "All is lost. The English king, Henry, is marching forward with a mighty army. Luckily I was informed in time, and so escaped from falling into the hands of these partisans of Alexander. Just now I saw the English ambassador, Earl Gilbert, in the King's suite."

Rinaldo was thunderstruck.

"At last," he cried, "I have the clue to the mystery. But it is strange that the negotiation between Alexander and England should have escaped our notice. I can scarcely believe it possible."

"It was entirely out of my calculation," said Henry, trying to console the statesman. "The English king, whose character you all know, has pursued a course which no one suspected, but which probably has been long in preparation. It is certain that he is not marching merely to Alexander's assistance, but against the Imperial supremacy."

"It is really absurd! As if a feeble gazelle could struggle against a tiger," said Dassel. "Let us go at once to the Emperor; he must hear it from your own mouth."

The Count was in no hurry, for he looked at the question in a different light.

"My personal safety forbids it," he said. "I have done all I could; I supported the Emperor; but it would be madness in me to give the English King a pretext for seizing my domains. For the time being, I can only be a secret ally of Frederic."

"What! Count, you think to serve two masters?" cried Dassel, furiously. "How can you be at the same time the friend and the enemy of the Emperor?"

The Count admitted the dilemma, but no entreaties could change his determination.

"It cannot be, my lord; I must no longer delay my return to Laon. Farewell; present my homage to the Emperor."

He sprang into the saddle and rode towards the city.

"Ah! these falsehearted Frenchmen!" said the Chancellor; "but it is well; our arms will teach them honor and conscience."

"That is my advice too," said the fighting Bishop Werner; "German honesty, which more than once has been the dupe of its own rectitude, is well known. Let us go to the camp at once, raise our standards, and reap a new harvest of laurels in the heart of France."

The nobles returned to the Imperial camp, where they found their sovereign surrounded by his princes and bishops. The startling intelligence of the change in the French policy, and the movements of the English King, amazed every one. A few, among whom were the fierce Otho of Wittelsbach and the schismatical bishops of the Empire, were in favor of crossing the frontier at once. But the Dukes of Austria, Saxony, and Bavaria, and some others, who were secret partisans of Alexander, took the matter with the greatest coolness.

Barbarossa remained calm in appearance, although the flash of his eyes and the contraction of his features gave unmistakable evidence that he with difficulty controlled his rage and disappointment. With a slight inclination of the head to the assembly, he beckoned to Rinaldo and left the tent, which had now become the scene of an animated discussion.

Hastily divesting himself of the sumptuous costume with which he had thought to dazzle the King of France and his great vassals, Barbarossa seated himself before the Chancellor.

"The solution of the question can now only be arrived at in the field," said Dassel, with the insinuating manner of a serpent creeping on his prey. "We must attack Louis before his troops are thoroughly organized. You have been insulted, and every man, even to the meanest serf in our army, feels the outrage done you by the King of France; let us profit by the opportunity."

"If you had observed my faithful vassals, you would scarcely call the present a good opportunity," replied Barbarossa. "Besides, I do not wish to trust all to the fortune of war. We are not strong enough yet to engage the united forces of France and England. But," he added, "is the result of this ecclesiastical meeting very certain?"

"Certain!" said the Count. "We are sure of our own bishops, but not of those of the King of Sweden. Some things cannot be accomplished by mere brute force, and rather need skill and intelligence than threats of violence."

"You are at your tricks again, and I am tired of them," said Barbarossa. "The Danish prelates are only men; after all, self-interest will guide them. Besides, Victor will be enjoined from the commencement of the Council to abrogate all appeal to Rome or elsewhere. We shall see how the Danes can get over this difficulty."

"All well enough in its way! that may intimidate some," answered Dassel; "but in this way you lessen the Papal power, and increase that of the bishops. What will the Emperor gain by the change?"

"What the Pope alone possesses now, will become the property of a thousand different individuals, and I have always looked upon a divided power as more easy of direction than when it is vested in one person."

"Your Majesty's observation is just and to the point," replied the wily statesman.

After a lengthy interview, Rinaldo left the Emperor to take charge of the preparations for the council. Louis breathed freely at the announcement of the departure of the German army for Besançon. Alexander had written to him of the intended campaign of the English King against Frederic. At the same time he learned that Andrew of Hungary was ready to march an army into Germany, as soon as the Imperial troops crossed the French frontier. In the meanwhile, the Emperor, accompanied by several of his princes, and by about fifty Bishops and Archbishops, nearly all of whom were as yet unconsecrated, had arrived at Besançon. King Waldemar of Denmark came to meet him there, but he was attended by only one prelate, the Bishop Absalom of Roskilde, for the northern sovereigns could not make up their minds to attend a council which had been convened in defiance of the canonical rules, and with the sole view of legalizing the acts of the schismatical Frederic. The preliminaries against Alexander, the recognition of Victor, and, as a natural consequence, the Imperial supremacy, were rapidly and skilfully arranged.

As the Emperor was leaving his apartment, to proceed with great pomp to the cathedral where the council was to be held, a letter with the seal of the Abbey of Cluny was handed to him.

"From Cluny! Who brought this?" he asked.

"A strange horseman," said the chamberlain. Barbarossa hastily ran it over, while Rinaldo examined his expression, with eager curiosity.

"Pshaw! it is scarcely worth talking about," said Frederic, laying the letter aside; "at least, we have no time to meddle with it. Still if you would like to know," he added, seeing Dassel's curiosity, "Count Rechberg informs us that he is going on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. That is all; the young man could do nothing better in order to escape the bonds in which a sage statesman would have tied him. Let us hope that he will come back completely cured. My lord Chancellor, you may give the signal for our departure now."

Under ordinary circumstances, it is probable that Barbarossa would not have listened so calmly to his kinsman's resolve, but just then he was busied in a matter of interest to all Christendom, and he could think of nothing else.

A long and brilliant cavalcade of princes and prelates proceeded to the Cathedral of Besançon, where the Emperor did not neglect the opportunity of holding the Pope's stirrup. Victor received the attention haughtily, as though it were in some way an offset to the many humiliations which he had suffered. The bishops and princes took their places in the centre of the nave. The presidency of the council was assigned to Victor, with Frederic on the right hand, and Waldemar, King of Denmark, on his left.

Barbarossa opened the proceedings by a recital of all the acts and artifices of the French and English sovereigns. He also paraded his efforts for the pacification of the Church and the suppression of heresy, and his discourse convinced the audience of his moderation and good intentions.

Victor followed with a long series of complaints against those whom he called the enemies of the Church, and particularly against Alexander. The substance of his discourse stated the numerous privileges which would be accorded to the Bishops.

After him Rinaldo spoke, and in skilful words insisted upon the legality of Victor's claims, while he endeavored to prove that the present meeting was in reality a general council.

Finally, Barbarossa rose and besought the assembly in energetic terms, to put an end to the schism, to banish Roland as an enemy of the Church, and to proclaim Victor as the head thereof. A general confusion commenced to prevail in the Cathedral. At this juncture Bishop Absalom rose and made a signal to his sovereign.

"For the love of God, my dear brother," exclaimed Victor, "do not leave at this most important moment."

"I am only here as an attendant on my sovereign," said Absalom, with marked coolness. "As he is leaving the Cathedral, I must follow him."

The withdrawal of the King and his prelate caused additional confusion, and a few other bishops, with whom the sentiment of honor was stronger than the dread of the Emperor's anger, followed their example.

But the proceedings were in no way hindered by their absence. Alexander was excommunicated, and Victor solemnly proclaimed Head of the Church, and then, after the *Te Deum*, the assembly adjourned.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HERMENGARDE'S CONSTANCY.

Five years had passed since the Council of Besançon. The struggle between the Pope and the Emperor still continued, but many things had turned to Frederic's advantage. In times of discord and civil war, only the most virtuous remain faithful to their honest convictions; the others allow themselves to be influenced and directed by circumstances, or intimidated by eventualities. In both cases, Frederic knew how to act upon the passions; his violence frightened some, his generosity gained others.

After the decease of Victor, who died as he had lived, an alien from the Church, tormented by remorse and without receiving the Holy Sacraments, the Chancellor Rinaldo immediately installed a new Pope, Pascal III., and the choice was ratified by the Emperor. The schism had again a chief, and Barbarossa used every effort to procure the recognition of his claims.

The bishops were compelled to recite in a loud voice, on Sundays and holydays, the prayer for Pope Pascal. The monks and other ecclesiastics were ordered, within the space of six weeks, to swear fealty to Pascal, and whoever failed in the performance of this pretended duty was considered an enemy of the Emperor and punished as such.

Frederic even went further, and at the diet of Würzburg, in the year 1163, caused the adoption of the following resolutions. "The Emperor, princes, and bishops refuse to acknowledge Roland, or any future successor appointed by his faction; the Germans swear to elect no Emperor, unless he pledges himself to consult the German policy in all that concerns the Papacy. Any layman acting in opposition to this decree, will lose his life and property; any ecclesiastic, in such case, will be deprived of his benefice and dignities. All princes and bishops will be held responsible for their subjects, to whom a similar oath will be administered."

In this manner, the German Church was severed from the Roman--the only Catholic Church,--since the German doctrines on the Papacy were entirely opposed to the true teachings of Jesus Christ.

Frederic was on the eve of founding a Western Empire, similar to that established in the East, of which he was to be installed the Supreme Chief. Like Victor, Pascal was a mere tool, and the episcopacy declined each day; for all its members were mere court prelates.

The death of Eberhard of Saxony deprived Alexander's party of a leader in Southern Germany, and thus the mitred personages, without direction, and enchained in golden fetters, became each day more careless of their sacred ministry. They exchanged the pastoral crook for the sword, the episcopal mitre for a casque, and their sacerdotal robes for the corselet of the soldier. The lower clergy were little better than their superiors; and the people, whose souls were intrusted to their care, fell more and more into ignorance and degradation.

Still there were some few whose sanctity opposed, with energy, the Emperor's designs. The Archbishop Conrad of Mayence, of the house of Wittelsbach, and the Archbishop Conrad of Salzburg, uncle to the Emperor, protested loudly against this usurpation. They were at once declared enemies of the Empire, deprived of their bishoprics, and forced to seek safety in Italy.

These brutal examples, however, produced the desired results; and the orders of the powerful monarch were henceforward obeyed literally and implicitly.

The position assumed by Henry of England towards Pope Alexander, also favored Frederic's projects. The cruel and despotic English King ruled his Church according to his own caprices. The cloisters and monasteries were, in his opinion, mere places whence to draw supplies for his material wants; and many of the bishoprics were left unoccupied, while their revenues were appropriated to the royal treasury. The celebrated St. Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, resisted, with all his energy, the tyranny of the sovereign; but at the royal instigation, he was slain on the steps of the altar, and all friendly relations between Alexander and Henry were suspended.

These circumstances came very opportunely to the aid of Frederic's projects. Rinaldo was sent to London to contract an alliance with England, and in order to cement it, a daughter of the King was affianced to the son of Barbarossa, and Henry the Lion to another princess of the royal family of England. Italy was quiet, although the people chafed under the Imperial yoke, and were silently preparing for revolt. The fire smouldered amid the ashes, but since the terrible chastisement inflicted upon Milan, no city dared to raise the standard of liberty.

In the year 1167, Barbarossa entered Italy with a numerous army and marched towards Rome, from which he wished to expel Alexander, who had returned to the city aided by King William of Naples. The Lombards had hoped that Frederic's justice would alleviate their distress, and an enormous crowd came with complaints against his Imperial agents. The complaints were listened to, but the grievances were not often redressed, and so soon as he was fairly on his way to Rome, the Lombard confederation was formed. It was at first weak and secret, but still it served as a happy presage and an encouragement to the oppressed inhabitants.

