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A T T I L A .

A ROMANCE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE GIPSY," "ONE IN A THOUSAND," &c, &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, 82 CLIFF-STREET.
1838.

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TO

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR, ESQ.,

THIS BOOK,

AS A FEEBLE TESTIMONY OF STRONG PERSONAL REGARD
AND SINCERE ADMIRATION,
IS DEDICATED, BY HIS FRIEND,

G. P. R. JAMES.

ADVERTISEMENT.

In giving this book to the public I have but little to explain. The reader who takes it up may expect to find something respecting the Princess Honoria. He will, however, find nothing. All that we know of her history is uninteresting, except to those who love to dwell upon the pruriencies of a degraded state of society: all that we know of her character is disgusting to such as love purity and dignity of mind. It would be tedious to the reader to explain why the author has thought fit to alter several names of the persons acting prominent parts in the story of Attila. In so doing he has consulted principally his own ear; and in a few other deviations which he has made from the course of that great monarch's history, he has consulted his own convenience. In regard, however, to the change which he has represented as taking place in the demeanour of Attila, his abandonment of the simple habits which at first distinguished him, and his dereliction from the calm equanimity which he displayed in his early intercourse with the Romans, the author believes that he is justified by the records of history as well as the course of nature. He is inclined to think, also, that if, in regard to the facts of Attila's death, we could display the chameleon truth, in the broad light of day, without any of the shades and hues with which time and circumstances have surrounded her, we should find her colour such as he has represented it; but this, of course, must ever remain in doubt.

A T T I L A.

CHAPTER I.

A LANDSCAPE IN DALMATIA.

Music was in the air, and loveliness was spread out over the earth as a mantle.

There was a voice of many waters--the bland musical tone of mountain streams singing as they wend their way over the smooth round pebbles of their hilly bed towards the sea. And the song of life, too, was heard from every field, and every glade, and every valley; the trilling of innumerable birds, the hum of insect myriads, the lowing of distant cattle, winding down from the uplands to pen or fold, the plaintive, subdued bleating of the patient sheep, the merry voice of the light-hearted herd as he led home his flock from the hills, after a long warm southern day in the maturity of spring. Manifold sweet sounds--all blended into one happy harmony, softened by distance, rendered more melodious to the heart by associations felt but not defined, and made more touching by the soft evening hour--filled the whole air, and spread a calm, bright, contemplative charm over the listening senses.

The eye, too, could find the same delight as the ear, equal in depth, similar in character; for though sweet April had sunk in the warm arms of May, still, even in that land of the bright south, the reign of summer had not yet begun: not a leaf, not a flower, not a blade of grass had lost a hue under the beams of the sun, and many a balmy and refreshing shower, during a long and

humid spring, had nourished the verdure and enlivened the bloom.

From the high round knoll upon the left, crowned with the five tall cypresses which perhaps flourished as seedlings on that spot in the young and palmy days of Greece, might be seen that unrivalled view which has never yet found eye to gaze on it uncharmed--that view which, of all prospects in the world, has greatest power, when suddenly beheld, to make the heart beat fast, and the breath come thick with mingled feelings of wonder and delight. On one side, at about a mile's distance, where the ground sloped gently down towards the sea, rose the palace of Diocletian, vast and extensive, massy without being heavy, and equally sublime from its beauty and its dimensions. Clear, upon the bright back-ground of the evening sky, cut the graceful lines of the architecture; and, though a sudden break in the outline of the frieze, with the massy form of a fallen capital rolled forward before the steps of the magnificent portico which fronted the sea, told that the busy, unceasing, unsparing hand of man's great enemy had already laid upon that splendid building the crumbling touch of ruin; yet, as, it then stood, with the setting sun behind it, and the deep blue shadows of the evening involving all the minute parts of the side that met the eye, the effects of decay even added to the beauty of the object, by making the straight lines of the architecture at once contrast and harmonize with the graceful irregularities of nature whereby it was surrounded. Several groups of old and stately trees, too, still more diversified the prospect on that side; and through the pillars of the portico might be caught the glistening line of the bright sea where it met and mingled with the sky.

Behind, and to the right hand, stretching far away to the north, rose mountain upon mountain, in all the fanciful forms and positions into which those earth-born giants cast themselves in Greece, and over them all was thrown that lustrous purple which in those lands well deserves the name of the "magic light of evening."

Between the knoll of cypresses, however, and those far hills robed in their golden splendour, lay a wide tract of country, gently sloping upward in a thousand sweeping lines, with here and there an abrupt rock or insulated mound suddenly towering above the rest, while scattered clumps of tall old trees, rich rounded masses of forest, villas, farms, vineyards, and olive grounds, filled up the intervening space; and had all been as it seemed--had all those farms been tenanted, had none of those villas been in ruins--would have presented a scene of prosperity such as the world has never known but once.

Still decay had made no very great progress; still the land was richly cultivated; still the population, though not dense, was sufficient; and as the eye ran along the innumerable little promontories and headlands of the bay, might be seen, rising up above some slight irregularities of the ground, a part of the buildings of the small but prosperous town of Salona. Close by the side of that knoll of cypresses, breaking impetuously from a bank above, dashed on the bright and sparkling Hyader; now fretting and foaming with the large rocks amid which a part of its course was bound; now prattling playfully with the motley pebbles which in other parts strewed its bed; now dashing like a fierce steed all in foam where it leaped over the crag into the sunshine; and then, where its clear blue waters spread out uninterrupted under the cool shadow of a hill, seeming--like time to a young and happy heart--to stand still in calm and peaceful enjoyment, even while it was flowing away as quickly as ever.

The eye that followed the Hyader down its course--and there was an eye that did so--rested on the bright and glowing west, and on the fairest, the most entrancing object of all that magic scene; for there, stretched out beneath the setting sun, lay the gleaming waters of the Adriatic, studded all along its shores with a thousand purple islands which rose out of that golden sea like gems.

The air was calm and tranquil; the sky, the unrivalled deep blue sky, which hangs over that most lovely sea, was without a cloud, varying with one soft and equable declension from the intense purple zenith to the warm rosy hues that glowed in the far west. The sea, also, was smooth and peaceful, and would have seemed unbroken by a wave, had not here and there a sudden bending line of light darted over the bosom of the waters, and told that they were moved in the evening light by the breath of the breeze.

Thus appeared the whole scene, when, from the opposite side of the bay, a white sail was seen to glide forward, as if coming from Salona towards the palace of Diocletian, or the little village of Aspalathus. Slowly and peacefully it moved along, giving one more image of calm and tranquil enjoyment; and while it steered upon its way, four sweet voices, sometimes joined in chorus by several deeper tones, broke forth from the mound of cypresses, singing:--

A HYMN TO THE SETTING SUN.

I.

"Slow, slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
Thy course of beneficence done;

As glorious go down to thy Thetis' warm breast
As when thy bright race was begun.
For all thou hast done
Since thy rising, oh sun!
May thou and thy Maker be bless'd!

Thou hast scatter'd the night from thy broad golden way,
Thou hast given us thy light through a long happy day,
Thou hast roused up the birds, thou hast waken'd the flowers.
To chant on thy path, and to perfume the hours--
Then slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
And rise again beautiful, blessing, and bless'd!

II.

"Slow, slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
Yet pause but a moment to shed
One warm look of love on the earth's dewy breast.
Ere the starr'd curtain fall round thy bed,
And to promise the time,
When, awaking sublime,
Thou shall rush all refresh'd from thy rest.

Warm hopes drop like dews from thy life-giving hand,
Teaching hearts closed in darkness like flowers to expand;
Dreams wake into joys when first touch'd by thy light,
As glow the dim waves of the sea at thy sight--
Then slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
And rise again beautiful, blessing, and bless'd!

III.

"Slow, slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
Prolonging the sweet evening hour;
Then robe again soon in the morn's golden vest,
To go forth in thy beauty and power.
Yet pause on thy way,
To the full height of day,
For thy rising and setting are bless'd!

When thou com'st after darkness to gladden our eyes,
Or departest in glory, in glory to rise,
May hope and may prayer still be woke by thy rays,
And thy going be mark'd by thanksgiving and praise!^[1]
Then slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
And rise again beautiful, blessing, and bless'd!"

CHAPTER II.

THE ACTORS IN THE SCENE.

The voices that sung were sweet, thrillingly sweet, and the music to which the verse was wedded of that dreamy, wandering kind which approaches more nearly to the tones of an Æolian harp than to any regular composition. It was, indeed, full of a wild and delicious melody, which was sometimes solemn and sublime, sometimes low and plaintive, and the same general theme might be heard running through the whole; but often the air wandered wide, like a bird upon the wing, and caught a note or two of a gladder or more joyous character, which brightened the general solemnity of the strain, like hope breaking in upon a life of grief. Music had not then reached that perfection which it has since attained; but there was a touching beauty in its fresh simplicity which is now but seldom found. It possessed the free unfettered charms of a graceful nature, cultivated, but not stiffened, by art, and it still went hand in hand with the sister spirit of poetry, in the land where both had birth.

But the hymn which had just floated on the air derived peculiar sweetness from the fine harmony of the voices which sung it. It seemed the varied tones of one family, where each knew

every note in the voice of the other, and modulated his own to suit it, with that spirit of love in the breasts of all, whereof the sweetest harmony that art can compose is but the musical image. In the chorus, however, there joined less cultivated singers; but, nevertheless, the voices were generally fine, and there was an enthusiastic eagerness on the tongues that repeated--

"Then slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
And rise again beautiful, blessing, and bless'd!"

which spoke of that happiness under the bright sun that was then sinking slowly to the breast of ocean, which is the poetry and melody of life.

Under the five tall cypresses, and partly reclining on the bank that sloped to the bright Hyader, sat the group from which those sounds proceeded. It was separated, indeed, into two distinct parts; for--with a very short space of green turf between them and those they served--lay stretched out in various attitudes, some raising the head upon the hand, some reclining the chest upon the folded arms, some supported on the elbow, eight or nine slaves of both sexes.

There was nothing, however, in the countenances of any there which spoke of the bitterness of slavery. There were no signs in their faces or their demeanour of the iron entering into their soul; and though, perhaps, no portion of human nature is originally so debased, and no condition of bondage can be rendered so gentle, that the chain will not gall and the load will not oppress, yet the lot was then common, and the accursed name of slave comprehended nearly, if not fully, one half of the earth's denizens. In the faces of those who lay stretched easily but not intrusively beside those to whom they were bound by that inhuman tie, there might be traced a line of care--perhaps a shade, it might be, of melancholy--gathered by long-preserved and fruitless remembrances of scenes, and objects, and persons far away; and on none, but the countenance of one white-teethed Nubian girl, and a young glad boy, whose life was in the present hour, and to whose mind the past and the future were but a vapoury cloud, was seen the light and laughing merriment of a heart which has known no sorrows in the past. With all the rest, contentment with their lot seemed chastened by griefs experienced and gone by. They could smile, they could sing when occasion called for mirth. Their minds were not irresponsive to sights or sounds of joy; but with them it was from the well, not the fountain, that the sweet waters of enjoyment sprung: they sparkled not up spontaneously, but required to be drawn forth by the hand of another.

Yet if one, remembering their bondage, turned to gaze upon the group near which they sat, the condition of their feelings was easily understood; for the forms and faces that were there--not in the outward lineaments alone, but in the beaming forth of the divine spirit, as much expressed in the air and movements of the whole body as in the heart's interpreter, the face--told that the taskmasters were of that kindly nobility of soul which, in after years, won for a whole class (that did not always merit the distinction) that most expressive name of *gentle*.

Under the cypresses, not exactly where the shade fell--for the sun, near the horizon, had lost his meridian heat, and the western breeze swept over the cool bright waters of the Adriatic--were seated three women and a boy of some fourteen years of age. They were evidently of the highest race of the land in which they lived; and had nothing else bespoke their rank, the broad deep border of purple, of triple die, which edged the snowy robe of the eldest of the party, would have distinguished her as a Roman lady of patrician blood. She was scarcely beyond the middle age; and time had treated her beauty leniently. Somewhat of the elastic grace, and all the slight pliant outline of early youth, was gone, but in contour and dignity much, too, had been gained; and the eye, more calm and fixed, was as bright and lustrous, the teeth as white and perfect, as ever. The hair, drawn up and knotted on the crown of the head, was still full and luxuriant; but, meandering through its dark and wavy masses, might here and there be seen a line of silver gray; while the cheek, which had once been as warm and glowing as the morning dawn of her own radiant land, sorrows calmly borne, but not the less deeply felt, had rendered as pale as the twilight of the evening just ere night reigns supreme.

Her dress was plain and unadorned, of the finest materials and the purest hues; but the gems and ornaments then so common were altogether absent. The consciousness of beauty, which she might once have felt, was now altogether forgotten; its vanity she had never known. As much grace as health, perfect symmetry of form, and noble education from infancy could give, she displayed in every movement; but it was the calm and matronly grace, where all is ease, and tranquillity, and self-possession. The same placid charm reigned in the expression of her countenance. She seemed to look with benevolence on all. Nay, more, as if the sorrows which had reached her in her high station had taught her that in every bosom, however well concealed, there is, or will be, some store of grief, some memory, some regret, some disappointment, there mingled with the gentleness of her aspect an expression of pity, or, perhaps, its better name were sympathy, which existed really within, and formed a tie between her heart and that of every other human thing.

She was, indeed, to use the beautiful words of the poet, "kind as the sun's bless'd influence."^[2] Yet the bright dark eye, the proud arching lip, and the expansive nostrils, seemed to speak of a nature originally less calm, of days when the spirit was less subdued. Time and grief, however, are mighty tamers of the most lion-like heart; and it was with that look of pity, mingling with tender pleasure, that she gazed down upon a beautiful girl of, perhaps, thirteen years of age,

who, leaning fondly on her knees, as the hymn concluded, looked up in her face for sympathetic feelings, while the sweet sounds still trembled on her full rosy lips.

Between the matron and the girl there was little resemblance, except inasmuch as each was beautiful; and though the lineaments, perhaps, regarded as mere lines, took in some degree the same general form, yet there were too many shades of difference to admit the idea that those two fair beings stood in the dear relationship of mother and child, although the fond, relying, clinging affection displayed in the looks of the younger, and the tender anxiety of the matron's smile as she gazed down upon her companion's face, argued affections no less strong between them than such a tie might have produced.

Eudochia--for so was the younger called--offered a lovely specimen of that sort of beauty which, however rare in Italy even now, when the native blood of the children of the land has been mingled with that of many of the fair-haired nations of the north, we find from the writings of Petronius to have been not uncommon in his days. Her hair was of a light brown, with a golden gleam upon it, as if, wherever it bent in its rich wavy curls, it caught and shone in the bright rays of the sun. Her eyes were of a soft hazel, though the long, sweeping black lashes made them look darker than they were: but her skin was of that brilliant fairness which did indeed exceed the

"Expolitum ebur indicum;"

and the rose glowed through it on the cheeks, as pure and clear as in those lands where the veiled sun shines most soft and tenderly. Her features were, indeed, more Greek than Roman; but her complexion spoke, and not untruly, of a mixture in her veins of what was then called barbarian blood by the proud children of the empire. Her mother had been the daughter of a German prince in alliance with Rome; but the Romans of that day had learned to envy the noble Paulinus his success with the beautiful child of the wealthy and powerful barbarian chief. Too short a time, indeed, had their union lasted; for though Eudochia had drawn her first nourishment from her mother's bosom, yet, six months after her birth, the fair wife of Paulinus had left him to mourn her death with two motherless children. He had continued to hold her memory in solitary affection, filling up, as is so common with man, the vacant place left by love in the shrine of his heart with the darker and sterner form of ambition; and while he led forward his son Theodore in the same path, he left his daughter on the Dalmatian shore, with one whose kindred blood and generous nature ensured to the fair girl all a mother's tenderness and a mother's care. For her alone the lips of Eudochia had learned to pronounce those sweetest of words, *my mother*--for her alone had her heart learned to feel the thrill of filial love.

The affection, however, of the Lady Flavia--for so was called the elder of whom we have spoken--was divided. For the love of man, woman has but one place in her heart, but maternal tenderness has many; and the agony of Niobe was not less for every child that died than if she had had but one. Flavia looked upon Eudochia as her child, and loved her as such; but the two others, of whom we have said that group was composed, were in reality her children.

Ammian, the boy, was like his mother in features and complexion, but not in character. More of his dead father's nature had descended to him, more of the wild and daring spirit which, sporting with perils and dangers, contemning pain, and laughing at fear, found food for a bright and eager imagination in scenes and circumstances which, to others, were full of nothing but horror and dismay. His pastime, as a boy, was to climb the mountains, and spring from rock to rock across the yawning chasms; to stand gazing down over the dizzy side of the precipice, and to drink in the sublimity of the scene below; to dash through the wild waves when the southwest wind rolled them in mountains on the shore, or to mingle with the pagan inhabitants, which still filled many of the villages near, and to watch without taking part in those sacrifices which were prohibited under pain of death by the Christian emperors, but which often took place even in the open face of day. His mother put no check upon his hazardous pleasures, for she was Roman enough to wish that her children might never know the name of fear. But yet her heart sometimes sunk with a chilly dread when she witnessed his wild exploits; for though the qualities which prompted them were those for which she had loved his father, yet she could not forget that the same daring spirit had led that father to death, by barbarian hands, in the wilds of Pannonia.

There was one more in the group under the cypresses, and one that must not be passed over in silence. She, like Eudochia, was reclining by her mother's side; but had the great Florentine sought two lovely models from which to depict night and day, none could have been found equal to these two beautiful girls. Ildica,^[3] however, was fully two years older than Eudochia, and those two years made a great difference. Eudochia was a child; Ildica was no longer so. Eudochia was the violet, but Ildica was the rose. Her form, too, spoke it; youth was in every trace: but there was the rounded contour, the graceful sweeping lines, which tell that nature's brightest effort to produce beauty is full and complete. She was at that age when the causeless blush comes frequent, and the unbidden sigh is first known; when the cheek will sometimes glow as if with shame at the innocent consciousness of loveliness; and her heart tells woman that she was created for others. Through the transparent cheek of the Dalmatian girl the eloquent blood played apparent at every word, and the long, lustrous, deep black eyes, the very eyelids of which seemed flooded with light, spoke of feelings within that snowy bosom which were yet to acquire intensity and fire. And yet Ildica fancied herself still a child. So gradual, so calm, had as yet been the transition, as their years passed away in that remote spot without any of the cares, the

turmoils, the passions, and the follies of courts and of cities breaking the tranquil current of their days, that she hardly knew the two years which had effected so great a change in her being had passed otherwise than in infancy. She had never very eagerly sought the light sports and pastimes of Eudochia, and others of the happy age: she had always shown a disposition to meditation and to feeling. It was not that she wanted cheerfulness; far from it; but it was, that through her very gayety was seen a train of deeper thought. There was a character of greater intensity in all she did than is usual in early youth. She loved music, she loved poetry, she loved every art; and her mother saw her own mind reflected in that of her daughter, with a shade, perhaps, of more passionate energy derived from the character of her father.

Thus sat they by the bright stream of the Hyader, whose clear water served to mingle with the wine of their light evening meal, enjoying, with sweet tranquillity of heart, the loveliness of a scene which, remembered from his earliest days, had lured Diocletian thither, some century before, from all the charms of power and empire, to spend his latter hours in a remote province and a private station. Simple as that meal was, consisting of nothing but light cakes of a fine flour, with some dried fruits and some early strawberries, it was more delicious to those who ate it, in that fair scene and that happy hour, than all the innumerable dishes of a Roman supper. Still there seemed something wanting; for--as the last stanza of the hymn was sung, and Eudochia lay reclining on the Lady Flavia's lap, and gazing up in her expressive face--the eyes of Ildica had followed the course of the Hyader down towards the sea, and rested with a longing, anxious look upon the boat that, with slow and easy motion, as the light but steady wind impelled it over the waters, steered onward, for some time, towards that part of the bay near which stood the little village of Aspalathus, a sort of appendage to the palace of Diocletian. Ammian, her brother, had remarked it too, and watched it also; but in a few minutes its course was changed, and its prow turned towards one of the islands. Ildica said not a word, but she bent down her eyes on the grass, and plucked one of the purple crocuses which checkered the green whereon she sat.

"He will not come to-day," said her brother, as if quite sure that the same thoughts were in his bosom and his sister's at that moment; "and, besides, he would not appear in a solitary boat like that. Ten such boats would not have held the gorgeous train which followed him when he came last year to take Theodore away."

"But remember, Ammian, my son," said Flavia, smiling at the eager looks of her two children, "remember, when last he came, our cousin Paulinus was sent to Dalmatia on the emperor's service, as count of the offices, and now he comes but as a private man to see his daughter. He is not one of those degraded Romans who in the present day never travel without an army of domestics. See, the boat has changed its course again. It did but bear up against the current of wind between the islands. Eudochia, my sweet child, it is perhaps your father after all."

As she spoke, the boat, catching the favourable breeze, came more rapidly towards the land, and in a moment after was hidden from their eyes by the wavy ground which lay between them and the Adriatic. "Run, Aspar, run," cried Flavia to one of the slaves; "run and see where the boat lands. Shall we return homeward, Eudochia? we may meet him sooner."

Ildica exclaimed, "Oh, yes!" but Eudochia and Ammian reminded their mother that they had promised to meet Paulinus on the spot where they had parted from him, even where they then sat; and, while they waited in the heart-beating moments of expectation, the light-footed slave again appeared upon the upland, which he had cleared like a hunted deer, and stood waving his hand, as if to tell that their hopes were verified.

For a moment or two he paused, looking back towards the sea, and then, running forward to the cypress, he said, "Yes, lady, yes! they have reached the shore, and are coming hither. I saw them spring from the boat to the landing-place of the palace; and while several ran up towards the portico bearing baggage, four took the path between the rocks which leads up hither by the field of Eusebius, the gardener."

"Was my brother there, good Aspar?" cried Eudochia, eagerly; "was my brother there too?"

"I could not distinguish, sweet one," replied the slave; "the distance was too long for my sight, and the sun was directly in my eyes; but the one that came first was slight in form, and seemed more like your brother than the Count Paulinus himself. There was the lightness of youth, too, in his step, as he bounded up over the rocks like a fawn towards its doe!"

Flavia smiled, and Ildica smiled too; but as she did so there was a slight, a very slight change of colour in her cheek. It grew paler; but it was not the paleness of either apprehension or disappointment; it only spoke of some intense feelings busy at her heart, though what they were she herself knew not. At that moment the slave exclaimed, "Lo, lo! he comes!" and all eyes were turned towards the upland.

CHAPTER III.

THE MEETING.

The lower edge of the sun's broad golden disk touched, or seemed to touch, the rippling waters of the Adriatic, and sea and sky were all in one general glow, when the form of the expected guest rose over the slope, and, with joyful arms outstretched towards the group under the cypresses, he appeared clear and defined upon the bright expanse behind him. The figure was that of a youth of eighteen or nineteen years of age, tall for his time of life, and of that form which promises great after strength. As he stood there, indeed, with his figure partly concealed by the mantle which fell from his shoulders, and with the smooth features, the unfurrowed brow, and beardless chin of youth, turned from the searching rays of the sun, one might have attributed to him many more years than he had in reality numbered; but there was the bounding joy of boyhood still in his steps, as, followed by three persons, among whom the eye of Flavia sought in vain for Paulinus, he sprang across the sloping ground to meet so many that he loved. To Flavia his first salute was given in the warm, the touching, the affectionate kiss of filial love; calling her, as he did so, by the tender name which his heart always willingly granted to her who had watched his infancy and formed his boyhood, "My mother!" His next glance was, certainly, to Ildica, but his words and his embrace were given, first, to his sister Eudochia, and then even to Ammian, whom he also called "his brother."

The words, however, were few, and the embrace short, ere he turned to Ildica, and took her hand. But his aspect was for a moment timid and uncertain, as if he knew not well in what words and what manner he was to greet her. Her eye, however, was full of light; her lip smiled with the irrepressible spirit of joy; her breath seemed to come short with some thrilling emotion in her bosom; and Theodore, growing bolder as her hand touched his, drew her, too, to his arms, and pressed a warmer kiss upon her lips. To her he would not say "My *sister!*" though he began those words which he had so often used towards her; but he stopped short, and his lips murmured, "My--my Ildica!"

If any one marked the agitation of either of those two young and happy beings, it was among the slaves; for Eudochia and Ammian had no eyes as yet for the slightest indications of the heart's inmost feelings; and Flavia, without any other observation, asked eagerly, "But where is Paulinus? Where is your father, Theodore."

"Alas, my mother," replied the youth, "he has been disappointed, and would not make me a sharer therein. Obligated to go into Cappadocia by the emperor's commands, he proceeds from Cæsarea to escort the Empress Eudoxia to Jerusalem. But he has promised, if fate be propitious, to join us all here on his return. He would not let me bear him company; but having given me the charge of some slight business at Salona, left me to hasten hither, and wait his coming."

"Let us return homeward, then, Theodore," said the matron, "and you shall tell us all the news wherewith your young and ever active mind is loaded. I am sure you have not yet learned, my son, to value all the things of the world according to their real lightness, and to suffer what the idle multitude call great events to pass you by as matters which have been acted over and over again a thousand times already, and to be enacted still a million times more in the ages yet to come. Heaven forbid that you should have acquired, since you left us, such sorrowful wisdom! though your father writes to me that you have become a man, whereas you left us a boy. But you linger as if you would fain stay here."

"I ordered the boat to come round hither," replied the youth, "when I found you were all here; and I would willingly gaze again upon all these lovely things. I have beheld many lands, dear Ildica," he added, turning naturally towards her with whom his heart held the nearest communion--"I have beheld many lands since I left you all on this very spot; Athens, the city of Constantine, Ida, and Olympus. My feet have even trodden Tempe; and yet there is no scene so beautiful to my eyes as that lovely sea, with Bratia, and Bubua, and Olyntha, rising like living sapphires from its golden bosom, and those grand Autariatian hills, leading up the soul's flight to heaven."

Without further question, they all once more laid themselves down upon the turf; feeling that Theodore would gladly see the sun set in that spot with which so many memories of early happiness were associated; and for a few minutes they left him in silence to enjoy the delight of his return. He gazed round the prospect; and it was easy to see that it was not alone the loveliness that his eye rested on which busied his thoughts, but that remembrance was eagerly unclasping with her fairy touch the golden casket of the past, and displaying, one by one, the treasured and gemlike memories of many joyful hours. As he gazed, the last effulgent spot of the sun's orb sunk below the sea; and he turned his look upon Ildica, on whose hand his own had accidentally fallen. Her eyes were full of liquid light; and her cheek was glowing as warmly as that sky from which the sun had just departed.

"And now, Theodore," said Flavia, with a smile, "tell us what tidings you bring; and first, before one word of the wide public news, say, what of your father? How is he in health? how fares he at the court? Is he as much loved as ever?"

"I had forgotten," replied Theodore, "in the joy of coming back--in the dreamlike and scarcely certain feeling of being here once more among you all--I had forgotten everything else. Paulinus is well, my mother; and his favour with the emperor and empress higher than ever, though he is not loved by Chrysapheus; but he fears him not. Here, Zeno!" he continued, addressing one of the servants who had followed him, and who had now mingled with the slaves of Flavia--"give me the case which I bade you bring;" and from a richly-chased silver casket which the slave laid beside him he drew forth a string of large and perfect pearls. "These, Eudochia," he said, throwing them over his sister's neck, "these from the empress, for her goddaughter; and this," he added, taking the rich collar of emeralds which lay below--"and this from my father, Paulinus, for his dear Ildica. Many were the messages of love," he continued, as he placed the splendid present sent by his father in the hand of the beautiful girl whom it was to adorn, and, with the playfulness of boyhood not yet passed away, twined, smiling, the links of emeralds round her arm--"many were the messages of love my father bade me give to all; and to you, my mother, I bear this letter: but let me be the first to tell you that your possession of the palace is confirmed by the emperor, and that the estates withheld from you by an unjust judge are restored."

"Thank you, my son, thank you," replied Flavia, opening the thread with which the letter was bound round; "but this light is too faint to enable me to decipher your father's epistle. Let us to the boat, my Theodore, and so homeward; for I long to learn more of what has passed at Byzantium, and the twilight is every moment getting a grayer hue."

The youth lingered no longer, but rose with all the rest; and while Flavia, talking to Ammian, who often looked behind, led the way over the upland and down the path towards the sea, Theodore followed, at some little distance, with Eudochia clinging to his left arm, and with his right hand clasping that of Ildica. As they went wandering onward through the sweet-smelling copses of myrtle, which sheltered the grounds of a neighbouring garden from the east wind, Eudochia asked a thousand questions of her brother, and marvelled much that he had grown so tall and strong in the short absence of nine months. Ildica said not a word; but she listened to the tones of his voice as he replied to his sister; she felt the touch of his hand as it held hers; she saw the brother of her love--the more than brother--returned from a far distance and a long absence; and a new happiness that she had never known before filled her heart with emotions too intense for speech. Did she know what she felt? did she investigate the nature of the busy, tumultuous sensations that then possessed her bosom? Neither! the absence of one with whom she had dwelt in affection from her infancy had, indeed, taught her that there were strange feelings in her heart, different from any that she had ever experienced before; but, oh! sweet and happy skill of woman, she had closed her eyes against all investigation of what those feelings were, lest she should find anything mingling with them which might render them less blessed. It was not for her to discover for herself that which was reserved for another to explain.

The considerate slaves lingered somewhat farther still behind, caring for the cups and vessels which had served the evening meal, and listening with the wondering ears of hermits to the news brought by their fellows from the capital of the Eastern world. Much, too, had those slaves to tell of all the splendid scenes which were hourly taking place in Constantinople, and the high favour and honour of their master, Paulinus, at the imperial court. Each feeling his importance increased by the honours and virtues of his lord, exalted in no measured terms the power and dignity of Paulinus; and to have heard the praises of his menials, one might believe that he excelled in learning and in talents the greatest men of literature's most golden days, and rivalled in the field the most renowned warriors of either Greece or Rome. One thing, at all events, was to be gathered from their discourse, and to be received without abatement; which was, that he possessed the great and happy talent of making himself loved by those who served him. Such, indeed, was his character; dignified, but not haughty, to his equals; respectful, but not slavish, to his superiors, he had always a kindly word or a warm smile to give to those whom fortune had placed beneath him. He did not court popularity; and the vulgar gratulations of the circus would have been offensive to his ear; but to a menial or to a woman he at once unbent the calm and philosophic reserve of his demeanour for the time of their temporary communication; and, with a gleam of kindly warmth, he cheered all those who approached him, as weaker or less fortunate than himself. Such a tribute is due to a man whose innocence even was not his friend, and who awakened jealousies even while he strove to disarm them.

Speaking thus of their well-loved lord, the slaves followed slowly till they approached the shore; and then, running forward to make up for their tardiness by momentary alacrity, they officiously aided the boatmen to push the boat close up to some gray rocks, which, shining through the clear blue water for many a foot below the ripple that checkered the surface, afforded a sort of natural pier for the party to embark. Flavia and her companions took their seats in the stern, and six or seven of the slaves placed themselves in the bow, the rest proceeding along the shore towards the palace. Ammian, leaning over the side in his fanciful mood, gazed down upon the small waves as they were dashed from the path of the boat; and then, catching a rippling gleam of yellow light tinging the crest of one of those tiny billows, he looked up to the heavens, where, just in that spot of deep sky towards which the streamer of the aplustrum turned, calm, and large, and bright, rose Hesperus above the world. He gazed upon it for several minutes with a look of rapt enjoyment, as if for the time he had forgotten everything in the universe but that one bright solitary star. Ildica had hitherto sat between her mother and Theodore, listening in silence to the brief and broken tales of his late travels which he was telling; but as a pause ensued, she fixed her eyes upon Ammian, and watched him with a soft smile, as if she knew what was passing in his thoughts, and waited to see what turn the fancy

would take. From time to time her eyes appealed to Theodore, and then turned again to her brother, till at length her sweet musical voice, speaking her pure native tongue, but slightly touched and softened by the Greek accent, was heard breaking the momentary silence-which had fallen upon them all.

"Sing it, Ammian," she said, speaking to his unuttered thoughts, "sing it! Theodore will hear it well pleased. It is my mother's poetry, written since you left us, Theodore: sing it, Ammian!"

The boy looked up into his sister's eyes with a gay smile, and then poured suddenly forth in song a voice clear and melodious as her own. The first two stanzas he sung alone; but at the end of the second, and of each that succeeded, all those who knew the music took up the first as a chorus, sending sweet harmony over the twilight waters, while the rowers with their oars kept time to his

SONG TO THE EVENING STAR.

I.

Hesperus! Hesperus! in thy bright hand
Bearing thy torch, lit at day's parting beams,
Shed thy sweet influence o'er our dear land,
Sooth thou our slumbers and brighten our dreams.

II.

Hesperus! Hesperus! each closing flower
Yields thee the sigh of her odorous breath,
Thine, too, the nightingale's musical hour,
Thine be the offering of song and of wreath.
Hesperus! Hesperus! &c.

III.

Hesperus! Hesperus! holding thy way
Lone, but serene, 'tween the day and the night,
Guide all our hearts with the same even sway,
Soften each sorrow and calm each delight.
Hesperus! Hesperus! &c.

IV.

Hesperus! Hesperus! star of repose!
Herald of rest to the labours of day!
Through worlds and through ages, where'er thy light glows,
Honour and thanks shall attend on thy ray.
Hesperus! Hesperus! &c.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG LOVERS.

It was more than an hour after the boat had reached the landing-place, and, fatigued with a long, bright, happy day, Ammian and Eudochia had sought the repose of hearts at ease; while Flavia, sitting with her daughter and Theodore in the small chamber near the great Corinthian hall in the palace of Diocletian, busied herself with manifold questions in regard to those friends of other years, in Constantinople and in Rome, from whom she had voluntarily separated herself, in order to lead her children up to years of free agency, at a distance from the luxury and corruption of either great metropolis. The anecdotes which he had to relate, the little traits and rumours which he had collected concerning those whom she had once loved dearly, seemed of

greater interest to the Lady Flavia than even the news of more personal importance which he had told her. Yet that news imported that the cession of a portion of Illyria by Valentinian to Theodosius was completely defined--that the dwelling in which she had found a home, by the interest of Paulinus, was now fully transferred from the monarch of the West, who had shown a strong disposition to despoil her of her lands in distant provinces, to the chief of the Eastern empire, who, on the contrary, had hitherto given her kindly aid and protection; and that her possession of that sweet spot, near which many of the estates of her dead husband lay, was confirmed to her by the hand of Theodosius himself.

The lamp had been placed at her right hand, in order that she might peruse the letter of Paulinus; but still she had not proceeded to that task. What were the feelings which stayed her, it were difficult to say; but the open pages lay unread by her side; and though she more than once took them up, as if to begin, she laid them down again as often, and asked some new question. At length, as the moonlight found its way through the half-drawn curtains of the door, she once more raised the letter, saying, "Well, I will read it now," and her eye again fixed upon the first few words.

"Notwithstanding, gentle Flavia," so the epistle ran, "the desire I had expressed to keep hidden from my son and our sweet Ildica our hopes and purposes, yet feelings that I cannot well explain, but which I will now attempt to depict, have induced me, sure of your consent and approbation, to tell him, ere he left me--perhaps for the last time--that it was my wish and hope, if his own heart seconded my desire, that he should in his twentieth year choose the one we both so dearly love for his bride."

Flavia raised her eyes to her daughter and the son of Paulinus, who had, in the occupation which had just employed her, a fair excuse for speaking in low and gentle murmurs. They had farther drawn back the curtains, and were gazing from the door upon the moonbeams which lighted up the great hall; and a bright, warm smile upon the mother's face told that her own heart took kindly part in the fond feelings which were so busy in theirs. She turned to the letter again, however, without comment, and read on. "I am about," continued Paulinus, "to travel through the provinces, and the will of God may require that I shall never return. I know not why, but I have a sadness upon me. As the sun goes down, small objects cast long shadows; and I have fancied that I once, and only once, beheld a cold look in the eye of the emperor towards me, a triumphant smile on the countenance of Chrysapheus; yet if ever omens were infallible, they would be the smiles of our enemies and the coldness of our friends. Nevertheless, let me acknowledge all my weakness--weakness which philosophy cannot conquer, and which it were wisdom to conceal from any other eye than thine, oh, thou that hast been as a sister to my widowed heart, as a mother to my orphan children. Before any evil augury could be drawn from the looks of others, my own heart seemed to feel the coming on of fate. There has been a shadow on my spirit, an apprehension of coming evil, a sensation of neighbouring danger, such as domestic animals feel when near a lion, even without seeing it."

Flavia laid down the page, murmuring, "And is it so, Paulinus? alas, and is it so? Go forth, my children," she added, abruptly, seeing them still standing in the doorway; "you seem as if you longed to taste the moonlight air. Go forth! It is a grand sight to gaze upon the waters of the Adriatic from that noble portico. It expands the heart, it elevates the mind, it raises the soul to the God who made all things. Go forth, then, my children, I would willingly be alone."

They needed no second bidding; for she told them to do that which had lain as a longing at their hearts ever since she had begun to read. Not a year before, when they had last parted, they would have waited no command--nay, no permission; but would at once, in the unconscious liberty of the young heart, bound forth to enjoy the scenes they loved, in the society that they loved not less--that of each other. But a change had come over their feelings since then, rendering all their intercourse more sweet, a thousand times more sweet, but more timid also. Theodore, indeed, knew why; for his father's parting words--the solemn sanction which Paulinus had given to his future union with Ildica, in case death should prevent a father's lips from pronouncing the blessing at their marriage feast--had opened his eyes to the nature of his own sensations. No sooner had the few first words been uttered by Paulinus than he had felt at once that his love for Ildica was more than fraternal affection; that it was different--how different!--from that which he experienced towards Eudochia; how different from that which he entertained towards any other human being! With Ildica, the knowledge was more vague: it was more a sensation than a certainty. So long as Theodore had been with her she had gone on treating him as a brother; but with the feelings of her heart changing towards him still, as imperceptibly, but still as completely, as the green small berry changes to the purple grape, the verdant bud to the expanded and to the yellow leaf. So long as he had been with her she had felt no alteration, though it took place; but during his absence she meditated on those things long and deeply; and on his return she met him with not less affection, but with deep and timid emotions, mingling a consciousness with her every look, which was sweet to the eye that saw it, and that wished it to be so.

Theodore raised the curtain, and Ildica passed out; but ere she had taken two steps in that grand moonlight hall, Theodore's hand clasped hers, and he led her on through all those splendid apartments--which have been, even in ruins, the wonder and the admiration of all after days--to the vast colonnade, six hundred feet in length, which fronted and overlooked the beautiful Adriatic. As they passed, in the various apartments of the slaves and domestics were to be seen lights, and to be heard many a gay voice laughing; and at the end of the principal streets of the

palace, for it had its streets as well as corridors, two or three groups were seen playing in the moonlight with polished pieces of bone, or, with loud and vehement gesticulations, disputing about their game. Theodore almost feared that the portico itself might be tenanted by some such party; and his heart had anticipated an hour of lonely wandering with her he loved so eagerly, that he might not have brooked disappointment with old and stoical patience. That portico, however, was considered by the general inhabitants of the palace, and those also of the neighbouring village, as in some degree sacred ground. It was there that the great emperor, after having conquered and reigned in glory through the prime of life, after having satisfied the vengeful zeal of his counsellors against the Christian sects, which now, in spite of all his persecutions, peopled the whole land, after having made his name awful by deeds of blood not less than by deeds of magnificence, had been accustomed to sit, self-stripped of his power, and to gaze out, *after having been an emperor*, upon nearly the same scene which his eyes beheld *before he was anything but a slave*. Although little more than a century had elapsed since the death of Diocletian, his fate and history, his acts and his character, had been strangely distorted by tradition; and though the peasantry had not learned to look upon him as a bad man, or to execrate him as a tyrant, yet the extraordinary vicissitudes which he had hewn out for himself, the vague legends of his acts during life, and the mystery attaching to his death, surrounded his memory with a fearful awe, which held the people of the neighbourhood aloof from the spot for which he had shown such peculiar fondness, when night covered the world with her dim and fanciful shades.

The portico was vacant; happy sounds rose up from the shore, where the fishermen were lingering beside their boats; and a merry laugh, or snatches of some light song, were heard from the neighbouring village, sinking into the hearts of Ildica and Theodore with the power of a charm, waking associations of sweet domestic joy, dim and undefined, but thrilling--potent--overpowering. Oh! who can tell the many magic avenues through which all the external things of the wide universe find, at some time or other, means of communicating with the inmost heart--avenues, the gates of which are shut till, at some cabalistic word of grief, or joy, or hope, or fear, they suddenly fly open, and we find in our bosom a thousand sweet and kindred fellowships, with things which had never learned to touch or agitate us before.

Glad and cheerful, yet calm, were the sounds that broke occasionally upon the listening ear of night; and grand and solemn, but still gentle, was the scene which lay stretched beneath the risen moon; but the sensations which were in the breasts of the two rendered those sounds and sights a thousand fold sweeter, a thousand fold more dear; and, in return, the gay, distant voices, and the calm, wide, moonlight sea, seemed to draw forth and render intense, even to overwhelming, in the souls of Theodore and Ildica,

"Into the mighty vision passing,"

the inborn joy of all the new emotions to which that day had given life within their hearts. They paused and listened to the melody of innocent mirth, and paused and gazed upon the bright world before them. Ildica's hand trembled in that of Theodore, and her heart beat quick; but he felt that she was his, and that she was agitated; and with the gentleness of true affection, though without any definite plan for sparing her, he took the very means of telling his first tale of love so as to agitate as little as possible the young and tender being, all whose deepest feelings were given to him alone.

"Hark!" he said, "hark, dear Ildica! how gay and sweet those merry voices sound! Some lover come back from wandering like me, tells the glad story of his journey done to the ear of her who has watched for him in absence."

Ildica grew more calm, and raised her eyes, too, to Theodore, not without some feeling of surprise, so different was his tone, so much more manly were his words than when they had parted. There had been, up to that moment, one thing, perhaps, wanting in her love towards him--the conscious feeling of man's ascendancy: she had loved with passion deep, sincere, and ardent; but she had loved as a girl, and looked upon him still as the companion of her early sports. His words and tone--the words and tone of one who had mingled with, and taken his place among men--put the last rose to the wreath. She felt that thenceforth to him she could cling for protection--to him she could turn for guidance and direction.

But Theodore went on. "Some lover," he said, "or perhaps some husband, Ildica, returned from the labours of the day to home, and happiness, and sweet domestic love! Oh, dear Ildica, since I have been away, often have I, in wandering through different provinces, lodged in the dwellings of traders in the towns, or in the cottages of shepherds and labourers in the mountains and the plains; and the most beautiful, the most blessed thing that I have ever seen has been found as often, if not oftener, in the hut of the herd, or the house of the common merchant, as in the marble palaces of the Cæsars, and within the walls of imperial cities. Oh, that sweet domestic love! that blessing--that bright blessing! which, like the glorious light of the sun, shines alike on every condition and on every state, cheering, enlivening, enlightening, all who shut it not out from their own dark hearts by vices and by crimes. Hark, hark! dear Ildica, how those gay voices seem to chime to my words, speaking of love, and joy, and hope! Oh, Ildica, dear Ildica! may not such things be also for you and me?"

Ildica sunk down on the stone seat by which they had been standing, but she left her hand still in his, and he felt it tremble. Nor did he himself speak unmoved; for his ardent nature, and the first breaking forth of those dear and treasured thoughts, shook his whole frame; and scarcely daring to trust his lips with further words, he placed himself by her side, murmuring only, "Dearest Ildica!" She answered only with a long-drawn, agitated sigh; and, gliding his arm round her soft waist, he drew her gently to his bosom.

"Oh, Theodore, is not this wrong?" she asked, but without attempting to free herself from his embrace.

"Wrong, my Ildica? wrong, my beloved?" he exclaimed: "oh, no! God forbid that I should ever seek to make you do or feel aught that is evil! No, no, dearest, my father's blessing will attend our union; he has promised, he has given it: our dear mother's consent was spoken to him long ago!"

"Indeed!" cried Ildica.

"Yes, indeed," he said, pressing her again closer to his bosom, from which she had partly raised herself as she spoke. "Yes, indeed, Ildica! Joyful did my father's words sound in my ear, as he told me that, if I could win your love, I might hope for your hand. Nothing now is wanting to my happiness but one dear word from my Ildica's sweet lips. Oh, speak it, beloved! Speak it; and say you will be mine." She could not find voice to utter the deep feelings of her heart; but her cheek sunk glowing upon his shoulder, and their lips met in the first dear, long, thrilling kiss of happy and acknowledged love.

CHAPTER V.

THE DISASTER.

From a dream of happiness such as mortal beings know but once on this side of the grave--a dream of happiness in which all the brightest, noblest, most joyful feelings of the fresh, unsullied, unexhausted heart of youth burst forth, like the streams of the Nile, from a thousand beautiful sources, Ildica and Theodore woke at length, and prepared to return to the side of her mother, to make her a sharer in their joy, and tell her how blessed, how supremely blessed they felt. Clinging close together in attitudes of tenderness, from which Attic sculptors might have learned yet another grace, they rose and moved along the portico. They moved, however, but slowly, lingering still for some fond word, some affectionate caress, or pausing in the scene, hallowed for ever in their eyes by the first spoken words of love, to gaze over it again and again between the colossal pillars of the portico. Over that scene, however, had by this time come a change--one of those sudden, inexplicable alterations not uncommon in southern climates. The moon, which by this time had wandered on far enough to warn them that the crowded moments had flown quickly away, was still hanging over the Adriatic, and pouring forth that glorious flood of light which makes the stars all "veil their ineffectual fires;" but the sky was no longer without clouds, and catching the light upon their rounded but not fleecy edges, the large heavy masses of electric vapour swept slow over the lower part of the sky, between the bright orb and the islands that slept beneath her beams. Theodore and Ildica paused to mark them, as slowly contorting itself into hard and struggling forms, one particular mass lay writhing upon the horizon, like some giant Titan wrestling with agony on his bed of torture. At the same time the breeze, which was balmy, though calm, during the evening, became oppressively hot, with a faint phosphoric smell in the air, and a deep silence seemed to spread over the whole world. The cigala was still, the voices on the shore had ceased, the merry laugh no longer resounded from the open cottage door, and the nightingale, which had prolonged her song after all the rest was silent, ceased also, and left a solemn hush over the whole universe.

"What strange forms that cloud is taking," said Theodore, called even from the thoughts of his own happiness by the sudden alteration of the scene: "and how quiet everything is. Doubtless, there will be a storm to-night. Alas! for those who are upon the treacherous sea."

"But your father," said Ildica; "he goes by land, Theodore. Is it not so?"

"Not so, dearest," replied Theodore; "he visits first Antioch, and then proceeds by land; but it is not for him I fear, as I heard of his landing while I was on the journey hither; but those strange clouds and the heat of the air must surely augur thunder to-night; and I saw a whole fleet of boats this morning at Tragurium, ready to put to sea."

"It is indeed warm," said Ildica; "I feel almost faint with the heat. Had we lived a few centuries

ago, Theodore, we might have drawn evil auguries for ourselves and for the fate of our affections from those hard clouds, and the dull and almost mournful silence which has fallen over the world."