Guido of Castellamare, faithful to his plighted word, remained at his home and abstained from any hostile act.

Hermengarde was now nineteen years of age; she seldom left the solitary castle in the valley, where, since her return from France, she had lived like a recluse. Her only distraction was an occasional visit to Genoa in search of news of Count Rechberg among the pilgrims returning from the Holy Land. At first she was successful, for Erwin's name had acquired a great reputation in Palestine. Many had seen and spoken to the young hero, and all related his prodigies of valor. But during the last two years the tidings had been extremely vague and unsatisfactory. His deeds were still present to the memory of the pilgrims, but none could speak positively of his fate, and Hermengarde's mind was tortured with the most mournful apprehensions.--He must have fallen battling against the infidels, she thought, as the tears coursed down her cheeks.

But hope rarely abandons the human heart, and the sad girl trusted always in God's mercy. Still each day her steps grew feebler and her cheeks more pale, like a lamp which flashes feebly and then is extinguished forever.

Formerly she frequented a little terrace whence she could overlook the valley and the distant sea, and each sail that hove in sight she would fancy was the one which was bringing home her betrothed husband. But at last the terrace was deserted; for months Hermengarde had watched no longer--she had lost all hope. Time cures every wound, Guido thought, as he watched his daughter.

To judge from appearances, Bonello's prognostications were correct. The girl became more calm, the journeys to Genoa less frequent, and Rechberg's name rarely passed her lips. To please her father, she sometimes visited a noble family of the neighborhood, but it was solely through filial obedience, and the visits were rare and of short duration. Still Bonello, assured that Erwin had shared the untimely fate of many of the Crusaders, was thinking of proposing another husband to his daughter, one who, if not so distinguished, was at least worthy of her. Old age looks at matters under a different aspect from youth. Experience had taught him the vanity of earthly aspirations, and he considered everything with cool and calm deliberation, for he thought it a matter urgent and important to secure for Hermengarde a husband who would watch over her happiness after her father's death.

"I am old," he thought; "I may die at any time, and my daughter must not be left defenceless and unprotected."

The idea had long been ripening in his mind, and his choice had fallen upon the only son of this same family of Rapallo, which he had occasionally visited with Hermengarde.

Heribert of Rapallo came regularly every week to Castellamare, where his visits appeared to gratify the old man, although it frequently happened that Hermengarde refused to see him. Bonello imagined that his daughter had forgotten her betrothed, because she never mentioned his name, and seldom went to Genoa or even to the terrace. But Heribert felt assured that her calmness was the result of her religious sentiments, and that Erwin's image was always present to her mind. He was right; she no longer expected to meet her lover upon earth, but, with resignation to God's will, trusted to be united to him in heaven.

Still he continued his visits, in the vague hope that some day she would consent to be his bride.

"It is very strange! Rapallo has not been here for a week," said Guido, one day after dinner. "I trust that no accident has happened."

"I was thinking of him also, father. To-day is Friday, and he had promised to come on Tuesday. He may be ill."

The interest which Hermengarde appeared to take in his friend pleased Bonello, who, after a short pause, continued,--

"Heribert is an accomplished gentleman--he is unassuming, noble, and brave."

"He is an agreeable companion, and his piety is unquestionable," replied the young girl.

"I am glad your opinion of him is so favorable, dear Hermengarde."

"He has been here so often that I have been able to judge his character thoroughly."

"Very good; but you ought to show yourself a little oftener when he comes, for I am disposed to think that it is a good deal more on your account than mine that he makes this long journey so regularly."

Guido smiled as he spoke. His daughter looked at him with such an expression of ingenuous simplicity that it was evident she had not penetrated his meaning. But the opportunity seemed favorable, and he hastened to take advantage of it to speak of his cherished project.

"In fact," he said, "Rapallo suits me exactly. What think you, Hermengarde?"

"I think, father, that you have excellent taste."

The old man was delighted; it seemed as if he was about to gain his purpose more easily than he had dared to expect.

"You agree with me, then, my child? I am glad of it; for Heribert will make an excellent husband, and I shall be most happy to call him my son-in-law."

The young girl shuddered, but Guido continued,--

"I am very old now, my dear child; death may come at any moment, and leave you without a protector. The Emperor Barbarossa has again crossed the Alps, and opened the campaign. What will become of you in a country where robbers and marauders can kill and plunder with impunity? No! I would not die in peace unless the walls of Castellamare were defended by some valiant knight."

"Dear father," she said, with emotion, "do not allude to this painful subject. You are strong; your health is excellent; why, then, speak of what may still be far from us, and which can only serve to make us unhappy?"

"You speak, dear child, as all do at twenty; youth lives thus careless of the future, and with scarcely even a thought for what the morrow may bring forth. Thank God, my health is good, but, at my age, a man should always be prepared for his last journey, and should accustom himself to the thought of death, which may come when he least expects it. As I have said, your isolation troubles me, and you should relieve my heart, Hermengarde, of this anxiety. You have seen and known Rapallo intimately; you tell me yourself that he is noble, and generous, and worthy of you--"

The young girl was silent; her lips moved convulsively, and tears fell from her eyes.

"Do not weep, my child; doubtless you are thinking of the gallant Erwin; he deserves all our sympathy, but why cherish a vain hope? He is dead; he has fallen beneath the weapons of the Saracens, like so many thousands of brave knights, victims of their devotion to the faith. As you must resign all thought of him for spouse and protector in these troublous times, another must take his place. Your marriage is the most ardent desire which your father now has. If you truly love him, you will relieve his heart of the burden which oppresses it."

Her tears ceased to flow, and she reflected seriously if it were not her duty to make the sacrifice which her filial love seemed to exact in order to secure her father's happiness.

At this moment the door opened, and Rapallo entered the room. The young man was scarcely above the middle height; his face beamed with frankness and benevolence, though his features were rather agreeable than positively handsome.

"Here you are at last, my dear Rapallo!" said the old man. "We were just speaking of you. You are right welcome now, although you have been neglectful of us lately."

Heribert bowed respectfully to the lady, pressed Bonello's hand cordially, and took a seat by his side.

"I was compelled to accept the invitation sent me by the Lombard confederation, which I am about to join," said he.

Bonello shook his head with a marked expression of disapproval.

"At least, I trust that you have made no positive engagement without consulting me?" he said. "Will you risk your life in an enterprise which has no chance of success? Heribert, Heribert, this is not well done! you have been very imprudent. I augur nothing good from this attempt."

An animated discussion followed between them; Hermengarde profited by it to leave the apartment unnoticed, and retired to her own room, where she could weep at her ease.

"Without doubt, I admit all that," replied Guido, after his guest had explained the motives which had induced his acceptance of the invitation sent to him. "I will even go further. I will suppose that the league increases, that the cities and the nobles have given in their adherence to it, that the necessary funds can be procured, that its generals are skilful, that it can command everything necessary to sustain the struggle: one thing will still be wanting, and that is--unity. So long as Pavia, Genoa, Lodi, Pisa, and Florence, that is to say, the most important cities of Northern Italy, support the Emperor's cause, every attempt at independence will only aggravate our condition."

"Must we then always wear our chains?" cried the young man, in whose eyes shone a fire which Guido had never before observed in him.

"As long as Italy deserves her chains, she will wear them, and she does deserve them for her intestine divisions," replied Bonello. "Besides, be convinced that, in a military point of view, we are far inferior to the Germans. We have been taught this again by the late bloody battle fought near the walls of Rome. Forty thousand Romans have been routed by twelve thousand Germans,

and of the forty thousand scarcely one half have escaped from the field."

"That affair is not so important as was at first supposed," answered Rapallo.

"Naturally the Lombards have tried to depreciate their enemy's success. But it is certain, my lord Rapallo, that, at the siege of Ancona, the German advanced guard, even without its usual leader, Frederic, well nigh annihilated the Roman army. Give the Emperor time to install his Pope on the throne of Saint Peter, and conquer the Sicilian princes, and you will soon see then how easily he will overcome the Lombards."

"But the yoke which we bear is intolerable. The cries and complaints which we hear on all sides, are heartrending."

"Yes, our countrymen know very well how to complain. However, I readily acknowledge that their murmurs are well-grounded; but this new insurrection will be entirely to the Emperor's advantage; he will find in it an excuse to weigh us down with new extortions. So, my dear Rapallo, listen to an old man's advice: have nothing to do with the league, and do not compromise yourself in a rebellion which will have no better success than all those which have preceded it."

Heribert changed the subject, and soon after took leave of his host.

"I should have wished to speak to you," said Guido, "upon another business, which probably would not have seemed disagreeable; but as you appear in a hurry, we will reserve it for your next visit."

CHAPTER I

THE CONSPIRATORS.

The young nobleman galloped rapidly through the narrow valley of Castellamare, and more than once turned in his saddle and gazed earnestly upon the ancient walls of the lofty castle.

"What could he have meant?" he asked himself, "The good old man probably wishes to give me a suit of that costly armor which I have so often admired. If he do so, I will send him the best horse in my stables." In his excessive modesty, he had not suspected the old man's intentions, for he had never allowed such a hope to dwell in his imagination for a moment.

After a long ride, he entered a ravine, shut in on every side by lofty mountains. The heights were covered with trees, but below, all was barren and desolate. A few fruit-trees stood here and there as vestiges of former cultivation, and some stakes, almost decayed by time, rose from among the thistles and rank grass. In the lower part were the ruins of an ancient monastery, of which the four walls and the tower alone remained, and although of comparatively recent date, the stones were covered with parasitic plants. Heribert fastened his steed to a fragment of the wall, near which stood a number of other horses, all saddled, but browsing upon the abundant herbage.

He then proceeded to the church, where the profound silence would scarcely have allowed him to suppose, that he was in the immediate vicinity of hundreds of men all breathlessly awaiting an orator of a kind widely different from those who had formerly spoken there.

A rostrum of moss-covered stones had been erected on the place where the altar had once stood, and upon it was a man depicting in fervid language the misfortunes and disasters of Lombardy. His audience, who were all in armor, listened to him with passionate and earnest attention; at times they applauded his words, at others their shouts of menace and defiance proved that he had succeeded in arousing their resentment. Rapallo, fearing to interrupt the harangue, stopped at the door.

"Dearly beloved brethren," cried the orator, with a piercing voice, "you have seen that Barbarossa is insensible to our grievances. In vain you have protested against the insolence of his prefects, against the injuries done to your property, the drudgery which has been imposed upon you, the ill treatment which you have borne; in short, against all the acts of violence and oppression of which you have been the victims. The Emperor has remained deaf to all your complaints. Do you know the reason?"

The orator paused for a moment; his lips compressed, his nostrils dilated, he seemed to infuse into his hearers, by his looks, the fury with which he was himself animated.

"It is," he resumed in a still higher key, "because he looks upon you as slaves, whose necks are

fitted to bear the yoke of his tyranny. Think of what he once said at Pavia: 'Italy is a conquered province, she has lost all her rights; to demand any of her former privileges is an act of rebellion.' Yes, this is what he said openly, the despot! I heard him with my own ears; yes, he dared to say, that you have no longer any rights, that you are nothing but his vassals."

A dull murmur ran through the assembly.

"Thus, brothers, when we appeal to right and justice, we are guilty of rebellion. With such principles, what have we left to hope for? Are you astonished now that an abstract has been made of your lands, of your houses, of your herds, of all your wealth, and that you have been taxed in consequence? Do you not know, brothers, that you no longer possess anything, but that all belongs to the Emperor? Gather in your harvests, the bailiffs come with their satellites and take what they please. Prayers and tears are unavailing. Only enough is left us to barely prolong our own wretched existence, and that of our children; and this is all that is necessary for slaves, who live merely in the interest and for the service of their master."

The murmurs became more threatening, for passion was working in the hearts of all.

"Poor slaves," he continued, "life is only a burden destitute of every joy. For this we have been deprived of our rights to hunt and fish, for this we are not allowed an instant which we can devote to the most innocent amusement. Woe to him who would leave his work to take a moment's rest. Is it right and just that your lives should be consumed in the most painful drudgery, that you should be subjected to every privation, whilst your masters revel in every luxury?"

The orator had attained his object, for he was compelled to pause an instant in order to allow his auditors to give vent to their rage in fierce imprecations against the oppressors of their native country.

"In ancient times the barbarians overran our fair land, but they only passed over her surface; by bending the head to the storm, its fury was soon spent, and the evils could be repaired. Barbarossa, on the contrary, has put about our necks a yoke from which there is no relief. We must build with our own hands the fortresses which threaten us; with our own hands we must construct for these cruel vultures--I mean for the worthy prefects of the Emperor--those nests from which they can swoop down upon us with impunity, to pillage and murder. Will you always submit to slavery? Are you willing to be oppressed until death sets you free? Will you not, at last, rise in your might, and expel the tyrants?"

"Liberty forever! Death to the tyrants! Down with Barbarossa! May he die, he and his infamous satellites!" was heard from all parts of the ruined church.

"Yes! liberty forever," resumed the orator in a calmer tone; "the hour of our deliverance is at hand; profit by it, for it may pass, never to return. At present the Emperor is before Rome. The most solid bulwarks to our liberty are the Church and Alexander, the successor of Saint Peter. If Barbarossa succeeds in overthrowing him, we shall lose forever all hope of shaking off the yoke imposed upon us by the Germans and the Emperor." And the orator descended from his rude platform amid the clamorous applause of his auditory.

The speaker was a nobleman of great respectability, whose patriotism was equalled by his benevolence towards the needy and distressed. He had exaggerated nothing; but, on the contrary, had endeavored to palliate; and this very circumstance had increased the effect of his discourse. The pitiless severity of the prefects was, unfortunately, a positive and general fact, and the harsh sentiments of the Emperor towards unhappy Italy were only too evident. By adroit allusions, the orator had awakened all the memories of his hearers. A great number of them had felt the avidity of Frederic's agents; many had even suffered cruel tortures; and as they related their misfortunes, each imparted to his hearers the hatred by which he was himself convulsed.

Soon the assembly arrived at a paroxysm of fury. On all sides were heard fierce curses and expressions of grief and anger. Their arms shook with menacing sound; their eyes flashed; the audience seemed inspired with indignation.

At last another orator mounted the rostrum, and the noise gradually ceased.

"It is the Milanese Pandolfo," was said in a low tone; for all that came from Milan was received with great respect. Milan had won the martyr's crown.

"I bring the good wishes of my city to all the brothers of the Lombard League," said Pandolfo, with a clear, ringing voice. "You have heard, no doubt, that Milan is no longer a mere heap of ruins; her walls have risen; her fortifications have again appeared, and soon she will stand more proud, more threatening, than in former days. But walls and towers are not enough to defend us against tyranny; what we need above all, what already constitutes our strength, is a powerful organization, and an extension of the Lombard League. Many powerful cities have already joined her; and next to Milan I can cite Brescia and Bergamo, Cremona and Placenza, Parma and Modena, while others are ready to raise the standard of Italian liberty. We no longer hold our meetings in the midst of ruins, or in narrow ravines, but in the open country. Whilst you are still forced to tremble before the minions of tyranny, and escape by stealth, to meet here, we defy Barbarossa's prefects, for we are now powerful, and strength gives us courage. Fear not for the

interests of our sacred cause. Neglect nothing to gain over to it your kinsmen, your friends, and your neighbors. Encourage the timid, arouse the cowardly. The victory is ours, and the chains of slavery will be broken from the very moment in which we shall be united."

Until then, Pandolfo had spoken in a calm and measured tone, and he observed with great satisfaction the favorable impression which had been produced by his report on the progress of the league. But soon, to arouse still more the minds of his audience, he began to paint the unhappy condition of Italy, and his language and manner became more passionate.

"Dear brothers," he said; "you have all seen at Milan, of what Frederic is capable, and what is the fate which threatens you. Perhaps you think that your misfortunes have reached their furthest limit, but you are mistaken. You are robbed, you are beaten, the fruit of your toil is torn from you, your horses and your oxen are stolen before your eyes, but as yet they have not carried away your wives and your children. You are treated with harshness, but they have not yet pillaged your churches; they have not profaned and desecrated your sanctuaries."

"Yes they have!" cried a voice, trembling with anger; "yes they have! Our bailiff--may God curse him!--has carried off everything of value which was in our church; he tried to force our old priest to pray for Barbarossa and the high-priest Caiphaz (the Antipope Pascal). Our good priest protested, and was shamefully beaten, and we ourselves, for refusing to pray for our oppressors, were driven from the church with blows and curses."

"All this is but a drop in the bucket," resumed Pandolfo. "Do you not know, brothers, that the Church, the Pope and the Clergy, are slaves like ourselves? Is it not right and proper that the Pope and the Clergy teach, pray, and preach in conformity with the Emperor's orders? Since you are Frederic's property," he added with bitter irony, "it is only reasonable that he should watch over your minds and your bodies; of course always in accordance with his own personal interests. You seem astonished! Perhaps you think that I exaggerate? If so, it is because you do not know what an Emperor is, and what ideas he has of his own importance. Are we not told that the ancient Romans worshipped their sovereigns? Go to Rome, you will still see there the statue of the divine Augustus. Aye, the Pagan emperors called themselves gods, and their subjects were compelled to pay them divine honors."

"What infamy! what impiety!" exclaimed the audience.

"Has not Barbarossa already assumed the title of Augustus? As he affects to imitate the Roman emperors in all things, he will finally oblige us to adore him as a divinity."

A derisive laugh interrupted the speaker for a moment.

"You laugh, brothers, you imagine that I am jesting? I speak in sober earnest. The tyrant's pride will not stop short of the abomination of idolatry. You shake your heads; it appears impossible? Let me only ask, did it not seem impossible ten years ago, that you would become slaves; that the time would come when you would no longer have possessions, or rights, or liberty? Is not the Emperor to-day Pope? Is not the pretended Pope the Emperor's humble slave? Does not the Emperor pretend to an authority over the Church which is wellnigh divine? Is it not he who lays down the forms of preaching and prayer? Thanks to him, our bishops have been replaced by the minions of tyranny, and our good shepherds by ravening wolves who tear the flock."

"He is right! all that is only too true; Pandolfo is right!"

"Barbarossa is the Antichrist!"

"He is a child of Satan!"

"A worthy successor of Nero!"

"An infamous tyrant!"

"Curses upon him! may he die unabsolved!"

"Long live our Holy Father the Pope! May God save Alexander!"

"Yes, long live the Pope! may God protect him!" resumed Pandolfo, who was charmed with the enthusiasm which he had excited. "The sovereign Pontiff is the rampart of liberty, the only real defence against Imperial despotism. Why is it that Barbarossa has turned all his rage against Alexander? It is because he knows that he can never accomplish his perfidious ends so long as the Christian world shall retain him whom God himself has appointed to be the guardian of right, and morality, and liberty. The Pope suffers and struggles in our cause; let us unite with him, let us bravely flock to freedom's standard. Raise your right hands, and swear allegiance to the Lombard league."

Instantly a hundred hands were stretched forth in breathless silence. A heavy cloud overshadowed the sun and seemed to threaten the roofless cloister. A violent wind rushed through the dismantled windows and shook the parasitic plants upon the crumbling walls.

"As it is better to die gloriously than live in shameful slavery," cried Pandolfo, whose clear voice rang through the ruined building, "we promise obedience and fidelity to the principles of the Lombard league. We swear to devote our property and our lives to our faith and our country, to the Church, and to liberty. We take God as witness to our loyalty; may He doom us to eternal torments if we violate our oath!"

"We swear it;" and the oath unhesitatingly pronounced by a hundred voices was repeated by the echoes of the surrounding hills. The assembly then broke up, and the conspirators separated; on their features might be read the thoughts which filled their minds, and the noble resolutions to which they had subscribed. Less than a quarter of an hour afterwards the ruins had become once more silent and deserted.

CHAPTER LI.

THE TRIBUNE.

Whilst the deputies of the Lombard cities were travelling through the province and working at the organization of the league, Frederic and his army were encamped before the walls of Rome. Informed of the storm which threatened from the North, he would have raised the siege and marched at once against the rebels, but Dassel dissuaded him. It was first necessary, the statesman urged, to expel Alexander from Rome, and place Pascal upon the throne of Saint Peter.

Henry the Lion, the Duke of Austria, and nearly all the princes of note had refused to send their contingents against Rome, and remained quietly in their homes, for they had begun to foresee the designs of the Emperor.

The German and Italian bishops, however, eagerly took part in the siege, and, clothed in armor, prepared to use the sword and lance to overthrow the successor of St. Peter. For the monarch had at last humbled the pride of the prelates, who, for the most part, were his mere tools, whose consciences were fettered with golden shackles. Rich and powerful, their ambition urged them to further the projects of the Emperor, which in abasing the Papacy lessened the power of the temporal princes.

Frederic's army was numerous, brave, and accustomed to victory. A division commanded by the Archbishop of Mayence and Cologne, had already achieved some successes, but Rome still held out, and her fall seemed yet uncertain. Everything presaged a long struggle, much to the dissatisfaction of the Emperor, who had just learned the increasing development of the Lombard league and the advance of William of Naples, who was marching to the assistance of the eternal city.

"Your advice is replete with danger," said Barbarossa to his Chancellor; "the Lombards are rising *en masse*; they have decapitated or hung my lieutenants, and are working diligently upon the fortifications of Milan, whilst we stand here idle. It is a mistake, an evident mistake."

Rinaldo merely smiled with the air of one who feels certain of success.

"When we can strike at the heart of our enemy it would be folly to try only to wound his foot," said he. "Rome is the heart; Alexander is the life of the confederation. Let Alexander fall, the rest must die of necessity."

"Your arguments are good, but mere argument will not harm a hair of Roland's head."

"Every precaution has been taken against contingencies," continued Dassel, without replying to the Emperor's observation. "The Pisan fleet guards the mouth of the Tiber, our Brabançon troops scour the country; in short, Roland's escape is impossible."

"It is most probable that he will not put your precautions to the test."

"Within three days at the latest, my Emperor and Lord will hear in the Church of St. Peter the solemn mass which I myself will celebrate as a thanksgiving," said Dassel, calmly.

Frederic gazed at him in astonishment.

"My captains watch most diligently," resumed the statesman, "and Roland would need wings to get away again! If I had a hundred more gold pieces to spend, perhaps the worthy Romans would open their gates to us to-morrow. My promises, too, have a good deal of weight: abolition of all taxes, re-establishment of the Senate, privilege of electing the Pope!"

"Ah! you have promised all that?" said Frederic.

"Certainly! but when you are in the city, you can only keep as many promises as it suits you; for, personally, you are pledged to nothing. I assure your Majesty that I have never seen a city which can be so easily deceived as Rome: all that is necessary is to promise. Everything is false among the brave Romans."