"Out upon auguries, my beloved," he replied; "we hold a better faith, and place our trust in God, who made our hearts and formed us for each other. We will confide in him, my Ildica; and for those who do so, signs and portents are but proofs of his power, which should strengthen, not shake our faith."

As he spoke he turned to lead her into the palace; but at that moment the low, sad howling of a dog broke the stillness of the night; and a figure, the face of which was turned from the moonlight, but which Ildica at once recognised as her mother, appeared at the end of the colonnade, and advanced towards them. Ildica and Theodore hastened to meet her, and each took and kissed one of her fair hands. "Give us your blessing, oh my mother!" said the youth; "we have been very happy. I have told Ildica how I love her. I have told her what hopes my father has given me; and she has promised to share my lot and make my home joyful."

"Bless you, my children, bless you!" replied Flavia, while Ildica hid her face on her mother's bosom, and Theodore again pressed his lips upon her hand. "Ye are young lovers, indeed; but still my blessing be upon you; and oh! may God grant that in the course of that love which is made to render us happy, you may be more fortunate than the parents of either! Your father, Theodore, and I have both lost those we loved as fondly as you love one another; but may better fate be yours, my children! may you never lose each other; but go on in the same warm affections through a long life, and death scarcely separate you, till we all meet again in heaven."

Flavia raised her eyes towards the sky, and for a moment remained in silence, though her lips still moved. The next instant, however, she added, "I came out to seek you, not because I thought you long absent, nor because I had any cause of fear; but I know not how or why it is I have a painful, apprehensive anxiety hangs upon me to-night, which will not let me rest. Perhaps it is the sultry heat of the atmosphere; the air has grown very oppressive; even the animals seem to feel it. Your sister's dog, Theodore, would not rest in her usual place by my feet, but ran out through the curtains; and Aspar told me as I passed that it had fled to the garden. How the cattle, too, are lowing in the village stalls! Do you not hear them? Does the wind come from Bratia?"

"Nearly," replied Theodore; "but cast away melancholy, my dear mother. Oh! that Ildica and I could give you a share of our happiness!"

"You do! you do, dear youth!" replied Flavia; "I do share in your happiness; and this melancholy will pass away again. Those who have known much grief are subject to such thick-coming fancies; and the first touch of deep sorrow brushes off the bloom of hope, crushes the firm confidence of the heart, and leaves shrinking apprehension to tremble at every breath; but let us in; there is a storm coming on."

As she spoke there was a low melancholy sound came rushing over the waters of the Adriatic; the clouds, which had before passed so slow and silently along, seemed now agitated by some unknown cause, and rushed in dark black volumes over the moon; while here and there, amid the clefts and rents of their dark canopy, looked out a calm bright star. But still the mourning sound increased; and the bending branches of the olives down below told that the breath of the tempest was already felt. The next instant, ere the lovers and Flavia could escape from the colonnade, the blast of the hurricane struck the building and shook the massy structure to its foundations. Behind the shelter of a pillar the two women escaped; but Theodore, strong and active as he was, found himself dashed forward against the wall of the palace; while leaves, and flowers, and broken boughs of trees were whirled about in the air, and strewed the marble pavement of the portico. It lasted but for a moment, however, dying away as it came, with a low moan; while a few large drops of rain followed, as if the punished demon of the storm fulfilled his allotted task of destruction with tears and with regret.

"Flavia! Ildica! you are not hurt!" cried Theodore, springing towards them.

"No! no!" replied Flavia; "we are safe; though it was a fearful gale. But let us in, Theodore; it may return. Hark! Good God! what is this?"

Well might she so exclaim. The wind had gone by; even its murmur had ceased; when suddenly there rose a roar from the earth as if ten thousand war-chariots had met in the shock of battle. The lightning burst forth from the clouds, and flashed along amid the innumerable dark gigantic pillars of the colonnade, lighting the whole of its vast extent with the blue and ghastly glare; the thunder rolled from the zenith to the horizon with a peal which would have deafened the ear to the loudest voice. But the lightning flashed, and the thunder rolled, scarcely seen or heard; for below, around, was a more dreadful visitation still. The earth shook beneath their feet; the pavement rose and fell like the waves of the sea; the enormous columns tottered and reeled; the walls of massive stone bent to and fro; while the roar of the earthquake and the echoing of the thunder were rendered more terrific by the crash of falling building, and the shrieks both from the interior of the palace and the more distant village. Theodore cast his arms round Ildica and her mother; and, staggering along, hurried them down the steps across the level in front of the palace, and out of danger of its shaken walls. It was the impulse of the moment which made him act, and Flavia yield; but she paused ere they were many steps from the building, exclaiming,

"My children! Theodore, my children! Your sister and Ammian! I must go back."

"And I will go too!" said Ildica, in a voice so calm that it made her lover turn suddenly to gaze upon her, who seemed to have lost the timid girl in the first moment of danger and horror.

"No, no!" he exclaimed. "Dear mother, hear me! There will be a second shock doubtless, but it will be some minutes ere it comes. Hasten with Ildica beyond the Golden Gate and up the side of the hill, out of reach of all buildings! I will seek Ammian and Eudochia, and join you in a moment. Fly, fly, dear mother! I leave in your charge what I value more than life. Save her!"

Flavia hesitated; but that moment a slave with a torch rushed out into the portico seeking them, while the motion of the ground subsided, and all became still. It was the swift runner, Aspar, who came up, crying, "Fly, lady! fly, dear mistress! the worst shock is never first; fly to the hills, fly!"

"Away with them, Aspar, beyond the Golden Gate," cried Theodore, breaking from them; "I will join you instantly! Away, away!"

Thus saying, he darted from them, rushed through the portico, and crossed the side avenue, while the wild clamour from the principal street of the palace echoed through the long halls and galleries; and the deep darkness in which that part of the building was plunged rendered the distant sound of wailing and of terror more frightful. On, on he went, though fragments of stone and cement obstructed his way, and crumbled under his feet, showing that even the first shock had been severe enough to shake that strong and massive fabric through every part. But Theodore still hurried forward, till, at length, in his haste, as he passed the spot where he and Ildica had seen the slaves playing on the pavement, he stumbled over a large soft body, and, stooping down, he felt with horror beneath his touch the yet warm form of a man, with the newly-fallen capital of a neighbouring column lying with crushing weight upon his loins. The long hair floating on his shoulders showed Theodore that the unhappy being had been a slave; but still the instinctive benevolence of the youthful heart made him pause a moment to ascertain if life were extinct. He spoke, but not a tone answered; he lifted the hand, in which life's soft warmth yet lingered; but not even a convulsive movement of the fingers told that one spark of the immortal fire still glowed in the mortal body. All was motionless, insensible, lifeless; and Theodore hurried on.

The gates of the Cyzicene hall were open; the glare of lights and the sound of voices came from within; and Theodore instantly entered, as the shortest way to the apartments occupied by Flavia and her household. Never, perhaps, did terror in all its forms present itself more awfully than in that grand and splendid chamber. There, as a general point of meeting, had collected eighty or ninety of the slaves and domestics of both sexes. Fear had not yet had time to subside; and with pale and haggard faces, livid lips, and wide anxious eyes they remained, some clinging to the columns which had so lately been shaken like reeds; some kneeling in the midst, and uttering the confused and terrified prayer; some cast down upon the pavement in utter self-abandonment; some hiding their eyes in their garments, as if they could shut out the approaching horrors that they feared to witness; some gazing wildly up to the roof, which they expected momentarily to fall upon them. Large fragments of the beautiful paintings which had covered the walls were now seen dashed about upon the floor; and a wide rent in the solid masonry over the door showed how insecure was the shelter which those terrified beings had sought from the night of the earthquake.

In the midst stood, gathered together in the hour of danger, three dusky Numidians, with a servant from the neighbouring Pentopolis, who, in happier times, had been too near akin to the dark Africans to live with them in amity, but who now clung to them for support; while a gigantic slave from the Porphyry mountains, one of the few who looked the unusual dangers of the night in the face with calm determination, was seen in the front, crushing out under his large foot a torch which one of his more terrified companions had let fall. There were two or three others who stood near, and, with arms folded on their chests, and dark brows full of stern resolution, gazed towards the door, as if waiting what horror was to come next.

In the hands of some of the bolder slaves were the torches which gave light to the hall; and the moment Theodore entered, one started from the group, exclaiming, in tones of eager--ay, and affectionate inquiry--though they were but slaves, "The Lady Flavia? Where is the Lady Flavia? Where is the Lady Flavia?"

He spoke as an old servant might speak to a boy he had known from infancy; but Theodore was no longer a boy; for the last nine months and the last few hours together had made him a man in mind as well as in body, and he replied with that prompt tone of commanding courage which won instant obedience.

"She is safe," he cried, gazing round him. "Up, up, all of you! Lie not there in prostrate terror, herding together like sheep beneath the lightning. Up, if you would save your lives! Up, and away! You with the torches go before them! Out beyond the Golden Gate you will find your mistress and Aspar. Keep close to the walls till you are in the open field! Another shock is coming, and the parapets and capitals fall first, but fall far out from the buildings. Crowd not together so, and crush each other in the doorway! Out, coward! would you kill your fellows to save your own miserable life? So! quietly--but speedily. You, Cremera! and you, and you, Marton,

come with me! You are brave and honest, and love your lady. Snatch up whatever jewels and valuable things you see, and follow quick! Where is Eudochia? Where my brother Ammian?

"Her chamber is within the Lady Flavia's!" said the Arab Cremera; and, darting through the lesser doorway, Theodore hastened thither, followed by the three he had called, and one or two others, gathering up caskets, and scrinia, and gold, and jewels, as they hurried through the more private apartments of the palace. A sound of murmuring voices was before him as he came near the chamber of Flavia; but, dashing aside the curtain, he rushed in.

Kneeling upon the floor, as she had risen from her bed in terror, with her bright hair flowing in waving lines over her shoulders, her hands clasped, and her eyes raised to heaven as her lips trembled with prayer, was Eudochia; while beside her, fainting with terror, lay the negro girl who had sat beside the Hyader, lately so gay and thoughtless. Near her stood Ammian, whose first impulse had been to seek her; but in whose dark imaginative eyes, instead of terror, shone a strange and almost sportive fire, as if his excited fancy felt a degree of pleasure even in a scene so full of danger and of horror. Nevertheless, he was eagerly entreating his fair *sister*, as he called her, to conquer her terrors, and to fly with him to seek their mother, exclaiming, "Come, come, Eudochia, you shall pray to-morrow--or to-night, if you like it better, when once you are somewhere safe. Your prayers will go to heaven in but tattered garments, if they have to force their way through yon rift in the roof. Come, come! Oh, here is Theodore! Where are my mother and Ildica?"

"Both safe!" replied Theodore. "But this is no hour for sport, Ammian;" and, without question, he caught up his sister in his arms. "You take the casket from Cremera, Ammian!" he continued. "Let him take yon poor girl! Hark, there is a rushing sound! Quick, quick, it is coming again! On before, Ammian. On before, to the Golden Gate!"

Eudochia clung to his breast, and, hurrying on with a step of light, he bore her through the many chambers of the building, till, turning through the great hall called the Atrium, he entered one of the transverse streets, and paused a moment to listen if the sound continued. All, however, was still and dark, except where the murmur of voices and the rush of feet were heard from a distant spot, and where a number of torches appeared gathered together near the beautiful octagonal temple of Jupiter, or where from the apartments occupied by the old and incapable conservator of the palace were seen issuing forth two or three slaves with lights, and a solitary priest bearing the consecrated vessels of the temple, which had already been converted to a Christian church.

Onward, in the same direction, Theodore now bore the fair light form of his sister; but ere he had reached the end of the street, another awful phenomenon took place. From the midst of the intense, deep, black expanse which the sky now presented, burst forth an immense globe of fire, lighting with a fearful splendour the gigantic masses, columns, and towers of the palace; showing the neighbouring hills and woods beyond the gates, and even displaying the heavy piles of mountains that lay towering up towards the north. No thunder accompanied the meteor; and its progress through the sky was only marked by a sound as of a strong but equal wind, till suddenly it burst and dispersed with a tremendous crash, leaving all in deeper darkness than before.

The sight had made the multitude pause and fall upon their knees before the church; and as Theodore approached he heard a voice exclaiming, "Let us die here! We may as well end our days here as in the open fields! Let us die here!"

But, to his surprise, the next moment the calm sweet tones of the Lady Flavia struck his ear, replying to the words which she had heard too. "No, my friends! no!" she said, in a voice which had no terror in its sound, but was all calm but energetic tenderness. "No! it is our duty to God, to ourselves, to our brethren, to our children, to take the means of safety which are at hand. Let us fly quick from among these buildings, which another shock may cast down to crush us. There may be dangers even beyond the walls, but here are certain perils. Let us go forth; I came back but to seek my children! Lo, they have come in safety, and let us now depart. Oh, delay not, pause not, for the hesitation of terror more often points the dart and sharpens the sword that slays us, than the rashness of courage. Come, my friends, let us come. God will protect us; let us take the means he gives. Come, my Theodore, come. Ammian, you look as your father used to look when he went forth to battle. Should not such a face as that shame terror, my friends? Come, I pray ye, come!"

Even as she spoke, the same hollow rushing sound was again heard; the steps on which she stood, above the rest, shook beneath her, and Ammian, seizing her hand, hurried forward. Clouds of dust rose up into the air, shrieks of terror burst from the very lips that had so lately proposed to remain and die there, and every one now rushed towards the gate. But their steps were staggering and unequal, for the solid earth was again shaken, the buildings and the columns were seen tottering and bending by the light of the torches, the crash of falling masses blended with the roar of the earthquake, part of the frieze of the temple was dashed into the midst of the group of slaves, who were flying on before their mistress, and one among them was struck down.

"Stop!" said the voice of Flavia; "let us not leave any one we can save. Hold the torch here!" But it was in vain. The man was crushed like a trodden worm!

"God receive thy spirit to his mercy, through Christ!" cried the priest; and they rushed on,

while still the earthquake seemed to roll the ground in waves beneath their feet, and their eyes grew dim and dizzy with the drunken rocking of the enormous buildings, through the midst of which they passed. The gate, though not far, seemed to take an age to reach, and joyful was the heart of every one as they drew near. But just as they were about to go forth, the struggling of the feverish earth appeared to reach its height; and one of those colossal flanking towers, which seemed destined to outlast a thousand generations, swayed to and fro like a young heart sorely tempted between virtue and crime, and then fell overthrown, with a sound like thunder across the very path of the fugitives. It left a chasm where it had stood, however; and through that rugged breach the terrified multitude took their way, stumbling and falling over the convulsed and quivering masses of stone.

Glad, glad were all bosoms when those walls were passed; and though still the ground heaved beneath their feet, though the roar continued, and the very trees were heard to crack and shiver as they passed along, yet all felt that some hope of safety was gained; though when they looked around, and saw the black and tangible darkness that covered the whole earth, and hid every object except that on which the occasional torchlight fell--when they gazed, I say, into that dull and vacant, unreplying blank, and heard the hollow roaring voice of the earthquake around, below, above, well might their hearts still sink, and well might many a one among them think that the predicted day of general dissolution had at length arrived.

Still carrying his sister in his arms, Theodore had followed Flavia and Ammian through the broken walls; and it was not till their feet trod the more secure ground beyond that he asked, "Where is Ildica, my mother?"

"Here at hand, upon the hill, my noble Theodore," she answered. "Eudochia now is safe," she added; "leave her with me, and give our dear Ildica tidings of our escape, for she promised not to quit the spot where I left her till my return. Yon faint spot of light upon the old tumulus--that is Aspar's torch."

Theodore placed his sister on her feet beside Flavia, and hurried on. He had no light with him; the heavens and the earth were all in darkness, and the roar of the last shock still rang, though more faintly, in the air. Yet, ere he had arrived within the feeble and indistinct glare of the slave's torch, the quickened ear of love and apprehension had caught the sound, and recognised the tread of his coming feet; and in a moment Ildica was in his arms, and her fair face buried on his throbbing bosom.^[4]

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVIL TIDINGS.

The horrors of that night had not yet ended; for from the third hour after sunset till day had fully dawned, the fever of the earth raged with unabated fury. A melancholy and a ghastly group was it that soon crowned the hill where Flavia had left her daughter, when at length all those who had escaped with her from the palace were collected together round the torches. Not one half of those, indeed, who dwelt in that magnificent building, to which the earthquake gave the first severe blow, had assembled in the train of the Roman lady; but during the pause of nearly an hour which succeeded the second shock, many pale and terrified beings, some wounded and bruised with the falling masses, some nearly deprived of reason by their fears, wandered up from the palace and the neighbouring village, guided by the lights upon the hill, and with wild exclamations and bemoanings of their fate added something to the horrors of the moment.

Gradually the brief-spoken or almost silent awe subsided during that long interval of calm; and many who had been waiting with sinking hearts for the coming of a third shock began to talk together in low whispers, and even to fancy that the hour of peril had passed by. Gradually, too, serving to encourage such thoughts, the clouds rolled away; the stars looked out calm and bright, and the moon was seen just sinking into the Adriatic, but with a red and angry glow over her face, in general so calm and mild. Hope began to waken once again in all bosoms; and one, more rash than the rest, a fisherman from Aspalathus, ventured down the hill, declaring that he would go and see what had befallen his boat.

The minutes seemed hours; but very few had elapsed after his departure, ere the fierce rushing sound of the destroyer was again heard; again the earth reeled and shook, and yawned and heaved up, and burst like bubbles from a seething caldron; and lightning, without a cloud, played round the hills and over the waves. The terrified multitude clung together, and the sick faintness of despair seemed to defy all augmentation, when the voice of the fisherman was heard, exclaiming, as he hastened back up the hill, "Fly farther, to the mountains! fly farther up! the sea

is rising over the land; the boats are driven into the market-place; the palace will soon be covered! Fly farther, and fly quickly, if you would save your lives!"

"Why should we fly?" cried the same voice which had before urged the multitude to stay and await death below; and at the same time a tall, gaunt man, with long streaming gray hair, and large, wild, melancholy eyes, pushed himself forward into the torchlight. "Why should we fly?" he cried; "and whither can we go to hide us from the wrath of God? Lo, I tell you, and it shall come to pass, that no sun shall ever rise again upon this earth, except the Sun of Righteousness. The last day, the last great day, is at hand, and in vain ye say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us; and to the hills, Cover us, in the great and terrible day of the Lord.' Make ready your hearts, and prepare your souls, for verily ye are called to judgment, and the Son of Man is coming, in clouds and glory, to separate the sheep from the goats."

His words, his solemn gestures, his wild and enthusiastic look, supported by his reputed sanctity of life, plunged the people in deeper despair; but Flavia again interposed, and with sweet and gentle, yet dignified and commanding eloquence, she won the people to hear, to yield, and to obey her. Lighted by a single torch, for those they had brought had burnt so far that it became necessary to spare them, the melancholy procession wound up the road which led over the mountains towards Titurum. After travelling for at least a mile, with a continual ascent, they again paused; and in order both to give new courage to the sinking hearts of those who accompanied her, and to prevent the enthusiast Mizetus from adding to their terrors, the lady besought the good priests of the palace church to guide them in praying to the Almighty in their hour of peril.

The old man had not spoken since they left the city; but the mild words of the Roman lady seemed to wake him from the stupor of anguish and terror into which he had fallen. Called upon to find words of consolation for the flock committed to his charge, he applied them first to his own heart, and instantly remembering the hopes and promises of a pure and exalted faith, he broke forth in a strain of powerful eloquence, now directing the people to put their trust in that Almighty arm which can save in the time of the most awful danger; now raising his voice in prayer to God, mingling adoration with petition, and offering at once the sacrifice of faith and supplication.

The people gathered round, slaves and freemen together, lifting their pale faces and anxious eyes by the dull torchlight to the countenance of the priest. They gained confidence and courage, however, at his words; and when he began his prayer, they kneeled around upon the still shaking earth, and rose again with hearts full of trust, calmed and strengthened by devotion. None had stood aloof, not even those who had hitherto remained firm to their ancient idolatry. In that hour of horror, they felt the need of some higher hope and more abiding trust, and they kneeled with the rest to that more mighty God whom hitherto they had not known.

Ere they rose, a light and grateful wind sprang up from the mountains; and with hope once more awakened, in a still dark and superstitious age, even so slight a change as that was received as a favourable presage. Many there were who regarded it as a sign that their prayers were heard; and when at length the calm gray dawn began to look from the eastern hills upon the wearied and anxious groups below, though the earth still shook, from time to time, with a convulsive shudder, the sight of the blessed light of returning day seemed to take the worst apprehension from their overloaded hearts, and many an eye shed tears of joy to see again those rays which they had feared were obscured for ever.

Rashness generally follows terror allayed; and scarcely had the sun fully risen, when numbers, anxious for friends whom they saw not--or, perhaps, with more sordid motives--began to hasten away towards the village and the palace. But the earth still shook, and Flavia, with her family and servants, still remained upon the hill, after striving anxiously to persuade the rest to wait till all was again completely still. Her reasoning was in vain, however, and troop after troop went off; but scarcely was the day an hour old, when another severe shock was felt, and many who had escaped the dangers of that fearful night were crushed or maimed in the ruins of the dwellings to which they had returned. That shock was the last, as it was the longest, which was felt; and when it subsided, all remained quiet; and though the ground was seen yawning in various places, though parts even of the mountains had slipped from their places, and rocks lay overthrown in the valleys; though the courses of the streams had been altered, and the whole face of the land was changed, yet it soon became evident that the earthquake was over, and mourning was all that remained--mourning unmingled with fear.

There was mourning in the hearts of all; and yet how many a glad embrace, how many a tender and affectionate caress, how many a prayer and thanksgiving, expressed the gratitude, the joy, the love, which filled the bosoms of Flavia and her family. How many an earnest and a wistful glance at the faces of each other told that, in the anguish of that long horrible night, selfish fear had been superseded by apprehensions of a nobler kind!

Bright and beautiful, calm and serene the day rose up over that scene of desolation and ruin, smiling as if to give comfort and consolation to the smitten earth; but still Flavia lingered on the hills, unwilling to trust her children or her domestics amid the ruins of the palace till she should be well assured that safety might be found within its walls. As the sun grew hot, however, she removed to the edge of a small wood of tall ilexes which hung upon the edge of the mountain road, though many of the finest trees had been uprooted and thrown down either by the wind or

the earthquake; and having placed herself beneath the shade, with her children round her, several of the slaves ran hither and thither, to seek some food whereof to offer their well-loved mistress the morning's meal. Each returned with something; but each had some sad tale to tell of the ravages that were to be traced in the direction in which he had gone. Milk, and wine, and early fruits had been found in abundance among the various cottages in the neighbourhood, and a meal, plentiful, but simple as that of the night before, was spread upon the grass beneath the trees.

The earth was still, the air was fresh and sweet, and the birds had begun again their melody, forgetting in song, like the happy heart of youth, the blow of calamity as soon as it had passed away. All tended to sooth and to reassure; and the heart of Ammian, which, even during the terrible scenes of the past night, had not lost its bold and fearless daring, now broke out in light and wild fancies. He would know the causes of the earthquake; and when he found that neither his mother nor Theodore could give a satisfactory reply to all his many questions--as who in that age could have furnished any on such a theme?--he let his imagination run wild in conjectures; and many a bright poetical theory he formed, and many a wild and baseless hypothesis he raised, sporting with all the dread images of the past like a child playing with the weapons of deadly strife gathered from a field of battle.

Then he urged his mother to return quickly to the palace, in order, as he said, to see what old Ocean had been doing there during their absence. With Theodore, Flavia held more rational intercourse, taking counsel with him as to what course she had to pursue, and expressing an apprehension lest the palace, left totally unguarded, might be plundered during her absence and that of the old imperial conservator, who remained with them, his senses still bewildered with all the terrors he had gone through. Theodore, however, showed her that the faithful slaves who had followed him through the building had brought away all the valuable jewels, caskets, and gold which they had found; and for the rest, he offered to return himself, with the conservator and some of the slaves, and provide for the preservation of the palace and all that it contained.

"Go you with the rest to Salona, dearest mother," he said; "some dwellings must there have been preserved; and among the merchants and traders which it contains you will always find shelter and assistance for gold. Shaken as the palace has been, many parts may yet be standing which will soon fall, and your presence would only be dangerous, and embarrass us in ascertaining the state of the building. I will accompany you part of the way to Salona, and then turn round by the heathen cemetery towards Aspalathus and the palace."

Ildica listened, and her look seemed to say that she would fain accompany him; for hers was one of those hearts which would rather, far rather, take part in the danger and the grief of those they love than share even their happiest hours. But she said nothing; for she knew that her wishes ought not to be granted, and she would neither put her mother nor her lover to the pain of opposing her even by a word.

Eudochia, however, in the inconsiderate apprehensiveness of girlhood, clung to her brother, and besought him not to go; but Theodore soon pacified her, assuring her that he would not venture rashly where danger was apparent; and, after a few more words, orders were given to the domestics, and Flavia rose to proceed towards Salona. Weariness, indeed, was in all limbs; and with slow and heavy steps, those who had remained with Flavia on the uplands took their way along a road, which wound for some distance over the ridge of hills nearest to the sea, and then descended, separating into two branches, the one leading to the town of Salona, the other to Aspalathus and the neighbouring palace. The latter branch, with a steep declivity, wound down the hill, bordered on either hand by a long row of tall dark cypresses, which reached from the northern gate of the palace to a cemetery on the side of the hill. In that burial-ground, surrounded by a low wall not two feet high--thus built that all who passed might gaze upon the records of mortality within--lay crowded a multitude of tombs, checkered with groups of dull funereal trees. There reposed the remains of all who had died in the vicinity since Dalmatia had become a Roman province, and the frequent *Siste, viator!* called the eye, and recorded the vain attempt to teach mankind wisdom and moderation from the common lot of all.

It was near this burial-place, just where the roads parted, that Theodore paused, and, after a few minutes' conference with the old officer of the palace, selected several of the slaves to accompany him on his way. But just as he was about to depart, the eye of Ildica rested upon a cloud of dust that rose from the point where the road towards Salona became first visible, emerging from a thick grove at the distance of perhaps half a mile from the spot where they then stood.

"Look! look!" she said; "here are people coming up from the city--perhaps to give us assistance; and I trust they may bring a chariot or a litter, for my mother is pale and weary, and Eudochia is faint also."

"And you are weary, too, my Ildica!" said her mother. "But look! Theodore, look! Do you not see armour and helmets glittering through the dust in the sun? It seems a turma of cavalry or more, for the line is long. Stay with us, my dear son, till we see what we have here: let us turn into this field opposite the cemetery while they pass by."

Her words were instantly obeyed as commands; and, winding on with a slow equal march, a small body of horse, followed by a number of stragglers on foot, ascended the hill, and then,

without pause or question, took the way on towards Aspalathus. In a moment after, however, at a quicker pace, as if to overtake them, and followed by a number of soldiers and attendants, came a superior person, who paused on seeing the group seated in the neighbouring meadow, and sent a messenger to ask if much mischief had occurred at the palace in consequence of the earthquake, and whether the Lady Flavia were safe.

"She is well, and present," replied Flavia to the messenger: "who is it that sends?"

"The military tribune, Marcian," replied the attendant, and Theodore instantly sprang up, exclaiming, "My father's dear and noble friend!" and without other comment he ran down the field. As soon as the tribune beheld him he leaped from his horse and pressed him in his arms, and after a few brief words gave some orders to his attendants, and advanced with Theodore to the spot where Flavia sat.

He was a man already in the middle stage of life, tall and powerful in frame, and of mild, but firm and serious countenance. He was not, perhaps, what would generally be reputed handsome, but his features were good; and there was the fire of genius in his large dark eye, the consciousness of energy on his broad square brow. Dignity was in his aspect and his whole demeanour; and, as he saluted the Lady Flavia, lamented with her the events of the preceding night, and inquired in tones of deep interest into all the perils through which she and her family had passed, there was that calm and graceful suavity in his deportment which inexpressibly won and struck every one who listened. Nevertheless, there was a cloud, as if of some deep melancholy, hung upon his brow; and when Flavia informed him of her purpose of proceeding to Salona, he shook his head mournfully, saying, "You had better not, lady! I think you had better not! It is a melancholy place," he added, a moment after; "much shaken and ruined, and a great number of people have lost their lives there. I fear that accounts from other parts of the empire will be sad indeed."

There was something gloomy and thoughtful in the manner of the tribune that surprised and somewhat alarmed the Roman lady; for so much habitual self-command had the soldiers of the empire, that it was rare to see any one, especially of such rank and renown as Marcian, display upon the occasion of any misfortune like the earthquake, the natural feelings which were not the less busy at their hearts. The marble exterior of the old republicans was much affected by all who sought to distinguish themselves in the Roman armies; and Marcian was famed for a temperate but unyielding firmness, which admitted not the semblance of grief or apprehension.

"Think you, then," she asked, "that we had better return to the palace? A report reached us in the night that the sea had nearly covered it."

Marcian paused for several minutes, as if meditating what were best to do, and then replied, "Lady, I will send to see the condition of the palace, and in the mean time bid them pitch me a tent here to give you a shelter from the sun. We have provisions with us too, and can offer you a meal, such as, perhaps, this great disaster may not have left at Aspalathus."

"I thank you," replied Flavia; "we have already eaten. We found no want of food among the cottages upon the hills."

But Marcian pressed upon them his hospitality so earnestly, that Flavia yielded, feeling that there was something more beneath his grave and thoughtful air than he suffered at first to appear; and while the tent was being raised by his attendants, he sent a messenger to the palace, with orders for such minute examination as showed that the day would be high ere he could return. Food already dressed was soon spread out under the tent; and one or two vessels of wine were produced, with several rich cups and vases, carved with the exquisite workmanship of an earlier age, and shining with many a precious stone. With grave suavity the tribune did the honours of the meal, and spoke much, and of many things, but with a wandering and discursive spirit, as if his mind was forcing itself to the task, and seeking more largely the aid of imagination than might have been the case had the heart been itself at ease.

"How magnificent are those cypresses!" he said, looking towards the long avenue which led down the hill; "I never beheld finer, except, perhaps, some that grow on the hill above Byzantium. But those stand solitary, as if to mark the tomb of some warrior who has died afar from his own land; these sweep down in a long row, like a line of departed monarchs seen in the shady grandeur of tradition. There they stood, centuries before Diocletian laid the first stone of his palace; there they stand now, when his history is almost forgotten; there they will stand, when we are as he is. Well are they placed between the palace and the sepulchre--those witnesses of the mortality of ages. The common lot of man! why should any one shrink from the common lot of man! Why should we look with hope to this world's future, or turn back our eyes with lingering grief to the past, or nurse bright hopes of such young beings as these," and he laid his hand upon the head of Ammian, "or mourn with bitter regret for those who have changed the thorny couch of mortal life for the calm bed of the tomb? Give me a cup of wine!"

"A prodigy! a prodigy!" cried one of the slaves, running into the tent; "an omen! an omen! Tribune, the eagle, which has hovered over us all the way from Salona, has settled on the pole of the tent!"

"Get ye gone!" replied Marcian; "what have I to do with omens? I may have the heart without

the wings of the eagle. Out upon ambition! and yet this very Diocletian, who founded the palace hard by, was a slave before he was an emperor. But he loathed, resigned, and refused to resume the power which he had acquired and proved. That eagle haunts me: twice has it hovered for hours over me while sleeping in the open field, and now it settles on my tent. These are strange accidents, and yet nothing more than accidents. Who should dream of ambition with those tombs before his eyes? Give me some wine!"

The attendant who stood near handed the goblet, which he had held ready filled for some minutes, to his master; and Marcian,^[5] yet but half a Christian, turned and poured some of the wine upon the ground. "To the dead!" he said, looking mournfully round him, "to the dead!" and his eyes fixed full and sadly, upon Theodore.

The youth started suddenly on his feet, and grasped the tribune's hand, exclaiming: "My father! I adjure thee tell me! What of my father?"

Marcian threw his arms round the slighter form of his young friend, speaking some words in a low tone. Flavia rose and gazed eagerly in the face of the tribune, who shook his head mournfully as his reply; and Theodore hid his face in his mantle, while Eudochia burst into wild and weeping lamentations. Ildica's dark eyes overflowed in silence; and though Flavia let not one drop roll over the jetty fringes of her eyelids, her pale cheek grew paler, and her lip quivered with intense emotion. Marcian said no more, but gazed down sternly upon the hilt of his sword; and the only words that were uttered for some time were: "Alas, Paulinus!" which broke from the lip of Ammian.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEPARTURE.

It was a long and dreary pause; but at length the stern and virtuous soldier, who, ere many more years had passed, seated himself without crime or bloodshed in the chair of the Cæsars, laid his hand upon the arm of Theodore, with a firm but kindly pressure which spoke at once to a heart full of high feelings and of noble energies, and roused it from the dull stupor of sudden grief.

"Oh! Marcian," exclaimed the youth, "this is an unexpected stroke! So short a while since I saw him depart full of vigour, and life, and happiness. So short, so common a journey--so easy--so safe! How, tell me how this has befallen? Was it by sickness, or accident, or war with some rebel, or in the chase of some wild beast?"

"Alas, no!" replied Marcian; "it was by none of these, my son. Nor would I wound your young heart afresh by telling how it did take place, were it not absolutely necessary for you to know your father's fate, in order that you may gain an augury or a warning of your own, and timely prevent it."

"The emperor," cried Flavia, "the emperor has destroyed his faithful friend: Paulinus saw it before he went. Every line of his last letter breathes the anticipation of his coming fate. He saw it in the gloomy brow of Theodosius; he saw it in the smile of Chrysapheus; he felt that he was going, never to return. Say, tribune, say! was it not the emperor's deed?"

"Even so!" replied Marcian. "By the order of him whom he had served with unequalled fidelity and truth--the friend of his schoolboy hours, the companion of his high and noble studies--by the hands of those he thought his friends--hands that had been plighted to him in affection, and raised with his in battle--at his own social board, and in the hour of confiding tranquillity--was slain Paulinus, leaving not a nobler or a better behind."

Theodore again shed tears, but Flavia asked eagerly, "The cause, tribune! What was the cause--or rather, what the pretext for cause--reasonable cause there could be none for dooming to death one of the purest, noblest, least ambitious men that the world has ever yet seen."

"The cause was jealousy, lady," replied Marcian; "a cause that leads men ever to wild and madlike actions. In the gardens of the Cæsars, near their eastern capital, is a solitary tree, which bears fruit rarely; but when it does, produces an apple like that which hung in the garden of the children of Hesperus--small in size, golden in colour, and ambrosial to the taste. Paulinus had bestowed on Eudoxia a book, containing poems of Sappho, which no other manuscript can produce; and the empress, in return, had sportively promised her husband's friend the rarest thing that she could find to bestow. The tree of which I spoke had in the past autumn produced

but one apple, and that was sent, on the entrance of the new year, by Theodosius to Eudoxia. She, in thoughtless innocence, sent it as the rarest of all things to Paulinus, and Chrysapheus took good heed that the fact should reach the emperor's ears, distorted to his purpose. Fury seized upon the heart of Theodosius; but the base eunuch had sufficient skill and power to make him conceal his suspicions and his hatred, for Chrysapheus well knew that an open accusation might produce a bold and successful defence. Paulinus was sent to Cæsarea; and there, unheard, without trial, and without justice, was put to death!"

"Tyrant!" muttered Theodore. "Base, ungrateful tyrant!"

"Let your indignation swallow up your grief, my Theodore!" replied Marcian; "but let it not injure your country. Great as it is, great as it well may be, still greater will it become when you hear that Valens, your father's bosom friend, has been since sacrificed for no other crime than his love for Paulinus; that several of your household slaves have been slain by the emperor's orders; and that all the wealth of Paulinus has been bestowed upon Chrysapheus!"

Theodore again started up, exclaiming--"I swear by all my hopes, and by my father's spirit--"

But Marcian caught his arm. "Swear nothing against your country, my son," he cried: "Theodore, we have need of every Roman!"

"Hear me! hear me!" cried Theodore. "Naught against my country. No, never, let the temptation be what it may, will I draw the sword against Rome. So help me the God in whom I trust! But should ever the time come when this hand can reach a tyrant, or a tyrant's minister, it shall doom him to death as remorselessly as he has doomed my noble father;" and having spoken, he cast himself down, and again covered his face in his mantle.

Never, perhaps, through all the long tragic record of human woes and suffering which the past, the sad and solemn past, holds in its melancholy treasury--never was there yet a scene in which the dark feeling of desolation penetrated more deeply into every bosom, than in the one which surrounded the tribune Marcian. The horrors, the fatigues, the destruction of the preceding night, had laid every heart prostrate in the general calamity; and when the blow of individual grief fell heavy upon all alike, it seemed to crush and trample out in every breast the last warm kindly hopes--the last bright delusions of our phantasm-like existence.

Flavia gazed on her children and on the orphans in deep melancholy; while Theodore, with his face buried in his robe, sat apart, and Eudochia hid her streaming eyes upon her adoptive mother's lap. Ildica, with clasped hands, and cheeks down which the large bright tears rolled slow, now gazed upon her young and mourning lover; now turned an inquiring, anxious, longing glance towards Marcian; who, on his part, again, with knitted brow and downcast eyes, sat in the midst, stifling emotions which struggled hard against control. Even the slaves of Flavia and Paulinus, among whom the news had spread, gathered round the open tent, and, standing wrapped up in their dark penulæ, gazed with mournful and sympathizing looks upon the sad group beneath its shade; while, mingled among them, here and there, were seen some of the stout soldiers who had accompanied the tribune, evidently sharing, notwithstanding all their own habits of danger and suffering, and their frequent familiarity with death itself, in the grief of the young and hapless beings before them.

One only of the party seemed occupied with other thoughts, and yet the seeming belied him. Ammian, reclining by the side of the little sandy path which crossed the meadow where they sat, seemed busy, in his usual abstracted manner, in tracing figures on the dust. One of the soldiers moved across to see what he was employed in, and by that action drew the attention of Marcian, whose eyes turned thither too; when, to his surprise, he beheld written in the Greek character upon the sand--

"Death to all tyrants! The blood of the guilty for the blood of the innocent! Vengeance for Paulinus!"

Rising at once, he set his foot upon the writing ere the slower soldier could decipher what it meant; and then, raising his finger to Ammian, he said, with emphasis, "Beware!"

The boy looked up in his face, and answered calmly, "I will beware, most noble Marcian!" But there was meaning in his eyes, and Marcian chose not to urge his wild and daring spirit further.

Seating himself again by Flavia's side, the tribune, with the calm gentleness of a compassionate heart, endeavoured to sooth the pain which it had been his bitter task to inflict; and when he had, in a degree, succeeded in gaining attention, he gave some orders to the soldiers, and spoke some words to the slaves, which caused them to retire from the vicinity of the tent.

"Listen to me, Theodore," he said; "listen to me, noble lady! Grief has had its part; other duties call for your consideration. I would fain ask you, sweet Flavia, whither you now propose to turn your steps; what plan you now propose to follow?"

"We proposed," replied Flavia, after a moment's hesitation, "to go forward to Salona; there to wait, if we could find a refuge, till the palace was again rendered habitable, or till we could send those things which may be necessary to our own villa upon the mountains. I have not dwelt in it

since my husband's death, but if it be necessary I can conquer memory."

"To Salona!" replied Marcian, musing; "to Salona! It is true, you could easily fly thence in case of necessity to Ravenna; but Valentinian, if report has informed me rightly, loves you not, and might avenge himself by giving you up to Theodosius!"

Flavia gazed earnestly in the tribune's countenance, as the new and painful conviction of fresh dangers broke upon her. "More sorrows!" she said, "more, more, to be endured! Think you, then, noble Marcian, that we are in danger at Salona? Think you, then, that Theodosius will extend his persecution even to us, innocent as we are?"

"He has already slain one as innocent as any of us, lady," replied the tribune, "and he has given up to the sword one friend and many of the slaves of him who is gone. Do you believe, then, that he will spare the cousin of one whom he hated--a cousin who was loved as a sister? Can you trust to his stopping short with the father, and not carrying on his vengeance to the son?"

"Oh that I were in his palace!" cried Theodore: "oh that I were in his hall, and before his throne!"

But Flavia answered more calmly: "Tell us all our danger, tribune. Give your kind and generous advice. You are known as wise and good, as well as brave and skilful. We will give our actions into your hands for guidance. You shall shape our course as you think fit."

"Lady," replied Marcian in a tone which, notwithstanding all his command over himself, showed how much his heart was moved,--"lady, I loved Paulinus as a brother. He was wise and eloquent, learned and brave, and I am but the son of a common soldier, nurtured in camps, and educated in the rude field. Yet between my heart and his there were common feelings; and in the course of our various lives we chained our souls together by mutual benefits: may his shade find Elysium! When I heard of what had befallen, my first thought was of my friend's children. My cohort was in Dalmatia, my time of command approaching; and though I had been called to the capital by the imperial mandate, I prepared to come hither with all speed. While I so prepared, I heard of the death of Valens and his slaves, and doubted not that the cup might next pass to me. I presented myself before the emperor to know at once my doom; but he contented himself with commanding me to come hither, and lead the troops instantly into Thrace. Another cohort under the command of Strator, the bitter enemy of Paulinus, is ordered hither instantly to regulate--such is the pretext--the line of frontier with the messengers of Valentinian. Lady, I fear me there may be other purposes to execute; and I have hastened, without pause or rest, to bring you tidings which, sad as they are, might have been crowned with bitterer still if I had not been the messenger--to bring you such tidings, and to take counsel with you for your safety. My opinion, indeed, my advice, is little worthy of your having; but still, let us consult together, and--as far as my duty as a soldier and a Roman will permit--let me be a brother to the Lady Flavia, a father to my dead friend's orphans."

"Your advice will be as wise as your heart is kind," replied Flavia. "Oh give it us, my friend! give it to us fully and openly. We will be guided by it, unless there be reasons against it, which even you yourself shall approve. If safety be not to be found in Illyricum, whither would you have us go?"

"To the extreme limits of the empire!" replied Marcian. "What matters it to you what the land be called which you inhabit for a few short years? what matters it if the north wind blow somewhat more coldly than in this golden land? if winter wear a ruder aspect, and the flowers and fruits linger for the summer sun ere they bloom and ripen?"

"What matters it, indeed!" said Flavia. "We love this scene, tribune--well and dearly do we love this glorious scene--but we love it more from the tender memories that have been attached to it, than even for its sunny splendour and its face of beauty. But now the thunder which has stricken us has turned the sweet and fruity wine which filled our cup to sour and hateful dregs. Another land will be brighter in our sight. Freedom from a tyrant's neighbourhood shall supply the place of beauties that we leave behind; the absence of objects that recall our griefs shall compensate for those that once awoke our joys; peace shall be our atmosphere of balm, security our sunshine. What say you, Theodore?"

"Let us go, my mother," replied the youth: "where you and Ildica, Ammian and Eudochia, are with me, shall be my country. The tyrant has smitten down one object of my love, but he is powerless over my capability of loving: that which was parted is now all concentrated. You will go with me, my Ildica, is it not so? and my father's blessing--the blessing of the dead--shall follow, and comfort us in exile. But whither would you direct our course, noble Marcian?"

"Towards the banks of the Danube," he replied. "There, at the extreme verge of the imperial territory, the power of Theodosius waxes weak, and is exercised with difficulty. There, too, if mad and persevering jealousy drive him still to seek your hurt, ten steps place you beyond his reach, where the feeble and degenerate Cæsar dare not stretch a hand to grasp you: your father's brother dwells at Margus, bishop of the place."

Theodore's countenance fell. "He was indeed the brother of my father's blood," he answered, "but was never the brother of his love. Grasping, avaricious, crafty, I have heard my father say

that Eugenius has the talents, but not the virtues, of a Roman."

"Yet with him," replied Marcian, "are you sure of a safer asylum than with any one else. Even at this moment he is at enmity with the court of Theodosius, and bears a mortal hatred to Chrysapheus, who had wronged him, abandoned him, and, notwithstanding the pleading of your father in his behalf, would have willingly given him up to the barbarians. With him you will find safety, I must not say you will find vengeance--but it may be so."

"Let us go!" cried Theodore; "let us go, my mother! The gold and jewels which, unwitting of all this, I made the Numidians carry forth last night, will render the journey lighter to you, dear mother; and if my uncle, careful of his wealth, refuse to give me support, I will find means to win it for myself."

"Fear not for that," replied Marcian; "your father's wealth, Theodore, is gone, but his estates are yours; and even Theodosius dares not openly take from you that which no law has sentenced you to lose. Strange that he who unquestioned takes a life unjustly should not have power to seize your land, and yet it is so. Now, lady, let me send once more to the palace, and bid them bring forth all that your treasury contains. Take with you all your moveable wealth; for if you do not so guard yourself, it will fall into hands which render no account. I will bid them, too, bring forth whatever litters and carriages they find, to bear you less weary on the way; and ere two days be over, I will follow, and rejoining you, protect you from harm, till, on the frontiers of M[oe]sia, I must leave you and march on. At all events, my presence and my troops will ensure your safety so far; and even after that, I shall be interposed between you and your enemies, so that no messenger of evil can pass without my learning his purpose, delaying his journey, and giving you timely tidings. Speed, however, matters much, and now I would have you set forth without a day's delay."

Flavia sought not to procrastinate; for though many a clinging memory attached her to those scenes by the fine filmy ties of associations, which even the sharp edge of grief could not cut, yet the safety of Theodore, the happiness of her own child, the enfranchisement from a state of society, where virtue was no safeguard and justice afforded no shield, were objects too dear and high to be risked by delay. Few and melancholy were the words that now passed, but the orders of Marcian were promptly obeyed; and though he would suffer neither Flavia nor Theodore to return, even for an hour, to the palace, knowing far more of the cruel orders which Theodosius had already given against them than he chose to communicate, yet a number of their domestics were sent thither with his soldiers to remove all that belonged to either family in the building.

Ere the sun had passed the meridian more than an hour, all who had been sent had returned, and many and curious were the objects which now surrounded that sad group by the side of the cemetery. A number of mules and horses were there; the black charger which had carried Paulinus in his last victory over the Alani, and which had never been ridden since by any one but himself; the white horses which drew the low carriage called *pilentum*, wherein Flavia was accustomed to drive along the margin of the sea; litters with their silver feet, and covered chairs of gold and ivory; rich caskets; leathern bags of gold and silver coin; and large quantities of silks and fine linens (then become general, but still considered costly,) made up into packages of convenient sizes for carrying on the shoulders of the slaves, or placing on the beasts of burden, together with cups and vases of gold, silver, and precious stones; and slaves of all complexions and of every different feature. Everything, in short, which was usually collected in a wealthy and powerful Roman house, at that luxurious and extravagant period, was there scattered round in glittering profusion, giving that group the appearance of some caravan from Ophir or from Tyre reposing on its journey. Some confusion and some delay took place, though everything was arranged as quickly as possible, while Flavia looked on in calm sadness, and Theodore gazed upon the scene with burning indignation unquenched by grief, making his lip still quiver and his bright eye flash.