"I know and appreciate them as they deserve," replied Frederic. "All that remains of their ancient glory is an overweening pride, which I mean to humble."

"Hark!" cried Dassel, "what is that noise?"

An extraordinary clamor was heard in the direction of the square of St. Peter, where an immense mob shouted and howled in such confusion that it was impossible to understand their meaning.

A marble column stood in the centre of the square, but in place of the image of the Holy Virgin, which it usually supported, it now served as a pedestal for the tailor Guerrazzi, while the sacred statue was laid upon the ground beside it, and a dense crowd pressed forward to listen to the excited orator. The tailor laughed and wept alternately, waved his hands, beat his breast, and tore his hair, while his voice assumed, by turns, an expression of menace or of flattery, as the occasion required. Guerrazzi was a paid agent of the Chancellor, and it was his pockets which received the gold pieces of which the latter had spoken, and which were to be distributed among the conspirators. The Romans were sharing the common lot of all those nations who are mad enough to suppose that schemers have any other object in view than self-interest; they were deceived and sold by the very men whom they considered to be their most devoted champions.

The orator pointed proudly towards a circular tower, which stood in front of him, commanding the square, with which it communicated by a bridge and a wide street. This building, whose lofty walls overlooked the whole city, was the mausoleum of Adrian, afterwards called the castle of Saint Angelo, and at present the Pope's last refuge.

"Look there!" cried the tailor, who was trying to flatter the national pride of his audience by recalling the mighty deeds of their ancestors; "look there at Adrian's mausoleum! there stands a memento of Roman grandeur. How magnificent it still is! I see before me the sons of the Gracchi, of the Scipios, of Brutus, the descendants of the masters of the world. But what are we to-day? We are mere pigmies in comparison with our progenitors. Ah!" said he, weeping, "there was a time when Rome dictated laws to the world, and all nations paid tribute to her majesty. Then our Senate, like a council of gods, sat in the Capitol!--And now?--But who has robbed us of this greatness? Who governs the universe after despoiling the Roman people of its power?--The Pope!--and the angry tailor paused.

"It is true!--It is true!"

"Well said!"

"What wisdom!"

And the crowd burst out in frantic applause.

"Romans!" continued the orator, "fellow-citizens! the Popes are the successors of that Saint Peter who thrice denied his master; but many of them seem to take as their model the thief, the traitor Judas!--Consequently, all the Popes are great men, but"--(here he paused and pointed to the castle)--"all the Popes are not saints!"

Again the mob applauded, but the wily orator, seeing at once that he trod on dangerous ground, made a skilful diversion.

"No one will dispute the fact that our Holy Father Alexander is one of the greatest of the Popes!" and his voice rang out loudly, as though to prevent all denial. "But although Alexander is a great and holy personage, will he restore to the Romans those privileges of which they have been deprived? No, fellow-citizens, he will not, because he cannot! He swore to hand down the spoils intact upon the day that he assumed the triple crown. But be comforted, fellow-citizens; we have a powerful protector, and that protector is the Emperor! Yes, the Emperor will bring back to Rome her pristine splendor; he will give her once more all that was hers, for he glories in being the defender of right and justice! Again you will have a Senate seated in the Capitol, for the power of priestcraft has had its day. Your ancestors had the right to elect the Pope; this right will again be restored to you. And do you know why Barbarossa refuses to acknowledge Alexander? Solely because he was not elected by the Roman people!"

A murmur of approbation and pleasure ran through the crowd.

"Neither Alexander nor Pascal will sit upon the pontifical throne; you can choose for Pope whom you please. Such is the Emperor's will." The orator was fast gaining his point, for if the Romans no longer possessed the energy of their ancestors, at least they had their pride.

"Rome will again reign supreme; all her liberties, all her privileges will be restored, and she

will once more rule the world as before the usurpation of the Popes. The Emperor has promised it, and Barbarossa keeps his word. But, you will ask, what does he require in exchange? Nothing, nothing except to receive from your hands the dignity of Roman patrician, nothing but the privilege of nominating the Pope of your own choice! Will you accept the hand stretched out to you by the noble Emperor, or will you close your gates against the defender of your liberties?"

"Long live the Emperor! Long live Barbarossa!" was shouted on all sides.

"Long live Frederic and the Rome of Augustus!" And the cries of the populace rent the air.

"Rejoice, O Rome! mistress of the world," cried the excited tailor, "thou wilt once more see thy Senate, thy Capitol, the tribunes of thy people!"

"Romans," he added, with increasing energy, "to your work without delay, every moment is of value: Elect your tribunes, send them immediately to the Emperor; tell him that you confer on him the title of Roman patrician, and that you wish to choose a Pope who will defend your rights and liberties!"

Guerrazzi descended from the rostrum, and the election of the tribunes began.

CHAPTER LII.

SEDITION.

The Pontiff was watching the people from the summit of the castle. He was overwhelmed with sadness; for he had long known the fickleness of the Romans, and the ease with which they could be misled caused grave fears of an early defection from his cause. Still he gave no evidences of discontent or ill humor; his sorrow was only that of a tender father mourning over the errors of a loved, though wayward child.

Near him stood Conrad of Wittelsbach, the deposed Archbishop of Mayence, a prelate of grave and dignified demeanor, whose features indicated firmness and energy. His efforts to bring about a reconciliation between Alexander and Frederic had been fruitless; the angry Emperor looked upon the Pope as the only obstacle to peace, and his renunciation of the pontifical throne was the essential condition on which he insisted.

"Poor misguided people; what a tumult!" said Alexander. "Hark how they cheer for the Emperor! What terrible ingratitude!"

"The Romans in this respect differ in no way from the rest of mankind, most Holy Father. To-day they cry Hosanna! to-morrow, Death! But it seems as though they were coming to see us," added Conrad; "the crowd is pressing in this direction."

In fact the mob, under the leadership of Guerrazzi and other demagogues, was moving towards the castle, and already the shouts of "Long live the Emperor!" were heard uttered with such violence that they even reached the Imperial camp. On the bridge the people stopped and glared at the portcullis with an air of hatred and defiance. Frangipani the governor of Saint Angelo, at once repaired to the presence of the Holy Father, to inquire if he would receive the tribunes of the Roman people.

"The tribunes of the Roman people?" repeated Alexander, with surprise.

"The designation appeared to me as extraordinary as it does to your Holiness," replied the soldier; "but, however it may be, the so-called tribunes of the Roman people desire an audience of your Holiness."

"Alas!" exclaimed the Pope, "their blindness is even greater than I supposed. However, let them come, I will receive them in the council-chamber."

A dense crowd entered the castle and were led by Frangipani to the room which had been designated. The pontifical court had adjourned but a few minutes before, and the cardinals' chairs were still around a long table, at the upper end of which stood the throne of St. Peter. Along the walls were shelves covered with books and parchments, for the archives of the Church had accompanied the Pope in his flight.

As soon as the last tribune had entered, the doors were closed and guarded by the soldiers, whose measured steps along the corridors, joined to the clank of their armor, produced a marked impression upon their excited minds. They looked anxiously around as if in dread, but Guerrazzi,

who perceived the general impression, hastened to reassure them.

"Do not be in the least alarmed," he said, "we have nothing to fear. The people surround the Castle, and would not leave one stone upon another, if any violence were offered to us. We possess their confidence, we must show ourselves worthy of our trust. Believe me, since the time of Romulus and Remus, no tribunes have ever been chosen with so much promptness and discrimination as ourselves. Since, in spite of my unworthiness, the people have seen fit to elevate me to the dignity of the tribuneship, I intend, as certain as I can trace my origin directly back to Romulus, to show myself worthy of the honor, and to defend the people's rights with all my energy."

At this moment the Pope, accompanied by Conrad of Mayence, entered the hall by a side-door.

Guerrazzi's colleagues, generally, belonged to the dregs of the people, and modelled their conduct upon his. Still, although the crafty tailor felt persuaded of their devotion to his cause and their own ambitious schemes, he felt that they were overawed by the calm majesty of the Pontiff, before whom they preserved a silence which induced Alexander to suppose, at first, that they had come to solicit his forgiveness for the insurgents.

But Guerrazzi was not a vulgar rebel; he was a villain ready for anything, an accomplished scoundrel. Approaching the Pope with assurance, he drew himself up, threw back his head, and spoke thus:

"Sir Pope, we, the tribunes of the Roman people, wish you to understand that the Emperor has offered us his friendship, and that we have accepted it. No harm shall be done to your person, but you must resign the sovereign dignity, in order that the Roman people may, as is its right, choose a Pope. As you are a pious and a holy man, you may, perhaps, hope that our choice will fall again upon yourself as a fit person to occupy St. Peter's chair."

The demagogue was silent and awaited the Pontiff's answer, but there was none; the arrogance and importance of the harangue rendered any reply impossible.

The tailor had more skill and craftiness than the Holy Father. People of elevated sentiments can never understand all the insincerity and baseness of which vulgar minds are capable, and Alexander could not suppose that the speaker only sought to lead him into a snare which would make him odious to the people.

"I am aware, Holy Father," he continued, "that you desire to put an end to the war. Many hundreds of Roman citizens are in the hands of the enemy: Frederic has promised their release if we throw open our gates; but he threatens to hang them and treat Rome as he has treated Milan, in case we persevere in our resistance. He will demolish our fortifications, will put us to the sword or send us into exile, and will turn this noble city into a heap of ruins. It is in your power to avert all this and save us from inevitable misery, by resigning the throne and ordering the surrender of the city."

Despite the wickedness which appeared in the harangue, the Holy Father was moved by the picture. He would gladly have gone into exile, or even to death itself, in the discharge of his duty, but the people seemed ready to yield everything rather than persevere in the struggle.

"My son," said Alexander, after a moment's reflection, "you have undertaken a matter which is beyond the scope of your abilities, and which is even contrary to justice; I will therefore make you no reply. It is to be deplored that the Romans are less disposed to do battle for God and his Church, than to make arrangements with the Emperor, whose only object is the gratification of personal ambition. His intention is to destroy the Church of God in Rome."

"Allow me to say, Sir Pope, that the Emperor has not come here as a destroyer, but rather as a protector of our rights and liberties."

"You cannot believe that, poor misguided people that ye are!"

As if in answer to these words of the Pope, the yells of the infuriated mob were heard before the fortress.

"Long live Barbarossa!--Election of the Pope!--Down with the government of the priests!--Hurrah for the Senate!"

These words, and others of a similar nature, showed the spirit which animated the populace.

"Listen to them, then, Holy Father! mark with what enthusiasm they acclaim the Emperor!" said the tailor, insolently. "Barbarossa is really a great man, an Emperor worthy of the name of Augustus. I recollect well the time when he came to St. Peter's with Pope Adrian. Oh, the happy days! Why cannot you, too, become the Emperor's friend? Every difficulty would then be removed."

"You do not understand me, my son; personally, I have no dislike to Frederic, but it is my duty to oppose his perverse designs."

"Do you not admit that Pope Adrian was a wise and saintly Pontiff?--The people have always so considered him."

"And they were right."

"Why then could he be the friend of Barbarossa, whilst you are not so?"

Among the rare qualities of Alexander III. must be counted the truly Christian patience with which he listened to the reproaches of wicked men, and the mildness which he employed in trying to convince them of their perversity. But the Holy Father was compelled to admit the hopeless impossibility of impressing upon this rabble the great importance of his contest with Frederic.

After a moment's reflection, he went towards the table and sought among the parchments.