At length all was prepared, and, with a few words of heartfelt thanks to Marcian, the lady placed herself with Ildica in one of the *lectulæ* or litters, Eudochia and her chief attendant reclined in another. Ammian sprang upon a small Thracian horse, and Theodore mounted his father's charger. The noble beast, wild with unwearied strength, reared high and snorted fiercely, as he felt the light weight of the young Roman; but Theodore with skill and power soon curbed him to his will, and patted his proud neck, while a tear, given to the memory of him who was gone, wetted his eyelids. The whole party then moved on, winding back again along the path which they had trodden that very morning.

Their way lay over the hills, and for an hour they moved on, ascending gently, but without stopping, till at length, on the highest spot of the inferior acclivity, which lies at the foot of the higher mountains, Flavia bade the bearers stop, and gazed out of the litter upon the scene which she was quitting perhaps for ever. There it lay, robed in the same splendid sunshine which had adorned it on the preceding day. To the eyes which looked upon it not a change was to be seen. The palace, the village, the distant town of Salona, the beautiful bay, the golden islands which are scattered along the coast, the liquid sapphire in which they seemed to float, were all sleeping beneath the wanderers' glance in the drowsy heat of midday, looking calm and tranquil, as if nature herself imitated the hypocrisy of man, and covered with deceitful smiles the desolation which reigned within her bosom. The measured round of the sun had scarcely been accomplished, since those who now stood upon the hill-top, fugitives from their dear domestic hearths, had met together after separation, and had gazed over that same lovely prospect from

the clump of cypresses which now lay beneath their eyes. Scarcely had one round of the sun been accomplished since, standing there, they had gazed upon that pageant-like scene of beauty, and had felt all its fair features reflected from the clear bright mirror of the happy heart. Scarcely had one round been accomplished since every splendid object that the eye could find, and every sweet sound that the ear could catch, in a spot, and a moment when all was music and brightness, had seemed but an image, a type, a prophecy of joys, and happiness, and successes yet to come; and yet in that brief space an earthquake had rent and torn that enchanted land, and had scattered ruin, desolation, and death over its fair calm face: in that brief space, from the bosoms of those who gazed upon it had been torn the bright joys of youth and inexperience; had been scattered the dear hopes and warm imaginings of innocent expectation; had been riven one of the dearest ties of human existence, the great band of the loving and the loved; for not one in that sad family but felt that the unjust fate of Paulinus had given a chilly coldness to their hearts--no, not one from the youngest to the oldest. The young felt that the fresh bloom was gone for ever from the Hesperian fruit; the elder that the cropped flower of hope, which had again been beginning to blossom, had been once more crushed down, and never could bloom again.

Between their fate and the scene they gazed upon there seemed some fanciful affinity; each felt it, each lingered with fond regret to gather into one glance all the thousand lovely and beloved sights; each sighed as they gazed and thought of the "*For ever!*" and at length, even from Flavia's eyes, broke forth the long-repressed tears.

The slaves stood round and sympathized with those who mourned. Many a dark eye and many a rough cheek was moistened with the drops of kindly feeling, till at length the lady wiped her tears away, and, waving her hand towards the valleys on the other side, said, "Let us go on!"

Again they began to move, when the voices of two slaves broke forth in a mournful song, which they had probably often sung in their own remote land.

SLAVE'S SONG.

I.

"We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth;
Our life's but a race to the death from the birth;
We pause not to gather the flowers as they grow,
The goal is before us, and on we must go!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth."

II.

"Fair scenes of our childhood, dear homes of our youth,
Memorials of innocence, virtue, and truth,
The land of our birth, the dear mother that bore--
We leave ye behind us, we see you no more!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth."

III.

"The joys that we tasted we taste not again;
Each hour has its burden, each day has its pain;
No moment in flying, but hurries us past
Some sight, sound, or feeling more dear than the last!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth."

IV.

"We leave ye behind us, and others shall come
To tread in our footsteps, from cradle to tomb;
Still gazing back fondly, with lingering eyes,
Where behind them the bright land of memory lies!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth."

V.

"The sound of Time's pinion, as fast he doth fly,
Is echoed from each mortal breast by a sigh;
What if there be fruits? they ungather'd must grow,

For fate is behind us, and on we must go!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth."

VI.

"We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth.
Hopes, joys, and endearments, sport, pleasure, and mirth,
Like a tempest-driven ship, sailing by some bright shore,
Time hurries us onward--we see you no more!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRANGER.

It was in the calends of June, and yet the day had very few of the attributes of summer. The grey rain came down heavily from the dull leaden sky, the wind rushed in fierce gusts from the northeast, the stream of the Danube rolled dark and rapidly, and a melancholy murmur rose up from its waters while they hurried on to the gloomy Euxine, as if in reply to the sad and wailing voice of the breeze. The only thing that spoke the season of the year was the vivid verdure of the wide green pastures, and the rich blossoms that hung upon the frequent trees. Along the banks of the dark river, accompanied only by two freedmen on horseback, rode Theodore, the son of Paulinus, dressed in the deep mourning tunic and mantle of dark grey, with no ornament of any kind upon his person except at the hilt of his sword. The same black charger bore him with which he had departed from Dalmatia; and pressing the noble beast onward, he cast his eyes frequently to the opposite bank of the river.

At length he suddenly drew in his bridle, exclaiming: "There is a raft, and if we can but make them hear we shall be secure. Dismount, Cremera; run to the margin, and shout loudly for the boatmen."

The dark Arab, who, though rendered free by Flavia after the earthquake, at Theodore's request, still followed the fortunes of the young Roman with love elevated by liberty, sprang eagerly to the ground to obey; but, to the surprise of all, ere he had led down his horse to the shore, the raft, which they had seen moored to the opposite bank, was put in motion by two men who had been sitting near, under the shelter of the wood, that was there thick and tall. Onward it came, skilfully piloted across the stream, till it approached the shore, on which Theodore and his two followers now stood ready to embark.

At the distance of twenty or thirty cubits, however, the raft paused, and those who steered it gazed upon the young Roman and his attendants with apparent doubt and surprise. Theodore pressed them to come on; and then, perceiving that they were barbarians from the north, he spoke to them in one of those dialects which feelings connected with his mother's memory had made him learn and preserve, even amid the gay amusements and deeper studies which had since had their share of his time. She it was who had first taught his infant tongue to pronounce those sounds so difficult for a Roman to utter: she it was who had used those northern words towards her boy, in the early language of affection and tenderness; and though she had died at a period of his life when the wax on the tablets of memory is soft, and impressions are too easily effaced, he had never forgotten the accents that he had so dearly loved. But now, that knowledge proved not a little serviceable. The barbarians looked up in surprise; and when he told them, in a language they understood, to bring near their raft with speed, as delay might be dangerous to him, they hastened to approach the shore, and suffered him to lead his unwilling horse upon the fluctuating and unsteady raft.

One of the attendants followed; but the boatmen seemed to doubt whether their rude passage-boat would sustain the third man and horse; though the large trunks of trees whereof it was composed were further supported by skins blown out like bladders. Theodore, however, would not leave one behind; and, though sinking deep in the water, the raft still bore them all up.

Floating heavily upon the rushing stream, it reached the other bank of the Danube, and a piece of gold repaid the service of the boatmen; but though, when the foot of Theodore touched the barbaric land, he felt the thrill of security and freedom at his heart, yet, as he mounted his horse and gazed upon the scene before him, he paused with a sensation of doubt and awe. The bank of the river where he stood was clothed with smooth green turf; but both farther up and lower down the stream might be seen high rocks; and at the distance of about a hundred yards

from the margin rose up dark, tall, and gloomy, the forest covering the primeval earth. The proximity of those mighty trees prevented the eye from discovering aught beyond them, except where the ground sloped down towards the west; but there, even, no promise of a more open country was given: for over the first forest line, at its lowest point, might be seen a wide extent of dark gray wood, rounded, and waving with an interminable ocean of leaves and branches.

The desolate aspect of the wilderness fell chill upon the heart of the young Roman; and though his resolution to pursue his way on that side of the river was not to be shaken, yet many a difficulty and a danger, he too well knew, lay before him. Through some part of that wood, he was aware, had been cut a military road, when the Romans had been indeed the sovereigns of the world; but since that time centuries had passed, and the inhabitants of the country had changed: a thousand uncivilized tribes filled the land which the people of the imperial city had once possessed; and all her magnificent works had been destroyed or neglected beyond the mere frontier of the diminished empire. Theodore paused, and gazed upon that dark and gloomy wood, uncertain by what path he should direct his steps, and without remarking the keen and eager eyes with which the two barbarian ferrymen examined him from head to foot.

At length, as he still stood scanning the forest, one of them asked some question of the Arab Cremera; but it was couched in the language of the Alani, and Cremera could neither comprehend nor answer. The barbarian then advanced to the side of the young Roman's horse, and said, in a mild and sympathizing voice, "Are you not he who was expected?"

"I am not," replied Theodore, in the same language. "I am a Roman; but I seek to go to Margus by the barbarian bank of the river."

"You will find it both difficult and dangerous," answered the other, "even if you already know this land; and if you do not know it, the lizard which climbs the rocks and trees, and glides through the smallest space upon its onward way, might as well try to travel upon the water. Besides, you know not whether you are welcome in the land."

"My mother was daughter of Evaric, king of the Alani of Gaul," replied Theodore; "and wherever the land is tenanted by that nation I shall be welcome."

The man kissed the edge of his mantle, saying, "Be you welcome!" and Theodore continued: "Can you give me no one to guide me on my way?"

"I will see, I will see!" replied the other; and he ran swiftly up into the wood.

Ere he had been long absent he reappeared, followed by a young man, clad in coarse clothing and common fur, who expressed himself willing, for a small reward, to undertake the task of guiding the stranger on his way; and though, by his stature and complexion, very different from those of the tall and fair Alani, Theodore discovered at once that he was of some other tribe, and found, also, that he could only speak a few brief sentences of their language, the young Roman was, nevertheless, glad to put himself under the guidance of any one who knew the country well. With the few words that he could command of the language which Theodore had been speaking, the guide told him that it would be a journey of two days from that spot to Margus, and that houses where they could find refreshment and repose would be few; but still Theodore determined to pursue his way, and the guide was at once promised the hire that he demanded.

He made the young Roman stay while he caught and mounted a small shaggy horse which had been straying in the wood, round a hut which was just to be distinguished upon the upland, through the bolls of the tall trees. No sooner had he sprung upon his beast, however, than the whole nature of the barbarian seemed changed. Where he had been slow and limping in his gait, he became quick and active; and setting off at full speed through the forest, he pursued paths along which it was scarcely possible for Theodore and his companions to follow him; so narrow were they, so tangled, so insecure for any horse unaccustomed to those intricate wilds.

Still poured down the rain; and as they galloped on through those dim vistas and sudden breaks, the white mist rolled in volumes among the trees, and each footfall of the horses produced a cloud from the marshy grass. At length, towards the evening, the sun, some three hours past his meridian, began to break through the heavy clouds, and streamed down the glades of the forest, while the light vapours rolled away, and the birds sang sweetly from the woody coverts around. In another hour three small tents of skins were seen; and, pausing there for a short space, the guide procured some food for the horses and milk for the riders. The people of the tents looked wild and fierce, and spoke the dialect of the Huns, which was unintelligible to all ears but that of the guide. They showed no curiosity in regard to the strangers' appearance, but they evinced that avidity which is the peculiar vice of frontier tribes.

At the end of less than an hour the guide pointed to the sun and to the horses; and Theodore, mounting, once more followed him on his way. Night fell ere they again saw a human abode; but at length they halted before a tall tower of hewn stone, which had, in former years, been a Roman fort, built as a defence against the very barbarians who now possessed the land. The guide tried the gateway; but finding it fast, shouted loudly for admission. He then paused to listen if any reply were made; and while he did so, Theodore heard afar the melancholy roaring of the Danube.

At length some grim faces and wild fur-clad forms presented themselves at the gate, and Theodore and his followers were led into what had been the chamber of the guard. There was no want of hospitality--nay, nor of courtesy of heart--shown by the rude tenants of that half ruined building, to the young stranger who sought the shelter of the roof that had become theirs. They lighted a fire in the midst of the hall to dry his still damp garments; they brought forth their stock of fruit and milk, and even some of the delicacies obtained from the neighbouring country. Broiled fish was speedily added; and while the men, by speaking gestures, pressed him to his food, the women touched his mantle, and seemed by their smiles to marvel at its fineness.

Though their appearance was rude, and no comeliness of form or feature won by external beauty that confidence which is so often refused to homely truth, yet Theodore read in their looks that he was secure, and lay himself down upon a bed of skins to seek that repose which he so much needed. The freedmen lay at his feet; and all was soon silence within those crumbling walls: but sleep, the bosom friend of youth and happiness, grows timorous as a sacred bird after the first fell grasp of grief. All that he had gone through within the last sad month, all that weighed upon his mind even then, came back in the visions of the night, and three times roused the young Roman from his light and troubled slumbers. The first time all was still, and the light of the blazing fire of pine flickered over the dark forms that lay sleeping around. The next time when he woke two figures were standing between him and the light; but one soon turned away and left the chamber, while the other, who remained, cast some fagots on the embers, and again lay himself down to rest. The slumber that succeeded was deeper, heavier, more tranquil; and when he again awoke, daylight was streaming in from above. Almost all the Huns whom he had seen the night before had left the chamber, and one, whom he had not hitherto beheld, stood with his arms folded on his chest, gazing upon him as he lay stretched in the morning light.

Between Theodore and the barbarian, however, awakened, watchful, and prepared, with his spear grasped in his hand, sat the faithful Cremera, his giant limbs and swelling muscles all ready to start into defence of his master on the slightest appearance of danger; but the eyes of the Hun seemed not even to see the slave, so intently were those small but searching orbs turned upon the countenance of the young Roman. Even when he woke and looked up, the Hun withdrew not that steadfast gaze; but seemed to contemplate, with eager curiosity, the same features which he had beheld silent and cold in sleep now wakening up into warm and speaking life.

Theodore returned the glance for a moment without rising, and, as he lay, scanned the person of the Hun. He was shorter than the ordinary height of the Romans; but his breadth across the shoulders was gigantic, with thin flanks and long muscular arms. His features were by no means handsome, and his complexion was a pale dark brown; but yet there was something in that countenance remarkable, striking, not displeasing. The small black eyes had an inexpressible brilliancy; the forehead, surmounted with thin gray hair, was broad, high, and majestic; and the firm immovable bend of the almost beardless lips spoke that decision and strength of character which, when displayed, either in good or evil, commands a separate portion of respect. His dress was nearly the same as that of the other barbarians whom Theodore had already encountered, consisting of dark gray cloth and skins; but the cloth was somewhat finer in texture, and the skins had a smooth and glossy softness, which showed the young Roman that the man who stood before him was superior to the rest of those by whom he was surrounded. Nor had it, indeed, required the slight superiority of his garb to teach Theodore that he beheld no ordinary man. It has been asserted, and it may be so, that from some hidden source of sympathy, some instinctive prescience, we always feel peculiar sensations on first meeting with one who is destined greatly to influence or control our fate through life; and whether such be the case or not, certain it is that through the breast of Theodore, the moment his eyes rested on the Hun, passed a thrill, not of fear, nor of awe, nor even of surprise, but of strange and mingled emotions, such as he had never known before; and, as I have said, he continued in the same recumbent attitude, gazing firmly in the face of one who gazed so steadfastly at him.

After a short pause, however, the Hun spoke, addressing him in the tongue of the Alani. "Though that bed," he said, in a low, deep-toned voice, every word of which was as distinct and clear as if spoken by a Stentor--"though that bed must be but a hard one for the soft limbs of a Roman, thou seemest too fond of it for such a youth as thou art."

"Thou art mistaken, barbarian," replied Theodore, springing on his feet; "the Romans, who can lie on silken couches when they find them, do not think the ground neither too cold nor too hard when necessary to use it for a bed. I was weary with long journeying for many days; otherwise the crowing cock is my awakener."

"Thou speakest the Alan tongue well," said the Hun, gazing at him from head to foot; "and thou art in colour and in size like a northman. Say, art thou really a Roman?"

"I am," replied Theodore; "but my mother was the daughter of Evaric--"

"King of the Alani," interrupted the Hun: "then thy father was Paulinus, count of the offices. We have met," he added, musing; "we have met; he is a valiant man: where is he now?"

"In the grave," replied Theodore.

The Hun started; and, after a moment's pause, replied, "I grieve for him; he was a valiant man: how did he die?"

"It matters not," answered Theodore; "he is dead. And now, barbarian, I would fain speed on my way, for I would be at Margus as early as may be. Where is my guide?"

"To Margus!" said the Hun: "know you that the priest of that city--the bishop as they call him--has offended Attila the King? know you that Attila has demanded him from Theodosius as a slave, to set his foot upon his neck, and trample on him?"

"I have heard such rumours as I came hither," replied Theodore; "but it matters not to me what quarrel there may be between my uncle and the barbarian chief. Attila will find it hard to trample on the brother of Paulinus."

"Ay! so he is Paulinus' brother!" cried the Hun; "I do remember now he *is* his brother: but if thou bearest tidings from Theodosius to thine uncle, tell him to put no faith in the arms of men who know not how to use them; to trust not in those who daily break their promises. Tell him that he who bade you thus speak knows full well Attila the King; and that he will as soon abandon his prey as the hungry vulture. Your guide is gone; but follow me; I will show you the way to Margus."

A number of barbarians were collected in the lower part of the tower and in the open space round it; but without a word they suffered Theodore and his freedmen, with their new guide, to proceed to a tree under which four horses stood prepared. All passed in silence; no one stood forward to assist; no one advanced to require recompense from the young stranger. The Hun who accompanied him sprang on his own horse at one bound, and then sat as if of a piece with the animal; while Theodore drew forth a coin of gold, and beckoned forward the barbarian who had acted the foremost part, on the preceding night, in offering him the rites of hospitality. The man looked wistfully at the gold piece which Theodore held out towards him, and then at the face of his superior, who sat beside the young Roman. The horseman, however, bowed his head, and the other instantly took the money, uttering a number of words which Theodore did not understand, but construed into thanks. Turning their bridles then towards the Danube, the journey towards Margus was recommenced, the Hun leading the way at a slow pace.

"You ride not so swiftly as our guide of yesterday," said Theodore, after proceeding for a few minutes, with the impatience of youth and anxiety urging him on; "remember, I would be at Margus ere nightfall."

"'Tis a three hours' journey," said the other, calmly: "you are impatient, youth. I would fain spare the beast thou ridest; for, were it as the gods willed it to be, it would be a noble creature, and thou hast ridden it too long and too hard yesterday for a creature so sleek and pampered."

"Despise it not, Hun!" said Theodore, as he saw the keen bright eye of his companion running over the charger's limbs; "despise it not. It has carried my father through a bloody field of battle, and has borne me through a long and painful journey, after which it may well show some signs of weariness; therefore despise it not, though it be unlike the rugged brute which thou ridest thyself."

"I do not despise it," rejoined the Hun. "In former times its soft and silken coat, its delicate limbs and weighty body, might have provoked my scorn; but I have learned to know that all things have their uses, and to despise nothing but vicious luxury, effeminacy, and cowardice. I see no reason why there should not be tribes who fight, and tribes who cultivate the land: each may be useful; and so with your horse and mine. Mine will carry me with a swiftness, and to a distance, and for a length of time, impossible to yours; will bear weather, and food, and cold, under which yours would die; but, very likely, in the shock of battle yours would bear down mine--if I did not prevent it--and, perhaps, might perform feats that mine could never learn. It is only when I see man debase himself to carve images, and paint pictures, and work gold, and spend years in making a dwelling to cover his miserable head, and lie upon the feathers of birds, and cover himself with the woven excrements of a worm, that I now feel disgust. Gems, and jewels, and cups of gold and silver, may be wrought by other nations, and may be used by us; but it is the part of bold and brave men to take them from those who are weak and effeminate enough to make them."

"I cannot argue with you, barbarian," replied Theodore; "my mind wanders unto other things: but I have heard my father say that all the graces and elegances of social life are the true touchstone of the noble heart. Those who are inclined by nature to evil will become effeminate and corrupt under their influence; while those who are brave and virtuous only gain thence a higher point of virtue and a nobler motive for daring. The diamond, when we throw it in the fire, loses nothing but the dirt and dust it may have gathered, and comes out clearer than before. A barbarian fights because he has nothing to lose but life, which has many miseries and few enjoyments; a Roman, because he has a duty to perform, although a thousand ties of refined pleasures and multiplied enjoyments bind him to the life he risks."

"Therefore is it that the Romans fight so feebly," replied the Hun; but as he saw the colour mounting in the cheek of Theodore, he added, "Be not angry, youth: my words shall not offend your ear in a land which thou hast sought, trusting to our hospitality. Thy father might well speak as thou sayst he did, for he was one of those that showed his own words true."

"Thou doest my father justice, my country wrong," replied Theodore; "but the day may come,

Hun--the day may come when Romans, rousing themselves from the sleep into which they have fallen, may teach those who now mistake idleness for cowardice, who take the love of repose and peace for timidity, that the lion yet lives, though his roar has not been heard for years."

A grim smile hung for a moment on the lip of the barbarian, and then passed away; but he replied nothing directly to the tart answer of his young companion. At length, as they rode along by the rushing Danube, winding their way once more between the forests and the river, he pointed first to the one and then to the other bank, saying, "Lo, Roman civilization--Scythian rudeness! and yet, as thou sayst, the time may come--nay, it may be near, when the trial will take place, of which country produces, which habits nourish, the boldest hearts and strongest hands. But setting that apart, I say, give me the forest and the wild meadow, and the simple hut or tent of skins, truth, justice, freedom: for it is my belief that simplicity and honesty are one; luxury and falsehood are not to be divided. Look at this forest," he continued, after a brief pause; "it seems almost impervious, yet thou hast found a way through it; and at the foot of the hill which we are now mounting you will find a paved road, leading into the heart of the land. It was constructed by thy ancestors, nearly in a line with the famous vallum Romanum; and if at any time need or fancy should make thee wish to see the nations which live beyond this woody barrier, follow that road, and ask for Onegisus, the friend of Attila the King. Thou shalt find safety, friends, and protection. But see! we are at the top of the hill, and I must leave thee. Yonder, on the other side of the stream, where the blue mist is rolling up the mountain, lies Margus. Lo! its many towers! Thou canst not miss the way. Now Mars protect thee!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE BISHOP OF MARGUS.

The two sides of that mountain were like the prospect laid out beneath the eyes of man when, in the midst of life, he pauses to survey the past and to scrutinize the future. Dark and gloomy, on the one hand, stretched masses impervious to the eye, wrapped in uncertain mists and vague, undefined confusion, where nothing was known, nothing was sure, but that there lay ruin, chill neglect, and desolation, even unto those regions where the Cimmerian darkness of the grave covered and confounded all. On the other hand, stretching out like the sweet memories that lie along the path of youth, was seen a fair and beautiful land, with the Danube rushing on through the midst towards Margus: valley and hill, fragments of the Dacian forests, but broken by broad cultivated plains, a watch-tower here and there; then, within their guardian line, a farm, a villa, gardens, and pasturages, with the towers and walls of Margus at about eight miles' distance; and beyond, but to the right, the Mons Aureus rising, like a pile of lapis lazuli, in blue majestic splendour to the sky.

Theodore paused to gaze; and feelings, mingled, intense, and even painful, woke in his bosom at the sight of those fair scenes from which he might so soon be driven, contrasted with that dark and gloomy land which might prove his only refuge.

He turned, however, after a moment's silence, to ask the Hun if he could, in truth, prefer the one to the other; but the barbarian had left him without further leave-taking, and his dark form was seen riding rapidly towards the thickest part of the forest. Theodore still remained gazing over the prospect; but, as he did so, he thought he heard a distant shout of many voices rising up from the woods behind him; and, fearful of any interruption in his course, he hurried on upon the road which lay open before him.

Increasing tokens of civilization now met his eye at every step as he proceeded; and shortly before he reached the shore, at the nearest point to the city, he beheld more than one ferryboat, no longer a mere raft, supported by inflated skins, but barks, provided expressly for the purpose, and offering every convenience at which the mature art of the Romans had yet arrived. Without question, the young Roman and his followers were admitted into one of the boats, and in a few minutes were landed on the other side of the Danube, in the midst of all that hurry, bustle, and luxurious activity which marked the precincts of a Roman city, even in a remote province, and in the immediate vicinity of those barbarian allies who were soon destined to overwhelm all those soft and splendid scenes in blood and ashes.

The Roman dress and air of Theodore and his two freedmen enabled them to pass on unquestioned through the gates; where a few soldiers, with their spears cast idly down, their helmets laid aside, and their swords unbraced, sat gaming in the sun, offering a sad but striking picture of the decay of that discipline which had once so speedily won, and had so long preserved, the dominion of the world. Gayly and tunefully carolled the flower-girl, as she tripped along with her basketful of wreaths and garlands for the festal hall or the flowing wine-cup;

loudly shouted, with the ready cyathus in his hand, the seller of hot wine in the Thermopolium; eagerly argued the lawyer and the suiter as they hurried along to the tribunal of the duumvir; gayly laughed the boys, as, followed by a slave bearing their books, they hastened homeward from the school. Splendid dresses, fair faces, magnificent shops, and chariots with tires of gold and silver, litters with cushions stuffed with the flowers of the new-blown rose, met the eye of Theodore in every direction; and as he looked on all this luxury and magnificence, and compared it with the scenes he had just quitted, he could not help asking himself, "And is this Margus? Is this the city daily threatened by barbarian enemies? Is this the extreme point of civilization, upon the very verge of woods, and wilds, and hordes of savage Scythians?"

At the end of a wide open space, towards the centre of the town, rose one of those beautiful peristyles--less light, but perhaps more imposing, than the Greek--whereof so many had been constructed under Hadrian. Within it appeared a massy temple, formerly dedicated to Jupiter, but now consecrated to that purer faith destined to remain unsullied through everlasting ages, notwithstanding the faults, the follies, and the vices of some of its ministers.

At the moment that the young Roman entered the forum, the mingled crowd of worshippers was descending the steps of the temple; and above them, between the two central pillars of the portico, clothed in his sacerdotal robes, and with his extended hands giving his blessing to the people, stood a tall and princely form, in which Theodore instantly recognised the Bishop of Margus, the brother of his father.

Dismounting from his horse, the young Roman waited for a moment, until the crowd had in some degree dispersed, and then, ascending the steps towards the door through which his uncle had retired into the church, he asked a presbyter, who was still lingering on the threshold, if he could speak with the bishop.

"You will find him at his dwelling, my son," replied the presbyter: "he has passed through the church, and has gone to his mansion, which lies just behind it."

Theodore took the direction in which the presbyter pointed with his hand; and, followed by Cremera and the other freedman, reached the entrance of a splendid dwelling, round the doors of which stood a crowd of poor clients, waiting for the daily dole of bread and wine. Theodore found some difficulty, however, in obtaining admission to his uncle's presence. "He is gone to divest himself of his sacred robes," one slave replied; "He is busy in private devotion," asserted another; a third plainly refused to admit the stranger, unless previously informed of his name and purpose.

"Tell the bishop," said Theodore, "that it is a Roman from Constantinople, who brings him tidings of his friends, which it much imports him to hear as soon as may be."

There was the accent of command in the young Roman's speech, which made the slave hasten to obey; and in a moment after the curtain, beneath which he had passed in order to communicate the message to the bishop, was drawn back, and Theodore found himself in the presence of his uncle.

The prelate gazed upon him for a moment in silence. It is probable that at first he did not recognise the boy, whom he had not seen for several years, in the young man that now stood before him; and yet that faint and twilight recollection--more like the act of perception than of remembrance--by which old impressions first break upon us, before memory has time distinctly to trace out the particulars, caused the shades of manifold emotions to pass over his countenance, as his eyes remained fixed on the face of his nephew.

"Theodore!" he exclaimed at length, "Theodore! what in the name of Heaven has brought you here at this hour, and under these circumstances? Know you not that the barbarians demand my life to expiate the sins of others? Know you not that they threaten to seek me even here, and sate their vengeance in the blood of my flock, if I be not given up to them? Know you not that the weak emperor, after having faintly refused their horrible demand, now hesitates whether he should yield his innocent subject, and the teacher of his people, to the barbarous hands of his enemies? What was your father thinking of to send you here? unless, indeed, he be bringing six legions to my aid, and you be but the harbinger of the coming succour."

"Alas, my uncle," replied Theodore, mournfully, "no such tidings have I to tell; nevertheless, my tidings are not few nor of little import; but let us speak of them alone. Here there are many ears around us; and you may perchance find it expedient to consider well what I have to say ere you make it public."

As he spoke, he glanced his eye towards the crowd of slaves and officers who filled the other end of the hall in which they stood; and the bishop, who had been moved to indiscretion by the sudden appearance of his nephew, resumed the caution, which, though a bold, ambitious man, formed part of his natural character, and, making a sign with his hand, said merely, "Follow me." As he spoke, he led the way through the great hall to a small room beyond, from which a flight of steps descended to a beautiful garden, laid out in slopes, and adorned with many a statue and many a fountain. The curtain, drawn back between it and the hall, exposed to the view any one who approached on that side, while on the other the terraces lay open to the eye, so that naught with a step less stealthy than that of Time himself could approach unperceived.

"Here, my nephew, here," said the bishop, "our secret words will not pass beyond our own bosoms. Tell me what brings you hither at a moment of such earnest difficulty--at a moment when I know not whether the base emperor may not deliver me up to the barbarian Attila. I who have abandoned all--state, dignity, the paths of ambition and of glory--to devote myself to the service of God and his holy church. Yet tell me, first, how fares your father, how fares my noble brother? Why wrote he not in answer to my letter beseeching him to use his power with Theodosius in my behalf?"

"I come," replied Theodore--who, judging that the bishop's questions regarding Paulinus were but formal words of no deep meaning, proceeded at once to the point on which his uncle's curiosity was really excited--"I come, my uncle, to seek refuge and shelter with you against the anger of a base, weak monarch. Three days' journey behind me is your cousin, Julia Flavia, with her children and my sister. Persecuted by Theodosius for no fault committed, we thought that if we could find shelter in the world it would be with my uncle at Margus."

"Safety at Margus!" cried the prelate, in truth affected by the earnest and pleading tone in which his nephew spoke--"safety at Margus! Oh, Theodore, Theodore! is there safety to be found on board a sinking ship? Is there safety to be found between the opposing spears of two hostile armies met in battle? You come to me at a time when I know not whether the next moment may continue to afford security to myself. You come to me at a moment when my soul is trembling--though not with fear--no, but wavering with uncertain purposes, like a loosened sail quivering in the blast of the tempest, uncertain to which side it may be driven, or whether it may not be torn in fragments from the mast. You come to me in such a moment as this for refuge? But could not your father protect you--my great, my warlike, my courtly, my all-powerful brother, who despised the poor-spirited priest, and thought the robe and stole the refuge of a low ambition? Oh, Paulinus, Paulinus! how I could have loved you! Yet what do I say, Theodore? your dark robe! your untrimmed hair! your jewelless garments! Tell me, boy, tell me, where is your father?"

"Alas," replied Theodore, "I have no father. He who was my father is dead, murdered by the emperor!"

The living lightnings of fierce indignation flashed from the priest's proud eyes; and after pausing for a moment, as if unable to give voice to the feelings that struggled in his breast for utterance, he shook his hand towards the sky, to which his eyes were also raised, exclaiming, "Tyrant, thou hast sealed thy fate!" then, casting himself down upon a couch, he drew his robe over his head, and Theodore could hear him weep. The youth was moved; and at length he took his uncle's hand in his, and pressed his lips upon it, saying, "I knew not that you loved him thus."

"Yes, Theodore, yes!" replied the bishop; "I did love him, better than he knew, better than I knew myself till this very hour. We had different tempers, we chose opposite paths, we held opposite opinions. That which I thought wisdom, he would misname craft; that which I held as just, he would taunt as base. We were both, perhaps, ambitious, but in different ways; and his ambition led him to contemn mine; and yet, Theodore, and yet I loved him better than any other human being. When I strove for eminence in the state which I had chosen, when I raised my voice and made the proud to bow, the sinner to tremble, piety to kindle into enthusiasm, and devotion to reach its highest pitch, my first imagination was what Paulinus would think; my first hope to tower above his low opinion. He was the object and the end of many of my best and greatest actions: almost every thought of my life has had some reference to him. I have disputed, opposed, quarrelled with him--nay, even hated him, and yet belied my own heart by loving him still!"

The bishop paused, and, crossing his arms upon his broad chest, fixed his eyes upon the sky, and remained for several minutes in gloomy silence, as if summoning up before the eye of memory all the visions of the past. "Theodore," he continued at length, speaking in a rambling, musing tone, "Theodore, I will be to you as a father. What my fate may be, I know not; but my brother's murderer shall never deliver me up to the power of the barbarians. Do you mark me? He shall learn that, deprived of the just defence of my sovereign, I can defend myself. But it matters not! You are too young for such counsels! Paulinus, my brother, thou art dead; but thou shalt be avenged. The cup of wrath wanted but one drop to make it overflow, and thy murder has poured an ocean into it. Now tell me, Theodore--the Lady Flavia, where is she? She shall be welcome to Margus. Within these walls my power is unlimited. The people and their magistrates are equally my flock and my servants; so that I can assure a welcome to those who seek it. Where is Flavia? Why came she not with you?"

"Because tidings reached us every day," replied Theodore, "of messengers sent from Constantinople, bearing orders for our arrest--perhaps for our death. Three of these messengers, we learned, had taken the way to Margus; and ere we could venture to trust ourselves here, I came on to see whether the power of my uncle could give us shelter and security."

A smile of bitter meaning gleamed over the countenance of the bishop. "Three messengers!" he said--"three messengers, bearing orders for your arrest or death! No later than yesterday morning, three Byzantines--for so part of their dress bespoke them--were found, slain by the Huns, as it appeared, near Tricornium, higher up the river. Perchance these have been the messengers, and have delivered their just and clement letters to the wrong hands."

"It is not unlikely," replied Theodore. "They must have been near that town early in the morning of yesterday; for I had news of their course, and crossed the Danube lest, with fresh

horses, and perhaps a guard from that station, they might overtake and seize me."

"They have been seized themselves," said the prelate, setting his teeth close. "The smiter has been smitten; the messenger of death has found death himself. But how escaped you the Huns yourself, bold youth! For the last month they have made excursions across the river, destroying wherever they came. How was it that you, who without permission entered their own land, passed through them in perfect safety?"

"In truth I know not," replied Theodore, "unless it was that I began by speaking to the ferrymen in the Alan tongue."

"That has saved you," replied the prelate; "but now, my son, we must not lose time. These are days of danger, when the very air is full of winged death. We must not leave the Lady Flavia and her children one moment longer unprotected than is needful. Tell me with what company she travels. Ye were not, I trust, obliged to fly in such haste as to leave all your domestics behind."

"Oh no!" replied Theodore; "the tribune Marcian, who brought us the sad tidings of my father's fate, and warned us of our own danger, took care that all the slaves should accompany us; and saw that all the gold and jewels, either belonging to Flavia, or which my father had left in Illyria, should be borne with us, to escape the greedy hands of Theodosius. Thank God, we have enough to support us with dignity till this storm be blown away, and the sun shines once more."

"Alas, Theodore!" replied the priest, "seldom is it with man that the sun, once clouded, ever shines again. The bosom of nature, torn by the tempest, soon recovers its gayety and its beauty, or, swept by the shower, wakes up again in brighter loveliness; but the heart of man, beaten by the storms of fate, never regains its freshness, but is dulled and withered by every drop that falls, and revives not again till his short day is closed. But I will send out to greet Flavia, and bid her welcome. Glad am I that she brings with her wealth and attendants. Not that I could not myself have supplied her with all she might need; for, thanks be to Him who gave, my worldly wealth is great--greater than is perhaps good for securing the treasure in heaven. Nevertheless, all our wealth may not be more than sufficient for the purpose that I have in view. I will send out to find her, and bring her hither."

"Nay, my uncle," replied Theodore, "I will myself be the messenger. She will not give herself to the guidance of any one if I do not return. I am not weary; and an hour or two of rest would enable me, had I but fresh horses for myself and the freedmen, to seek her at once. This bank of the river, by the death of these messengers, is now free, and the way is shorter."

His uncle made some opposition on the plea of his nephew's youth and yet unconfirmed strength, but that opposition was slight, and soon overcome. There was, indeed, an eagerness, a haste, an impetuosity, in the bishop's whole demeanour, which betokened a keen and ambitious mind struggling with difficulties and dangers which he feared not, but estimated at their true value. He seemed, to the eyes of Theodore, like a skilful swordsman contending with a multitude of enemies, with all his energies awake and active to avoid every blow, to parry every thrust, and to return upon his assailants their strokes with usury.

When at length he consented that his nephew should go, and gave him into the hands of one of the officers, with directions to provide for his repose and refreshment, what was the impression which his uncle's conduct had made upon Theodore's mind? The bishop had been kinder than he expected; he had evinced more affection for his father, more deep love for that dead parent whose memory was enshrined in the heart of Theodore, and revered as the relics of some pure and sainted martyr; he had shown more depth of feeling, and more of the energy of talent, than the youth had been taught to believe he could display; and yet Theodore was not satisfied. The diamond touchstone of a pure and innocent heart, without an analysis, without minute investigation, detected at once the alloy which ran through the seeming gold: he saw that there was much of goodness, he saw that there was much of power, in his uncle's character; but there wanted the simplicity, the mildness, the humility of the Christian priest: there were strong feelings without strong principles, high talents without high honour, and through all his best and brightest qualities ran a vein of brilliant selfishness, stimulating nearly, in appearance, the more precious things with which it mixed; but, oh! how different in intrinsic value.

CHAPTER X.

THE TREASON.

It was night; but no bright moon compensated for the absence of the greater orb, and the air

was dark, though the sky itself shone with all its innumerable sparks of golden light. It was one of those nights in which the depth of the heavens becomes apparent, in which each separate star is seen hanging distinct and apart from all the rest, a lamp of everlasting fire in the blue profound of space. The lately troubled waters of the Danube had become clear; and, flowing more calmly, though in a less volume, mirrored the splendid pageantry of heaven's resplendent host.

Within an hour, however, after the full setting of the sun had left the earth to the dominion of the night, another light than that of the stars was reflected from the waters of the rolling stream at the distance of a few miles from the city of Margus. The glare of a multitude of torches flickered over the rolling stream, and cast a red, unpleasing light over the rocks and trees amid which the Roman road was cut from Tricornium to Margus. That light, too, shone upon the anxious and wearied countenances of those who, a little more than a month before, we have seen set out from the spot where all their happy memories were left behind them to wander forward towards lands and fortunes that they knew not.

A change, however, had been effected in the appearance of many of that party. Young as he was, Theodore had shown a wisdom and prudence beyond his years; and as soon as they had lost the escort of the tribune Marcian, on the frontiers of M[oe]sia, he had selected twenty of the most faithful slaves, and had besought Flavia to liberate and arm them. His pretext was that, in approaching the barbarian countries, many dangers lay upon the way; but he did not say that even against the authority of the emperor himself those arms might not be used.

Belated by the length and fatiguing nature of the way, many a timid glance was cast by Ildica and Eudochia towards the opposite bank of the stream, where lay, shrouded in its dark woods, the strange and dangerous country of the Huns. Many an apprehensive inquiry, too, went from lip to lip among the women slaves that followed; and, though each knew that the other was as ignorant of the land through which they were passing as herself, many a time was the question asked, "How far is it now to Margus!" meeting still with the same unsatisfactory reply. At length Theodore, riding up from the rear of the line, where he had remained to see that no one lingered behind, approached the side of the lectula in which Ildica was borne, and said, to the no small joy of all who heard him, "Lo! the arch of Trajan. To Margus is but one short mile."

That mile was soon accomplished; and at the gates of the city they were met by persons sent on purpose to welcome them, both by the magistrates and by the bishop of the town. Such friendly greeting in such a remote spot, the sight of a populous and wealthy city, the cheerful sounds and objects which met the ear and eye in the streets, served to revive hope in the bosoms of that weary and anxious train, and to recall the images of warm domestic tranquillity, which had been banished during their dreary journey of the last two days: a house had been prepared for them not far from the dwelling of the bishop, and they found, waiting their arrival, all those ready luxuries which the skill and ingenuity of the most pleasure-loving nation upon earth had devised in the most voluptuous period of the world's history. Baths were prepared; wine-cups crowned with garlands, and delicacies from remote lands, waited for the lip; the softest triclinia surrounded the already spread table; and the sound of sweet music was breathing through the atrium: odours floated on the air; lights blazed through the halls; and when at length Flavia, Ildica, Eudochia, Theodore, and Ammian stood in the midst of that enchanted scene--far from their enemies, with a place of certain refuge close at hand, and the long, weary, perilous journey accomplished behind them--feelings of joy and thankfulness, great, irrepressible, overpowering, welled up from the deep fountain of the heart, and, casting themselves into each other's arms, they wept.

Many moments passed in those entrancing feelings; but when, at length, the bishop appeared to bid them welcome to a city over which his eloquence and powers of mind had given him greater influence than even the representative of the imperial authority possessed, Flavia had again resumed her calm and tranquil dignity. He would not sit down to meat with the guests for whose entertainment he had provided so sumptuously, affecting an abstinence which might or might not be habitual; but he insisted upon waiting in a neighbouring chamber while they supped, declaring that he had matter of some moment to communicate to the Lady Flavia. Simple in her habits, and encouraging simplicity in her children, Flavia was soon prepared to give the prelate that private hearing which he desired. He led her accordingly into another chamber, while Ammian sported with Eudochia; and Theodore, seated beside Ildica, tasted once more the sweet moments of love.

They were the only ones that they had known since the fatal night of the earthquake, since that night which had witnessed the first union of their hearts in the bond of spoken affection. In all their other meetings--in every other communication which they had yet had--danger and terror, like the drawn sword in the eastern feast, had hung above their heads, and marred the tranquillity of their mutual hearts. Now, however, when apprehension was drowned in hope, they felt, and oh, how dear was the feeling! that the love, which had grown up in joy and peace, had been increased and strengthened, brightened and perfected, by dangers and misfortunes.

Theodore held Ildica's graceful hand in his, and gazed into those dark, dark lustrous eyes, reading therein a reply to all the intense and passionate love of his own ardent heart; and Ildica, seated on the couch beside him, lifted the long sweet curtains of those gemlike orbs to the countenance of her lover, and, with the mingled glance of timidity and confidence, seemed to pour forth the thanks of her fervent spirit, not only for all that he had done to sooth, to comfort, and to protect her, but for all the unspoken thoughts of love, the anxieties and fears concealed,

the constant remembrance by day, the frequent dreams by night, for all, in short, which her heart told her that his had felt in the hours of pain and care through which they had so lately passed. Low and murmured words read a comment on those looks, and Theodore and Ildica once more knew an hour of intense delight.

A large chamber intervened between that in which they sat and that to which her mother had retired to hold conference with the prelate, and the veils over both the doorways were drawn. For some time the voice of neither speaker was heard, but at length the tones grew higher. The low sweet murmur even of Flavia's tongue found its way to the hall where her children waited her return, and the high but harmonious tones of the eloquent priest sounded loud, and sustained, as if he were using all his powers of oratory upon some great and inspiring theme. No distinct words, however, were heard, and then again, after a time, the voices once more sank low, and in a few minutes the bishop and the lady issued forth with hasty steps and agitated looks. The prelate was passing rapidly on, without noticing his brother's children, as if carried forward by some strong excitement; but, ere he reached the doorway, his habitual self-command returned in a degree, and, turning round with a knitted brow but an air of dignity, he raised both his extended hands, saying, "Bless you, my children! the blessing of God be upon this house, and all that it contains." That done, he again turned upon his way, and rapidly quitted the apartment.

In the meanwhile, in the midst of that rich hall, stood Flavia, with her pale cheek flushed, her beautiful eyes wild and thoughtful, her fair hand pressed tight upon her broad, statue-like brow, and her lip murmuring words which sounded vague and unmeaning, because the key to their sad interpretation was in her own bosom. At length she spoke:--"Hie thee to repose, Eudochia," she said; "hie thee to repose, my sweet child, Ammian, too, seek rest, my boy, while thou mayst find it. Ye have had a weary journey, children, and God only knows when it may be renewed."

With some light and fanciful words from Ammian, breathing the spirit of bright untiring youth, some of the slaves were summoned, and the two younger members of that family, whose fate we have so long followed, retired to sleep. Flavia listened for their parting steps; but when all was quiet, she caught the hand of Theodore, exclaiming, "Oh, my son, have you known and consented to this?"

"Have I known what, dear mother?" demanded Theodore, who had hitherto mastered his surprise. "I have consented to nothing which should move my mother thus painfully."

"I believed it, Theodore, I believed it," replied Flavia. "In your veins and in mine flows the blood of those Romans who thought life a light sacrifice for their country, whose gore flowed like water for the defence and preservation of their native land; and I am sure that if you be your father's son, no danger, no injustice, will induce you to forget your duty, and bring upon the country of your birth the tide of barbarian warfare! Is it not so, my son?"

"It is!" answered Theodore; "but what mean you, my mother? We understand not to what your words apply."

But Flavia continued, turning to her daughter: "And you, Ildica," she said, "tell me that you are my child indeed--that you would sacrifice life, and all life's dearest interests, rather than take part, or benefit by, or instigate the ruin of your country."

"I would, my mother, I would," replied Ildica, while her person seemed to grow taller, and her resemblance to her mother increased under the excitement of the moment. "I would sacrifice life, and, what is far dearer than life, I would sacrifice him," and she laid her hand upon the arm of Theodore. "I would rather see him die in defence of his country than live and prosper by its fall. Oh, my mother, you have judged your child rightly; the blood of my father, spilled by the enemies of our native land, throbs in his daughter's heart; and even this weak hand, were there none other to assert our country, might yet strike one blow in her defence."

"My noble child," cried Flavia, throwing her arms around her daughter, "thou art worthy of thy race. Theodore, what think you that your uncle proposes to me to do? To throw wide the gates of Margus to the barbarians, to open the way for the Huns into the heart of the empire, to buy revenge for your father's death and safety for ourselves by the desolation of our native land, the destruction and ruin of our friends, and the massacre of our fellow-countrymen! Shame on such degenerate Romans! Shame, shame upon them to all eternity! Oh God, oh God! where are thy thunderbolts?"

Theodore stood, for a moment, as one stupified by the strange and fearful tidings he had heard; and fixing his eyes upon Flavia's face, he gazed upon her with an expression of inquiring doubt, which showed how far he was from any participation in the schemes or feelings of his uncle. "My mother," he said at length, "let us go hence. This is no refuge for us. Did he think, by showing us here an image of that splendour and comfort which we so long possessed, and so lately lost--did he think to blind our eyes, and weaken our hearts, and destroy our virtue? My choice, oh my mother, is made; give me honour and misery, if virtue cannot secure peace. Let us go hence."

"At sunrise to-morrow," replied Flavia, "we will depart; for I much fear that he told me not all; I doubt that his dealing with the Huns is far advanced."

"Why not at once, then?" demanded Theodore; "to-morrow's daylight may be too late."

Flavia turned her eyes upon her daughter, who understood the glance, and answered at once, "My mother, I can go, though I am wearied: were it not better to drop by the wayside than risk our future peace?"