"Here is a document," he said, "written by Pope Adrian. It will show you that our predecessor was gravely annoyed by the Emperor's conduct which always was hostile to the independence of the Church. 'God be thanked,' he writes to the German bishops, 'that you have remained faithful! God be thanked for giving you the ability to judge, dispassionately, between Frederic and the Holy See! This schism which he has instigated will recoil upon his own head; it is like a dragon, which, wishing to fly to heaven, has fallen to the earth, and has been swallowed up. He who would exalt himself, shall be abased. This fox seeks to lay waste the Lord's vineyard; this guilty son forgets all gratitude and all fear. He has fulfilled none of his promises, he has deceived us in everything; he deserves then to be treated as a rebel to his God, as a heathen, as an outlaw.' You see then, my children, how severely Adrian judged the Emperor. What would this saintly Pontiff write now; what sentence would he pass upon Frederic at the time when he is persecuting with still more virulence the Church of God?"

A savage yell, which seemed to approach the castle, interrupted Alexander, and Frangipani appeared.

"Holy Father," said the soldier, "I can no longer endure the presence of these bandits; allow me to drive them away by force."

"By no means; let no blood be spilled! Tell them," he said, turning to Guerrazzi, "that there can be no alliance between Christians and the enemies of God; tell them, distinctly, that Rome has naught to fear, so long as she fights against the foes of the Church!"

He withdrew, and a few moments later, Guerrazzi was again upon his column, haranguing the rabble which pressed eagerly around him. The tailor inveighed bitterly against the harshness of Alexander, who, he asserted, had no pity for the sufferings of the people, and was disposed to resist the Emperor at any cost.

"I represented everything to him," he said, "I reminded him of Milan, of your inevitable destruction if you rejected the proffered mercy! I reminded him of our captive brothers who will certainly be hung, unless we stretch out our hand to Barbarossa. With tears in my eyes, I besought him to have pity upon us, upon our wives, upon our helpless children; my words would have touched a heart of stone, but they were powerless to move this barbarian. Do you call such a one a holy man, a father?--He is a tyrant, a destroyer!"

Guerrazzi at last had carried his point; the crowd was rampant with sedition.

"Death to Alexander! Down with the tyrant!"

"Forward!" resumed the tailor, violently,--"brave people, rise in your might, break your chains, and go to meet your Augustus!"

He sprang to the ground, for his task was accomplished, and the fire of sedition was spread rapidly through the masses. Rinaldo's emissaries urged on the revolt, and soon nothing was heard but wild panegyrics of Barbarossa, and curses against the Pope.

Each day the excitement increased in Rome, where the Chancellor had already distributed large sums of money, and where the seditious harangues of Guerrazzi, Bariso, and many others embroiled everything.

Alexander was denounced as a merciless savage.

"Soon, brothers, you will suffer all the pangs of hunger," said the tailor, always speaking from his favorite column. "You will be obliged to feed upon roots, and leather, and old shoes, and other things too disgusting to mention. What does Alexander care for our sufferings, he is well provided with every luxury behind the walls of St. Angelo."

"The man of the castle has no heart!" cried Bariso, who had replaced Guerrazzi upon the pedestal; "if he had, would he compel us to bear this misery, and submit to the misfortunes which ruined Milan? Yes, the Emperor has sworn to destroy everything with fire and sword, if we do not surrender within a week."

"Alexander will not resign the pontifical chair," said another voice. "What does it signify to him

if his obstinacy causes our destruction? Barbarossa desires to restore to Rome her ancient splendor and her liberty. Alexander has other intentions, he claims everything for himself. He cares for neither our honor, nor our glory; he is plotting our ruin!"

Every day there were popular meetings in different quarters of the city, and loud complaints were launched against Alexander, while some of the insurgents even went so far as to shout, through the loopholes in the walls, words of encouragement to the enemy.

At last Frederic stormed a portion of the works, and burned the church of Santa Maria della Torre; the conflagration spread, and the vestibule of the dome of Saint Peter was destroyed.

From the summit of St. Angelo, the Pope saw the flames surround the tomb of the prince of the Apostles; but although his face glowed with indignation, and his lips trembled with emotion at the sacrilege, he remained undaunted in his resolution to endure every trial in the interest of the Church. He wept, and his tears were doubtless carried to the foot of the eternal throne of God, where they pleaded for pity and forgiveness.

After the capture of the Vatican, Barbarossa attacked the castle of San Angelo, but the assault failed. Several other positions were also in the possession of the Papal troops, but a longer resistance seemed of no avail. It was useless to remain in a city the people of which was hostile.

Alexander saw the precarious condition of the desecrated Church, and resigning himself to his fate, determined to seek safety in flight. But the enemy had evidently foreseen the contingency, and every disposition had been made to prevent the escape of the Pontiff.

A cordon of troops was drawn around the citadel; these were doubled after nightfall, and so great was the importance which the Emperor attached to the Pope's capture, that none but Germans were detailed on the service, for Frederic had little confidence in his Italian mercenaries.

The gigantic castle of Saint Angelo rose towards heaven, and the gilded statue of St. Michael glittered upon its summit. The helmeted sentinels in full armor, their lances poised upon their shoulders, paced the bridge with measured tread. At times they looked towards the castle, then upon the river, and then towards the distant horizon; for they knew that the Pope would seek to escape.

Further on, a strong detachment of soldiers were sleeping on the ground, with their helmets and lances carefully piled near them. Among these might have been seen the knight Goswin and the tailor Guerrazzi, who were engaged in earnest conversation.

The frankness of the worthy German found little to sympathize with in the crafty Italian; but Guerrazzi, who never lost the opportunity of showing his zeal for the Emperor, had offered to keep him company and share the fatigues of the night-watch. Of course no fault could be found with this, but Goswin looked upon his companion much as a dog would on a cat which fawned upon him. The German, it is true, had a very limited intellect, but his natural good sense taught him that the Italian was full of tricks and artifice.

At first he paid no attention whatever to Guerrazzi, as if to show him that his presence was a matter of perfect indifference, and he walked up and down the banks of the Tiber immersed in thought.

But Goswin was not a philosopher, and could not remain for hours at a time in a revery, so he very soon began to weary of the silence, and finally approached Guerrazzi.

"A very fine evening!" said the knight, opening the conversation like one who did not know what to say.

"We are in the month of July, noble sir, and at this season, I think, the custom ought to be to sleep all day and work at night."

"Sleep all day!--you?" said Goswin; "did I not see you on the square, haranguing the Romans, and working them up as a baker kneads soft dough? And if I mistake not, you were at the allied camp before daybreak? Don't you sleep either day or night?"

"Not when there is anything to be done, my lord; and there will be, as long as Rome is not entirely in the power of the Emperor!"

"What means that statue on the top of the tower?" asked Goswin, pointing to the castle.

"Ah! that is a strange story," replied the tailor, laughing. "They used to call the fort, Adrian's Mausoleum, but ever since an angel lighted on it, it has been named the tower of Saint Angelo."

"An angel came there? This is a strange story."

"I will tell it to you in a few words. It happened one night while Gregory the Great occupied the throne of St. Peter, that a terrible pestilence had broken out in Rome. None knew whence the scourge came, nor what caused it, but he who was smitten fell dead at once; the very air was infected, and it is since then that it is customary to say when a man sneezes: God bless you!--that

means: may God preserve you from the pestilence! Now, when the disease had reached its height, Pope Gregory ordered a general fast and a procession through the city, to implore God's pity. Nothing was of any avail, although the physicians opposed the procession, on the ground that the concourse of so many persons would necessarily tend to spread the contagion. Gregory, absorbed in pious meditations, mounted to the summit of that tower, precisely as Alexander has since done. The people marched slowly onward, chanting the *miserere*; at every moment their ranks grew thinner, as a corpse fell to the ground. Suddenly the sky became illumined, and an angel was seen upon the tower. He held in his hand a fiery sword, which he brandished over the city, and then he seemed to return it to the scabbard. At the same instant the plague disappeared. It is for this that you see there the image of the blessed Archangel St. Michael, who protects us still, for since then the pestilence has never appeared among us."

"This is indeed a marvellous legend!" said Goswin. "The flaming sword in the hand of St. Michael clearly shows the punishment which God intended for the Romans."

"There is no doubt about it," sneered Guerrazzi.

"You laugh?"

"Certainly; for I look upon the legend as an idle tale: old women often see miracles where our cool, good sense perceives nothing which is not entirely natural."

"But did not the plague cease?"

"Yes; but it would have disappeared all the same without St. Michael's interference."

The tailor's irony shocked the honest German, whose pious faith saw nothing astonishing in the visitation of the glorious archangel.

"If all the Romans thought as you do, they did not deserve St. Michael's assistance."

"Bah! the St. Michael of the mausoleum is not an article of the Creed! Although I may think the story of the apparition false, I am not a pagan."

Goswin stared angrily at the tailor, and turned away.

Whilst this scene was passing upon the bridge, Alexander was hurriedly preparing for his flight. The garrison was ignorant of the intentions of his Holiness, but in the antechamber of the apartment, the bishops and cardinals were kneeling, and reciting fervently the prayer for the safety of travellers.

The door of the Pope's chamber was open, and through it might be seen the Head of the Church and two ecclesiastics, all clothed as pilgrims, kneeling before the little altar, on which burned two candles before a large crucifix.

The cardinals and bishops prayed with voices tremulous with emotion.

"Aid thy servants, who have faith in thee, O God! Send us assistance from thy holy place, and from Sion protect us! O Lord, be our strength to resist the enemy, and let him not prevail against us! Praise be the Lord! May he grant us a prosperous journey! Show us thy ways, and direct us in thy paths. The crooked road shall be made straight, for God has commanded his angels to protect thee on thy way. Lord, listen to my prayer, and let the voice of my supplication come unto thee."

"The Lord be with you," said the Pope at the altar.

"And with thy Spirit," answered the cardinals.

"Let us pray," added the Pope. "O God! thou who hast caused the sea to be crossed as the dry land, thou who hast guided the magi by thy holy star, grant to us a prosperous journey; and may we, under thy gracious protection, arrive in safety at the goal to which we direct our steps."

"*Amen!*" answered the cardinals.

There was a profound silence, which was broken by the entrance of Frangipani, who in full armor stood motionless before the door. The bishops and cardinals remained seated, but the tears were coursing down their cheeks, for as they looked upon the Pope, they trembled for his safety.

Without, was heard the measured tramp of the sentinels, then soon all again was still.

Alexander knelt once more at the foot of the altar, and raising his eyes to the crucifix,

"O my God! my Saviour!" said he with emotion, "protect the flock which I am compelled to abandon! Be merciful to thy deluded people, for they know not what they do."

He paused and bent his head; then suddenly looking up, he exclaimed in a loud voice:

"O Almighty God of justice, look upon thy Church: turn thine eyes towards thy spouse. See her misery, her forlorn condition, her persecution, her danger! How far wilt thou allow this wickedness to triumph, O Lord? O Lord, if thou hast pity on our misfortunes and our griefs, come to the aid of thy Church! Awake, O Almighty God, bare thy avenging arm! O Sweet Jesus, deign to save thy holy Church."

Alexander's voice became stronger, and his features more animated, as though he had seen a vision. His words also had a supernatural expression, and the Pontiff seemed to have received, directly from the Almighty, the power to bless and curse.

At this critical moment, the representative of God upon earth had repassed in his mind all the circumstances by the aid of which he had struggled so long for the holy cause which had just been overthrown. The giant grasp of the Emperor had clutched on the Church, and God alone could compel him to leave his prey. The Pope felt all this, and consequently it was to God that he looked for assistance, to him that he addressed his prayers.