But Theodore interposed: "No, no," he said; "an hour before daylight will be time enough. The slaves are wearied beyond all endurance; and perhaps, also, were we to attempt it to-night, the guards might become suspicious, and stay us at the gates. To-morrow it will seem more natural. The wearied soldiers, at that hour, will let us pass without inquiry, and, following the course of the river, we can pass through Noricum, and take refuge either among my kindred of the Alani, or under the strong shield of Ætius, in Gaul, from whose protection neither weak emperor dare attempt to snatch us. Rest thee, Ildica!" he added, throwing his arms around her; "rest thee, my beloved; and rest thee, too, dear mother! I will see all prepared, and ready to set out an hour before the dawning of the day."

"And thou, my poor Theodore," said Flavia, "thou hast no rest!"

"Am I not a Roman?" was the youth's reply.

On the next morning--while the city of Margus was still buried in slumber, and all vacant were those streets so lately thronged with the gay unthinking crowd pursuing with light heart the butterfly pleasure, and never dreaming that fate, like a lion, was following fast upon its track--the same train which the night before had entered the gate with joy, now passed them again with sorrow, but without regret. Theodore had first presented himself, and had held a momentary conversation with a soldier on guard. The gates had then been opened by the janitor of the night, and the slaves, who led the train, passed out. Ildica and Eudochia followed; but as the litter of Flavia was borne forward, Theodore approached its side, and said, in a low voice, "They demand that one of us at least should stay to give account of our departure either to the bishop or the magistrates; I will keep Cremera and some others with me. In the meantime go you on, and I will join you speedily."

Flavia turned an anxious look upon him, but he added, in a still lower tone, "Fear not: they dare not detain me;" and, motioning to the slaves who bore the litter to proceed, he drew back under the archway.

Their course lay to the westward; but as Theodore turned towards the city, a faint gray light hung over the massy towers and columns of Margus, showing that the dawn of day was fast approaching. With a slow pace, and a sad but resolute heart, Theodore returned to the house which had been assigned to them as their dwelling; and, after a momentary pause, turned his steps on foot to the mansion of the bishop. The gates were already open, some of the slaves at work, and the light of the now dawning day was seen streaming faint and cold through the long range of vestibules and halls from an open archway, beyond which appeared various groups of statues, fountains, and pillars, ornamenting a courtyard. Like all dependants on the great and powerful, keen to perceive who were in favour, who were influential with their lords, the slaves, who, a few days before, had obstructed the access of Theodore to his uncle, hastened to pay their court to one whom they now knew, and besought him, with officious civility, to repose himself there till the bishop should have risen to receive him.

The mind of Theodore, however, was not in a state to permit him to take even corporeal rest; and he replied that he would walk forth into the court and amuse himself with the statues and fountains till his uncle was prepared to receive him. The cold and absent tone in which he spoke checked all intrusion; and, meditating on his wayward fate, he walked forth alone, now pausing as if to contemplate some beautiful piece of sculpture, now gazing, as if with pleased attention, on the clear waters that, welling from the rocky ground on which the city was built, sparkled round the court in innumerable graceful urns and vases, but with his mind, in fact, employed on matters far different from the light elegances and calm pleasures of life.

Thus absent and musing, he went on to a spot where a long flight of steps led down to the bottom of that terraced garden which he had beheld from above in his first conference with his uncle. Scarcely conscious of what he did, Theodore slowly descended the steps, and entered one of the long paved walks at the very lowest part of the garden. The right side was flanked by a strong wall, in which were two or three doorways leading, as it would seem, to the pomærium, or open space between the town and its fortified walls--for the house itself was one of the farthest from the centre of Margus. Scarcely had he entered that path, however, when the sound of steps made him raise his eyes, and he beheld before him four dark figures--to see which, in that place, caused him suddenly to pause, and lay his hand upon his sword. Ere he could distinguish their faces, by the general aspect of their forms, he perceived that they were barbarians, free, and in a Roman city at that early hour. A moment more showed him that, while three of the party had mingled their barbarian dress of skins with jewels and ornaments of gold and silver, the fourth, who preceded the others as they advanced, retained the original simple habit of his nation, being clothed in plain but valuable furs and dark cloth, but of exceeding fineness. Those who followed bore about them many strange and barbarian arms, but he who preceded had nothing but a broad and heavy sword, composed solely of iron from its hilt to its scabbard. In him Theodore instantly recognised the Hun who had been his guide on his last day's journey through the Dacian territory, and the same unaccountable feeling passed through his bosom which he had

experienced on beholding him before. He saw too well, however, that Flavia's suspicions were correct, and that his uncle had already plunged irretrievably into those dangerous intrigues which were destined to prove, not only the ruin of himself and of the city which yielded itself so tamely and entirely to his government, but far beyond that, to his whole native land, and indignation for a moment mastered all other sensations.

"What doest thou here, barbarian?" was his only greeting when they met.

"What is that to thee, youth?" rejoined the Hun, with a calm, haughty smile, such as may play upon a father's lip when he reproves--though amused thereby--the frowardness of some spoiled child. "But speak thine own language," he continued, in a corrupt dialect of the Latin tongue; "speak thine own language: weak and insignificant as it is, it will cover from the ears of those who hear us such light words as those thou hast just spoken."

"My words were not light, Hun," replied Theodore: "for every Roman may well demand what thou doest here, when he meets with armed barbarians in the heart of a Roman city."

"We are armed," said the Hun, "but we are few. What I do here is naught to thee; but if thou wilt listen to me, my coming may do thee service. I love thee for thy mother's father, and for her brother. They were my friends; and he who would be terrible to those who hate him must do good deeds to those who love him. Know that the Roman empire trembles to its fall. Attila the King has said it, and it will come to pass. He has said, 'I will sweep it as a cloud sweeps the tops of the forest. I will pass over it as a storm,' he has declared, 'from one part even unto the other; and I will not leave it so long as one Roman stands up before me to oppose me.' Attila the King has said it, and his words shall be made true. Nevertheless, as thou art one of those who think that there is yet vigour in weakness and strength in Rome, I bid thee consider what will be thy fate even should thine emperor be successful in resistance. The blood of thy father is upon his head; thou fleest from his vengeance, and he seeks thy life. Thus much have I learned from thee and from thine uncle. Should Attila be successful, and thou not of his friends, thou perishest. Should Theodosius triumph, thinkest thou that he who has trodden upon the mighty will spare the weak?"

"Hun!" said Theodore, taking a step forward to pass him, "could my blood, poured forth on the banks of yonder river, like the dragon's teeth of Cadmus, raise up a host of armed men to defend my native land against thee and against thy king, I would hold my throat to the knife, and die with gratitude and joy! Thinkest thou that such a one can be impelled by fear, or led by hope, to serve thee and to betray his native land?"

"I think," replied the Hun, "that thou mightst be a faithful friend to a worthier monarch than thine own. Fare thee well! and remember, as I told thee when last we met: in future times, when the hands of fate shall have shaken from their places thrones and empires, and have changed the fate of little as well as great, shouldst thou need protection, thou wilt find it at the name of Onegisus. Now, forward to thine uncle; I must hence."

Without returning to the court, Theodore sprang up the terraces of the garden towards the chamber where he had before conferred with the bishop. His hurried step caught the prelate's attention; and, ere Theodore had reached the top, his uncle's majestic form, clothed in his splendid robes, appeared in the doorway above, gazing down to see who it was that approached so rapidly.

"Theodore," he exclaimed, while an expression of pleasure and expectation lighted up his features, "I trust you are come to bear me good tidings, and that the Lady Flavia is not so rashly obstinate as when last I saw her."

"Far from it!" said Theodore, gravely, "I have come but to tell you that we remain Romans to our death. All who entered the gates last night, except myself and a few slaves, are by this time an hour's journey on their way to Noricum."

"Rash woman! what has she done?" cried the bishop, clasping his hands; "she is lost, she is lost! Fly, Theodore, quick! Fly like the lightning! Bring her back hither; or, if she will not come, lead her on the road to the south, anywhere but the road she has taken."

Theodore gazed upon the agitated countenance of his uncle in amazement; but the bishop continued, more vehemently than before, "Fly! do I not tell you to fly? Lose not a moment! breathe not a word! Away, as if a lion were behind you. The Huns are already across the river, on the very road she has taken. If she will not return hither, seek for no highway, look for no easy path, but plunge at once into the country, and hurry to the southward, making not a moment's pause!"

Without a word of reply, the youth darted through the vacant rooms, passed the gates of the dwelling, the Basilica, and the Forum; reached the house where the horses and slaves remained, sprang upon his charger's back, and, followed by the rest, dashed out towards the walls of the city. The gates were open, but, to his surprise, no soldiers, no gatekeepers were now there. The guard had been withdrawn for purposes which he too well divined; and passing out unquestioned, he hurried on with the same frantic speed in search of those he loved.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SEARCH.

Hurrying on without pause, and impressed with but the one overpowering thought of the danger of all he loved on earth, Theodore soon reached the banks of the Danube, and gazed onward upon the road, which for several miles lay straight before him. But nothing met his sight, either to raise his hopes or increase his apprehensions; all was open and clear, and not even a cart or a beast of burden from the country, no, not a single peasant bringing in his basket of fruit or flowers, arrested the eye, as it wandered down the long, straight avenue. A pair of enormous eagles, whirling slowly round, high up in the blue morning sky, was the only sight of animated being that presented itself; the singing of a light bird, too lowly and insignificant to fear those majestic tyrants of the skies, and the dull roar of the great river, were the only sounds that broke upon the ear.

Hope sets her quick foot wherever fear leaves the space vacant; and Theodore trusted that Ildica might have passed on ere the Huns had crossed the river. He paused not, however, at the voice of the siren, but still urged on his horse, gazing anxiously forward, and listening for every sound. The five freedmen who had remained with him followed as fast as they could, but the superior power and swiftness of the young Roman's charger left a short but increasing interval between them. That interval was less, perhaps, than half a mile, when Theodore reached the wooded rocks, round whose immoveable bases the road was forced to wind; but his faithful Cremera saw him disappear behind them with apprehension, and urged on his horse with eager haste, till he and the rest had also turned the angle of the rocks, and once more beheld his master.

Theodore was now at less than a hundred yards' distance: he had dismounted, and, with the charger standing beside him, was kneeling over some object which had attracted his attention on the road. When the freedmen came up, they too sprang to the ground to look upon the sight which had stopped him. It was the body of one of their companions, who had been selected, like themselves, to bear arms upon the dangerous journey they had been forced to undertake. His spear was in his hand, with the iron red with blood, and in his heart was fixed a reed arrow, such as some of the Scythian nations used in their wars.

Theodore pointed in silence to the corpse, gazed for a moment round, and followed with his haggard eye the long track of the road, apparently to discover if any new object of horror lay before him; and then, after once more looking sternly upon the dead man, he shook his sword from the sheath, sprang again upon his horse, and galloped on his way. As he went, however, his eye searched anxiously on the ground for further traces regarding the too evident fate which had befallen Flavia and her company; nor was he without finding such marks; the ground was dented and beaten with horses' feet, and stains of blood here and there showed that there had been a contest of a fierce and desperate kind on the spot over which he passed.

Scarcely three hundred yards from the place where lay the body of the freedman, a small road turned off to the left, leading down through the woods, with which that part of the country was thickly strewn, to the banks of the river Margus, higher up than the city. At that point, too, the traces, which had hitherto marked so plainly the course which those he sought for had pursued, no longer afforded him a clew; for, separating as it were into two distinct streams, the footmarks of the horses went on in either track, leading, on the one hand, towards Tricornium, and, on the other, into the thinly-peopled and half-cultivated country towards Illyria.

He paused in doubt; and the agony of impatience, even at a moment's delay, was only equalled by that of apprehension lest he should mistake the path, as he turned from one to the other. However, the sun, just rising above the trees that fringed the bank, suddenly poured a stream of light upon the left-hand road, and the rays caught and glittered on some shining substance, which lay at about a bowshot distance. Theodore darted forward, and his doubts were removed at once; for that which accidentally flashed back the sunshine to his eye was the collar of emeralds which he himself had borne to Ildica from his father Paulinus. He hesitated no longer, but hurried on; and, ere he had proceeded more than a quarter of an hour, the sound of voices and the neigh of horses told him that his speed had brought him near to those he had pursued.

What was his purpose? he himself scarcely knew: it was vague, undefined, uncertain: it might be to save, it might be to live or die with those whom he loved.

The spot where he then stood was a wooded covert, near the brow of a high hill, which, sloping down on the other side beyond him, left the forest on its summit, and stretched into natural meadows, covering the bottom of a sweet and tranquil valley. He knew not, however, what was the scene beyond the brow; but he heard voices and barbarian tongues, and was

hurrying on to meet the fate in store for him, whatever that store might be, when the figure of a woman darted through the wood; and Flavia, pale and sad as a statue on a tomb, stood by his horse's side, and threw her arms up to clasp him as he sat.

"My children! my children!" she cried; "oh, Theodore! my children are in the power of the Huns!"

"Where?" demanded Theodore; and his fierce and flashing eye, and knit determined brow, told that he was prepared to do those deeds which were once common among the children of his native land: "where?" he demanded, and it was the only word he spoke.

"Down in yon meadow," replied Flavia, "over the brow of the hill. But listen: oh God! they might yet be saved if we had but fleet horses: there are few of the barbarians with them; those few are revelling at their morning meal: the rest are gone to pursue the party from Tricornium."

"What party?" cried Theodore: "is there a chance of any aid?"

"Alas, no! my son," she replied, in the same rapid tone; "alas, no! We met a centurion and his soldiers coming from Tricornium to Margus, and while we were in parley with him, the barbarians suddenly fell upon us, like a cloud of brown locusts upon the fertile land: there was resistance and strife, and I sought to flee with the children. I know not how it happened; for it was like struggling with the waves of a tempestuous sea, all terrible, and nothing distinct; but at length, when I could discern anything, I found myself alone, defended by Acer, the freedman, against a single Hun, who lingered behind to seize upon me as his prey, while the greater body of his companions pursued the centurion along the high road, and a few hurried down hither with their captives and plunder. Though wounded, the freedman defended me as if he had been a Roman, and struck the fierce barbarian with his spear a blow that made him fly; but, as he galloped off, he drew his bow, and in a moment an arrow was in Acer's heart. I was alone; my children were in captivity, and I followed hither; for I had only sought to save myself with them, but not to live without them."

Theodore sprang to the ground. "My mother," he said, "I will deliver them or die;" and making the freedmen dismount, he chose four to follow him, leaving the Arab Cremera to remain with Flavia. His orders were few, but they were distinct. "When Eudochia, Ammian, Ildica, are here," he said, addressing the freedman, "mount them and the Lady Flavia on the horses: speed back to Margus, and bid the bishop save them at any price. Should you find the city in the hands of the Huns, pronounce the name of Onegisus; and when you have found him, tell him that the youth Theodore, to whom he made a promise, claims his protection for those who are most dear to him on earth. Mother," he continued, embracing Flavia, "mother, I go!"

Flavia gazed mournfully in that sad, firm countenance. "Theodore," she said, pressing him in her arms, "Theodore, thou goest to destruction!"

He made no reply, but wrung her hand; and, waving to the slaves he had chosen to follow, burst from her embrace and hurried over the hill.

In another moment the resting-place of the Huns was before his eyes, though the branches of the trees still waved between him and them, affording concealment while he observed them. He paused but for an instant, but that instant sufficed to show him the barbarians scattered on both sides of the stream, gathered in groups of eight or ten, with their small rugged horses feeding beside them, and their weapons cast upon the turf whereon they sat. The heart of Theodore rose to see that they were so few, for not more than two hundred were there; and the number of the captives, who sat apart, with bending heads, and the self-neglecting look of utter despair, had their arms been free, might have offered no slight support in the bold attempt he was about to make. "Our object," he said, turning to those who followed him, "is to free Ildica, Eudochia, and Ammian. Let whoever reaches them first cut their bonds, and bid them fly up the road over the hill. Then free your fellows, and oppose the pursuit of the barbarians! Thou art pale," he added, addressing one of the freedmen; "thy lips are bloodless; if thy heart be faint, turn back."

"Thou goest to death," replied the man, firmly, "and I will go with thee. I feel that death is horrible; but it must be borne once, and I can bear it now."

"Follow, then!" said Theodore, "but cautiously, under the covering of the trees, till we are close upon them."

It was a great, a mighty, a sublime thing, that determined resolution unto death, which possessed the young enthusiastic Roman; which did away boyhood, and made him at once a strong and valiant man, in vigour, in powers, in intellect, in energy. To die for her he loved; to ransom her from the barbarians at the price of his own blood; to see her for the last time as her deliverer, and to know, in dying, that his hand had freed her, was the last aspiration, the only remaining hope that rested with Theodore, of all the many sweet and probable dreams of happiness which haunted his fancy but one short month before.

Calmly and deliberately he led the way through the trees to a spot where, with irregular sweeps, the forest met the meadow. Within fifty yards sat Ildica and her companions, mourning, like the enslaved Hebrews, their captivity, by the banks of the strange waters. Beside them, as a sort of guard--though the bonds by which they were tied rendered their unassisted escape

impossible--lay spread upon the grass some ten or twelve of the dark and filthy barbarians, with their rude and frightful countenances, scarred with ancient gashes and sallow with long-accustomed dirt, distorted by wild merriment, as they feasted near the first captives whom they had taken in their invasion of the Roman state. At the feet of one who sat closest to the prisoners lay a gory human head, the short cut hair and beard of which showed that it had belonged to no barbarian form; and--while Theodore, pausing behind the trees, let his eye run over the other groups of Huns, as they were scattered about at a greater distance, some eating and drinking, some playing with their unbridled horses, some erecting tents of skins, as if their numbers were soon to be greatly increased--the fierce barbarian ended some speech in his own tongue by a wild and ringing laugh, and, with a stroke of his foot, kicked the trunkless head into the river.

It was the signal for his own destruction. "On!" cried Theodore, "on!" and, with the sudden stoop of the eagle on its prey, he bounded forward upon the barbarian. The Hun started on his feet, but that instant the sword of the young Roman cleft him to the eyes; and rolling back in the convulsive agonies of death, he plunged into the river, where he had so lately cast the head of his adversary.

Scarcely was the blow struck when it was followed by another, which laid a second Hun prostrate and disabled at his feet: two more fell before the spears of the freedmen; and the rest, conceiving that much greater numbers of enemies must be approaching, fled to their comrades farther down the stream. There was a thirst in Theodore's heart to pursue and smite them still, but he remembered Ildica, and turned to where she sat. A moment freed her from her bonds: Eudochia and Ammian were set at liberty.

"Up! up! over the hill, beloved," cried Theodore: "quick as light, Ildica! No words! you will find horses ready. Cut their bonds quick," he continued, mingling his orders to the freedmen who had accompanied him, and to the captives as they were liberated. "Snatch up what arms you can find! There are the swords, and arrows, and javelins they have left behind. Fly, Ildica! I beseech you, fly! Ammian, hurry her and Eudochia up the hill; your mother is there with horses; we follow in a moment. Quick! quick! see, the barbarians are pouring back upon us! form a phalanx across the road! Away, away! for God's sake! for my sake! Away, my Ildica!"

There was no time for further words; the Huns were upon them; but, happily for Theodore, thirsty for immediate vengeance, they poured upon him with the sword and spear, instead of trusting to the missiles which they might have used with more fatal effect. Supported by twenty of the most resolute slaves and freedmen, some hastily equipped with the arms they had snatched up, some heaving masses of stone, the young Roman, active and skilful in the use of all the weapons of the day, barred the path between the Huns and their liberated captives, and met them with a courage and a fierceness even superior to their own. Every tree, every broken mass of rock, formed a point of resistance; and, though hurled against him with still increasing rage and impetus, the Huns recoiled, like javelins cast against a rock, leaving some of their number dead or dying at his feet.

Each moment, however, their numbers increased, as the scattered parties from the different spots of that wide meadow hurried up to the scene of conflict; and Theodore, grim with the blood of many enemies, but, alas! not unstained with his own, slowly retired step by step towards the spot where the road entered the wood. There he had resolved to make his last stand and die; but, ere he reached it, a broad tremendous form, which had just come up from the farther part of the meadow, mingled with his assailants, and, armed like himself with a heavy sword, seemed to single him out for destruction. His countenance, however, was nobler than that of the Huns in general, as his height was greater; and when Theodore heard him exclaim, in a tongue near akin to the Alan language, "Leave him to me! leave him to me!" he thought that, if he must die, it might be sweeter by his hand.

Still, however, he contended with him with but little disadvantage; for, as a Roman, he had greater skill, if the barbarian had greater strength. Blow to blow, and hand to hand, blow following blow, and thrust succeeding thrust, they stood almost alone, while the youth's companions were driven back; and with flashing eyes and slow irregular breath, pursued the lightning chances of the combat. Neither had gained a step, though Theodore's blood was trickling fast away, when a wild scream from the hill above caught his ear, unnerved his heart, and brought dim despair of his last dearest desire's result, like a dark cloud before his eyes.

He turned but for an instant to listen to that sound, but that instant was enough. His guard was beaten down; he fell upon his knee: though hope had abandoned him, courage had not, and he strove to struggle up, but it was in vain; his mighty adversary poured blow after blow upon the weak defence which his sword could now afford. He rose, fell again, staggered even upon his knee; exposed the arm which held the weapon over his head to the descending stroke of his enemy; dropped the sword itself from his disabled hand, and saw the shining steel, thirsting for his heart's last drop, raised high in air above his defenceless head. The hour he had expected had arrived, and he was prepared to die!

As with quick and heavy sweep the blow fell with a vehemence which he himself who struck it could not restrain, another weapon interposed, caught the keen blade upon one no less strong, and turned the stroke aside.

"Spare him, Ardaric! spare him!" cried the deep tones of a voice that Theodore had heard

before. "Spare him, for love of me!"

The young Roman started on his feet, and gazed wildly round upon the scene about him. When last he had time to look around, nothing had been seen but some two hundred Huns contending with himself and his small faithful band. Now, sweeping round in a semicircle which hemmed him in, down to the very river's brink, was seen an innumerable multitude of those dark ferocious horsemen, while thousands on thousands more appeared streaming down from the road, and spreading themselves out over the whole meadow.

The space for nearly forty cubits immediately about himself and his adversary was clear, except where stood beside him the same dark chief who had been his guide on the other side of the Danube, and where, a pace or two behind, a barbarian attendant held the powerful horse from which he had just sprung. But as Theodore gazed along the dusky line of savage foes around him, a sight more painful to his heart than the impending death which had just hung over him struck his eyes. There, where a multitude of banners, rudely embroidered with a black eagle crowned, marked a particular spot in their irregular line, stood Flavia and her family, once more in the hands of the barbarians!

But the hope of still purchasing their safety followed instantly upon the agony of that sight. Theodore at once cast himself at the feet of the Hunnish chieftain. "Oh, Onegisus!" he exclaimed, "oh, noble Onegisus! Thou hast promised me, unasked, thy favour and protection. Now, for the first time that I have ever required a boon at the hands of man, I beseech thee to grant me one. Let this brave man, from whose arm thou hast just saved me, plunge his sword into my heart! But let yon women and children, bound to me by the ties of blood and love, go free! Send them, oh send them, to the dwellings of my mother's race, beneath the snowy Alps, where they may find safety and protection! I adjure thee, by the God in whom I believe! I adjure thee, by the gods whom thou thyself worshippest! Spare them, oh spare them, and send them forth in peace!"

The dark chieftain gazed upon him for a moment with an aspect stern but not fierce.

"Ardaric," he said at length, "he is the captive of thy hand. Wilt thou give him unto me, and the first ten captives that I make they shall be thine?"

The other chieftain, whose brow had relaxed from the stern frown of contest, and on whose face was a mild and not displeasing smile, thrust his sword back into the scabbard, saying, "I give them to thee all, oh mighty king! I give them to thee, without recompense or bargain. Let them be the first spoil taken in the land of the Romans, which Ardaric offers to Attila the King."

At that tremendous name, already shadowed over with a cloud of vague but fearful rumours of wide lands conquered, kings bent to homage, and nations, as savage as that over which he ruled, overthrown by that mighty hand, Theodore drew a step back, and gazed with doubt and surprise on the dark features and sinewy limbs of him who had just saved his life; and if his feelings had been strange and mysterious when he had first seen that powerful but ill-proportioned form, what were they now, when he heard the stranger called by that fearful name.

"I am Attila!" said the monarch, answering his wondering and inquiring look. "What sayst thou now, young man? If I will send these women and slaves free, and on their way, wilt thou be the bondman of Attila?"

"Oh, not a bondman!" said Theodore, letting his head droop upon his bosom: "I can die, oh monarch! but I cannot be a bondman! Let him slay me, and let them go free; but bind not the limbs of a free Roman!"

Attila gazed on him a while with the same grave majestic air which he had never lost even for a moment, and then added, "I understand thee: I will not bind thy hands; I will not demand thy service against thy native land--thou shalt draw no sword for Attila against Rome--thou shalt fill no servile employ--honoured and caressed, thou shalt be the friend of Attila; and, if thou showest the same wisdom in other matters as in this, thou shalt be his counsellor also. Not his first friend--not his first counsellor," he added, "for here stands Ardaric, whose place none can supply; and yonder is Onegisus, found faithful in all things--but thou shalt be among the first. Harken, thou shalt promise me for seven years to be to me a faithful friend and counsellor--except in war or counsel against thy native land--and I will send these thy people upon their way, with the king's pledge for their safety till they reach the land of thy kindred."

"Surely the king has some secret motive!" exclaimed Ardaric, king of the tributary, or rather subject, nation of the Gepidæ; "surely the king has some secret motive for showing this favour to a captive--though the boy is brave!"

"I have, Ardaric!" replied Attila, "I have! There is a strange bond between me and him--but that matters not. Wilt thou accept the offer, youth?"

"I will!" replied Theodore; "but cannot they go with me?" and he pointed with his hand to Flavia and her companions.

"Thou knowest not what thou askest!" cried the king, with a cloud darkening on his brow. "It were evil with them, and not good, to go. I will send them in safety and in honour to the land of the Alani, if thou wilt be as obedient to my commands as a son to a father's during seven years,

except in the things which are against thy country; dost thou accept the terms?"

"I do," replied Theodore, "I do; and deep and heartfelt gratitude will I ever show to thee, oh monarch, for thus befriending me in my hour of need!"

"For seven years!" said the monarch, gazing up thoughtfully towards the sky, while the light of wild but mighty aspirations illuminated his harsh but striking features--"for seven years! Ere seven years have fled, I shall have conquered the whole earth!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE PARTING.

A silent pause of several minutes ensued, while the terrible monarch of the Huns thus suffered to burst forth so clear an indication of his hopes and purposes; and as he stood in the midst, still gazing up to the sky, with each firm and powerful limb in statue-like repose, his feet planted on the earth as if rooted to it, his broad chest thrown open, and his wide square forehead lifted to the morning sun, there was an air of might and majesty in his whole appearance which impressed those who beheld him with a belief in his power to accomplish fully that which he so boldly planned. Though far less in height than the chief of Gepidæ, yet Ardaric gazed upon him with reverence and awe; and Theodore, as he beheld him, and traced the light of potent intellect flashing from those dark eyes, while his lip pronounced his vast designs, could not but feel that there stood the most dangerous enemy that Rome had ever known.

At length Attila recalled his thoughts from those dreams of conquest, and, waving his hand towards the spot where the standards of his nation were gathered together, he exclaimed, in a voice which, though not apparently loud, came deep and distinct to every ear around, "Edicon! Edicon, come hither!"

A tall, dark man, with the shrewd face of a Greek, but the air and expression of a barbarian, sprang from his horse and advanced a pace or two into the open space around the king; but, as he came forward, Attila bade him bring the principal captives with him; and, pale, faint, and sick at heart, Flavia and her family, uncertain either of their own fate or of his, so closely, so dearly linked with them, approached the spot where the dark monarch stood with his naked sword still clasped in his sinewy hand. As they came near, the joy of having saved them burst all restraint; and Theodore, though the blood was still dropping from his garments, clasped them one by one in a brief but joyful embrace.

"You are safe, my mother!" he cried, "you are safe, my Ildica! Ammian, Eudochia, you are safe! you are safe, and at liberty! The king will send you securely to the land of the Alani."

"And you, my son, are a slave!" said Flavia. "You are a slave, and we shall never see you more!"

"Not so!" said Attila, gazing upon the group, and somewhat moved by their meeting. "He is no slave, but has bound himself to dwell with Attila not less than seven years. Neither do I ask him to war against his country, it would be doing wrong unto his nature; but I ask him to be a faithful and true friend to him who has saved his life, in every other thing. Edicon, thou art a scribe: write down this compact between Attila the King and Theodore the son of Paulinus, in order that no one may ever doubt that he did not betray his native land, or that Attila could not be generous to his enemy."

He spoke in the Latin tongue; and though he used not that language with ease, yet his meaning was distinct, and Flavia replied--"Act ever thus, oh monarch! and thou shalt conquer more by thy generosity than by the sword!" A hope might, perhaps, have crossed her mind, even while she spoke, that in so free and kindly a mood the monarch of the Huns might be induced to suffer her and her children to take up their abode in the same land with Theodore; but she thought of Ildica, of her young blossoming beauty, of her tender nurture, and her graceful mind, and she repressed the wish ere it was spoken; all she added was, "Oh, keep him not from us for ever!"

"I have pledged and plighted my word," replied the king, "that in seven years he shall be free to leave me if he will. More: if he show himself as faithful to me as he has been to his country, he shall, from time to time, have leave and opportunity to visit those he loves. But I have mightier things to think of now," he continued: "wait ye here till I provide for your safety. Ardaric, come thou with me; I go to tread upon the necks of the Romans." Thus saying, he sprang upon his

horse, and issued a few brief commands in the Hunnic tongue. The dark masses of the barbarian horse began to move on by the river-side as if towards Idimium; and while they swept along, like the shadow of a cloud over a field of green corn, the monarch continued conversing with his attendant Edicon, without further notice of the captives. At length, when Theodore saw him about to depart, he ventured to ask, "Go you to Margus, oh king?"

Attila looked upon him with a smile so slight that it scarcely curled his lip, and replied, "Margus was mine ere I came hither! My people are skilful in dressing wounds," he added; "let them tend thine, for thou art bleeding still."

As he spoke, he raised his hand slightly on the bridle of his horse; the beast sprang forward across the meadow, and, followed by a troop of Huns who had remained upon the left, Attila galloped on in the same direction which his host had taken before him.

Only two bodies of barbarians continued upon the field; one, consisting of perhaps a hundred men, remained with Edicon, near the spot where Theodore and his companions stood; the other, fewer in number, were gathered farther down in the meadow, near which the struggle between Theodore and the Huns for the deliverance of the captives had first commenced. A glance showed the young Roman that they were in the act of removing or burying the dead; but objects of deeper interest called his attention elsewhere, for Flavia, Eudochia, Ammian, Ildica, gathered round him, gazing in his face, pale as it was with loss of blood, and looking upon him with the thankful eyes of beings whom he had delivered from bondage worse than death. How he had delivered them, by what means, or by what motives in the breast of the Hun that deliverance had been accomplished, was strange and incomprehensible to them all, even to Theodore himself; but that it was by his agency, on account of his valour, constancy, and faithfulness, none of them for a moment doubted; and as Ildica raised her large dark eyes to his face, they were full at once of love, of admiration, and of gratitude.

Oh, who can tell the mingled feelings of that hour, when sitting round him they loved--while one of the rude Huns, with the peculiar appliances of his nation, stanching the trickling blood and dressed his many wounds--those who had lately given way to despair, now spoke to each other the few glad words of reviving hope! Oh, who can tell the deep and fervid yearnings of the heart towards God in thankfulness for the mighty mercy just vouchsafed! Oh, who can tell the thrilling, the ecstatic sense of security, of peace, and of happy expectation which succeeded, after having been plunged in such a depth of grief, of care, and agony!

What though their thoughts might wander on into the vague future, and sad experience might cause a fear to cast its shadow over the prospect! What though Flavia's heart might feel a chilliness at the idea of strange lands, strange habits, and strange nations! What though Ildica and Theodore might look upon a probable separation of seven long years with grief and regret; yet oh, how such pitiful alloy sunk into nothing when mingled with the golden happiness of knowing that safety, liberty, and peace had been obtained after so fearful a struggle! Could Theodore gaze upon the lovely and beloved form of the sweet Dalmatian girl, and know how dreadful a fate might have befallen her, without feeling that life itself would have been a poor sacrifice to save her from such a doom? Could Ildica behold her lover, and recall the moments when last she saw him surrounded by fierce foes, and determined to die, that he might give her a chance of liberty, without feeling that a seven years' absence was but a cheap price for the life and safety of so noble, so devoted a being?

To part--to part, perhaps, for seven long, solitary years--would, in happier days, have seemed a fate too bitter for endurance; but now, the dark and fearful images from which that lot stood forth made it look bright and smiling. The hour of horror and danger had passed by; despair had given way: and though fear still lived, yet hope, hope was the victor for the time.

Their words were few but sweet, and they were uninterrupted; for the Huns, after the youth's wounds were dressed, pointed out to them some shady trees as a place to repose, and left them unrestrained, and almost unwatched. The barbarians knew well that the whole land around was in their king's possession, and feared not that any one could escape. The words of the captives, I have said, were few, but still those words were not unimportant, for they went to regulate the future fate of all. Each promised, when occasion served, to give tidings of their health and prospects, hopes and wishes, to a mutual relation in Rome, the noble Julius Lentulus, and each unloaded the mind to the other of every feeling which, in a moment such as that, the heart could experience, of every thought which the memory could recall.

As they thus sat and conversed, the slaves and attendants who had been captured with them crept gradually nearer and nearer, not yet comprehending fully the situation in which they were placed; feeling themselves to be prisoners, and yet marvelling that their limbs remained untied, after such a bold effort to escape, when they had been bound with leathern thongs before. Nearly one half, however, of the freedmen were absent; and painful sensations passed through the hearts of Theodore and Flavia when they looked around, and missed some old familiar face; but neither spoke their feelings on this point to the other. As the sun passed the meridian, however, two or three Huns from time to time came riding down the road, driving before them, with their short spears, several of the absent attendants; and while the day went on, a considerable part of the baggage, whereof Flavia's company had been pillaged on their first capture, was brought back without a word of explanation, and piled up round the trees underneath which she sat. Strange is it and unaccountable how the heart of man, which despises many a mighty warning,

draws auguries for its hopes and fears from the pettiest occurrences that befall us in our course through life. When Flavia, and Ildica, and Theodore saw the litters, and chairs, and chariots, and bales of goods restored, and laid down in silence, a well-pleased smile beamed upon the face of each; not that either thought at that moment of comfort or convenience, or of all the little luxuries which the glass of civilization magnifies into necessities; but that each one thence drew a renewed assurance that the barbarian monarch, into whose hands they had fallen, however fierce and bloodthirsty he might have shown himself to others, at all events meant well and kindly towards them.

Towards the third hour after noon, food rudely cooked, and a beverage peculiar to the people of Dacia, were set before them; and Edicon, sitting down to meat with them, pressed them to their meal, using the Latin tongue as purely as if it had been his own. He spoke of the empire of the Huns, of their might, their conquests, and their innumerable hordes; he spoke even of Bleda, the brother of the king, and monarch of one part of the nation: but the name of Attila he pronounced not; and, when it was mentioned by Theodore, he turned quickly to some other theme.

The sun had lost much of its heat by the time the meal was concluded; and, shortly after, a Hunnish horseman came down the road with fiery speed, and addressed a few quick words to Edicon.

That chief instantly turned and addressed Flavia. "Tricornium and Singidunum have fallen," he said, "and the way is clear before you. It is the will of the king that you commence your journey."

Flavia gazed upon Theodore, and Theodore upon those he loved; and the bright drops clustered in the dark eyes of Ildica like dew in the half-closed leaves of the morning. Eudochia, too, hung upon her brother's neck, and Ammian grasped his hand; but still the son of Flavia, with wilder and less regulated feelings than the rest, could not yet understand or appreciate the grief of Theodore at that moment of parting. "Would I were you, Theodore!" he exclaimed. "Gladly would I see the country and manners of these wild Huns; and oh, if I had a father's murder to avenge as you have, I would march on with that brave and mighty Attila, and smite the tyrant, Theodosius, on his throne."

"Could it be without the ruin of my country," replied Theodore; "but, alas, Ammian, that cannot be. Weep not, dear Ildica! Sorrow not, my mother, that for a time you must leave me here. Let us remember our condition a few hours ago, and be thankful to God that it is as it is even now. Far safer, too, are you under the guidance and protection of these powerful barbarians, than if, unaided and unguarded, we had attempted to penetrate into Noricum: far safer am I left here, with those who have spared me even when my sword was drawn against them, than if I were attempting to guide you through strange lands that I know not, and barbarian people who hate us for our very civilization. I trust implicitly to the word of Attila. He has promised us his favour and protection, and I fear not."

"Thou judgest rightly, Roman," joined in Edicon, who still stood by. "The word of Attila, whether for good or bad, has never yet been broken. His sentence is irreversible; his mind unchangeable. Fear nothing for the safety of your friends. Two hundred of our bravest warriors guard them to Singidunum, whence a tribe of the Heruli, with a messenger from the king, convey them onward to their destination. They are safe wherever they go, for Attila has promised them protection; and is not Attila lord of the earth?"

Still Ildica clung to him; still Flavia gazed upon him with wistful affection; and the heart of Theodore, while they prepared once more for their journey, swelled with feelings too painful for utterance. Weakened with loss of blood, wearied with terrible exertion, and forced to part for long, dim, uncertain years from those whom alone he loved on earth, his manly fortitude wavered; but the presence of the Huns and the pride of a Roman sustained him. He could not bear that barbarians should see him weep; and though he held them one by one to his bosom in the warm embrace of passionate affection--though he spoke to the very slaves and freedmen with the tenderness of old and fond regard--though he looked upon each familiar face and long-remembered feature with the clinging earnestness of love--yet he mastered the emotions of his bosom, and saw them prepared to go without a tear moistening his eye. One last kiss, one long, dear embrace, and Theodore turned away. Then came the sound of many feet, the neighing of horses, the cries of barbarian voices in the tone of command, the rustling and the rush of a moving crowd. Gradually the noise became less, the tongues sounded more faintly, the tramp of feet subsided into a lower and a lower murmur, and Theodore, looking round, found himself left alone, amid a small party of the Huns, with a feeling of deep desolation at his heart, such as he had never known before.

THE DESOLATION.

A long deep sigh was all that Theodore would now give to the pain of parting. It was over, finished, and endured! and he stood there, calm but grave, prepared for the long cold lapse of the next seven years. Oh, sad and sorrowful is it, more melancholy, if not more painful, than any other state of human being--fertile as existence is in woes and miseries--when over the summer and the sunshiny days of early youth are brought the premature storms of manhood, the hurricane of angry passions, or the deep and settled clouds of disappointment and despair! Oh, sad and sorrowful is it, when the half-open flower of the heart is broken off by the rude footstep of adverse fate ere it has time to expand into beauty! Oh, sad and sorrowful is it, when by the rough hand of circumstance the fresh bloom is brushed from the fruit ere it be ripe!

Yet such was the fate of Theodore. Endowed with ardent feelings, strong passions, powerful energies both of mind and body, he had been called, while those feelings were in their first freshness, while those passions were in their early fervour, ere those energies had been strengthened by time or instructed by experience, to mingle with scenes, and take part in events, which few even of the mightiest and most mature minds of accomplished manhood could pass through, without bearing away the indelible stains left by feelings blighted, or the rude scars inflicted by evil passions. He had loved, and he had been beloved. He had tasted once of the nectar cup of the gods, which, when pressed by a pure lip, instils into the heart a spirit of immortality--and his lip had pressed it purely. Then had been called forth the exertion of that great attribute of manhood, the power of protecting, aiding, directing weaker beings in moments of terror and danger. Then came the mingling of that most bitter draught, when grief and indignation are all that are offered to allay the thirst of a lip burning for revenge. Then came the ignominy of flight from an enemy alike hated and despised; then the temptation conquered, to pamper vengeance by treason; and then the mighty struggle where life was played for as a dicer's stake, and every energy of heart and brain was called into fierce activity, when human blood was spilt, and mortal being extinguished by his hand, to save from death, or worse than death, those he most loved on earth. And there he now stood, that wayward, fated being, around whom within the last month so many lightnings had played, left alone amid men with whom he had no community of feeling.

Those hours of agony and excitement had indeed made him a man before his time, and well, well might they take the bloom off his young heart; yet though the siren voice of expectation might have lost part of its sweetness; though the chord which once vibrated to every joy might now possess no longer its elastic tone; though there was the gray shade of doubt mingling with every bright colour which went to paint the future, and the enchanter could charm no more; still there was within his bosom, in his love for Ildica, a sweet source of unpolluted happiness, a well of youthful feelings undefined, a fountain of bright clear waters, where wearied hope might come and drink and be refreshed. As he stood there in his loneliness, the value of that spring of secret enjoyment was displayed in all its brightness. He knew, he felt that there was his treasure; and, with that support and conscious innocence alone, he prepared to face the future, be it what it might.

The rapid process of thought had ran over in a few minutes all the varied particulars of his situation, the much of gloomy and dark, and the small but intense spot of guiding light; and, ere the few Huns who remained with him showed any disposition to move, he himself turned towards their leader, and demanded what was to ensue.

"Are you able to sit a horse?" demanded Edicon, gazing on his features, still pale with loss of blood.

"I am," replied Theodore, "if the journey be not long."

"Then we must follow the king," replied Edicon; "but I have his commands to make the stations suit your capability. There is your sword," he continued, giving him the weapon which had dropped from his hand when the blow of Ardaric had for the time disabled his right arm. "You are to be treated in no way as a bondman."

"Keep it for me," replied Theodore, putting it aside with the back of his hand; "I will never go armed into my native land with the enemies of my country."

Edicon laughed aloud. "Is there anything else," he demanded, "that your fancy would have! I am ordered to humour thee to the utmost."

"There was one faithful freedman," said Theodore, "whom I saw not with the rest who departed just now. I would gladly hear of his fate: I left him with the horses on the hill."

"What! a giant?" demanded Edicon. "I saw such a one contending like a madman with our whole army. If it be of him you speak, most probably he is dead. I saw him fall beneath a blow which would have slain a bull. At all events, he is in the hands of Attila the King; for I heard him bid his people see to the brave African. Is there aught else?"

"I would fain," said Theodore, with a sigh, "I would fain recover the horse I rode. It was my

father's charger: but I fear that it is vain, for I left it upon the hill."

"What, the black horse with the white star on his forehead?" demanded Edicon.

"The same," answered Theodore, with some surprise. "Have you seen him?"

"I saw him with you on the other side of the Danube, some four days ago," replied Edicon, "when Attila came down from the interior to meet you."

"To meet me!" exclaimed Theodore, with a faint smile; "he could not come to meet me; for I crossed the Danube by accident, not from any long-conceived purpose."

"So it might be," answered the chief, "and yet the king knew that you were coming, and went down to meet you. Do you not believe that there are men who see the coming events as clearly as we see the past? But it matters not," he added; "we left the tribe of Vultingours upon the hill. Perchance the horse may have fallen into their hands; if so, thou shalt have him."

He then spoke a few words in their own tongue to some of the Huns near, two of whom instantly sprang upon their horses and galloped up the hill. While they were gone, Theodore and Edicon lay down in the shade upon the grass; and the young Roman endeavoured to induce his companion to pursue to some clearer point of explanation the vague hints which had been given regarding his first meeting with Attila; but the wily barbarian was not to be led onward beyond the precise line by which he chose to bound his communication; and as soon as Theodore attempted to gain further information, he started up, and busied himself in giving orders to the wild warriors around him.

In a few minutes the two Huns returned, leading down at a quick pace the horse of the young Roman, which, snorting and rearing, resisted the unfamiliar hands by which he was guided. In a moment, however, the voice of his master rendered him tame and docile as a lamb; and Theodore could perceive, by the smiles and gestures of the barbarians, whose affection for, and command over, their own horses were even then proverbial, that he had risen highly in their esteem by the love and obedience which the noble beast displayed towards him.

When at length all was prepared, he mounted, though with much pain and difficulty from his wounds; but when once on his horse's back he experienced no further inconvenience, except from weakness; and, riding side by side with Edicon, he proceeded slowly on the same track which Attila and his troops had previously taken.

A little farther to the east, the woods again swept down to the very banks, seeming to present an impervious barrier against their advance in that direction; but still the Scythian horsemen rode on direct towards the forest, and, separating on the very edge, each took his path by himself, winding along with extraordinary skill and dexterity, and keeping up their communication with each other by shrill, sharp cries. They had apparently left the direction taken by Attila and his myriads; for the grass of the forest bore no trace of having been trodden down by the feet of those innumerable horsemen; and the green boughs on either side, clad in the refreshing garment of the early year, neither scorched by the summer's sun nor withered by the autumn's wind, were unbroken and undisturbed. With slow and heavy wing rose up the feathered tenants of the wood, on the passage of strangers through those spots of which they had held solitary possession for so many years: the beasts started away from their path, almost under the horses' feet; and everything indicated that calm tranquillity had reigned there for many a year, while the civilized world beyond had been torn by faction, turbulence, and war.

For nearly three miles the branch of the great Dacian forest, which they were now traversing, continued unbroken, but at the end of that distance it again suddenly ceased, and, issuing out upon a wide savanna, the little band of Huns reunited, and rode rapidly on. Another wood succeeded, but of less extent, and bearing evident traces, in many parts, of the destroying axe. It, too, was soon crossed; and when Theodore had again reached its extreme limit, another scene, more gloomy, more painful, more terrible, broke upon his eye.

It was a cultivated land laid desolate! The corn, just losing its fresh green, and touched with the golden hand of summer, was beaten down, and trodden into the very ground from which it grew; the fences and partitions were swept away, and the scattered remnants thereof, mingled with the produce which they were intended to protect, spread wide over the trampled and ruined country. The huts and cottages of a lowly but industrious population were seen around; but the roof had fallen in, and the blackened and smouldering rafters told the tale of destruction but too well. In the midst of the field lay a husbandman with a javelin wound in his throat, and at the door of one of the cottages, stretched across that threshold which her feet had so often passed with joy and gladness, was the body of a young mother, with her golden hair streaming on the ground, her white arms extended motionless above her head, now tranquil in death, but telling still the tale of agonized emotion past, of supplication urged in vain, and unanswered appeals unto mysterious Heaven; and there, beside her, seeking with plaintive cries its wonted food, crept on towards her bosom her infant child, its little hands dabbling in the stream of gore that welled from the fond loved home of infancy, the dear maternal breast now for ever cold and feelingless.

"Oh God, the child!" cried Theodore, as they rode by.

Edicon gazed on it with a stern dark brow. "There will be many such," he said, and it was all his reply.

The young Roman's heart swelled within him with the choking agony of fruitless indignation. He could do naught to succour, to save, or to defend; and bending down his eyes upon the arching neck of his proud charger, he strove not to see the many miseries of the land through which he passed. He could not shut his eyes to all, however. Every now and then the horse would recoil from a corpse stretched across his way. Every now and then the crashing fall of some burning cottage or Roman watch-tower, which were thick upon the road towards Viminacium, would make him start and look up, and behold new traces of ruin, slaughter, and desolation.

They passed by a hamlet where once many happy hearths had gathered round a small Christian church; but the hearths were strewn with the rafters that had covered them; the voice of the pastor and the hearts of the congregation were now still in death; the church was void, its walls smoking, its pavements stained with blood, and its altar profaned; and silence reigned equally where the merry laugh and the gay song had rejoiced in the blessings of God, and where the voice of supplication or of gratitude had been raised to him in prayer or adoration.

They passed by a villa built in the graceful and the mighty times of Trajan, while the name of Rome was awful over all the earth; but its halls and vestibules, its courts and gardens, were strewn with its fragments of works of art, and blackened with the fire which had destroyed its fair proportions.

Oh how glad was Theodore, when the gray coming on of twilight gave him the hope that night would soon shut out from his weary eyes the sight of such scenes of horror and devastation. But, alas! even when darkness spread over the whole sky, the earth beneath--as he rode along, across the high grounds which there sweep down to the Danube--seemed glowing in a thousand spots with the lurid light of wide-spread conflagration; and Theodore beheld the destiny of his native land. Fire consumed each dwelling's roof-tree, and blood drowned out the ashes.

At length, at the bottom of the hills, where a small wood skirted one of the little rivers they had to cross, they came suddenly upon a number of fires, round which were seated some thousands of the barbarians. On the approach of Edicon and his party, numbers of them started up, and, leaving the loud rude merry-making in which they were engaged, gathered around the new comers, with wild gestures and quick vociferous tongues talking, laughing, shouting, and screaming, while the fitful gleams of the fire displayed, in strong, unpleasant light and shade, their strange attire and harsh repulsive countenances. Food of various kinds and in great abundance was set before Theodore and those who escorted him; but the young Roman felt no power to eat, and only quenched the burning of his lip, while he strove to drown remembrance of his griefs in two full cups of wine.

"We must on with the first light to-morrow morning," said Edicon, "and therefore it were better for you to take what sleep you can, though, perhaps, being a Roman, you cannot find slumber on such a couch as nature provided for man, and under such a tent as the starry sky."

"Sleep!" cried Theodore, "sleep! Do you expect me to sleep after such a day as this? Such sleep, however, as I can gain may as well be taken here as anywhere else," and, wrapping his mantle round his head, he cast himself down near one of the fires. For repose he sought not, for he neither hoped nor expected to find it, but he sought to shut out from his sight the fierce forms and savage merriment of those who had just devastated his country. With his eyes closed, and his mantle round his head, he saw them not, it is true, but still the wild peals of barbarian laughter rang in his ears, as they caroused around the fires; still imagination called up to his view the rude, ill-favoured countenances of the Huns; still memory presented to his fevered brain all the sad and painful sights which he had beheld during the day.

Thus passed by the greater part of the night; for, even when the Huns, giving themselves up to slumber, left silence to recover her empire over the scene from which their rude revels had banished her, bitter remembrance haunted the young Roman still, and drove far away from his troubled breast that soft and soothing guest which visits so unwillingly the couch of pain or wo. About an hour before dawn, exhaustion, however, conquered thought; and when Edicon roused him to proceed, he was sleeping, if the name of sleep could be applied to that dull, unrefreshing want of consciousness into which he had fallen for the time. He started up, however, ready to go on, ay, and willing; for although he could hope to find but little better or fairer in the things before him, yet every scene in which he was placed was, for the time, so hateful to him, that it was a relief and consolation even to change.

The road lay still by the side of the Danube; but, after leaving their night's resting-place, it was evident that they were coming fast upon the great host of Attila himself. Multitudes of small wagons covered the way. Thousands of straggling parties were seen in every direction; and at length, after riding on for about two hours, they came in sight of the towers of a city, rising up from the banks of the river. At the same moment, as they stood upon the hill above it, a shout came up to the ear so loud, so fierce, so demoniacal, that it seemed to Theodore that the very fiends of hell had burst forth to mingle with the dark innumerable multitudes that he beheld whirling round that devoted town like the waves of some mighty vortex in the stormy oceans of the north.

Another and another yell succeeded; and as Edicon still led on down the hill, screams of anguish could be distinguished mixing with the shout, and fire might be seen bursting forth from various parts of the city.

"Viminacium is taken!" said the Hunnish leader: "we shall find the king in the market-place; ride close by me, and let us on."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAPTURED CITY.

In one dark, close-rushing stream the Huns were pouring into Viminacium, when Theodore, with unutterable agony of heart, approached the gates with those who held him a prisoner. It was an hour in which he could full well have died with scarcely a regret, for every sight and every sound around him spoke nothing but despair.

A few words from his conductor brought the barbarians who accompanied them pressing round the young Roman, so as to keep him distinct from all the multitude which had followed Attila to his first actual conquest in the Roman territory. But so dense, so rapid, was that living torrent, that after they had once entered the gates no one could move except in the same onward course; and, knee pressed against knee, horse jostling horse, forward they rushed, while nothing could be seen in the dark long street but an ocean of human heads, except where the flames burst forth from dwellings, palaces, and temples, and formed a fiery canopy above them.

To see beneath the horses' feet was not possible; but every now and then some dreadful indications, on which it were needless to dwell, showed Theodore that his charger's feet were passing over a pile of dead; and still, amid the clang and rush of those wild horsemen, burst forth from other parts of the city the same long, piercing, awful shrieks, which told that the work of massacre had not yet ceased within those ill-starred walls. Wherever, too, a street, branching to either side, gave a momentary view of what was passing beyond, groups of struggling forms were seen, with heaps of corpses, falling houses, and masterless horses galloping hither and thither, and rolling clouds of smoke writhing in dark masses amid the building.

Still, however, Edicon pursued his way straight on, though at every turning some body of the Huns left the onward path, bent on plunder or on bloodshed. At length the way opened out into the forum, whose wide space was covered with scattered groups of the barbarian host, whirling here and there, in obedience to commands emanating from a group who had forced their horses up the steps leading to the temple of Mars.

Here, in the forum, the Roman legionaries had made their last stand; and here, thick and many, lay the bodies of those slain by hands that had never learned to spare. Here, too, dismounted from their horses, and stripping the yet warm dead of their rich arms and vestments, were thousands of bloodstained groups of the conquerors: and here, penned up, and dying man by man, was the last determined cohort which resisted the barbarian force. Even at that very moment, as Edicon was forcing his way onward, that last lingering spark of resistance was extinguished; for Theodore could see one Hunnish horseman, followed by several others, urge his horse fiercely down the steep steps of the temple, and plunge into the midst of the multitude which was pressing round the brave men of Viminacium. A loud shout burst from the barbarians as that horseman hurled himself forward like a thunderbolt against the front of the cohort. Its line, which had remained firm even in despair, was rent in a moment, as an oak that has withstood the winds is rent by the lightning, and the Roman helmets disappeared in the dark mass of the Huns. Again that same horseman separated himself from the multitude, rode slowly back towards the temple, and urged his horse once more up the steep and slippery steps. Towards him Edicon pursued his way; and, as they came near, Theodore perceived that it was, indeed, towards him their journey had been directed.

There, advanced before the rest, Attila sat gazing from his battle-horse's back over the awful scene before his eyes; while near him an equestrian statue of Trajan, with his calm, thoughtful features, and a bronze group of a lion tearing a bull, contrasted strangely, and harmonized well with the fierce and heated aspect of the stern Hun, as, covered with blood and dust, he rolled his flashing dark eyes over that terrible scene of massacre, fire, and desolation.

"Oh," cried Theodore, as they came near the steps, "oh, beseech him to sheath the sword, and spare the unresisting!" and, as he spoke, he naturally urged on his horse, to plead the cause of his miserable countrymen with one who had shown himself, in his own case, not insensible to pity.

But Edicon caught his bridle quickly, exclaiming, "Speak to him not! Speak to him not, if you value life! See you not that the mighty spirit of war is upon him. Speak to a hungry lion tasting the first blood! Plead with the tiger for its prey! But cross not Attila in his hour of battle and victory! Bleda, his brother, might hear you, and spare you at the time to slay you for his pleasure after; but were you to cross Attila now, he might strike dead the man whom to-morrow he would cherish as a son."

At that moment, however, the eye of the monarch lighted on the garb of Theodore. "A Roman!" he cried, "a Roman before my eyes! Smite him to the ground! Give his heart to the vultures!"

The youth understood not his words, which were spoken in the Hunnish tongue, but the fierce gestures of the barbarian king were enough; and at the same moment a hundred spears were raised around to drink the Roman's blood.

"Let them do their will," he said, calmly, "let them do their will. Who would love life after such sights as these?"

But Edicon interposed. "Hold!" he cried, to those so prompt to obey in any work of blood--"hold! he is the king's friend. Attila knows him not. Oh king!" he continued, raising his voice, "thou hast promised this youth protection: wilt thou break thy promise?"

Attila rolled his eyes over the whole group in silence; and Edicon, with those who surrounded him, well knowing that the fierce and eager mood of their lord would pass away, retired slowly from his sight, leading Theodore with them. No tranquil spot, however, no place of refuge or repose, did that wide city now contain. Plunder was still going on, though slaughter, insatiable still, even when gorging upon thousands, had exhausted nearly all, but only halted for want of food. Some wretched woman, indeed, or some helpless child, was dragged every now and then from its ineffectual hiding-place, and a solitary scream or a dying groan marked the new victim. But the work of butchery was now wellnigh complete; and conflagration, spreading rapidly in every part, threatened to consume the barbarian victors themselves, in the burning city which they had captured and destroyed.

A small open space, near what was called Trajan's Gate, at length afforded a place of repose to Edicon and his party; and there, following the example of the Huns, Theodore alighted from his horse, and, sitting down upon one of the massy stone steps before a dwelling which had once belonged to some rich banker, and had been one of the first to be plundered by the barbarians, he covered his eyes with his hands, and tried to shut out even from memory the horrors which he had just beheld.

In vain--it was vain! Confused, countless, terrible images and feelings of destruction and despair rushed through his burning brain and his indignant heart, and drove him wellnigh to madness. At length two or three wild notes of some barbarian trumpet, loud, long, and melancholy, sounded through the streets, and were heard above the general roar of the Hunnish multitudes, coming from different quarters of the city. Edicon sprang up and mounted his horse; and, seeing Theodore remain in the same attitude of despair, he exclaimed, "Up, up, we must away! It is dangerous to linger."

Theodore rose slowly; and though the curling flames which at once struck his eye, flickering above all the buildings around, together with the shower of sparks and flakes of fire which were falling incessantly from the dense and lurid clouds of smoke above, showed that the words of Edicon were true, and that the warning voice of the trumpet had only been sounded in time; yet slow and heavily did the young Roman rise, as if he would willingly have remained to die in the flames of that vast holocaust to the barbarian god of warfare. In vain the Huns urged him to haste; he gazed upon them dark and gloomily, as if the bitterness of death itself were passed; and they, with all their power, could do no more.

With strange and unusual gentleness for one of so fierce and uncontrollable a nation, Edicon endeavoured to persuade him to follow them from the captured city. He offered no violence, he used no rude command; but, after every other argument had failed to quicken the movements of the young Roman, he added, as if he could have divined the only chord which--left strung and resonant where so many were broken--could still vibrate the touch, "Remember that there are others in the world to whom your life is dear; beings kind, beautiful, and beloved, who may need the protection of your arm, the consolation of your affection, and the shelter of your breast."

The tears rose in Theodore's eyes: but the thrilling life of human hopes and fears was once more kindled from among the dead ashes of despair; and, springing on his horse, he followed wherever they would.

Wild, and terrible, and extraordinary was the scene of confusion and disarray which followed, while the Huns, some fast and eagerly, some lingering with their appetite for plunder still unsated, poured forth from the gates of the burning city. Order and ranks were there none. Tumult and confusion, loud cries, wild laughter, shouts of triumph, and barbarous songs, dark masses whirling hither and thither, horses, which had lost their masters, seeking them familiarly through the crowd, the rush of innumerable multitudes, and the mighty hum of congregated myriads, formed all that was seen and heard over the wide green fields which surrounded what a few hours before had been Viminacium--except when, loud and slow, surmounting every other

noise, were heard the long, melancholy notes of the barbarian trumpet, calling conquerors from the work of spoil and desolation.

Sweeping round in a semicircle upon the declivity of the hills which domineered the city, the host of Attila was at length gathered together, at the end of about two hours after Theodore had seen the barbarian monarch in the forum. The youth had set apart upon the edge of the hill gazing upon the dim multitudes, as they covered and struggled up the intervening space between the walls and the spot where he was placed. The same party of Huns which had always hitherto accompanied him, more to protect than to detain him, remained with him still, except, indeed, Edicon, who had left him for the time. At length, however, he reappeared, and, sitting down beside the youth, addressed him kindly.

"The king," he said, "has asked for you. The fierce cloud of strife has passed away from his heart, and the sun will shine upon those that approach him now. Let us draw near. Lo! yonder he stands, where you see the crowd upon that high knoll. The warriors are going to bring their booty before him. If thou hast any boon to ask at his hands, ask it now."

Theodore rose, and followed on foot, though there was a fevered weariness in his blood, a confused giddiness in his brain, which prevented him from clearly comprehending, or, indeed, from taking any interest in the words that were addressed to him. Even when he had approached the presence of him on whom his whole fate now depended, the objects passed before him as if in some unreal pageant, wherein he had no feelings engaged, and by which curiosity and admiration were hardly excited.

There sat Attila on horseback, and beside him a taller and a younger chieftain, with keen sharp eyes, and a low fierce brow. In his countenance there might be more of cunning, but there was less of power and intellect than in that of Attila; and, as Edicon caught the eye of the young stranger wandering over his form, he whispered, "That is Bleda, the brother of the king."

Theodore paused, where his companion paused, at no great distance from the spot where the two leaders stood, and looked on, while the whole host passed in long line before the kings and their immediate followers, casting down in a pile all the rich and costly plunder which had been acquired in the first capture of a Roman city. How often, in the course of the succeeding months, was that scene to be repeated! There were the chased and jewelled cups and chalices which had graced the merry banquet, and poured the libation of hope or gratitude; there the sacred vessels of the church; there the gems and ornaments torn from the neck of beauty, and from the violated limbs of the tender, the gentle, and the beloved. There was poured out the miser's long-accumulated store; there the early gift of young affection; there the inestimable product of ancient art; there the shining mass, only prized for its intrinsic value. Each object there cast down recorded some deed of profanation, either of sacred civil order, or of holy piety, or of the sweet sanctity of calm domestic life: each spoke trumpet-tongued against the horrid, the desolating trade of war; the honoured, lauded, and rewarded curse, parent of murder, violence, and wrong.

Theodore scarcely remarked the division of the spoil, though he perceived that no voice, no, not even that of Bleda, was raised against the stern but just allotment made by Attila. Each soldier received his share; and each seemed to hear with reverence the words of his leader, and to gaze with awe upon the countenance of him whose steps seemed destined to crush thrones into the dust, and on whose breath hung the fate of nations and of empires.

When the division was over, Attila turned his eyes upon Theodore. "Bid the Roman approach," he said; and the youth advanced to the spot where he sat on the same horse which had borne him through the sacking of the city. His countenance, however, was now mild and calm; and the tone in which he addressed to Theodore some simple words of greeting was kind and father-like. Bleda said nothing; but he rolled his fierce eyes over the form of the young stranger, and his whole countenance spoke the unmitigated hate which he felt towards everything that bore the Roman name.

Theodore listened to the words of the monarch calmly; and then at once replied, "Oh king! I have a boon to ask at thy hands; I beseech thee to grant it unto me."

"Speak," said Attila, in the tongue of the Alani; but Bleda muttered in the same language, "Dash his brains out with an axe! that were the best boon to give him."

Attila's brow darkened; but, without noticing further than by that heavy frown his brother's words, he bade the youth proceed.

"Thou art mighty, oh king!" said Theodore, "alas! too mighty; and, it may be, that, ere thou receivest defeat from the Roman arms" (Attila smiled), "many such a city as this that thou hast to-day destroyed may fall before thee--"

"Many shall fall!" interrupted Attila: "I will tread upon their towers from Margus to Byzantium. I will mow the land as with a scythe: I will shake the armies from before my path, as a lion shakes off the morning dew from his mane. The fortified cities will I lay low, and the open villages I will burn, and my horses shall eat up the grass of the whole land. There shall be no green thing, and no beautiful thing, and no living thing, left throughout the country, unless speedy compensation

for the wrongs done to me and to my people avert the wrath, and turn away the storm: but yet, what wouldst thou?"

"This, oh king!" replied Theodore; "my eye cannot witness the desolation of my native land. Either my heart will cease to beat, or my brain will turn, if I behold more of such scenes as those which I have this day beheld. I am thine to do with as thou pleasest, and I will keep the promise I have made; but, I do beseech thee, send me afar from such sights. Let me go into thine own country; and I swear, by all that I hold sacred, to remain there tranquilly till thou returnest."

"I know not how that may be," replied the king: "thy life is dear to me, youth; and were a Roman now to show himself in the land of the Huns, without protection and support, except, indeed, as a captive, the stream of his days would soon fall into the great gulf of death."

"If thou takest me on," cried Theodore, "to witness the murder of my fellow-countrymen, the ruin and devastation of my native land, thou slayest me by a worse death than any of thy people can inflict."

"Well, thou shalt go back," replied Attila; "but I will send people with thee, to protect thee in my name, till thou art known and in safety in the land. I cannot spare thee, Edicon; but he shall choose others who can speak some of the languages thou knowest: ours thou wilt soon learn. Follow me until this night be over; to-morrow thou shalt depart. See to his repose, Edicon, and find him wherewithal to cover him from the night air. These Romans are not, as we are, familiar with the elements."

Edicon smiled; and Theodore felt the scorn which had fallen upon his nation; but he replied not, for the reproach was too true; and, retiring from the presence of Attila, he felt his heart relieved at the certainty of being no longer forced to contemplate with his own eyes all the horrors that awaited his native land.

In their eager and fiery course towards the destruction of the Roman empire, the Huns knew no pause, lingered for no repose. Ere noon, Viminacium was a heap of ashes; ere two hours more had passed, the division of their plunder had taken place; and, ere another had gone by, the unwearied myriads were again upon their way, to repeat the same scenes of slaughter and destruction. At nightfall they halted. The innumerable small wagons, which followed them with a celerity quite marvellous, formed at once the ramparts of their principal camp and the abode of such as were affected by some touch of softer manners. In the centre of the camp was raised the standard of the king, the rude black eagle crowned,^[6] and round it, at the distance of about a hundred cubits, was drawn an inner circle of wagons; but in the clear and starry nights of summer, no tent or awning covered the head of Attila; and beneath that victorious banner, which he carried unchecked from Caucasus to Gaul, he lay stretched upon the hide of a wild bull, which his own hand had slain.

Round about the great camp were a number of smaller enclosures; some appropriated to different tribes and nations, who followed the multitude of the Huns in their career of victory and pillage; some assigned to various friends and officers of the great monarch himself. Nevertheless, the warrior horsemen of that innumerable host did not confine themselves, where they feared no attack, to the circle of their encampment, but, spreading over the plain around, spent the early hours of the night in feasting and revelry.

Theodore, with Edicon, who showed for him on all occasions kindness and consideration, which was little to be expected from one of so barbarous a race, followed full half an hour behind the general march of the army, in order to avoid those sights of occasional violence and cruelty which were sure to take place, even in the thinly-peopled part of the country which they now traversed. When they reached the spot, therefore, on which Attila had fixed for his encampment, night had already fallen; and for several miles around were to be seen blazing up a countless number of fires, with scarcely fifty yards from the one to the other, and with a circle of those wild soldiers surrounding and carousing about each. Little was the attention which they paid to the new-comers, as they rode through the midst of them; and Edicon, by frequently stopping to speak to those he knew, gave his companion a full insight into the habits of that roving people. We must not pause thereon, for this is not intended for a book of description; and yet it was a wild, strange scene that he beheld, full of matter of disgust and sorrow, and yet not without interest either. There all the vices of a savage state were displayed; while some peculiar virtues, and some of those strong enthusiasms which, though not virtues, find chords of sympathy in every noble heart, broke forth from time to time, and shed a lustre over the mingled whole.

At some of the fires, reclining or sitting in grotesque or picturesque attitudes, lay groups of the wild Scythians, in their strange but striking dresses, drinking deep of various liquors, which they had either compounded or plundered; and in the eyes of many the fiery gleam of intemperance was already shining, while with hoarse laughter and savage gesticulation they detailed the deeds of the day or mocked the agonies of their victims. Round other fires, again, gaming, with the same eagerness, the same loud words and fierce anxieties, so often to be found disgracing the capitals of civilized lands, might be observed other bodies of barbarians moved by another class of passions. Then, again, farther on, gazing with eager eyes, or listening with acute ears, and answering with bursts of thoughtless merriment, sat other bodies of the Huns, around some buffoon or jester,^[7] in whose tale, or whose joke, or whose antic contortions their whole thoughts seemed to be engaged, forgetful of the bloody yesterday, unmindful of the bloody

morrow. Farther still rose up the voice of song; and, in notes not unmelodious, some native minstrel sung of love and war; praised the beauties of some honoured fair, or extolled the valour of some mighty chief. There, too, around him might be seen, the dark countenances of those swarthy children of the North, moved by all the deep emotions which his song touched through the fine chords of association. There the youth leaned back; and, as he listened to the name of love, or heard the glowing words which painted some fair creation of the singer's mind, memory turned towards his native home, affection held up before his eyes the image of the one beloved, and his heart beat with eager palpitations at the gentler and the sweeter thoughts poured into his rude breast. There, too, might be seen the elder and the sterner soldier, who, when the song took up the tale of war, and told of things achieved by glorious courage, lands conquered, thrones acquired, and everlasting glory won, would half start from his grassy bed, and, resting on his arm, gaze with flashing eyes and stirred up enthusiasms upon the singer, and, with fond anticipations of the future, promise his own heart the glorious meed of deeds recorded in a song like that. Oh, beautiful, universal nature! noble feelings! touching harmonies of the musical heart of man! why, why among you must be thrown so many discords to bring out your sweetness? Why can we not have on earth the perfect harmony? where, from the lowest to the highest, from the most solemn to the gayest note, all may find place, and rise in one grand, all-comprising anthem to the God of all?[7]

CHAPTER XV.

THE PERIL AND ESCAPE.

It was to one of those detached circles, which we have described as separated from the general encampment, that Edicon led the way, after speaking with several of the chiefs, as they passed along. It had been apparently reserved for himself and those who followed him, for the enclosure was nearly vacant, except where, before the entrance of a tall but curiously-formed tent, which had probably been taken in war from some Eastern nation, blazed up a large and cheerful fire. Around were seated about a dozen Huns, not less wild and fierce in the expression of their faces than the rest of their nation; and yet there was something about their dress and general appearance which struck Theodore as more familiar to his eye. As he approached, one of them rose and addressed him in the Latin language, and welcomed him to his tent with great purity of speech and accent; and oh, how sweet and musical did those sounds appear, after the strange, harsh tongues which had lately rung in his ear, amid scenes of ruin, bloodshed, and strife!

Sweet, sweet indeed it was, but overpowering. He felt the tears ready to gush from his eyes; a word would have made them overflow; and, without speaking, he entered the tent to which the man had pointed. It contained nothing in the outer chamber of the two, into which it was divided by a curtain, but a lighted lamp upon a small table; and in the inner a bed, piled up of skins, with a single wooden settle. It had an air, however, of civilization and comfort; and how often is it in this life that the air has more influence upon our happiness than even the reality? We are the slaves of association, and, as such, truly but children of a larger growth, to whom the paint and tinsel of appearances render the toy valuable, whatever be its intrinsic worth.

Theodore cared little for the comfort, and thought Roman civilization had fallen into effeminacy; and yet the sight of that tent, like the sound of Roman words, sent a thrill through his heart, and made him happier. Edicon saw his emotion, and seemed to understand its cause, at least in part.

"You are surprised," he said, "to hear the Latin tongue; but you will be more so to know that there are several thousands in our host who can use it fluently."

"I have heard," replied Theodore, "when I was in Rome, that Ætius, the great general in Gaul, has several bodies of Huns among his mercenaries."^[8]

"Ay, and Valentinian also," rejoined Edicon. "Not two years since full ten thousand of our nation were engaged in defence of the Western empire. We are too near neighbours to the East to have such friendly commerce with her. Besides, Theodosius is unworthy the defence of brave men--a mere weak coward, a flimsy knave, whose only means of proving his manhood is by murdering with hired steel the only honest and noble men left to save his empire."

Edicon struck the chord aright, and Theodore's heart replied, though his lips were silent. "These men," continued the Hunnish chief, pointing to the barbarians, who were again seated round the fire, and took but little notice either of Theodore or their newly-arrived companions, who had followed him with Edicon--"these men have been chosen by the king himself, not because they speak thy language better than others in the camp, but because they are known as faithful and just. They will accompany thee back into our land; and, though they go with regret, thou wilt find them true and trustworthy. Ten more will be added, whom thou mayst choose either from among the Huns who have lived with the Romans, or from among thy kinsmen the

Alani."

"I will choose the Alani," answered Theodore, quickly; and he observed, as he spoke, the brow of his companion contract as if he were offended--"I will choose the Alani--not, noble Edicon," he added, "that I doubt or distrust the Huns, for to me they have been merciful, kind, and generous, whatever violence and cruelty they may have shown in dealing with my native land. But remember that those I love the best have gone to seek a refuge with the Alan tribes; and perchance, by having some of them near me, I may learn, as I go, tidings which will cheer and console me to hear."

"Not only as you go," answered Edicon, with a smile, "but afterward also; for those who are now chosen to accompany you are not only directed to be your guard by the way, but are also given you--not as servants to a lord, but as followers to a leader, and will obey you in all things, as far as our customs permit, so long as you remain with us."

"It is strange," answered Theodore, thoughtfully; "your king, so harsh and fierce towards others, is so gentle and merciful to me--considers my wants, provides for my security, and cares for my comfort as if he were a father."

"Receive it all with gratitude," replied Edicon, "and he may prove a father to you. Nor must you think Attila harsh and fierce towards any, except in the hour of battle, when the spirit of war is upon him, and with the powers of a god he claims the attribute of vengeance. No! though grave and stern, he is just and humane towards his people. Determined in his purposes, inflexible in his judgments, his purposes towards those who obey him are mild, his judgments even against himself are equitable. It is only the traitor among his own people, the aggressor among foreign nations, that he treats with rigour."

"Think me not ungrateful," said Theodore; "I meant not to accuse thy monarch; and while I felt thankful for the tenderness he hath shown to me and mine--thankful for life and liberty preserved, and for the safety of those who are dearer to me than life itself--I have been forced to marvel that he has dealt so different a measure to me and to others. There is something strange in it."

"There may be so," replied Edicon; "but think you there are no such things as sudden intimations given us from Heaven of those with whom our fate is to be linked for good or evil? Think you that those prepossessions for or against, which we feel so suddenly, so unaccountably, in rare and extraordinary cases, are mere fancies, passing whims, which have no reference to after events?"

Theodore made no reply, for he remembered well his own peculiar feelings when he had first seen that powerful monarch with whom his own destiny had since been so completely mingled. He remembered it well, but he answered not, for the Hun seemed to have seen his feelings, or at least divined them; and at length Edicon went on:--"Such may have been the prepossession of Attila towards you; and we know, or at least believe, that the feelings I have mentioned are given us by the gods, to let us know our friends and enemies. Does not the horse tremble when the unseen lion is near? Do not the bleatings of the sheep warn the shepherd to watch even while the wolf is yet afar off?"

He paused a moment for reply, and then added--"But I will leave you to repose; and yet, ere you seek sleep, take some food, for your eyes are haggard and hollow, your cheek burning as if this tent were a furnace, and you have neither drunk mead nor broken bread during the whole day. Bid a slave bring food," he continued, speaking to those without; and then, taking from one of his own followers the sword which Theodore had left in his hands, he laid it down on the small table by the lamp, saying, "You are now turning to another land. Keep your weapon, for, whether you need it or not, it is always well to be prepared. Add to it a javelin and a bow; for, as you go through our country, you may strike a stag or a wild bull, and gain honours in the chase, which we hold next to war. I will now leave you, and see you to-morrow ere you depart."

Thus saying, his conductor left him, and a frightful negro slave, precious in the eyes of the Huns from the hideousness of his face and figure, brought him cooked meat and thin cakes of flour, with a strong drink composed of honey. Theodore tried to eat, but only few were the mouthfuls he could swallow, though the meat was not unsavoury. He tried, too, to drink; but there was a burning heat in his throat and mouth, and the sweet liquor was revolting to his taste.

"I will bring wine," said the negro slave, in tolerable Greek; "I am a present from Attila the King to his Roman son, and he is henceforth my lord. Wilt thou have wine? for it shall go hard but, with mine own wit and Attila's name to bear me out, I will find you as pure wine in the Hunnish camp as ever you tasted in the city of Constantine."

"I would rather have pure water," answered Theodore; "I have a painful thirst upon me; and heart and tongue feel burning as if with fire."

The slave sprang away, and returned in a few moments with both water and wine; and mingling them together, Theodore drank with delight which he had not known for long.

"I thank thee, friend," he said, giving his hand to the slave in gratitude for the blessed draught: "it is exquisite, and I thank thee."

The slave took his hand and kissed it, gazing intently on his face; and then, seeing by the calm and grateful sincerity of the young Roman's look that no scorn existed in his bosom towards that deformed and frightful shape which crouched at his feet, he sprang up, saying, "I have deceived you, but I will not betray you. I am not sent by Attila, but by Bleda, his brother. Beware of him! Roman, beware of him!"

"I have no cause to fear him," answered Theodore: "I have done naught to injure him."

The slave shook his head mournfully. "Are we only injured by those whom we have injured?" he demanded. "Alas! were it so, I should not be what I am. But I must speed hence, and not talk with thee too long, lest he hear that I have done so, and think I have betrayed him."

"But tell me, what is thy name?" demanded Theodore. "I have naught to give thee as a reward, but some day, perchance, I may have, and I will not fail."

"My name is Zercon," answered the slave; "and I am the crooked and mutilated jester of Bleda, the brother of Attila. Thou hast looked upon me with eyes of feeling and compassion, and I am rewarded enough; but I will serve thee further still."

Thus saying, he left the tent, and drew the external curtain closely after him. Theodore paused to think over what he had heard; but, as he reflected, he could find in all the wide range of probability no cause why Bleda should seek to injure him--"There must be some mistake," he thought; and, overpowered with weariness and exhaustion, he laid his sword close beside the bed of skins, and casting himself down, endeavoured to forget his cares in slumber. Restless, unhappy, fevered, long and painfully he tossed upon that lowly couch, courting in vain the blessed influence which opens for us, for a while, those gates of care, that shut us in the dreary prison of ourself. The faintly-burning lamp stood beside him; and by its pale light, as his eye roved round, the dark hangings of the tent became peopled with the spectres of imagination. His father passed before him, as he last had seen him at Byzantium; but his garments were spotted and dabbled with blood, and his countenance was pale with the ashy hue of death. Then came Flavia, with a crown upon her head, and a shroud about her person. Then he beheld Eudochia struggling in the arms of a fierce and eager form, and then Ildica glided across the scene, clothed in bridal robes, and with her left hand clasped in that of a wild, shadowy shape, which led her slowly forward, while in her right she carried a naked dagger, dropping as she went large goutts of crimson blood.

He knew, he felt, that it was all delusion, but yet he could not banish the swarming fancies that disturbed his brain, and even deceived the organ of sight itself. He closed his eyes, and resolutely turned his face to the wall of the tent, near which he lay, and employed himself in listening to the various sounds which rose up from the myriads spread over that wide plain. Although there were some noises which might be distinguished from the rest, an occasional burst of laughter, the loud and measured tones of some singer or reciter, or the wild notes of various rude instruments of music, yet the general buzz of all the many voices far and near came upon his ear with a drowsy and lulling hum, which gradually brought on an inclination to sleep. As time passed, too, the louder and more distinct sounds died away, and the whole subsided into a low and whispering rustle, which was like the noise of the sea upon a pebbly shore, only that it wanted the regular intermission of the successive waves. Forgetfulness fell upon him; but in a moment he awoke again with a quick start, gazed round to see where he was, felt the load of care pressed back upon memory, and hastened again to close his eyes, and cast it off once more.

He slept again, and this time more profoundly than the last, though his breathing was short and thick, and his limbs tossed to and fro. The lamp burnt more and more dimly. The sounds in the camp fell into silence, only broken now and then by the wild neighing of a war-horse.

At length, a little before midnight, the curtain, which separated the tent into two chambers, and which he had let drop when he lay down to rest, trembled as with a slight wind--was slowly moved--was drawn back; and a tall, powerful form took a step within, and let it quietly fall again. Two more paces brought him to the side of the couch where the young Roman lay, and, with arms folded on his chest, the giant-like intruder gazed upon the sleeping youth, and then looked cautiously round the tent. When he had done so twice, he blew out the lamp, and drawing over his tall form the mantle which Theodore had cast off, he crouched himself down at the foot of his bed. All was still and silent but the quick, heavy breathing of the Roman youth, and the rustling of his clothes, as he turned from time to time upon his uneasy couch. In less than half an hour, however, the curtain again moved, and a listening head was advanced within it.

"The lamp has gone out," said a whispering voice, speaking to some one in the outer chamber, in the lowest tone that the human tongue can assume; "lift up the curtain of the door, lest I miss my blow."

The curtain was lifted up, the inner one pushed back, and in streamed the pale, calm moonlight, showing Bleda, the brother of Attila, partly advanced within the inner chamber. He took another step forward, and listened, grasping tight the shining blade which he carried in his hand. Another step brought him within arm's length of the Roman's couch, and his hand was raised to strike, when, bounding like a lion on his prey, up started from his master's feet Cremera, the Arab freedman, and seized the murderer in his gigantic grasp.

An instant struggle took place; but the Hun was no match for his antagonist, who cast him down upon the ground, shaken, and nearly stunned. Another barbarian, however, rushed in, sword in hand, from the outer tent; but Theodore was now upon his feet, and, springing across the prostrate body of Bleda, interposed between the armed Hun and his gallant freedman. Another barbarian appeared at the door of the tent, and how the struggle might have gone, who shall say? but then there came a cry of Attila the King! Attila the King! and, with a torch before him, the dark monarch of the Huns advanced slowly into the tent. He gazed round upon the faces of all present with that stern, calm, unmoved look which never changed but in the fury of the battle.

Bleda, who had risen, answered his brother's glance with a look of fierce and fiery impatience, and planted his foot upon his sword, which had fallen from his hand in the struggle, as if he feared that some one should snatch it up. The companion who had followed him, with his naked blade still in his hand, stood trembling before the face of Attila with a pale and changing countenance.

To Bleda the great monarch said nothing; but slowly drawing his heavy sword from the sheath, he raised it over his head, and at a single blow cleft through the scull of his brother's follower, till the trenchant blade stopped at his teeth and jaws.

Bleda sprang forward with wrath flaming from his eyes. "How darest thou," he cried, "slay my servant?"

"How darest thou," said Attila, in a voice of thunder, "lift thy hand against my friend? Thinkest thou that Attila can be deceived? Thinkest thou that Attila will not punish? Bleda, Bleda! Once, twice, thrice have I warned thee! The measure is full! See that it run not over. I am neither blind to thine ambition nor thy purposes. Beware while it is yet time, and be yet my brother."

"Why, what have I to fear from thee?" demanded Bleda, haughtily; "am I not a king as thou art? Did not the same father beget us, the same mother bear us? Was not the dominion left to us equally divided? What art thou that thou shouldst judge me? Am I not a king as thou art?"

"Our portion was once equal," answered Attila; "but though I have not robbed thee of one tribe or of one charger, what are my dominions now and thine? I have added nation unto nation, and kingdom unto kingdom, while thou hast held thine own only beneath the protection of thy brother's shield. Bleda, I have trod upon the necks of fifteen kings, each greater than thou art. Force me not to tread upon thine. Once more, beware! I tell thee, the cup is full! Thou knowest Attila; now get thee gone, and leave me."

Bleda paused a moment, as if he would fain have given voice to the rage that swelled within his heart. But there was a strange and overwhelming power in his brother's presence, which even he, who had struggled with him from infancy up to manhood, could not resist. He remained silent then, not finding words to answer; and taking up his sword, he shook it with a bent brow at Cremera, and quitted the tent.

"Take away, yon carrion, and give it to the vultures," said Attila, pointing to the body of him he had slain.--"Brave man," he continued, turning to Cremera, "well hast thou done what I gave thee in charge--thou hast saved thy master's life; now leave us, but wait with the men without, to whom I gave the task of guarding him from evil. Bid them be more cautious for the future and tell them, that the presence of the king's brother--nay, of his son himself can never more be an excuse to Attila for failing in obedience unto him. For the present, they are pardoned; get ye gone."

Cremera retired; and Attila motioning his own attendants to withdraw, made them drop the curtain of the tent, and then sat down upon the couch of skins. Theodore stood for a moment by his side, but the King made him be seated, calling him by the gentle name of my son.

"Thou art surprised," he said, "to see thy faithful freedman here amongst us; but when I found thee first, sleeping in the watch-tower beyond the Danube, he sat between thee and me with his spear in his hand, glaring upon me as I have seen in Eastern lands the lioness glare upon the hunters, who would take her young; and I said to mine own heart, 'If this youth should ever want a faithful guard, here is one who could spill his own heart's blood rather than a drop of his lord's should flow.' When I followed thee from Margus, too, I found him almost alone, struggling with some of my warriors who had gone on before, in defence of the women, for whom, as well as for thyself, I had promised thine uncle my protection. He would not yield till a heavy blow on the head had stunned him, but I gave him in charge to those who are skilled in the secret virtue of herbs and flowers, with commands to bring him after me, and to cure him. They promised me he should be soon well; and when I heard of thy danger, and that he had recovered, I sent him hither to guard thee, till I could come myself, not choosing to oppose any of my own nation to the hand of my brother; and I knew that that brother would do the deed he meditated with his own arm."

"Then I have once more to thank thee, mighty Attila, for life," said Theodore; "to thank thee, the enemy of my native land, the destroyer of my countrymen."

"Not so," replied the monarch: "I have once saved thy life, I grant, when thou wert in the power of Ardaric; but for the deed of to-night thou owest me nothing. I promised thee protection,

and had I not given it when I could, I should have been myself thy murderer. But to-morrow thou seekest to depart and leave me. Is it not so?"

"It is," answered Theodore; "not that I am ungrateful for thy favours, oh king! nor insensible to the distinction which thou makest between me and others of my race; but the scenes I have beheld, the grief and bitterness of heart that I have endured, since the morning sun of yesterday, would soon terminate my existence, were they often to be renewed. Did your nation wage warfare like a civilised people, I might endure though I might grieve; but now the sight of the utter extermination and devastation which thy tribes inflict wherever they pass is death, is worse than death to me likewise."

Attila fixed his eyes upon the ground, and remained for a moment silent:--"I will reason with thee, my son," he said at length; "for, though I disdain the art of the idle and subtle fools, who wrangle, as I hear, for an empty word in the schools of thy capital, yet Attila is not without reasons for anything he does, and when needful, can give those reasons, if it so please him. Thou talkest of the hostilities of civilised nations, and speakest with anger and fear of our more just and reasonable dealings in our warfare. But we make war upon our enemies, not upon our friends. We either go to subdue and bring under our dominion other nations, or to avenge ourselves upon a foreign foe. If the first be our object, and resistance is offered to us, how foolish to leave our enemies the means of resisting us with success? how weak to spare men who have done all they could to slay us, or women and children, by which the race of our adversaries may be kept up and increased? No; it behoves us to smite with the arrow and the sword, so long as there is any power of resistance in the land, and never sheathe the blade; or unstring the bow, till we are undisputed masters of the whole race and region. Then again, if we go for vengeance, what vengeance do we gain by suffering our own warriors to be slain without slaying our enemies? The more that die, the more is vengeance satisfied, and if we purchase it with our own blood, we must drink the blood of our enemies. What you call civilised warfare is a mere folly, which protracts the attainment of the end it seeks, and often loses it altogether--which, instead of blazing like a bright fire, and consuming rapidly a small quantity of fuel, lingers long, and burns a thousand-fold as much. No, no, my son, the most merciful warfare is that which is the shortest; and that in which no compassion is shown or asked, is always sure to be the soonest over. Nevertheless," continued Attila, "I seek not to make thee witness the ruin of thy native land, though, methinks, the destruction of thy father's murderer might well repay the sight; but thou shalt go hence. The men I have chosen to accompany thee are under thy command, and thou shalt have cattle, and woods, and pasturage assigned thee from my own herds and lands; ay, even gold shalt thou have, and, what is better, security and peace; for whosoever lifts his hand against thee shall have Attila for his foe; and now fare thee well, till we meet again on my return."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COUNTRY OF THE HUNS.

Theodore was left alone once more, and weariness was more than ever upon him; but yet the busy, untiring course of thought went on for long after he had again lain down to rest. Thought's insidious enemy, sleep, at length crept upon him; but, ere calm forgetfulness had complete dominion, Cremera once more stole into the tent, and again lay down at his feet. The lamp, however, had been lighted by the followers of the monarch; and Theodore, recognising the form of his faithful attendant, merely spoke a few words of thanks and greeting, and let his heavy eyelids fall.

Broad daylight was shining through the chinks of the tent when he awoke; and Cremera was sitting in the outer chamber, polishing with a knife a strong ashen staff, to which he had fitted the iron head of a spear. Theodore saw that the day must be far advanced, and rising, he offered prayers and thanks to God; and then, while speaking many kindly words to the freedman, he advanced and pushed back the loose hangings that closed the interior of the tent from the view of the outer world.

How changed was the scene which met his eye from that which he had passed through on the preceding night! The Huns were gone; scarcely a vestige of them remained; not a wagon, not a group was to be seen over all that wide plain, except where, before the door of the tent, ten or twelve of the Huns, and an equal number of the Alani, taller, stronger, and fairer to look upon than their dark companions, employed the vacant hours in packing a number of small and strangely-assorted articles into two of the low wagons which had formed part of the night's circle round the tent. The sun was not very far from its meridian, and Theodore saw that he must have

slept long and profoundly, but yet he was not refreshed. There was a weariness, a heaviness upon his limbs that he had never felt before--a burning heat upon his skin, that the cooler climate in which he now was placed could not have produced.

Nevertheless, he gladly prepared to depart, and bade the attendants who had been assigned to him make all things ready, while he went to bathe his feverish body in a small stream that his eye caught glistening on at a short distance upon its way to join the rushing waters of the Danube. The cool wave, however, proved no refreshment, and only caused a chilly shudder to pass over his limbs, succeeded quickly by the same heat as before. On his return he found food prepared, but he could not eat; and though his lip loathed the wine they offered, he drank a deep draught from the horn of a urus, for the sake of gaining that temporary strength of which he felt himself to stand in need.

His own horse, fresh as the early morning from a night of repose, stood near, but the horses of the barbarians were still straying over the plain. A shrill, long whistle, however, brought them in a moment to their masters' sides, and small grooming did the rude riders of the Dacian wilds bestow upon their swift but rugged beasts. The tent was by this time struck and placed upon the wagons; and Theodore, with one of the Huns beside him to guide him as he went, led the way onward towards that strange land which seemed thenceforward destined to be his home for many a long year. Of his guide he asked various questions, and was answered fluently in his own language; but at length Cremera, who followed, pointed towards the towers of a far distant city, saying, "Is not that Margus?"

"It is," answered the Hun. "We can go thither if thou wilt," he continued, addressing Theodore. "We can repose there to-morrow night. It is now a city belonging to Attila the King."

"No, no," replied Theodore, with many a painful feeling at the very thought finding expression on his countenance--"no, no, not in the city for a thousand worlds; rather let us lodge in the open field."

"Thou art wise, young chief," replied the Hun. "Cities are hateful places: Attila loves them not any more than thou dost; and, though Margus is his, he will not keep it long, but will either sell it back to the Romans or destroy it."

Theodore replied not; and they rode on till at length, towards eventide, they came near the banks of the Danube, and, after half an hour's riding within sight of the river, halted for the night on a spot near the old Roman way from M[oe]sia into Dacia. Theodore was fatigued, but yet he could not rest; and while they were engaged in setting up his tent, he wandered forward to drink of the great river.

It was a sweet, bright, tranquil afternoon. The sun was just dipping beneath the wood-covered hills upon the opposite bank of the river, but the air was still full of his light; and the forests and mountains, the soft green slopes, the blue sky, and the light passing cloud, were mirrored in the swift waters of the mighty stream, as it flowed on towards the ocean. The air, too, was calm; and silence hung above the world, except when the laughing note of the woodpecker, or the melody of the thrush, broke the silence for a moment, to render it more calm and sweet. Theodore gazed up the stream, and beheld afar gigantic masses of masonry, rifted and broken, projecting from either bank, while here and there, from the broad sealike bosom of the Danube, rose up massy piers and woodwork, the fragments of some vast fabric swept away.

It was evidently the famous bridge of Trajan that stood before him, just as the destroying hand of his envious successor had left it; and as Theodore gazed upon the remnants of that stupendous work, as they stood in the clear light and shade of evening, he could not but meditate upon the change of dynasties, the vanity of human hopes, the fruitlessness of earthly endeavours, and all the many and melancholy themes on which poet and philosopher have sung and moralized, hoping, even while they did so, for that earthly immortality which they knew and proved to be a bubble. There before his eyes stood one of the greatest works of one of the greatest men that the human race, in all its vast succession of beings, in all its complexity of characters, in all its variety of qualities, has ever produced, from the creation till to-day; and yet a mean follower, unable to compete with him in intellect, in feeling, in effort, or in success, had possessed the power to sweep away from off the earth that majestic monument of a grand and creative mind, to cast down what the good and wise had raised up, to destroy what the noble and energetic had created.

"Oh, wonderful frailty of man's most lasting works!" thought the young Roman; "that nothing can give them certain existence, no, not for a century. That which the earthquake spares, the hand of war and violence pulls down; that which hostile armies have respected, the mean envy of inferior genius will destroy. Alas! when we look around, and think of the work of but a few short lustres upon man's noblest efforts and his brightest productions, well, well may we ask, What is lasting upon earth?"

He paused--"Yes, yes!" he thought again; "virtue is lasting! virtue is immortal even here! Rarely as it is seen, often as it is counterfeited, shunning publicity, hating pomp, virtue, indestructible like gold, even in the fire of time and amid the trial of circumstances, comes out pure and passes on uninjured, accumulating slowly, but brightly, in the treasuries of the past, and forming an inexhaustible store of example and encouragement for all who choose to take it.

Yes, yes, virtue *is* lasting! One may produce, and another may destroy; but Trajan shall be remembered when Hadrian is forgotten or contemned."

Theodore, as the confidence in some great principle of stability returned to his heart, set his foot more firmly upon the earth, which, to his imagination, had seemed crumbling beneath him like a pile of dust and ashes, while he had only remembered how brief, how transitory is the existence of the noblest fabrics that it bears.

He would fain have gone on to examine more nearly the mighty fragments of what had once been the celebrated bridge of Trajan; but the ruins were farther than they seemed: he was weary and languid; and ever and anon urged by the burning thirst upon him, he paused to drink again of the waters of the Danube. At length he gave up his purpose and returned to the tent, where the Huns were broiling, on a wood fire, a large fish which they had caught in the neighbouring river. At the very sight of food a sickening disgust came over the young Roman; but his faithful Cremera pressed him so anxiously to eat, that he forced himself to swallow a few mouthfuls. But it was in vain: he could not go on; and soon retiring to his tent, he endeavoured to find repose.