The cardinals and bishops remained kneeling in deep emotion, as the Pope, rising with the air of one who had confided everything to faithful hands, bestowed upon them his solemn benediction. Then he took his pilgrim's hat and staff, and, followed by his companions, descended the steps of the altar.

Frangipani had got all his men under arms in order to cover the Pope's flight by a vigorous sortie, in case it was noticed by the besiegers. Goswin had just lain down upon the ground and had begun to doze.

The sentinel stood upon the bridge, his head bent forward upon his breast, scarcely awake. A heavy cloud veiled the moon and threw long shadows upon the city; a few doubtful rays glided upon the surface of the stream and played here and there upon the armors. Suddenly a small postern was cautiously opened and three persons came out from the castle.

Goswin was seated upon the ground, his face towards the river, his back against a stone. The fatigues of the day forced Rinaldo's spy to struggle against sleep, and he was scarcely conscious of what he saw, everything was dim and indistinct before him. But the sense of hearing had become more acute in proportion as the other faculties of the tailor had diminished.

An almost imperceptible noise came from the tower, and in a moment Guerrazzi was on his feet peering eagerly into the night. He fancied that he perceived human forms moving away under cover of the darkness, and he hastily gave the alarm.

"Halloa! up! look yonder; they are escaping from the castle."

The drowsy soldiers heard a fall, a shout, and then a splashing in the water.

"What is the matter with you? what are you shouting about?" asked Goswin. "Halloa! there he is again; ah! he has sunk a second time," said the soldier, pointing with his lance towards the water. "The idiot! why did he jump into the river if he did not know how to swim?"

"Who has jumped into the river?" asked the sentinel.

"The Italian; I don't know what was the matter; he suddenly cried out that some one was leaving the castle, and then sprang into the Tiber. Did you see anything?"

"Nothing at all; everything was quiet; the idiot was dreaming, I suppose."

"All this comes because of his want of respect for St. Michael," said Goswin. "The devil has blinded him so that he took the water to be the solid ground. I should have liked to save him, but it is not possible to fish in the dark."

The soldiers crowded around the bridge and gazed at the water, which was carrying the villain's body away.

CHAPTER LIII.

BARBAROSSA IN ROME.

Alexander was in safety at Gaeta before his flight was discovered by the Romans. Frederic's anger knew no bounds.

"He has succeeded, after all, in eluding your guards and your Brabançons," he said to Rinaldo,

who communicated the fact to him.

"If we were unable to seize the Pope in Rome, we shall be more successful at Beneventon or Naples," replied the Chancellor. "It is probably a piece of good luck by which not only Alexander but also his champion, King William, will together swell the triumph of the Roman Emperor."

The news spread rapidly through the city, and a thousand details were added, all in favor of the Pope's sanctity. Some even asserted that he had penetrated unseen the line of sentinels, and that Guerrazzi had perceived and tried to seize him, but had been thrown by invisible hands into the Tiber. As he was going, added the crowd, the Holy Father had fulminated the anathema against Barbarossa, and had called down the vengeance of Heaven upon the head of the wicked Emperor, while a flash of lightning had pierced the clouds, announcing the most dire misfortunes.

These marvels were related everywhere, and acquired additional credit from their very circulation.

Frederic determined to make his triumphal entry into Rome on the 3d of August, when he and Beatrice would be crowned in the Church of St Peter, and receive the allegiance of the inhabitants. It was necessary that Frederic should enter Rome with becoming pomp, and immense preparations were being made for the reception. St. Peter's Square and its vicinity was profusely decked with flags, and flowers, and laurel crowns; and tall poles, hung with streamers and appropriate emblems, were set up in all the streets through which the procession was to pass. Frederic had announced three days of popular festivity, during which he was to appear in public, robed in the Imperial purple, and dispense his bounties in person. The Romans were favorably disposed; all the avenues were alive with crowds of citizens in their holiday attire, and in each house everything was being made ready for the banquet.

In the army, too, every one was busy; the squires and men-at-arms brightened up their armor and polished their lances and bucklers; in the ecclesiastical quarter, the chaplains were preparing the sumptuous vestments of the prelates, while the nobles were assembled in Council near their sovereign, deeply intent upon the organization of the cavalcade.

Heaven alone appeared unwilling to take part in the festival. Until then the burning sky had diffused a stifling heat, but on the eve of the ceremony heavy clouds began to collect upon the distant horizon, and pile up in dark masses, whence flashed lurid sheets of fire, while the thunder rolled menacingly. Still the air was calm, and scarcely a puff of wind fluttered the gay pennons of the knights. All nature seemed hushed in dread expectancy.

Goswin was seated at his door, watching the darkening sky, and as the weather became more overcast and the lightning blazed more fiercely, he shook his head uneasily.

"Tighten the tent-cords, Bruno," he said, turning to his squire; "we shall have a storm soon."

Hardly was the order given before the tempest burst forth in all its fury. The tents were prostrated or else whirled away by the wind; and on all sides were heard the shouts and cries of the soldiers struggling amidst a deluge of rain to repair the wild confusion.

Fortunately the hurricane was of short duration, and subsided as rapidly as it had arisen; but it seemed as though a threat from Heaven weighed down the army and the city. The lightning had ceased, and the thunder rolled no longer, but the clouds, which had been chasing rapidly through the air, suddenly stopped, as though they had reached their destination, and hung over Rome, gloomy and mournful as a funeral-pall.

Knights and pages looked with apprehension upon this ominous calm. To most it seemed as though the storm was only massing its strength in order the better to destroy all within its reach.

"What a singular tempest!" exclaimed Frederic, who had been driven from his tent by the violence of the gale; "it is as though chaos had come again."

As if in answer to the Emperor, a dazzling flash furrowed the sky, and extended from above the camp to the Eternal City, as though to presage its destruction, and then the lightning again blazed forth, and crash succeeded crash, while the rain poured down in torrents. Then there was a pause, followed by three deafening peals, at regular intervals, and all was still.

The statue of the Archangel no longer guarded the summit of Saint Angelo; the tempest had hurled it from its pedestal. All was wild uproar; and the affrightened soldiers sought shelter where they could from the violence of the storm.

"Woe to us!" they cried; "our last day is at hand; we must all perish in this deluge!"

But although the environs of the city were laid waste, no one was fatally injured, and soon the clouds rolled away, and the stars shone out brightly in the dark azure of the cloudless sky.

During the height of the storm, two soldiers were riding towards the camp, but it was in vain that they spurred on their jaded steeds; the terrified animals tumbled and stood still, as each flash burst forth.

So far as his appearance went, one of these horsemen belonged to the highest rank of the aristocracy; his armor was costly and richly arabesqued in gold, and his helmet bore a Count's coronet; but on the shield the only device was a simple cross, the emblem of the crusaders. His face, half hidden under his casque, was bronzed by the suns of Asia, and his eyes shone brightly, as if he would have defied the fury of the elements. He rode on calmly, with loosened rein, and at times patted his charger's neck, with words of encouragement.

"What is the matter, my good Velox?" he said; "we have braved many a storm before. Courage, good horse, we will soon be there."

On his arrival at camp, the stranger requested to be taken at once to the Imperial tent.

Frederic was seated at a table; before him a parchment was spread out, which he was reading attentively, and occasionally crossing out words and writing marginal notes. He was correcting the sermon which his Pope was to deliver next day in the Church of St. Peter.

A heavy step was heard, and the Emperor looked up, angrily, for he had expressly forbidden all intrusion. But when the curtain of the tent was drawn aside, and a man of tall stature and noble bearing entered, Frederic uttered an exclamation of glad surprise. Throwing down his pen, he sprang forward and caught Rechberg in his arms.

"God be thanked! You are back at last.--Come here, my boy, and let me look at you!" and the Emperor led him to the table. "Why, you have grown to be a man, Erwin! Your eyes glow with the fire of the Eastern sun, and your face has gained a look of energy and resolution."

He again embraced him, and laying aside the sermon, ordered in some refreshments.

"You are wet to the skin, Erwin; change your clothes first," said Frederic. "Why did you travel in this horrible weather?"

"The storm broke upon me suddenly, and as far as I can judge, it has done some damage in the camp. All I need do is to change my surcoat."

The powerful figure of the young man stood out in bold relief before the Emperor, who looked upon him with an expression of almost paternal interest, which softened his stern features.

"How does it happen that we have had no news of you for the last two years?"

"The Infidels captured me while I was asleep, and for eighteen months I have been in a dungeon, with scarcely a hope of release, for the ransom which they demanded was exorbitant."

"I don't blame them," said Frederic, laughing; "you cost them dear enough. All the pilgrims returning from the Holy Land relate marvels of your prowess."

"At last the Knights of the Temple stormed the fortress where I was confined, and delivered me."

"Ah! the Templars!--Valiant warriors! Their courage is wonderful, and their daring amounts wellnigh to rashness; but how did you get back to Europe?"

"On a Norman ship, which landed me at Tarentum."

"Well! you will tell me all your adventures when we have more leisure. I look forward with pleasure to their recital. But you arrived most opportunely for the celebrations of our late victories. We are to crown Pascal to-morrow in the Church of St. Peter."

Rechberg made no answer, but his face wore a pained expression.

"As I have just returned from Palestine," he said, after a brief pause, "I trust, my dear godfather, that you will excuse me from taking part in Pascal's glorification."

"Very good! I understand," exclaimed the Emperor, with a slight frown. "The Crusader is not inclined to recognize our Pope! Well, well, be it so! you shall be entirely free to act in everything which concerns your conscience."

The two kinsmen continued their conversation until a late hour of the night.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY.

At last the day so anxiously longed for by Barbarossa arrived; the tents which had been overthrown by the storm were again pitched, and the Romans completed their preparations for the festival.

Still all hearts appeared to suffer from this fictitious joy; no one seemed at his ease; a dull presentiment hovered over Rome, where all felt vaguely that the angel of vengeance was at hand.

A crowd of citizens dressed in holiday attire, was assembled upon the main road leading from Saint Angelo to the Basilica of St. Peter. The settled gloom of their features contrasted strikingly with their brilliant costume, and as they glanced towards the castle, where had stood formerly the statue of St. Michael, they shook their heads and sighed.

"Saint Michael has protected us for centuries," said an old man, "but he has disappeared now! May God have mercy on us!"

"You are alarmed at nothing, Master Bartholomew," replied his friend Anselm; "you know that metals attract the lightning, and as the statue was of gilded bronze, it could scarcely escape the fluid at that exposed point."

"You are very wise, Anselm," resumed the first speaker; "but the statue has stood there unhurt during all the storms of five hundred years! not one had power against it until the eve of our reception of this schismatical Emperor!"

"It is nothing but the merest chance!"

"Take care, Bartholomew," added a third, "the Emperor has hosts of friends, and it might be dangerous to speak against him."

"I am certain that chance has had nothing to do with it!--I take care! Anselm, do you think that an old man of eighty-seven years of age is afraid to speak the truth? Yes, Barbarossa is a schismatic, he is the scourge of the Church. He will bring bad luck to Rome, and I know there are many who think as I do, but have not courage enough to express their opinion!--Look how money has been lavished here for the last four weeks! but see if the gold and the treason which it purchased do not burn those who are guilty!"

And Bartholomew started off again in the direction of the Castle of Saint Angelo.

"He is right in the main," said Gervase; "not a man in Rome has a doubt who is the lawful Pope, but what could we do? the terrible Barbarossa would have demolished Rome, as he did Milan, without the slightest scruple."

"Certainly he would," replied Anselm.

"Is it true that Alexander has anathematized the city?"

"No, no!" exclaimed several voices; "he did not even curse Barbarossa."