No sounds disturbed his rest, for nothing was to be heard but the rushing of the Danube and the sighing of the wind through the tall trees. No human being had been seen through all that morning's journey; no voice of salutation had welcomed them as they passed, showing too well how desolate the land had been made; and after the youth's attendants had laid themselves down to sleep, not a tone but one solitary scream from some flitting bird of night broke the silence of the world around: and yet Theodore courted slumber in vain. He tossed his weary limbs upon the couch of skins which had again become his bed, and counted the heavy minutes from night till morning. Frequently, through all the violent heat that burned in his whole frame, a cold chilly shudder would pass over him, and he felt that the hand of sickness was upon him.

Nevertheless, he started up with the dawn, bent with feverish eagerness upon pursuing his journey as quickly as possible, while yet the last efforts of his remaining strength could be exerted to oppose the overpowering weight that pressed him down. Looking out from the tent, he saw the Huns and the Alani already busy in preparing for departure; and, in a few minutes, one who seemed to have been despatched to seek for a means of transport came back to say that the raft had already come down to the shore. Cremera gazed anxiously on the changed and ashy countenance of his lord; but he spoke not, and led the war-horse, who knew his hand better than that of any of the Huns, down to the bank of the river. A raft, such as had borne Theodore across once before, was waiting with some of the rude boatmen of the Danube, and in two voyages the whole party which accompanied the young Roman was borne across and landed on the other side of the river.

Dacia was now before his steps; and although he could not but feel a chilly coldness at the thought that he had passed, perhaps for ever, the boundary of his native land; had left behind him, for an unlimited space of years, all those scenes and objects linked to the brightest memories of his heart; had entered upon a course where all was new and strange, where much was dark and doubtful, and much distinctly painful; and that he had nothing in prospect, at the very best, but a long, dull lapse of years, among nations inferior to his own in every point of intellect and every art of social life; yet there was a feeling of joy broke across the gloom of such anticipations when he remembered the sights of horror which he had just beheld on the Roman frontier, and felt that he would be called to mingle in such scenes no more. The very feeling gave him new energy; the morning air seemed to revive him; and he spurred on with the rest through the wide forest that lay before their steps, and across which a grass-grown track afforded them a way into the interior of the country.

In less than three hours, at the rapid rate at which they travelled, they had crossed the belt of wood which for a considerable way bordered the Danube. Beyond that belt stretched out a plain, which would have seemed interminable had not the blue lines of some distant mountains, rising up against the far horizon, marked its boundary. Except where, here and there, was seen a line of forest ground, looking like a group of bushes in the vast extent over which the eye could stretch, the whole plain seemed covered with long green grass, waving like a mighty lake as a light wind bent it to and fro in the morning sunshine.

There was something grand and expansive in the view, notwithstanding its vast monotony; and as Theodore paused for a moment, and let his horse breathe upon the edge of the slight slope on which the forest ended, he gazed with some feelings of surprise and admiration upon the new world which was henceforth to be his habitation. That feeling again refreshed him; but much need had he indeed of refreshment, and of anything which could give even a momentary support to that strength which was failing fast under the pressure of fatigue and illness.

"Let your horse pause for a moment and eat," said the Hun who rode by his side. "We are a long way from a resting-place: under those woods is our first village."

Theodore did as the other advised, but his heart grew faint at such a notification of the length of way; for though he would not pause nor yield so long as any powers of life were left, yet he felt that the powers of life were waning, and that, if he reached not soon some place where he could obtain refreshment and repose, he should never reach it at all, but sink of unwonted weariness by the way.

In a few minutes they again began their journey through the plain, riding up to their horses' chests in the long rich grass, which, though it proved no obstacle to the small, quick horses of the Huns, impeded and irritated at every step the fiery charger which had carried the young Roman. In the meanwhile the summer sun got high, and poured its burning rays upon Theodore's unsheltered head; a white, filmy, and oppressive mist rose up from the moist plain, not thick enough to impede the sight, but tinging every object with a peculiar hue. For a long time nothing diversified the scene, nothing interrupted the monotony of their progress; out at length an immense bird sprang up almost from under their horses' feet, and spreading its wings, without rising from the ground, ran on with extraordinary speed before them.

"An ostrich! an ostrich!" cried Cremera, forgetting the distance between the spot where he then stood and his own porphyry mountains--"an ostrich! a young ostrich!"

But the Hun who was by his side paused for a moment without speaking, poised the javelin he carried in his hand, and launched it with a strong arm in the air. Falling with unerring aim, it struck the great bustard between the wings; and, riding on, the Hun took it up and slung it over his shoulders, saying, "This will secure our evening meal."

Still they rode on, and more and more terrible grew the lassitude of the Roman youth; the heat was overpowering; the way seemed interminable, and that distant line of wood towards which their steps were bent, though appearing certainly to grow larger, yet was approached so slowly that Theodore, as he gazed upon it, felt his heart grow faint with the despair of ever arriving at the calm shelter which he vainly hoped there to find. With his lip parched, with his eye glazed, with his cheek pale yet burning, and with his hands scarcely able to hold the reins, still he rode on, looking forward with an anxious, straining gaze upon those woods, thinking they never would be reached. Wider and wider they stretched out before him. The plain on which he had seen them stand alone, like a group of bushes, when he had gazed on them from the distant heights, now seemed bounded by them entirely on that side. As he came nearer he could distinguish the vast rolling masses of forest, the dark, deep brakes where glades or savannas intervened; and at length, while with his dim and dizzy sight he scanned eagerly the scene before him, he thought he could perceive some low, wooden cottages, crouching, as if for shelter, beneath the wide-extended arms of the tall trees upon the edge. That sight again gave him a momentary impulse; he urged his horse on; he saw the cottages more distinctly; but, as with that last effort he attempted to reach them, strength, and hope, and thought all gave way at once, and, with just the consciousness of utter exhaustion, he fell fainting from his horse.

A lapse of time succeeded, over which Theodore's memory had no power. He had talked, he had suffered, he had raved, he had struggled during the interval; he had named names which those around him did not know; he had spoken a thousand things which they could not comprehend, while for fourteen days he had lain tossed between life and death, and tended by the hands of strangers. But of all that he had no recollection when at length reasoning consciousness had returned.

It was the evening of a sweet summer's day, when, opening his eyes, he looked around and wondered where he was. There was a small chamber, lined with smooth and fragrant pine wood, from the cracks and crevices of which the fresh resin was yet oozing. On the walls hung, in fantastic garlands, many a barbarian instrument of war, spears and swords, the quiver of arrows and the unstrung bow, the buckler, the club, and the far-slaying sling. There, too, beneath, on stands and tables of wood, might be seen a number of strange idols, wild, unseemly shapes, such as a child might carve for sport out of a block of wood. Settles and tables were there also, of the same plain material, but on some of them appeared objects of a more valuable kind and a richer workmanship. There lay, even in abundance, gems and gold, bearing evident marks of cultivated taste and skilful art; but there were two things more sweet than any other could have been to Theodore's senses at that moment, which called all attention from every other object.

The first was the calm, sweet breath of the summer evening, borne light and fragrant through the open window; the other was the sweet, melodious voice of a woman singing.

He turned his eyes to where the singer sat beside the bed on which he was stretched, and saw a girl of some seventeen years of age, with bright brown hair, worn not as Roman women wore it, but parted on the fair forehead, and thrust in clustering ringlets behind her ears. The face was very sweet and beautiful, and everything would have been soft--perhaps too soft for great interest--had it not been for the deep, devoted blue eyes. They were somewhat darker in hue than the sky by day; but yet, as they gazed forth from the long dark lashes, they looked like that same azure heaven at the moment when its colour is most deep, yet most pure, just ere the curtain of the night falls over its expanse. She saw the youth turn his eyes upon her; but, thinking only that sleep had fled again from his still fevered brain, she recommenced the song she had been singing, while her small white hands continued to ply the light labour of the distaff. Theodore, however, could now hear and understand; and he listened with delight that cannot be told, while, in the Alan tongue, the language of his own dear mother, she sang, with a sweet, soft, rounded voice--

"Come, gentle sleep, to the couch of the stranger,
From thought's weary burden, oh give him relief!
Take memories of anguish and prospects of danger,
The future's dull care and the past's heavy grief.

"Sweet friend of our childhood, thou strewest with flowers
The pillow where infancy rests her calm head,
When weary with sporting through long happy hours,
With thee for her angel, she seeks the soft bed.

"Coy visitant, come! We prize thee more highly,
In years more mature when we've tried the world's truth;
Why com'st thou so rarely? why fly'st thou so shyly?
Oh what thus estranges the friend of our youth?

"We've been false to thy friendship, despised thy caresses;
For pleasures we've left thee, and even for cares;
The faithful, the tranquil, the humble, sleep blesses,
But flies from the couch that one wild passion shares.

"Yet, balm-giver, yet, for the sick and the weary,
Thy merciful gifts we implore as a boon;
Oh give us thine aid, on our way long and dreary--
Aid, tardily valued, and lost all too soon!"

CHAPTER XVII.

NEVA.

It is a strange and awful sensation, when, after having enjoyed to the full the powers and energies of manhood, we find ourselves suddenly reduced by the unnerving hand of sickness to the feebleness of infancy: when giant strength lies prostrate and busy activity is chained to the weary bed. It is strange and it is awful, for it shows us most sensibly how frail a thing is that vigour which, in our boisterous days of health, we madly think an adamantine armour against all adversity. It is strange and awful, for it leads us to the brink of that fatal precipice over which all must fall, and displays, as if from the very verge, the inside of our future grave.

From a stupor, in which all memory and every power of thought had been at an end, Theodore woke as feeble and incapable as when, in the nurse's arms, he moved his mother's heart by his first infant cry. The same feelings of tenderness; the same mingled emotions, where pity, and hope, and the pleasure of protecting, all unite; the same sensations of affectionate interest for the thing we rear, and guard, and watch for, as those which fill the breast of a mother towards her child, affected, though in a less degree, those who attended the couch of the young Roman during his illness and convalescence. It was but slowly he recovered: for the fever which had seized upon him had been fierce and powerful; and it had been only unfaded youth's tenacity of life and the natural vigour of his frame which had finally conquered that terrible assailant.

The persons who attended him were entirely women, except when his faithful Cremera took his daily turn to watch by his bedside; and though an elder and more matronly dame came in and out, and frequently remained in his chamber for an hour or more, still his principal attendant was the lovely girl whom he at first had seen, or a maiden who seemed to be her sister, still younger than herself.

Often would he keep his eyes closed, to listen, uninterrupted, to the sweet singing of the barbarian girl; often when he woke would he find that graceful form bending over him, and those deep, intense blue eyes gazing upon his countenance, as if to mark the outposts of victorious health, spreading life's rosy banner where the pale flag of sickness had been advanced so lately. As he recovered strength also, and his tongue became more capable of its office, he would converse with her from time to time in the language which she had used in singing and though she spoke it not as her native dialect, yet they could thus converse fluently.

With the matron it was different: she was kind, but not conversable; yet, when she did speak, it was always in the pure Alan tongue; and Theodore could almost have fancied that he heard once more the voice of his mother. Under kind care and skilful management he at length reached that point where his recovery became certain; and from that moment his convalescence proceeded rapidly. He was soon able to quit his chamber; and going forth, though with wavering

and unsteady steps, he walked along, enjoying the fresh air of the morning, beneath the rude portico of unshaped stems of trees which shaded one side of that long low dwelling, while his heart was raised with fresh gratitude to Heaven at every sweet sound and sight that he was permitted again to enjoy. There had been a time, not very long before, when life had seemed to him a weary burden, which he desired not to retain; the earth a dreary and a desert dwelling-place, in which he was but little anxious to remain. But such feelings had only existed while the body remained in strength and vigour, oppressed and impatient under a mind overcharged with sorrows, anxieties, and cares. Now, however, the corporeal frame had been weakened and cast down; the body as well as the mind had been humbled and chastised; the blessings of life were more valued, the past could be regarded with resignation, and the future looked forward to with hope.

As he walked forth one day under the shadow of that portico, his eye wandered over the whole plain, on which, at a little distance, appeared some horsemen, whom he afterward found to be those who had attended him thither. In the shade, however, were collected a number of women, comprising all those whom he had hitherto seen; and Neva, the blue-eyed daughter of the house, smiled gayly to see his wavering steps. The next moment she greeted him with, "Come, sit you with the women till you have strength enough to join the men;" and she made room for him on the bench on which she sat between herself and her mother.

All were employed in some domestic occupation; and the distaff, and the spindle, and the wheel went on, while Theodore, sitting beside them, began to ask the first questions which he had hitherto ventured, regarding the place and the family in which he then was. He found that the village which he saw stretching along under the forest contained not less than two or three hundred wooden cottages; and his eye at once showed him that the one in which he had found shelter and received so much true kindness was by far the most extensive and most ornamented of the whole. When he came to ask, however, whose was the house in which he dwelt, and whose the family that tended him so carefully, they answered him at once that it was that of Bleda, the brother of Attila.

His countenance changed, and he asked no more questions. Ere he had sat long there the horsemen returned from the field, bringing with them some game which they had procured; and eagerly, and with signs of much regard, they gathered round Theodore, and wished him joy on his recovered health. Towards evening two herdsman drove home from a distance a large flock of diminutive cattle, and a shepherd brought some sheep into the fold. Two or three other lesser flocks were driven slowly across the plain to different houses in the village; but the men who drove them formed the only male population, with the exception of his own attendants, which Theodore had yet seen since he entered Dacia.

As the days passed on, and he mingled more with the people, he found that this first view was fully confirmed, and that almost all the men of the land, except such as were too old or too young to bear arms, had gone forth with Attila in his invasion of the Roman empire.

"Were Rome now," thought Theodore, "what Rome once was, while this barbarian monarch invades and ravages the East, the legions of the West would pour across Pannonia, and, sweeping the whole land, take as hostages the women and children here left unprotected. But alas! I fear me that neither the legions of the East will have power to withstand the myriads of Attila, nor the West have energy to hasten his return, by invading his territories, and taking hostages for his future tranquillity. 'Tis true they may not know that the land is left in such a state; but, alas! I must not point out its weakness. Even to save my country, I must not return the mercy shown me, and the kind hospitality received, by base ingratitude. Doubtless, when strength returns, I could escape; doubtless I could bear to Valentinian, or, better still, to Ætius, tidings of the condition in which this land is left, and thereby, perchance, deliver the empire itself. But it must not be! No, no! such a task must not be mine."

The situation, however, was a painful one; and the knowledge, too, that he was dwelling in the house of Bleda, of the man who had striven to take his life, and whose enmity--though he knew not why--was evidently fiercely raised against him, added to the gloom he felt, and made him anxious to proceed farther into the country.

Ruga, the wife of Bleda, however, was herself one of the Alani, from a tribe which had remained amid their original valleys on the Georgian side of Caucasus. She had by this time learned that the mother of the young stranger had been a daughter of the same nation, though sprung from a different tribe; and, little aware of the enmity of her husband towards him, she now pressed Theodore anxiously to stay with them till the armies of the Huns returned. Her daughter, too, urged the same request with all the native simplicity of a guileless heart; and Theodore himself, as innocent in thought and purpose, believed that he could there remain happily, without risk or danger to the peace of any one, were it not for the enmity of Neva's father. He made inquiries, however, and he found that no chance existed of any of the Huns returning for several months; and he determined to remain for a time, hoping that, if he could win the regard of the chieftain's family, the causeless animosity of Bleda himself might by their report be done away.

There, then, he stayed, increasing in the love of all, and habituating himself to the language, the sports, and the manners of the people. He had found, on his recovery, that the purse of gold pieces which he had borne with him from Dalmatia, and which had been but little diminished on

the journey, had been carefully preserved during his sickness; and, though the amount was not very large, yet the difference in the value of everything among the Huns and among the Romans was so great, that his small store seemed grown into an inexhaustible treasure. The attendants whom Attila had given him would receive no recompense for their services; and the sports of the chase, which he pursued in company with them and Cremera, afforded more than sufficient provision for his followers and for himself. Ruga declared that her house had never been so bountifully supplied, even when Bleda himself was present; and the simpler food, to which the women of the Huns were accustomed, received no slight additions from the hunter skill and bold activity of their guest.

For several weeks Theodore pursued this course in peace, proceeding to the woods or plains, or to the mountains, early in the morning with his followers, and retuning ere nightfall to the village. To those followers, indeed, the young Roman endeared himself every day more and more. His courage, and the dexterity with which he acquired all their wild art in the chase and in the management of the horse, won their reverence; while his kindness, his gentleness, and his easy suavity, touched another chord, and gained their hearts. If stag, or wolf, or bear turned upon him, every one was ready to defend him; and Theodore soon found that on any enterprise which he chose to undertake, except, indeed, where some higher duty forbade, he might lead those men to danger, or to death itself. Nor did he make less progress in the regard of the villagers. The old men took a pleasure in teaching him their language, and in telling him wild tales of other days, and other lands; the children clung to him, and gathered round his knee; the shepherds brought him whatever they found in their wanderings, which seemed to their rude eyes either rare or valuable. To, his cultivated opinion all questions were referred; and when they found that, ere two months were over, he could wield their arms, and speak their language, with as much facility as they could themselves, adding to their barbarian dexterity all the arts and knowledge of a civilised nation, they seemed to think him something more than mortal.

The wife of the chieftain forgot her matronly state, so far as to hold long conversations with him on the nation whose blood flowed in both their veins; and her fair daughter sprang forth with eager gladness to welcome him back from the chase, or if he went not thither, wandered with him in the mornings to show him fair paths through the wood, and teach him what fruits were hurtful, what beneficial to man, in those wild solitudes; or sat near him in the evenings, and, with her long lashes veiling her cast down blue eyes, sang all the songs which she knew he loved to hear.

It was those deep blue eyes, and their look of devoted tenderness, which first woke Theodore from his dream of peace. Neva was lovely, gentle, kind, noble in all her feelings, graceful in all her movements, frank, simple, and sincere. Pure in heart and mind, the elegancies of polished life seemed scarcely needful to her native grace. In whatever task employed, she looked, she acted, as--and no one could doubt she was--the daughter of a king: and yet Theodore's thoughts were seldom upon her. Sometimes, indeed, when he saw a flower of peculiar beauty, or when his arrows struck some bird of rare plumage, or some beast of a finer fur, he thought, "I will take this home for Neva;" but his fancy never strayed amiss to warmer feelings or more dangerous themes than those.

Oh, no! his thoughts were far away! The one deep-rooted passion, strong and intense as life itself--that one bright passion, as pure, when it is noble, in man as in woman, as incapable of falsehood either by thought or act--left not one fond fancy free for any other than her, his first, young, early, only love. When the sun in floods of glory went down beyond the western hills, he thought of her lonely in that distant land, and willingly believed that with her, too, memory turned to him. When the bright moon wandered through the sky, and poured her silver flood of light over those wide plains, he would gaze forth, and call to mind that first peculiar night when he heard the dear lips he loved breathe answering vows to his beneath the palace portico on the Dalmatian shore; he would call up again before his eyes the scene in all its loveliness; he would fancy he could feel that soft, dear form pressed gently to his bosom; he would seem to taste the breath of those sweet lips as they met his in the kiss of first acknowledged love; and he would imagine--justly, truly imagine--that at that hour the same treasured remembrances might fill the bosom of Ildica with visions as entrancing, and that memory might with her, too, give to hope a basis whereon to raise her brightest architecture. When the morning woke in the skies, and when, ere he went forth to taste the joys of renewed existence, he knelt down to offer to the God of his pure faith adoration, and thanks, and prayer, the name of Ildica would first rise with his petitions to Heaven, and her happiness would be the subject of his first aspirations.

Could he think, then, of any other I could he dream that it was possible to love any one but her? No! he did not, he could not; but, as time wore on, and summer sunk glowing into the arms of autumn, there came a deep light into the eyes of Neva, which pained, which alarmed him. He would sometimes, when he suddenly turned towards her, find her gazing upon him with a look of intense, thoughtful affection, which was followed by a warm and rapid blush; and, without one feeling of empty vanity, Theodore began to see that his stay might produce evil to her who had so kindly tended him.

Still, however, Neva's regard assumed that air of simple, unrestrained frankness, which is less frequently the token of love than of friendship. In her pure mind, and in her uncultivated land, all seemed clear and open before her. She felt no shame in the sensations which she knew and encouraged towards the young stranger. She saw no obstacle to prevent her from becoming his bride. She was the daughter of a king, but she knew him to be worthy of her love; and as that

love became apparent to her own eyes also, she only felt proud of her choice. The sole difference which that knowledge of her own heart's feelings wrought in Neva was, that with her bright brown hair she now began to mingle gold and gems, and that, from time to time, a bright but transient glow would tinge her cheek when her eyes and Theodore's met. Far from shrinking from his society, far from trembling at his approach, she gave way at once to all the feelings of her heart as they arose; greeted him with glad smiles in the morning; sprang forth to meet him when he returned from the chase; sat by him in the lengthening evenings; and, feeling the deep earnest love of first affection burning at her heart, she took no means to hide or to conceal it from others or herself.

Theodore had pondered over these things for some days, and considered how it were best to act; but he deceived himself in regard to Neva; and the very openness with which she suffered her passion to appear made him believe that it was as yet unconfirmed. He compared it with the shy and trembling love of Ildica. He remembered the same kind affection in her, too, when a girl, ere their feelings took a warmer tone than brotherly regard; the candid display of preference for his society, and the interest in all his pursuits which she had then evinced. He recollected, also, the change that had taken place as simple affection grew into intense love--how timid, how retiring, how apprehensive that love had been! and by comparing those two stages of a passion he had known and marked, with the conduct of the lovely girl under whose father's roof he had dwelt--as pure, as innocent, as full of real modesty as Ildica herself--he judged, that whatever her feelings might become, they were not yet such as might ever render them painful to herself.

As the period for which he had promised to remain had not yet expired, and he could assign no cause for suddenly absenting himself, he determined to seek the first opportunity of speaking, in the presence of Neva, of the ties which bound him to her he loved. Little mention had hitherto been made of his family or his circumstances in his own land. The wife of Bleda seemed to take no further interest in his former life than was connected with his mother and her nation; and Neva herself, in the present happiness which she derived from his stay among them, appeared never to remember that there was such a thing as a past, affecting him in a way she knew not--though that past was unfortunately destined to affect all the future for herself. She asked nothing, she thought of nothing but of the present; and thus Theodore felt that he would have to commence the subject himself. Though it was one he loved not to speak on upon every light occasion, yet he resolved to do so. But still, after long hesitation, he determined not to tell the tale of his early days, when, sitting in the family of Bleda, every eye might be ready to mark his own emotions--or, indeed, those of others; for although to his own heart he put forward the motive of concealing the expression of his feelings, his real inducement was consideration for the fair girl, who might be more moved, he feared, by the words he had to speak, than he was willing to admit even to himself.

After two long days of unsuccessful hunting, having found nothing within several miles of the village, he threw down his spear and arrows, declaring he would go no more; and on the following morning, while the dew was still upon the grass, Neva offered to lead him up to the fall of a river in the woods, whose roar he had often heard at a distance, but which he had never seen, so deeply was it buried in the intricacies of the forest. He gladly followed, resolved to seize that moment to tell her all. And yet Theodore was agitated, for he wished not to pain or grieve her; but still he feared, from her whole manner, and from the tender light which poured from her blue eyes, that the words he had to speak would be displeasing to her ear. It was a bright morning, and between the tall trunks of the trees, over bush, and underwood, and mossy turf, the slanting sun poured his golden light, in the first bright freshness of the rising day.

"What a lovely morning is this!" said Theodore, after they had walked on some way, for Neva had remained silent under emotions of her own. "What a lovely morning!--how clear, how beautiful!"

"Have you not such in your own land?" demanded Neva.

"Oh yes," answered Theodore, "we have many; and these mornings and the evenings are our chief hours of delight, for the heat of the risen day is oppressive. I remember such a morning as this," he added, willing to lead the conversation to the matter on which he desired to speak--"I remember such a morning, some four or five months ago, so bright, so beautiful, shining upon my path as I returned from Constantinople towards what I have always called my home."

"And was it not your home?" demanded Neva. "Did no one wait you there to welcome you?"

"Oh, several," answered Theodore--"several that I loved, and still love more dearly than anything else on earth." Neva cast down her eyes, and her cheek grew deadly pale. "There was my mother," continued Theodore--"I mean the mother who has adopted me, and ever treated me as one of her own children." The colour came again into Neva's cheek. "Then there was my sister," he went on. "And last," he added, in a lower tone, "there was my promised bride, my Ildica, who will one day be my wife."

Neva spoke not, but the rose again left her cheek. That, however, was the only sign of emotion she displayed, except, perhaps, that she walked on more rapidly, and that her small feet brushed the dew from the grass on either side of the path, wavering, as she went, with an unsteady pace. Theodore followed close to her side, scarce knowing how to break that painful silence. It had continued so long, that, ere a word was uttered, he heard the roar of the waterfall, and he

resolved to speak, let it be on what it would. But at the first word he breathed, the fair girl pressed her right hand upon her heart with a convulsive sob, and fell fainting at his feet.

Theodore caught her up in his arms, and ran on upon the path. He could not find the cataract, but the stream which formed it soon caught his eye; and, laying Neva on the bank, he bathed her brow with water from the river, and strove to recall her to herself by words of comfort and consolation.

At length she opened her eyes; and finding herself lying in the arms of the man she loved, with her head supported on his shoulder, she turned her face to his bosom, and wept long and bitterly. Theodore said little, but all he did say were words of kindness and of comfort; and Neva seemed to feel them as such, and thanked him by a gentle pressure of the hand. At length she spoke. "I had thought," she said, in the undisguised simplicity of her heart, "I had thought to be your first and only wife. I was foolish to think that others would not love you as well as I."

Theodore had now the harder task of explaining to her, and making her comprehend, that in his land and with his religion, polygamy, so common among her people, could not exist; but the effect produced was more gratifying than he could have expected.

"Better, far better that it should not," cried the girl, raising her head, and gazing full in his face with those earnest, devoted eyes. "Better, far better that it should not. Had you asked me, I could not have refused, feeling as I feel; but I should have been miserable to be the second to any one. To have seen you caress her, to have known that you loved her better, and had loved her earlier than you loved me, would have been daily misery; but now I can love you as a thing apart. You will marry her, and I will have no jealousy, for I have no share: I will think of you every hour and every moment, and pray to all the gods to make you happy with her you love. But oh, stranger, it were better, till I can rule my feelings and my words, and gain full command over every thought, that you should leave me."

"Would to God!" said Theodore, "that I had never beheld you, or that you could forget all such feelings, and look on me as a mere stranger."

"Not for worlds," she exclaimed, "not for all the empire of my uncle Attila. I would not lose the remembrance of thee if I could win the love of the brightest and the best on earth. I would not change the privilege of having seen, and known, and loved thee, for the happiest fate that fancy could devise. Oh, Theodore, would you take from me my last treasure? But perchance you think me bold and impudent in thus speaking all that is at my heart; but if you do so, you do not know me."

"I do, I do indeed," cried Theodore--"I do know, I do admire, I do esteem you; and had not every feeling of my heart been bound to another ere I saw you, I could not have failed to love one so beautiful, so excellent, so kind. Nay, I do love you, Neva, though it must be as a brother loves a sister."

"Hush, hush!" she said. "Make me not regret--and yet love me so still. Forget, too, that I love you better, but oh, believe that no sister ever yet lived that will do for you what Neva will; and in the moment of danger, in the hour of sickness, in the time of wo, if you need aid, or tendance, or consolation, send for me; and though my unskilful hand and tongue may be little able to serve, the deep affection of my heart shall find means, if they be bought with my life's blood, to compensate for my weakness and my want of knowledge;" and, carried away by the intensity of her feelings, she once more cast herself on his bosom and wept. "But you must leave me," she continued, "you must leave me. Yes, and when I see you again, I will see you calmly--not as you now see me. Yet you must have some excuse for going, and whither will you go?"

"When your uncle Attila bade me come into Dacia till his return," replied Theodore, "Edicon, who remained with me, affirmed that it was the monarch's will I should proceed to his own usual dwelling-place, on the banks of the Tibiscus."

Neva thought for a moment as if she did not remember the name; but then exclaimed, "Ha! the Teyssa--what you call the Tibiscus we name the Teyssa. That is much farther on; but let my mother know that such were the directions of Attila, and she will herself hasten your departure; for my father and my uncle often jar, and my mother would fain remove all cause of strife. Or I will tell her," she added, with a faint smile, "I will tell her; and you shall see how calmly I can talk of your departure."

She then spoke for some time longer, in a tranquil tone, of all the arrangements that were to be made; and as she did so, still, from time to time, her eyes were raised to the young Roman's face with a long, earnest glance, as if she would fain have fixed his image upon memory, so that no years could blot it out. Then in the stream she bathed the traces of the tears from her eyes; and looking up calmly, though sadly, said, "Let us go, my brother. It is sweet, but it must end."

They took some steps homeward; but, ere they had gone far, she paused, and laying her hands upon his, she said, "Oh, Theodore! promise me, that if ever, while you are in your land, you need help or aid, you will send to me. Send me this trinket back by a messenger;" and she gave him one of the small golden ornaments which she wore in her hair; "send it me back, and I will come to you, be it wheresoever it may. Deeply as I love thee, I would not wed thee now for worlds; but,

oh! I would give life itself to render thee some service, which should make thee say in after years, 'Alas! poor Neva! she loved me well indeed!'"

Thus wandered they homeward; and often did she pause to add something more, and to give some new token of that deep and all unconcealed, but pure affection, which had taken so firm a hold of her young heart. Theodore, too, strove to sooth and to comfort her; and all that was kind, all that was tender--except such words as only the ear of the beloved should ever hear--he said, to give her consolation. As they came near the village, however, she spoke less, for she seemed to fear that her emotions might leave traces behind for other eyes than his; but she gained courage as they went on; and, to Theodore's surprise, when they joined the household, no sign of all the busy feelings which he knew to be active in her breast was in the slightest degree apparent, except, indeed, in a shade of grave melancholy, which was not natural to her.

She chose the moment while all were assembled at the morning meal to announce to her mother the necessity of Theodore's departure. The matron had made some observation upon the young Roman's recovered health, when she replied, "We shall lose him soon, my mother. He has been telling me that the commands of Attila the King were strict, that he should go on to the king's own dwelling by the Teyssa."

She spoke calmly; so calmly, indeed, that there were but two persons among all the many who seemed to notice that she touched on things more interesting than ordinary. Theodore could not but know all the emotions which that calm tone concealed; and her mother, as soon as she heard the subject of her discourse, fixed her eyes upon her with a look of mingled wonder, tenderness, and surprise, as if she, too, could see into her daughter's heart, and asked, by that glance, "Can you, my child, talk thus calmly of his going?"

After that momentary pause, however, she replied aloud, "If Attila bade him go forward, the king must be obeyed. My son, you should have told us this before; for though my husband is also a king, yet Attila is his elder brother, and we wish not to offend him."

"If fault there be," replied Theodore, "the fault is mine. The commands of the king affixed me no certain time; and I do, indeed, believe that he named his own residence as my dwelling-place only for my greater safety."

"'Tis not unlikely," said the wife of Bleda; "but still, my son, you must obey: tarry not here more days than needful; for we know not when Attila or Bleda may return."

Theodore, too, knew that it was needful he should go, and yet he felt regret at leaving those who had treated him with so much kindness and tenderness; at leaving scenes in which he had known a brief interval of tranquillity and peace, after having undergone so long a period of grief, of horror, and of danger. He gave himself but the interval of one day, however; and then, in the early morning, his horse and his followers stood prepared at the door. The wife of Bleda gave him her blessing as he departed with motherly tenderness; and Neva herself stood by, and saw him mount without a tear wetting the dark lashes of her tender blue eyes, without a sigh escaping from her lip. All she said was, "Farewell, my brother: remember us."

Theodore himself could have wept; and as he saw her stand there in her beauty, her innocence, and her devoted love, deeply and bitterly did he regret--ay, and reproach himself, for having, however unwittingly, brought a cloud over her sunshine, and first dulled the fine metal of her bright and affectionate heart. He sprang upon his horse and rode away, turning back more than once to gaze upon them as they stood gathered round the door of their dwelling, and to wave his hand in token of adieu.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HERMITS.

The life of man is a series of scenes, generally connected with each other, often by the strong bond of cause and effect, but often linked together by some fine accidental tie, having no reference to the principal events. Each day may be considered as one act in life's drama; and sleep comes with night to change the scenes, and give the weary actors a moment of repose. Sometimes, however, there breaks in among the rest--but detached from all those that surround it--a scene in which we live, and act, and interest ourselves for a limited and defined space of time, but which, when it is over, produces no effect upon our general fate, acts as no cause in the complicated machinery of our fortunes. Sometimes the scene maybe fair and sweet, a solitary well in the desert, which cools our lip and quenches our thirst, but supplies no river, waters no

distant land. Sometimes it is terrible and dangerous, a thunder-storm suddenly sweeping over the summer sky, coming when all is brightness, reigning an hour in awful majesty, and then passing away, and leaving the world as tranquil as it was before.

Theodore rode on, taking his way across the woods, and asking his heart what was to come next; what, in all the vast, vague variety of earthly chances, was the next thing that was to befall him on his onward way. When, but a few short months before, he had stood upon the mount of cypresses with those he loved, and had gazed over the calm splendour of the Adriatic Sea, with life all before him, and hope to lead him on, he had fancied that his fate would be as fair and bright as the glowing scene beneath his eyes; his future had promised to be as calm and unbroken by a storm as those tranquil waters, sleeping, unruffled, beneath the setting sun. Had any one less than a prophet then told him all that the next two months should behold, he would have laughed the prediction to scorn, in the full confiding hope of undisappointed youth. But now that for many a week every hour had brought its change, that he had seen the expectations of to-day, to-morrow trampled under foot, and the sunshine of the morning darkened ere the evening's close, he had learned still to ask himself, "What next?" with every day that rose, and every change of scene that came upon him. That blessed reliance on the dear deluding tales of hope, which is youth's peculiar power, had left him for ever; and though the "What next?" might be asked, with the determination of bearing all worthily, yet apprehension had always its share in the question too.

The woods were wide and intricate; and, as Theodore and his companions rode on, the trees and shrubs began to change their character: enormous birches tossed about upon the rocks and rising grounds, succeeded to the beech and oak; and after them again came the tender larch, and the dark pine, as the road began to wind up into the mountains. It was a sultry autumn day; and the misty haze that hung about the world, with the close electric air of the forest, were ominous of a thunderstorm; and at length the clouds, gathering round the summits of the higher hills, burst upon the heads of Theodore and his followers, just as they had reached a spot, where, from the top of the first range of eminences, they could gaze over a wide extent of forest ground. The rain poured down in torrents, the lightning flickered through the sky; but neither of those would have prevented Theodore from pursuing his way, had not the mountain paths they followed become so slippery with the rain that his horse could not advance, and even the lighter and more sure-footed beasts of the Huns could make no progress.

They were debating as to where they could find shelter, when suddenly they beheld, standing on the rock above, a tall thin human form, scantily covered by its tattered robes from the wind or storm. He was gazing down upon them without speaking; but Theodore, as soon as he turned his eyes that way, recollected the enthusiast Mizetus, who had attempted to persuade the people, during the earthquake in Dalmatia, to stay and perish amidst the ruins of the falling palace. He had heard long before that the enthusiast had wandered over many parts of the earth, and had dwelt long in deserts and barren places as a hermit, according to the prevailing superstitions of the day; and the young Roman doubted not, that since he had been driven forth by the partial destruction of Aspalathos, Mizetus had again returned to his erratic life, and found his way to the frontiers of Pannonia. "Go up to him, Cremera," said Theodore--"go up to him, and, telling him who we are, ask him where we can find shelter, for he must surely have some cave or hut wherein to dwell himself."

The Arab obeyed, leaving his horse below; but the enthusiast made him no reply, gazing sternly, and even fiercely at him, till the freedman used some angry words to drive him to an answer. He then exclaimed aloud, "Get ye gone! get ye gone from me, ye miserable, worldly, self-seeking generation! get ye gone! Ye shall not pollute my dwelling. Farther on ye will find one who will give welcome alike to the lustful Roman and the bloody, barbarous Hun. Get ye gone! I will have naught to do with ye. On, on upon the path, I say: ye will find shelter onward to cover your heads from the earthly storm, though not from the tempest of God's indignation."

Cremera reported to his master the reply he had received, for the thunder prevented it from reaching, at once, any ears but his own; and Theodore, as the only course, slowly pursued the path along which Mizetus had pointed, looking anxiously, as he proceeded over the wet and slippery rocks, surrounded by precipices and impeded by scattered fragments, for some sign of human habitation. It was long ere he discovered any, however; and was indeed passing on, when Cremera exclaimed, "There is a cave! there is a cave! and something standing therein like the figure of a man."

Theodore hesitated not; but leading his horse towards the narrow mouth of a cavern which he now beheld, ascended the steep path with risk and difficulty. The Huns followed; and though, on entering, they discovered that the object which Cremera had taken for a man was in fact a large crucifix, they found seated within the cave one of those many devout but enthusiastic beings, thousands of whom in that age devoted their lives to solitude and privation, on a mistaken principle of religion. Some subjected themselves to the most tremendous inflictions, thinking thereby to please God; and the pillar and the chain still find their place in history as illustrations of human fanaticism. But the hermit here was of a different character: his enthusiasm had taken a different form; and though not less wild, perhaps we might say not less diseased, prompted him not to the severer sufferings which were indispensable to obtain the reputation of sanctity among the anchorites of the Thebais. He dwelt, it is true, but in a cavern of the rock; but that cavern, high up on the mountain side, was dry, and not unwholesome: his dress was indeed composed of nothing but skins, yet the inhabitants of the country were principally clothed with the same

materials, though arranged in a more convenient and agreeable form: his bed, which was raised high with rushes and forest hay, was piled up above that with soft and warm skins; and the contributions not only of some neighbouring villages on the other side of the hills, but of many distant towns (for the whole land regarded him as a holy being), supplied him plentifully with good and varied food. His appearance, however, was venerable; and his countenance, half covered as it was with a long white beard and a profusion of silvery hair, was calm, peaceful, and mild, and well calculated to obtain both reverence and love. There was, indeed, an occasional look of worldly shrewdness seen upon those high but withered features, which might have made many a suspicious man doubt the sincerity of his vocation; but there came also from his eyes, from time to time, gleams of quick uncertain light: whenever he approached particular subjects, too, his whole air and manner changed, his colour mounted, his eye flashed, his lip quivered; and Theodore could not gaze upon that countenance, under all its frequent changes, without believing that some slight touch of insanity had warped an intellect originally fitted for high and noble things. When he rose to welcome the strangers, his beard fell down below his girdle, and his long nails, untrimmed for many a year, were exposed in all their deformity. His manners, however, were noble, one might say courtly, for there was grace as well as dignity, and polished terms as well as mild and benevolent ideas. He asked no questions, neither whence the strangers came nor whither they were going; but gladly gave them shelter from the storm, and spread before them such viands as his cell contained, pressing them to partake with hospitable care, and blessing, in the name of God, the food to which he invited them. His eye, however, rested upon Theodore; and though the youth had by this time adopted in a great degree the dress of the Huns, yet his air and countenance were not to be mistaken, and the hermit addressed him at once in Latin.

"There is a hermit from our native land," he said, after some conversation upon other subjects, "living near, and doubtless a holy and religious man he is; but the Almighty has not endued him with the spirit of sufferance towards his fellow-creatures, and he thinks that he cannot serve God without abhorring men. He was sent hither unto me some months ago by Eugenius, bishop of Margus, to ask mine aid and counsel in dealing with the Huns; but, when he had received his answer, he would not depart, and has remained here ever since, doubtless sent as another thorn in my flesh."

Theodore very well conceived how the wild enthusiast might become a thorn in the flesh of any one less fanatical than himself, and he replied, "He refused us shelter but now, reverend father; and sent us on to thee in the midst of the storm, although I know him well. He dwelt for some two years at Aspalathos, on the Illyrian coast, and gained high repute for sanctity among the common people; but in the terrible earthquake in which we had all nearly perished some five or six months since, he strove to persuade the people to remain instead of leaving the falling buildings, prophesying that the last day was about to appear."

"He prophesy! my son," cried the hermit, with a wild look of scorn; "no, no; the gift of prophecy has not fallen upon him. It is for that he hates me: and because I impart, as I am directed, the knowledge of those things that are revealed unto me to all who ask it, he abhors and reviles me."

Theodore made no reply; for the spirit of prophecy was claimed by many a one in those days: and though their predictions had often proved false and worthless, yet that extraordinary endowment had been too recently exercised and confirmed by facts for any one in that age to say that the purpose was accomplished and the power withdrawn from the children of men. Theodore had learned, however, to doubt; and, therefore, he paused ere he gave credit to the gift which the hermit evidently wished to insinuate that he possessed.

"During the whole of this day," continued the old man, when he saw that the young Roman did not answer, "I have been waiting anxiously, looking for the approach of some stranger from distant lands. There has been a knowledge of the coming of some one upon me since the first dawn of day; but it was not thee I expected, my son. It was some one more powerful, some one more terrible, with whom I might have to wrestle and contend. I know not--I cannot have deceived myself. Still, it is now past the third hour, and no one has yet come."

"I should think," replied Theodore, "that it were not likely any one would come; for all the great and powerful of the land are absent with Attila, and we have made a long journey this morning without encountering a living creature."

"But have you had no tidings of Attila's return?" demanded the hermit. "Some messengers, who passed by this place but two days ago, spoke of it as likely, and brought me presents from the king."

Theodore would not suffer himself to smile, although he thought that the hermit, like many another man, might deceive himself in regard to his own powers, and confound shrewd calculations with presages. The old man had heard, it seemed, that Attila was likely to return; the messengers might very probably have dropped some hint as to the time; and the mind of the hermit himself having calculated the probabilities, the impression that it would be as he anticipated had become so strong that he looked upon that impression as a certain presage; and, if fulfilled, would consider it thenceforth as a new instance of his prophetic inspiration.

Theodore restrained all expression of such thoughts, however, and merely replied, "Then, by

his sending you presents, you already know Attila, and are protected by him."

"I know him, my son," replied the old man, "but I am protected by a higher king than he is. He rather may call himself protected by me, or, at the least, *directed*, though he, as I am, is but an instrument in the hands of God. The sins of those who call themselves Christians have gone up on high," he continued, while a wild and wandering gleam of light glistened in his eyes, and his pale cheek flushed--"the sins of those who call themselves Christians have gone up on high, and the vices of the east and the west have risen up to heaven as foul and filthy as the smoke of a heathen sacrifice. They have called down judgments upon the earth; lightnings, and tempests, and earthquakes, and sickness, and pestilence, and warfare; and, lo! among the visitations of God, I tell thee, young man, this Attila the King is one of the greatest--an appointed instrument to punish the iniquities of the land! So long as he shall do exactly the work assigned him, and not disobey the word that is spoken, he shall prosper on his way, and shall sweep the lands from the east to the west, and from the north to the south: he shall stretch out one hand, and it shall touch the Propontic Gulf; and he shall stretch out the other, and dip it in the German Ocean; but neither the city of Romulus nor the palace of Constantine shall he see or injure. He shall pull down the cities, he shall destroy the nations, he shall trample under foot the yellow corn, and the purple fig, and the sweet grape. Of their olive-trees he shall light fires to warm him in the night; and with their flocks and herds he shall feed the myriads that follow him to victory and spoil. Armies shall not stand before him for an hour, and fenced cities shall not keep him out; he shall destroy wherever he cometh, and behind him he shall leave a bare plain; but the life of not one of those appointed to be saved shall he take; and if he touch but a hair of their heads, the power shall pass away from him, and he shall die a death pitiful and despised. Lo! he comes, he comes!" and spreading wide his arms, with a wild but striking gesture he advanced to the mouth of the cavern, and gazed out upon the road below.

Theodore, who had also heard the sound of horses' feet apparently approaching up from below, followed the hermit, and gazed forth likewise. The thunder had ceased, and the rain was falling but slowly, yet the ground was not less slippery and dangerous than when he himself had passed. Nevertheless, coming almost at full speed was seen a horseman, followed by two others at some short distance behind. Not a false step, not a stumble did the charger make; and Theodore at once perceived that the announcement of the hermit was correct, and that it was Attila himself who approached to within a yard of the spot where they stood. He came at the same headlong speed; and then, alighting from his horse, he threw the bridle over its neck, and entered the cavern with a slow, calm, and tranquil step. The monarch gazed at Theodore for a moment, as if surprised at beholding him there; but no slight emotions ever found their way to the countenance of Attila; and his only observation was, "Ha! my son, art thou here?"

Theodore bent his head, and the monarch turned to the hermit, who pronounced in his favour a singular prayer, one indeed which Theodore imagined might give no light offence to the stern chieftain of the Huns. "May God enlighten thine eyes," he said, "and purify thy spirit, and soften thy hard heart, and make thee leave the abomination of thine idols, so that thou mayst become a servant of the true God, and not merely an instrument of his vengeance!"

But Attila merely bowed his head, saying, "May the truth shine upon me, whatsoever it is!"

"Have I not told thee the truth?" demanded the hermit; "did I not tell thee thou shouldst conquer? Did I not say that no one should be able to oppose thee, if thou didst follow the words that were spoken unto thee?"

"I did follow those words," said Attila: "I spared Margus, as thou badest me, and I gave protection, as thou seest, to the first person who crossed the river to meet me;" and he turned his eyes upon Theodore.

"Ha!" cried the hermit, "and was this youth he? I spoke but the words that were appointed me to speak," he added; "but I had fancied that they had applied to another--not to him. God rules all these things according to his own wise will. Say, where met you the youth?"

Ere Attila could reply, the sunshine, which was now beginning to pour into the mouth of the cavern, was darkened by a tall form, which advanced with wild gestures, and placed itself directly before the monarch of the Huns. It was that of the enthusiastic Mizetus; who, in the exalted and menacing tone in which he usually spoke, now addressed the king, exclaiming, "Wo, wo unto the nations that thou wert ever born! Wo, wo unto the world, far and near, oh son of Belial, that thou didst ever see the light! Thou art died in blood, thou dost ride in gore. The earthquake precedes thee; blue lightnings march with thy host; famine goes forth on thy right hand, and pestilence on thy left."

"Shall I slay him, oh mighty king?" cried one of the attendants of Theodore, who had unsheathed his sword, and held it ready to strike the enthusiast to the earth.

"Slay him not," said Attila, calmly, "slay him not; the man is mad, and speaks the truth. What hast thou more to say, my brother? Thou hast but said what is true."

"I have said what is true," continued the enthusiast, "and there is more truth to be said. Wo unto thee if thou doest not the will of God! I say, wo unto thee! for, if thou failest to do his will, all the evils that thou pourest forth upon the nations shall, in return, be poured forth upon thee; nor

shalt thou raise thyself up in the pride of thine heart and say, 'It is I who do all these things!' Neither shalt thou suffer thyself to be puffed up by the praises of the weak beings who now surround thee. Know that thou art no more than a sword in the hands of the slayer; a rod in the hands of Him who is appointed to chastise. Henceforth and forever cast away thy vain titles, and abandon thine idle pretences. Thy name is THE SCOURGE OF GOD; and through all nations, and unto all ages, by that name shalt thou be known."

"I will fulfil thy words, and do accept the name," replied Attila, calmly; "yes, I will be called the Scourge of God; and truly," he added, with a dark smile, "I have already scourged the land from the Danube to the sea. But now, my friend, hast thou more to say t for though we reverence madmen, and those whose intellects the gods have taken into their own keeping, still my time is precious, and I would be alone."

"I am not mad, oh king," replied the enthusiast; "but I tell thee truth, and yet I leave thee, having given thee a name by which to know thyself, and by which thou shalt be known when thou and I shall have gone to our separate places;" and thus saying he turned and left the cave.^[9]

"I will also go, oh king," said Theodore, "and will proceed upon the way towards thy royal dwelling."

"Do so," said Attila: "go not too fast, and I will overtake you soon."

Theodore craved a blessing of the hermit, and then departed. The road still mounted for some way; but by this time the rain was over, and, as a drying wind rose up, the horses could better keep their feet upon the steep and rocky ground. Passing over the ridge of the mountain, the road, in about half an hour, began to descend through woody glens and wild rocky ravines, similar to those which they had passed in ascending; and as Theodore slowly pursued his way, he revolved in his own mind that part of the conversation between the hermit and the mighty monarch of the Huns which referred more particularly to himself. It was not difficult to discover that, actuated by superstitious feeling, Attila had, in consequence of some vague warning of the hermit, spared the young Roman, not from any prepossession in his favour, but solely because he thought it the command of Heaven, and a condition on which the success of his enterprise depended. Since those first events, however, the monarch had shown him kindness of an extraordinary character; and either from some vague notion of their fate being linked together by some unexplained and mysterious tie, or from natural feeling of favour towards him, had evinced an interest in his fate and happiness which demanded gratitude. Theodore was not one to reason very nicely as to how far the motives of a benefactor lessen the obligation imposed by his kindness; and he only remembered that Attila had twice saved his life, as well as spared him where any other Roman would have fallen, when he intruded uncalled into the Dacian territory; that he had rescued from worse than death those he most loved, and had shown a kindly sympathy with feelings that few supposed him to possess. Thus, though he revolved the means of learning more of what were the first motives of the king in giving him such protection, he determined, as he rode on with his followers, to seek every opportunity of showing his just gratitude towards Attila.

They had not gone far, however, ere the sound of horses' feet was heard echoing among the crags; and in a moment after Attila was by the young Roman's side. A slight shade of triumphant pleasure--enough upon the countenance of Attila to tell that he was moved internally by no slight feelings of satisfaction--met the eye of Theodore as he turned to answer the monarch's greeting.

"Art thou quite recovered, my son?" demanded the king. "We heard thou hadst been ill, and likely to die; but the gods protect those whom they love."

"I am now quite recovered," replied Theodore; "but I was very ill, and should have died, had it not been for the care and tenderness of thy brother's wife and children."

"Let the good acts of the wife," replied Attila, "counterpoise the bad acts of the husband. But Bleda will not seek thy death now, I trust. We have made war in company; we have conquered together; and he has had a plentiful, a more than plentiful share of the spoil. It was me he sought to injure more than thee; and now that his appetite for prey and power seems satisfied, he may heed the suggestion of prudence, and forget the ambition for which he has neither talent nor energy sufficient."

Though the words of the king might have led to a fuller explanation of the mysterious tie by which he seemed to feel himself bound to Theodore, yet the young Roman was more strongly excited by the mention of barbarian triumphs in his native land than by anything which could personally affect himself; and he replied with an inquiring tone, "I have heard nothing, oh Attila! of thy progress since I left thee. I have received no tidings even of how the war has gone."

"War!" said Attila, proudly; "I call that war where brave men encounter one another, and fight till one surrenders or dies; but such is not that which the Romans have offered to Attila. Wouldst thou know, youth, how my march through M[oesia] and Thrace has gone? Thus has it happened; but call it not a warfare, for warfare there has been none. I have marched upon the necks of conquered enemies to the Ægean Sea. H[ermus] and Rhodope have not stayed me; seventy fortified cities have fallen before me; and the last Roman army which dared to look me in the face lies rotting in the Thracian Chersonese, as thou dost call it, or feeds the vultures from Mount

Ada. I found the land a garden, and I left it a desert, even as I promised to do; but I say unto the weak thing that sits upon the Eastern throne, 'Why hast thou made me do this? Why hast thou called me to slay thy subjects and lay waste thy cities? I slept in peace till I was wakened by thine injustice. My sword grew unto its scabbard; my people kept their flocks, and were turning tillers of the ground: the Danube flowed between calm and peaceful banks, and my people held out the hand of amity unto thine. I gave thee leave to trade within my land, and at the first mart where thy subjects appeared they plundered mine, and scoffed at the claims of justice. I demanded that he who, as I was told, had concerted the deed with others, Eugenius, the bishop of Margus, should be given up to me; or some one, proved to be the robber, in his stead. Thou wouldst give me no justice, and I have taken vengeance; but the deed is thine, oh weak man, for thou wert the aggressor. Thou hast lighted the fire that has consumed thy land, and the punishment is not yet complete.'"

"And did none resist thee?" demanded Theodore, sorrowfully. "Did none show that the spirit of our fathers still lives at least in some of the children?"

"Yes, yes," replied Attila. "There was one small city, called Azimus, whose children showed me what ancient Romans may perhaps have been. They were worthy to have fought beneath my standard, for they repelled that standard from their walls. They fought as thou wouldst have fought, my son, and they won the reverence and the love of Attila. I found that they might be slain, but could not be conquered; and I valued my own glory too much to risk it by crushing a race that I acknowledged to be worthy of life. All the rest fought, if they did fight, like cowards and like slaves, and I slew them without remorse; but I would not have destroyed those Azimuntines to have saved my right hand. Bear witness, youth, of what I tell you. My people have been robbed and plundered by the creatures of Theodosius; I demanded justice; it was refused; I took revenge. Thine emperor now seeks to treat, because he thinks he can deceive Attila; thou shalt witness his proceedings, and shall judge whether I strike again without just cause. Attila slays not without cause; but thine is a lettered nation, and they will transmit a false tale of these deeds unto after times. We Huns write not our own histories."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHASE OF THE URUS.

Theodore pursued his way with his own followers only after the king had left him to return to his host; and less than two days more brought him to the banks of the Tibiscus. At the third hour after sunrise, on the second day after meeting with Attila, he came in sight of one of the few fixed habitations of the wandering Scythians--the ordinary dwelling of the king. It was all unlike a Roman capital, and yet it was not an displeasing scene.

Upon a wide plain, broken by some tracts of wood, and skirted by some rich sloping hills, at the foot of which it rested, stood a congregation of several thousands of low wooden dwellings, each separated from the other, and covering a large space of ground; but with all their lowliness, those houses were not without ornament--of a different kind, it is true, from that which decked the stately mansions of Rome or Constantinople, but suited to the buildings, the people, and the scene. Before each ran along the same long portico, supported by the trunks of trees, which Theodore had remarked in the dwelling of Bleda; and many an ornamental screen and piece of trellis-work gave lightness and beauty to various parts of the building. Trees were scattered here and there among the houses, giving shade to their high-peaked roofs; and flowers and shrubs were not wanting, such as the infant art of the age and country could produce.

Many a busy group was there, engaged in all the peaceful occupations of pastoral life; and though here, as before, women and children formed the greater part of the population, a number of men--mingling with the other groups--showed Theodore that the land had not been so entirely left without defenders as he had imagined. As he rode on and entered the streets--if by such name we can designate the wide open spaces between the houses--the population became more dense; and he observed among them every shade of complexion and every line of feature that it is possible to conceive. The colour and cast of countenance of the Huns was certainly more general than any other; but there also might be seen the Roman and the Greek, the beautiful tribes of Caucasus, the fair-haired children of the North, the Goth, the Vandal, and the Helvetian. Nor was this mixture merely apparent, but, on the contrary, it was borne out by the many tongues which struck the ear of Theodore as he rode along. There his own language was frequently heard; there the tongue of his mother's land was common; and not only did Theodore recognise Greeks and Romans as captives or bondmen, but many walked free and armed among the rest of the population, as if holding rank and authority among them. The young Roman now began to

perceive that Attila, with wise policy, had left the guardianship of his land during his absence to persons whose situation, as fugitives or exiles from their native country, would render their resistance to any invading force desperate, determined, and unconquerable. He himself, as he passed, excited no great attention, for the Roman features with the Hunnish dress was too common among them to call forth much remark. Cremera the Arab, however, by his powerful limbs and gigantic height, drew all eyes upon the little troop as it advanced towards the mansion of the king; and Theodore heard many an observation made upon him and his, in tongues which the speakers thought he could not understand, but which were familiar to his ear.

At length they reached the open space in which the dwelling of Attila was placed. It was merely a wooden building like the rest, but far more extended; and though as simple as any in some respects, yet much more ornamented and tasteful in others. Besides the principal mansion, a number of smaller houses were congregated in the same space, probably destined for the reception of his immediate officers and friends; but the whole mass of buildings thus collected was separated from the rest by a piece of open ground, spreading on all sides to the extent of several acres. In this space several horsemen were exercising themselves with various arms, poising the spear, casting the javelin, drawing the bow, or urging the mock contest with the sword. Under the porticoes and within the low screens groups of women and children were seen employed in various household occupations and juvenile amusements; and the whole presented a picture of cheerful, active, and happy life, which might have taught an inexperienced heart to believe that among that people was to be found the wished-for state, where busy life proceeded in peaceful tranquillity, without the cares, the anxieties, the jealousies, the strifes of more civilized and more corrupt society.

Theodore rode on, as he had been directed, towards the gate of the principal dwelling; but he was surprised, and somewhat offended, as he came near, by one of the horsemen, who was careering in the open space, hurling a javelin right across his path so as to pass within a foot of his head. Theodore's nerves, however, were too strongly strung to give way even to the slightest appearance of emotion; and urging forward his horse rather than checking it, he passed on without noticing a loud and scornful laugh which burst from the young man who had cast the dart. Cremera, who rode a little behind his master, turned and gazed fiercely round, while the Hunnish youth and those who were sporting with him dashed in among the followers of Theodore, as if on purpose to disturb him, separating a part of them from the rest. Theodore was now turning to remonstrate; but he heard the chief of his attendants already in sharp discussion with his fellow-countrymen; and the first words that caught his ear made him resolve to abstain from even remonstrance, in a case which might add new causes of anxiety and circumstances of difficulty to his long and painful exile among the Huns.

"Know you who I am?" cried the youth who had hurled the javelin.

"Well!" answered Theodore's attendant. "You are Ellac, the son of the king, yourself a monarch; but we are here under the shield of Attila, where his son himself dare not strike us; for Attila is just, and kindred blood shields no one from the stroke of his equity." Some more words ensued, and Ellac at length said, "Is not this he who has dared my uncle Bleda, and provoked him to anger?"

"We know naught of that, oh king!" replied the attendant; "all we know is, that we are given to this young leader by Attila the King, as true soldiers to their chief. We are commanded and are willing to die in his defence, and will guard him against any one and every one with our lives."

"Have ye no tribe and chieftain of your own?" demanded Ellac, scornfully. "Where is the head of your own race, that ye have the base task of following a stranger?"

"The head of our race died upon the plains of Gaul, with fifty of our brethren," replied the attendant; "and it is not a base task to follow a sword which has drank deep even of the blood of our own nation."

"If it have drank the blood of our nation," replied Ellac, "he that wields it should be slain."

"Such is not the will of the king," replied the attendant; and he then added, "Stop us not, oh king, for we do our duty."

The young chieftain sullenly drew back his horse, and turning with a look of angry comment to his own followers, he suffered those of Theodore to proceed. They accordingly rode on and overtook the young Roman, who had preceded them by a few paces, just as he reached the light screens of woodwork which separated the palace of Attila from the open space around it.

There Theodore dismounted from his horse, and in a moment was surrounded by a number of those who were spending their idleness under the shade of the portico. A mixed and motley group they were, comprising old warriors, unfit any longer to draw the sword, beautiful girls of various ages--from that at which the future loveliness bursts forth from the green film of childhood like the first opening of the rose, to that at which charms that have seen the fulness of the summer day spread out in their last unfaded hours like the same rose when its leaves are first ready to fall. Children, too, were there, and many a slave from every distant land, with mutes and dwarfs, singers, jesters, and buffoons. [\[10\]](#)

A number of these, as we have said, now crowded round Theodore with looks of interest and expectation, while others, listless and unheeding, lay quietly in the sun, casting their eyes with idle carelessness upon the stranger, without thinking it worth their while to move. Many was the question that was now asked, and many was the curious trait which struck the sight of Theodore. But we must not pause to paint minutely the life and manners of the Huns. That Attila was on his march homeward was already known at the royal village, and orders had been received regarding the treatment of the young stranger. One of the houses in the same enclosure as that of the monarch had been appointed him for a dwelling; and having taken up his abode therein, he found himself served and supplied as if he had been one of the barbarian king's own children.

Although the scene which now passed daily before his eye was very different from that which he had beheld at the dwelling of Bleda, and he found it more difficult to enter into the kindly intimacy of any of the barbarian families than he had done there, yet the same simple manners were to be seen. Large flocks and herds were daily driven out to pasture; from every dwelling poured forth the drove in the morning, and to every dwelling returned the well-fed cattle in the evening, with him who had been their guardian during the day singing his rude song to cheer the empty hours.

The women, too, whatever their rank or station among the people, were seen sitting before their dwellings, twirling the spindle in the sun, or occupied in other domestic cares which had long since been abandoned by the polished and luxurious dames of Rome.

The mixture of foreign nations with the Hunnish population had indeed produced a sort of mockery of the vices and luxuries of civilized capitals; and Theodore saw that simple fare, and coarse, unornamented garments were by no means universal among the Huns. Gold, and silver, and precious stones appeared upon the persons and in the dwellings of many, and even the silken vestures of the East were seen among the female part of the inhabitants.

For several days Theodore remained almost totally without society; for, after the first movement of curiosity, the inhabitants of the palace took no further notice of him, and no one else sought for his acquaintance, except, indeed, some of those Romans who had abandoned their country and assumed the appearance of the Huns. Several of these, it is true, presented themselves at his dwelling, and would fain have looked upon him as one of themselves; but Theodore was on his guard, and he received their advances somewhat coldly. He was ready, indeed, to meet with kindly friendship any one whom the arm of injustice had driven from their native land, and who preserved pure their faith and honour, but unwilling to hold an hour's companionship with men who had been scourged forth by their own vices, or had betrayed their native land for the gratification of any passion, whether the sordid hope of gain, the wild thirst of ambition, or the burning fury of revenge. Of all who thus came to him he was suspicious, and his doubts were not removed by their manners; for all more or less affected to graft upon the polish of the Roman the rude and barbarian fierceness of the Hun. Though accustomed to a more refined, though perhaps not a better, state of society, they endeavoured to assume the manners of the nation among whom they dwelt; and the mixture thus produced was both painful and disgusting to the feelings of the young Roman, whose character was too decided in its nature ever to change by its contact with others, and possessed too much dignity to affect manners of any kind but those which sprang from his own heart, tutored as it had been from youth in habits of graceful ease.

In all the visits of this kind that he received, and they were many, a topic of conversation soon presented itself which acted as a touchstone upon the exiles. This was the comparative excellence of the Roman and barbarian mode of life. Almost every one broke forth on the first mention of such a subject into wild and vague praises of the simplicity, the freedom, the purity of the most unrestrained and uncivilized nation into whose arms either fortune or folly had driven them; and all the commonplaces against luxury and effeminacy had been conned and noted down to justify as a choice that which was in fact a necessity--their abode among the Huns. But Theodore thought differently, and he expressed strongly his opinion.

No man hated more effeminacy, no one more despised sensual luxury; but he thought that refined manners and refined taste might exist with virtue, purity, even simplicity; and he thought, also, that as the most precious substances, the hardest metals, and the brightest stones take the finest polish, so the most generous heart, the firmest and the most exalted mind, are those most capable of receiving the highest degree of civilization. At all events, he felt sure that no one who had tasted the refinements of cultivated life could lose their taste for what was graceful and elegant; and that if, from any hatred of the vices or follies which had crept into a decaying empire, they fled to a more simple and less corrupted state, they would still prize highly, and maintain in themselves that noble suavity, that generous urbanity, which springs from the feelings of a kind, a self-possessed, and a dignified mind.

These opinions, as I have said, he did not scruple to express boldly and distinctly; and he soon found that such notions, together with those he entertained regarding patriotism and the duty of every man towards his country, were not pleasant to the ears of his visitors. Some slunk away with feelings of shame, not altogether extinct in their bosoms. Some boldly scoffed at such prejudiced ideas; and only one or two, with calm expressions of regret, acknowledged that they felt as he did, and only lamented that injustice and oppression had driven them from the society in which they had been accustomed to dwell, and the refined pleasures which they were capable of enjoying, to the wilds of Dacia and the company of barbarians. With these Theodore would not

have been unwilling to associate: but, ere he did so, he sought to see more of them, and to hear their history from other lips than their own; and, therefore, with a coldness of demeanour which was not natural to him, he received all advances from his fellow-countrymen.

Ellac, the son of Attila, he saw no more; and he was glad to be spared fresh collision with one who was evidently ill disposed towards him, and who was so dangerous an enemy. He strove not to avoid any one, however, but walked forth alone among the houses of the Huns with that fearless calmness which is generally its own safeguard. Still he saw, without choosing to remark it, that Cremera's apprehensions for his safety were greater than his own; and that, though he ventured not to remonstrate against any part of his master's behaviour, yet whenever the young Roman went forth on foot towards the close of the day to enjoy the calm hour of evening in that tranquil meditation with which it seems to sympathize, he caught a glance here and there of the tall, dusky form of the Arab following his footsteps with watchful care.

Sometimes the young Roman would ride out on horseback, followed by his attendants, to hunt in the neighbouring woods; and if any of the idler Huns followed their troop to join in the amusement or to share their game, the skill and activity which Theodore had acquired excited their wonder and admiration.

Early on the morning of the seventh day after his arrival at the residence of Attila he thus went forth, accompanied both by the Alani and the Huns who had been given to him, and rode along by the banks of Tibiscus to the wide deep woods which, at the distance of about five miles from the village, swept up from the river, and covered the sides, nearly to the top, of a lateral shoot of those high mountains which crossed the country to the eastward.

He followed the side of the river as closely as the nature of the ground permitted, even after he had entered the woods; for he knew that about that hour the stags and the elks, then so common in the Dacian and Pannonian forests, came down to drink at the larger streams, seeming to disdain the bright but pretty rivulets that sparkled down the sides of the mountains. He had heard, too, that such was the case with the urus, or wild bull; but the animal was scarce even in those northern solitudes, and he had not any personal knowledge of its habits.

Remarking the course of the stream when first he entered the wood, he ordered his attendants to spread out at some distance from himself, and drive the game towards the river, the banks of which he himself proposed to follow. Little appeared, however, and that of a kind not worthy of pursuit. A wolf, indeed, crossed his path, and, casting his javelin at it, he struck the grim robber of the fold down to the ground; but, shaking it quickly from his weapon, he passed on, and for near an hour followed the side of the stream, hearing from time to time the cries of his attendants, as they shouted, both to give notice to their companions of the course they were pursuing and to scare the game from the lair.

Mingling other thoughts of a more heartfelt and interesting kind with the alternate expectations and disappointments--trifling, indeed, but still exciting--of the chase, he did not remark that after a time the voices of his followers sounded less and less loud, and that the river swept away more than he had calculated towards the west. Cremera, indeed, he saw from time to time emerge from the deeper parts of the wood to catch a glance of him, and he fancied that the others were not far distant. But at length all the sounds ceased, and after some time he became aware that he had strayed considerably from the direction which he had proposed to take. He heeded it not much, however, saying to himself, "They will soon rejoin me: the river sweeps round again not far on."

As he thus thought, he heard the distant cry of dogs; and putting his horse into a quicker pace, he hurried on towards the spot from which the sounds proceeded. They were faint and far off, however; but, as he rode forward, they seemed to advance upon him, winding hither and thither in the wood; and he thought, as his practised ear caught the sounds, "It must be an elk they are upon; they cry more eagerly than on a stag."

There were some high grounds above him, but covered with deep wood; and though, soon after, Theodore could hear the musical voices of the hounds pass across the upland, and could even catch the rushing and crashing sound of some large beast passing through the underwood, he could neither see dogs nor game. He thought, however, "That is no elk! It does not bound like an elk--most probably a wild boar; and, if so, one of enormous size."

Then, giving a hasty glance to the river, he exclaimed, "It turns there: the brute must either take the water, face the dogs, or come back hither by the open ground;" and urging his horse as close as possible to the stream, he rode on to meet the animal, whatever it was, just as it burst from the wood. As he approached, he heard that he had calculated rightly by the turn which the dogs took; and he paused that he might fling his javelin with a surer aim.

At that moment, however, a cry like that of a human being in pain or fear caught his ear, proceeding from among the trees just before him; and dashing on to give aid if the beast were brought to bay, he plunged his horse in among the brushwood, passed in a moment a narrow slip of forest that impeded his sight, and found himself in a small open space, round three sides of which the river bent like a sickle.

One object, however, in that space occupied all his attention, one feeling took possession of

his heart, and but one course was left him to pursue. In the midst, clothed in a shaggy mane, with foam covering its black nostrils and fury flashing from its dark sinister eyes, its foot planted on a hound that it had just killed, and its enormous neck bent and head drawn back, in act to strike again with the short but pointed horns upon its wide square brow, stood the urus which the dogs had driven from its mountain solitudes.

Before it, prostrate on the earth, and panting in the agonies of death, lay one of the small horses of the Huns, with streams of blood pouring forth from a tremendous gore in its side. Fallen with the fallen horse lay a boy of about twelve years of age, splendidly appalled after the barbarian fashion, and with one small hand raised and grasping a sword, he made a vain effort to strike the fell adversary that was rushing upon him.

On one moment hung life or death; and, even while his horse was clearing the last brushwood, Theodore, with all the strength and swiftness of youth and vigour, hurled his unerring javelin at the monster. It struck him but slightly, for the youth's hand was shaken by the spring of his horse; but it flew so swiftly, that the sharp steel cut through the tough hide upon his back just as he was dashing forward to crush the boy to atoms. It shook and turned him; and as the young Hun writhed partly on one side, the fury of the animal's stroke was spent upon the dying horse. Mad, however, with pain, he now turned upon his new assailant; but Theodore, active as well as strong, snatched the second javelin from his saddle bow, sprang from his horse, and met the brute as he rushed upon him.

With his head down and his eyes closed, the urus rushed on; but Theodore, though knowing his danger, was neither fearful nor unprepared; and when the animal was within two steps of where he stood, he darted on one side, and then plunged the spear into its back. The weapon struck against the bone, however--stopped--broke short off; and, but little injured, the bull turned upon him again.

There were now the cries of coming huntsmen, but no time was left for distant succour to arrive. On himself, on himself alone, the young Roman was forced to depend; and, drawing his short sword, he again stood prepared to meet the assault of his adversary. With his eyes not now closed as before, but keenly watching his prey, the urus again rushed upon him; and Theodore, knowing that, though his sword was sharp and his arm was strong, it was in vain to strike at that bony head or that thick and heavy mane, again sprang on one side, but farther than before, more to avoid the first rush than to strike the animal as he passed.

The bull, however, was not again deceived, but followed him like lightning; as he did so, however, the coming huntsmen and dogs rushing through the trees met his ferocious eye. He wavered for a moment between flight and vengeance--exposed, as he turned, his side to the arm of the young Roman--and Theodore, seizing the moment, plunged the keen blade into his chest up to the hilt, casting himself forward upon the beast with such force that they both fell and rolled upon the ground together.

The weapon had found the heart of the fierce animal; and after but one faint effort to rise, his head and hoofs beat the ground in the bitter struggle of the fiery and tenacious life parting from the powerful body, till with a low bellowing groan he expired.

Theodore raised himself from the ground, and drawing his sword from the carcass of the urus, he gazed round upon the scene in which the strife had taken place. Greatly was it altered since he had last looked about him, for it was filled with a multitude; and when Theodore turned his eyes towards the spot where had lately lain the boy he had just saved from death, he saw him raised up from his dead horse, and clasped in the arms of Attila himself.

CHAPTER XX.

THE NEW FRIENDS AND NEW ENEMIES.

Theodore stood bewildered in the midst of the strange scene which now surrounded him, his thoughts all hurried and confused from the fierce strife and imminent peril into which he had been so suddenly hurried. At first, when he had turned to follow the cry of the dogs, he had forgotten--in the eagerness of the noble sport, the primeval pastime of earth's giant sons--that his own attendants were now unaccompanied by the hounds with which he had been accustomed to hunt in the forest near Bleda's dwelling; and, from the moment he had first seen that noble-looking boy, to that in which he rose from the prostrate carcass of the ferocious beast that had so nearly destroyed him, there had been no time for any other thoughts but those connected with the fierce combat in which he was engaged.

Now, however, as he looked round, he divined the whole, well knowing the custom of those barbarian chiefs to pursue the chase as eagerly while marching along with hostile armies as when it served to solace the vacant hours of peace. That he had fallen in with the hunt of Attila he clearly perceived; but who the boy was that he had saved, he could only gather from the fond embrace with which the dark monarch held him in his powerful arms. Fond and tender, no one who saw it could doubt what that embrace really was; and yet scarce any sign of emotion could be discovered on the iron countenance which so often led the slaughter in the fiercest fields of barbarian war.

The boy was talking eagerly and rapidly, and pointing to Theodore as he rose; and the moment after, while the young Roman drew forth his sword from the side of the mighty beast that lay cumbering the earth like a huge gray mound, the king set his son down, and, after resting his broad hand on his head for a moment, strode across the open space and stood by the side of the boy's deliverer.

For an instant his eyes ran over the tremendous limbs of the urus, the broad square head, the tangled mane, from amid the thick coarse hair of which the dark blood was pouring out in streams, and upon the sharp-pointed horns, one of which had burrowed in the earth as he had rolled over in the agonies of death--and then he turned his look upon his boy. The next instant he held out his hand to Theodore, saying, "Thou hast saved my child! Well and truly did yon holy man declare that the safety of myself and of my race depended upon him whom I should first meet as I marched against the Romans; and that the first act of forbearance and mercy which I showed should be followed by benefits that I could never repay. Nor was that all. When you met me on the mountain, young Roman, scarce a week since, that same old man, gazing from the brink of the everlasting, and beholding the future like a valley at his feet, traced out the after life of this my youngest son. He should escape from mighty perils, the prophet said, and be the last who should survive to carry on my race. Has he not now escaped from mighty peril by thine aid? and though it was foredoomed, deep and heartfelt is the gratitude which I owe thee for saving the life of this my boy at the immediate hazard of thine own. Attila thanks thee, and will keep the memory of this deed in his heart. I have called thee my son, oh Theodore, and shalt thou not be unto me a son indeed? Ay, and a well-beloved son too, only next in place to him whom thou hast rescued from untimely death."

"I am still thy debtor, oh Attila," replied Theodore: "once hast thou spared me when I intruded on thy territories; twice hast thou saved my life, knowing me to be a Roman and an enemy; and I have only rescued this fair boy, whom I would have saved as unhesitatingly if he had been the son of the poorest warrior in the Hunnish ranks;" and, as he spoke, he held out his hand towards the youth, who had advanced nearly to his father's side, and who seized it eagerly, and clasped it with a grateful gesture to his heart.

"Let mutual benefits bind us to each other, my son," said Attila. "I loved thee from the moment my eyes lighted upon thee. Whether it was a feeling sent by the gods to tell me that I should owe thee much, I know not; but I loved thee then, and how much more do I love thee now? Thou shalt find that though those, who unjustly oppose the will of Attila, injure his friends, or insult his people, die by the death they merit, yet those who risk their lives in the defence of him or his are not forgotten in the time of gratitude--but come thou with me. We march by slow journeys, that the host may diminish as we cross the land; to-morrow, however, I shall sit once more in mine own seat. Come, then, with me, and spend this night in our camp; to-morrow we will find another place of repose."

Thus saying, the monarch dismounted; a fresh horse was soon found for the boy Ernac; and Theodore followed by the side of the youth, who, talking to him eagerly in the Hunnish tongue, thanked him over and over again with simple sincerity for the service which had been rendered to him. There was something noble and frank in the manners of the boy; and, as they went, he told his deliverer how the whole of that day's adventure had come about; how he had gone forth from the palace four or five days before to meet his father on his march homeward; and how, in that day's hunting, he had been stationed near the river's brink to watch for the smaller game as it was driven down to the water; and then, when the urus appeared, how he had fancied he would please Attila by killing such a gigantic beast as that. He dwelt, too, on all he felt when he found his horse slain and himself at the mercy of the enraged monster, and Theodore experienced a double pride and pleasure in having saved so promising a child.

From time to time, as they rode on, the young Roman cast his eyes around, and listened somewhat anxiously for the coming of his own attendants, fearing that they might seek for him long in those dark woods. Cremera, however, he had seen among those who stood around when he rose from his contest with the wild bull; and he doubted not that the others would soon gain some knowledge of the path he had taken from those who had been left to bring away the body of his huge antagonist, as a trophy of the sylvan war.

He mentioned that he had missed his attendants, however, to his young companion Ernac, who laughed with boyish glee at his apprehensions, adding, "Oh, they will find you ere an hour be over. We Huns have ways of tracing our way through the thickest forests that you Romans do not understand;" and the proud emphasis which a mere boy laid upon "We Huns," showed Theodore how strong had become the national pride of the people under the victorious reign of Attila, though he could not but feel painfully, at the same time, the deep contempt which had fallen upon the once tremendous name of Rome. Ernac's anticipations, however, in regard to the

attendants, did not prove false; for as the hunting train of the dark monarch rode through on the wilds, every now and then Theodore perceived the person of one of his own followers appearing between the trees, and taking their place among the rest. Attila proceeded slowly, and, as he rode on, spoke to no one, except when he turned, and with an unwonted smile of fond, paternal love, addressed a few words to his rescued boy.

At length, towards evening, they emerged from the forest; and entering one of the plains which here and there diversified the country, they approached once more the wild and extraordinary scene presented by a Hunnish camp. At a considerable distance Theodore could see it as it lay upon the slope of one of the uplands, with the dusky millions moving about in their various occupations, with a bustling, whirling activity, like ants in one of the large ant-hills of that very land. As they approached nearer the different masses seemed to separate; and the camp assumed the same appearance--with its fires and circles of wagons--that it had presented when Theodore before beheld it in the Roman territory.

Approaching the central circle which formed the abode of Attila, the monarch turned towards the young Roman, saying, "You follow me!" and passing on, he led the way within the boundary.

The space enclosed for the monarch's own dwelling was large, and filled with a number of Huns, busy in various preparations. A change, however, seemed to have come over the tastes of Attila since his successful invasion of the Roman territory, for many more of the external marks of dignity of station surrounded his abode. In the midst of the circle, too, stood a magnificent tent, which had evidently once belonged to one of the luxurious generals of the Eastern empire, but which was now surmounted by the same black eagle that ornamented the standards of the Huns. Thither Attila himself proceeded, while all made way for his footsteps with looks of awe and respect, not servile, not timid, but seeming only the expression of heartfelt reverence for the daring courage, the powerful genius, the mighty mind, which nature had implanted in the breast of him whom the accident of birth had made a king.

Theodore paused, and looked to the boy Ernac, who seemed to understand his doubts at once, and replied to them by saying, "Yes, stay you here, and make your people get you provisions! I will go in to my father, and see what is his will with regard to you; but I must wait till he speaks to me, for I dare not address him first."

The young Roman was by this time sufficiently accustomed to the Huns to make himself at home among them without uneasiness or restraint; and proceeding nearly to the verge of the circle, he lay down upon the ground, while the Huns who accompanied him, and who had by this time separated themselves from the followers of the monarch, lighted a fire, and sought for provisions in the camp.

He gave himself up to a fit of musing, regarding the events of the day and the difference of his own feelings now, compared with what they had been but a few months before. At that time, when he at first met Attila--though he had experienced on beholding him, even before he was aware of his name and station, sensations which he could not define--he had regarded the monarch of the Huns but as the talented chief of numerous barbarian hordes. Now he felt hourly creeping over him more and more of that same kind of awe with which the various nations under his command seemed uniformly to regard their chief; and Theodore tried to investigate in what consisted that peculiar power which was producing such an impression, gaining such an ascendancy over a mind not unconscious of vigour, activity, and brightness. He revolved the words, the conduct of Attila in every respect, and he could attribute this effect to nothing, were it not to the combination of many great and powerful qualities, seldom united in one man, but, as it were, all cemented together in the mind of Attila by a certain calm, deliberate sternness, which never left him except in the fiercest fury of the sanguinary strife. His every thought seemed stern; and the unshaken and extraordinary calmness which he displayed on all occasions appeared to give him instant and perfect command over all the powerful talents which he inherited. There could be no such thing as doubt or hesitation in his nature; and to that godlike certainty of purpose Theodore attributed the power over the minds of others which he so singularly possessed.

While he thus lay musing, forgetful of the scene around him, a sudden step woke him from his reverie; and the next moment his former antagonist, Ardaric, king of the Gepidæ, cast his huge bulk down upon the ground beside him. "Well, my friend," he said, looking upon the countenance of Theodore, and running his eye over the limbs of the youth, manly and strong as they were, but still infinitely inferior in muscular strength to his own, "well, my friend, when last we met it was in deadly strife; and now, in calm friendship, after our contest is over. I love the brave, whether they be enemies or not: and when the boy Ernac, who is not unlike thee in face and manners, told me thou wert here, I resolved to come and see thee, that I might discover, if I could, how one who seemed to me but a stripling could give me more trouble in the combat than a whole cohort of his countrymen. I cannot understand it even now, for thou art very young, and certainly not yet in strength mine equal. Thou art more active, perhaps; but that will not do everything. However, let us not talk of strife! I come to eat and drink with thee, that the bond of hospitable union may be strong between us."

"Gladly will I make it so, noble Ardaric," replied Theodore. "The generous and noble soon become friends whenever they cease to be enemies. You spared my life when you might have taken it, and I will love you not a bit the less because you vanquished me."

"I spared you not, good youth, for your own sake," replied Ardaric, frankly; "I spared you for the sake of Attila, my friend. I would have slain you at the next blow had it not been for him; for at that moment my blood was heated. You had, with your own hand, killed three of my people, and I had not time nor coolness to think, just then, that you were a brave youth, and a noble spirit, and that it were a pity to cut you off so soon. I may have thought so since; and from my heart I forgive you for thinning our ranks of two or three of those startled foxes, who fled before you when you burst among them as if they thought you must be some evil demon, to dare, with but two comrades, to attack a whole tribe."

"You held as prisoners, noble Ardaric," replied Theodore, "those whom I valued far more than life itself; and my only calculation was how long I could bar the way against your warriors, while those I sought to save effected their escape."

"I thought so," rejoined the King of the Gepidæ, "I thought so: and now I hear that your mother and that fair girl--who is not your sister--are among your kinsmen of the Alani. Why go you not to see them?"

"Because," replied Theodore, "I have promised to stay with Attila for full seven years."

"Oh, he will give you leave to go," replied Ardaric. "Use him but nobly, and Attila is ever kind and generous. He will give you leave to go. When first he speaks to you, lead you the conversation to your wishes; and besides," added the chief, with a grave and warning look, "I think it may be better for you to be absent from this land for a brief space. Bleda, the brother of the monarch, loves you not. He is ambitious; and men scruple not to say, among the leaders of nations who obey and accompany the great king, that his hatred towards you proceeds from some idle prophecy which combines the safety of Attila with thine. I say not that he would slay his brother; but he would little scruple, men affirm, to take away the life of one whose existence was important to the monarch's safety. I believe not in such prophecies," added Ardaric, after a pause of thought--"I believe not in such prophecies, but Attila, and Bleda, and many others do. They think that a man's destiny is fixed and known long before his birth; that every little act which he performs is but one part of a great necessity; and that, such being the case, the gods give intimation of what they have already determined to certain men peculiarly chosen for that purpose. I believe, on the contrary, that everything takes place by accident; and that, if the gods interfere at all with what we do, it is but to drive us on again upon our way, as a herd does to a stray bull that wanders from the drove. I put no faith in such prophecies; and I see that even those who do strive as much to have their own way against destiny as those who think that there is no such thing. Now Bleda would take your head to-morrow, in order to put his brother's fate out of joint; and Ellac, they say, has no great love for you, though he be Attila's son. But his hatred proceeds merely from overbearing pride. He loves his father, and would not injure him; but he likes not that Attila should favour or promote any one but himself."

"I will take care to give him no offence," replied Theodore. "I seek no promotion at Attila's hands, because, as a Roman, I can receive none. His love, I believe, I already possess; but Ellac will not envy me that, when he finds that it is followed by no benefits demanded or conferred."

"It is therefore, I say," answered Ardaric, "that it would be well for you to be absent from this land for a short space. Bleda's ambition will not let him rest, though Attila thinks that he has sated him with honours and with spoil. But the grave, and ambition, and avarice are insatiable. Bleda's ambition will not let him rest, I say; and these things will come to an end ere many months be over! But here come thine attendants and mine, loaded with food far more than we need, yet let us partake."

There was something so frank and noble in the bearing of Ardaric, that Theodore was not unwilling to possess his friendship; but scarcely had they tasted the meal placed before them, when a messenger from Attila called the young Roman to his presence. Without delay, he followed the Hun to the tent of the monarch, whom he found with Ernac, his youngest son, alone.

Attila was seated on a rude bench, and clothed in the simplest garments of his race; but yet there was still that indescribable calm dignity, which, perhaps, had greater and more extraordinary effect from the harshness of his features and the want of accurate proportion in his limbs. He greeted Theodore kindly, and made him sit down beside him; and once more touching upon the events of the morning, he spoke of the skill and dexterity, as well as strength and courage, which were required in hunting the wild bull, saying that few but the most powerful and the most daring of their own practised hunters were at all competent to meet that ferocious beast when brought to bay. He asked where Theodore had learned his skill in the chase; and the youth's answer, informing him how long he had remained with the family of his brother Bleda, threw the monarch into a fit of musing.

"Then thou hast never quitted the territory of the Huns since thou didst first enter it?" demanded Attila.

"Never, oh king," replied the young Roman. "I plighted my word to thee that I would not."

"Not in a direct manner," answered Attila; "and I thought that strong temptation might have led thee to the land of the Alani. I would not inquire: it sufficed me that thou hadst returned."

"My word, oh king," answered Theodore, "whether directly or indirectly given, is never violated. That which I have knowingly implied, that will I execute, as willingly and punctually as if I had sworn to perform it. Many a time did I inquire for tidings from the land of the Alani; but though I gained none, I never dreamed of going. I would not even write, though I thought once of doing so, and sending it by one of those who followed me."

"And why not write?" demanded Attila.

"Because," replied Theodore, "coming as I did, a stranger to thy land, and seeing, as I did see, that it was left without defence, that there were few but old men, or women, or children remaining in the country--for I had not yet come on hither. Seeing all this, I would not, even by sending a messenger from thy territories to a nation which has daily communication with the Gauls, give thee just cause to say that thou hadst trusted me, and I had betrayed thy undefended country to Ætius and his legions."

"Thou art wise and honest," rejoined Attila; "and thine honesty shall win full reliance. Hast thou never longed to see those once more whom thou didst part from so sadly between the Margus and the Danube?"

"Have I longed?" exclaimed Theodore. "Oh king! many and many has been the night that, after the hardest day's hunting, I have passed without the soft finger of sleep touching mine eyelids, thinking deeply of those dear friends of mine early youth, and thirsting to behold them again, as the weary traveller in the desert thirsts for a draught of water from the well-remembered fountain in his own domestic hall. It has been my dream by night, when slumber has shut out the world's realities. It has been my dream by day, when thought has wandered on from objects present to a world of her own, with hope and imagination for her guides. Oh, how I have longed to see them once again!" and, clasping his hands together, the youth fixed his eyes upon the ground, and seemed to plunge into the visions of happiness which his words called up.

"Thou shalt go," said Attila, "and taste the joy for which thou hast pined. Yet rest with me two days, in order that my brother Bleda may betake himself to his own abode, and leave the path open to thee without danger. Not that I think he would hurt thee now: he is sated with plunder and with conquest. Nevertheless, it were as well for thee to wait; for though he left the camp this morning to bend his steps homeward, yet he goes but slowly, and his followers are not safe. Still thou shalt go after two days are at an end. Go, Ernac, my son, and learn from Onegisus if any of the followers of thine uncle Bleda are still in the camp."

The boy departed without a word, and Theodore remained with Attila, who proceeded to fix the time within which he bound Theodore to limit his absence. "The full moon will see thy departure," he said, "and she shall once fill up her crescent during thine absence; but ere the second time of her fulness thou shalt return, or thou art false to Attila. Wert thou to stay longer, the snows would impede thy return; and in the long evenings of the winter I would have thee here, for I might seek to hold discourse with thee upon the state and changes of thy native land. Thou art one who, having guarded his honesty in dishonest times and amid dishonest people, deserve that thy words should find attention."

Almost as he spoke, his son Ernac returned, saying, "Bleda is gone, my father, and all his followers, except his household slaves, who follow by daybreak in the morning, with Zercon his black jester. I saw the foul slave myself; and he said his master had gone away so quickly, because, having taken so much plunder from those who were weaker than himself, he feared to be left with those who were stronger, lest they should begin the game again."

"Thou saidst nothing of this youth's journey, I trust," said Attila.

"Nothing," replied the boy. "But when Zercon asked me if the Roman youth were still here, I answered yes, but that he would not be here long."

"Unwisely answered, my son," said Attila; "but it matters not; I will send those with him who can protect him. Thou shalt lead back a troop of the Alani to their own land," he continued, turning to Theodore; "and in the meanwhile keep near my person. Take thy place beside Edicon as we march to-morrow, and now sleep you well. Ernac, where is thine eldest brother? Has he left the camp already, after having so lately joined it?"

Theodore was departing as the monarch spoke; but, ere he had left the tent, he had heard the boy's reply. "No, my father," answered Ernac; "he has gone a short way on the road with my uncle Bleda."

A slight shade came over Attila's brow; but Theodore was not sorry to hear that two men, who were certainly his enemies, were absent for a time from the camp; and rejoining his own followers, he lay down to sleep in peace, followed by the happy hope of soon seeing again those whom he loved best on earth.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BITTER WRONG.

In the audience hall of the rustic palace of Attila, towards the middle of the subsequent day, were assembled the chiefs of all the different nations he commanded; and at once strange and brilliant was the display of wild, but rich and picturesque attire which there presented itself. The gold and silver of conquered nations, the trinkets and precious stones of many a plundered palace, were mingled with the shining steel and rich furs of the conquerors; and scarcely could the luxurious courts of those famed Eastern monarchs, whose effeminate splendour had become a by-word in the world, exceed in the blaze of gems and gold the hall of the dark monarch of the Huns. But in the midst of all, and distinguished from all by the perfect simplicity of his garb, sat Attila himself, with his large hand resting on the iron hilt of his broad heavy sword. Kings of a hundred different nations stood around, gazing with awe and veneration upon that dark plain man, and acknowledging in every look and gesture the mighty influence of superior intellect. Beside these, on either hand, were placed the many sons and the favourite friends of the monarch; among the last appeared Onegisus, Edicon, and Theodore; and a number of slaves and attendants, covered with barbarian ornaments, filled up the rest of the wide space.

What had passed before needs not description; but at the moment we now speak of a messenger from the weak Theodosius was brought into the presence of the king, with the aspect of a trembling slave approaching an offended master. Attila gazed upon him sternly as he came near; and Theodore felt the indignant blood rush up into his cheeks as he beheld the degradation of his country.

"Art thou of what thy nation calls of patrician rank?" demanded Attila, when the ambassador, with his forehead almost bending to the ground, had approached within two steps of the monarch.

"Alas, no," he answered; "I am but the humblest slave of Attila the King."

"If thou art my slave, thou art happier than I believed thee to be," replied Attila; "for to be the slave of a slave is a humbler rank than any that we know on this side of the Danube. Yet such thou art, if thou art the servant of Theodosius. How dares he," continued the king, fixing his keen black eyes fiercely upon him, "how dares he to send any but the noblest in his land to treat with him who sets his foot upon his neck? 'Tis well for thee that thou art but a servant, and that therefore we pardon thee, otherwise hadst thou died the death for daring to present thyself before me. But now get thee gone! Yet stay! Edicon, we will that thou shouldst accompany him back to the vicious city of Theodosius, the womanly king of an effeminate nation. Thou shalt go into his presence and say unto him, 'How is it that thou hast been so insolent as to send any of blood less noble than thine own, even to lick the dust beneath the feet of Attila? As thou hast so done, thou shalt be exiled again by the same hand that has smitten thee; for Attila the King, thy master and mine, bids thee prepare a place for him.' Thus shalt thou speak--in these words and no others?"

"Oh king! I will obey thee to a word," replied Edicon. "When wilt thou that I set out?"

"Ere the earth be three days older," answered Attila: "take that Roman slave from my presence; to see him offends mine eye. Now, what tidings from my brother Bleda?" he continued, turning to a warrior who stood near, dressed in glittering apparel.

"He greets thee well, oh king! and bids me tell thee that, after resting in his own dwelling for a space, he will lead his warriors towards the banks of the Aluta, if thou dost not need his services against thine enemies."

Attila turned his eyes towards Ardaric, who cast his down, and smoothed back the beard from his upper lip.

"Fortune attend him," said the monarch; "and thou mayst tell him, my friend, that as he will be in the neighbourhood of the revolted Getæ, he had better, if his time permit, reduce them to a wise and bloodless submission, otherwise Attila must march against them himself, and this hand strikes but once. Bid good fortune attend him, and wisdom guide him in all his actions!"

Attila placed a peculiar emphasis on his words, but his countenance underwent no variation. Such, however, was not the case with the chiefs who stood around, on the brows of many of whom Theodore had remarked a cloud gather at the announcement of Bleda's purposes; and they now heard the reply of their great leader with a grim but not insignificant smile. The young Roman could not, it is true, divine the secret causes of all that he saw; but the conversation of Ardaric on the preceding evening led him to believe that Bleda was hurrying on his hopeless schemes of ambition, and that he would soon be plunged into open contention with his far more powerful brother. With all the feelings of a Roman yet strong within him, Theodore could hardly regret the prospect of a struggle which might divide and occupy the enemies of his native

country; but still he felt a degree of sorrowful regret that all the high and noble qualities of the barbarian king should not have been enough to win the love or overawe the ambition of his inferior brother.

When the messenger of Bleda had departed, Theodore himself was called before the king. The object of Attila was but to give him permission to begin his journey on the following morning; but as this was the first time that the young Roman, whose undaunted bearing had busied the tongue of rumour in the camp, had appeared before the monarch in the presence of the Hunnish chiefs, many an eye was turned to watch his demeanour, some of the leaders looking upon him with jealousy, as having suddenly started into a place in Attila's favour, some gazing with ready admiration upon one who had so early obtained that renown which is dear to every noble heart.