"I can speak positively on this point," said Anselm, "Frangipani heard the Pope's very words as he was kneeling before the image of our Saviour; this is what he said:--'Arise, O Lord, and judge between me and my enemies! O Almighty God, stretch out thine arm against the enemies of the Church!--This was precisely what happened, and nothing more.'"

"It is quite enough! he called down Heaven's vengeance upon us, and we may expect the most direful calamities!"

"Nonsense!" said Anselm; "all this is merely the effect of yesterday's tempest."

"What a time that was, what a storm!"

"Yes, and cries and groans were heard in the air."

"And some people even saw a cross of fire above St. Peter's Church."

"Did not the hurricane come from the direction of Gaeta? Such a thing was never known before; I tell you it was more than natural."

"You are a fool, Ambrose."

"Alexander is at Gaeta, and Rome may yet regret that she deserted the Head of the Church. Say what you please, that was no ordinary storm. Did you not notice in what a gloomy terrible manner it burst upon the city?"

"Cheer up; mayhap you will be elected to the Senate, and the embroidered toga will soon make you forget your scruples of conscience. But here comes the procession."

At this moment the bells of St. Peter began to toll.

"Come to my house," said Ambrose, "we can see it so much better from the balcony."

The cavalcade advanced; first came a body of knights occupying the entire width of the street; at their head rode the herald of the Empire, dressed in a splendid tabard. On either side was a standard-bearer, clad in a sumptuous costume, and glancing haughtily upon the crowd. Behind them came the serried ranks of the knights, who had laid aside their coats-of-mail, their lances, and their shields. They wore only their swords, and were all in plated armor, which shone in the rays of the August sun like a moving sea of silver.

"How formidable those men of iron appear on their chargers!" said Ambrose; "how powerfully built they seem! those Germans are sturdy soldiers!"

"At last they have all gone by; how many were there? Just look, how they drive the crowd back on St. Peter's Square, to form a brazen wall up to the Basilica."

"Here come the bishops! Holy Virgin, how magnificently they are dressed! Anselm, count the prelates.--I want to know how many of them there are."

"Do you see that one with long, black hair? That is the bishop who fought so bravely in the last attack, And that one behind him, with the red head, is the Bishop of Osnabruck,--a miserable villain!"

"Yes; they all look ill-natured and wicked; they ought to be called the Emperor's spiritual knights; how they glare at everybody!--By St. Peter! I would not like to be confirmed by one of those gentlemen; they strike too hard!"

During this conversation, the bishops had approached the Church; they wore brilliant mitres on their heads, and their steeds were covered with gorgeous housings.

Next after the bishops came the Antipope Pascal in full Pontifical robes, surrounded by the prelates of his court. But the costume of this Head of the Church became him as little as it had done his predecessor, Octavian, and his embarrassed manner and undignified carriage formed a painful contrast with the exalted and difficult functions of the ministry which he was called upon to discharge.

"Fancy Alexander by the side of Pascal," said Ambrose. "What a difference! In Alexander everything showed the real pope: his looks, his words, his bearing, even the glance of his eye. But with Pascal there is nothing! Bah! the Emperor has made a singular choice to fill St. Peter's chair."

"Silence!" cried Anselm, "here comes the divinity of the festival, the *Divus Augustus* himself."

At this moment the mob shouted,--

"Long live the Emperor! Hail, Great Augustus!"

Frederic appeared mounted on a magnificent charger; by his side rode the Empress Beatrice, and in front was borne the Imperial banner.

As he approached the castle, the crowd made a movement, the applause ceased, and all eyes were turned to the tower of Saint Angelo.

In place of the image of the mighty Archangel, an immense flag hung from its summit. This unexpected memento of their humiliation created a most painful impression upon the Romans, who looked in vain for the venerated emblem of their patron saint. Alexander's curse, with all its fearful consequences, recurred to their minds, and hushed the cries of rejoicing, even among the paid emissaries of the Chancellor, and it was amid a death-like silence that Frederic moved towards the church of St. Peter.

"What does this mean?" said Gervase, who, from the balcony, could not perceive the flag; "everybody is staring at the castle, and the cries of 'Hail to the Emperor! Glory to the great Augustus!' have ceased."

"Only look at the Imperial mantle! how it glitters!"

"Yes; and see how proudly Barbarossa rides! They might call him *Jupiter tonans!*"

In fact, Frederic slowly advanced with the grave and stern bearing of a conqueror. Not a trace of emotion was visible on his countenance, and his eyes glanced calmly upon the admiring multitude.

A branch of laurel was entwined upon his diadem, and he bore, in his right hand, the Imperial sceptre, with a more haughty grace than Augustus himself in his triumphal chariot.

"The Empress is a gracious lady," said Anselm; "she looks like a lamb by the side of a lion."

"Who is that red-bearded noble behind the Emperor?"

"Frederic of Hohenstauffen, Duke of Suabia, a good and kind prince, very different from his cousin. They say the Emperor does not trust him, and that the Duke looks so sadly, because Frederic forced him to join his army.

"Ah! look there! Here comes the Chancellor Rinaldo! What a handsome little man he is! See how he smiles,--you would never imagine, from his appearance, that he is deceit personified?"

A squadron of men-at-arms closed the procession, which was followed by an immense crowd.

"Quick, my friends," said Ambrose, "let us go to St. Peter's as fast as we can! If we can only get through the crowd! What a retinue of bishops!"

"Yes, seventy-three!--it is a holy number, for both seven and three are in it!"

The church was filled to overflowing. Pascal offered up the holy sacrifice, upon the tomb of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, in the presence of those who, instead of discharging the functions of their sacred ministry, had entered God's sanctuary like thieves and robbers. The people often have singular presentiments, and scarcely had Pascal mounted the steps of the altar, when a murmur of discontent broke out. For a moment a riot seemed imminent, and many of the spectators endeavored to leave the church, through dread of some violence to the Antipope, the Emperor, and the schismatical bishops.

During the ceremony, Frederic knelt devoutly, and Beatrice took her place by the side of her husband.

At the conclusion of the Mass, Frederic ascended his throne, and Pascal seated himself in the pontifical chair, which was placed opposite. The Emperor wore the Imperial crown, in his right hand he held the sceptre, in his left the globe. In the space between the two thrones knelt the bishops, all of whom rose when Rinaldo proceeded to the altar to read aloud the formula, by which the clergy were to swear allegiance to Pascal as lawful Pope.

The organ and the solemn chants ceased; and Rinaldo's voice resounded through the church, while the people looked on with sullen interest. The hands were raised, the oath administered, and then each in turn approached the Emperor's throne to pledge him his obedience.

On the first step they bowed respectfully, on the second they knelt before the monarch and kissed the hand which held the sceptre; then they moved towards the altar, knelt before Pascal and kissed his pastoral ring, in token of submission.

Meanwhile the organ broke out into a joyful strain, and the choir sang, but the melody found no echo in the hearts of the Romans.

The conviction that the schismatic Pascal was a mere tool of the Emperor, and that this assembly was composed of bishops who were aliens to the Church, wounded all their preconceived ideas. They feared lest the vengeance of God should come to punish this usurpation of Saint Peter's chair. Many again tried to leave the church, but the crowd without choked up all egress.

The Emperor placed his right hand (which had borne the sceptre) upon his knee, and each bishop kissed it as he passed, but he scarcely perceived their presence. His haughty soul was floating in an ocean of gratified pride. At last he was seated in that place which Alexander once had occupied, and where his predecessors used to receive the homage of Christendom. What a change! Alexander was a helpless fugitive, and Pascal was his creature, his puppet; he himself was the real *Pontifex Maximus*. Absolute master of Church and State, he was at last at the pinnacle of greatness; success had crowned his efforts; all Christendom was his vassal. He glanced towards the kneeling bishops, and then his eyes turned to the crowd as if he could no longer delay the moment when they too should swear him their allegiance.

But God has not yet given to mortals the power to thwart his designs. If for a time he allows the wicked man to prosper, it is to cut him off at the decisive moment of his career.

The hand of the Almighty was raised against the master of the world: the cup was full, and at the very moment when Barbarossa was dreaming of new conquests, the avenging angel hovered around his head.

The ceremony was nearly at an end.

Frederic turned towards the Pope, as if to say:

"Well then, speak, repeat the lesson which I have taught you."

It appeared as though the sermon which had been prepared and revised by the Emperor, was not to Pascal's liking; still he dared not disobey his master's sign--he descended from the altar. Again the music ceased, and a profound silence prevailed through the church, where all listened anxiously for what the Imperial Pope was to say.

But Pascal was not to speak.

Scarcely was he in front of the altar, when an extraordinary movement commenced in the crowd; here and there persons fell lifeless. It seemed as though death was smiting its chosen victims. At first it was thought to be merely the result of fainting-fits, so often met with in crowded assemblages; but as the mortality continued to spread, and the corpses immediately became covered with black spots, a great fear seized the minds of all.

"He is dead! really dead!" said Gervase, who was supporting the body of his friend Ambrose. "May God have mercy on his soul!"

And he made the sign of the cross on his forehead.

"But see how black he becomes!" said Anselm. "By all the saints! it is the plague!"

Scarcely had he spoken, when his words were repeated by the crowd.

"The plague! the plague!" was cried out on all sides.

"God help us! the pestilence is in Rome!" exclaimed the people, as they fled tumultuously through the doors to escape from the infected atmosphere.

At first the Emperor's face flushed with anger, for he imagined that it was a scheme concocted by the malevolence of his adversaries; but when the crowd began to scatter in disorder, and the terrible cry, "the pestilence is among us," was heard, a mortal dread fell upon the Imperial retinue. The bishops grew pale, and many a remorseful conscience whispered,--

"It is the vengeance of an offended God."

Still Frederic gave no signs of fear or agitation; his dauntless spirit was a stranger to any such sentiments. He merely regretted the interruption of the ceremony, that was all. He had erected his triumphal throne in the Church of St. Peter, in the very heart of Christendom, and his eyes gleamed with menace and discontent, as though he would have forced the pestilence itself to recoil before his frown. But death fears no mortal man, not even him who, seated on the topmost pinnacle of successful ambition, thinks to rival God.

Already the plague had struck down some of Frederic's own retinue.

Count Ludolf of Dassel, the Chancellor's brother, had fallen dead, at a few steps from the throne; and his neighbor, the Bishop Alexander of Lodi, a few moments after, shared his fate. The prelates looked with stupid wonder at these corpses, all bearing distinctive marks of the scourge. Not one among them had the courage to stoop down and perform the last duties which the Church enjoins. These men had none of the noble sentiments of their calling; they had the vices and the passions of the court, hands fitted only to wield the sword, and guilty hearts which scarcely now began to be touched by repentance.

Many wished to follow the example set them by the Romans, but the Emperor's voice forbade.

"What means this, my lords? What, Bishop of Luttich, you, one of the most valiant swords in my army, would you too be one of the first to fly from danger? If God sends us a misfortune, we will bear it with becoming resignation."

He ordered the grand marshal to arrange the return to his camp. There was no disorder. The people had left the church, and the square of St. Peter was deserted; for the Romans, in the vain hope of escaping the pestilence, had sought refuge within their dwellings. At first the bugles sounded the march, but the joyous music met with no response; there were no shouts of popular applause; the streets were empty, and on all sides were seen the corpses of the victims. Princes and prelates rode along with downcast eyes and looks expressive of grief and apprehension. Suddenly a soldier fell dead from his horse; the pestilence was among the men-at-arms. The bugles were silent, the cavalcade halted for an instant, and then all was wild confusion; the ranks were broken, and each man dashed madly forward to escape from the infected air of the poisoned city.

All order was lost; the return to camp was like a rout, and even Barbarossa and his consort urged their horses to a gallop to regain their tents.

CHAPTER LV.

THE HAND OF GOD.

The plague continued to rage as violently as it had broken out. Death smote its victims without forewarning: some fell as they were putting foot in stirrup to mount their steeds; others, by the side of the friend whom they were placing in the grave, which had been dug for him through charity.

"God chastises us for our behavior to the Pope," said the Romans.

This feeling spread even among the German soldiery. The tents were emptied of their inhabitants who had fallen victims to the direful contagion. In a few days, many thousands had perished, and among them the Emperor's cousin, the Duke of Suabia, and Diepold of Bohemia; but the bishops were attacked with marked virulence, and it seemed as though not one of them was destined to return to his home. There was a dead silence everywhere, unbroken even by the clash of arms, and naught was heard but the creaking of the death-carts piled up with corpses which were thrown together by hundreds into a common pit. But soon it was no longer possible even to bury them, and the dead bodies lay rotting in the sun; adding by their pestilential odors to the malignity of the disease.

Even the horses were attacked; they fell into a species of stupor which terminated in death. Still, although his camp was almost depopulated, Barbarossa remained unmoved; he hoped that the plague would wear itself out, and that he might resume the great work which it had interrupted. As yet the Romans had not sworn allegiance to the Empire, Pascal had not been installed as sovereign Pontiff and Frangipani still held bravely out in the Castle of St. Angelo, The partisans of Alexander must be entirely destroyed; and to accomplish this Frederic would not yield a step, not even to the plague.

In this determination he was encouraged by Dassel.

"If we give up now," he said, "we are lost. All Christendom will look upon our defeat as a judgment of Heaven. You cannot hereafter undertake anything which will not appear to be marked with the seal of divine displeasure."

Frederic admitted the justice of the policy, and determined to dare everything. He rode through the streets of the camp, striving to encourage his troops. Erwin was always at his side, although he had frequently implored his young kinsman to return to Germany.

"You must go beyond the Alps," he said. "I wish it; and as soon as this Roman question is settled, I will join you."

"But I will not go, my dear godfather, even were the camp peopled with corpses."

The Emperor was deeply touched by this mark of affection, and he pressed the young man's hand with emotion.

One day, Barbarossa returned to his tent, after his usual round of inspection. The destruction of his army seemed inevitable, if it was not soon removed from this pestilential atmosphere, and his indomitable pride was crushed at last.

He ordered the immediate attendance of his chancellor.

Rinaldo was writing in his tent; near him sat his favorite pupil Hillin, who had been nominated upon his recommendation to the bishopric of Augsburg, and the Chancellor was then dispatching his orders and instructions to the chapter, for which Hillin was to start at once.

"You have scarcely as yet the age which is prescribed by the canons," said Dassel; "but the canons are out of date, like many other things. What an absurdity it is to leave talent unrewarded on the pretext of youth! How old are you, Hillin?"

There was no reply.

"I ask you your age."

Still there was the same silence! He turned his head and started back in horror. Hillin was dead, his hand still held the pen, his arms rested on the table, and his head had fallen forward upon the parchment.

Shaking his head in astonishment, Dassel walked towards the corpse and then called for his servants. His fear had passed away, for the Chancellor was not easily agitated.

"Hillin is dead," he said; "the young man had fine prospects, and would have been useful; but dead, he is only a nuisance. Take away this carcass!"

At this moment the Emperor sent for him, and Rinaldo, throwing into the fire the now useless letter, dressed himself in his court-ropes and repaired to his master's presence.

Frederic's face was sad and calm. He replied to his minister's bow with a mute smile, and motioned him to a seat.

"Chancellor," he said; "we have done all that is possible. But Heaven seems inexorable; the

plague rages with renewed fury; two-thirds of my army have perished, and if we remain here longer, the remainder will share their fate."

"Still we must stay here. Our flight will only aggravate our condition; I have foreseen all this. The plague will cease as unexpectedly as it began."

"But if it really were a chastisement from God?" said Barbarossa.

Rinaldo sneered viciously: he looked steadily at the Emperor for a moment, and then answered,--

"We must then suppose that God amuses himself by punishing the Romans every year; for every year the heat raises these noxious vapors from the marshes, and breeds a pestilential fever; it is an unhealthy climate, that is all that can be said."

Barbarossa shook his head.

"Your explanations are not satisfactory," he replied; "this is no fever, it is the plague, and the plague is not the result of mere chance, it is the effect of divine wrath! We must humble ourselves before God!"

"By all means, Sire; and since God opposes our designs, we must give up, and acknowledge ourselves to be beaten by Alexander!"

This remark touched the Emperor's pride, and Rinaldo continued his arguments.

"I thought," he said, "that it was only the rabble who had these ideas about God's judgment--"

A wild shriek closed his speech: the Chancellor was a corpse, and Barbarossa stood gazing upon his confidant, whose features still bore the impress of devilish hate.

The Germans, however, did not abandon the bodies of their princes. All were embalmed and transported from Italy beyond the Alps, to be buried in the cathedrals of their native land. Two large tents were pitched, beneath which were laid out in state the deceased nobles: the bishops in full canonicals, with cross and mitre; the knights in complete armor, as if about to go to battle.

A small escort rode up: in front came the cross, borne by the Bishop of Pavia, and followed by the clergy, and then Rinaldo's body, carried by four of his own soldiers; Barbarossa, Rechberg, and a few of the nobles closed the procession. At the entrance, the Bishop of Pavia recited the prayers for the dead, and then the mortal remains of the once powerful Chancellor were deposited with the others. All, save the Emperor and his kinsman, departed in silence, but Frederic still stood there, sad and dejected, a tear in his eye, gazing upon all that was left on earth of those who had died in his cause. There lay his cousin the Duke of Suabia; near him Diepold of Bohemia, Count Berenger of Sulzbach. Rodolph of Pfulendorf, Henry of Tubingen, and Ludolf of Dassel, the bishops of Prague, Ratisbon, and Augsburg, of Basle, of Spire, and of Constance, of Toul and Verdern and Cologne. Who could say whether he too would not soon take his place among these lifeless bodies? He began at last to look with awful fear upon his eternal future, and almost completely weaned from earthly vanities, he returned to his own apartments.

CHAPTER LVI.

CONCLUSION.

Barbarossa retreated with the remains of his once powerful army towards Germany; but before he had reached Lucca, two thousand more were stricken down by the pestilence. Attacked and annoyed on all sides by the Lombard league, he finally fought his way to the loyal city of Pavia, where he rejoined the Empress Beatrice and was able to take some repose.

But the terrible chastisement at Rome had only quelled his pride for the moment, and it now broke out again, as he turned to crush the Lombard league. The confederation had attained an extension which he had not anticipated; Lodi and Cremona had joined it, and all swore to root the German rule out of Italy.

But although Frederic was preparing to open an energetic campaign against the Lombards, the reasons which had induced our hero to remain in the camp existed no longer, and he felt himself irresistibly drawn towards Castellamare. He was only at two days' journey from the dwelling of his betrothed; but the roads were infested with the light troops of the Lombard league. Still the young knight determined to risk everything, and he informed the Emperor of his

intentions, with little care whether they met with his sovereign's approval or not.

To his surprise, however, Barbarossa listened gravely, but without any marks of disapprobation.

"I should be wrong," he said, "to make any further opposition to a love which has survived so many trials. Bonello acted badly, but I have since learned he is not implicated in this new confederation, although his refusal may have been really perilous to his own safety, and this deserves some consideration. I approve of your choice, Erwin, and wish you every happiness; but the roads are unsafe, and I cannot now give you the proper escort."

"The insurgents will respect my pilgrim's cape," replied the young man.

It was true, the pious spirit of this age forgot every party feeling in presence of the crusader's staff, and even Frederic's hatred was obliged to do this justice to his adversaries.

Rechberg left the Emperor to search for his faithful Gero. As he passed through the palace he met a nobleman who was entering at the gates. It was Heribert of Rapallo.

"Have you aught to lay before His Majesty, sir knight?" asked Rechberg.

"Yes, if you will assist me," replied Heribert, who was attracted by the frank demeanor of our hero; "but I can find no one to present me to him. I have already spoken fruitlessly to several persons, but it is absolutely necessary that I communicate to the Emperor a message from the lady of Castellamare. I must speak with him."

"The lady of Castellamare!" said Erwin, whose heart was beating violently.

"As you are the only person who has shown me any courtesy, you shall know the whole affair. Hermengarde, for so the lady is named, has been betrothed for six years past to the Emperor's cousin, the famous Count Erwin of Rechberg. But the Count went to Palestine, where, it is said, he fell a victim to the Saracens; and Bonello, the lady's father, now wishes her to choose another husband."

"And Hermengarde?" said Erwin, trembling.

"She will obey, provided the Count be really dead, but she still doubts the fact."

The young man grew pale.

"Count Rechberg!" he spoke wildly as if he scarcely knew the import of his words. "But I have heard of him; I think that I remember."

"Where then is he? does he live?" inquired Rapallo, with a voice of mixed joy and sadness.

"He does live."

"God be thanked!"

"Do you know him who seeks Hermengarde's love?" asked Rechberg.

"It is I."

"And yet you would rejoice at the Count's safe return?"

"With all my heart! Hermengarde would have married me only through obedience to her father's wishes."

"You are a noble heart," said Rechberg, taking the other's hand. "Yes, Erwin of Rechberg still lives, and he stands before you now."

Heribert uttered an involuntary ejaculation of surprise and started back; then he bowed respectfully.

"The Emperor's cousin is your friend for life," said Erwin; "it can never be otherwise, after such noble self-devotion. Come with me to my own apartments, for I have many questions to ask you."

On the next day they started with their retinue for Castellamare. The journey was made without interruption, for although they encountered many of the Lombard bands, Heribert's passwords removed every opposition. Erwin soon perceived that his companion belonged to the League; but this circumstance in no way injured him in his consideration. Although thoroughly loyal to his sovereign, Rechberg could not approve of his system of government, and was obliged to admit that the insurrection was by no means without cause. On the second day they reached Castellamare, where joy knew no bounds, and the old Bonello even wept with emotion.

A few months later, the marriage of the long betrothed couple took place in the presence of all the nobility of the province.

Frederic succeeded in retreating into Germany; but he was no longer a conqueror at the head of his army; he was a fugitive.

The catastrophe at Rome had annihilated all his plans, and the people were convinced that God had interfered between him and the Church. His partisans were discouraged and lost all influence; and he was at last compelled to sue for a reconciliation with Alexander.

The meeting of the two sovereigns took place at Venice, where they embraced, and swore a friendship which was never afterwards broken.

No longer guided by the pernicious counsels of his Chancellor, Frederic attended to his duties, and abjured all his errors. He governed his empire with energy and justice; and what he could not accomplish with the Church against him, was an easy task as soon as he submitted to her sway; within a few years he became the most powerful sovereign of the world.

At last, at an advanced age, he left Germany for the Holy Land. But he could not reach the goal which he sought, and on the very frontier of Palestine, on the 10th of June, 1190, he found his death in the freezing waters of the Cyanus.

The crusaders recovered his body, which they buried under the banner of the cross, at Antioch.

Recalled to the presence of his God, in the fulfilment of a holy enterprise, Barbarossa, we may hope, expiated the errors of his past life, and was vouchsafed the forgiveness of his sins.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BARBAROSSA; AN HISTORICAL NOVEL OF THE XII CENTURY ***

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