Whatever might be the feelings with which Theodore approached the powerful chief on whom his fate so entirely depended, he would not for an empire have shown before the eyes of the barbarians the slightest sign of fear or awe. Grave and respectful his demeanour certainly was; but when he had advanced before the seat of Attila, and bowed his head as a token of reverence due to his power and station, he raised his eyes full to the dusky countenance of him who spoke, and endured the gaze of those eyes before which so many mighty quailed, without withdrawing his own. When the monarch had concluded his commands, Theodore again bowed his head and withdrew; and though, as he passed, he heard Ellac, the eldest son of Attila, who had by this time returned, say something concerning "*the crafty Roman*," he suffered not the insulting word to disturb the joy which his approaching journey already bestowed.

Hope, like a kind parent, reaches up the cliff and gathers for us the flowers long ere our own slow childish efforts can attain them; and Theodore was already revelling in joys which were yet afar in that vague uncertain future. He spent the day in happiness; and after a night given up to waking dreams, far brighter than even the fair magician, Fancy, could have called up in the phantasmagoria of sleep, he rose with the first gray streak of dawn, and set out to realize the visions.

It was a dull and heavy morning, with the white veil of clouds rolled round the summits of the distant mountains, and flying showers passing frequently over the plains; but as the young Roman proceeded at the head of near two hundred of the Alan horsemen, whom Attila, on the pretence of sending them to their own homes, had given him in fact as a guard, his heart was too light and joyful to feel or know that the brow of nature was overcast. His eye might roll over the mountains plunged in mists; or over the forests, where the pattering rain was seen falling amid the autumnal leaves; or over the plain and along the meadows, where a hazy whiteness rested a few feet above the general level: but the mind's eye was in other lands and on other scenes; and, for the time, even his corporeal faculties seemed to correspond with the mental vision alone. It is scarcely too much to say that he knew not the morning was not fine.

Following on the banks of the Tibiscus for a long way, Theodore and his companions sought in vain for fords; for the heavy rain which had fallen during the preceding night had swelled the river which rushed on in haste, a brown, discoloured mass of hurried waters, towards the Danube. Night fell ere they had succeeded, and the early moon burst out and swept the clouds away. Choosing some sandy soil for their night's encampment, Theodore and his own immediate attendants sat round one fire, while the Alans, following the practice of the Huns, lighted several others; and, though the young Roman was again long ere he slept, yet at length pleasant dreams blessed his eyes, and daylight was already pouring on the world when he awoke. It was the bustle of preparation which aroused him, and he found all nearly ready to depart.

Looking round as he was about to spring upon his horse, he missed a face that was seldom absent from his side. "Where is Cremera!" he demanded of those who stood near.

"He went at daybreak," they replied, "to see if he could find a ford farther down the river. He said that he would not be long, but he has not yet returned."

"Then we must trace down the river till we find him," replied Theodore; and, mounting his horse, he led the way slowly along the banks of the Tibiscus. An hour went by, and then another, but Cremera did not appear. The woods which swept over the neighbouring country, and which every here and there approached within a few hundred yards of the river, though not thick, afforded quite sufficient covering to have concealed the Arab, if he had taken his way back to the sleeping-place by some of the forest paths; and such, Theodore became convinced, had been the case, as the third hour went by, and the freedman had not rejoined them. Towards the end of that period, however, they found a ford, and halted on the margin in expectation of his coming; for his young master could not help feeling it extraordinary, that one so quick and rapid in all his decisions as the Arab was should not long before have discovered that the whole troop had gone on, and overtaken them as they rode.

As more time passed and he appeared not, Theodore became uneasy, and the memory of the faithful African's zeal, and affection, and services came in full stream upon his heart. At length, bidding the Alani cross the ford and wait for him at the other side, he turned back with his little troop of Huns, and rode swiftly along, spreading out his men through the woods on the right, and, as was customary among them, keeping up his communication with them by cries of various conventional import.

Thus they had proceeded for more than an hour and a half, though they rode much more quickly than before, and they had nearly reached the spot whence they set forth in the morning, when Theodore heard one of his followers in the wood give the peculiar shout which was understood to express a desire for all the companions of him who uttered it to halt. The next instant the man appeared at the verge of the wood, beckoning eagerly to the young Roman.

Riding up with a sinking heart, Theodore eagerly asked what he had found. The man made no other reply than, "Come hither! come hither!" with an expression of countenance which did not serve to allay the Roman's apprehensions. Ten steps brought him into a little gap in the wood; and what was his horror to behold the gigantic form of the faithful African stretched out between two trees, with one hand nailed to each, so as to keep him in an erect position.^[11] His head, fallen forward on his chest, showed that life was quite extinct, and a number of arrows left in the body spoke the cruel and painful death which he must have died.

With a heart full of grief and indignation, Theodore approached the body with his companion; but while they gazed upon it, wondering who could have committed so horrible a deed, another of the young Roman's followers came up, galloping through the trees at full speed. Ere he could speak distinctly, however, the cause of his quick approach became evident. Other Hunnish horsemen appeared whose faces were unknown to the young Roman; men on foot came gliding through the wood, and Theodore, with his two followers, found themselves surrounded by at least a hundred fierce-looking strangers, whose purpose was scarcely doubtful.

They rushed in upon him suddenly and without speaking; and as he drew his sword to take some vengeance at least before he died the same death as the unhappy freedman, one of those on foot sprang upon his horse's back behind, and embarrassed his arm by clinging closely to him. He was then overpowered in a moment. His two Hunnish followers made no resistance to the overwhelming force which surrounded them, but only remonstrated loudly and rapidly, threatening the vengeance of Attila. Their captors, however, answered only by a scoff: and Theodore could hear the name of Bleda pronounced as authority sufficient for the act they had committed.

At that name, the prospect of immediate death presented itself more strongly than ever; and though he nerved his mind to bear with unshrinking fortitude the same dreadful lot which had fallen to the unfortunate Cremera, yet even then, in the dark moment of approaching fate, the memory of those he loved--whom he might never see again, and whom he left all alone and unprotected in the wide and perilous world--came thrilling through his heart, inflicting, by anticipation, the worst of all death's pangs. When once he found that he could not resist effectually, he suffered his captors to do with him whatsoever they pleased; but he found to his surprise that they did not take him from his horse, contenting themselves with tying his hands and arms tightly behind his back with thick thongs of leather; and it soon became evident, that, if their intention still was to put him to death, they would choose another hour.

Hitherto the young Roman had not spoken; but when at length they took the bridle of his horse, and were about to lead him away, he turned his eyes upon the body of Cremera, saying to one who seemed the leader of the troop, "Will ye not give him burial at least?"

"No!" replied the Hun, fiercely. "No! Did he not dare to raise his hand against our lord and king? No! There shall he stay, till from his bones the vultures and the crows have picked away his flesh: the toad, and the lizard, and the snail shall crawl over his feet, while the carrion-eater comes down from the heavens, and takes its daily meal upon his carcass. Such, too, shall be thy fate; but it is first needful that Bleda the King should see thee, that he may devise how to punish thee as thou meritest."

"I fear not death," replied Theodore, "and can bear pain; but of this I am sure, I shall not die unavenged. Attila will avenge me even of his brother."

"If he can," replied the Hun; "but perchance the day of Attila's power is gone by."

Theodore replied not, but suffered them to lead him whithersoever they pleased. At first they proceeded slowly, looking to the young Roman from time to time; but seeing that he sat his horse as well as before, although his hands were tied, they soon got into a quicker pace, which increased to a gallop when they reached the open plains. After crossing one of these, they again came to a large tract of wood; and when they issued forth once more, the sun, in setting, was pouring a flood of light upon the blue eastern mountains, towards which their course seemed bent. Theodore thought the features of the scene were familiar to his eye; and, as they rode on, he felt sure that a distant wood which he saw stretching out into the plain was that on the verge of which was situated the dwelling of Bleda. Night, however, came on rapidly; and, ere they came near the wood, the whole world was involved in darkness.

At length they began to pass among the houses, and Theodore became convinced that he had not been mistaken. All was quiet as they rode on, for the early Huns had betaken themselves to their dwellings; and it was only as he passed along before the wide rambling building which formed the dwelling of Bleda, that Theodore heard the sounds of mirth and rude revelry proceeding from that apartment which he knew to be the hall of the banquet. He was led along to the farther extremity of the building, and thrust into a chamber which had evidently been destined for a place of confinement. It, like the house, was all of wood, but no windows, except a

row of small apertures near the roof, appeared to admit air or light; and across the outside of the door through which the prisoner had entered was cast, as his captors departed, a huge beam of wood, which would have defied the strength of a Hercules to shake it from within.

Theodore was left alone; for the two Huns who had been captured with him, and had been brought there at the same time, were placed in some other chamber, perhaps from a fear that they might assist him in escaping. All was darkness, for neither food nor lamp was given to the prisoner; and, seating himself upon the rude bench which he found at one side of the room, Theodore spent the succeeding hours in momentary anticipation of death, and in thoughts and regrets which added fresh gall to the cup of bitterness.

Few were the sounds which disturbed his painful reveries; for though from time to time the roar of barbarian merriment echoed through the long passages, and found its way even to the lonely chamber in which he was immersed, yet it came faint and softened to his ear, and at length, after rising to a louder pitch than before, suddenly ceased, and all was still. Theodore listened to hear if those sounds would be renewed; but deep silence seemed to reign over all the household, and for two hours everything remained perfectly quiet.

At length a streak of light appeared above and below the door, and a low murmuring sound reached the sharpened ear of the prisoner. "It is a fit hour for death," he thought; and the next moment he heard the heavy beam grate slowly and gently against the walls as it was removed from across the door. The door itself was opened cautiously, and the deformed head and shoulders of the negro jester, Zercon, were thrust into the room. In one hand he held a lamp, and with the forefinger of the other, raised to his lips, seemed to enjoin perfect silence.

He held up the lamp ere he entered fully, and looked round the room with careful attention, as if he expected to see some other tenant besides Theodore. Then, advancing rapidly, he whispered in Greek, "The Lady Neva knows of your being here; I heard that you were taken while I was in the hall, where her fierce father was drinking; and as I had found out by her face, when he talked of waylaying you yesterday, how it went with her young heart, I told her all directly, and she is coming to save you: but she sent me first to see if any of the guards remained with you, for the poor buffoon can venture, in his folly, upon things that the clumsy wise man would spoil if he touched--Hush! I hear her in the passage, or somebody else;" and he advanced and looked out at the door, which he had closed behind him as he had entered.

The next moment he made a sign with his hand--there was a light footfall--the door was pushed farther open, and with an eager step the beautiful daughter of Bleda entered the room, and stood before him she loved. She was very pale, but that might proceed from apprehension; and yet there was a devoted determination in those tender eyes which told that death itself would have no terrors if it lay in the path to save the young Roman. She also carried a lamp in one hand, but in the other she bore a naked dagger. Ere she spoke a word, she set down the lamp upon the ground, and cut with a rapid hand the thongs which bound the prisoner's arms.

"I knew," she said at length, "I knew that the time would come when I should save you. Oh, Theodore! how I have prayed for this hour! But I must not waste it now it has arrived. Zercon! quick! see why that tardy slave, Ahac, has not brought a horse. He would not betray me, surely. But sooner than that he should deliver the Roman again to death, drive thy dagger into his heart. I bid thee do it, and I will abide what comes!"

The negro hastened to obey; and Neva gazed upon the countenance of him whom she was risking so much to save with one of those looks of deep, unutterable affection, which the very hopelessness of the passion from which it sprung purified, dignified, sanctified even in its strong intensity. The next moment, as Theodore was pouring forth his thanks to an ear that seemed scarcely to hear them--so deeply was she occupied with the emotions of her own bosom--the sound of a horse's feet was heard, led gently forward; and a smile of triumphant pleasure played upon Neva's lip.

In another instant, however, it changed, as she thought that horse was to bear him away, perhaps for ever. The tears rose in her blue eyes, ran shining through the black lashes that fringed them, and fell upon her cheek; and for one moment she hid her face upon the young Roman's bosom, and he pressed her gently, gratefully in his arms, whispering words of comfort and of thanks. But, suddenly raising her head, she turned it away, while her hand still lingered in his, saying, "Go! go! Tarry not longer. I have saved you--that is enough--I am happy. To know that I have saved you is enough happiness for me through life. Go! go! every moment is precious!"

Theodore raised the hand he held to his lips, pressed upon it one kiss of deep gratitude, dropped it, and left the chamber which had been his prison. At the door stood Zercon, who led him quickly forth to a spot where, among the grass, so that his feet might not be heard, stood a horse, held by one of the slaves whom Theodore had seen when he was there before.

"I could have wished it had been my own horse," he said, speaking to Zercon.

"Your own horse will never bear any one more," replied the negro: "they slew him within an hour after they had brought him hither."

Theodore could have wept; but, without reply, he sprang upon the horse, and shook his hand

towards the dwelling of Bleda.

"Follow yon star," continued Zercon, pointing to one near the pole, "and ere morning thou shalt be among the mountains that overhang the dwelling of Attila."

"I thank thee," replied Theodore, speaking to the negro--"I thank thee, my friend: the time may come when I can show thee my gratitude." Thus saying, he shook the bridle, and urged the horse on at full speed, following exactly the course which had been pointed out to him. Ere morning, he beheld the waters of the Mariscus stretching out before him; but knowing that the horses of the Huns possessed, either by natural instinct, or had acquired by constant habit, the power of distinguishing what rivers and what places they could swim across, he rode the beast rapidly to the bank, and then left the bridle upon his neck, in order that he might take to the stream or not, as he pleased. The horse, however, without any sign of disinclination, ran down the bank and waded into the water. After pausing for a moment to drink, he advanced still farther, and then, with a sudden plunge, began to swim, though the stream was running somewhat rapidly. The deep water was of no great extent, and the horse's hoofs soon struck the ground. The bank was soon gained, and, apparently refreshed with the cool wave, the swift horse bore the young Roman rapidly on his way.

The dawn was just breaking when he arrived at the foot of the hills, and by the time he had reached the top the broad light of day was shining over all the world. He saw, by one of the peaks to the south, that he was several miles farther up in the chain than the spot where he had before passed in the neighbourhood of the two hermits. Pausing to breathe his horse, he looked over the plain behind him, and could see, at the distance of several leagues, what appeared to be a strong body of horsemen following rapidly on the very track he had taken. There was no time to be lost; and, hurrying on, he reached the plains at the foot of the hill, nor paused again till the flagging powers of his horse obliged him to stop in order to give the animal food and repose.

He could well afford to rest, however; for even if the horsemen he had seen were really in pursuit of him, yet the distance at which they had appeared from the foot of the mountains, and the difficulty of climbing those mountains themselves, promised to afford him at least four hours of open time. His horse fed, and then lay down to rest among the long grass; and Theodore, in the latter respect at least, followed its example; knowing how small an object might be discerned from the tops of the mountains in that wide uncovered plain, and trusting that, while hidden by the grass, his enemies, if they came sooner than he expected, might miss his track, and perhaps turn back disappointed. He kept his eye fixed, however, upon the ridge of the hills; and well it was he did so, for, having taken, perhaps, an easier path than he had done, his enemies did begin to appear upon the summits in less than two hours after he had reached the base.

At first they could scarcely be distinguished from the rocks amid which they came forth on the top of the hills; but soon the number of moving objects which he beheld at one particular point showed the young Roman that as yet they had followed but too successfully. For a time the pursuers seemed to hesitate whether they should proceed any farther, and he could see them lingering during several minutes, hanging like a dark cloud upon the ridge of the mountain. At length they began evidently to descend, and that moment. Theodore sprang upon his feet, roused his horse, which seemed to have fallen asleep, and, leaping into the saddle, galloped on towards a wood that lay at the distance of three or four miles before him.

As he came near, he beheld several small huts gathered together; and, approaching them, he resolved to see if he could procure a fresh horse in exchange for the weary one which bore him. The name of Attila obtained what no bribe could have gained. The head of the little tribe, leading out his own horse, placed the rude bridle in Theodore's hand; and, once more hurrying on his way, the young Roman, ere night fell, saw the mountains and the woods that swept round the dwelling of the king, and heard the rushing sound of the near Tibiscus.

It was night when he arrived at the widespread village; but all was peaceful within, and no guard or sentinel impeded his way, even to the porticoes of the monarch's lowly abode. As he alighted and approached the inner gates of the building, he was met by one of Attila's slaves, whom he had seen more than once before, and who now told him that the king had gone to rest.

"He feared that you were slain," continued the man; "for many of those who went hence with you but a few days ago returned with speed this day, and declared that you had been put to death. They are now at the dwelling where you were lodged before, and will gladly see you living, for they thought you dead."

The young Roman took his way to the house he had formerly inhabited; and the unaffected joy displayed by the rude Huns who had been given him as attendants, on seeing him again in life, compensated for some bitter pangs. Attila's slaves brought him provisions and wine, but he was too weary to enjoy food, and, after a short and slight repast, he cast himself down to rest.

The image of his faithful Cremera, however, rose up before his eyes, and for some time banished sleep. His noble horse, too, though less in the scale of regret, was not without its share of painful recollection. "The two last friends," he thought, "who accompanied me from my native home to this barbarian land, have in one day been taken from me, and I am alone--without one being near me who has any memories in common with mine own." Fatigue at length prevailed, and he slept. Early on the following morning he was roused by a summons to the presence of the

king, and at the gate of the palace he beheld a numerous train of horsemen, waiting as if prepared for a journey.

Attila himself was seated beneath the porch, and beside him stood Ardaric and another kingly leader, whom Theodore afterward learned to be Valamir, king of the Ostrogoths, with several other chiefs of inferior power. The brows of all were clouded, with the exception of that of Attila, which wore the same stern, calm aspect that so seldom left it.

"Thou hast been impeded on thy way, my son," said the monarch, slowly; "one of thy faithful followers slain, and thou thyself carried away to the dwelling of my unwise brother Bleda; so some who returned hither reported to me yesterday. Did he set thee free, after having, as he thought, sufficiently insulted his brother? Or didst thou escape?"

"I escaped, oh king! during the night," replied Theodore; but not knowing what might be the conduct of Attila, he refrained from telling how his escape had been accomplished, lest the share which Neva and Zercon had had therein might reach the ears of Bleda. "I escaped during the night, and have been keenly pursued, even across the mountains."

Attila rolled his dark eyes round to the faces of all the different leaders near, with a slight compression of the lips, which marked that he was moved more than usual.

"And thy faithful Arab is dead, then; is it not so?" demanded the king.

"Alas! so it is, oh king!" replied Theodore: "nailed by the two hands to two separate trees, I found him pierced with arrows by the banks of the river, some two hours' journey on this side of the first ford. There any one may see him, for they have denied him even the shelter of the grave."

Attila folded his arms upon his wide chest, and gazed for a moment upon Theodore in silence. "Wouldst thou still pursue thy journey," he asked at length, "after such misfortunes on the way?"

"If it may be pursued at all with life, I would fain pursue it," answered Theodore.

"It may be pursued with safety," said the monarch. "In thy case, Attila's protection has been twice insulted--it shall not be so a third time: None but a brother dared do what has been done; but even a brother has gone too far. If thou wouldst go on thy way, join with thy followers, in less than an hour, those warriors who stand around the gate. They will conduct thee by the higher country to the land of thy kindred; and I swear by mine own heart that those who stay you, going or returning, were it even by a willow wand across thy path, I will smite from the face of the earth, and lay their dwellings level with the sand, and sell their wives and children unto slavery. Now make ready quickly, and proceed!"

Theodore failed not to obey; and in as short a space of time as possible he was once more upon horseback, and on his way towards the west.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MEETING OF THE PARTED.

Across wide plains, through deep solitudes, amid dim woods, over gigantic mountains, by the banks of the stream, and the torrent, and the lake, among the occasional ruins left upon the footsteps of ancient civilization and the scattered villages of barbarian hordes, Theodore once more pursued his way. Every kind of scene but that of the cultivated city met his eye, and every kind of weather that the changeful autumn of a northern land can display accompanied him on his path. The splendid October sunshine, beaming clear and kind upon the earth, like the tempered smile of a father looking in mellow ripeness of years upon his rising offspring; the flitting shadows of the heavy clouds, as they swept by over the landscape, resembling the gloomy cares and apprehensions which sometimes cross the brightest moments of enjoyment; the dull misty deluge, pouring down from morning until night, without interval or cessation, shutting out all prospects, and promising no brighter time, like the hopeless existence of but too many of the sons of toil; the brief and angry thunder-storm, rending the stoutest trees, like the fierce passing of war or civil contention, all visited him by turns, as he journeyed onward from the banks of the Tibiscus, till he once more joined the Danube, at a spot where, shrunk to a comparatively insignificant stream, it flowed on between the countries now called Bavaria and Austria.

It was on one of those dim uncertain days, when all distant objects are shut out from the sight, that he crossed the river a little above its junction with the Inn, and entered upon the open

country of Bavaria. Nothing was to be seen but the flat plain which stretches onward along the banks of the Inn; and when, after halting for the night amid some rude huts, where the people seemed to speak the language of the Goths, he recommenced his journey on the following morning, the same dull cheerless prospect was all that presented itself, stretched upon the gray back-ground of broad unvaried cloud. His companions had now been reduced to twenty, by the larger party having left him as soon as he was free from danger; and none but his own peculiar attendants accompanied him, except three officers of the household of Attila, sent with authority from that mighty and far-feared monarch to demand a free passage for the young Roman through whatever countries he might have to traverse. It was one of these officers--who took care to show all kindly reverence towards a youth who stood so high in the favour of the king--that now, pointing forward to a little stream which flowed on to join the Inn, informed the young Roman that along its banks was settled the nation which he came to seek.

"And is this," thought Theodore, "this bleak wilderness the destined habitation of my Ildica, nurtured in the lap of ease and civilization? Is this flat, unmeaning plain, bounded by a gray cloud, all that is to greet her eyes after the splendours of the Adriatic shore and the marvellous beauty of Salona?" And with a deep sigh he thought of the regretted past.

Ere he had ridden on a quarter of an hour longer, however, a light wind sprung up; and rising, like a curtain drawn slowly up from some picture of surpassing beauty, the veil of clouds was lifted to the south, displaying as it rose, robed in the magic purple of the mountain air, the wild but splendid scenery of the Bavarian Tyrol.

A few moments more brought the young Roman to a congregation of small wooden houses, not far from the first gentle slopes that served to blend the plain with the highlands. A fair girl, with whose face Theodore felt as if he could claim kindred, paused, with a basket of milk in her hand, to gaze upon the troop of horsemen who were passing by, but without any sign of fear. Theodore asked her some question concerning the road, and she replied lightly and gayly, with the milkmaid's careless glee, speaking the pure Alan tongue in accents that made the young Roman's heart thrill again to hear. He rode gladly on his way, assured by those tones that he was at length once more in the same land with her he loved. That land, he knew, was of no very great extent, and therefore he had not any cause to anticipate a long and painful search; but still the eager thirst with which young affection pants towards its object made him anxious not to lose a single moment in any unnecessary delay; and he determined, as they wound onward towards the little capital of the mountain tribe, to inquire, wherever he came, for the dwelling of the Roman family, whose arrival in the land, he doubted not, had excited no small rumour and attention.

There remained yet two hours to sunset, when, passing through some gentle hills, Theodore suddenly found himself on the banks of a small but beautiful lake, surrounded on three sides by the mountains. The shore, at the spot where he stood, was low and sandy, with here and there a fringe of long reeds, mingling the water with the land, but on all the other sides the banks were more abrupt. From the lake up to the very sky on those three sides stretched the upland, rising in different ranges, like Titan steps whereby to scale the heavens, but divided at different angles by intervening valleys, up which was seen the long blue perspective of interminable hills beyond. The first step of that mountain throne, carpeted as if with green velvet, by pastures still unimbrowned and rich, was covered with sheep and cattle feeding in peace. Beyond that appeared a range, clothed with glowing woods of oak, and elm, and beech, filled with the more timid and gentle inhabitants of the sylvan world; while above, tenanted by the wolf, the fox, and other beasts of prey, stretched wide the region of the pine and fir; and, towering over all, gray, cold, and awful, rose the peaks of primeval granite, with nothing but the proud eagle soaring between them and heaven. Below, the lake, unruffled by a breeze, lay calm and still, offering a mirror to the beauty of the scene, where every line of picturesque loveliness was reflected without a change, and every hue of all the varied colouring around, from the rich brown of the autumnal woods to the purple of the distant mountains, and the floods of amber and of rose that evening was pouring along the glowing sky.

Upon the lower range of hills many a wooden cottage, neat and clean, was to be seen; and several villages, peeping from the first woods, varied the scene with the pleasant aspect of intelligent life; and as, winding round the left shore, the young Roman and his companions advanced towards a spot at the other end of the lake where they proposed to pass the night, a thousand new beauties opened out upon their sight. Theodore gazed around, thinking that here indeed he could spend his days in peace; and, perhaps, he might envy the shepherd-boys that looked down upon him from low flat-topped hills under which he passed, or the women and girls who, sitting by the cattle at pasture, roused themselves for a moment from their pleasant idleness to mark the troop of horsemen passing by.

At length, upon the verge of a smooth meadow, which covered the summit of a steep green hill at the foot of the higher mountains--jutting out in the form of a small promontory above the road he was pursuing, with the green edge cutting sharp upon the blue mountain air beyond--he beheld a group of people gathered together, apparently enjoying the evening sunshine. Neither sheep nor cattle were near; and though the dark line of the figures, diminished by distance, were all that Theodore could see as they stood on the clear, bright back-ground, yet in those very lines, and in the graceful attitudes which the figures assumed as they stood or sat, there was something so Grecian and classical, so unlike the forms offered by a group of barbarians, that the heart of the young Roman felt a thrill of hope which made it beat high.

Suddenly reining in his horse, he stopped to gaze; the glad hope grew into more joyful certainty; and, without further thought or hesitation, carried away by feelings which refused control, he urged his horse at the gallop up the steep side of the hill, nor paused, even for a moment, till he had reached the summit. The Huns gazed with surprise from below, and beheld him, when he had arrived at the top, spring from his horse in the midst of the group which had caught his attention, and, with many an embrace and many a speaking gesture, receive his welcome to the bosom of ancient affection.

"He has found his home!" they said to one another as they saw his reception; and, winding round by a more secure path, they followed up to the summit of the hill, perceiving, as they ascended, a number of beautiful mountain dwellings congregated in the gorge of a ravine behind.

Oh who can tell what were in the mean time the emotions which agitated the group above! To Theodore it was the fruition of a long-cherished hope. He held his Ildica in his arms, he pressed her to his heart, he saw those dark and lustrous eyes, swimming in the light of love's delicious tears, gaze at him with the full, passionate earnestness of unimpaired affection; he tasted once more the breath of those sweet lips, he felt once more the thrilling touch of that soft hand. She was paler than when he had left her, but in her countenance there was--or seemed in his eyes to be--a crowning charm gained since he last had seen it. There was in its expression a depth of feeling, an intensity of thought, which, though softened and sweetened by the most womanly tenderness and youthful innocence which human heart ever possessed, added much to the transcendent beauty that memory had so often recalled. In her form, too, there had been a slight change, which had rendered the symmetry perfect without brushing away one girlish grace. Flavia, too, had a part in his glad feelings, as with the full measure of maternal tenderness she held him in her arms, and blessed the day which gave him back to those who loved him. Eudochia also, over whose head the passing months had fled, maturing her youthful beauty, clung round her brother, and with eyes of joyful welcome gazed silently up in his face.

Ammian was not there: gone, they said, to hunt the izzard and wild-goat among the highest peaks of the mountain; but the slaves and freedmen who had followed Flavia still, through every change of fortune, drew closer round, and with smiling lips and sparkling eyes greeted the young Roman on his return among them. It was not long ere his attendants joined him; and as there was much to be inquired and much to be told on all parts, Flavia speedily led the way to the dwelling which she had obtained in the land of the Alani; and Theodore, with Ildica's hand clasped in his, and Eudochia hanging to his arm, followed to the little group of houses which filled the gorge above.

Oh what a change from the palace of Diocletian! the marble columns, the resplendent walls, the sculptured friezes, the rich-wrought capitals! All was of woodwork, neat, clean, and picturesque: spacious withal, and convenient, though simple and unassuming. Within, Flavia, and her children and attendants, had laboured hard to give it the appearance of a Roman dwelling, trying, by the presence of old accustomed objects, to cheat memory and banish some of her sad train of regrets; nor had they been unsuccessful in producing the appearance they desired, for all that they had brought from Salona, and which, under the safe escort of the Huns, had been conveyed from the neighbourhood of Margus thither, enabled them to give an air of Roman splendour to the interior of their rude habitation.

In the village Theodore's attendants found an abode, while he himself, once more in the midst of all he now loved on earth, if we except Ammian, sat down to the evening meal, and listened eagerly to the details of everything that had occurred to Flavia and her family since he parted with them on the verge of the barbarian territory. Their journey had been long and fatiguing, the matron said, but safe and uninterrupted, and their reception among the simple mountaineers had been kind and tender. The choice of a dwelling had been left to themselves; and though the capital of the tribe was situated in the valley of the Inn, they had fixed upon the spot where they now were for their abode as one less subject to the passage of strangers or to the inroads of inimical neighbours.

The most important part of the tale, however, was to come: scarcely a month ere Theodore had arrived, ambassadors from Valentinian had presented themselves at the court of the King of the Alani, and Flavia and her family had held themselves for a time in even deeper retirement than before; but, to their surprise, one morning the envoys appeared at their dwelling by the lake, and the Roman lady found, with no slight astonishment, that Valentinian was already aware of her residence among the Alani. The mission of the ambassadors to the barbarian chief was one of small import, but to Flavia they bore a message from the emperor of unwonted gentleness. He invited her to fix her abode in the Western empire; promised her protection against all her enemies, and full justice in regard to all her claims; nor could she doubt, from the whole tenour of his message, that, with the usual enmity of rival power, even when lodged in kindred hands, whoever was looked upon as an enemy by Theodosius, was regarded as a friend by Valentinian. Flavia, however, without absolutely refusing to accept the fair offers of the emperor, had assigned as a motive for delaying to reply, that she expected daily to receive tidings from the son of Paulinus.

Theodore mused at these tidings; but Eudochia, who with childless thoughtlessness looked upon all that happened to themselves as of very little import whenever it was over, now pressed eagerly to hear the adventures of her brother since they had parted; and Ildica also, with a deeper interest than common curiosity, looked up in his face with eyes that seemed to say, "I

have waited long, beloved, that you might be satisfied first, but oh, make me a sharer now in all that has occurred to one far dearer than myself."

Theodore needed no entreaty, but began his story, and with minute detail related all that had occurred to him during the last few months. Was there any part of that history which he did not tell, any of the events that had checkered his fate which he omitted in his narration? There were! A feeling of tenderness, of interest, of gratitude, kept him silent upon some points of the history of Bleda's daughter. He spoke of Neva, indeed; he told how she had nursed him in sickness, and how she had delivered him from captivity; but he could not, and he did not tell, while many an ear was listening, that she had bestowed the first love of her young heart upon one who could not return it.

Flavia hearkened to the tale, and at that part of it which related to Bleda's daughter her eyelids fell a little over her eyes. It was not that she doubted Theodore, for there was a simplicity and candour in all he said which admitted no suspicion; but she deemed how it was, and for the sake of the poor girl she was grieved that it should be so. Ildica, possessed but by one feeling, suspected and divined nothing; her only comment was, as she heard of his danger and escape, "Oh, why was it not I to whom the means of saving you were given?"

"Thank God, my Ildica," replied Theodore, "that you were far from such scenes and such dangers." But, as he was proceeding to conclude his tale, there were quick steps heard without, and the voice of Ammian singing gayly as he returned successful from his mountain sport.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE INTERVAL OF HAPPINESS.

Hitherto we have given nearly a connected narrative; but now it may become necessary to proceed sometimes in detached scenes, leaving the mind of the reader to fill up the obvious chain of intervening facts.

Theodore and Ildica sat alone by the banks of the lake, with their eyes fixed upon the rippling waters that came whispering up nearly to their feet; and they gained, without knowing it, a tone of calm repose, in the midst of their hearts' thrilling enjoyment, from the tranquillity of the scene around, and the bright, untroubled softness of a fine autumn day. If, when they met on the preceding evening, Theodore had been moved by joy, such as his heart had never known before, Ildica's had been still more agitated, for delight had been carried to its fullest height by surprise. Theodore had come thither with expectation and hope as the harbingers of gratification; but to Ildica, the joy of his coming had burst suddenly forth, like the May-day sun when he scatters the clouds of morning from his path. Neither, however, the youth nor the maiden had been able to pause, and--if I may use so strange a term--*enjoy their joy* during the first evening after his arrival. The mind of each had been full of whirling images of pleasure, but with forms scarcely definite. Now, however, as they sat by the side of that calm lake, amid those glorious mountains, with a sky clear, but not burning, above their heads, and the fresh stillness of the early morning pervading all the air, the solemn tranquillity of the scene sunk into their souls, and bade their mutual thoughts flow on in peace.

The history of all external events which had befallen them had been told, it is true, by Flavia and Theodore, and many a little trait had been added by Eudochia, Ammian, and Ildica herself; but still she and her lover had both a long history to tell of thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, of far deeper interest to each other than things that might seem of greater importance. Ildica towards Theodore had no thought concealed. No idle fear of lessening the value of her love by displaying it put an unnatural bar upon the pure feelings of her heart: not a doubt of his generous construction of all that she said fettered her words or embarrassed the expression of her thoughts; and she poured forth, without fear or hesitation, the tale of all she had felt since she left him in the hands of the Huns; how she had wept, and how she had feared; how she had daily looked for some tidings from him, or some change in her own fate; and how she had consoled herself with the remembrance of the extraordinary power he seemed to have obtained over the barbarian king.

The telling of that tale, now that the dangers were over and the fears gone by, was in itself a happiness; and, mingled with many a look of love and accent of affection, and many a tender caress, Ildica's narrative of all that she had felt proceeded, till, in the end, she had to relate how, on the very preceding night, while sitting on the little promontory with Eudochia, and her mother, and the slaves, there had been something in the situation which--though unlike in all the features of the landscape, though the air was colder, and the mountains nearer, and the sky of a

paler hue--recalled the lovely Dalmatian shore to her mind; and how in the magic glass of memory had risen up the mound of cypresses, and the bay of Salona, and the glorious sunset, and all the objects and all the feelings of that well-remembered evening when her lover had last returned from the city of the emperors; and how, at those thoughts, the unbidden tears were rising even to overflowing in her eyes, when she saw a horseman suddenly gallop up the hill, and wild hopes and joyful presentiments had rushed through her heart, and taken from her all power of speech or motion, till she was once more clasped in his arms.

Theodore, too, had his tale to tell; and now, to the ear of her he loved, it was not less full or less candid than her own had been. He gave her a picture of all his thoughts in every situation through which he had passed, and her own unconscious questions soon brought the narrative towards Neva. But Theodore felt that he could trust in Ildica, and he told her all; and, with his arm circling her waist, he pressed her more tenderly, more closely to his bosom while he spoke of the love of another, as if he sought thereby to express how much more dear she had become to his heart under every change and every circumstance.

Neither did he do the daughter of the barbarian chief the injustice of breathing the tale of her unhappy love, without adding every pure and noble trait which had shone out in her conduct; and Ildica, who had listened with a beating heart but not a doubting mind, pressed her eyes, in which were some tears, upon Theodore's bosom, saying, "Poor girl, I am sorry for her! I wonder not at her loving you, Theodore. It is but too natural she should; and oh, I am sure that her love for one so much above any being that she ever saw before will last, unhappily for herself, through all her life. She will compare every one with you, and every one will fall short. I am sorry for her, beloved; and yet, Theodore, yet I could not share your love with any one; I could not part with the smallest portion of that treasure for a world. See how selfish and miserly I have become!"

"None can ever take the slightest portion from thee, my Ildica," replied Theodore; "from infancy to death there shall be but one image which shall fill my heart. But to do poor Neva justice, she seeks not to rob my Ildica of that which is Ildica's own. She would not share in a heart that is given to another, Ildica, even if she could; and as, from all that has passed from her father's hatred towards me, and the injuries he has done me, it is impossible that Neva and I should ever meet again, I trust that she will forget feelings which were suddenly raised, checked almost in their birth, and have no food on which to feed and prolong their existence--I trust she will forget--"

"Never, Theodore! never!" cried Ildica; "such feelings are not to be forgotten. She will see none like you; but, even if she did, she would fancy none she saw your equal. The memory of having saved you from death, too, will perpetuate her love--ay, the memory of that action, and the memory of her love, will go down together with her to the tomb, embalming and preserving each other."

"I trust not, my Ildica, I trust not," he replied.

"Oh, Theodore," she answered, "were I absent from you for long years, separated from you even by impassable barriers, would you love me less? could you forget our love?"

"No, certainly not," replied Theodore; "but our love is mutual and full of mutual hopes. Her love is hopeless and unreturned; and I trust she will forget it."

"Such may be the case with man," answered Ildica. "Hopeless and unreturned, his love may, perhaps, seek another object. Woman loves but once, and never forgets, my Theodore. My heart tells it me even now; and though in such things I have, of course, but little skill, yet I feel and know that time, absence, despair itself, could never make me forget my love for thee. The time must come when remembrance shall be extinguished in the grave, and the fine lines traced by the diamond style of love on the tablets of the spirit may be hidden for a while beneath the dust of the tomb; but to that cold dwelling-house shall the unfaded recollection go down with me; and when I waken again from the sleep of death, the memory of my love shall waken with me--I feel--I know it will;" and, as she spoke, she raised her eyes to heaven, while the rays of the morning light danced in their liquid lustre, as if they, too, were of kindred with the sky.

Theodore pressed her to his heart, and long and sweet was the communion that followed; but we cannot, we will not further dwell upon things that those who have loved truly will understand without our telling, and that those who have never so loved cannot comprehend at all. Let them be sacred! those holy feelings of the pure and high-toned heart; those sweet, ennobling emotions of the unpolluted soul. Let them be sacred! those sensations, intense yet timid, pure and unalloyable as the diamond, as firm, as bright, as unspotted; but which, like a precious jewel that baser minds would ever fain take from us, are wisely concealed by those who possess them from the gaze of the low and the unfeeling. We seek not to display--we would not if we could--all the finer shades, the tenderer emotions, of the love of Theodore and Ildica. We have raised the veil enough to show how they did love, and we will raise it no further.

The days of his stay passed in visions of happiness to Ildica and himself, a long, dreamy lapse of exquisite delight. Beyond each other, and the few dear beings around them, what was the world to them! The limits of that valley were the limits of their thoughts; and, whether they sailed on the bosom of the lake, or climbed the giant mountains round about, or wandered through the rustling woods, or sat upon the shore and watched the tiny billows of that miniature

sea, the thoughts of the two lovers were only of each other, though the lovely scene, mountain, and stream, and woods, and lakes, and meadows, mingled insensibly with their own dream of happiness, heightened the colouring of their hopes, and, in return, received a brighter hue itself. Sweet, oh, how sweet! were the hours, and yet how rapidly they flew; till at length, when they rose one morning and gazed forth, a wreath of snow was seen hanging upon the peaks of the mountains--not alone upon those higher summits, on whose everlasting ice the summer sun shone vainly through his longest, brightest hours, but on those lower hills which the day before had risen up in the brown veil of the autumnal forest, or the green covering of grass, or the gray nakedness of the native stone. It was the signal for Theodore to depart; and then came the hours, ere he set out, of melancholy and of gloom.

Those hours, however, were broken by many a long and anxious consultation. The offered hospitality and protection of Valentinian had yet to be considered, for it was a proposal which, if even not accepted at once, both Theodore and Flavia judged might prove of great utility at an after period. No one could tell either what changes might take place in the positions of the barbarian nations, or what might be the final result of the victories and successes of Attila himself. Where he might next turn his arms was a question which none even of his own court could solve; and while it was evident to all that a victorious and devastating excursion against the Eastern empire was by no means the ulterior purpose of his powerful and ambitious mind, yet no one could divine what was the end proposed, or whither the pursuit might lead. Under these circumstances, to have a place of refuge open against the storm of war was always a blessing; and Theodore strongly counselled Flavia to despatch messengers to the emperor, charged with thanks, and such presents as circumstances permitted her to send; not exactly accepting the offer of asylum he had made, but expressing a purpose of taking advantage thereof at no very distant period.

"Were you to go thither even next year," Theodore observed, while speaking on the subject with Flavia alone, "Ammian would be some protection to you all; for I remark that his bold spirit and his mountain sports are every day giving greater vigour to his limbs, and his frame is towering up towards manhood. A year will do much in such pastimes as these, while the free and wild simplicity of the barbarian habits will secure him against the weak and effeminate manners of Rome; and, at the same time, it were but right and necessary that both he and Eudochia should receive that civilized education which can be obtained nowhere but in the empire."

"Alas! my son," replied Flavia, "I fear that it will be long ere Ammian can give us that protection which thou mightst do; for, though courageous to a fault, and resolute, yet there is a wild and heedless spirit in his breast which often prevents his nobler qualities from acting as they might. His heart is kind and generous, his mind upright and noble; but in the exuberance of his youthful daring, and the wanderings of a wild imagination, he forgets too often, Theodore, that there is such a thing as danger to himself or others. He wants prudence, he wants consideration, he wants that calm presence of mind which sees under all circumstances that which is best to do, and is ever ready to do it."

"But, my mother, he is yet but a boy," replied Theodore: "time will give prudence, experience will give judgment, and age will tame quickly the wildest and most wandering fancy. At all events, I only desire that you should have a refuge prepared. Doubtless--both because this mighty barbarian does really, I believe, regard me with affection, and because he has been taught to imagine that there is some mysterious connexion between his fate and mine--doubtless, I say, he will allow me from time to time to renew the visit he has now permitted; at all events, I will find means to send, both to give you my tidings and to gain news from you. If there be danger, I will let you know, and be ready ever, upon but a short warning, to fly to the court of Valentinian. As I go hence, I shall visit the capital of the Alani by the banks of the Inn; for the kindred that I have among them might think it strange and wrong were I to pass through the land without seeing them; and, when there, of course I will do all I can to ensure that the refuge which you have here received shall be as safe, as peaceful, and as happy as it can be made. There is much in the ties of blood, even between a Roman and barbarian, and I think that my requests will find favour among the Alani."

Theodore would fain have lingered and protracted the hours; for although he knew that he soon must go, and the thought of parting sadly imbibed even the present, yet around Ildica there was to him an atmosphere of light and happiness, which banished all that was dark and gloomy from his heart. But he had made a promise to Attila, and with Theodore a promise was inviolable. Ildica, too, would fain have detained him, would have fain drank slowly out the last sweet drops of the cup of happiness which had been offered to her lip: they were but the dregs, it is true, and bitter was mixed with them, but yet the taste of joy remained; and if she could not have it pure and unalloyed, she yet lingered over the last portion, however sadly mingled. But Theodore had given a promise; and Theodore's unstained integrity and unvarying truth were as dear to Ildica as to himself--were dearer, far dearer, than any personal enjoyment. She would not have him forfeit his word to Attila, in order to remain with her, for all that the world could give; and she herself bade him go whenever she learned that he had barely time to accomplish his journey by the path that it was necessary for him to follow. They parted--not now, however, as when last they parted; for then before them had stretched out nothing but one vague and indefinite expanse--the gray cloud of the future! on which even the eye of fancy could scarcely trace one likely form, through which the star of hope shone faint and powerless. Now, after all those fearful scenes and that dreadful separation--scenes and circumstances which had

benumbed their feelings, and, like some crashing wound, which by its very severity deprives the sufferer of his sense of pain, had left them bewildered and almost unconscious, till time had shown them the deprivation they had undergone. Now they had met again; hopes that they had scarcely dared to entertain had been realized ere the heart grew weary with delay. They had known a longer and more tranquil period of happiness than they had ever tasted since first the mutual love of their young hearts had been spoken to each other; and hope, the sweet sophist, skilful in turning to her purpose all things that befall, drew arguments from past joy in order to prove her promises for the future true.

They parted then: Ildica declared that she wished him to go, and Theodore strengthened himself in the remembrance of his promise. Yet, nevertheless, let no one think that their parting was not bitter: Theodore struggled even against a sigh; and over the cheeks of Ildica rolled no tear, though on the dark long lashes that fringed her eyelids would sparkle like a crushed diamond the irrepressible dew of grief. Yet, nevertheless, let no one think the parting is ever less than bitter, when, even in the brightest day of youth, two hearts united by the great master bond which God assigned to man to bind him in the grievous pilgrimage of life to one chosen from all his kind, are separated from one another for long indefinite hours, with loneliness of feeling and the dim uncertainty of human fate hanging over them like a dark cloud. Who shall say, when thus they part, that they shall ever meet again? Who shall say with what dark barrier the mighty hand of destiny may not close the way? whether death, or misfortune, or interminable difficulty may not cut short hope or weary out the spirit in the bondage of circumstance, till expectation is vain of reunion on this side the tomb?

They parted firmly: but such partings are ever bitter; and when Theodore was gone, Ildica wept for long hours in silence; while he, as he rode on, beheld nothing of all that surrounded him; for the soul was then in the secret chamber of the heart, communing sternly with her own grief.

FOOTNOTES

[Footnote 1](#): It may not, perhaps, be unnecessary to remind the reader that Christianity, though established in both the eastern and western empires, was still far from universal; and even in the minds of its most enthusiastic votaries was strangely mingled with the picturesque superstitions of a former creed; so that the same man was often a Christian in belief, who was pagan in many of his habits and almost all his familiar expressions.

[Footnote 2](#): Cowley.

[Footnote 3](#): The learned reader will perceive that I have changed the last syllable of this name, for the sake of a more regular feminine termination than the original gives, in sound at least, to an English ear. Let me acknowledge at once, also, that I have followed the same bold plan throughout, changing everything that did not suit my purpose.

[Footnote 4](#): In "The Story of Azimantium," which I published about six years ago in Blackwood's Magazine, and which has since been re-published in "The Desultory Man," I gave very nearly the same account of this great earthquake with that here given. The actors and the scene are different; but the principal facts, being founded on historical truth, are the same.

[Footnote 5](#): He was at this time probably an Arian; but there is reason to believe that his family had long held their ancient religion, against all the decrees of the Christian emperors.

[Footnote 6](#): It was called Astur, and is supposed to have been the same as the tributary bird of the Tartars named the Schongar.

[Footnote 7](#): We find from all records that the Huns were peculiarly fond of gaming and of buffoons.

[Footnote 8](#): Not only was such the case, but in various contentions in the empire, hired bodies of the Huns were frequently found fighting on both sides, and doing their duty faithfully.

[Footnote 9](#): It would appear, from various accounts, that the tremendous title by which Attila was well pleased to be known, was given to him as stated above, though some lay the scene of his interview with the hermit in Gaul.

[Footnote 10](#): Both the Greek and Roman historians strive to impress their readers with the idea that the Huns were mere Scythian savages; but at every line they let fall something which impugns this assertion. We find that gold, gems, silver, tables, various kinds of drinks of their own manufacture, firearms and equipments, jesters, dwarfs, singing, and several games of chance, were common among them: and, in short, that there was an extraordinary mixture of civilized arts with barbarian habits.

[Footnote 11](#): Crucifixion, which we have reason to believe one of the most agonizing kinds of death, was one of the common punishments among the Huns.

END OF VOL. I.

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